

New Statement of Community Involvement (SCI): response of Heaton with Oxcliffe Parish Council

1. The Heaton with Oxcliffe Parish Council discussed the SCI at its meeting on September 11th 2013.
2. Members of the Parish Council applauded the City Council's intent "to engage anyone who is interested in planning issues...The greater the level of engagement achieved the greater level of ownership in regards to planning decisions, land allocation or planning policy" (para. 2.1.) and the Planning and Housing Policy team's "strong commitment to community involvement" (para. 4.12).
3. The Parish Council noticed some tension in the SCI between such sentiments and re-iteration of statements about limited resource levels and the criterion of 'reasonableness'. For example, "requests [for information or consultation] will have to be considered against whether sufficient resources are available and whether it is a reasonable request" (para 4.7). Similar statements are made elsewhere in the SCI (e.g. paras. 6.5; 8.1).
4. The Parish Council was interested in the final section of the document concerning Monitoring and Review. It noticed, in particular, the observation that "there are a number of measures [of consultation] which offer significant benefits" which would not be used at present for reasons of resource (para.9.2). Nevertheless, the Parish Council welcomed the statement that "where resources permit and where new methods are seen to be effective, the Council will carry out community involvement over and above the measures outlined in this document" (para.9.3).
5. The Parish Council does not doubt the need to balance scarce resources against reasonable measures of community involvement. However, it would like to draw attention to the need for transparency over decisions taken, and definitions of criteria used, by the Council and the Planning and Housing Policy team in this area.
6. The Parish Council assumes that an annual report on Community Involvement in planning and related issues will be published by the Team. It suggests that in such a report there are factual lists of a) requests for information and consultation which have not been acted on for reasons of resource cost, reasonableness or other criteria and of b) new methods of consultation which have been considered but not utilised for reasons of cost or other criteria.

Bob Bailey.

Parish Clerk

15/09/2013