

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

FOR: Cabinet	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/19/8
FROM: Cabinet Member for Planning	DATE OF MEETING: 12 June 2019
OFFICER: Robert Hobbs (Corporate Manager - Strategic Planning)	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB118

THURSTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To presents the findings of the Independent Examiner's Report on the content of the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan Submission Draft document.
- 1.2 Subject to the implementation of the detailed recommendations contained within the Examiner's Report, it is proposed that Cabinet agree that the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan proceed to a local referendum.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The local planning authority may propose to make a decision on a recommendation that differs from that set out by the Examiner in their report. If so, it must give its reason why and undertake further consultation before issuing a final decision. As appropriate, this may require the matter to be re-examined. For the reasons set out in section 4 below, this option has been discarded.
- 2.2 The recommended option as set out below is that the local planning authority agree that this Neighbourhood Plan proceed to a local referendum.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Thurston Parish Council be requested to make the necessary modifications to their Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the Examiner's recommendations.
- 3.2 That, subject to the satisfactory completion of the above (to be agreed by the Corporate Manager for Strategic Planning); the Neighbourhood Plan be advanced to a local referendum covering the parish of Thurston.

REASON FOR DECISION

- 3.3 To enable the Council to meets its statutory obligations under Section 17A of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and to allow the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan to proceed to a local referendum

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced the concept of neighbourhood plans. These are plans developed by local communities covering the area in which they live and work,

and provide them with an opportunity to prepare planning policies and allocate land to shape the future of their area. Consequently, each plan has its own character.

4.2 The Thurston Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The key stages prior to independent examination are set out below:

- Area Designation: 2 Sept 2013
- Regulation 14 Pre-submission Consultation: 9 July - 31 Aug 2018 (carried out by the Parish Council).
- Regulation 16 Submission Draft Consultation: 21 Jan - 6 Mar 2019 (carried out by the District Council). During this period, ten representations were received.

The Consultation Statement provided by the Parish Council sets out in more detail how they went about preparing the Plan. Officers at the District Council have also been kept updated during the Plan's preparation.

4.3 The independent examination of the Plan was carried out by Janet Cheesley BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI, they being a suitably qualified and experienced person who was independent of the plan making process. The examination was conducted via the written representation and through matters of clarification from the Examiner to which both the Parish and District Council responded.

4.4 On 15 April 2019, the Examiner issued their Final Report. It concludes that - "*subject to my recommendations being accepted [...] the Plan does will provide a strong practical framework against which decisions on development can be made*" The modifications and other recommendations of note are summarised in paragraph 4.7 below. The Examiner's full report can be accessed via the link at Appendix 1. The Examiner did not consider it necessary to extend the local referendum area.

4.5 The District Council must now consider each recommendation, the reasons for them, and decide what action to take in each case. It must also come to a formal view about whether the Plan meets the 'Basic Conditions'.

4.6 The 'Basic Conditions' are set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990 (as amended). In order to satisfy them, the Plan must:

- *have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State,*
- *contribute to the achievement of sustainable development,*
- *be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area,*
- *not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, European Union obligations, and*
- *meet the prescribed conditions in relation to the neighbourhood plan and the prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the neighbourhood plan.*

4.7 The Examiner has concluded that, subject to the implementation of the modifications, the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions and other statutory requirements and can proceed to a referendum. In the main the recommendations involve improving the wording of policies and supporting text so that they are clear

and unambiguous and can be used in a consistent manner by decision makers. The recommendations of specific note are:

- that none of the twelve policies in the Plan (which cover Spatial Growth, Housing & Design, Community Infrastructure, Movement, and the Environment) require deletion but all but one (Policy 5: Community Facilities) require some modification;
- a modification to paragraph 3.50 which refers to the railway foot crossing. During the examination, clarity was sought on when mitigation measures should be in place. The modified text acknowledges both the Parish and District Councils position by recognising that, while improvements need to be made, any calculation of risk associated with the crossing is not simple and should not, in itself, be used as a reason for refusing planning applications;
- in Policy 1 (Spatial Strategy), which seeks to focus new development within the settlement boundary and identifies a number of key matters to be addressed, replacement of the reference to “*All residential development*” with “*All new housing proposals*”. Also in Policy 1, a re-working / re-wording of criterion D so that it now identifies what types of development would be considered acceptable outside of the settlement boundary;
- modifications to both Policy 4 (Character and Design) and the supporting text. The policy seeks to retain and enhance the character of the Parish and the modification includes strengthening the link between this and the ‘Character Assessment’ prepared as supporting evidence to the Plan. With regards to the supporting text, some detailed modifications to paragraph 5.26 which will require the deletion of those bullet points which read as detailed policy guidance but which go beyond what is specified in Policy 4.
- modifications to both Policy 6 (Key Movement Routes) and the supporting text. The policy seeks to enhance identified Key Movement Routes and ensure safe pedestrian and cycle access. The modifications confirm that the policy criteria should only apply to development proposals ‘where appropriate’ and clarify matters with regards to developer contributions. More significantly, and because there is no corresponding policy within the Plan to deliver the proposed cycleways and footpaths, it is recommended that paragraph 7.22 and Figure 10 be moved to the non-policy section of the Plan; and
- in Policy 8 (Parking Provision), a modification that removes conflict between the desire for off-street parking only while also meeting the requirements of the County Councils Guidance for Parking.

4.8 Officers have assessed the content of the Examiner’s Report and each recommendation and concur with its findings. It is therefore recommended to Cabinet that all the modifications proposed be made by the Parish Council. If the Cabinet agrees with this recommendation the District Council will need to publicise its decision (a ‘Decision Statement’) and move to a local referendum.

4.9 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has made it clear that the only modifications that the District Council can make at this stage are those required to ensure that:

- the plan is compatible with EU obligations,
- the plan does not breach Convention Rights, or

- those required for the purpose of correcting minor errors.

The District Council is therefore only able to exercise limited discretion at this point.

- 4.10 The task of modifying the plan falls to the Parish Council with assistance from the District Council. While there are no prescribed periods for this process, a copy of the plan, as modified, along with other specified documents will be required before the date of the local referendum can be confirmed.
- 4.11 Thurston Parish Council are already working proactively with officers at the District Council to prepare a final version of the neighbourhood plan that incorporates all of the Examiner's recommendations. The plan is therefore nearing the local referendum stage.
- 4.12 The referendum process is governed by the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendum) Regulations, 2012 (as amended). The regulations set out that not less than 28 working days' notice must be provided of the date of the local referendum. Officers will work with colleagues in the Electoral Services Team and with the Parish Council to agree an appropriate date on which the local referendum will take place.
- 4.13 The Parish Council will be expected to promote the referendum but it should be noted that there are restrictions on the publication of promotional material, advertisements and expenses. The format of the Referendum question will be:

'Do you want Mid Suffolk District Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Thurston to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?'

- 4.14 If more than 50% of those who vote in the referendum are in favour of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, then it must be brought into legal force and be 'made' (adopted) by the District Council. A further paper would be presented to Full Council to ratify the eventual outcome.

5. LINKS TO JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

- 5.1 The successful making (adoption) of the neighbourhood plan will enable the District Council to fulfil its corporate priorities, in terms of housing delivery, business growth and community capacity building.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The District Council receives £20,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for each neighbourhood plan once a referendum date has been set following a successful examination. This sum is paid to meet the District Council's costs in helping to deliver this Plan and will be sufficient in this case.
- 6.2 If the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan is successfully 'made' (adopted) the Parish Council will be eligible to receive 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy receipts from qualifying development in its area.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1990, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act,

2004 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations, 2012 (as amended). It has also had regard to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations, 2004 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2017.

7.2 If 'made' (adopted), the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Councils Development Plan and be used to help decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 This report is most closely linked with Significant Business Risk No. 3a - Enabling communities to become more sustainable. The key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
The Neighbourhood Plan fails to receive support at the referendum stage.	Unlikely - 2	Bad - 3	The Parish Council is responsible for promoting the referendum.
Legal challenge to the content of the Neighbourhood Plan and/or judicial review of the District Council's decisions.	Unlikely - 2	Bad - 3	Ensuring that the relevant Regulations are followed and that the decision making processes are clear and transparent.

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 As noted in paragraph 4.2 above, the District Council undertook formal consultation on the content of the submission draft Thurston Neighbourhood Plan between 21 January and 6 March 2019. The written representations received can be accessed via the link at Appendix 2.

9.2 Guidance issued in early 2018 by the Independent Examiner Referral Service (NPIERS) affords the Parish Council / Neighbourhood Plan Working Group the opportunity to consider and respond to the submitted representations before the examination commences. A link to the Parish Councils response is also provided at Appendix 2.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

10.1 There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not required.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The consideration of environmental implications are an integral part of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process. The Thurston Neighbourhood Plan has been subject to the appropriate Strategic Environmental and Habitats Regulations screening assessments.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(1) Examiners Final Report'	https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Neighbourhood-Planning/Thurston-NP-Exam-Report.pdf
(2) Submission Draft Representations <i>and</i> Thurston PC response to the above	https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Neighbourhood-Planning/Thurston-NP-R16-Reps.pdf https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Neighbourhood-Planning/Thurston-NP-Reg16-Reps-Response.pdf

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

The submission version of the Thurston Neighbourhood Plan can be found at:

<https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Neighbourhood-Planning/Thurston-NP-Sub-Dec18.pdf>

- Ends -