

Appendix 1

Proposed Scheme for setting up and administering the Neighbourhood Plan Fund

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Anticipated neighbourhood plan activity in the district up to 31 March 2028	2
3. Resources required to bring a neighbourhood plan through to adoption.....	2
4. When will the fund open and how will it work?	3
5. How will applications made to the fund be determined and processed?	4
6. Monitoring the fund	5

Agenda Item 10 - Appendix 1

1. Introduction

As outlined in the updated 2025-26 Action Plan, associated with the district council's Corporate Plan 2023-27, the Council agreed on 18 September 2025 to create a fund available to parish councils who are in the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan.

The intention is to make this fund available from the adoption of this scheme at Finance and Assets Committee in November 2025 through to 31 March 2028, or when the £50,000 fund is exhausted, whichever is earlier.

The Council resolved to create this fund in recognition of the additional difficulties faced by parish councils since the Government's 2025 Spending Review, which resulted in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) withdrawing the previous funding and support regime offered to neighbourhood planning groups via Locality.

2. Anticipated neighbourhood plan activity in the district up to 31 March 2028

There are 10 adopted neighbourhood plans in the district. With the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan currently at examination, by early 2026, we expect there will be 11 adopted neighbourhood plans in the district. Of the adopted plans, one is anticipated to come forward for review during 2026-27, with another anticipated to come forward for review the following year.

A further 7 neighbourhood areas are designated, which is a clear indicator of neighbourhood planning activity. It is anticipated that six of these will progress during the period up to 31 March 2028.

Further information on neighbourhood plan activity in the district can be found at:

<https://eastcambs.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-guidance/neighbourhood-planning/introduction>

3. Resources required to bring a neighbourhood plan through to adoption

Preparing and bringing forward a successful neighbourhood plan that achieves success at referendum is a significant undertaking that will take about 2 to 3 years¹. It requires:

- considerable volunteer resources

¹ Due to their dependency on volunteer resources and depending on difficulties experienced along the way, many plans take longer than this.

- professional resource
- financial resources.

The cost of preparing a neighbourhood plan can be as low as £10,000, but this is mostly only achieved for a small, non-complex neighbourhood plan with no site allocations, limited use of consultancy support and covering an area with a small population.

In practice, most neighbourhood plans will cost more to prepare. Less complex plans covering areas with higher populations could cost up to £30,000. More complicated plans, such as a plan that allocates sites for development or seeks land-use planning solutions to place-specific challenges, could cost more.

4. When will the fund open and how will it work?

To help mitigate the cost of preparing neighbourhood plans, parish councils will be able to apply to the district council, for up to £5,000 to cover the period from the date at which the scheme is adopted up to **31 March 2028**, for the purpose of advancing an emerging neighbourhood plan. Applications may be made via email to planningpolicy@eastcambs.gov.uk or in writing to Strategic Planning, the Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4EE.

Eligibility

To be eligible, applications must:

- a) be made by a parish council in the district
- b) relate to a parish that is already designated as a neighbourhood area; and
- c) relate to a neighbourhood plan being prepared or reviewed.

Application requirements

To be successful, the parish council making the application must:

- d) be willing to commit their own finances during the year in which the application is being made, to an amount that matches at least the amount being applied for from the district council
- e) be accompanied by a project plan that outlines the programme of intended work involved in bringing forward the neighbourhood plan and demonstrates that the legislative requirements of a neighbourhood plan will be met (e.g. 6-week formal consultation on draft plan at pre-submission stage). To assist with this, officers within the strategic planning team will make a template project plan available and share this, via email, with applicable parish councils
- f) explain how the funding will be spent and, with reference to the project plan, demonstrate how this will help bring forward a neighbourhood plan that meets the legislative framework and within a reasonable time period (e.g. the plan is

anticipated to be at submission stage within at least three years from the time of the application being made).

With regard to item f) above, examples of how the funding may be spent:

- community and stakeholder engagement activities (printing, postage, presentation boards, online survey software, website costs etc.)
- preparing technical evidence (e.g. parish level call for sites, site assessment, open spaces assessment, landscape study, views assessment)
- analysing and reporting on feedback received as part of community and stakeholder engagement activity
- plan preparation and preparation of other documents required for submission (basic conditions statement, consultation statement etc.)
- consultant fees associated with any of the above.

Also with regards to f) above, to ensure monies received as part of this scheme contributes directly to the progression of a community-led neighbourhood plan, funding must not be used for the following:

- financing the salaries of parish council staff
- paying members of the neighbourhood plan group or parish council other than for the purpose of reimbursing expenses incurred as part of undertaking volunteer activity (e.g. purchase of neighbourhood plan related equipment on behalf of the group/parish council).

5. How will applications made to the fund be determined and processed?

Upon receipt of an application from a parish council, planning officers will

- check whether the application is eligible and
- assess the content of the application against the criteria set out in Section 4 above.

Where the application is considered to meet the requirements, officers will prepare a brief report to the Council's Director (Operations) recommending that funding be issued. The transfer of funds will then be administered by officers sitting within the finance directorate in accordance with the Council's processes.

Where an application is considered by officers to require further information, officers within the strategic planning team will liaise with the parish council and, where applicable, provide support so that an eligible and successful application can then be brought forward.

6. Monitoring the fund

Officers within the strategic planning team will monitor how the district council's neighbourhood plan fund is used throughout the year.

A report will be taken to the Finance and Assets Committee in early autumn 2026, to provide an overview of how the fund has been used to date and, in light of this, a recommendation as to how the fund should proceed up to 31 March 2028.