

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Neighbourhood Planning Wokingham Area Designation Sign Off Procedure</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	The Executive on 26 July 2018
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Director of Corporate Services – Graham Ebers Director of Locality and Customer Services – Josie Wragg
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	Executive Member for Business, Economic Development and Strategic Planning - Stuart Munro

## **PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)**

That Twyford and Wokingham Without Parish Councils will be able to lead on the preparation of Neighbourhood Development Plans that will help to influence development decisions in each respective parish. Delegating the authority to approve future area designations for whole parish applications provides an efficient decision making process which reflects the regulatory requirements.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the following are agreed by the Executive:

- 1) that Twyford Parish is designated as a Neighbourhood Area;
- 2) that Wokingham Without Parish is designated as a Neighbourhood Area;
- 3) that delegated authority be given to the Director of Locality and Customer Services, in consultation with the Executive Member responsible for strategic planning and the relevant ward members, to determine future applications for Neighbourhood Area designation.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Through a Neighbourhood Plan, communities are able to write planning policies to influence where new homes, shops and offices should be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided.

Where communities wish to take up the opportunities offered by Neighbourhood Plans, they must first apply to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area.

Changes to the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended) now mean that where a parish or town council applies for the whole of the area of the parish to be designated as a neighbourhood area, the local planning authority must designate the whole of the area applied for with no requirement for consultation. Twyford and Wokingham Without Parish Councils have recently submitted applications to be designated as Neighbourhood Plan Areas, the first step in the neighbourhood planning process.

It is recommended that the procedure for determining area designations be delegated to the Director of Locality and Customer Services, in consultation with the Executive Member responsible for strategic planning to streamline what is an obligatory process. In the meantime, it is recommended that Executive agree that both Twyford and Wokingham Without Parishes are designated as Neighbourhood Plan Areas in accordance with the mandatory requirements of the relevant regulations.

## **BACKGROUND**

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Through a Neighbourhood Plan, communities are able to write planning policies to influence where new homes, shops and offices should be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided. A draft Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of Wokingham Borough's Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plans. Once a Neighbourhood Plan has been through an independent examination and a successful referendum, it must be adopted by the Council and become part of its development plan. The Neighbourhood Plan thereby forms part of the suite of plans which are the primary consideration when making decisions on planning applications.

Where communities wish to take up the opportunities offered by Neighbourhood Plans, they must first apply to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area. In areas with parish or town councils the application must be made by these organisations, although in the preparation of the plan they are expected to work with the wider community.

### Designating Neighbourhood Areas

In the past, regulations governing applications for designation as a Neighbourhood Area required the application to be advertised, followed by consideration of whether the areas applied for represented a suitable planning area.

The regulations (Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (as amended)) have since been altered to streamline the process. Consultation is no longer required. Also, applications for Neighbourhood Areas which relate to a whole parish area must be approved.

Effectively, there is no decision for the local planning authority to make except in very limited and specified exceptions apply<sup>1</sup>.

### Delegation of authority to designate Neighbourhood Area Applications

Delegated authority is requested to designate future applications for designation as a Neighbourhood Area which relate to whole parish areas, to reflect the regulatory requirements and ensure efficiency in process.

Where applications vary from the parish boundary or where one of the specified exceptions applies, a report will continue to be brought to Executive to consider whether the proposed area reflects a suitable basis on which to plan.

The requested delegation would not remove any decision making ability of Executive.

### Twyford and Wokingham Without Parish Councils

At this time, Twyford Parish Council and Wokingham Without Parish Council both wish to prepare neighbourhood plans covering the entirety of their administrative areas and

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<sup>1</sup> This is where the area applied for: has already been designated as a neighbourhood area which extends beyond the parish boundary; or forms part of another application that has not yet been determined.

have submitted the necessary applications to be designated as neighbourhood areas. For clarity, these are to be two separate neighbourhood plans, and not a joint plan.

Given that these relate to the whole parish area, as discussed above, Wokingham Borough Council must therefore designate these areas as applied for in line with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (as amended 2016).

### Recommendation

Delegated authority is requested to designate future applications for Neighbourhood Areas which relate to whole parish areas, to reflect the regulatory requirements and ensure efficiency in process.

Additionally, in the absence of agreed delegation at this point in time, it is recommended that Executive approve the applications from Twyford Parish Council and Wokingham Without Parish Council in accordance with regulatory requirements.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	N/A	N/A

### Other Financial Information

There are no financial implications of the recommendations.

It should be noted that currently funding is made available from government to local planning authorities to assist their supporting communities preparing neighbourhood plans. Funding has previously been received to support the designation of neighbourhood plans, however this is limited to five plans. Wokingham Borough Council has applied for this grant for each of the current five neighbourhood plans under preparation (Shinfield; Arborfield & Barkham; Remenham; Ruscombe and Hurst). No further funding for additional designations is currently available.

### Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

In accordance with Regulations no consultation is required at this stage, as set out in the report. As the plan progresses it will be subject to extensive consultation which will be led by the Neighbourhood Groups until the plan is formally submitted to the Council.

Adopted neighbourhood plans will influence decisions on planning applications. Where neighbourhood plans have been completed, parish and town councils are entitled to

receive a higher percentage of receipts from the Community Infrastructure Fund. The proportion retained by Wokingham Borough Council thereby reduces from 85% to 75%.

The notion of neighbourhood planning sits well alongside the Council's own emerging localities agenda.

#### **Resourcing and Timeline for Next Steps**

Neighbourhood Plans are a community initiative so the timetable will be dependent on each Neighbourhood plan group. WBC Officers will engage with the groups to determine when support is needed.

#### **Timeline for Review and Evaluation**

The progress of neighbourhood plans is dependent on the Neighbourhood Group. Officers will remain in contact with the respective Groups to monitor progress.

#### **List of Background Papers**

Twyford Parish Council application for the designation of a Neighbourhood Plan Area including Parish Neighbourhood Plan Area Map

Wokingham Without Parish Council application for the designation of a Neighbourhood Plan Area including Parish Neighbourhood Plan Area Map

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