

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	31 st March 2015
Report of:	Caroline Simpson (Director of Economic Growth and Prosperity)
Subject/Title:	Neighbourhood Planning Grants Scheme
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Don Stockton, Housing and Jobs

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Since July 2014 Cheshire East has launched a programme of support for Neighbourhood Planning which has seen 20 communities formally begin the process and excellent progress toward draft plans already being made, with two communities, Bunbury and Sandbach now formally entering into consultation. Requests for further information and advice have been received from over 40 of the 116 parishes within Cheshire East and the programme is anticipated to grow significantly over the coming months.
- 1.2 Neighbourhood Plans offer communities the opportunity to formally prepare planning policy that helps shape local development. Whilst this tier of plans is relatively new, the community views expressed in Neighbourhood Plans are increasingly being upheld at appeal and by the Secretary of State in decision making on major applications.
- 1.3 The proposals in this report are to enable Cheshire East Council to further support residents in Cheshire East to establish local planning policy that is relevant to their communities. To help communities achieve this, the implementation of a Neighbourhood Planning Grants Scheme is proposed.
- 1.4 Establishing a Neighbourhood Planning Grants Scheme, and associated policy to closely manage the scheme, will enable Cheshire East Council to continue to provide a transparent and clear approach to funding local councils and relevant organisations that prepare Neighbourhood Plans in the Borough.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the policy for the allocation of Neighbourhood Planning Grants, as described in the report.
- 2.2 That the funding of grants to local town and parish councils be met by resources set aside from the grants income received from DCLG for Cheshire East's supporting role in Neighbourhood Planning.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 Neighbourhood Planning forms a key element of the Government's Localism agenda. 1300 communities are now preparing Neighbourhood Plans across the country with 43 plans now approved by referendum. A series of high profile planning appeals, Secretary of State interventions and High Court Judgements are confirming that Neighbourhood Plans are increasingly being given considerable weight in the development process. There is cross-party support for the agenda and committed funding is in place beyond the current parliament.
- 3.2 The Neighbourhood Planning Team work with local councils across the Borough. The purpose of the funding is to increase the capacity and capability of Local Councils to prepare Neighbourhood Plans to shape future development in their localities through the formation of statutory planning policy.
- 3.3 Cheshire East Council receives grant income from DCLG (£30,000 per plan) to support Neighbourhood Planning. This funding is to recognise costs incurred by the Council in its supporting role, particularly the Council's responsibility to fund an independent examination and referendum for each Neighbourhood Plan. From this funding, it is proposed to establish a grants scheme to enable local councils the discretion to fund activities most valuable to their own plan making process.
- 3.4 Where local council's objectives complement those of the Corporate Plan, and the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan, it is proposed that such organisations may apply for a grant of up to £7,000 from Cheshire East Council. A demand for funding is present now, and anticipated in the future. The draft Policy is appended to this report.
- 3.5 Parish Councils can also access a direct grant of £8,000 per plan from DCLG; the proposed grant from Cheshire East Council would be in addition to this funding.

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 must be given full weight in 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 Cheshire East Council receives grant income from DCLG (£30,000 per plan) to support Neighbourhood Planning. This funding is to recognise costs incurred by the Council in its supporting role, particularly the Council's responsibility to fund an independent examination and referendum on each Neighbourhood Plan.
- 8.2 From this funding, it is proposed to establish a grants scheme to enable local town and parish councils the discretion to fund activities most valuable to their own plan-making process. Where local councils' objectives complement those of the Corporate Plan, and the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan, it is proposed that such organisations may apply for a grant of up to £7,000 from Cheshire East Council.

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 In awarding grants, the Council must ensure that in each case it has the legal power to fund the proposed scheme. In all cases there is a condition requiring a report back to the Council on the expenditure of the grant. Consideration should also be given in each case to the imposition of other appropriate conditions.
- 9.2 The Council's legal powers for awarding these grants are contained in various statutes, including Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, and Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. In addition the Council should ensure that there is a transparent process and policy in respect of determining the level of grant subsidy to any community group.

10.0 Risk Management Implications

- 10.1 Neighbourhood Plans are a significant policy tool to shape and control development in the host area, this is particularly useful in the interim

period until the Council can adopt its emerging Local Plan Strategy (currently suspended from Examination in Public). The risk of not agreeing an approach to funding Local Councils, and relevant bodies preparing Neighbourhood Plans, is that some organisations may be unable to continue their activities toward producing a Neighbourhood Plan therefore resulting in a loss of community benefit and missed opportunities to strengthen the planning policy framework at a local level.

- 10.2 There is a need to carefully monitor and engage with emerging neighbourhood plans to ensure they coordinate and strengthen our key development aims identified in the emerging Local Plan Strategy.

11.0 Background and Options

- 11.1 A decision is required to enable the allocation of grants to local councils and other relevant bodies related to Neighbourhood Planning in 2014/15.
- 11.2 This proposed policy introduces a framework to ensure a consistent and transparent approach to support for Neighbourhood Plans for elected members of CEC, CEC officers and local councils.
- 11.3 The final decision to award grants, and the level of grant funding awarded, will be taken by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Jobs and the Director of Economic Growth and Prosperity, in accordance with the Constitution and the Neighbourhood Planning Grants Policy.

12.0 Access to Information

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

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