REVISED MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMUNITY LED PLANNING PROTOCOL

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Maldon District Council Community Led Planning Protocol which was adopted by the Planning and Licensing Committee in January 2013 (Minute No. 738 refers).

2. AREA FOR DECISION/ ACTION

2.1 Background

2.1.1 Since the introduction of the neighbourhood planning process by Central Government an increasing number of neighbourhood plans have been put forward within the District. The experience gained from undertaking the seven neighbourhood plans in progress has meant that there is a need to update the Community Led Planning Protocol to ensure a transparent process is given to parish and town councils undertaking the neighbourhood planning process.

2.1.2 The neighbourhood planning process has implications for staff resources and the time given for the neighbourhood planning process had been discussed at the November 2012 (Minute No. 563 refers) and January 2013 (Minute No. 738 refers) Planning and Licensing Committee meetings.

2.1.3 On these previous two occasions, the Planning and Licensing Committee determined that in addition to the statutory tasks and responsibilities, the Council should provide 5 - 10 days officer time, and attendance at four meetings, to support each community led plan produced in the District. This support could include:

- Advice and assistance on the process of producing neighbourhood plans.
- Basic assessment and review of work produced by a neighbourhood group throughout the development of a plan. This would include providing ‘critical friend’ assistance to ensure that the emerging work is in conformity with Maldon District Council planning documents and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Written responses to community groups outlining assessment and review work undertaken on emerging neighbourhood plans.
• Attendance at meetings with neighbourhood groups to present the views of the Council on an emerging plan, and provide advice and assistance as required.

2.1.4 It has been found that setting limits on meetings and time available is not productive in the support of neighbourhood planning and it is better to tailor the level of support to each neighbourhood plan, taking into account resources available within the Planning Policy Team and individual requirements of the community group.

2.1.5 The Rural Communities Council of Essex (RCCE) has been assisting Parish and Town Councils with community consultations and attending council meetings to talk about the neighbourhood planning process.

2.1.6 RCCE’s involvement in the neighbourhood planning process has been very successful and has reduced the amount of officer time, particularly in the early stages when a Parish or Town Council is thinking about and developing a framework to commence the neighbourhood planning process. RCCE’s community engagement experience has also assisted Parish and Town Councils in preparing community engagement exercises which are required to be a robust evidence base for the neighbourhood plan.

2.1.7 To make community groups aware of the support available from the Council and RCCE, and ensure that a consistent level of support is provided to all groups, a revised Community Led Planning Protocol has been produced (see APPENDIX 1).

2.2 The Revised Community Led Planning Protocol

2.2.1 The revised protocol outlines the involvement of officers from the Planning Policy Team and RCCE.

2.2.2 The Council has purchased 10 days of time from the RCCE which is to be used to assist parish and town councils with exploring the process of creating a neighbourhood plan as well as assisting with a project plan and community engagement. The involvement of the RCCE in the early stages is important and enables the parish and town council’s to formulate a robust evidence base. RCCE’s involvement in the neighbourhood planning process is included in the revised protocol.

2.2.3 The role of the Planning Policy Team is to provide advice on the production and content of policies in the neighbourhood plan. The Planning Policy team are committed to assisting with the neighbourhood planning process and providing feedback regarding the robustness of policies and the workability of the document itself.

2.2.4 The Council is required by Regulation 9 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 to undertake the environmental assessments of plan. This requirement was not detailed in the previous protocol, and should therefore be included in the update to the protocol to provide a more detailed description of the process.

2.2.5 Once approved, the updated Maldon District Council Community Led Planning Protocol will be shared with all parish and town councils in the District.
3. **IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS**

3.1 Neighbourhood planning has the potential to support the following corporate goals which underpin the Council’s vision for the District:

- Enabling, supporting and empowering communities to be safe, active and healthy;
- Protecting and shaping the District and balancing the future needs of the community; and
- Meeting the needs of the District.

4. **IMPLICATIONS**

(i) **Impact on Customers** - Agreeing how the Council will manage the neighbourhood planning process will provide greater certainty and transparency to communities.

- Customers would benefit from the assistance and support provided by the Council involved in the production of neighbourhood plans and would be affected by the level of assistance that the Council can provide. Customers would benefit from greater support being provided by the Council.
- Opportunity for communities to directly plan the future of their area.

(ii) **Impact on Equalities** - Neighbourhood planning has the potential to identify and manage local inequalities that may not have been identified by the Council. Supporting neighbourhood planning could help to address locally based inequalities in the District.

(iii) **Impact on Risk** - It is unknown how many areas may become interested in producing neighbourhood plans, particularly following the successful completion of plans in other areas. The establishment of a number of neighbourhood plans could have a significant impact on existing council resources, and could potentially divert resources away from other tasks and responsibilities including the production of the LDP if sufficient additional resources are not made available.

(iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** - The greater number of areas that are interested in producing neighbourhood plans would create a larger demand on the Council resources. Financial resources are required to fund the examination and referendum on a neighbourhood plan.

(v) **Impact on Resources (human)** - The greater number of areas that are interested in producing neighbourhood plans would create a larger demand on human resources within the Planning Policy Team.

(vi) **Impact on the Environment** - Neighbourhood plans have the potential to improve the local environment where plans are being produced.
5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 A Community Led Planning Protocol is required to outline how the Council will support local community groups in the production of neighbourhood plans. This report provides a revised Community Led Planning Protocol for Member approval.

6. RECOMMENDATION

That the revised Community Led Planning Protocol (APPENDIX 1) be approved.

Background Papers:
Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004
Neighbourhood Planning Regulations (2012)
Neighbourhood Planning (Referendum) Regulations 2012
Localism Act (2011)

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