

AGENDA ITEM 5B

Chichester Neighbourhood Development Plan

Summary

Chichester City Council has delegated the authority to produce a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for the Parish to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG). The NPSG has a difficult relationship with the City Council and work on the plan has stalled. There is no evidence that the NPSG will make a plan that can be adopted within a reasonable timescale. The City Council should instal a new Chair of the NPSG to lead and complete this important piece of work.

Background

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced through the 2011 Localism Act as a vehicle for local people to exert influence over development taking place in their local area. A NP is a planning policy document which contains a suite of planning policies, that the Planning Authority must have regard to when determining planning applications in that area. A NP may also include a "Vision" for the area and objectives, which the planning policies will aim to achieve. It can also include aspirations for the area, such as tree planting or other physical changes, that the NP cannot itself bring into implementation, but which are statements of public support for an idea which could encourage the relevant landowners or other interested parties to investigate the practicalities of implementing such ideas.

There are strict legal limitations on the content of NPs, and policies must accord with the Local Plan (LP), otherwise the NP would not be legally sound and would fail at its examination. NP policies therefore are not a replacement for Local Plan policies but sit under or alongside those policies and provide more specific detail or address specific areas.

There is a correct legal process for producing NPs which must be followed. These include several formal consultations and an examination by a planning inspector. If these formal requirements are met, a referendum is then held where residents within the NP area vote yes or no to adopting the Plan. After a vote count, if 50% or more of the votes are in favour, the Plan is adopted.

Progress

On 15th July 2019, Chichester City Council undertook to commence work on a Neighbourhood Plan. NPs usually take between 2-4 years; it was envisaged at the time that adoption would take place by the end of 2021.

The launch of the Neighbourhood Plan took place and a well-received public consultation in early 2020 attracted over 1,660 survey responses from individual residents. A Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (NPSG) was formed. The membership and chairmanship have changed over time.

Over 600 residents signed up to an email list for updates on the NP. I cannot find any recent email updates that have been sent to residents by the NPSG. A Chichester NP Facebook group was set up with 782 members to discuss NP topics. The last post on this Facebook page by the group was in July 2023. This was advertising a consultation on the NP to be held during the Gala. There has not been any subsequent update.

Several specific reports have been commissioned to inform the NP work and to evidence the policies which would later be developed. These included a study on trees and green spaces, a carbon output and reduction report and a feasibility study relating to highways.

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Work commenced on Planning, Landscape, Culture and Engineering (PLACE) assessments. These consist of in-depth public engagement with residents, creating a planning-related assessment for the residential areas of Chichester.

The last PLACE work uploaded to the NP section of the City Council website was in September 2021 at which point approximately 33% of the city had a completed PLACE assessment.

A planning consultancy, Feria Urbanism, was asked to support the work on the NP by guiding the Steering Group through the necessary processes and providing planning advice, when necessary, in order that a legally sound NP could be produced and adopted.

Opinion

I am concerned about the progress that the NPSG has made towards completing their plan.

- There is not an “Issues and Options” document which starts to define possible policy directions for the NP, drawing on previous consultation. Once an Issues and Options document is produced it would be sensible to consult with the community to confirm its validity.
- There is not yet a draft plan, which would be drawn up following the Issues and Options work.
- The 1,660 resident response survey may now be too old to draw on for an issues and option document.
- PLACE assessments have been carried out on approximately 33% of the Parish Area. The new Minerva Heights development is yet to carry out a PLACE assessment.
- The NPSG has uploaded 130 documents to their own software programme that has been purchased by the City Council. Of the 130 documents, 72 are original and the other 58 are duplicates of the 72. There are 19 agendas and five documents are blank.
- There is no timeline of what work still needs to be done and therefore there are no plans as to how this will be accomplished or by whom.

Expenditure to date

- 2019-2020: £13,793.86
- 2020-2021: 36,187.73
 - Carbon footprint report £1,875
 - Summersdale character study £2,830.95*
 - *It appears this was paid to Feria but not completed, Feria opined it unnecessary.
 - Stantec (Highways) £7,800
 - Ethos (Trees & Green Spaces Study) £9,275
 - Groundwork Grant to cover the above study -£9,275
 - Feria Planning Consultants £1,145.50
 - Motion (Highways) £1,500
 - Staff £20,286.78
 - Survey Monkey (Consultation) £750
- 2021-2022: £7,400
 - Feria Urbanism (Planning Consultant) £7,400

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- 2022-2023: £4,864.66
 - Feria Urbanism £364.66
 - Craft Pegg Concept Design £4,500
- 2023-2024: £6539.50
 - Feria Urbanism £6539.50
- Total expenditure to date £68,786.25

Relationship with the City Council

There is a poor relationship between the NPSG and the City Council. The NPSG will not work with the City Council Planning Advisor. The Chair of the NPSG asks to meet on neutral venues and has been reluctant to allow examination of the work done to date. The NPSG suggests that the City Council is driven to complete a plan for financial reasons ie an uplift in the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for new developments. This is incorrect as the City Council commissioned a NP to enable the community of Chichester to influence the use of the land within their Parish. The NPSG dismisses the involvement of the City Council Officers as purely administrative.

Proposals for consideration by the Planning and Conservation Committee

- (i) The responsibility for producing a plan remains with the City Council.
- (ii) The NPSG has put in time and effort for the work that has been done to date; for this the City Council owes them thanks.
- (iii) A new Chair of the NPSG is required to drive the NP to conclusion and the City Council needs to work with the NPSG to achieve this aim.
- (iv) An experienced NP consultant needs to be employed to review the evidence gathered so far and the next steps. They should project manage the development of all aspects of the NP.

Sean McHale April 2024