Chelmsford City Council Policy Board

16 July 2020

Neighbourhood Plans Update

Report by:
Director for Sustainable Communities

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Purpose
The purpose of this report is to update Members on current progress on Neighbourhood Plans in the City Council’s administrative area.

Recommendation
That Members note the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced new powers for communities to have greater control over development and planning, through a number of community-led planning initiatives including Neighbourhood Plans. The Regulations are contained in The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
1.2 A Neighbourhood Plan is a statutory planning document which establishes general policies for development and use of land in a neighbourhood, including the location of new homes and offices, and what they should look like.

1.3 Neighbourhood Plans should be used positively to plan for future development and support growth, reflect and build on the strategic needs set out in the Local Plan, and be in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.4 It is not a process that can be used to prevent development or promote a lower level of development than is set out in a local plan. Once it has been agreed by a local referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan attains the same legal status as the Local Plan.

1.5 Across England there are now more than 1,000 adopted (‘made’) plans and a further 1,800 in progress.

1.6 This report provides an update on Neighbourhood Plan activity in the Council’s administrative area.

2. Designated Neighbourhood Plan areas

2.1 In a parished area the Parish Council is the only group which can bring forward a Neighbourhood Plan. There are eight Neighbourhood Plans in progress. The areas for Neighbourhood Plans in Chelmsford align with their respective parish boundaries, although it is possible to prepare a plan for part of a parish, or for more than one parish working together.

2.2 The first stage in the process was for groups to apply to the Council to designate the areas to be covered by the Neighbourhood Plan. The groups and their designation dates are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood Plan</th>
<th>Designation Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Woodham Ferrers</td>
<td>14 January 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danbury</td>
<td>9 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broomfield</td>
<td>22 March 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writtle</td>
<td>3 January 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Baddow</td>
<td>6 January 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boreham</td>
<td>11 January 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandon</td>
<td>21 October 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Hanningfield</td>
<td>24 September 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 In the unparished area, communities can set up a formal body called a Neighbourhood Forum by applying to the Council, along with an application for the area they wish it to cover. There are no Neighbourhood Forums in Chelmsford.
3. Neighbourhood Plans progress

3.1 Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is entirely voluntary and relies on Parish Council members working with people from their local community to bring plans forwards. The Neighbourhood Plan group sets up a steering group and structure for reporting to the main Parish Council, agrees a timeline and budget, reviews and gathers evidence, engages with the community, and drafts the Neighbourhood Plan.

3.2 The City Council’s role is to support Neighbourhood Plan groups by advising on the process, sharing data and evidence documents, identifying key stakeholders, providing technical support such as mapping, screening emerging plans for environmental impacts, and advising on compliance with national and local planning policy.

3.3 The Council has provided a high level of support to Neighbourhood Plan groups via a dedicated officer as part of a wider role. This has included:

- Advising parishes on preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and alternative community-led planning approaches
- Attending annual Parish meetings and other public meetings to introduce the concept to local communities
- Providing advice and information updates on best practice and new legislation
- Preparing and consulting on Strategic Environmental Assessment/Habitats Regulations Assessment screening reports
- Attending a County-wide officer forum and representing the Council on a national learning group
- Giving detailed feedback on draft Neighbourhood Plans and policies.

3.4 The formal steps for progressing a Neighbourhood Plan once the group has finalised the draft version are as follows:

- The group itself consults on the draft plan — referred to as Regulation 14 consultation
- The group refines the plan taking consultation responses into account, before it is submitted to the Council
- The Council consults on the draft plan — referred to as Regulation 16 consultation
- The group finalises the plan taking consultation responses into account
- The Council arranges for an independent examination, leading to a referendum in the area covered by the plan, before formal adoption.

3.5 Some issues identified by the Neighbourhood Plan consultation process fall outside of planning matters, and most Neighbourhood Plans will also include actions to address these as community aspirations or projects. Examples include traffic and transport improvements, enhanced community facilities, and public realm work.
3.6 The Neighbourhood Plan process is set out in greater detail in the draft review of the Statement of Community Involvement, being reported to this meeting of the Policy Board.

3.7 The progress made so far by the active Neighbourhood Plan groups, and the ongoing support provided by the Council, is summarised below.

3.8 South Woodham Ferrers

- Neighbourhood Plan visioning event 2017
  Public consultation including exhibitions and questionnaire 2019
- Business and landowner workshop 2019
- Emerging ideas consultation 2019
- Regulation 14 consultation in February and March 2020. The group has used consultation responses to refine the plan, for anticipated submission to the Council in July 2020 for a Regulation 16 consultation.

Council support:

The Council will hold a Regulation 16 consultation, liaise with the group on the process, feed back on the consultation results, and work with the group to make any further necessary changes before proceeding with the further formal steps as outlined at 3.3 above. The Council will consider how to carry out effective consultation if this is impacted by the current coronavirus restrictions.

3.9 Danbury

Chelmsford’s Local Plan allocates around 100 new homes in Danbury, with the location/s to be decided through the Neighbourhood Plan. The group has carried out a range of engagement events including:

- Vision workshop 2017
- Public consultation including vision, objectives and potential sites 2018
- Exhibition on feedback received 2018
- Call for sites 2019 to give a further opportunity for landowners within the parish to submit land for consideration for development.

The group is currently finalising selection of its preferred sites, taking previous consultation responses and a wide range of evidence into account. It anticipates a further consultation exercise on the preferred site selection before finalising the draft plan for a Regulation 14 consultation.
Council support:
The Council is currently assisting with development of detailed evidence relating to the site allocations and will advise on the draft plan as it develops.

3.10 **Broomfield**

- Residents’ questionnaire 2017
- Stakeholders’ survey 2017, including businesses and community groups
- Commissioned evidence base documents - Landscape Appraisal 2018, Housing Needs Assessment 2109
- Site assessment 2019/20 to assess whether any small-scale proposals might be justified in terms of community benefit

Policy drafting is now underway. When drafted, an informal public consultation is proposed, followed by the formal stages set out at 3.3 above with anticipated adoption before the end of 2021.

Council support:
The Council is monitoring progress and will advise on the draft plan as it develops.

3.11 **Writtle**

- Community exhibition and questionnaire 2018
- Business questionnaire 2018
- Focus groups and community group meetings 2018-2020
- Production of Writtle Parish Design Guide March 2020 (with AECOM)

The group recently sent the Council a draft version of the plan for review prior to finalising it for a Regulation 14 consultation later this year.

Council support:
The Council has sent detailed comments to the group which are currently being reviewed prior to amending the draft plan. The Council will liaise with the group on how to carry out effective consultation if this is impacted by the current coronavirus restrictions.

3.12 **Little Baddow**

- YouTube video introducing the plan and its importance to the parish 2017
- Promotion of plan and feedback gathering 2017
- Initial engagement event 2017
- Residents’, business and clubs/societies’ surveys 2017 and 2018
- Policy engagement event 2019
The group recently sent the Council its draft policies for the plan, for review prior to finalising it for further community feedback followed by a Regulation 14 consultation later this year.

Council support:
The Council has sent detailed comments on the draft policies to the group which are currently being reviewed prior to amending the draft plan. The Council will liaise with the group on how to carry out effective consultation if this is impacted by the current coronavirus restrictions.

3.13 **Boreham**

- Initial consultation meeting 2017
- Circulated a questionnaire to gain an overall view of local residents on key topics 2020
- A new website will be launched soon to host all Neighbourhood Plan information.

Council support:
The Council will be able to assist with access to relevant evidence base information, and will advise on the draft plan as it develops.

3.14 **Sandon**

- Video introducing the plan and its importance to the parish 2018
- Circulated a public consultation questionnaire 2018
- Business questionnaire and school survey 2019
- Vision, objectives and policies workshop 2019

The group recently sent the Council a draft version of the plan for review prior to developing the plan further.

Council support:
The Council has sent detailed comments to the group which are currently being reviewed prior to amending the draft plan.

3.15 **East Hanningfield**

In the early stages of preparing to produce a plan

Council support:
The Council will be able to assist with access to relevant evidence base information, and will advise on the draft plan as it develops.
4. Conclusion

4.1 Neighbourhood planning activity is progressing at a different pace in each of the designated areas.

4.2 The amount of work required by a group to bring a Neighbourhood Plan forwards requires a range of skills, and significant time and energy. The commitment by the Neighbourhood Plan groups to create meaningful plans which reflect local concerns is to be commended.

4.3 The Council will continue to support existing and future Neighbourhood Plan groups through offering informal advice, encouragement and co-operation, and by arranging the formal consultation and adoption stages.

List of appendices:
None

Background papers:
The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional:
Neighbourhood Planning activity within the Council is carried out with regard legislation and guidance set out in the Localism Act 2011 and The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

Financial:
There is a cost to the Council of arranging Regulation 16 consultation, Neighbourhood Plan examinations and referendums, however this is reimbursed via Government grants.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment:
Neighbourhood Plans align with the Local Plan and taken together they promote sustainable development through policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change and protect the environment.

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030:
Neighbourhood Plans align with the Local Plan and taken together they promote sustainable development and measures to reduced carbon emissions.
Personnel:
There are no personnel issues arising directly from this report as staff resources are in place to support the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Risk Management:
There may be a risk if Neighbourhood Plans do not come forward in a timely manner, although the decision-maker should revert to the Local Plan in this situation.

Equality and Diversity:
An Equality Impact Assessment is a requirement for meeting the basic conditions for a Neighbourhood Plan, to comply with Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. This sets out the Public Sector Duty (Equality Duty), on all public bodies, to consider the impact on equalities in all policy and decision making.

Health and Safety:
There are no Health & Safety issues arising directly from this report.

Digital:
There are no IT issues arising directly from this report.

Other:
Neighbourhood Plans will become part of the Local Plan once adopted (‘made’) and contribute to priorities in the Council’s Our Chelmsford, Our Plan 2020: A Fairer and Inclusive Chelmsford, A Safer and Greener Place, Healthy, Enjoyable and Active Lives and A Better Connected Chelmsford.

Consultees:
CCC - Legal and Democratic Services

Relevant Policies and Strategies:
This report takes into account the following policies and strategies of the City Council:
Local Plan 2013-2036
Statement of Community Involvement 2017
Draft Review of Statement of Community Involvement, June 2020
Our Chelmsford, Our Plan, January 2020
Our Chelmsford, Our Plan

The above report relates to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

Promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible growth to stimulate a vibrant, balanced economy, a fairer society and provide more housing of all types.

Making Chelmsford a more attractive place, promoting Chelmsford’s green credentials, ensuring communities are safe and creating a distinctive sense of place.

Encouraging people to live well, promoting healthy, active lifestyles and reducing social isolation, making Chelmsford a more enjoyable place in which to live, work and play.

Bringing people together, empowering local people and working in partnership to build community capacity, stronger communities and secure investment in the city.