

Neighbourhood Action Planning

Municipal Year 2011/12



Committee Membership:

Councillor Ash	Councillor D Mortimer
Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)	Councillor Mrs Parvin
Councillor Field	Councillor Mrs Paterson
Councillor FitzGerald (Vice-Chairman)	Councillor Mrs Stockell
Councillor Hinder	Councillor Yates

Chairman's Summary

Councillor Annabelle Blackmore



The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed Neighbourhood Action Planning which evolved from the Planning for Real model. Planning for Real enables local people to become proactive within their local area for the benefit of the whole community. The model enables residents to voice their concerns without feeling intimidated by the process. The pilot for Maidstone Borough Council centred on Park Wood. The Committee collected information from the variety of guests and witnesses and the passion and enthusiasm which bubbled through was clear. Many groups are already thriving and the Council must continue to provide constructive assistance for the groups where this mirrors our own strategic priorities.

At the start of the project a map of the Park Wood area was created and the children at Bell Wood School were able to plot their own residence on the map which evolved into a 3D model. This provided a tangible focal point which enabled other residents to pinpoint places where problems occurred or improvements could be made.

Over the coming years there will be a greater emphasis on localism. The development of a Neighbourhood Action Plan within a community will help to focus their actions. The Neighbourhood Action Plan will also give a voice to those who want to improve the neighbourhood for all residents through their positive energy and subsequent action.

Finally, I would like to offer my thanks to Orla Sweeney for her assistance during the production of this report and also her minute taking during our two meetings for this particular subject.

Neighbourhood Action Planning

At the beginning of the Municipal Year the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted to evaluate Neighbourhood Action Planning with a focus on the vulnerable and areas of deprivation as part of its work programming. Members felt that this should be set against the Localism Bill 2011 and the Committee wanted to establish where Maidstone Borough Council were heading, in the longer term, to strengthen ties with communities.

The Localism Bill was given Royal Assent on 1 November 2011. It details the intended power shift from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and local councils. Localism has the following priorities under which Neighbourhood Action Planning can be established:

- Give communities more powers (localism and devolution)
- Encourage people to take an active role in their communities (volunteering)
- Transfer power from central to local government
- Support cooperatives, mutuels, charities and social enterprises

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has an 18 month Structural Reform Plan. The actions to be completed within that time frame will enable the decentralisation and transparency reforms that will put residents and councils in control of their communities.

In the DCLG's monthly implementation update (January 2012) the following action was detailed to be started by the end of January 2012:

- 5.1 (iv) Work with a small number of places to develop Neighbourhood Plans using existing powers.

Maidstone Borough Council (MBC), with residents' input, developed a pilot scheme in Park Wood as part of Neighbourhood Action Planning and an action plan was developed spanning a 5 year period.

The Committee identified a number of actions specific to Park Wood and made recommendations to the Council in this report to help fulfil outcomes. These were discussed with residents, stakeholders and Council Officers. In further recommendations the Committee seek to address possible obstacles such as finance and the regeneration of areas in the borough by Housing Associations. This could impact on the future delivery of Neighbourhood Action Planning in other areas of Maidstone.

It was clear to the Committee that finance will remain a challenge with a significant reduction in the Home Office Grant from £200,000 to £47,000. This will impact on partners including Kent Police, Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council.

Recommendations

The Committee sought to understand Neighbourhood Action Planning and the Planning for Real process and identify the way forward by establishing the lessons learnt from the Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15 pilot.

Representatives from residents groups in the area shared their enthusiasm and vision. There was a willingness from residents to improve the area in which they lived demonstrated by the abundance of volunteers who offered their time. Currently residents produce their own newsletter which communicates to residents what is offer in Park Wood. One of the main ambitions noted was to take over the running of Heather House in Park Wood.

1. That the Community Halls Audit report is taken to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address the possibility of communities running facilities similar to Heather House in Park Wood

The Park Wood pilot had funding of £50,000, secured by the Council for improvements to the area and £10,000 from the Community Chest which was specifically for residents and charities to spend in the area. There had also been financial and additional support through staff involvement from strategic partners including Golding Homes and Kent County Council (KCC).

It was difficult for the Committee to establish the impact of the financial contributions to the area. The notable successes were residents coming together and working together for the benefit of all; innovation, joined up working and communications were the key components. Social networking sites provided the quickest and easiest method for communication between residents.

The Council were building on the capacity of communities to access funding and training. A Health Champions course offered by MBC encourages a healthy lifestyle including a well balanced diet and the cessation of smoking. Residents felt that they would prefer to hear from like-minded people to whom they could relate.

Community groups must be 'constituted' to access funding. This is a simple process and support and guidance can be provided by the Community Development Team.

The Council's Community Development Strategy of which the Committee were consultees, demonstrates the Council's focus in this area. The main priority was to build the capacity and capability of communities. Worklessness and youth

unemployment were identified by residents as high priority areas and were addressed by this strategy. The Committee asked that Anti Social Behaviour be addressed separately within the strategy. Members were informed that the Community Development Team which included Community Partnerships and Community Safety would be less focused on sports and play activities and would therefore have the ability to develop a programme focussed on this.

The Committee felt the Council's remit was becoming one of 'facilitator'. The assistance given in the future may not necessarily be financial but through the provision of staff resources. There are many funding streams which are not available to MBC. However through assistance provided by the Council we can enable community groups to access funding streams for their projects.

2. That assistance be given by the Community Development Team to Park Wood residents in the production of their residents' newsletter

3. That the financial implications of extending Planning for Real across other wards of the borough be undertaken before decisions are finalised

4. That case studies be used to convey the successes achieved in Park Wood when delivering Neighbourhood Action Planning in other areas of the borough. Established residents' groups in Park Wood should be encouraged to share their experiences with others

The starting point for Park Wood had been the creation of the Planning for Real 3D model of the area with children from Bellwood School. This was used as a tool for engagement with all residents and the enthusiasm created by the children for this idea was well received by all groups of residents.

5. That the involvement of children in the creation of the 3D model which forms part of the Planning for Real methodology should be the starting point for any future Neighbourhood Action Planning

The pilot scheme started with a blank sheet of paper and asked residents for their high priority issues. At a later stage that there was an attempt to relate residents' issues to the evidence based priorities of statutory authorities. Information presented to residents by local authorities and other partners needed to be addressed. Residents asked for simple, uncomplicated language and a more coordinated approach.

The inclusion of 'you said, we did' in the Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-2015 was considered an excellent communications tool for updating residents. This method was favoured by the Committee.

6. That the priorities arising from the Planning for Real process take into account residents' needs and the priorities of the partners involved

Golding Homes had used the Planning for Real process as a starting point to engage with residents in a meaningful way. Its regeneration of the area was discussed in relation to Neighbourhood Action Planning.

The discussion, involving residents addressed rumours circulating in Park Wood about the regeneration of the area. Golding Homes confirmed that residents moving out of the area during the regeneration would have to go through a bidding process. An automatic return to the new properties in the area was not guaranteed. The newly built properties would be let on an affordable rent basis which was 80% of open market rent rather than a social rent of 50% market rent. This was inline with Government policy.

Although this was not directly related to Neighbourhood Action Planning it was felt that the regeneration of Park Wood and other areas would have an impact across the borough. Residents were re housed and stable communities became dispersed and fragmented, leaving a need to re establish communities.

7. That Golding Homes and residents from Park Wood are invited to Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee to address the issues that arose regarding the regeneration of Park Wood

8. That clarification is required for residents on how they can access new properties in Park Wood

The Committee's findings from its scrutiny of the pilot Neighbourhood Action Planning project in Park Wood were generally positive with an appetite from residents to move forward and make a difference to the area in which they live. This Committee would like to see continued support from Maidstone Borough Council for the residents groups in Park Wood and advocate Neighbourhood Action Planning being taken to other areas of Maidstone. It asks that the recommendations made in this report are given full consideration during the decision making process.

Thank you

The Committee considered evidence from a variety of stakeholders and would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who have personally contributed to this review:

Kent County Council

Charlie Beaumont, Effective Practice & Performance Manager, Youth Offending Service

Fusion Healthy Living Centre

Sara Hutchinson, Manager

Parents is the Word

Jade Webster, Chairman

Bulk Buy Scheme

Jackie Pye, Chairman

Golding Homes

Caroline McBride, Head of Community Development

Richard Cannecot, Head of Regeneration

Kick Kent

Ian Summers

Kent Police Authority

Inspector Prodger

Maidstone Borough Council

Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager

Jim Boot, Community Development Manager

Ellie Kershaw, Senior Corporate Policy Officer

Councillor Marion Ring, Cabinet Member for the Environment

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