



Statement of Community Involvement

Adopted March 2006



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Foreword

The Council wishes to encourage the community to be involved in every part of the planning process. The Statement of Community Involvement is a guide to how and when we will be seeking to engage with the community. It sets out how you can be involved in each of the various documents that comprise the Local Development Framework, and the role you can play on specific planning applications.

Planning is carried out by the Council on behalf of the community, and we do our utmost to plan the borough well. We aim to make South Ribble a great place to live, work, visit and play. To properly achieve this we have to remain in touch with the community's aspirations, issues and concerns. We also recognise the tremendous pool of knowledge and interest about the built and natural environments that exists in the community. In short, we recognise the fundamental importance of engaging with the community, and that the best way to plan well is by doing it together.

In this Statement of Community Involvement the Council is committing itself to involving the community at every stage and in every area of planning. However, the Council cannot achieve this on its own. It requires the community to respond, by seizing the opportunity to be actively involved, if we are to succeed in planning the future together. I wholeheartedly encourage you to do so.



*Councillor Tom Hanson
Regeneration and Planning portfolio holder*

1 Introduction

Purpose of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

- 1.1 This Statement sets out why, how and when the council will involve the community in the planning process. The consideration of planning applications and the preparation of planning policy documents must comply with the standards set out in this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 1.2 The council has involved the community in the planning process for many years. The new planning system¹ seeks to increase the level of involvement from the community even further. Tapping into the community's expertise and insight on local issues has been proven to produce better planning. In turn, community involvement encourages public ownership of planning policy and greater interest in making better places.
- 1.3 It is important that all involved understand when and how they can contribute to the planning process, and have realistic expectations of the outcome.

Vision

- 1.4 The council's and the South Ribble Partnership's joint vision is to make South Ribble a great place to live, work, visit and play.
 - A place to be proud to belong to and which goes from strength to strength
 - A place with a strong identity, making a major contribution to the wider sub-region
 - A place with diverse, dynamic communities, which work together for a better future.
- 1.5 This joint vision is expressed more fully, together with how it will be implemented, in the *Community Strategy*. The Community Strategy is produced by the South Ribble Partnership, which is an alliance of over forty public, private, voluntary and community organisations, including the council. The Community Strategy can be obtained from council offices and the council's website.
- 1.6 The Local Development Framework (LDF) seeks to implement the Community Strategy as it relates to the development and use of land. In implementing the vision, we work jointly with the people and organisations that have an interest in the borough, both through the South Ribble Partnership and directly with the community.
- 1.7 The council has many examples of working closely with other agencies to achieve Community Strategy objectives. One such is liaison with the MAPS team (Multi-Agency Problem Solving team) to ensure the LDF includes measures to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Such contacts ensure the LDF is integrated with other programmes as part of a co-ordinated effort to meet the wider needs of the community.

¹ Introduced by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
South Ribble Borough Council
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Who is the community?

- 1.8 Any individual, business or group that is affected by planning is included in the definition of the community. This includes everyone living, working or having an interest in the borough, as well as businesses with interests or future interests in South Ribble.
- 1.9 For the purposes of engaging with the community, we have identified broad categories, as below.

Broad categories within “the community”

The General Public	Young people	The Elderly	
Borough Councillors	County, Parish & Town Councillors		
Businesses	Developers	Landowners	Interest Groups
Public Sector Agencies		The South Ribble Partnership	

- 1.10 We recognise that there are groups that will overlap and that smaller groups exist within and between those listed. The categories are a useful tool we can use to check that the involvement techniques we are using reach all in the community. We recognise that different groups will respond in different ways and that different techniques will need to be used in order to engage all.
- 1.11 In applying the SCI, common sense will be applied regarding the composition and geographical spread of “the community” relevant to the document being prepared or the planning application being considered.

Implementing the Local Compact

- 1.12 The South Ribble and Chorley *Compact* is an agreement that makes a commitment to improving relations between local public bodies, voluntary, community and faith groups for mutual advantage. The Compact sets values, principles and commitment for how these sectors can best work together. All parties to the Compact promise to have timely consultation and communication in their working relationships.
- 1.13 This Statement of Community Involvement and its operation in practice seeks to implement the South Ribble and Chorley Compact in relation to South Ribble’s planning service.

Planning Aid

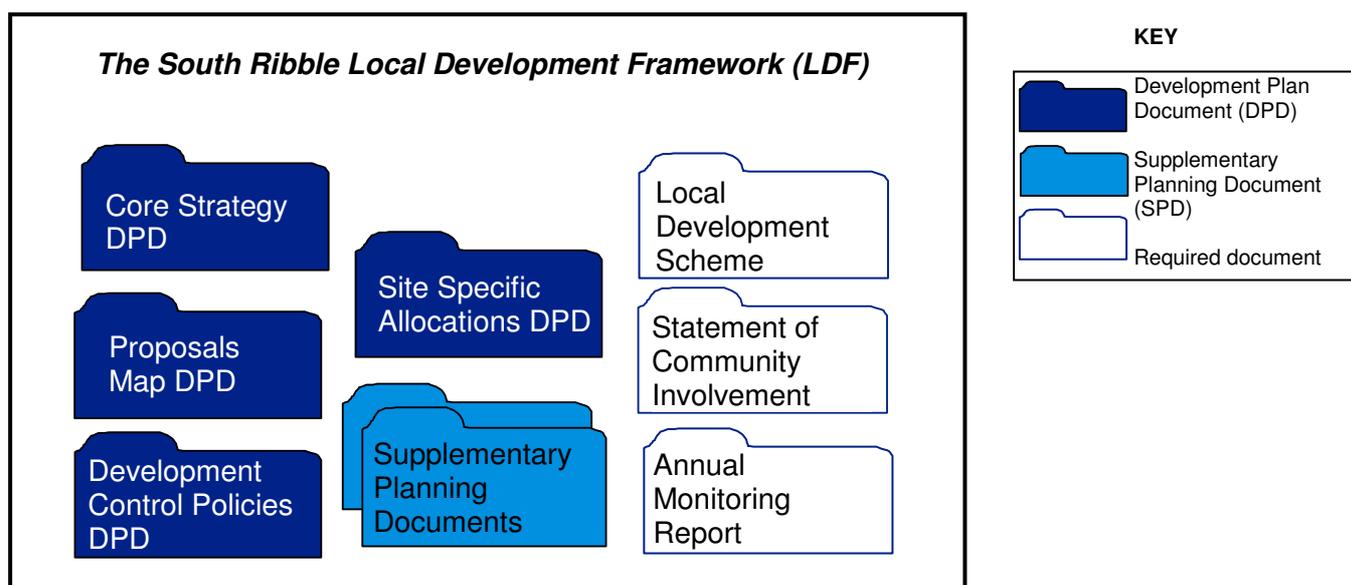
- 1.14 Planning Aid exists to help individuals and organisations that want independent advice or assistance on planning matters, but cannot afford to pay a planning consultant. Further information about the service provided by Planning Aid is given in Appendix 4.

2 Involving the community in making planning policy

What is The Local Development Framework?

- 2.1 Planning applications have to be decided in accordance with planning policy, which means that your best time to influence a planning application is when the planning policy is being made. We are required by law to produce planning policy in the form of a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is an umbrella term for a collection of separate documents, which for South Ribble are envisaged (at 2005) to be as in figure 1 below.
- 2.2 The **Core Strategy** Development Plan Document (DPD) sets out the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for South Ribble, reflecting the Community Strategy and other key influences. The interrelationships between the Core Strategy DPD and other programmes are described on page 13.
- 2.3 Elaborating the Core Strategy DPD are a number of separate Development Plan Documents:
- the **Site Specific Allocations DPD**, which identifies specific sites for development (such as housing, employment or open space uses) and sites which are protected from development (eg. green wedges).
 - the **Proposals Map** which defines, on an ordnance survey map, the precise boundaries of sites identified in the Core Strategy DPD and Site Specific Allocations DPD.
 - The Generic **Development Control Policies DPD**, setting out the detailed standards which apply to various types of developments.
- 2.4 Elaborating on the implementation of policies contained in the Development Plan Documents (DPDs) are Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). These must clearly relate to a policy or policies in a DPD. SPDs have a more streamlined consultation process, described in paragraph 2.22.
- 2.5 Details of all the documents included in the South Ribble LDF and the timescales of their preparation are found in the Local Development Scheme. This may be found on the council's website at www.southribble.gov.uk/ldf.

Figure 1



How will we will involve the community in LDF preparation?

Seeking a Consensus

- 2.6 Community consultation attempts to build a consensus, or failing this, establish common ground and the majority opinion. We seek to engage the community in open, fair and detailed discussion in order that they can make a positive and timely contribution to achieving well considered planning policy documents.

Techniques for involving the community in the LDF

- 2.7 The council will seek to engage with all sections of the community on all aspects of the LDF and will use a variety of techniques as shown in figure 2 overleaf. We recognise that different methods are suitable for different groups in the community. Community involvement techniques are also tailored to the particular requirements of each type of LDF document, and the different stages in the process. Further details on the techniques are given in Appendix 1.
- 2.8 The timing of various stages in the process are elaborated on pages 7-9, but for development plan documents (DPDs) the most important is the initial stage, when the content of documents is formed during on-going participation over weeks or months. Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) elaborate DPD policies, and therefore for SPDs the main stage is the publication of the draft SPD.

Reaching all in the community

- 2.9 A number of organisations and individuals are already actively involved in planning. This is welcomed, but there is a risk that the voice of the less well organised is not heard, including the 'silent majority'. Consequently use will be made of the Citizen's Panel, comprising 1,500 people who are a representative cross section of the population of South Ribble. We use the Citizen's Panel as a sounding board on many issues, including planning matters. Panel members are asked to take part in three or four surveys a year and are also be invited to take part in focus groups and other consultation exercises in small groups. The panel provides an indication of the views of the "silent majority" and is useful to quantify the extent to which comments received from other means are representative of the majority view.
- 2.10 We recognise that some people have extra hurdles to overcome in order to be involved in planning, such as physical disability, limited mobility, caring commitments or various social hurdles. The council will attempt to reduce barriers to participation by, amongst other techniques;
- A hearing loop will be used at meetings for the hard-of-hearing
 - Large print versions will be available of all documents on request
 - Documents will be made available in braille on request
 - Use will be made of the council's "Forward" quarterly newspaper, delivered to all households, thereby reaching those with mobility difficulties
 - Use will be made of the internet, for accessibility at weekends and evenings

- Meetings will avoid school pick-up and drop-off times
- Local meetings (area committees) and local information displays will reduce the disadvantage faced by those with limited mobility
- The consultation statements (paragraph 2.9) will enable individuals to identify others who have a similar point of view, with whom they may be able to band together to represent their perspective
- Attention will be drawn to Planning Aid
- Documents will use Plain English and avoid unnecessary jargon
- Tick box questionnaires will be provided at the “Issues & Options” stage.
- Seek to engage with organisations representing minority groups

2.11 There is not a large BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) population in South Ribble, but there are representative organisations in neighbouring authorities, such as the Asian Business Federation in Blackburn and places of worship (Muslim and Hindu) in Preston. There are currently no gypsy or travellers’ sites in the Borough, and these groups do not have a strong local presence. However the Council can continue to make suitable contacts with the gypsy and traveller community through their representative national organisations. The general phrase “minority groups” allows for the flexibility to include groups that are currently unrecognised (eg Eastern European minority groups).

2.12 The Council will seek to engage with organisations representing minority groups, recognising that minority groups may face particular problems of language and unfamiliarity in engaging in planning issues. We will seek to counter these obstacles by, amongst other actions, seeking to include representative organisations in public consultations, by utilising the ethnic minority focus group that the Council is planning to establish, and by offering translation facilities on request. The Council’s full policy and proposed actions on ensuring equal opportunities for minority groups is contained the Council’s Race Equality Scheme, a copy of which is available on the Council website.

What we will do with the community’s comments

2.13 We recognise that it is vital to show clearly how the community’s comments have been taken note of, and demonstrate the difference they have made to the emerging development plan document (DPD) or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal¹. In doing this, the council will not just *record* comments received, but will endeavour to *incorporate* the comments received in the emerging document.

2.14 To achieve this, the responses will be published as part of a “Consultation Statement” which sets out:

- i. how the council has involved the community,
- ii. who has been consulted,
- iii. whether there is any other relevant community participation from related programmes or strategies, that has a bearing on the DPD or SPD,

¹ Initial stage only: in the preferred options stage the Sustainability Appraisal is taken as a given.

- iv. a summary of responses received, and the number of representations,
- v. how the council has addressed the main points and issues raised by the consultation, in the development plan document (DPD) or supplementary planning document (SPD) or in the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal.

2.15 This approach has the benefit that all stakeholders can see the multiplicity of viewpoints and what effect the various representations have had on the final document. It should also help identify where a consensus is being formed. Consultation statements will be available to view at the council offices, as a reference document in the libraries and on the council website.

Ground Rules

2.16 The community must recognise some important procedural rules. Responses must be received *in writing* (letter, email or internet proforma) or minuted at meetings, and received by the deadline stated on the consultation material. To keep the process manageable, we cannot enter into individual correspondence on each representation. Respondee will automatically be added to the consultee database (unless they expressly request otherwise), and informed of the next stage in the process (including the publication of the consultation statement) by letter or email at the relevant time.

Weight given to community comments

2.17 The community's comments must be considered in balance with other views, such as a statutory requirement to conform to regional and national planning policy, and to meet sustainability objectives. Ultimately the weight afforded to the community's comments is a decision taken by the democratically elected councillors.

2.18 A safeguard is the independent examination of development plan documents (DPDs), where an inspector will examine whether the plan is "sound". This includes consideration of whether due weight has been given to the community's views, but assessment of this is a matter of subjective judgement. (This does not apply to supplementary planning documents – SPDs).

2.19 On some matters a consensus view may be apparent, but on others there will inevitably be a diverse range of comments that are mutually conflicting. Officers, through the consultation statements, will present all the responses received, and will endeavour to take all perspectives into account in drawing up documents. However, in the final analysis the choices amongst conflicting options must always be taken by democratically elected councillors (at initial & preferred option stages) or the inspector (at the examination stage).

Fig 2: Techniques for involving the community in the LDF

GROUPS IN THE COMMUNITY	All Development Plan Documents (DPDs) & accompanying Sustainability Appraisals; SCI revisions	ADDITIONAL FOR:		Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)
		Core strategy DPD	Site Specific Allocation DPD	
All groups	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Documents placed at SRBC offices, libraries & website. Area committee meetings.</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> Documents placed at SRBC offices, libraries & website. Area committee meetings. Public notice in the local press.</p>			<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Focus group /workshop.</p> <p><i>Draft SPD:</i> Draft placed at SRBC offices, libraries & website. Area committee meetings. Public notice in the local press.</p>
General public & hard-to-reach groups	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Citizens Panel survey. SRBC "Forward" & Local Press coverage. Mini displays (poster format)</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> Mini displays (poster format) Local press coverage.</p>	<p><i>Initial stage</i> Focus group/workshop</p> <p><i>Pref. Options:</i> Public information displays</p>	<p><i>Pref. options:</i> Site Notices. Public information displays.</p>	<p><i>Draft SPD:</i> Mini displays. Local press coverage.</p>
Borough councillors & council departments	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Internal consultation. SRBC Planning Committee.</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> SRBC Planning Committee.</p>			<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Internal consultation.</p> <p><i>Draft SPD:</i> SRBC Planning Committee.</p>
Parish & town councils, county councillors & MPs, statutory consultees	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Invitation for comments by letter/ email.</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> Notification of formal consultation by letter or email.</p>			<p><i>Draft SPD:</i> Formal consultation by letter or email.</p>
South Ribble Partnership	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Invitation for comments by letter/ email.</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> Notification of formal consultation by letter/ email.</p>	<p><i>Initial stage</i> Focus group /workshop.</p>		<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Focus group /workshop.</p> <p><i>Draft SPD:</i> Formal consultation by letter or email.</p>
Local organisations & interest groups, Developers/ Agents, Local businesses, Landowners	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Invitation for comments by letter/ email.</p> <p><i>Preferred Options stage:</i> Notification of formal consultation by letter/ email.</p>	<p><i>Initial stage</i> Focus group /workshop.</p> <p><i>Pref. Options:</i> Official launch with press coverage.</p>	<p><i>Pref. Options:</i> Site Notices</p>	<p><i>Initial stage:</i> Focus group /workshop.</p> <p><i>Draft SPD:</i> Formal consultation by letter or email.</p>

Refer to paragraphs 2.31- 2.35 for consultation techniques at Submission stage.

These techniques are elaborated in Appendix 1.

When does involvement happen in preparing LDF documents?

Making Decisions on LDF documents

2.20 The input of the community and other influences (right and left columns in figure 3) is essential to the process of preparing LDF documents. Planning officers prepare various formal draft documents (shaded blue in figure 3) which reflect the inputs received to date. These are considered in public session by planning committee, and then by cabinet and full council where required by the council's constitution. Cabinet makes its recommendation to full council, taking into account any comments which planning committee has made. In making their decisions on LDF documents, the elected councillors must consider the views of the community, the underpinning evidence base and other influences that the council is legally required to incorporate.

Overview

2.21 Community involvement will be sought at various stages in the preparation of each document in the LDF, as set out at figure 3 overleaf. Development plan documents (DPDs) have a three stage process, each of which involves a published document on which the community can make representations. The result of community involvement is reported in a first consultation statement, a second consultation statement, and in the Inspector's Report. Revisions to this SCI will follow the same process as DPDs, but do not require a sustainability appraisal.

2.22 Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) follow a simplified, two stage process. Continuous community involvement is expected in the initial stages of preparing a SPD, but no formal document is published at this initial stage. In the second stage, a draft SPD is published. This is the main stage for community involvement in a SPD. The results of these two stages of community involvement will be published in the first and second consultation statements. SPDs are not subject to an independent examination.

2.23 There are many influences on the LDF, such as the Community Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy, national planning policy, regional economic strategies, etc. These form an external framework within which the LDF must fit. Should the community disagree with the external influences, they are encouraged to influence them directly. Most of the external influences are prepared with public participation, and it is important that the community seize these opportunities when they are provided, recognising their ultimate effect on more local issues such as the LDF. For instance, the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West follows a process similar to the consultation process for the LDF shown opposite¹. The links between other programmes and the LDF are elaborated on page 13.

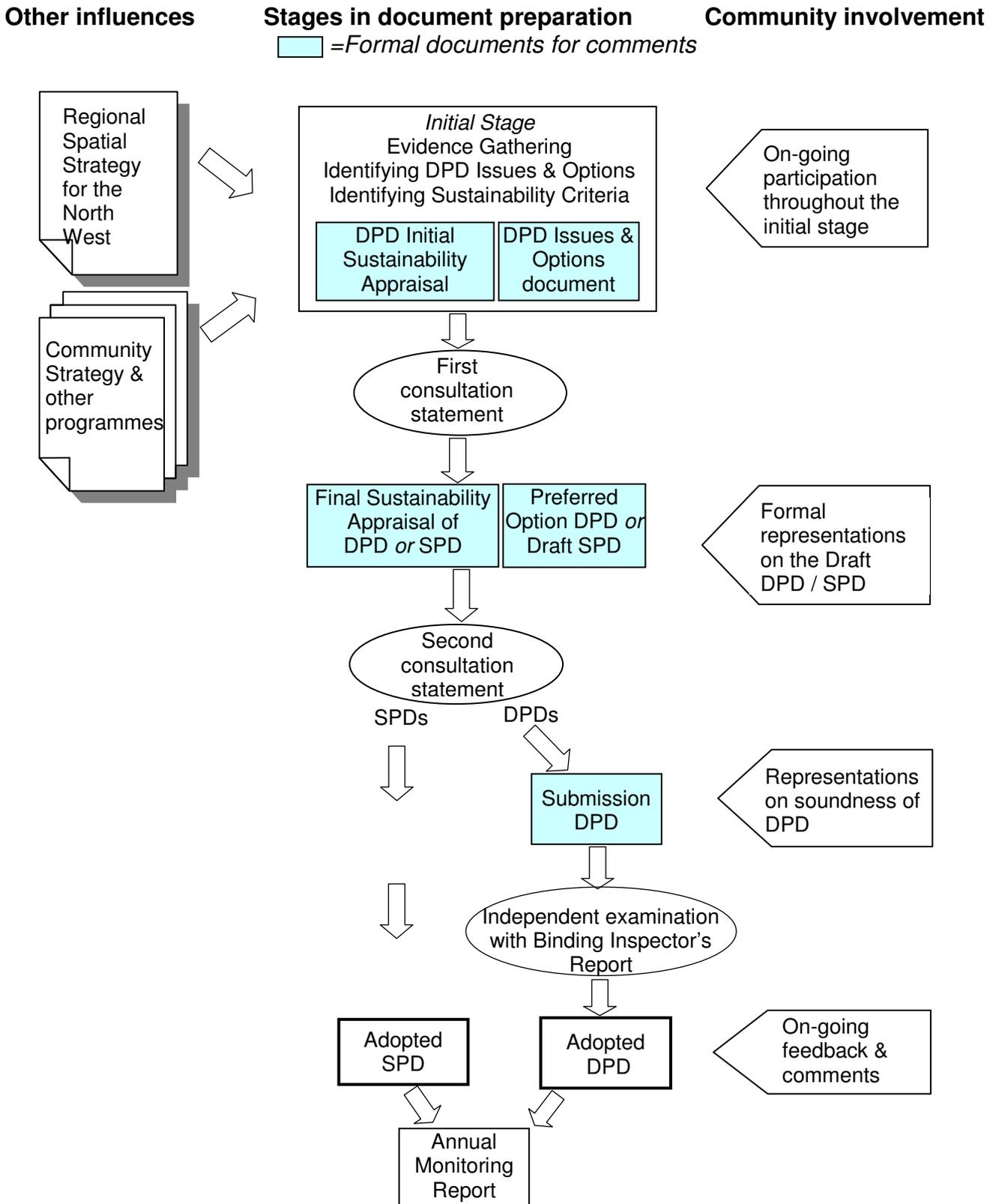
2.24 On occasion the council may consult on a number of documents at the same time, to reduce "participation fatigue" and keep costs down. If it does so, it will make clear the separate nature of those documents and invite representations on separate forms. Separate consultation reports will be prepared for each document.

Early involvement is critical

2.25 Involvement in the early stage is the key to effective influence on DPDs. It is this stage when the needs, issues, concerns and priorities of the community are identified. The initial stage builds consensus where it can be found, or, where consensus cannot be reached, identifies the majority view. It is at this stage when most influence can be had on the emerging DPD.

¹ [Details on the North West Regional Assembly website at www.nwra.gov.uk](http://www.nwra.gov.uk)

Figure 3: Community involvement in preparing LDF documents



2.26 The initial stage is when the council will concentrate its consultation effort on DPDs, and this can be spread out over many months. It encompasses discussion with the community not just on what the issues and options are, but also how to choose between the options - a process termed "Sustainability Appraisal".

Sustainability Appraisal

2.27 Sustainability appraisal is a procedure which measures the social, economic and environmental impacts of each option by listing "criteria" against which the options will be measured. The most appropriate measuring sticks ("criteria") to be used in the sustainability appraisal of the document are themselves a matter of debate. Similarly, should certain criteria be given more weight than others? The community's involvement is essential in identifying the sustainability criteria and the weight given to each one. Later in the initial stage it is important for the community to comment on the published Initial Sustainability Appraisal, as the key to the decision-making process from which will emerge the Preferred Option DPD.

First Consultation Statement

2.28 The results of community involvement from the initial stage will be reported to planning committee and be reflected in the next stage of the LDF document by means of a *First Consultation Statement* (see paragraph 2.14).

Preferred Option DPD/ Draft SPD & Second Consultation Statement

2.29 The council will next produce a "Preferred Options" DPD or Draft SPD, with an accompanying final "Sustainability Appraisal". The final Sustainability Appraisal is complete at this stage, but provides a useful reference point for commenting on the Preferred Options DPD or Draft SPD. The council will invite representations on the Preferred Options DPD or Draft SPD in a formal 6 week period of consultation.

2.30 At the conclusion of this 6 week consultation period the Council will consider the representations made. It will then produce a *Second Consultation Statement* which will be considered by the council along with the submission Development Plan Document (Submission DPD) or the final Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Submission documents and independent examination

2.31 The submission development plan document (Submission DPD)¹ is subjected to a formal, independent examination by a planning inspector, before it can be adopted by the council. The community can still comment at this stage, but only on the soundness of the document. The area where representations can still be made are known as “tests of soundness” and are listed below.

Tests of Soundness

1. it has been prepared in accordance with the local development scheme;
2. it has been prepared in compliance with the statement of community involvement (SCI);
3. the plan and its policies have been subjected to sustainability appraisal;
4. it is a spatial plan which is consistent with national planning policy and in general conformity with the regional spatial strategy and it has properly had regard to any other relevant plans, policies and strategies;
5. it has had regard to the authority’s community strategy;
6. the strategies/policies/allocations in the plan are coherent and consistent within and between development plan documents prepared by the authority and by neighbouring authorities, where cross boundary issues are relevant;
7. the strategies/policies/allocations represent the most appropriate in all the circumstances, having considered the relevant alternatives, and they are founded on a robust and credible evidence base;
8. there are clear mechanisms for implementation and monitoring; and
9. the plan is reasonably flexible to enable it to deal with changing circumstances.

Source: PPS12 para 4.24, paraphrased.

2.32 The council will invite representations on the submission DPD¹ by:

- Writing or emailing statutory consultees, interested parties and all persons who have made comments on earlier stages of the DPD
- Through a public notice in the press
- Publication on its website and the placing of documents at council reception

2.33 To be involved in an examination you need to complete the form for representations which accompanies a submission development plan document. You will then be invited by the inspector to either make your case by writing (“written representations”) or in person, by attending the examination. The Inspector will determine the most appropriate procedure to hear those who have indicated that they wish to attend the examination.

2.34 The model on which examinations are based are those of the successful “Examinations in Public”. These examinations have been used in strategic planning for many years and consist of an inspector chairing a round-table discussion. The inspector invites the parties to speak at the points where he or she feels their contribution would be beneficial. This format is very user-friendly, with no specialist skills required of the parties taking part, other than to make their point when asked, and listen to the other parties in their turn.

¹ This procedure also applies to Statements of Community Involvement.

2.35 Following the examination, the inspector produces a report to the council detailing the changes he considers should be made to the development plan document. This report is binding on the council. The council must implement them in order to adopt the DPD¹, or abandon the DPD. After adopting the DPD¹ the council must make the inspector's recommendations publicly available.

Incorporating on-going feedback

2.36 The community's comments are sought on an on-going basis after the DPD, SPD or SCI is adopted. On-going feedback on the operation of the development plan documents is highly useful and will contribute to the decision of when to start the process of preparing a replacement. On-going feedback includes amongst others:

- unsolicited letters and emails received from the community
- questionnaire results
- appeal decisions
- other statistical and qualitative information gathered by the council

2.37 An acknowledgement will be sent to persons who give feedback on the operation of the development plan documents. Relevant feedback obtained during the year (including feedback on the operation of this SCI) will be included in the Annual Monitoring Report. They will be taken into account when replacement DPDs, SPDs and SCI are produced.

2.38 The council seeks to learn from experience and improve upon past arrangements where it can. The Annual Monitoring Report is a key technique in regularly reviewing experience and assessing whether to start a review of a DPD, SPD or SCI.

Reviewing policy documents

2.39 When the time comes to review DPDs and SPDs the degree of community involvement will be dictated by the degree of change that is set to occur. A small change such as the correction of a typesetting error could be implemented after approval has been gained from a cabinet member. If a change in planning policy will result, the procedures set out previously in this document will be followed. The methods of involvement (figure 2) will be appropriate to the scale of alteration, the geographical spread of the policy and the range of stakeholders affected.

2.40 This SCI will be reviewed if the Annual Monitoring Report or external changes suggest to officers that there is a need. A review may also be requested by council members through a resolution at planning committee. Members of the community seeking to change the SCI should contact a councillor or an officer with their representations. Preparing a new SCI follows the same process as DPDs, with the exception that SCIs do not require a Sustainability Appraisal. Any comments received will be included in a First Consultation Statement, leading to publication of a draft replacement SCI, and following on through the DPD process to the adoption by the council of a new SCI.

¹ Or Statement of Community Involvement

3 Interrelationships with other programmes

Input from other programmes

- 3.1 The Local Development Framework (LDF) must reflect and help to implement other key strategies and programmes, most notably the South Ribble Community Strategy, prepared by the South Ribble Partnership, and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), prepared by the North West Regional Assembly. So important are these influences that development plan documents (DPDs) must be in general conformity with the RSS and must also have regard to the Community Strategy in order to pass “tests of soundness” 4 and 5 at the independent examination stage (page 11).
- 3.2 Other strategies and programmes have varying levels of influence on the Local Development Framework (LDF) such as education, health, waste, regeneration, housing and economic strategies, the Local Transport Plan and others. Their input is shown in figure 3 on page 9.
- 3.3 When involving the community, the council will indicate as far as possible what is genuinely open for change and what is pre-determined by other documents, policies and approved programmes. In the interests of making the process fully transparent, the impact of another strategy or programme on a development document will be clearly stated at the early stage of preparing a development document.

Joint or Separate consultation?

- 3.4 Many programmes use community involvement in their preparation, and it is sensible to reflect this and build upon it wherever possible. Where there has been separate consultation that is relevant, this will be reflected in the Consultation Statement as set out in paragraph 2.14. Where possible, additional community involvement for input into LDF documents will build upon existing community involvement in a complementary and integrated manner.
- 3.5 Where consultation on a related strategy is taking place concurrently, shared consultation exercises are recognised to save resources and reduce participation fatigue. Shared consultation would normally only be appropriate at the early stages of gathering evidence and identifying the issues and alternative options, and should refer explicitly to the emerging development plan document (DPD) or supplementary planning document (SPD).
- 3.6 At the “Preferred Options” stage the emerging development plan document (DPD) or supplementary planning document (SPD) will merit its own dedicated and focused consultation arrangements, to ensure that the community involvement reaches all the necessary interested parties and that those involved are clear about the implications of what is being discussed.

4 Involving the community in planning applications

Consultation by developers

- 4.1 All planning applications are potentially contentious. The Council believes that it is better for developers to talk to those who may be affected and refine their proposals while they are at a formative stage, thereby “nipping” any problems “in the bud”. Among those likely to be involved are neighbours, utility and infrastructure providers and, for larger proposals, councillors and the wider community.
- 4.2 While it is not a legal requirement for developers to consult, the council encourages it because it is in the developer’s best interest to do so, bringing the following benefits:
- Addressing problems *before* the planning application is submitted, may reduce the chance of a refusal of permission.
 - Refinements to the proposals are made at an early stage, preventing abortive work.
 - Ensures accurate information is circulated to potential objectors, which pre-empts damaging ill-informed rumours and misconceived objections.
 - In the long run, reduces the time and cost of reaching a successful outcome.

Pre-application consultation

- 4.3 The rule for consultation is ‘the earlier the better’. The council will advertise proposals and consult with interested parties as part of the process of dealing with planning applications. However, pre-application consultation by developers can highlight issues that may be resolved prior to submitting the application, thereby possibly contributing to a speedier and/or more successful decision. It ultimately can save the developer time and money to consult in advance of submitting a planning application.
- 4.4 There are a number of easy techniques that *all* developments can employ, including major, minor and householder developments:
- Provide neighbours with *draft* plans and invite comments.
 - Request feedback within a specified timescale (eg. 1-2 weeks), making it clear that this is the best time to take their comments on board, *before* the plans are finalised.
 - Check with infrastructure providers that their requirements are satisfied – eg. that you are not building over or near to service cables or pipes.
 - Have pre-application discussions with development control officers, in the form of meetings and/or site visits, as the council actively encourages.

- 4.5 Where the proposal constitutes “major development”, more formal consultation is encouraged. “Major development” is defined as involving 10 or more dwellings, *or* where the site area exceeds 0.5 hectares (residential development) *or* involving over 1000 square metres of floorspace *or* exceeding 1.0 hectare site area (non-residential development).
- 4.6 Developers of major schemes are encouraged to undertake consultation that they consider most appropriate to their case. It is for developers to determine the extent and methods used for consultation, as it is for their own benefit that consultation is carried out. The following examples may be helpful:
- Make detailed proposals available for public view at the site (eg. drawings, photo montages & sketches mounted on the site boundary, including 3-D representations where possible)
 - Public exhibitions
 - Circulate a leaflet or letter outlining the proposals within the vicinity
 - Arrange a meeting with groups in the community (eg. Parish council, residents associations, interested parties, ward councillors, neighbours), giving sufficient advance notice
 - Hold interactive workshops to elicit feedback from the community
- 4.7 Developers are encouraged to submit a consultation statement with their planning application. This should include:
- The techniques they employed to gain stakeholder comments, including correspondence, public notices, a record of persons attending exhibitions & meetings, etc.
 - A summary of the responses received
 - A list of the main objections that have been raised
 - Any other matters raised
 - The developer’s comments on the responses
 - The amendments made to the proposals as a result

Post-application consultation

- 4.8 It is also in the developer's interests to publicise their proposals when a planning application is submitted, in order that the people they have previously consulted can see the submitted scheme, and see whether their earlier concerns are still relevant. The simple measures of a site information board and/or letter to those concerned will provide clear and accurate information.



The Council's consultation on planning applications

- 4.9 Although the community are consulted on individual planning applications, they must recognise that planning applications must be determined in accordance with adopted development plan documents (DPDs)¹ and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). It is important that the community recognises that the key stage, when it will have most impact on planning decisions, is when development plan documents (DPDs) are being prepared.
- 4.10 We consider the key to community involvement on planning applications is disseminating accurate information about the applications received. Experience has shown the community is generally forthcoming with comments on applications of interest, and responses received in writing are reported in the planning officer's report.

¹ or the adopted South Ribble Local Plan and Joint Lancashire Structure Plan, until superceded by the emerging DPDs and SPDs.

4.11 The council consults on planning applications as follows:

All applications

- Neighbours notified by letter or site notice (or both where appropriate).
- Statutory consultees relevant to the application, such as the Highways Authority, the Environment Agency, etc are notified, with 21 days to respond.
- The weekly list of planning applications is circulated by email or post to ward councillors, parish councillors and the Lancashire Evening Post. This list is also emailed or sent by post to any group or individual who has requested a copy (a small charge applies).
- The weekly list is available free of charge on the council website.
- The council website offers a search facility where a summary of the application details can be found. There is also the facility to make a response on-line via a comments form.
- Plans and drawings that have been submitted in support of a planning application are available for inspection at council reception. They are also available to view online (from late 2005).
- All comments received on planning applications are included in the planning officer's report.

Major¹ applications and those to be considered at planning committee

In addition to the above:

- A site notice will be displayed.
- A public notice will be displayed in the Lancashire Evening Post.
- Views of the relevant area committee are sought wherever it is possible to do so within the time constraints set by government.
- The agendas and minutes of planning committees are available to view on the council's website.
- Objectors and developers may speak publicly at planning committee meetings.

¹ Defined as construction of 10 or more dwellings, *or* where the site area exceeds 0.5 hectares (residential development) *or* involving over 1000 square metres of floorspace *or* exceeding 1.0 hectare site area (non-residential development).

- 4.12 Persons wishing to speak at planning committee need not give notice beforehand. The chairman of planning committee routinely invites questions, statement and comments from members of the public at the appropriate time. The committee members then discuss the planning application, during which time no further comments are allowed from the public. The rules applying to the public speaking at planning committee are given in appendix 5.
- 4.13 When a planning application is amended, the council may re-consult neighbours and other consultees, depending on the significance or scale of the changes to the planning application.
- 4.14 Consultation responses are always reported in the planning officer's report, and contribute to the officer's recommendation on a planning application. Consultees should be aware, however, that decisions on the planning merits of an application are usually taken in accordance with planning policy, and this is normally given precedence in the event of a conflict, as decisions which do not accord with planning policy tend to fall on appeal. Planning policy is subject to rigorous community involvement as described in section 2 of this SCI, and is not easily overturned at planning application stage.

Who makes the decision?

- 4.15 On major applications the decision is taken by the planning committee. Decisions on the majority of minor and household applications are delegated to the head of Planning and Regeneration and the Development Control Manager. A copy of the scheme of delegation is available from the development control team on request.

After a decision is made

- 4.16 As part of the council's commitment to community involvement, the council:
- Informs individual objectors by letter of the decision. Objectors should note that planning officers cannot enter into discussions or correspondence on the merits of the decision.
 - Makes decision notices available on the council's website (this enables interested persons to view the conditions placed on a development).
 - A weekly list of planning decisions is circulated by email or post to ward councillors, county, parish & town councillors and any group or individual who has requested a copy.
- 4.17 When an appeal against refusal of planning permission is lodged, the council notifies neighbours and persons who had made representations on the original planning application. Appeals are also listed on the council website, with a link to the summary details of the planning application to which they relate.
- 4.18 Appeals are heard by a planning inspector, by written representations, an informal hearing, or in a more formal planning inquiry. The inspector will consider written representations from the community, and in hearings/inquiries usually provides for members of the community to verbally state their case.

5 Resource Implications

- 5.1 To achieve the level of community involvement that has been outlined in this statement costs time and money. The community generally appreciate the need to strike a balance between the need to be involved in the planning process and the costs involved to the council tax payer. This SCI seeks to achieve an acceptable balance between the costs that will be incurred against the importance of the community being involved.
- 5.2 It should not be forgotten that the costs of greater community involvement will be offset by other changes in the new planning system. Notably, a lengthy Local Plan inquiry involving barristers is not required under the new system, having been replaced with a streamlined independent examination. In addition, early community involvement should lead to more acceptable proposals and less challenge.
- 5.3 The council has already in place a good framework for involving the community which the planning service makes full use of. The communication structures that are listed below are already in place so will not involve any extra expenditure:
- approachable reception staff in “The South Ribble Gateway”
 - a well managed & highly developed website
 - public speaking rights at planning committee
 - eight area committees situated in local venues throughout the borough
 - the annual residents survey
 - the Citizen’s Panel
 - the delivery, on a quarterly basis to all residents, of the council’s newspaper “Forward”
 - existing use of mass email & notification by letter procedures
 - integration with other participation exercises in which the council is involved, for example the community strategy, regeneration workshops, etc.
- 5.4 The council takes its statutory planning function seriously and has made financial provision to cover the process. We believe the community involvement procedures outlined in sections 2 & 4 above should be achievable within the annual provisions, using the existing full staffing levels for the planning service. However a drop in budget or staffing numbers will have inevitable repercussions on community involvement levels.
- 5.5 On occasion, community participation may be beyond the available staffing capabilities of the planning service, in which circumstances external facilitators and consultants may be required. The use of staff from other departments of the council will also be considered.

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APPENDICES

- APPENDIX 1 - Techniques for involving the community in the LDF process
- APPENDIX 2 - Statutory Consultees
- APPENDIX 3 - Forward Planning's Database of Consultees
- APPENDIX 4 - North West Planning Aid
- APPENDIX 5 - Public Participation at Planning Committee Meetings

Appendix 1

Techniques for involving the community in the LDF process

Publicly available documents

The council will make all development plan documents available at: SRBC offices at the Civic Centre, West Paddock, Leyland PR25 1DH on the web, at www.southribble.gov.uk/ldf and at local libraries, namely:

Leyland Library, Lancastergate, Leyland Tel. 432804
Kingsfold Library, Hawksbury Drive, Penwortham Tel 744457
Lostock Hall Library, Watkin Lane, Lostock Hall Tel 339775
Penwortham Library, Liverpool Road, Penwortham Tel 744331
Bamber Bridge Library, Station Road, Bamber Bridge Tel 335402
Longton Library, Liverpool Road, Longton Tel 617401

All comments forms will be clearly worded. Online response forms will also be provided. To facilitate responses, tick box questionnaires will be provided at the "Issues & Options" stage.

Planning officers are normally available to speak to over the telephone, via email or at the council offices during normal office hours.

Public information displays and mini displays (poster format)

Results from the Citizens Panel suggest "displays & questionnaire" at public venues is one of the more useful techniques. The citizens panel survey suggested that the presence of a planning officer did not make a significant difference to public interest in such displays. A straightforward questionnaire with tick box answers can assist in obtaining the views of the "silent majority" on key issues.

Supermarkets and libraries have been successfully used in the past, and continue to be a focus for public information displays on development plan documents. The involvement of schools is important in reaching young people, and therefore mini displays in the form of posters will be sent to all secondary schools.

Where the subject matter and the venue are suitable for this technique, a display may be provided at committee meetings, workshops and official launches.

Committee Meetings

Documents will be presented to planning committee.

The area committees are consultees at key stages in the preparation of DPDs and SPDs. Eight area committees meet on a 6-weekly basis, and provide a local forum for all council issues, of which planning is one. These are Western Parishes, Higher Penwortham, Penwortham South, Central, West Leyland, Leyland East, Bamber Bridge & Eastern.

The dates, agendas and minutes of all committees are available on the internet at www.southribble.gov.uk/about_the_council.

Notification by letter or email

The forward planning team holds a database of contacts, which are notified at key stages in a development plan document's progress. Any organisation or individual who wishes to be added to this contact database may do so by telephoning the Forward Planning team on 01772 625384 or emailing ldf@southribble.gov.uk. To keep costs within reasonable limits, notification will be by email wherever possible.

Focus group / public workshop

Focus groups are typically a small invited group who engage in interactive discussion in a structured session. Workshops are larger, but similarly comprise a structured, interactive meeting. Workshops are generally more open to the public, although specific invites can also contribute to workshops to ensure businesses and developers are represented.

The organisations invited will reflect the subject under discussion, and will include groups involved in, or affected by, the delivery of the DPD/SPD. The most relevant of these two techniques for the likely participants and the subject under discussion will be used as appropriate.

“Plan your community” interactive events

“Plan your community” interactive events are essentially a public drop-in workshop using various interactive techniques (such as map bases, post-it notes, questionnaires, etc) to elicit ideas. These may be combined with council consultation on other programmes, such as the regeneration area workshops.

Official launches

Popular with developers and consultants, this technique works well with press coverage. It permits an officer presentation of the document and an opportunity to put questions directly to planning officers.

Coverage by “Forward” & the Local Press

“Forward” is a community newspaper which is delivered quarterly to all residents in the borough. Due to its timescales, it may not always be possible to include mention in the 6 week formal period for representations on preferred options, but the council will nonetheless use “Forward” to draw attention to a forthcoming formal stage of consultation.

Press releases will be issued, although the council has no control over what the Press choose to publish.

Public Notices in the local press

A public notice will be put in the local press when a Development Plan Document is presented at the Preferred Options stage and again when it is formally submitted to the Secretary of State.

Appendix 2

Statutory Consultees

There is a statutory requirement to consult the following bodies before submitting Development Plan Documents for examination and before adopting Supplementary Planning Documents (to the extent that the council thinks that it affects the consultee):

Government Office for the North West

The North West Regional Planning Authority

The North West Development Agency

Neighbouring Local Authorities, namely Preston, Ribble Valley, Blackburn with Darwen, Chorley, West Lancashire & Fylde councils

Parish and town councils within or bordering South Ribble

Infrastructure providers

The Highways Agency

The Strategic Rail Authority

The Health Authority

Electricity & Gas Providers in South Ribble

Operators of communications equipment in South Ribble

Sewerage & water providers for South Ribble

Other national bodies

The Countryside Agency

The Environment Agency

The Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England

English Nature

Appendix 3

Forward Planning's Database of Consultees

Persons or organisations who wish to be contacted when LDF documents are under preparation, may request to be placed on a database of consultees by contacting the Forward Planning team on 01772 625384 or emailing ldf@southribble.gov.uk . Contact is by email wherever possible, to reduce costs.

A wide range of organisations are currently included on this database, such as local interest groups & societies, churches & minority faith groups, groups representing the interests of disabled persons, individuals who have requested inclusion, housing associations, developers and their agents, landowners, and businesses.

The inclusion of persons or organisations to be contacted on each different development plan document (DPD) or SPD is based on common sense (ref para 2.4), but where uncertainty over relevance occurs, the council errs on the side of over-coverage.

Persons or organisations who wish to be routinely contacted when LDF documents are under preparation (or conversely, if they wish to no longer be contacted) should contact the Forward Planning team as above.

Appendix 4

North West Planning Aid

How does Planning affect me?

Planning and development in towns and cities affects everyone who lives and works in them, from the building of major retail and housing developments to the refurbishment of a local playground. However, if faced with a planning issue or problem many people would not know where to start due to uncertainty or unfamiliarity with the planning system, procedures, legislation etc. Additionally, many might not be in a position to be able to pay a planning consultant to help them to resolve it.

Planning Aid can help!

Free, independent town planning advice is available from **North West Planning Aid** (NWPA) for people who cannot afford to pay a planning consultant. Although it helps people with their immediate concerns, a key aim of Planning Aid is to build people's confidence with the planning system so that if any future issues arise they have a better chance of dealing with it themselves.

How does it work?

Professionally qualified volunteers can give advice on a wide range of planning issues either in person (by making site or home visits) or by telephone – depending on the type of enquiry. In some cases they can attend meetings or public enquiries on behalf of clients. Because it is independent of local or central government Planning Aid can give impartial, practical advice and information, in addition to that provided by your Local Authority.

What about communities?

Local authorities now have to involve and consult people and communities on planning and development in their areas – how they plan to do this is set out in the 'Statement of Community Involvement'. The NWPA Community Planning programme helps communities to understand and play a role in the planning process, particularly on issues affecting local areas and neighbourhoods. Volunteers can simply give advice to groups or can get involved in a wide range of activities to help them improve their areas.

Key elements of the Community Planning programme include:

- Information events and presentations.
- Advice and assistance on contributing to local development plans.
- Helping communities to develop their own strategies, including parish plans.
- Training on the planning system and development plans.
- Educational projects with school children and young people.

How can I find out more?

By calling the Advice Line on **0870 850 9804**

By emailing **nwco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk**

Appendix 5

Public Participation at Planning Committee Meetings

The committee wants to hear the views of the public in relation to the business on its agenda, and the public are therefore encouraged to participate in the proceedings. It is also important, of course, to manage the conduct of the meeting effectively, so the following basic rules apply to the participation of the public in the meeting.

1. At an appropriate point in the consideration of each item, the chairman will invite questions, statements or comments from members of the public. These must relate directly to the item being discussed. In the case of planning applications, the chairman will usually allow the applicant to speak first, followed by objectors, other members of the public, the relevant ward members and then the committee itself.
2. Each member of the public is limited to speaking for a maximum of five minutes during the meeting. This is to ensure that everyone has a reasonable opportunity to do so. Where many people wish to speak on a particular item, the chairman may use his/her discretion in further limiting the number and length of contributions in the interest of the efficient conduct of business.
3. All questions/comments from the public should be directed to the chairman who, where appropriate, may request another member or an officer to reply.
4. No question may be asked on a matter which is the subject of legal proceedings, an appeal or an investigation, nor in relation to the employment or conduct of an individual employee or member of the council.
5. The chairman will not allow any question, statement or comment which in his/her opinion is scurrilous, irrelevant, repetitive, objectionable or improper. This includes questions that are of a personal nature.
6. Speakers are not required to identify themselves, but may wish to do so where this is relevant to the matter in hand.
7. In the unlikely event that a member of the public interrupts the proceedings, the chairman will warn him/her and, if the interruption continues, the chairman will order his/her removal from the meeting.

South Ribble Council
Civic Centre, West Paddock,
Leyland, Lancashire
PR25 1DH

Email: ldf@southribble.gov.uk
Website: www.southribble.gov.uk/ldf

For more information about this document contact:
The Forward Planning Team (01772) 625384

This document can be made available in large print, audio,
Braille and other languages – please ring (01772) 625384.