

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

## Cabinet

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2015
<b>Report of:</b>	Caroline Simpson, Executive Director of Economic Growth and Prosperity
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Neighbourhood Planning Update Report
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Ainsley Arnold, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning

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### 1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Neighbourhood plans offer a unique and important opportunity to deliver local planning policy aspirations through a framework supported by Cheshire East Council, but delivered by our residents. Through continuing to engage with our communities in this way, the Council can help our residents identify opportunities for future development and those assets that should be given most protection in the planning process.
- 1.2 Since last summer when we set out toward this aim by establishing support for a group of 14 'front runner' town and parish councils to produce neighbourhood plans in Cheshire East. Great progress has been made since then and Cheshire East Council has expanded its package of support to include extra staff resources and has introduced a neighbourhood planning grants scheme to enable the recycling of national government grant, directly to communities.
- 1.3 As the popularity of neighbourhood planning has grown and the support offered by CEC has evolved in recognition of this, a further 15 town and parish councils have joined the initial group resulting in a total of 29 active neighbourhood plan groups, including some of our key towns such as Sandbach, Congleton, Knutsford and Poynton. This is the largest number of neighbourhood planning communities in the north of England and applications to begin the process continue to be submitted, most recently the Council have received an application from Wybunbury, a collaboration between 10 parishes to prepare a joint neighbourhood plan, that could well be the largest number of Parish or Town Councils engaged in a collaborative Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 1.4 There are now four communities (Audlem, Bunbury, Brereton and Sandbach) that have reached the later stages of the process and have submitted proposed plans for examination.
- 1.5 This is a considerable achievement within a year and is testament to the dedication of this Council to support our residents to plan locally, and to the residents themselves who have pushed their neighbourhood

plans forward at a pace which will lead to the first neighbourhood planning referendums taking place in Cheshire East in spring of next year. Beyond these four communities strong progress is being made across the group with a series of draft plans expected to be completed throughout 2015 and 2016.

- 1.6 This Council are firmly backing neighbourhood plans – not only for their power to galvanise communities in thinking about how their communities will change in the future but also as a key delivery mechanism for local growth.

## **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 To note the content of the report and the progress made in enabling communities across the borough to prepare neighbourhood plans.

## **3.0 Reason for Recommendation**

- 3.1 It is important for Cabinet to note the significant progress being made across our communities on neighbourhood planning and, through their production within the framework of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy, the important role these plans will play in the long term development planning of the Borough.

## **4.0 Wards Affected**

- 4.1 All wards

## **5.0 Local Ward Members**

- 5.1 All ward members

## **6.0 Policy Implications**

- 6.1 Positive Impact.
- 6.2 Neighbourhood Plans establish policies that affect land use and community development. Once formally adopted by CEC, such policies will be used to assist with determining planning applications within the relevant Neighbourhood Plan area. Once adopted, Neighbourhood Plans form a statutory part of the Development Plan for Cheshire East and will be used to inform decision making.

## **7.0 Implications for Rural Communities**

- 7.1 Neighbourhood Plans enable rural communities to participate in the plan making process and develop policies to address those planning matters that affect their interests and well being. The process allows greater engagement of rural communities and for such communities to take ownership of planning

policy which directly affects their futures. Implementation of a policy to support this process will have a positive impact on rural communities

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

8.1 Not applicable

## **9.0 Legal Implications**

9.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from the content of this report.

9.2 There are a number of legal considerations that apply to the process of devising and bringing a neighbourhood plan into effect. Those implications will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

9.3 Once brought into legal effect (“made”) neighbourhood plans form part of the Local Development Plan Framework in accordance with which planning applications must be determined unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Whilst emerging draft plans (including neighbourhood plans) can attract some weight in the decision making process depending on the stage of the process they are at, the weight that can be afforded to them prior to them coming into effect will be limited.

## **10.0 Risk Management Implications**

10.1 Not applicable

## **11.0 Background and Options**

11.1 Neighbourhood plans enable local councils (town and parish councils) to directly prepare statutory planning policy relating to their local area. The process of plan preparation includes a series of prescribed stages:

- Define neighbourhood area
- Prepare plan
- Consult on draft plan
- Refine draft plan
- Submit proposed neighbourhood plan to Local Planning Authority
- Independent examination of proposed neighbourhood plan
- Proceed to referendum
- CEC “make” the neighbourhood plan

11.2 Neighbourhood plans generate grant income directly payable to Cheshire East Council. Using this income, in July 2014, Cheshire East Council established a programme of support to enable communities to prepare and bring into effect neighbourhood plans. Initially this involved appointment of Cheshire Community Action to deliver a package of support to a group of 14 ‘front runner’ town and parish councils and the provision of a CEC officer to oversee the process, and to assist and advise communities.

- 11.3 Since then CEC has expanded its package of support to include extra staff resources and has introduced a neighbourhood planning grants scheme to enable the recycling of government grant, directly to communities.
- 11.4 As the popularity of neighbourhood planning has grown and the support offered by CEC has evolved in recognition of this, a further 15 town and parish councils have joined the initial group resulting in a total of 29 active neighbourhood plan groups. This is the largest number of neighbourhood planning communities in the north of England and applications to begin the process continue to be submitted, most recently the Council have received an application from Wybunbury, a collaboration between 10 parishes to prepare a joint neighbourhood plan, that could well be the largest number of Parish or Town Councils engaged in a collaborative Neighbourhood Plan area.
- 11.5 Importantly, there are now 4 communities that have reached the later stages of the process outlined above – that have completed neighbourhood plans and submitted them to CEC for examination. These communities are:
- Audlem
  - Brereton
  - Bunbury
  - Sandbach
- 11.6 This is a considerable achievement within a year and is testament to the dedication of these communities to prepare plans and the difference that additional support from CEC has made. Following examination of these plans, a local referendum will be held to allow residents the final say on whether the plan is right for the community. Schedules for these referendums are currently being drawn up and are expected to take place in the early spring. Beyond these four communities strong progress is also being made across the group with a series of draft plans expected to be completed throughout 2016.
- 11.7 Beyond the 29 groups that have formally begun the process, the agenda remains popular and enquires are regularly received by the Neighbourhood Planning team who continue to engage our communities across the borough, attending parish council meetings to explain the plan making process and the support on offer. Over 50 of our parishes have now been visited CEC officers to discuss how neighbourhood plans can benefit our residents.
- 11.8 Cheshire East Council is keen to support local views expressed via neighbourhood plans and is bringing emerging neighbourhood plans into the decision making framework for planning applications where it can. Neighbourhood plans have been brought into the decision making framework in a number of instances to date on applications in Brereton, Sandbach and Bunbury. Audlem NP will now also be used as a material consideration in determining planning applications, and will be given appropriate weight. CEC will increasingly use neighbourhood plans in this way as more come through the process.

- 11.9 The government continues to support neighbourhood planning at a national level with funding confirmed across this parliament and the forthcoming Housing Bill proposing a series of regulatory amendments to improve the neighbourhood planning process.
- 11.10 As the examination into the Local Plan Strategy continues, neighbourhood plans offer a unique and important opportunity to deliver local planning policy aspirations through a framework supported by Cheshire East council, but delivered by our residents. Through continuing to engage with our communities in this way, the Council can continue to help our residents identify opportunities for future development and those assets that should be given most protection in the planning process.

## **12.0 Access to Information**

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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