

A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR DIDCOT

Planning & Development Committee Report

At its meeting on 5 June 2024, Didcot Town Council (DTC) Planning and Development Committee (PDC) requested a Report to update on the process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for Didcot Parish, and prospectively a wider area encompassing the Didcot Garden Town 'Area of influence' (i.e. those Parishes around Didcot that are included in the Garden Town Delivery Plan..

DTC Full Council resolved to support and fund these preparatory processes at its meeting on 14 May 2024, having previously received a Report discussed by PDC and sent forward with an accompanying Resolution passed at its meeting on 23 March 2024 [Agenda item 231].

PDC is requested to keep in view the availability of supportive expertise and resources from SODC/VOWH during the NP development process that will now follow.

In order to address the requirement of somewhat separating the 'Didcot NP' from the 'Didcot Garden Town NP' at this stage, it is recommended that PDC form two new Working Groups. Members of these WGs can include Councillors other than voting members of the PDC. But it would be prudent to ensure that the chair and vice-chair of each WG are members of the PDC. There is also likely to be merit in having the same chair and vice-chair for both WGs, albeit that other members might sit on only one of the two. The main justification for proposing this method is that it would concentrate responsibility for reporting and report-making under the aegis of PDC.

The common role of both WGs is:

(a) consultation with stakeholders and other interested parties on the aims and cost/benefit assessment of an NP

(b) dissemination of information and discussion of the process of developing and deciding on an NP

(c) seeking the constructive engagement of local communities, interest groups and other organisations with the possibilities and options that can be accessed via NPs.

However, each NP is also likely to have a somewhat different 'principal audience'.

In the case of '**Didcot Parish NPWG**' it is likely to be individuals, groups and other entities with which different DTC committees and DTC Staff have greater or less existing 'familiarity'. On that basis DPNPWG will interface routinely with the NP Team at SODC/VOWH by supplying a considerable amount of new information that is not presently collated or even collected. It will prepare the ground for subsequent proposals to Full Council *via* the PDC, and, if these are agreed, for the eventual Report to central government and a subsequent referendum.

In the case of '**Didcot Garden Town NPWG**' there is likely to be a primary need to align the interests and expectations of separate public legal authorities, (Parishes *etc.*) some of which already have their own NPs in place, as well as others that do not. The DGTNPWG is likely to interface with the SODC/VOWH NP Team as 'The Go-between', helping to arbitrate rather differing priorities, demands

and expectations among Parishes in the Garden Town Area of Influence. It will report periodically to PDC on the results of its negotiations, and if appropriate PDC will submit proposals about an 'enlarged' NP area to Full Council.

Over the past 6-9 months of preparatory work for the initial WG Report submitted to PDC in February 2024, the most oft-reiterated advice received from SODC/VOWH NP Team was 'The simpler and more straightforward the initial aims of an NP, the more likely it is to be implemented sooner and to cost less'.

It is to be hoped that both WGs will keep that advice much in mind.

As there will be a lot of work for WGs to undertake, it is recommended that each should comprise six Councillors, including the chair and vice-chair; and that each should initially establish a work plan including the allocation of different functions to different members.

Whilst there should be no difference in status between the WGs, it follows from what has been stated above that the DPNPWG needs to be formed as soon as possible, so that work can begin. Although it is desirable that a DGTNPWG is formed at an early date, its working agenda is likely to benefit from early results and feedback identified by DPNPWG, and hence its more 'diplomatic' function might not kick in for some months ahead, even though it could usefully develop some skills via internal discussion before 'going live'.

Membership and Terms of Reference: Didcot Parish NPWG

Those councillors wishing to be members of the working group should inform the chair of the Planning and Development Committee prior to its next meeting so that that committee can agree the membership of the committee.

Terms of Reference of the DPNPWG:

(a) consultation with stakeholders and other interested parties on the aims and cost/benefit assessment of an NP

(b) dissemination of information and discussion of the process of developing and deciding on an NP

(c) seeking the constructive engagement of local communities, interest groups and other organisations with the possibilities and options that can be accessed *via* NPs

(d) co-operating with the SODC/VOWH NP team to access funding support, technical support and other available resources in preparing an NP, and in establishing the basis for a Report to government authorities and a referendum on the NP

(e) to recommend to Planning and Development Committee using financial resources allocated by DTC to precede or augment financial and technical support from SODC/VOWH in advance of the receipt of such support

(f) maintaining records of meetings and proposed expenditures and making reports of these to PDC as required.

(g) the WG shall be quorate when at least four members are present including one of the WG Chair or Vice Chair.

Membership and Terms of Reference: Didcot Garden Town NPWG

Those councillors wishing to be members of the working group should inform the chair of the Planning and Development Committee prior to its next meeting so that that committee can agree the membership of the committee.

Terms of Reference of the DPNPWG:

(a) consultation on the aims and cost/benefit assessment of an initial area-wide NP with Parishes around Didcot that fall within the Garden Town Area of Influence and (by mutual arrangements) with other stakeholders and interested parties

(b) dissemination of information and discussion of the agreed aims of an initial area-wide NP

(c) seeking to develop longer-term understandings over the aims, possibilities and future options that might be developed *via* an area-wide NP

(d) to recommend to Planning and Development Committee using financial resources allocated by DTC to precede or augment financial and technical support from SODC/VOWH in advance of the receipt of such support

(e) maintaining records of meetings and proposed expenditures and making reports of these to PDC as required.

(f) the WG shall be quorate when at least four members are present including one of the WG Chair or Vice Chair.

Financial requirements:

As Reported to PDC (23 March 2024) and Full Council (14 May 2024) the ‘best estimate’ for costs associated with the development of a Didcot Parish NP plus consultations with DGT Area of Influence Parishes about a ‘wider’ NP is £20,000.

Of that total, the NP Team at SODC/VOWH has provided an estimate that – assuming a ‘less complex’ rather than ‘more complex’ Didcot Parish NP – about £18,000 can be offset by financial support available via SODC/VOWH.

Additionally, it is considered that DTC might be able to receive considerable ‘value added’ technical support in terms of, for example, guidance over Building Design Codes or ‘precedent setting’ examples of conservation of areas within wider areas that are subjects of development.

It is therefore requested that DTC Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGP) should support PDC by agreeing to allocate £20,000 to PDC for funding the work of the Working Groups.

Proposed budget to be allocated to Planning and Development Committee:

Expenditure	£20,000
Income	
Standard grant receivable	£(10,000)
Discretionary grant receivable	£(8,000)
Cost to the council	£2,000

Proposal

The Planning and Development Committee supports the proposal that Didcot Town Council proceeds with the production of a Neighbourhood Plan as set out in this report.

Cllr Hugh Macdonald