

Committee: Uttlesford Planning Policy Working Group

Agenda Item

Date: 23 February 2015

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Title: Neighbourhood Development Plans update

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Summary

1. This report updates members on the Neighbourhood Development Plans within the District and considers how the District Council can support the process moving forward.

Recommendations

2. To note the report and consider how the District Council can support the development of Neighbourhood Development Plans moving forward.

Financial Implications

3. None – but dependant on outcome of discussions.

Background Papers

4. None

Impact

- 5.

Communication/Consultation	This paper is published on the website.
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Ward-specific impacts	Affects all wards equally
Workforce/Workplace	This will involve officers from the Planning Policy Team and others as necessary.

Situation

6. This report seeks to update members on the Neighbourhood Development Planning work within the District, explain the support provided to date and consider how support can be provided in the future.

Current Neighbourhood Plan work

7. Since the Introduction of the Localism Act the Council has been working to support parishes to take forward Neighbourhood Development Plans if they wished to.
8. Three Neighbourhood Development Plan Areas have been submitted and designated by the District Council. These are Felsted, Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden. In all three cases the Plan Area is contiguous with the Parish Boundary.
9. Two further submissions are expected shortly from new areas.

Great Dunmow

10. The Neighbourhood Development Plan of Great Dunmow is by far the most advanced of any plan within the District. This plan has been developed over the last few years by the Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group working under the remit of the Town Council. The Town Council employed a project officer to steer the work and external advice was gained from Planning Aid. Regular meetings with Officers have taken place which provided advice and guidance as required.
11. The Neighbourhood Development Plan was put out to a pre-submission public consultation during the second half of 2014 and the District Council responded. Further meetings with officers have been held and more recently discussions have been held surrounding the relationship with the 2014 draft Local Plan.
12. The plan is expected to be submitted to the Council for formal consideration, the external Examination and then referendum during 2015.

Saffron Walden

13. The Neighbourhood Development Plan process started at about the same time as in Great Dunmow with a number of topic groups meeting to discuss issues. Due to the emerging Local Plan work was put on hold. Following the publication of the draft Local Plan work restarted in 2014 but there seems to have been limited progress recently. Meetings with officers were held during the early part of the process but no requests for meetings have been received recently.

Felsted

14. The Neighbourhood Development Plan Area was approved recently and Officers have held meetings with the Parish Council and provided support to the Neighbourhood Development Plan Group. Work is at an early stage.

Great Chesterford

15. The Parish Council have now decided to progress a Neighbourhood Development Plan after a number of meetings with officers. A submission of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Area is expected shortly. This submission may include a joint submission with Little Chesterford Parish Council.

Newport

16. While government money was secured for a Newport Neighbourhood Development Plan (see below), which is still available, due to changes in personnel on the Parish Council no progress has been made.

Stansted Mountfitchet

17. The Parish Council have now decided to progress a Neighbourhood Development Plan after a number of meetings with officers. A submission of the Neighbourhood Development Plan Area is expected shortly.

Funding

18. As part of the early government initiative the Council jointly with the relevant Town/Parish Council put a bid in for funds to support the development work. As a result the Council secured £20,000 to be shared between Newport and Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Councils, £20,000 a piece for Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden Town Councils. This fund has now closed.
19. For the last few years Local Councils have also been able to take advantage of a Government funded scheme to received advice from Planning Aid. This advice has been especially useful for Great Dunmow Town Council/Neighbourhood Development Plan group to take forward their work programme.
20. The District Council has funded the Rural Community Council for Essex to provide support for both Parish Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan work (as well as support for the Exception Housing project). This funding has allowed for fieldworkers to visit Parish Councils to provide advice and guidance on the process to be followed, assistance in holding and running community consultation events and support for carrying out questionnaires etc.
21. The Government is currently winding down the contract to provide direct support for communities through Planning Aid. In future grants will be available for groups to bid for directly. This money can be used to support the development of a plan either through paying for copying of questionnaires, hiring of venues for events, commissioning studies or buying in specialist advice.

Options for the way forward

22. Given the importance of Neighbourhood Planning the District Council should carefully consider what support, if any, it is able to provide over and above the support provided direct by officers to the groups.
23. While groups can bid for funds from Government this is unlikely to cover all the costs of producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan. While there is some merit in communities using some of their own funds, or support in kind, there is likely to be a gap in available funds.
24. With the closure of the Planning Aid support by Government there is no longer a clear supply of trained and knowledgeable professional planners who are available to provide advice and guidance. The Neighbourhood Development Planning process is different to other types of planning and requires different skills. It may therefore not be possible to simply 'buy in' support from planning consultants who may not have the required skills.

Conclusion

25. The production of Neighbourhood Development Plans (and Parish Plans) is an important tool in allowing local communities to bring forward ideas and plans for their area to develop over future years. This community empowerment is an important part of the Localism Act and fits in with the Councils desire to support communities.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Failure to comply with and demonstrate the Duty to Cooperate	2 – Some Council's have been found lacking in this Duty by Inspectors. Therefore need to ensure that we capture as many groups, issues and outcomes as possible to present a full picture of our work.	3 – Will result in the Local Plan being found unsound. Significant impact on planning policy and planning applications.	Cooperate closely with current organisations and continue to do this through the plan making process. Identify any gaps in cooperation and work closely with those bodies to rectify situation.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.