

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) –
8th December 2015
Cabinet – 10th December 2015

Executive Portfolio: Strategic Planning and Housing (DD)

Report by: Head of Development (AM)

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report introduces a new 'Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide' to clarify how the council will support local communities that wish to embark on community planning initiatives.

Recommendation(s):

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing):

- 1) Considers the proposed approach to clarifying Huntingdonshire District Council's neighbourhood and community planning offer and conveys its comments to Cabinet.

That Cabinet:

- 1) Approves the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide document attached as Appendix A of this report.

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1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT / PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report introduces a new guide that clarifies how the council will interact with local communities and town and parish councils when they wish to pursue community planning initiatives. The purpose of this 'Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide' (attached at Appendix A) is to manage the expectations of local communities and to enable the council to offer a consistent and deliverable level of service to those local communities.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY / BACKGROUND

- 2.1 A number of local communities within Huntingdonshire have started to undertake formal Neighbourhood Plans. These include St Neots Town Council, Godmanchester Town Council, Huntingdon Town Council, Bury Parish Council, and Houghton and Wyton Parish Council. Brampton Parish Council moved to the first formal stage of the Neighbourhood Plan process but has since indicated that it does not currently wish to make further progress.
- 2.2 Once 'made' (approved) following a local referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the statutory Development Plan for the District, meaning that it is a material consideration with significant weight in the decision making process for planning applications.
- 2.3 Other options are available to local communities which seek to achieve different community planning objectives. These include the ability to promote local affordable housing projects through the 'rural exceptions' process; a range of community facilities and amenities (for example, new village halls and playing fields) through the 'enabled exceptions' process; and more general community action plans or parish plans that focus on specific community needs identified by the communities themselves.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED / ANALYSIS

- 3.1 The proposed 'Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide' includes advice on processes and timescales for community planning initiatives, and links to external advice. In this, its first iteration, the guide focuses on the Neighbourhood Plan process, as that is the area where most local communities will initially wish to engage with the council.
- 3.2 The guide will be placed on Neighbourhood Planning page of the council's website, and it will be edited and added to as required in light of experience of using it and with regard to any future changes in the regulatory framework. Future amended versions will identify how the council will engage with local communities on community planning initiatives that do not form part of the formal Neighbourhood Plan process (see paragraph 2.3 above). Future amendments to the guide will be notified to town and parish councils by email as part of an ongoing communications strategy.
- 3.3 The guide is part of the council's ongoing initiative to assist local communities and customers by providing easily accessible information that allows them to 'self-serve'. In addition, town and parish councils will be invited to a Neighbourhood and Community Planning seminar in March 2016 to raise awareness of the guide, relevant processes, and experiences to date with neighbourhood and community planning initiatives.
- 3.4 The format of the 'Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide' document is based on the following sections:

- a) Introduction.
- b) Picking the right tool for the job: identifies the range of potential options available for community planning and includes a Community Planning Tools diagram.
- c) Introduction to Neighbourhood Plans, including a step by step guide:

Stage 1:

- Getting organised.
- Applying for a Neighbourhood Area.
- Consultation on the application.
- Designation of a Neighbourhood Area.

Stage 2:

- Community engagement and evidence.
- Developing plan content.
- Consulting on the draft plan.

Stage 3:

- Submitting the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Consultation on the submitted plan.
- The Examination.
- Progressing to referendum.
- The referendum.
- Adoption of the plan.

Stage 4:

- Delivering the Neighbourhood Plan.

- d) Support from HDC: a summary of the support measures identified throughout the document.
- e) Useful resources: links to external sources of information.
- f) Templates: standard letters and forms to help local communities to submit consistent information.
- g) Glossary of terms used in the neighbourhood and community planning process.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

- 4.1 This matter is being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) on 8th December 2015 and its comments will be conveyed to Cabinet.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 5.1 The clarification provided by the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Offer document should have positive impacts by ensuring that local communities have appropriate guidance on how HDC will be able to assist them in the development of their plans. The document will be available on the council's website and will be updated from time to time in light of experience of its use and to take account of relevant legislative changes. The appropriate HDC officers will also continue to be contactable by any interested community representatives to confirm how the council will interact with them on community planning matters.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

6.1 The recommendation of this report relates to the following element of the Huntingdonshire Corporate Plan 2015 - 2016 (page 8):

- Working with our communities: to empower local communities – support community planning including working with parishes to complete parish plans.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 As part of its formal 'Duty to Support' town and parish councils in preparing Neighbourhood Plans, the council needs to have robust processes and supportive advice in place to ensuring that Neighbourhood Plans and other community planning initiatives make satisfactory progress towards key decision making stages. A specific process has already been established to for making progress with Neighbourhood Plans once the independent Examiner's report has been received (approved at Cabinet, 19th November 2015).

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The purpose of the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide document is to clarify the level of service available from HDC's officers, and to positively manage the expectations of local communities with regard to HDC's input and assistance with a range of community planning initiatives.

9. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

9.1 The recommendations will ensure that the council meets its 'Duty to Support' obligations for the Neighbourhood Planning process.

10. RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing):

- 1) Considers the proposed approach to clarifying Huntingdonshire District Council's neighbourhood and community planning offer and conveys its comments to Cabinet.

That Cabinet:

- 2) Approves the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide document attached as Appendix A of this report.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix A: Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide document

CONTACT OFFICER

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