

Since I last reported to the Town Council, work has continued on the Neighbourhood Plan with nearly 240 hours' worth of free work being undertaken by members of the Management Group and new and existing extremely talented and dedicated volunteers. As with everything else, our ability to carry out work has been impacted by the pandemic and, as restrictions ease, we are all looking forward to being able to engage more with the Droitwich Spa community in a meaningful and positive manner in the continued development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

However, time is moving on and, with the information received from Item 9 of the Agenda of the Planning Committee meeting held on 12 April 2021 which, as I pointed out then was not mentioned to me prior to the meeting as a matter of courtesy, there are concerns that the timetable set for the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan will be set back again with a real and tangible danger that it might not be deliverable in the timeframe available. This raises the concern that the work already done will have been wasted by and from people that have given freely of their time and goodwill.

It should also be noted that since the suspension of the Neighbourhood Plan was lifted in June 2019, the Town Council has not expended any physical or financial resource on it, a commitment given by the NP Management Group to require no Town Council funding which is still its intention to honour. Locality monies are available for NP development but for the Neighbourhood Plan to be deliverable in the timetable set by the Management Group, this needs to be applied for by the end of June 2021 at the very latest. If this money cannot be applied for, for whatever reason, the Neighbourhood Plan Management Group would anticipate having to ask the Town Council to cover whatever amount(s) could have been applied for in order for the Referendum on the Plan to take place in 2023 which has always been the Group's intention.

Further, it was agreed at the Full Council meeting held on 14 December 2020 that a Support Group would be set up to assist in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan; however, this Group has still not met nor is it known what its exact composition is going to be or its Terms of Reference. A Terms of Reference document was provided to the Town Council by the Neighbourhood Plan Management Group for consideration on 17 February 2021.

The Neighbourhood Plan Management Group calls on the Town Council to confirm the following this evening:

1. The membership of the Support Group that the Town Council set up on 14/12/20.
2. That this group will meet no later than 21 June 2021 (preferably sooner) and that arrangements will be in place to enable decisions by the Support Group to be enacted without reference to a Full Council meeting which are normally two to three months apart.
3. That the Terms of Reference, the Project Definition Document and the Grant Application for the Locality monies can be distributed to all members of that Group prior to the first meeting for their consideration, discussion and amendment so all documents can be agreed at the meeting and the Grant Application submitted to Locality to accord with the Management Group's timetable.
4. That if (3) above cannot be agreed, the Town Council agrees to commit to covering the amount that could have been applied for from Locality to enable the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan to meet its timetable (it is anticipated this would be £3,500.00).

I would remind the Town Council that many of us committed to the investigation of the delivery of a Neighbourhood Plan in our election promises of 2019, now nearly 2 years ago. We have also reaffirmed that commitment in many meetings since then. Time is now running out to enable us to deliver on those promises.

There are some people that may feel that our failure to act on the promises made may bring us into disrepute thus risking reputational harm to the Town Council.

The role the Town Council plays in the local Government structure for Worcestershire is a limited one, but this is something for which the public of Droitwich Spa looks to us to lead on and it is something I strongly feel we should not disappoint them on.

The Neighbourhood Plan represents a fantastic opportunity for the Town Council to be seen to be listening and responding to the residents of our town to deliver an agreed vision for Droitwich Spa.

Councillor Alan Humphries
Monday 19 April 2021