

- Other Chief Officers John Ridgley on behalf of PTES
- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Warwickshire Rural Community Council –
comments included in the report.

FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Stratford on Avon Area Committee - 27th July 2005.

Parish Appraisals and Parish Plans

Report of the County Solicitor and Assistant Chief Executive

Recommendation

That the committee endorses the proposed guidelines for the County Council responding to Parish Plans and Appraisals set out in this report

1.0 The Parish Appraisal / Parish Plan Process

1.1 Community consultation and involvement is increasingly important to the life and development of rural communities. Consultation processes help to find out how a village or town feels about itself, its strengths and weaknesses and how its residents want it to develop in the future. Central to the consultation process in rural areas are three consultation mechanisms that are key elements of the Government's rural policy. These are set out in paragraphs 1.2 – 1.4 below.

1.2 Parish Appraisals

A Parish Appraisal takes a detailed look at life in a Parish. The appraisal is devised and conducted by local residents, creating a snapshot of community life at a point in time. Often the information obtained in the Parish Appraisal process is used as a foundation for a Parish Plan.

1.3 Parish Plans

Parish Plans build on Parish Appraisals, taking the snapshot of community life within a Parish provided by the appraisal, highlighting needs and aspirations, enabling the Parish Council to devise an action plan for the short to medium term.

1.4 Village Design Statements

The third element of this range of rural policy mechanisms is Village Design Statements. These relate to the physical design and layout of a settlement and may be adopted by the local planning authority as supplementary planning guidance. They are not covered in detail in this report as their subject area relates primarily to District and Borough Councils as local planning authorities, although in certain circumstances, they do address traffic management and highway design issues that are responsibilities of the County Council.

2.0 The Situation in Warwickshire

2.1 In Warwickshire, the Rural Community Council, through their Field Officer, Linda Ridgley and her colleagues, promotes and supports the Parish Appraisal / Plan process. The process provides a valuable way for local people and Parish Councils working together to formulate a vision for how their community could develop in the future. The process can help in shaping the future of a community and can act as a catalyst in bringing the community together. The end product of a finalised appraisal or plan has a value, as does the process involved in its production. A number of plans have been prepared in recent years, providing a useful guide to key issues in the communities involved. A schedule of plans completed in each area will be available at the area committee meeting.

2.2 The Countryside Agency are not currently funding any new Parish Appraisals / Plans. There are indications that the Government Office for the West Midlands may find funding for Rural Community Councils to facilitate further Parish Plans, but neither the timing nor extent of this possible funding is clear. Defra has agreed a sum for the current financial year only for Parish Plans in Warwickshire which will provide for up to eight grants to the maximum of £1,250 (to cover 50% of the total plan costs)

2.3 The County Council, does not currently have an agreed approach to participating in the production of plans / appraisals, nor does it have a means of formally responding to plans / appraisals once produced. The purpose of this report is therefore to:

- i) establish a protocol for the engagement of County Councillors and County Council departments in the production of plans / appraisals, and
- ii) to identify an approach how the County Council should respond to plans / appraisals once produced.

3.0 Warwickshire County Council Involvement in the process of producing Parish Appraisals / Parish Plans

3.1 It is important for the County Council to participate as fully as possible in this process because of the importance of County Council services to rural communities and because of the central role played by County Councillors in the leadership of these communities. The “Local Council’s Charter”, refers to the importance of Parish Plans and to the value of the County Council supporting their preparation. Cabinet agreed a revised version of the charter on 30th June.

3.2 In order to ensure a more consistent level of County Council involvement in the Parish Plan / Appraisal process it is proposed that Warwickshire Rural Community Council be requested to notify the appropriate County Council area team in the Chief Executive’s Department about expressions of interest in producing plans / appraisals and to keep the area teams informed as projects progress. The area teams, through their relationship with County Council service managers at a local level, should then be responsible for facilitating appropriate County Council involvement in plan / appraisal preparation, ensuring that relevant County Council staff and departments are involved as appropriate. The area teams should also inform the County

Councillor for the settlement concerned of any impending Parish Plan / Appraisal and where appropriate, support the councillor in participating in the process.

- 3.3** Because of the importance of plans and appraisals and because of the uncertainty over government funding, County Council Area Committees may wish to consider the provision of financial support from the funds at their disposal to Parishes / communities carrying out appraisals and seeking to produce plans. Area offices should inform Area committees of the intention to undertake Parish Plan / Appraisal work in their area and should indicate any funding requirements related to that work. The use of the Area Committee's Well – being Fund or Social Inclusion Fund may be appropriate to help the funding of Parish Plans / Appraisals, depending on the focus of the particular piece of work.
- 3.4** The role of County Council departments and officers in these processes should be advisory and supportive. The plans and appraisals are very much the community's plans, rather than the Council's, however if County Council officers and members participate and co-operate in their preparation, the plans are likely to be better informed, more realistic and relevant to the needs of the community than if produced in isolation.
- 3.5** Parish Plans and Appraisals also provide a vehicle through which issues of rural deprivation and isolation can be addressed. The latest small area census information, along with local information, enables small pockets of rural deprivation to be better identified and targeted than has previously been the case. It is therefore suggested that the County Council give particular priority in encouraging and supporting Parish Appraisals and Plans that explicitly seek to address problems of rural deprivation and isolation.
- 3.6** When appraisals/plans are completed, it is proposed that the appropriate County Council Area Committee be given the opportunity to respond to the appraisal / plan. Key issues and proposals from the appraisal / plan should be reported to the Area Committee who should then be asked to endorse the plan in whole or in part.
- 3.7** Where a Parish Plan/ Appraisal contains issues or proposals that relate directly to County Council services, the appropriate County Council department should be asked to comment on those matters in the report to the Area Committee. The Committee should then take a view on those issues or proposals, where appropriate referring matters to departments for possible action or alternatively, referring matters to Cabinet for further consideration or decision. In considering proposals contained in Parish Plans / Appraisals, the views of County Council departments, Area Committees or Cabinet may have to be without prejudice to any decision on spending commitments.

4.0 Summary

- 4.1** The Parish Appraisal / Planning process is a well-established way of articulating the needs and aspirations of rural communities. The approach set out in this report will add value to the process and will help to establish closer working relationships between the County Council and the rural communities that it serves.

DAVID CARTER
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24 June 2005