

# **Statement of Community Involvement**

**Draft for consultation  
March 2021**



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is an aim of the City Council to improve dialogue and consultation throughout Council processes. This is explained in the Oxford Council Strategy 2020-24 <http://occintranet/about-the-council/council-strategy>
- 1.2 There is a legal requirement under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) for the City Council to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which sets out how it intends to achieve community involvement in the preparation of plans and in decision-making on planning applications.
- 1.3 The City Council adopted its first SCI in 2006. Since then there have been a number of changes to the planning system which have produced new requirements and processes for producing local plans and for dealing with planning applications. In addition, the City Council is keen to promote early public engagement in planning decisions. The City Council continues to keep these processes under review, including commissioning an independent review of planning processes, including consultation processes, through the Roger Dudman Way Review (2013)<sup>1</sup>. The recommendations and lessons learnt about community engagement from these reviews have also helped to shape this SCI.
- 1.4 The SCI sets out consultation requirements and guiding principles, with more detailed information provided through supplementary guidance and help sheets that can be updated more easily and frequently via the website. This is so that the SCI is flexible if there are further changes to the planning regulations or government policies in the next few years, and so that we can adapt processes to reflect best practice.
- 1.5 The SCI goes above the minimum statutory requirements for consultation<sup>2</sup> and promotes best practice in the delivery of our planning services.

### What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

- 1.6 Oxford City Council (OCC) is the local planning authority for Oxford. The SCI sets out the City Council's approach to involving the community and stakeholders in the production of planning policy documents and development management decisions in the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Dudman Way Review, Main Report and Executive Summary available online: <http://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/documents/s16562/RDW%20INDEPENDENT%20REVIEW%20FINAL%20REPORT%20140107%2017th%20Jan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The current minimum requirements for consultation on local development plan documents and Supplementary planning documents are set out in The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. The minimum requirements for consultation on Planning Applications are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the City Council will involve the community when preparing planning policy documents and deciding on planning applications.

The Statement of Community Involvement:

- Lets you know how you can get involved in planning decisions;
- Sets out how we will engage the wider community in planning decisions; and
- Sets out the level of community engagement that we expect from developers in the planning process.

In summary, it is about how we inform, involve and consult local people in our planning decisions.

- 1.7 In preparing the SCI, consultation has been undertaken to help develop an approach that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community, stakeholders and the City Council.

### Oxford's communities

- 1.8 The 'community' includes all the individuals, groups and organisations that live, work, or operate within Oxford. Communities can take many forms, they can be:

*Communities of Place* - people living, working or undertaking other activities in geographically distinct areas of the city (such as neighbourhoods or wards).

*Communities of Identity* - people who share common aspects of their identity (such as ethnicity, religious beliefs, age or gender).

*Communities of Interest* - people with shared interests (such as allotment holders, cyclists or businesses) or people who use the same services or facilities (such as parks, roads, or community buildings).

- 1.9 The SCI also refers to 'stakeholders'. By this we mean individuals or organisations with a direct influence on the subject under discussion, such as landowners or the highways authority. Some of our consultation with stakeholders is also governed by legislation such as the Duty to Cooperate. The SCI seeks to avoid repeating legislation or statutory requirements, because that is fixed by the government. Instead it focusses on what we are specifically doing locally in Oxford over and above the requirements.

### White Paper – Planning for the Future (August 2020)

- 1.13 At the time of writing the Government had recently carried out a consultation exercise on proposed substantial reforms to the planning system in 'Planning for the Future (August 2020)', to streamline and modernise the planning process. The proposals include, example changes, to the preparation of the Local Plan, with the city being potentially divided into areas of growth, renewal and protection. In the case of 'growth' areas, once a site has been allocated for a use or mixed-uses and the Plan adopted, then outline planning permission in principle will automatically be granted. Development Management policies and housing growth numbers are proposed to be set at the national level. These examples show that there will potentially be some significant changes to 'what' and 'when' the public and stakeholders can engage in the planning system.
- 1.14 Amongst other key proposals the Government is keen for local planning authorities to modernise 'how' they engage with people and encourage the use of digital-technology.

The Government will review the comments received and decide what changes will be taken forward, along with the appropriate supporting legislation that will be required. The SCI may then need to be updated accordingly to reflect these changes, in particular because the types of documents and way we engage people in them might change significantly.

## 2. Our principles for community involvement in planning decisions

### Why is it important to involve the community in the planning process?

- 2.1 We want to inform and involve the community in planning decision-making processes. Achieving effective community involvement in the planning process can have several benefits, including:
- More focus on the priorities identified by the community;
  - Influencing the provision of local services to meet local needs;
  - Ability to draw upon a local knowledge base;
  - Increased community commitment to the future of an area; and
  - Increased support for planning services, as communities will have a better understanding of how planning policies are developed and how decisions are made.
- 2.2 The City Council's approach to community engagement contributes directly to its ambition to build a world class city for all. Many of Oxford's residents are highly articulate and very skilled at getting their points of view heard and those contributions are always welcome. The City Council also wants to open up more opportunities for people whose voices might not be so easily heard to be involved if they wish to.

### Our principles for community involvement in planning decisions

- 2.3 The commitments in this SCI are framed by wider City Council strategies about community engagement, as well as being informed by consultation and other feedback.
- 2.4 We have identified four key principles for effective engagement in planning processes:
1. *Timely and sustained* – events and activities should start before any planning decisions are made and engagement should last throughout the planning process and beyond;
  2. *Inclusive for all local people* – those living and working in an area have a right to be involved, all parties are welcome, and process must take account of peoples' varied needs;
  3. *Two way, open and responsive* – communication should be discursive not prescriptive, so that information can be debated and ideas exchanged; and
  4. *A matter of public record* – the processes must be documented and published.

(Roger Dudman Way Review, Vincent Goodstadt, 2013, paragraph 91)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup><https://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/documents/s16562/RDW%20INDEPENDENT%20REVIEW%20FINAL%20>

- 2.5 The SCI has also been informed by consultation and reviewing customer feedback. Two of the key themes arising from previous feedback are that people want to be involved at an early enough stage when decisions and proposals can still be truly influenced, and also to be kept informed of progress and for us to set out clearly how consultation has influenced decisions.
- 2.6 Therefore a general theme of the SCI is that consultation should start as early as possible to give everyone the opportunity to participate and influence the development of policies and options for an area. This includes encouraging consultation on major applications at an early stage. This will give communities and stakeholders the chance to put forward their own ideas rather than simply comment once proposals are fixed. The City Council and applicants will then be better placed to understand the issues and needs that are important to the community.
- 2.7 The SCI also encourages on-going community involvement, with feedback and information on progress and outcomes. Involving communities at an early stage, and continuing that involvement throughout the planning process, will help to resolve issues and achieve consensus where possible, which will in turn avoid the need for lengthy independent examinations. Nonetheless planning decisions are often contentious, and require differing views (including those of the community) to be balanced and judgements made. So the SCI also promotes transparency of processes and decisions, and clearer communication, so that even if people do not like the outcome of a decision they can at least understand how it has been reached.
- 2.8 The scale and type of community involvement in planning also needs to be proportionate and appropriate, and reasonable in terms of cost.

**Based on these principles, this SCI seeks to ensure the planning service provides:**

**The opportunity to contribute ideas** – people will have the opportunity to put their ideas forward and the City Council will consider and respond to these suggestions as appropriate;

**The opportunity to shape proposals and options** – the City Council will provide opportunities for people to actively engage in the planning process at early stages when there is more scope to shape them. The City Council will also encourage applicants/the promoters of development proposals to do the same;

**The opportunity to make comments on formal proposals** – for more advanced development proposals and planning policy documents, the City Council will meet the Regulatory requirements for community involvement, and where appropriate go beyond the requirements;

**The opportunity to receive feedback and be informed about progress and outcomes** – the City Council will consider all comments received through consultations on policies, and make appropriate changes accordingly and explain our response. The City Council will then provide updates on the progress of planning policy documents to all those who have submitted comments on the document. This may be by direct contact or by publishing material on the City Council's website (e.g. consultation reports and updates).

The City Council will also explain how comments on planning applications have been taken into consideration in officers' reports. These reports are published on the City Council's website;

**To provide relevant information** - when asking for comments, the City Council will be clear about which issues can and cannot be taken into consideration, which issues are already fixed (e.g. by legislation); and

**To achieve value for money** – ensuring consultation is worthwhile and value for money by balancing cost and time constraints and City Council resources, and ensuring that consultation is appropriate and proportionate to the issues being considered and the communities affected.

**We will deliver these principles through:**

- Being open and transparent in our decision-making;
- Using plain English as far as possible;
- Ensuring that planning policy documents are clear and concise;
- Using images, maps and illustrations, to make planning policy documents more accessible to a wider range of people;
- Front-loading engagement at the early stages of producing new policies and generating options;
- Encouraging developers to undertake early consultation when preparing planning applications, including before they are submitted as formal applications;
- Promoting electronic methods of communication to increase efficiency (whilst also providing for those who find it difficult to access material online); and
- Promote best practice, and explore new and evolving methods of communication and consultation.

2.9 The rest of this document and appendices explain how these principles will be applied to the preparation of policy documents and consideration of planning applications.



### **3. Digital and online methods and response during a pandemic or similar restrictive situation**

- 3.1 The restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that there had to be a changed approach to public engagement. These changes came into force as 'temporary measures' that were put in place to minimise the impacts on people engaging with the planning process. Many of these measures were still in place at the time of writing and in the event of 'local' outbreaks within Oxford taking place then the measures would have to be re-introduced to ensure the health and safety of those engaging in the planning process.
- 3.2 Greater use of digital-technology is likely to continue to play an important role in the planning system in the future. The adaptations that were necessary have worked effectively, and indeed have some particular benefits. Online events can make participation easier and less intimidating, as people do not have to travel or make their voice heard in a crowd. Online exhibitions can have live chat sessions, which maybe one to one, where people can feel comfortable raising their questions. Live polls and ability to notate plans can also increase interactivity and interest. However, there are potential disadvantages with relying entirely on digital-technology. These include excluding those who do not have access to it, and also that it relies on people visiting websites and clicking links, which they will do only if they already have an interest. The ability to find people in their community and to try and engage with them about something they might not otherwise be interested in is a lot harder and requires more creativity. Options might include joining other online events, and ensuring materials are particularly engaging.
- 3.3 The council will continue to look to best practice examples in this evolving field, including the utilization of digital technology. There is recognition that a wider and enhanced use of digital technology will make it easier and perhaps more convenient for many people to engage in the planning process but there must be some acknowledgement that this method of consultation and engagement with the community should not be completely relied upon. It will not always be the most suitable means and the council recognise that a one size fits all approach to engagement is not inclusive. A range of methods will need to be considered, depending on factors such as what is being consulted on and who the intended audience will be. The council has a Localities team who work closely with communities across the city and who have built positive relationships with those that live there. The council will better utilise these existing relationships when it wishes to engage with these communities and the first port of call will be contacting the relevant Localities officer who can not only advise on the most appropriate methods of consultation to achieve the most meaningful and inclusive engagement, but who can also act as a first point of contact for the community as someone who is familiar within the locality.
- 3.4 Appendix 1 sets out adaptations to methods of engagement that may have to take place as a result of restrictions. Tables 1, 2 and 3 include mention of potential online engagement.

## 4. Engagement processes for planning policy documents

### Which documents will we be consulting on?

4.1 The main planning policy documents that the City Council produces are:

**Statement of Community Involvement** – this document is itself the subject of public consultation to help develop an approach that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community, stakeholders and the City Council. The consultation requirements set out in this document will need to be met in producing any new local development plan documents or supplementary planning documents.

**Local Development Scheme** – this sets out the City Council’s work programme for the preparation of new development plan documents and supplementary planning documents, including a description and timetable for each document. The Local Development Scheme is published on the City Council’s [website](#). This is not subject to public consultation.

**Local Plan** – this sets out the long-term spatial vision and development framework for the city and how it will be achieved. At present it also includes development management policies and allocates land for specific uses. The Local Plan usually consists of one main development plan document and can also include area-based development plan documents.

**Area Action Plans** – these provide more detailed information to guide development in a specific area where significant development is planned.

**Supplementary Planning Documents** – these documents supplement and elaborate upon policies and proposals set out in development plan documents. Although they are not subject to independent examination, they will undergo public consultation, and must be consistent with national planning policies. These documents may focus on specific issues (such as affordable housing) or they may provide site specific development guidance. They cannot change policies contained within the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plans, but can give detail on how those policies are implemented. These documents are material considerations when assessing a planning application.

**Technical Advice Notes** - these documents provide informal advice and guidance on key issues for applicants/developers and decision-makers. These are not subject to public consultation

**Sustainability Appraisals** – these will be produced by the City Council alongside local development plan documents and, where appropriate, supplementary planning documents. Sustainability Appraisals examine the impact of policies and proposals on economic, social and environmental factors, and fulfil an important legal requirement known as ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment’. Sustainability Appraisals are iterative, prepared alongside policy documents, and will be available for consultation alongside the development plan documents or supplementary planning documents that they relate to at formal stages of consultation.

**Annual Monitoring Report** – the performance of planning policies will be reviewed in an Annual Monitoring Report. The Annual Monitoring Report will also review the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and Statement of Community Involvement in Planning. There will not be consultation on this report as it is a factual document, but we may contact specific groups to obtain some of the data required. This is not subject to public consultation.

4.2 Figure 1 explains how the different planning policy documents link together to form the Local Plan for Oxford and their relationship with the wider planning process.

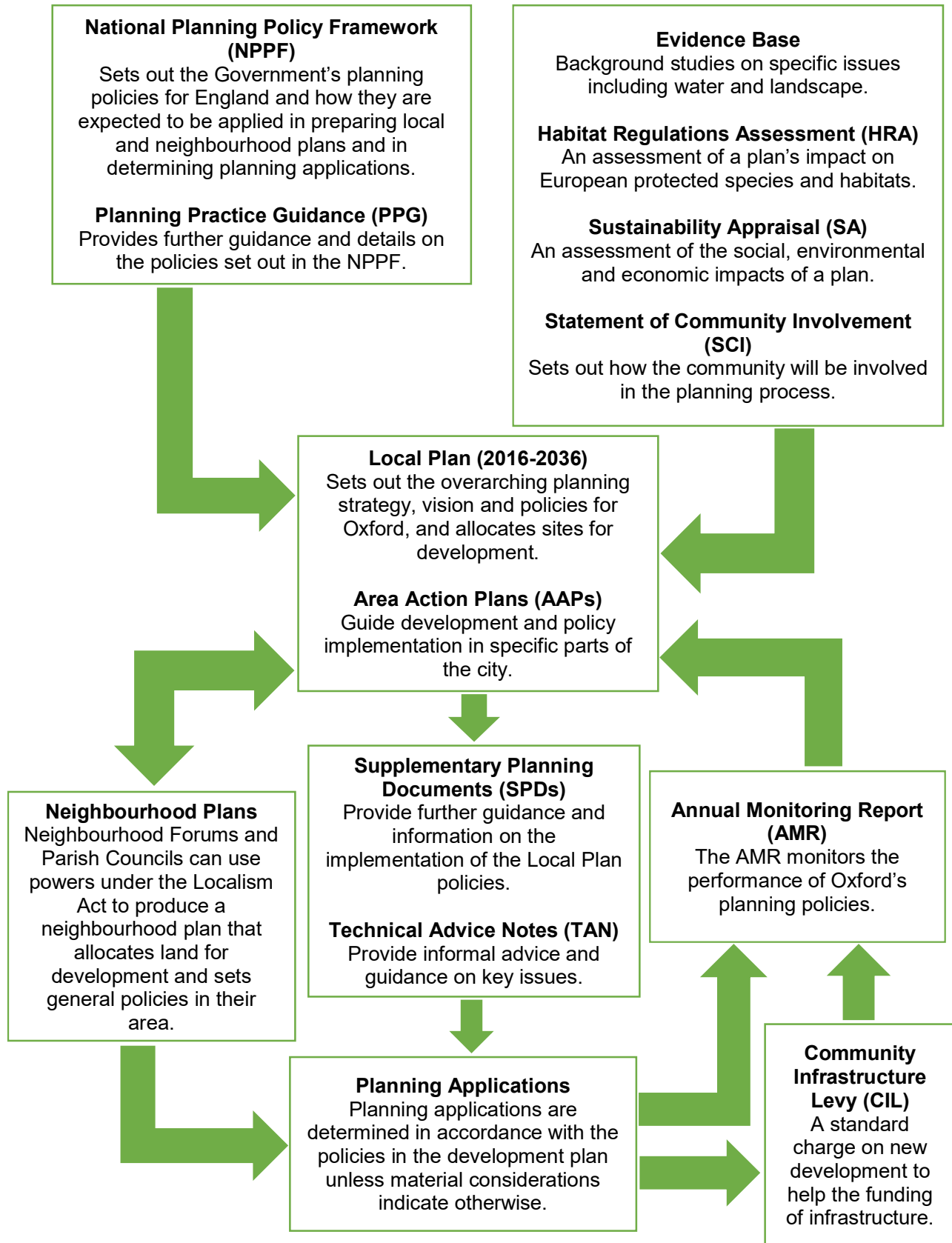


Figure 1: Oxford's Local Plan and its relationship to the wider planning process

## How will we involve people in the preparation of planning policy documents?

- 4.3. There are a range of different methods of involvement that we may use in preparing planning policy documents (as set out in the Appendices in Tables 1 and 2). The methods we use will depend on the subject and the stage in the plan-making process, together with external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has necessitated greater use of digital-technology. Following the recent COVID-19 pandemic and the advice given by Government it has been necessary to use digital technology as the only means of involving people in the plan-making process to ensure that the planning process is able to continue functioning. Whilst this has happened by necessity, in practice this has generally worked very successfully and shown to offer significant benefits, such as being able to reach out and involve people that may not normally take part in the planning process. The Government White Paper has shared this view and wishes all local authorities to embrace digital technology as a means of making the plan-making process easier to access, more transparent and engaging for everyone to participate in.
- 4.4. Different levels of involvement that may be appropriate in different circumstances:
- *Participation* – interactions between the City Council and the community and/or stakeholders to identify issues and exchange views (for example, when considering the issues a policy document might need to address);
  - *Consultation* - asking for the views of the community and stakeholders (for example, asking for views on a draft document); and
  - *Information-sharing* - providing information to the community and stakeholders (for example, providing updates on the progress of planning policy documents).
- 4.5. Sometimes it will be more appropriate to gather a wider-range of less detailed comments using methods such as questionnaires and surveys. This is often a good way to collect views from a large number of people, although it does not generally provide much opportunity for an in-depth discussion of the issues.
- 4.6. At other times we will need to talk to people in more detail, such as through workshops or meetings with specific groups, to gain a deeper understanding of their views. When undertaking consultation on planning policy documents, we will aim to use digital technology but also include a variety of other methods to reflect the topic matters and to try to reach the different community groups that may be affected. In the event of a resurgence in the COVID-19 pandemic at either local or national level it may however be necessary to rely solely on digital technology for consultations, workshops, meetings or information sharing to ensure that plan-making and the production of new policy documents is able to continue to fulfil statutory requirements.

## Consultation on Development Plan Documents

- 4.7. At the time of writing the key stages that the City Council will follow in preparing the Local Plan (which may consist of several development plan documents) are largely set out in legislation and national policy, but the SCI sets out in more detail what we will do in Oxford and how we are going beyond the basic requirements. The process is different for Neighbourhood Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents, which are explained later in this SCI.
- 4.8. The key stages for Development Plan Documents are:

- 1. Establish an appropriate consultation programme for each document –**  
When starting work on any new development plan document, the authorising City Council body will agree a bespoke consultation programme for that document. This will set out which communication and consultation methods are most appropriate for that document and how they will be used at each stage, so that both councillors and the public are clear about what consultation can be expected from the start. This tailored consultation programme will be published and will then be followed throughout the process of preparing the document.

Whilst this stage is not required by the Regulations, the City Council is adopting this approach to ensure that consultations can be tailored appropriately and proportionately to the issues and the community groups that may be affected. Table 1 in the Appendices provides more information on the methods of communication and consultation that may be used.

- 2. Early community and stakeholder involvement<sup>4</sup> –** Before policy writing begins, informal consultation will be undertaken and a process of informal dialogue will commence. This may be as broad ranging as simply asking questions about what the document and policies should include.

The main purpose of this stage is information-gathering. This stage enables people to put forward their ideas and to participate in the initial stages of developing proposals and options whilst the discussion is still fairly broad. Once we are sure that we have understood and considered all the views expressed we will start to refine this and narrow it down, to formulate options and proposals, including input, as appropriate, by City Council bodies.

- 3. Consultation on the emerging options or draft policies (as applicable) –**  
As part of the process of refining the options and policies, the City Council may publish an options document and/or a draft policies document, including a related Sustainability Appraisal, for public comment. Any formal consultation will normally last for six weeks. There is also likely to be informal dialogue through this period, as appropriate.

- 4. Pre-submission consultation<sup>5</sup> –** When the City Council has refined the policies to what it thinks is the final version, it will publish the document for a final stage of consultation before submitting it to the Government. Normally at this stage the key evidence documents that sit behind the plan/policies will also be made available including the Sustainability Appraisal. Consultation will normally last for six weeks.

Following this consultation, the City Council will normally only make minor changes to the document, such as to clarify text. The City Council will collate the comments received and pass them to the Government Inspector to consider along with all of the other supporting documents and comments from earlier stages of consultation.

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing this is known as the 'Regulation 18' stage in reference to Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing this is known as the 'Regulation 19' stage in reference to Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

- 5. Independent examination<sup>6</sup>** – This will be held by an independent Inspector (appointed by the Government). The examination process is determined by the Inspector so it is not for the City Council to propose a process for this stage in the SCI, or to replicate what is already set out in government guidance or regulations elsewhere. The examination period commences once the document has been submitted to the Government and ends when the Inspector issues their report or conclusions. Within this period there are usually hearing sessions, where people who have commented at the pre-submission stage may be invited by the Inspector to speak in a round-table discussion.
- 6. Adoption** – The final stage is for the City Council to adopt the document. The decision will usually be made by Full Council, and published on the Council website. It is at this point that the document formally becomes part of the development plan for the area, and can be fully applied to relevant planning decisions.

## Consultation on Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

- 4.9. The key stages in preparing SPDs are slightly different to those for development plan documents because they normally provide supplementary guidance rather than policies, as set out below:

## Keeping you updated throughout the planning policy preparation process

- 4.10. Throughout the process of preparing development plan documents and supplementary planning documents, from the earliest stages through to adoption, we will keep the community and stakeholders informed of progress in the following ways:

- The latest version of any formally published consultation documents will be available on the City Council website and at relevant deposit points<sup>7</sup> throughout the city;
- The City Council will acknowledge representations received by electronic means (email or online forms) at each consultation stage;
- Reports to City Council committees (including Cabinet and Full Council) are available on the City Council website and these meetings are held in public;
- At examination stage (for local development plan documents), we will tell those who asked to be notified when the document has been submitted to the Secretary of State. We will also publish a consultation summary report on the City Council website and the representations from the pre-submission stage will be made available for public inspection;
- The final, adopted versions of documents will be published on the City Council

<sup>6</sup> At the time of writing, this is known as the 'Regulation 24' stage in reference to Regulation 24 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

<sup>7</sup> An up-to-date list of deposit points (where paper copies of consultation documents will be made available) and their opening times is provided on the City Council [website](#).

website and at relevant deposit points throughout the city; and

- Throughout the preparation of the plan, an email address and contact phone number will be available for the community and stakeholders to find out the current position on the progress of documents, in addition to the information that will be supplied on the City Council website.

## 5. Consultation process for Neighbourhood Development Plans

5.1 The preparation of neighbourhood planning documents is led by local communities in accordance with the Regulations<sup>8</sup> and the principles of localism. As such, the majority of the community engagement in the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans will be undertaken by the neighbourhood planning group<sup>9</sup>.

5.2 There are then certain stages where the City Council is required to carry out formal consultation in accordance with the Regulations<sup>10</sup> as follows:

### Application to designate a Neighbourhood Area

If a community wishes to produce a Neighbourhood Plan then the first stage is for the area to be designated. The City Council will publish the name of the neighbourhood area, a map, and the name of the relevant body who applied for the designation on the City Council website. People will be able to comment on the extent of the area to be designated. In addition, the neighbourhood planning group will be encouraged to let the local community know through local notices, their own websites, and other means as appropriate. Engagement methods with the local community should aim to utilise digital technology and include a variety of methods to try and reach all members of the community.

Following this consultation, the City Council will publish its decision to either designate or refuse the application (with reasons, if refusing) on the City Council website.

#### a) Application to designate a Neighbourhood Planning Group

The City Council will publish a copy of the application and details about how to comment, on the City Council website. The City Council will also encourage the neighbourhood planning group to publicise the application in the local area.

If the City Council agrees to designate the group, it will publish the name of the group, a copy of the constitution, and contact details on the City Council website. If the City Council decides to refuse the designation then it will publish reasons for the refusal on the City Council website.

#### b) Options testing and preparing the Neighbourhood Plan

*(Consultation carried out by the neighbourhood planning group)*

During the preparation of their plan, the neighbourhood planning group will need to carry out consultation on the issues and options being considered, and involve the local community. They will be encouraged by the City Council to engage as early as possible, and to take into account emerging best practice including utilising digital technology. They may also need to prepare a Sustainability Appraisal and consult on that as we

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<sup>8</sup> At the time of writing, this is The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Neighbourhood planning groups are community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parish councils. Where a Parish Council exists for local area, then they are the only group allowed to progress a neighbourhood plan in their area. It is the role of the City Council to agree who should be the neighbourhood planning group for the neighbourhood areas without a parish council.

<sup>10</sup> We have produced a help sheet that provides an overview of the roles of the neighbourhood planning group and the City Council at each stage of the Neighbourhood Plan Process.



**c) Pre-submission consultation**

*(Consultation carried out by the neighbourhood planning group)*

At this final stage of consultation, before the plan is submitted to the City Council, the neighbourhood planning group will be encouraged to take into account emerging best practice, using digital technology.

**d) Publicity/submission consultation**

Once the neighbourhood planning group has submitted their Neighbourhood Plan to the City Council, the City Council will publish the plan and supporting documents in accordance with the regulatory requirements<sup>11</sup> on the City Council website. Copies of these documents will also be available at the main council offices (St Aldate's Chambers, subject to there not being any restrictions, for example as a result of Covid-19). The City Council will contact all those who we are advised have commented previously on the Neighbourhood Plan to invite final comments.

**e) Decision on a Neighbourhood Plan**

The City Council will send a copy of the Neighbourhood Plan, the supporting documents and comments received at the submission stage to an appointed examiner for independent examination. Hearing sessions, if required (at the discretion of the Examiner), will be open to the public to attend but only those invited by the Examiner may participate in discussions.

The City Council will then publish the Examiner's report and decision statement on the City Council website, and make it available to view at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers, subject to there not being any restrictions, for example as a result of Covid-19), before proceeding to arrange (subject to a favourable Examiner's report) the referendum.

**f) Referendum**

At least 28 days before the referendum takes place, the City Council will publish the following documents on its website (hard copies will also be made available at the main City Council offices, St Aldate's Chambers, subject to there not being any restrictions, for example as a result of Covid-19): the draft Neighbourhood Plan; the Examiner's report; a summary of the representations submitted to the Examiner; a statement that the City Council is satisfied that the plan meets the basic conditions; general information on town and country planning to ensure voters have sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision; and an information statement that provides detailed information on the referendum arrangements. The City Council will also encourage the neighbourhood planning group to let local people know about the referendum and encourage a high participation rate so that it is representative.

The Regulations<sup>12</sup> cover all aspects of organising and conducting a referendum, so it is not for the City Council to propose processes in the SCI, or to replicate what is already set out in government guidance or regulations elsewhere. If the majority of those who vote in a referendum are in favour of the draft Neighbourhood Plan, then the Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory development plan for the area. As such, it will then steer relevant planning decisions for that area of the city.

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing this is a minimum of six weeks, as set out in The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing this is the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendum) Regulations 2012 (as amended by the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendum) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 and 2014) and the Neighbourhood Planning (Prescribed Dates) Regulations 2012.

## 6. Engagement processes for planning applications

6.1 The degree of involvement in planning applications will vary according to the nature of the individual application, and at different stages. The processes are different to those for policies, because usually there is a role both for the applicant as well as the City Council, especially on larger applications.

### Consultations before planning applications are submitted to the City Council

6.2 All applicants (or their agents) are strongly encouraged to discuss development proposals with the City Council before applying for planning permission. Applicants are also encouraged, especially for major applications, to engage with the community and relevant stakeholders, to a degree proportionate to the nature of the proposal, at the earliest appropriate opportunity.

For **minor applications** (such as house extensions), all applicants are encouraged to discuss their plans with their neighbours before submitting a planning application. This could involve speaking with them or putting a note through the door.

If the scheme falls within the definition of a **'major' application**<sup>13</sup> then applicants are strongly encouraged to contact those who live, work and/or undertake other activities in the surrounding area who may be affected by the proposals, to inform them of their plans and to identify/discuss any potential issues and opportunities<sup>14</sup> so that the submitted proposal acknowledges and addresses community concerns, even if it cannot fully resolve them. Consultation at this stage should be appropriate and proportionate, and will normally include helping the community and non-planning experts to visualise what the development will look like and to understand the impacts on the area<sup>15</sup>. Consultation should utilise digital technology and include a variety of methods to engage with the community where possible.

Whilst there is no legal obligation for applicants to undertake consultation at the pre-application stage, failure to consult properly is likely to lead to objections being made by interested parties (such as neighbouring residents) later on in the process which could be material to the determination of a planning application. Pre-application consultation may be made a formal requirement via a Planning Performance Agreement<sup>16</sup> where relevant.

A statement setting out how consultation has been carried out and any changes made to the proposals as a result, is encouraged to be submitted with the planning application, and should be easy for the community to find so that they can easily see the feedback. Developers are also encouraged to feedback directly to the community via a second round of pre-application engagement, before submitting the application to the Council, to explain any changes to the proposal and how concerns have been addressed.

We also encourage applicants to let the local ward councillors know about their proposals. The City Council's Code of Practice for councillors on planning applications advises that councillors attending public meetings should take great care to maintain their impartial role,

<sup>13</sup> At the time of writing, major applications are defined by Article 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure (England) Order 2015).

<sup>14</sup> We have produced [help sheets](#) on the Council website which set out examples of good practice in pre-application engagement.

<sup>15</sup> We have produced a [help sheet](#) that set out examples of visualisation tools that can help community engagement.

<sup>16</sup> A planning performance agreement sets timescales for actions by the City Council and applicants at the pre-application and application stage. (See the [Planning Practice Guidance](#) for further information.)

listen to all the points of view expressed by the speakers and public, and not state a conclusive decision on any pre-application proposals or submitted planning applications.

Nonetheless we would encourage applicants on major schemes to make local councillors aware of their proposals so that they can help to bring it to the attention of their constituents at the earliest stages.

Similarly, applicants are encouraged to contact local representative groups who may be able to help raise awareness and explain the proposals to the community, and may also be able to provide representative views from a community perspective and provide local insight.

- 6.3 There are significant benefits to involving communities and stakeholders early on in the process of preparing of a proposal before it is finalised and submitted to the City Council for planning permission, including:
- Issues and opportunities can be identified, and where possible addressed, early on in the process, making more efficient use of resources (both for the applicant and the City Council);
  - Community and stakeholder views can be taken into consideration early on, helping to achieve higher quality design that utilises local knowledge and better reflects communities' needs and aspirations;
  - Addressing issues early on is likely to result in higher quality proposals that are likely to move through the application process more quickly and smoothly;
  - Responding to community and stakeholder views early on reduces the likelihood of objections at the application stage; and
  - Early engagement increases openness and transparency.
- 6.4 With regard to major applications, it is noted that Section 122 of the Localism Act 2011 inserted a new Section 61W into the Town and County Planning Act 1990 which currently requires applicants to carry out pre-application consultations where a proposed development meets criteria set out by the Government in a development order. In future there may be development orders published in relation to this requirement, which will influence the requirements for applicants to consult on major applications. Irrespective of the regulations, the City Council is keen to encourage pre-application engagement.

### **Involvement once applications are submitted and are under consideration by the City Council**

- 6.5 The Government sets out minimum standards for consulting on planning applications that the City Council must comply with (see Appendices Table 3). These standards apply to all applications. If the City Council goes beyond the standards required by the Government then there needs to be a balance between cost, speed of decision making, and providing a reasonable opportunity for public comment.
- 6.6 People are encouraged to 'self service' where possible, using updates on the City Council website and through alert services such as [PlanningFinder](#) to find out about planning applications.
- 6.7 The City Council will make information available about planning applications using the following methods (underlined indicates online/electronic information):

**Advertisements and site notices** – site notices will be placed in the vicinity of the

application site to notify the occupiers of the properties most likely to be affected by the development proposals, including those bordering an application site. The number and location of notices will be proportionate to the proposal. Comments are normally required within 21 days of the notice being displayed. Developers are also required to display site notices for certain types of development. In addition, the City Council is required to publish information about some types of planning application<sup>17</sup> in a local newspaper<sup>18</sup>.

**Public Access** – the details of all submitted planning applications are available on the City Council website to view online through the Public Access system.

**PlanningFinder** – online tool similar to Public Access which enables the public to view all planning applications. People can also register to receive email updates about individual applications or notifications of new planning applications received within specific postcode areas to help you find out about development in an area.

**Weekly list** – a list is published weekly of all the valid planning applications we have received. This list also highlights key information such as developments in or affecting conservation areas and developments that could affect a listed building or its setting. The list is available on the City Council website.

**Statutory consultees** – we are legally required to consult certain organisations as set out in government guidance<sup>19</sup>. The organisations consulted will vary depending on the nature of the proposal and location.

**Availability of plans** – plans and documents submitted as part of a planning application are available to view online and at the main City Council offices (St Aldate's Chambers, subject to there being no restrictions such as those introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic) during office hours. Paper copies of documents for major planning applications are available in reception, or for other types of planning application are available to view by making an appointment with the relevant case officer in advance. All planning applications are also available to view on the [City Council website](#) via Public Access. The website contains further details of the applications including when they are likely to be determined.

## How planning applications are determined

- 6.8 Applications are assessed against planning policies by planning officers. An officer will write a report outlining the main issues and considering them against the relevant planning policies before reaching a recommendation to approve or refuse permission for the proposal. Before recommending a decision, the planning officer will make a full site inspection and take account of any comments received from neighbours, interested bodies, and statutory consultees. The results of any consultation will be reported and taken into account in decisions made by, and on behalf of, the City Council.
- 6.9 In general, planning applications will be determined in accordance with adopted policies, unless material considerations outweigh these policies<sup>20</sup>. A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application, or in an appeal against a planning decision. We have produced a help sheet that provides more information on material considerations which is available on our [website](#) to help you comment on applications.

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<sup>17</sup> The publicity requirements for different types of planning application are set by the Government in the [Planning Practice Guidance](#).

<sup>18</sup> Qualifying planning applications are currently advertised in the Oxford Times newspaper.

<sup>19</sup> A summary of statutory consultees for planning applications is provided in the [Planning Practice Guidance](#).

<sup>20</sup> Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 6.10 Legislation requires that applications are refused only when there are good planning reasons for refusal. In some cases it is appropriate to impose planning conditions in order to render a proposal acceptable. In other cases, officers may ask for small changes to be made to the proposal, and for amended plans to be submitted, in order to resolve issues. Any amended plans will be available on the City Council website and if the changes impact significantly then they will be subject to additional consultation, which may include updated site notices around the site, and re-advertisement to those previously consulted. Alternatively if there are more significant issues to resolve, the application may be determined in its original form and the applicant invited to re-apply with revised proposals as a new application.
- 6.11 The majority of planning applications are decided by planning officers under delegated powers. These are mainly householder applications and small-scale or minor development proposals. Planning applications are decided in this way to help ensure that the majority are dealt with promptly.
- 6.12 Other applications are decided by a Planning Committee if:
- The application falls outside officer delegated powers (for example major applications);
  - City councillors request that the application is dealt with at committee; or
  - The application is submitted on behalf of the City Council or by an officer or city councillor.
- 6.13 Reports for applications being determined at committee are available for public inspection at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers, subject to there being no restrictions such as those introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic) and on the City Council website usually one week before the committee meeting. The current structure at the City Council is two area planning committees (East and West), plus a single Planning Review Committee. Following a decision, the Council's Planning Review Committee may on occasions, reconsider planning applications that have been dealt with by the area planning committees but which councillors have "called in" for reconsideration.
- 6.14 Planning Committee meetings are open to members of the public to hear the discussion. The following groups will usually have the opportunity to speak at the committee before a decision is reached:
- Parish Councils;
  - Objectors/representatives of objectors; and
  - Applicants/their agents and supporters.
- 6.15 Normally a maximum of five minutes is available to speak either against or in support of each application, and this must be shared between all those wishing to speak at the meeting.
- 6.16 Committee members will then vote on whether to accept the officer's recommendation in the report, and the outcome will be announced verbally at the meeting. Some applications may be deferred to a later meeting if further information or negotiation is needed.

- 6.17 All decision notices are published on the City Council website (via Public Access). A copy of the decision notice is also sent to the applicant (or their agent).

## Appeals against planning application decisions

- 6.18 If an applicant has a planning application refused, or disagrees with the conditions attached to the granting of permission, or if the City Council fails to decide the application within the agreed timescales, the applicant has a right to appeal. In most cases appeals will be determined by an independent Inspector, although in some cases the Secretary of State may choose to determine the appeal themselves. This right of appeal does not extend to a third party (i.e. there is no right of appeal to anyone who is not the applicant).
- 6.19 The procedures for notifying people of appeals and for submitting comments during the appeal process is set out by the Planning Inspectorate<sup>21</sup>, so it is beyond the remit of this SCI. However for completeness an overview of the process is provided here.
- 6.20 When an appeal is made, the City Council will contact all those who commented on the original planning application and to adjoining properties, notifying them that an appeal has been made and, depending upon the type of appeal, informing them of how they can submit further comments should they want to do so. There is no need to repeat comments submitted at the application stage as these comments will be forwarded to the independent Inspector by the City Council. Local councillors are also notified.
- 6.21 The majority of appeals are dealt with by written representations and, where this is the case, the appeal is decided on the basis of the statements submitted by the appellant, the City Council and any third parties. Where a public hearing is to be held to consider an appeal, a site notice is also erected and in some cases information is published in the press. Appeal hearings and inquiries are open to the public and members of the public may also be given an opportunity to speak, at the discretion of the Inspector.

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<sup>21</sup> The Planning Inspectorate guide to Planning Appeals is available online via the Planning Portal website: [www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk)

## 7. How will consultations be resourced?

7.1. Undertaking and publicising consultations on planning policy documents and planning applications requires considerable resources.

7.2. The following principles have been applied throughout the SCI to achieve effective consultation whilst at the same time making best use of City Council resources:

- Electronic methods of communication through digital technology are promoted as an efficient way to share information with a large number of people and quickly. However, care has been taken to ensure that we do not exclude people who find it difficult to access material online.
- Council-led consultation events will normally be led by City Council planners, but may involve other City Council officers and external resources if needed.
- The Planning department will work with other City Council departments, to share costs and resources, and to combine consultations to make best use of the community's time and efforts, and avoid consultation fatigue.
- When producing the consultation programme for new policy documents, we will combine consultation activities where appropriate, and as timetabling allows, to get the best value from resources and to avoid consultation fatigue.
- Where major planning applications require significant publicity and engagement, this may also require resources from the applicant, especially at the pre-application stage prior to submitting to the Council.
- The City Council will provide support to neighbourhood planning groups and is required to undertake consultation at specific stages, however the majority of consultation will be organised and funded by the relevant neighbourhood group.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1** Summary of statutory requirements and additional consultation methods for Development Plan documents

**Table 2** Summary of statutory requirements and additional consultation methods for Supplementary Planning Documents

**Table 3** Summary of Planning Application Consultation



**Table 1: Summary of statutory requirements and additional consultation methods for Development Plan Documents**

<b>Development Plan Documents</b> (including the Local Plan, Area Action Plans and site allocations) When starting work on any new Development Plan Document, an appropriate City Council committee (usually the City Executive Board) will agree a specific consultation programme for that document. This will set out which publicity and consultation methods are most appropriate for that document and how they will be used at each stage, so that both councillors and the public are clear about what consultation can be expected.		
<b>Stage consultation takes place</b>	<b>What we must do to consult and notify you</b> (Statutory requirements)	<b>Additional methods of informing and consulting you</b> (We will select the most appropriate methods from this list taking into consideration the subject of the policy document. We will also be mindful of those who may not have access to the internet.)
Early public involvement and Consultation on emerging options or draft policies  (May be more than one stage)	Notify the people and organisations listed in the Regulations <sup>22</sup> to tell them the subject of the local development plan document and invite comments on what it should contain.  Undertake consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report with the people and organisations listed in Regulations and other bodies as considered appropriate by the City Council.	<b>Inform at appropriate stages using a combination of the following methods:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release to local news organisations.</li> <li>• Contact groups and/or individuals on the City Council’s consultation register by email/letter (contact may be targeted if appropriate to the subject under consideration e.g. targeting people in a specific geographical area).</li> <li>• City Council website.</li> <li>• Social Media (such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube).</li> <li>• Posters (poster locations could include community noticeboards, libraries and other venues as appropriate).</li> <li>• Leaflet campaigns.</li> <li>• Development Management User Group.</li> <li>• City Council newsletter ‘Your Oxford’.</li> <li>• Contact local interest groups (such as Area Forums and Resident Associations) to ask them to share information with their members. We may also contact other local groups and organisations such as schools, youth groups, university students, business groups, etc. as appropriate.</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> </ul>
Formal public consultation on pre-submission document	Pre-submission document, Sustainability Appraisal and associated documents required by the Regulations <sup>23</sup> to be made available for inspection at the City Council’s main offices (St Aldate’s Chambers, when this is possible) and published on the City Council website.  Notify the statutory bodies listed in Regulations. This includes people who live, work or operate in the area, as considered appropriate by the City Council.	<b>Consult at an appropriate stage using one or a combination of the following methods:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires and/or comment forms (online and/or paper versions)</li> <li>• Public exhibitions/displays/stalls/road shows (staffed and/or unstaffed, with consideration to interactive online engagement exercises)</li> </ul>

<sup>22</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 18 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

<sup>23</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 19 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops/'Planning for Real' exercises</li> <li>• Involve pre-existing panels and other regular City Council meetings with groups</li> <li>• One-to-one meetings with key stakeholders, in person, by phone or online</li> <li>• Focus groups, which may use digital methods</li> <li>• City Council committees (which may be held online)</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> <li>• Telephone</li> </ul> <p>We may also look to use other consultation methods as best practice continues to evolve, including the utilisation of digital technology. This includes meetings and/or focus groups taking place online using platforms such as 'Zoom' and 'Microsoft Teams' etc. and utilising features such as 'Breakout Rooms' which allow you to split your 'Zoom' meeting up into separate sessions.</p> <p><b>Each time that we undertake formal consultation we will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the formal consultation document available on the City Council website, at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers), and in appropriate public locations/deposit points in the city (see the <a href="#">help sheet</a> for specific locations of deposit points that we may use, and their opening hours).</li> <li>• Consider all comments received and publish feedback on the City Council website.</li> <li>• Consider extending the consultation period where it includes the summer or Christmas holidays.</li> </ul>
Submission to Government and Independent Examination	<p>Make copies of the submission documents available for inspection both online and at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers, when possible).</p> <p>Notify the statutory bodies listed in the Regulations<sup>24</sup>, as well as other people who have requested to be notified of the submission of the</p>	Provide details of the hearing sessions and examination progress via an examination website or dedicated page on the City Council website.

<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 22 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

Adoption	<p>Final document, adoption statement, Inspector's report and final Sustainability Appraisal to be made available for inspection at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers, when possible) and published on the City Council website as set out in the Regulations<sup>25</sup>.</p> <p>Notify anyone who requested to be notified of adoption and send them a copy of the adoption statement.</p>	No further consultation needed.
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**Table 2: Summary of statutory requirements and additional consultation methods for Supplementary Planning Documents**

<b>Supplementary Planning Documents</b>		
<p>When starting work on any new Supplementary Planning Document, an appropriate City Council committee (usually the City Executive Board) will agree a specific consultation programme for that document. This will set out which publicity and consultation methods are most appropriate for that document, so that both councillors and the public are clear about what consultation can be expected.</p>		
<b>Stage consultation takes place</b>	<b>What we must do to consult and notify you</b> (Statutory requirements)	<b>Additional methods of informing and consulting you</b> (We will select the most appropriate methods from this list taking into consideration the subject of the policy document. We will also be mindful of those who may not have access to the internet.)
<p>Early public involvement</p> <p>and</p> <p>Consultation on draft document</p>	<p>Regulations<sup>26</sup> suggest a minimum 4 week consultation period on draft document.</p>	<p><b>To inform at appropriate stages using a combination of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press release to local news organisations.</li> <li>• Contact groups and/or individuals on the City Council's consultation register by email/letter (contact may be targeted if appropriate to the subject under consideration e.g. targeting people in a specific area).</li> <li>• Social Media (such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube)</li> <li>• City Council website</li> <li>• Posters (poster locations could include: community noticeboards, libraries and other venues as appropriate)</li> <li>• Development Management User Group</li> <li>• Contact local interest groups (such as Area Forums and Resident Associations) to ask them to share information with their members. We may also contact other local groups and organisations such as schools, youth groups, university students, business groups, etc. as appropriate.</li> </ul>

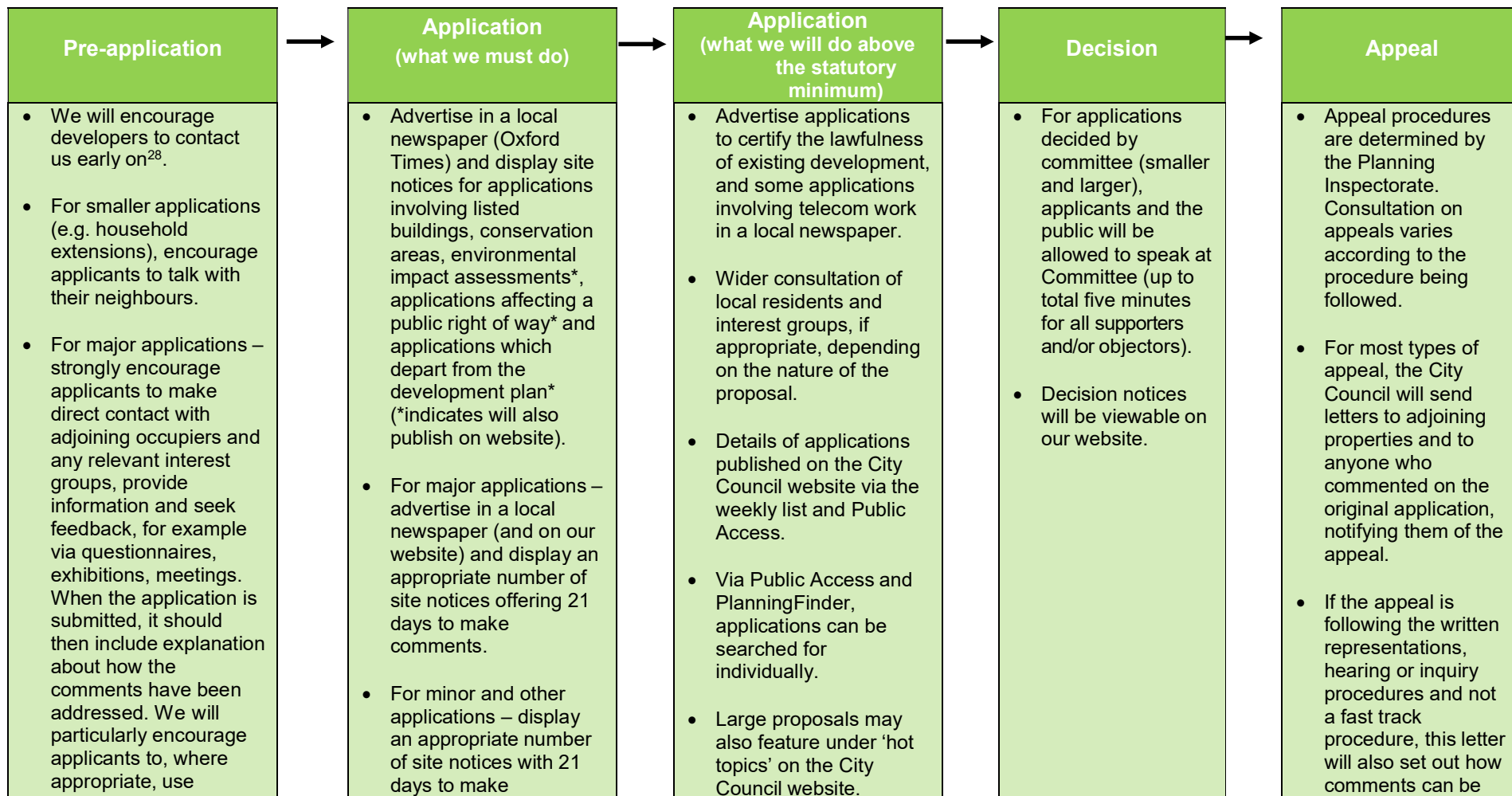
<sup>25</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 26 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

<sup>26</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 12/13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

		<p><b>To consult at appropriate stages using a combination of some of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaires and/or comment forms (online and/or paper copies)</li> <li>• Public exhibitions/displays/stalls/road shows (staffed and/or unstaffed, potentially online)</li> <li>• Interactive displays, with consideration about potential for making these work online, in addition or as well as in public locations.</li> <li>• Workshops/'Planning for Real' Exercises</li> <li>• One-to-one meetings with key stakeholders in person or by phone, email or video call</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Involve pre-existing panels and other regular City Council meetings with groups</li> <li>• Public meetings/area committees.</li> </ul> <p>We may also look to use other consultation methods as best practice continues to evolve, including the utilisation of digital technology. This includes meetings and/or focus groups taking place online using platforms such as 'Zoom' and 'Microsoft Teams' etc. and utilising features such as 'Breakout Rooms' which allow you to split your 'Zoom' meeting up into separate sessions.</p> <p><b>Each time that we undertake formal consultation we will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the formal consultation documents available on the City Council website, at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers) and in appropriate public locations/deposit points in the city (see the <a href="#">supporting paper</a> for specific locations we may use and their opening hours).</li> <li>• Consider all comments received and publish feedback on the City Council</li> </ul>
Adoption	<p>Prepare and publish a summary of consultation, and make it available for inspection along with the SPD, and the adoption statement, at the main City Council offices (St Aldate's Chambers) and on the City Council website.</p> <p>Notify anyone who requested to be notified of adoption and send them a copy of the adoption statement<sup>27</sup>.</p>	No further consultation needed.

<sup>27</sup> At the time of writing, these requirements are set out in Regulation 12/13 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

**Table 3: Summary of Planning Application Consultation**



<sup>28</sup> There may be additional fee for this service. Further details about pre-application advice are provided on the City Council [website](#).

illustrative measures to assist the local community in understanding the proposal (see website for additional information about examples to help visualisation). This may also be applicable during period of the application being considered, depending on the technique used.

- For applicants of major applications where a Planning Performance Agreement is in place, we will seek to incorporate pre-application community engagement as a formal requirement.
- We will encourage applicants of major applications to engage with the Oxford Design Review Panel,<sup>29</sup> both at pre-application stage and at the point when a more detailed proposal is set out.

comments.

- Depending on the nature of the application, consult with appropriate statutory consultees.

- Every planning application will have a nominated planning officer as a main point of contact for interested parties.
- A planning officer will visit site prior to recommending a decision. A site visit may not be necessary if a planning officer has visited the site previously, for example associated with pre-application advice. A planning officer may also use photographic evidence available for a site if a visit is not possible.

submitted.

- There is no opportunity to submit comments on appeals following a fast track procedure (such as the householder appeal procedure).
- Copies of all comments received at the application stage will be forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate.
- Members of the public may also be given the opportunity to speak at a hearing or inquiry.

Statutory consultation bodies will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20066/planning\\_applications/765/design\\_in\\_the\\_planning\\_process](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20066/planning_applications/765/design_in_the_planning_process)

**Appendix 2 - Measures and amended practice that may be necessary in response to emergency situations such as Covid-19 pandemic**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. Oxford City Council is committed to keeping essential services running where possible. It is important that the planning process continues to move forward as planning has an important role to play in supporting our communities and economy. Our Planning service will adapt its approach to planning decisions and plan making where necessary in a number of ways in light of any restrictions relating to emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.2. This Appendix and the measures contained within it will apply particularly when restrictions are introduced by the UK government, for example closure of public buildings and social distancing measures.

## **2. Involving the Community at the Planning Application Stage**

### Decision Making Process

- 2.1. Our Planning service will always endeavour to continue determining planning applications during a crisis, including the coronavirus pandemic. We have a robust system to determine applications remotely. We have the technology to be able to do this. We can change some of our working practices around site notices and site visits and these are set out below. The SCI encourages effective pre-application engagement and we would encourage applicants to discuss with their case officer the approach to pre-application consultation to ensure it is effective at informing proposals.

### Hard Copy Documents

- 2.2. We are currently unable to make available hard copies of planning application documents in either the Council or local libraries as these offices are closed to the public. In certain circumstances, the Council has a statutory duty to make hard copy documents available for inspection at the Council offices and at other locations. In the current circumstances, these documents will be available on the Council website. The public will still be advised of relevant applications by site notices and/or press notices. In addition every planning application has an appointed case officer that the public can contact should residents encounter any issues in accessing these documents.

### Site Visits

- 2.3. As part of any government advice on social distancing, officers will minimise site visits to properties. Instead, officers will review what information they have available to them to make a decision, whether this be by doing site visits from the public realm, reviewing planning histories, and contacting applicants to undertake virtual site visits by requesting photographs with guidance from the officers. This is not the case for all applications but applicants may be asked to provide photographs. Any site visits that we do carry out and where access onto the site is essential will be governed by social distancing requirements and a series of triage questions will be asked in advance of any visit being arranged.



### **3. Involving the Community in Planning Policy**

- 3.1. Some specific changes may be needed to respond to government restrictions. Although documents can be made available online, making plan documents available to view at the Council's Office and other deposit locations will not be possible while they are closed to visitors. We also acknowledge that any public consultations on development plan documents and supplementary planning documents that take place during restrictions may not be able to undertake physical meetings, events etc. which are listed as possible consultation methods in Table 1 and 2 of the SCI. As set out at paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 of the SCI an appropriate consultation programme for each document is required and this should consider appropriate measures for the individual document being prepared.
- 3.2. The following measures will be utilised in the absence of being able to deposit hard copies of planning policy documents where set out in paragraph 3.11 of the SCI. These seek to ensure that local people are still able to participate in planning processes and minimise the impact of not being able to make hard copies of planning policy documents in deposit locations. These measures address the consequences of this unavoidable situation and ensure local people continue to be made aware of the progress of the planning policy documents and have access to documents associated with them.

#### *I Making Documents and associated information available online*

- 3.3. The City Council will make the relevant documents available online via the City Council's website.

#### *II Notification to all individuals, businesses and organisations on our Local Plan databases*

- 3.4. The City Council will inform all persons and organisations on the Local Plan database of formally published policy documents including consultations documents, submission of development plan documents Inspector reports, and final adopted versions of documents. This will indicate how and where the relevant documents can be viewed on the City Council's website. Included within this correspondence will be the contact details of a named officer including phone number and email address which can be used to discuss any problems they may have in accessing documents via the website. Notifications will be sent by email and also by letter to anyone who has not provided an email address previously.

#### *III Public notices at normal deposit points and the Town Hall*

- 3.5. A public notice will be posted at the City Council's main office (St. Aldates Chambers), the Oxford Town Hall and all public libraries listed in the published Statement of Community Involvement as deposit locations. The notices will be posted in a position that can be seen and read from the public highway or other publically accessible vantage point. The notice will inform the reader of the relevant document or consultation and how and where documents can be viewed on the City Council's website. The notice will also give a name, phone number and email address for an officer who can be contacted by any person who is encountering difficulty in accessing the documents online.

#### *IV Public Notice in Local Newspapers*

- 3.6. A similar public notice will also be published in the two main local newspapers – the Oxford Mail and the Oxford Times. The notice will inform the reader where the relevant documents are on the City Council's website. The notice will also give a name, phone number and email address for an officer who can be contacted by any person who is encountering difficulty in accessing the documents online.

#### *V Press Releases*

3.7. A press release will also be published and sent to local media outlets to raise awareness through local news. This will include where relevant documents can be found on The City Council's website. The press release will also give a name, phone number and email address for an officer who can be contacted by any person who is encountering difficulty in accessing the documents online.

#### *VI Social Media*

3.8. The City Council will also disseminate information via other usual social media channels about relevant planning documents and/or consultations. This will include where the relevant documents can be found on the City Council's website and a name, phone number and email address for an officer who can be contacted by any person who is encountering difficulty in accessing the documents online.

## 4. Neighbourhood Planning

- 4.1 For Neighbourhood Planning, deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will also need to take account of government guidance. Any relevant documents should be published online to view. When the relevant qualifying body's office or other appropriate publicly accessible venues are not available, measures should be put in place by the relevant qualifying body (e.g. a Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum) to ensure access to assistance, with notices including an email address and phone number, so that anyone having problems viewing the documents can discuss the consultation and seek assistance to view them.
- 4.2 The Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government have published a new section to the online planning guidance relating to neighbourhood planning specifically about the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and neighbourhood plans<sup>30</sup>. This will concern those neighbourhood planning groups preparing neighbourhood plans who may be at a stage close to carrying out a public consultation or submitting their plan to the Councils. The guidance also indicates that no referendums can be carried out now until 6 May 2021.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#covid-19>

## 5. Approaches where a revised approach is necessary due to a pandemic or other state of emergency<sup>31</sup>

Page	Paragraph	Ideal approach	Revised Approach in Response to emergency
13	3.11	<p>'The latest version of any formally published consultation documents will be available on the City Council website and at relevant deposit points throughout the city;</p> <p>At examination stage (for local development plan documents), we will tell those who asked to be notified when the document has been submitted to the Secretary of State. We will also publish a consultation summary report on the City Council website and the representations from the pre-submission stage will be made available for public inspection; the final, adopted versions of documents will be published on the City Council website and at relevant deposit points throughout the city;'</p>	<p>If it is not possible for the Council to make hard copies at the deposit points throughout the city, the Council will make the relevant documents available online via our website and take the additional temporary measures set out in section 3 of this appendix, above.</p>
15	4.3 – e)	<p>'Publicity/submission - consultation Once the neighbourhood planning group has submitted their Neighbourhood Plan to the City Council, the City Council will publish the plan and supporting documents in accordance with the regulatory requirements on the City Council website. Copies of these documents will also be available at the main council offices (St Aldate's Chambers). The City Council will contact all those who we are advised have commented previously on the Neighbourhood Plan to invite final comments.'</p>	<p>If it is not possible for neighbourhood planning groups to make their plan and supporting documents available to view at the main City Council offices (St Aldate's Chambers). Instead, the neighbourhood planning group ensure access to assistance, with notices including an email address and phone number, so that anyone having problems viewing the documents can discuss the consultation and seek assistance to view them.</p> <p>Deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will also need to take account of government guidance.</p>

<sup>31</sup> The revised approach will only replace the adopted approach where COVID-19 pandemic restrictions deem these revised measures necessary. Once the government's advice on the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions changes to allow the adopted approach, those relevant paragraphs will be reinstated.

Page	Paragraph	Ideal approach	Revised Approach in Response to emergency
15	4.3 – f)	‘...The City Council will then publish the Examiner’s report and decision statement on the City Council website, and make it available to view at the City Council’s main offices (St Aldate’s Chambers), before proceeding to arrange (subject to a favourable Examiner’s report) the referendum.’	It is not possible for the Council to make Neighbourhood Plan Examiner’s reports and decision statements available to view at the City Council’s main offices (St Aldate’s Chambers). The City Council will make the relevant documents available online via our website and neighbourhood planning group should work to ensure access to assistance, with notices including an email address and phone number, so that anyone having problems viewing the documents can discuss the consultation and seek assistance to view them. Deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will also need to take account of government guidance.
15	4.3 – g)	‘At least 28 days before the referendum takes place, the City Council will publish the following documents on its website (hard copies will also be made available at the main City Council offices, St Aldate’s Chambers): the draft Neighbourhood Plan; the Examiner’s report; a summary of the representations submitted to the Examiner; a statement that the City Council is satisfied that the plan meets the basic conditions; general information on town and country planning to ensure voters have sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision; and an information statement that provides detailed information on the referendum arrangements. The City Council will also encourage the neighbourhood planning group to let local people know about the referendum and encourage a high participation rate so that it is representative’	Government guidance has stated that no referendums can take place until 6 May 2021 and is therefore unlikely to be affected by current restrictions.
17	5.7	‘Availability of plans – plans and documents submitted as part of a	It is not possible for the Council to make available

Page	Paragraph	Ideal approach	Revised Approach in Response to emergency
		<p>planning application are available to view online at the main City Council offices (St Aldate's Chambers) during office hours. Paper copies of documents for major planning applications are available in reception, or for other types of planning application are available to view by making an appointment with the relevant case officer in advance.'</p>	<p>plans and documents submitted as part of a planning application to view online at the main City Council offices (St Aldate's Chambers) or provide paper copies of documents for major planning applications. Instead, the City Council will make the relevant documents available online via our website. Every planning application has an appointed and named case officer that the public can contact should residents encounter any issues in accessing these documents. The public will still be advised of relevant applications by site notices and/or press notices.</p>
18	5.8	<p>'Before recommending a decision, the planning officer will make a full site inspection and take account of any comments received from neighbours, interested bodies, and statutory consultees'</p>	<p>As part of the current government advice on social distancing, officers are not making site visits to properties.</p> <p>However, officers are currently reviewing what information they have available to them to make a decision, whether this be by doing site visits from the public realm, reviewing planning histories, and contacting applicants to undertake virtual site visits by requesting photographs with guidance from the officers. This is not the case for all applications but applicants may be asked to provide photographs.</p>
19	5.13	<p>'Reports for applications being determined at committee are available for public inspection at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers) and on the City Council website usually one week before the committee meeting.'</p>	<p>Reports for applications being determined at committee are not currently available for public inspection at the City Council's main offices (St Aldate's Chambers).</p> <p>Instead, these reports are available online to view via</p>

Page	Paragraph	Ideal approach	Revised Approach in Response to emergency
			<p>our website. Every planning application has an appointed and named case officer that the public can contact should residents encounter any issues in accessing these documents.</p>

## Glossary

Term	Definition
<b>Adoption</b>	Formal approval by the council of a document whereupon it achieves its full weight in making planning decisions.
<b>Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)</b>	The performance of planning policies will be reviewed in an Annual Monitoring Report. The Annual Monitoring Report will also review the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and Statement of Community Involvement in Planning. There will not be consultation on this report as it is a factual document, but we may contact specific groups to obtain some of the data required.
<b>Area Action Plan (AAP)</b>	These provide more detailed information to guide development in a specific area where significant development is planned.
<b>Cabinet</b>	Consists of lead councillors of the majority party (at the time of writing, Labour Group is the largest party for Oxford).
<b>Community</b>	Includes all the individuals, groups and organisations that live, work, or operate within an area.
<b>Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)</b>	A standard charge on new development to help the funding of infrastructure.
<b>Conservation Areas</b>	An area of special architectural or historical interest that makes them worth protecting and improving. The main purpose of creating a conservation areas is to preserve and enhance the unique and distinctive character of an area through planning and other environmental measures.
<b>Constitution</b>	Oxford City Council's Constitution sets out how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.
<b>Consultation</b>	Asking for the views of the community and stakeholders (for example, asking for views on a draft document).
<b>Development Management (DM)</b>	The Development Management team is responsible for assessing planning applications in accordance with the adopted development plan, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) and any other material considerations including consultation responses.
<b>Development Plan</b>	This includes adopted Local Plans, neighbourhood plans and the Oxfordshire Waste and Minerals Local Plan. It is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Planning applications have to be decided in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise
<b>Development Plan Documents</b>	Development Plan Documents set planning policies in council areas. All are subject to public consultation and independent examination.
<b>Duty to Cooperate</b>	Created in the Localism Act 2011 and amends the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It places a legal duty on councils, county councils in England and public bodies to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local and Marine Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.
<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b>	Process of evaluating the likely environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse.
<b>Full Council</b>	Consists of all elected councillors.
<b>Listed Building</b>	Buildings and structures which are listed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as being of special architectural and historic interest and whose protection and maintenance are the subject of special legislation. Listed building consent is required



	before any works are carried out on a listed building.
<b>Local Development Scheme</b>	This sets out the City Council's programme for creating new development plan documents and supplementary planning documents over a three year period, including a description and timetable for each document.
<b>Local Plan</b>	This outlines the vision for the city and how it will be achieved. Also includes development management policies and site allocations which allocates land for specific uses.
<b>Major Applications</b>	Development involving any one or more of the following: (a) the winning and working of minerals or the use of land for mineral-working deposits; (b) waste development; (c) the provision of dwellinghouses where— (i) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or (ii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectares or more and it is not known whether the development falls within sub-paragraph (c)(i); (d) the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or (e) development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more.
<b>Material/Material Consideration</b>	A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application, or in an appeal against a planning decision.
<b>Minor Application</b>	Small-scale development proposals which do not meet the criteria of a major application. Small-scale proposals consist mainly of householder applications.
<b>National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)</b>	Sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied in preparing local and neighbourhood plans and in determining planning applications.
<b>National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)</b>	Provides further guidance and details on the policies set out in the NPPF.
<b>Neighbourhood Planning Groups</b>	Community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parish councils. Where a Parish Council exists for local area, then they are the only group allowed to progress a neighbourhood plan in their area. It is the role of the City Council to agree who should be the neighbourhood planning group for the neighbourhood areas without a parish council.
<b>Neighbourhood Plans</b>	Neighbourhood Forums and Parish Councils can use powers under the Localism Act to produce a neighbourhood plan that allocates land for development and sets general policies in their areas.
<b>Planning Application</b>	Planning applications are determined in accordance with the policies in the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. There are a number of applications types including Listed Building Consents.
<b>Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004</b>	An Act to make provision relating to spatial development and town and country planning; and the compulsory acquisition of land.
<b>Planning Inspectorate (PINS)</b>	The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) is an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Communities and Local Government. PINS deal with planning appeals, national infrastructure planning applications, examinations of local plans and other planning – related and specialist casework.
<b>Planning</b>	Planning officers or officers are responsible for assessing planning

<b>Officers/Officers</b>	applications. Heritage officers are responsible for assessing Listed Building Consent applications.
<b>Planning Performance Agreement</b>	A planning performance agreement sets timescales for actions by the City Council and applicants at the pre-application and application stage
<b>Planning Permission</b>	Formal permission from a local planning authority for the erection or alteration of buildings or similar development.
<b>Planning Policy</b>	The Planning Policy team is responsible for producing the planning documents that make up the Development Plan.
<b>Pre-Application</b>	Pre-application is an informal process, independent of the formal planning application process that provides an indication as to whether a proposal is likely to be considered acceptable or not. The advice given does not constitute a formal response or decision of the Council, but is an informal opinion by a Planning Officer.
<b>Referendum</b>	A general vote by the electorate on a single political question which has been referred to them for a direct decision.
<b>Representations</b>	Commenting on a planning matter, including both objecting and/or supporting.
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Individuals or organisations with a direct influence on the subject under discussion, such as landowners or the highways authority.
<b>Statement of Community Interest (SCI)</b>	This document is itself the subject of public consultation to help develop an approach that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community, stakeholders and the City Council. The consultation requirements set out in this document will need to be met in producing any new local development plan documents or supplementary planning documents.
<b>Statutory Consultees</b>	The City Council are legally required to consult certain organisations as set out in government guidance. The organisations consulted will vary depending on the nature of the proposal and location.
<b>Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)</b>	An assessment of the environmental effects of policies, plans and programmes, required by European legislation, which will be part of the public consultation on the policies.
<b>Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)</b>	These documents supplement and elaborate upon policies and proposals set out in development plan documents. Although they are not subject to independent examination, they will undergo public consultation, and must be consistent with national planning policies. These documents may focus on specific issues (such as affordable housing) or they may provide site specific development guidance. They cannot change policies contained within the Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plans, but can give detail on how those policies are implemented.
<b>Sustainability Appraisals (SA)</b>	These will be produced by the City Council alongside local development plan documents and, where appropriate, supplementary planning documents. Sustainability Appraisals examine the impact of policies and proposals on economic, social and environmental factors, and fulfil an important legal requirement known as 'Strategic Environmental Assessment'. Sustainability Appraisals are iterative, prepared alongside policy documents, and will be available for consultation alongside the development plan documents or supplementary planning documents that they relate to at formal stages of consultation.
<b>Technical Advice Note (TAN)</b>	These are documents which provide informal advice and guidance on key issues for applicants/developers and decision-makers.

