

Neighbourhood Plans.... how to go about them and get one started. A few thoughts for Wem Town Council from our recent training session with Anthea Pellagram.

You have to apply to Shropshire Council for their approval to proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan.

Before doing this, you must identify what it is you want to achieve from a Neighbourhood Plan and use this to inform any decisions and whether this is the best way forward.

The contact for the Neighbourhood Plan at Shropshire Council is Vicky Turner who is one of the place plan officers that coordinates involvement in the Neighbourhood Plan (vicky.turner@shropshire.gov.uk).

The plan usually takes 2-3 years to complete, there are grants in the region of £10,000 to £18,000.

The biggest advantage of making a plan is that the CIL moneys you get from having development in the Town rises from 15% to 25%. This can then be spent on the projects you put in the plan.

To start the Plan, you need to:

1. Open with a 'consultation event' which will involve as many people from the community and make sure everybody has had a chance to participate. It takes about 6 weeks. From this event you can then form a vision of what you want to put in the plan. You need 3-5 policies about 2-3 pages each, which are the priorities you need in the town then you can ask developers to contribute to these projects. Demonstrate you have consulted the community.
2. Then form a Steering Group made up of Councillors and local people, roughly 50/50 split and chaired by a Councillor. The steering group makes the decisions but can also set up working groups and task and finish groups to work on the policies you want to put in the plan. The group starts with getting its 'Terms of Reference' established. It also will need a website for information. To help do this look at the Shropshire Council Website and see what their vision is. For example, the policies could be to improve transport around the Town or cycling and walking in the community, project on green space around the town.

The question is would we as a Town Council now want to move this project forward for the benefit of our town/area? It is a lot of work but has the potential to give us improvements that we might otherwise not get because it helps us focus our efforts locally and then draw down added funding to enable projects plans to be delivered/achieved.

If we do then perhaps one of the next steps is to make contact with SC Officers who deal with Neighbourhood Plans and/or make visits to towns that have drawn one up and learn from them some of the practical difficulties/lessons they have had. After all we need to be realistic and not 'reinvent the wheel' where we don't need to!

Peter Broomhall and Edward Towers – December 2022