

Delegated Decision

19 May 2020

Minor Modifications to the Statement of Community Involvement



Report of Corporate Management Team

**Geoff Paul, Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy
and Growth**

**Councillor Carl Marshall, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic
Regeneration**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to consider the minor modifications to the Statement of Community Involvement (2019) to reflect exceptional circumstances such as the current national lockdown and social distancing related to COVID-19 and the implications for the forthcoming main modifications consultation on the County Durham Plan.

Executive summary

- 1 Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which explains how local communities and other interested parties are consulted on planning matters. The SCI was adopted on 7 January 2019. The SCI sets out the opportunities available for all interested parties to become involved in the planning process; local plan preparation, development management and neighbourhood plans.
- 2 The County Durham Plan is currently subject to an Examination in Public. Throughout the examination, the appointed independent Inspector has explored the potential for main modifications to resolve any soundness and legal compliance issues he has identified. The Inspector is now satisfied that, at this stage of the examination, the main modifications proposed by the council are all necessary to address soundness issues and will be effective in so doing. The next key stage

in the examination is a public consultation on these proposed main modifications.

- 3 The nation is currently in a state of lockdown owing to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The council has had to make many difficult decisions in response to the national crisis including the temporary closure of libraries and customer access points because of the social distancing measures that have been put in place by the Government. Therefore, whilst most of the current consultation arrangements set out in the SCI remain available, it is not currently possible to make use of some methods mentioned, including making hard copies of documents available within libraries and customer access points.
- 4 It is therefore necessary, in line with the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 076 - 078 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513), to revise the Statement of Community Involvement (2019) to acknowledge that there may be some circumstances, beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lockdown during the COVID-19, which require a change in some methods of engagement and involvement. Even in such circumstances, however, the council remains committed to involving the community as much as practicable and this report outlines the alternative consultation arrangements that are to be put in place.

Recommendation

The Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Regeneration, is recommended to agree the minor modifications to the SCI are agreed in particular to ensure that consultation on the County Durham Plan can continue in exceptional circumstances such as a time of national lockdown. The consultation on the main modifications will commence on 26 May 2020 and will run until 21 July 2020. This will ensure the progress of the County Durham Plan through the statutory process can continue.

Background

- 5 The County Durham Plan seeks to guide the future development of the county and to improve the lives of its existing and future residents. The county has seen some successful regeneration in the past but our overall economy is the weakest in the North East, itself the poorest performing economy in England.
- 6 COVID-19 is having, and will continue to have for some time, significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of residents and the county's economy, including the side effects of the current lockdown. These impacts will have direct consequences on the county's economy and it is important that an up-to-date County Durham Plan be adopted to guide the future development of the county to improve lives of existing and future residents and aid the county's economic recovery. The County Durham Plan is an ambitious plan that promotes quality of life, provides jobs for a flexible and skilled workforce, protects and enhances our special environment and supports our towns and villages. This plan will help provide the certainty needed to support businesses and local communities in future including as the county recovers from the consequences of COVID-19.
- 7 The County Durham Plan is currently subject to an Examination in Public. Throughout the examination, the Inspector has explored the potential for main modifications to resolve any soundness and legal compliance issues he has identified. Section 20(7C) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires the Inspector to recommend main modifications that are necessary to make the plan sound and legally-compliant.
- 8 The Inspector is now satisfied that, at this stage of the examination, the main modifications proposed by the council are all necessary to address soundness issues and will be effective in so doing. The next key stage in the examination is a public consultation on these proposed main modifications.
- 9 This stage of consultation is not prescribed within the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. However, paragraph 6.7 of the Planning Inspectorate's 'Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations' requires that all proposed main modifications must be subject to public consultation and, where necessary, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment before the Inspector can make recommendations on them. The Procedure Guide recognises (paragraph 6.8) that the precise arrangements for public consultation will vary from case to case but will follow general principles including that the scope and duration of the consultation will reflect those of the

consultation held at Regulation 19 stage. Further detail of the proposed consultation is set out below.

- 10 It should be noted that the consultation is only about the main modifications deemed necessary to make the County Durham Plan sound. This consultation is not about repeating any previously submitted comments as these have already been considered by the Inspector, nor for the submission of comments which do not specially relate to a proposed main modification.

Statement of Community Involvement

- 11 The SCI sets out how communities will be consulted in the planning process including on the preparation of the County Durham Plan.
- 12 Cabinet resolved on 13 June 2018 to agree the revised SCI for consultation from 22 June 2018 to 3 August 2018. It was also resolved that any minor modifications to the document following consultation and approval of the final document are delegated to the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy and Growth in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development. The SCI was subsequently revised to take into account consultation comments before being adopted on 7 January 2019.
- 13 The Statement of Community Involvement (2019) recognises the benefits of a flexible approach to consultation and explains that the council will use a variety of methods to maximise the opportunity to be involved in the preparation of the County Durham Plan. In addition to contacting everyone included on our consultation database either by email or letter, the SCI recognises (at pages six to eight) that the types of methods that will be used either individually or in combination are:
 - (i) internet based consultation and the use of social media;
 - (ii) press and public relations;
 - (iii) availability of reference copies at libraries and customer access points;
 - (iv) public exhibitions;
 - (v) public meetings; and
 - (vi) formal and informal meetings with existing networks.
- 14 The reference to either “individually or in combination” makes clear that the SCI contemplates that not every method will necessarily be used at every stage of public engagement.

- 15 The SCI also sets out (at page 3) that the ways in which the council will endeavour to make consultation documents and any relevant supporting information available; electronically, hard copy documents in main council offices, libraries and customer access points and offering advice via a range of methods including telephone, the council's freepost postal address and email. The wording of the SCI recognises that it may not be possible for all of these methods to be available in every situation.
- 16 Public consultation has always been a significant component in the shaping of the County Durham Plan which has been subject to three separate rounds of six week consultation (Issues and Options 2016, Preferred Options 2018 and the Pre-Submission 2019). The consultation has always been aimed at involving as wide a cross section of the community as possible including; press releases, social media, websites, radio coverage, public drop-in events and exhibitions, specific consultation with schools, presentations and discussions with the Area Action Partnerships through the County Durham Partnership including disability forums.
- 17 In order to ensure that the County Durham Plan can progress in a timely manner taking account of the current pandemic, it is necessary to ensure that the flexible approach to consultation required in the current circumstances is reflected within the SCI. This is specifically acknowledged by Government's Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 076 - 078 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513) which encourages local authorities to undertake an immediate review and update policies where necessary so that plan-making can continue. Therefore, it is proposed that the following wording (as shown in underlined text below) is inserted into the SCI:
- (i) at paragraph 1.1: the council are committed to involving as many people and organisations as possible in the planning process, including those who are traditionally under-represented. This document is the SCI. It sets out how and when the council will provide opportunities for you to contribute in the planning process, including local plan preparation, neighbourhood planning activity as well as the consideration of specific proposals subject to planning applications and Permissions in Principle. It also sets out how the council will support groups undertaking neighbourhood planning activity as well as giving advice on how neighbourhood planning groups should seek to continuously involve local people and groups in this activity. There may be some circumstances, which are beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lock-down during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may

result in a variation to the consultation and involvement methods set out herein. In such circumstances, the council will at all times remain committed to involving the community as much as practicable.

- (ii) at paragraph 2.11: Wherever possible, local plan consultation documents will be made available for inspection at County Hall in Durham, customer access points and council run local and mobile libraries during the set consultation period. The documents will provide details of how and when you can make representations.

- 18 The minor modifications to the SCI have been the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment appended to this report. In considering flexible consultation arrangements, the council have also ensured that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met. The council has had due regard to the matters set out in s149 of the Equality Act. The council will continue to promote equality and diversity, and not unfairly discriminate against anyone who wishes to participate in the planning system. For this reason, hard copy documents were also made available at all previous stages of consultation to anyone without access to the consultation material via electronic means.
- 19 Libraries and customer access points are temporarily closed. It is therefore not possible to make hard copies available at libraries and customer access points at the current time. Should these public buildings reopen prior to or during the consultation then hard copies will be again made available at these locations. All other methods of consultation set out within the Statement of Community Involvement (2019) remain unchanged (albeit not all the methods specified necessarily have been, or will be, utilised at each stage of the process, for example paragraph 2.14 of the SCI in relation to public meetings).
- 20 In order to ensure that no one is unfairly disadvantaged, hard copy documents will be posted to anyone who is unable to access the consultation material via electronic means and requests the documents to be sent. To take account of any delays for postage in the circumstances of the pandemic, it is proposed that the statutory six week consultation period is extended to eight weeks. The consultation on the main modifications will commence on 26 May 2020 and will run until 21 July 2020. This will also allow additional time for people and organisations that may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to respond to the consultation.
- 21 In accordance with the guidance in the 'Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations' on the general principles for consultation at main modifications stage, the minor modifications to the Statement of

Community Involvement (2019) will ensure that the scope and duration of the consultation reflects those of the consultation held at Regulation 19 stage, taking account of exceptional circumstances which are beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

- 22 In order to ensure that the consultation on the main modifications to the County Durham Plan can be undertaken in a robust and fair manner, in the context of exceptional circumstances which are beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic, the necessary minor modifications identified above should be made to the Statement of Community Involvement (2019).
- 23 Whilst the majority of consultation methods in the SCI remain unaltered, in order to ensure that no one is unfairly discriminated by the present closure of libraries and customer access points, hard copies will be posted to anyone who is unable to access the consultation material via electronic means and requests a copy. The consultation period is extended to eight weeks.
- 24 In line with the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 076 - 078 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513), the minor modifications to the SCI will enable the County Durham Plan to progress through the statutory process and consider the adoption a local plan at the earliest opportunity to provide an up-to-date development plan to guide future development to 2035 and to aid the economic recovery that will be required because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background papers

) None.

Other useful documents

) None.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to produce a SCI which explains how local communities and other interested parties are consulted on planning matters. The main modifications consultation stage is not prescribed within the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Finance

There will be some minor financial implications arising from printing and postage of hard copy documents however the County Durham Plan has a continuing budget commitment that will cover such expenditure.

Consultation

Minor modifications to the SCI will enable the consultation on the main modifications to the County Durham Plan to go ahead for an eight week period. This approach has been agreed with the council's Consultation Officers Group.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The council acknowledges that, in exercising its functions, it has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This duty applies to all people defined as having protected characteristics under that legislation.

An Equality Impact Assessment on the changes to the SCI has been undertaken and the necessary steps have been taken to ensure that everyone is treated in a fair and equitable manner.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

Protocol 1 Article 1: Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions, including their property. The plan allocates land for development which will affect landowners' rights to develop their land. It is noted, however, that rights afforded under this article are not absolute but qualified. Therefore, any interference with landowners' rights must be

balanced against the wider public interest. It is lawful for a local planning authority to take action if that action is clearly necessary and proportionate. In this instance, the procedural measures by which the County Durham Plan main modifications should be consulted upon are necessary and proportionate in the public interest to ensure that a local plan is in place to guide development across the county to 2035.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

The resource required to progress the local plan is in place and staff resources are in place to post hard copies as required.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

Not having an adopted local plan in place will hinder the county's ability to guide the future development of the county and to improve the lives of its existing and future residents and to support the local economy in its recovery following COVID-19.

Procurement

None.

Statement of Community Involvement Equality Impact Assessment

May 2020

Altogether better



Durham County Council Equality Impact Assessment

NB: The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires Durham County Council to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different groups. Assessing impact on equality and recording this is one of the key ways in which we can show due regard.

Section One: Description and Screening

Service/Team or Section	Spatial Policy Team
Lead Officer	Mike Allum
Title	Spatial Policy Manager
MTFP Reference (if relevant)	N/A
Cabinet Date (if relevant)	Delegated Decision
Start Date	May 2020
Review Date	Post consultation

Subject of the Impact Assessment

Please give a brief description of the policy, proposal or practice as appropriate (a copy of the subject can be attached or insert a web-link):

Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which explains how local communities and other interested parties are consulted on planning matters. The current version of the council's Statement of Community Involvement was adopted on 7 January 2019. The Statement of Community Involvement sets out the opportunities available for all interested parties to become involved in the planning process: local plan preparation; development management and neighbourhood plans.

The County Durham Plan is currently subject to an Examination in Public. Throughout the examination, the appointed independent Inspector has explored the potential for Main Modifications to resolve any soundness and legal compliance issues he has identified. The Inspector is now satisfied that, at this stage of the examination, the Main Modifications proposed by the council are all necessary to address soundness issues and will be effective in so doing. The next key stage in the examination is a public consultation on the proposed Main Modifications to the County Durham Plan which will be subject to consultation 26 May to 21 July 2020.

The nation is currently in a state of lockdown owing to the COVID19 global pandemic. The council has had to make many difficult decisions in response to the national crisis, including the temporary closure of libraries and customer access points because of the social distancing measures that have been put in place by the Government. Therefore, whilst most of the current consultation arrangements set out in the Statement of Community Involvement remain available, it is not currently possible to make use of some methods mentioned, including making hard copies of documents accessible within libraries and Customer Access Points.

It is therefore necessary to revise the SCI to acknowledge that there may be some circumstances, beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lockdown during the COVID19, which require a change in some methods of engagement and involvement. This is consistent with recent amendments published by the Government to the Planning Practice Guidance ([Paragraph: 076 - 078 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513](#)), to revise the Statement of Community Involvement (2019). Even in such circumstances however, the council remains committed to involving the community as much as practicable.

1 The minor modifications to the Statement of Community Involvement are the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment ("EQUIA") to ensure that no one is unfairly discriminated against by the changes made. Therefore, it is proposed that the following wording (as shown in underlined text below) is inserted into the Statement of Community Involvement:

- (a) At paragraph 1.1: We are committed to involving as many people and organisations as possible in the planning process, including those who are traditionally under-represented. This document is our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). It sets out how and when we will provide opportunities for you to contribute in the planning process, including local plan preparation, neighbourhood planning activity as well as the consideration of specific proposals subject to planning applications and Permissions in Principle. It also sets out how we will support groups undertaking neighbourhood planning activity as well as giving advice on how neighbourhood planning groups should seek to continuously involve local people and groups in this activity. There may be some circumstances, which are beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lock-down during the COVID19 pandemic, which may result in a variation to the consultation and involvement methods set out herein. In such circumstances, the council will at all times remain committed to involving the community as much as practicable.
- (b) At paragraph 2.11: Wherever possible, Local Plan consultation documents will be made available for inspection at County Hall Durham, our Customer Access Points and Council run local and mobile libraries during the set consultation period. The documents will provide details of how and when you can make representations.

In considering flexible consultation arrangements, we have also ensured that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The council has had due regard to the matters set out in s149 of the Equality Act. The EQUIA will ensure that any planning consultations will continue to promote equality and diversity, and not unfairly discriminate against anyone who wishes to participate in the planning system.

Who are the main stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users):

Anyone who lives in, studies in, works in, visits, or has an interest in County Durham may be interested in the SCI. This includes the general public, anyone previously interested in local plan consultations and included on our database, council staff, Elected Members, developers and landowners, various partners, stakeholders from various sectors and interest groups or communities, Area Action Partnerships, Town/Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Forums and statutory consultees / prescribed bodies as defined by the Government.

Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics?

Protected Characteristic	Negative Impact Indicate: Y = Yes, N = No, ? = unsure	Positive Impact Indicate: Y = Yes, N = No, ? = unsure
Age	Y	Y (following mitigation)
Disability	Y	Y (following mitigation)
Marriage and civil partnership (workplace only)	N	?
Pregnancy and maternity	Y	Y (following mitigation)
Race (ethnicity)	Y	Y (following mitigation)
Religion or Belief	N	?
Sex (gender)	N	?
Sexual orientation	N	?
Transgender	N	?

Please provide **brief** details of any potential to cause adverse impact.
Record full details and analysis in the following section of this assessment.

The minor changes made to the SCI potentially could negatively impact on someone with protected characteristics because libraries and Customer Access Points and council offices are temporarily closed to the public. It is therefore not possible to make hard copies available at libraries and Customer Access Points at the current time nor should the public, including COVID19 shielded groups (including by characteristic of age, disability or pregnancy) be encouraged to access public buildings.

It is possible that someone with Protected Characteristics may not see or hear about the publicity and information regarding changes to the consultation and how to request copies of the documents. In order to ensure this possibility is minimised, everyone on the local plan consultation database will receive either a letter or an email and information will be disseminated through social media, the press and existing partnership arrangements.

How will this policy/proposal/practice promote our commitment to our legal responsibilities under the public sector equality duty to:
eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
advance equality of opportunity, and
foster good relations between people from different groups

There is potential for both direct and indirect negative impacts and some of the protected groups. The minor modifications to the SCI in response to the COVID19 pandemic aim to improve and safeguard the involvement of the county's communities in the planning process through a variety of means. There is a potential for a negative impact as a result of changes made for people reliant on accessing the consultation documents through the libraries, customer access points and council offices because these facilities are not currently open for people to visit and access. Further, certain groups are required to self-isolate and be shielded, which includes some protected characteristic groups. This means that such people are more limited with regard to their movements and ability to go out and access documents, even if libraries and customer access points re-open during the consultation period. Furthermore, people are not currently able to meet in groups, which may make it more difficult for them to discuss potential responses to the consultation.

Extra measures have therefore been taken to ensure an inclusive approach will remain and therefore reducing any likelihood of negative impacts. In order to help ensure that no one is unfairly disadvantaged, hard copy documents will be posted to anyone who is unable to access the consultation material via electronic means and requests the documents to be sent. All contacts on the County Durham Plan data base to receive an email or a letter to inform them of the consultation and how to access consultation documents.

To take account of any delays for postage and other disruption in the circumstances of the pandemic, it is proposed that the usual 6 week consultation period is extended to 8 weeks. The extended consultation period will also enable organised groups such as Age Concern and disability groups, wishing to contribute to the consultation to be able to have more time to

formulate their responses which may be currently made more difficult because of other current priorities, or the inability to hold face to face committee meetings. Potential respondees who cannot meet each other will have more time to communicate by alternative means.

The extra measures taken to mitigate any potential negative impact for some protected characteristic groups during the current lock down are:

- A consultation period lasting 8 weeks, rather than the usual 6 weeks;
- Internet based publicity, press releases, public relations, the use of social media and the council's consultation page on the Local Plan website, to ensure as wide an audience as possible is made aware of the consultation.
- All contacts on the County Durham Plan data base to receive an email or a letter to inform them of the consultation and how to access consultation documents to ensure as wide an audience as possible is made aware of the ongoing consultation.
- Copies of consultation documents to be sent to anyone requesting copies because they do not have access to them via electronic means. These will be sent via post and free of charge. This will mitigate the fact that people cannot currently access hard copies in public buildings.
- Appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the community, including groups with protected characteristics, can continue to be part of the process. This will include making consultation documents available in alternative formats if required e.g. braille, large print, alternative languages.
- A telephone hotline to be made available which can be used to ask officers questions (on an appointment basis) about the consultation process, documents or request paper copies. This is important for people with disabilities, or those who are shielding.
- Post will be collected as normal from County Hall and a freepost address to be made available. This will provide a means of responding to the consultation, other than by using a computer, to ensure anyone without electronic means of communication can still submit their comments to the consultation.
- For anyone currently shielding and unable to respond via electronic means, arrangements will be made to collect hard copy responses.
- Formal and informal meetings if required, via Microsoft Teams or other available platforms.

We will continue to promote equality and diversity, and not unfairly discriminate against anyone who wishes to participate in the planning system. Officers will be available to offer support.

Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your findings?
Please **outline** your data sets and/or proposed evidence sources, highlight any gaps and say whether or not you propose to carry out consultation. Record greater detail and analysis in the following section of this assessment.

There is national, regional and local evidence available which shows that people with certain protected characteristics can face barriers in employment, access to services and information, participation in decision making and in consultation. Census 2011 and equality related evidence from the Integrated Needs Assessment (INA) has been used in section two of this assessment.

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2389/2011-Census>

<http://www.countydurhampartnership.co.uk/article/8461/Integrated-Needs-Assessment>

Government guidelines and regulations regarding COVID 19 that have an impact on protected characteristics and the consultation process are found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Government guidance encourages local authorities to advance with plan making and review their SCIs ([Paragraph: 076 - 078 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513](#)
[Revision date: 13 05 2020](#))

Screening Summary

On the basis of this screening is there:	Confirm which refers (Y/N)
Evidence of actual or potential impact on some/all of the protected characteristics which will proceed to full assessment?	Y
No evidence of actual or potential impact on some/all of the protected characteristics?	N

Sign off

Lead officer sign off: Spatial Policy Team Leader	Date:
Service equality representative sign off: Equality and Diversity Officer	Date:

If carrying out a full assessment please proceed to section two.

If not proceeding to full assessment please return completed screenings to your service equality representative and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

If you are unsure of potential impact please contact the corporate research and equalities team for further advice at equalities@durham.gov.uk

Section Two: Data analysis and assessment of impact

Please provide details on impacts for people with different protected characteristics relevant to your screening findings. You need to decide if there is or likely to be a differential impact for some. Highlight the positives e.g. benefits for certain groups, advancing equality, as well as the negatives e.g. barriers for and/or exclusion of particular groups. Record the evidence you have used to support or explain your conclusions. Devise and record mitigating actions where necessary.

Protected Characteristic: Age		
What is the actual impact or potential impact on stakeholders?	Record of evidence to support or explain your conclusions on impact	What further action mitigation is required?
<p>The SCI minor modifications aim to reduce potential inequalities through holding the consultation during a period of lockdown by promoting access to consultation and the planning system.</p> <p>There is potential for a negative impact on older persons who may rely on libraries and customer access points, council offices to access the consultation documents and engage in the consultation. Further, even in the event that libraries and customer access points open during the consultation process, if older people are shielding (because in a vulnerable category, as set out in Government guidance or similar on COVID19) they will be unable to visit.</p> <p>Likewise, older people will not be able to collect</p>	<p>It is recognised that the population of County Durham is already ageing and over the next few decades, there will be a 'demographic shift' with the number (and proportion) of older people increasing. In 2035 the proportion of people aged 65+ will increase by 6% to 26% from population figures in 2016 of 20%.</p> <p>Older persons have been deemed a vulnerable group by the government as having an increased risk of severe illness from COVID19. They are advised to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. Their ability to engage will be affected as they will be unable to leave their homes to access consultation material.</p>	<p>A consultation period lasting 8 weeks, rather than the usual 6 weeks. This will take account of delays in postage and the fact that organised groups are not able to meet in person at present e.g. Age Concern.</p> <p>Internet based publicity including press and public relations, the use of social media and the council's consultation page on the website.</p> <p>All documents will be accessible online for anyone to access and download.</p> <p>An email or a letter will be sent out to all people and organisations on the council's local plan consultation data base to inform them of the changes to the consultation as a result of COVID19. The letter will explain all of the ways to engage in the consultation process</p>

<p>documents from public sites, such as council offices should they open during the consultation.</p> <p>Should these centres open, older people may not be able to walk to them and avoid public transport as per government guidance.</p> <p>They may not be able to visit the post office/post a letter to request a copy by post.</p> <p>Support networks older people rely upon to be able to engage in such processes as the consultation may have other priorities, or may not be meeting as regularly. If people/groups are not made aware of the changes they will not know the alternative ways they can engage in the consultation.</p> <p>The proposed minor modifications to the SCI will have a positive impact on older people who may not have access to the internet to keep up to date with changes and to access electronic documents because they will have copies sent free of charge rather than being reliant on copies in public buildings. This will provide them with more time for a considered response.</p>		<p>and how people can access all of the documents. This will have a positive impact on engagement, particularly for older people who may not have access to the internet that would enable them to keep up to date with the consultation changes online or communicate via email.</p> <p>Copies of consultation documents to be sent to anyone requesting copies because they do not have access to them via electronic means. These will be sent via post and free of charge.</p> <p>Appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the community, including groups with protected characteristics, can continue to be part of the process. This should include making consultation documents available in alternative formats if required.</p> <p>Officers available for telephone conversations with members of the public with no access to a computer or other identified needs. These can be arranged on an appointment basis using the telephone hotline.</p> <p>For anyone currently shielding and unable to respond via electronic means, arrangements will</p>
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		<p>be made to collect hard copy responses.</p> <p>Formal and informal meetings if required, via Microsoft Teams or other available platforms.</p> <p>Placement of hard copies of the consultation documents in libraries and customer access points and council offices should they open during the consultation period.</p> <p>Any further reasonable adjustments will be made and all requests viewed on a case by case basis. Any further measures made by the council will continue to involve the community as much as practicable.</p> <p>The measures will eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. They will also help in promoting inclusion and positive attitudes towards older people and so foster good relations between people from different groups.</p> <p>It is concluded that the mitigation measures in place will help to ensure that anyone within the age protected characteristic group is not unfairly discriminated against. However, continual review of these measures throughout the consultation period will take place. If it is</p>
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		apparent during consultation that the mitigation measures identified have not been effective, it may be necessary to make adjustments, or to pause and recommence the consultation outside of the national lockdown.
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Protected characteristic: Disability		
What is the actual impact or potential impact on stakeholders?	Record of evidence to support or explain your conclusions on impact	What further action mitigation is required?
<p>The SCI minor modifications aim to reduce potential inequalities through holding the consultation during a period of lockdown by promoting access to consultation and the planning system.</p> <p>There is potential for a negative impact on people with disabilities as a result of the minor modifications to the SCI.</p> <p>People with disabilities may have relied on library and customer access points and council buildings to access consultation information.</p> <p>Further, even in the event that libraries and customer access points open during the consultation process, some people with disabilities (including those shielding (because in a vulnerable category) will be unable to visit or</p>	<p>County Durham has a higher percentage of permanently sick and disabled people than the North East average, representing nearly a quarter of the overall population.</p> <p>People with certain health issues have been deemed by the government as having an increased risk of severe illness from COVID 19. They are advised to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures</p> <p>Their ability to engage will be affected as they will be unable to leave their homes if they are shielding or any carers they are relying upon may be shielding themselves.</p>	<p>As above.</p> <p>An email or a letter will be sent out to all people and organisations on our local plan consultation database to inform them of the changes to the consultation as a result of COVID19. The email and letter will explain the various ways to engage in the consultation process and how people can access all the documents.</p> <p>Organisations, such as the Disability Partnership, will be able to further disseminate the information with its group members.</p> <p>Our commitment to continue to have a meaningful consultation includes making documents and information available in Braille, large print, or audio version.</p> <p>The measures will eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. They will</p>

<p>be able to collect documents.</p> <p>They may not be able to visit the post office/post a letter to request a copy by post.</p> <p>Support networks people with disabilities rely upon to be able to engage in such processes as the consultation may no longer be available, or working as effectively. If people/groups are not made aware of the changes they will not know the alternative ways they can engage in the consultation.</p> <p>The proposed minor modifications to the SCI as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic aims to eliminate disadvantage for those without access to the internet, disabled people, older people or those with limited mobility. This includes rural areas where accessibility is more problematic for some people. Some residents rely on local hubs such as libraries or mobile libraries. The measures taken will also help in promoting inclusion and positive attitudes towards disabled people.</p> <p>The proposed minor modifications to the SCI will have a positive impact on disabled people who may not have access to the</p>		<p>also help in promoting inclusion and positive attitudes towards people with disabilities people and so foster good relations between people from different groups.</p> <p>It is concluded that the mitigation measures in place will help to ensure that anyone within the disability protected characteristic group is not unfairly discriminated against. However, continual review of these measures throughout the consultation period will take place. If it is apparent during consultation that the mitigation measures identified have not been effective, it may be necessary to make adjustments or to pause and recommence the consultation outside of the national lockdown.</p>
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internet to keep up to date with changes and to access electronic documents because they will have copies sent free of charge rather than being reliant on copies in public buildings. This will provide them with more time for a considered response.		
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Protected Characteristic: Marriage and civil partnership (workplace only)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
The council is not currently aware of any likely impact arising as a result of this protected characteristic. In line with its ongoing duties to consider equalities impacts, if the council becomes aware of such an impact, the council will fully consider any such change of circumstances.	N/A	None specifically identified.

Protected characteristic: Pregnancy and maternity		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>The SCI minor modifications aim to reduce potential inequalities through holding the consultation during a period of lockdown by promoting access to consultation and the planning system.</p> <p>To safeguard against disadvantage for those who would access the consultation documents</p>	<p>Those who are pregnant have been deemed by the government as having an increased risk of severe illness from COVID 19. They are advised to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures. Their ability to engage may be affected as they need to be particularly cautious</p>	<p>As above.</p> <p>The measures will eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. They will also help in promoting inclusion and positive attitudes towards this group and so foster good relations between people from different groups.</p>

<p>via libraries and customer access points including people and groups who may need to self-isolate, the following measures have been put in place:</p> <p>The proposed minor modifications to the SCI will eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity and have a positive impact on pregnant or maternity people who may not have access to the internet to keep up to date with changes and to access electronic documents because they will have copies sent free of charge rather than being reliant on copies in public buildings. This will provide them with more time for a considered response.</p>	<p>regarding leaving home, or if they are shielding.</p>	<p>It is concluded that the mitigation measures in place will help to ensure that anyone within the pregnancy protected characteristic group is not unfairly discriminated against. However, continual review of these measures throughout the consultation period will take place. If it is apparent during consultation that the mitigation measures identified have not been effective, it may be necessary to make adjustments or to pause and recommence the consultation outside of the national lockdown.</p>
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Protected Characteristic: Race (ethnicity)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
<p>The SCI minor modifications aim to reduce potential inequalities through holding the consultation during a period of lockdown by promoting access to consultation and the planning system.</p> <p>There is potential for a negative impact on</p>	<p>In County Durham ethnic minority communities are a relatively small number of the population. According to the 2011 Census, 98.1% of Durham's population is white British. 1.9% is 'other ethnic group', the largest component of this being mixed race and Asian. We also have a significant population of</p>	<p>As above.</p> <p>An email and a letter will be sent out to all people and organisations on our database to inform them of the changes to the consultation as a result of COVID 19. The email and letter will identify all of the ways to engage in the consultation process and</p>

<p>Gypsies and travellers if they are not made aware of the changes because they do not have internet, the site wardens are not aware of the changes or they have to settle on a different site during lockdown and cannot be contacted.</p> <p>There is potential for a negative impact on people and groups that do not speak English if relevant groups of contacts are not made aware of the changes in order to pass this information on. Alternative formats are available.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>Gypsies and Travellers who are either travelling or settled in the County.</p> <p>Gypsy and travellers' ability to engage may be affected if they are not made aware of the changes by the site wardens because the wardens have not been notified of the changes. They may also be affected if they have had to settle on another site during lockdown and so wardens are unable to contact them.</p> <p>People and groups that do not speak English may have their ability to engage in the consultation affected as meetings where organisations or relevant community groups or contacts would disseminate the information are not held. A similar issue may arise if these groups/contacts were not made aware of the changes.</p>	<p>how people can access all of the documents. Organisation leaders such as gypsy and traveller wardens will then be able to disseminate this information. This will have a positive impact on community involvement of groups such as gypsy and traveller groups that may not have internet access and people and groups that do not speak English</p> <p>Translation and interpretation requests will be considered in line with corporate policy.</p> <p>The measures will eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. They will also help in promoting inclusion and positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities and so foster good relations between people from different groups.</p> <p>It is concluded that the mitigation measures in place will help to ensure that anyone within the race and ethnicity protected characteristic group is not unfairly discriminated against. However, continual review of these measures throughout the consultation period will take place. If it is apparent during consultation that the mitigation measures identified have not been</p>
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		effective, it may be necessary to make adjustments or to pause and recommence the consultation outside of the national lockdown.
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Protected Characteristic: Religion or belief		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
The council is not currently aware of any likely impact arising as a result of this protected characteristic. In line with its ongoing duties to consider equalities impacts, if the council becomes aware of such an impact, the council will fully consider any such change of circumstances.		None currently required.

Protected Characteristic: Sex (gender)		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
The council is not currently aware of any likely impact arising as a result of this protected characteristic. In line with its ongoing duties to consider equalities impacts, if the council becomes aware of such an impact, the council will fully consider any such change of circumstances.		None currently required.

Protected Characteristic: Sexual orientation		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
The council is not currently aware of any likely impact arising as a result of this protected		None currently required.

characteristic. In line with its ongoing duties to consider equalities impacts, if the council becomes aware of such an impact, the council will fully consider any such change of circumstances.		
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Protected characteristic: Transgender		
What is the actual or potential impact on stakeholders?	Explain your conclusion considering relevant evidence and consultation	What further action or mitigation is required?
The council is not currently aware of any likely impact arising as a result of this protected characteristic. In line with its ongoing duties to consider equalities impacts, if the council becomes aware of such an impact, the council will fully consider any such change of circumstances.		None currently required.

Section Three: Conclusion and Review

Summary

Please provide a brief summary of your findings stating the main impacts, both positive and negative, across the protected characteristics.
<p>The proposed minor modifications to the SCI are made in the context of an unusual circumstance of national lockdown and social-distancing restrictions. The SCI, as proposed to be amended, notes that there may be some circumstances, which are beyond the council's control, such as a time of national lockdown during the COVID19 pandemic, which may result in a variation to the consultation and involvement methods set out therein. In such circumstances, the council will at all times remain committed to involving the community as much as practicable.</p> <p>In considering flexible consultation arrangements, we have also ensured that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The council has had due regard to the matters set out in s149(1) of the Equality Act. We will continue to promote equality and diversity, and not unfairly discriminate against anyone who wishes to</p>

participate in the planning system. For this reason, hard copy documents were also made available at all previous stages of consultation to anyone without access to the consultation material via electronic means.

The measures put in place in response to the COVID 19 lockdown have the potential to have positive and negative impacts on some of the protected characteristic groups (on account of age, disability, pregnancy, or race) documented above. There is potential for some protected groups to be at a disadvantage if they are unaware of the changes to the consultation process and all of the ways they can continue to engage. However, measures put forward will help effectively to safeguard against this. Information regarding the consultation process, as well as consultation documents will be accessible to all, for example all information made available online including press releases and adverts regarding the Local Plan, emails and letters will be sent to inform all who are on our Local Plan consultation database of the changes to the consultation and hard copies of consultation documents, including in various formats, will be made available if requested. Translation and interpretation requests will be considered in line with corporate policy. The consultation process will be continually reviewed with consideration given to the effectiveness of the consultation and if further changes should be made to mitigate disadvantage. In conclusion, these measures should ensure that there are no likely negative impacts as a result of the changes made to the SCI and that there will be positive impacts.

Will this promote positive relationships between different communities? If so how?

The steps taken by the changes to the SCI will meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of a person who does not and encourage persons who share a relevant characteristic to participate in the consultation. These steps have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding of these protected characteristic through the differing ways they can be affected by the changes made and the measure put in place to address this.

The measures taken to identify where there are positive impacts for groups as a result of the changes made to the SCI and measures taken to mitigate any potential disadvantage of some groups will help to ensure it promotes positive relationships between different communities.

Due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding

The SCI is part of a statutory process which aims to involve all interested stakeholders in the spatial planning of their area for the future. The minor modifications to the SCI will ensure that the requisite engagement and consultation continues to take place, including in the circumstances of the COVID 19 pandemic or similar.

Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescales for implementation
All contacts on the County Durham Plan data base to	Policy officer, spatial planning Team	26 th May

receive an email or a letter to inform them of the consultation and how to access consultation documents.	Spatial Policy Manager	
Internet based publicity including press and public relations, the use of social media and the council's consultation page on the website.	Communications Team Spatial Policy Manager	26 th May
Copies of consultation documents to be sent to anyone requesting copies because they do not have access to them via electronic means. These will be sent via post and free of charge.	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation
Appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the community, including groups with protected characteristics, can continue to be part of the process. This should include making consultation documents made available in alternative formats if required.	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	Available by request throughout the duration of the consultation
A telephone hotline to be made available which can be used to ask questions about the consultation process, documents or request paper copies.	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.
Officers available for telephone conversations with members of the public with no access to a computer or other identified needs. These can be arranged on an	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.

appointment basis using the telephone hotline.		
Post will be collected as normal from County Hall and a freepost address to be made available.	Policy officer, spatial policy Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.
For anyone currently shielding and unable to respond via electronic means, arrangements will be made to collect hard copy responses.	Policy officer, spatial policy Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.
Formal and informal meetings if required, via Microsoft Teams or other available platforms.	Policy officer, spatial policy Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.
Delivery of hard copies to libraries and customer access points and council offices should they open during consultation	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	To be kept under review throughout the duration of the consultation
Review of these measures throughout the consultation period including additional measures as a result.	Policy officer, spatial planning Team Spatial Policy Manager	Throughout the duration of the consultation.

Review

Are there any additional assessments that need to be undertaken? (Y/N)	Y on going review throughout the consultation
When will this assessment be reviewed? Please also insert this date at the front of the template	On a future review of the SCI. There is no set date for such a review, but as made clear above a future review could arise following monitoring during this or other consultations.

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Spatial Policy Officer, Spatial Policy Team	Date: 18.05.2020
Service equality representative sign off: Equality and Diversity Officer	Date: 18.05.2020

Please return the completed form to your service equality representative and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk