

Report to: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**
Date: **24th August 2017**
Title: **Neighbourhood Planning – Support to Groups**
Portfolio Area: **Customer First – Cllr Hilary Bastone**
Wards Affected: **All**
Relevant Scrutiny Committee: **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken: in line with recommendation (e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision)

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel support the level of assistance the Council is giving to Neighbourhood Planning Groups.

1. Executive summary

1.1 The report outlines the support the Council is providing to Neighbourhood Planning Groups within the District and outlines future plans to secure support at this level.

1.2 The development of Neighbourhood Plans is an important factor within the recently submitted Joint Local Plan, and supports the Councils priorities and objectives, specifically in relation to Homes and Economy.

2. Background

2.1 Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.

2.2 They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and facilitate planning applications for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.

2.3 Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area.

2.4 Neighbourhood planning is not a legal requirement but a right which communities in England can choose to use. Communities may decide that they could achieve the outcomes they want to see through other planning routes.

2.5 Options include incorporating their proposals for the neighbourhood into the Joint Local Plan, or through other planning mechanisms such as Local Development Orders, Community Right to Build Orders and supplementary planning documents. Other routes include through pre-application consultation on development proposals, establishing a Community Land Trust and making a planning application.

2.6 Since the introduction of the Neighbourhood Planning regime there has been a high level of uptake across the South Hams. At present there are 29 groups at different stages of developing their plans.

2.7 The Council, as the Local Planning Authority, should;

- be proactive in providing information to communities about neighbourhood planning.
- fulfil its duties and take decisions as soon as possible, and within statutory time periods, where these apply.
- set out a clear and transparent decision making timetable and share this with those wishing to prepare a neighbourhood plan or an Order.
- constructively engage with the community throughout the process including when considering the recommendations of the independent examiner of a neighbourhood development plan or Order proposal.

3. Support to Neighbourhood Planning Groups

3.1 The Council has both statutory and discretionary roles in supporting Neighbourhood Planning Groups as detailed in 2.6. In order to ensure that Groups were aware of the level of support that the Council were resourced to provide, an 'offer' was communicated to the groups through a meeting in Woolwell on 13 September 2016 and subsequently uploaded to the Council's webpages.

3.2 The 'offer', attached at Appendix A, set out what we would do and promoted the benefits of the groups working together and utilising their funding to secure additional, expert support where necessary.

3.3 The 'offer' reflects the fact that the Council had committed to produce and adopt a Joint Local Plan with West Devon and Plymouth against an aggressive timescale. The impact of this has been that the Specialist expertise required to support the Groups has been primarily focussed on delivery of the JLP.

3.4 This lack of available expertise has created issues for some groups in terms of the timeliness of responses and level of support. It has also created challenges for officers in terms of meeting conflicting priorities and customer expectation.

3.5 In response to the increasing demand from the Groups and in recognition of the JLP commitment, an additional Specialist Officer was recruited on a temporary basis to provide a point of contact alongside the Senior Case Management support already in place. This arrangement has recently been extended for a further six months whilst the JLP timetable is confirmed.

3.6 The addition of the new, dedicated resource has been received positively by the Groups. However, it is recognised that support around some specific, statutory areas including screening opinions for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) / Sustainability Assessment (SA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) has not been as accessible as hoped. Plans are in place to increase support in this area through further realignment of Specialist resources over the next six months.

4. Outcomes/outputs

4.1 The provision of suitable support to Neighbourhood Planning Groups enables communities to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape development and growth of their local area.

4.2 29 Groups are developing their plans with one at the examination stage and others nearing submission.

4.3 Neighbourhood plans have been identified within the draft Joint Local Plan as contributing in the order of 720homes over the plan period. The JLP provides a robust platform for Neighbourhood Plans to take control of development in their area, but is not prescriptive.

5. Future Plans

5.1 It is important to secure the ongoing provision of timely, specialist support for the groups. In order to do this the following options are being assessed;

- A review of the cost of undertaking the examination and referendum stages of the process to determine whether the funding received from Government will be sufficient. This will enable future resource planning to be undertaken.
- The possibility of utilising the Localities Engagement Officers to provide support to the groups in addition to the Specialists.
- An assessment of the ongoing Specialist resource requirement for the Joint Local Plan post adoption; subject to the JLP timetable.

5.2 It is envisaged that the outcome of the above will be that the Council will be able to continue to provide the necessary support to the Groups as they progress through the process.

6. Summary and Conclusions

6.1 Neighbourhood Planning enables communities to shape the development and growth of their local area.

6.2 The Council plays an important role in supporting the development of Neighbourhood Plans and has set out a clear 'offer' to the Groups to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of roles within the process

6.3 Delivery against the 'offer' had been inconsistent due to conflicting priorities but has improved markedly with the addition of temporary, specialist resource.

6.4 Plans are in place to secure continued support to the Groups.

7. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals	Details and proposed measures to address
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	Y/N	
Legal/Governance	Y	The Council Constitution includes the provision for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to set its own work programme. In so doing, the Panel has requested receipt of this report.
Financial	N	There are no significant financial implications directly related to this service update report.
Risk	Y	There are reputational risks associated with the performance of the Neighbourhood Planning support function. Whilst there have been a number of factors that have previously had an adverse impact on the function, this report evidences that performance is improving.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity	N	There are no equality and diversity implications directly related to this report.
Safeguarding	N	There are no safeguarding implications directly related to this report.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder	N	There are no community safety or crime and disorder implications directly related to this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing	N	There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications directly related to this report.
Other implications	N	N/A

Supporting Information

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Neighbourhood Planning Offer of Services to Communities (South Hams and West Devon)