

2019 September

Neighbourhood planning report

Markfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group report –

29th August 2019

Current position

The Markfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (SG) is a properly constituted sub-group, established by Markfield Parish Council, with the aim of producing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) for the Parish covering up to 2036 to tie-in with the evolving Hinckley & Bosworth Local Plan.

The SG has sought the public's view on a wide range of issues at 3 drop-in events plus business opinions at a Stakeholder one. It has also having received the views of over 200 Mercenfeld school children on a range of local matters. The SG has now gathered a lot of information about the parish; however, it still needs more to ensure the development of planning policies for the draft NP are fully evidenced.

It's therefore preparing a detailed adult questionnaire, for distribution to every house across the parish and a shorter youth questionnaire, for 11 to 17-year olds. Both questionnaires will also provide residents with background information on what the NP hopes to achieve. Topics covered will include: transport/traffic; facilities and services; heritage; environment; housing; employment and business and open spaces.

The SG is aiming to present drafts of both questionnaires to the October PC meeting for comment, prior to a final edit, printing and distribution later in the month.

Since its establishment the SG has been assisted by specialist officers from the RCC, the funding for which has been provided by the borough council. The council's funding only covers the RCC's support for the drop-in and stakeholder events. Thereafter, the cost of developing and completing the plan, must be found from other sources.

It would be very difficult for the SG to develop and complete the plan without continuing professional help. The RCC, with the support of an associate planner, can provide this. Whilst the SG had been very pleased with the support it had received from the RCC, it wanted to assure itself that they and their associate planner, could provide appropriate support over the next crucial stages. To that end the SG conducted a lengthy interview with them on 4th July 2019 and unanimously concluded that they'd fit the bill.

RCC agreement

Although the SG can make recommendations to the PC, legally the latter is "The Qualifying Body" and all formal agreements, payments etc must be approved by it.

As part of that process, the RCC have prepared a letter detailing their "Terms of Engagement" and a "Neighbourhood Planning Support Service Specification" - I believe this has already been circulated to councillors.

The "Terms of Engagement" covers the RCC will support for the development of the NP. Whereas the "Service Specification" covers the different stages within that process and estimated costs for Phase 2 and 3 support (Phase 1 is complete). Although at this stage it is difficult to say exactly when it's hoped the plan will be completed and approved, the SG is currently looking towards the end of 2020/early 2021.

As can be seen, there is a substantial difference between the estimated costs for the two phases. That reflects, the level of support and time required to undertake the detailed work required by the RCC/associate planner on Phase 3, in the run-up to seeking approval of the final plan.

In addition to the estimated costs detailed in the RCCs submission, there will be further costs to consider. These will include:

- Room hire for public meetings/open events
- Questionnaire printing and packaging costs– the aim is to hand deliver the adult questionnaires and provide A4 envelopes so they can be returned confidentially

- Acquiring and preparing display material for future public meetings/open events
- Refreshments for meetings/events
- A contingency sum to cover any agreed additional work undertaken by either RCC Staff or their Associate consultant.
- A contingency sum to cover any other unforeseen requirements

Sourcing funding and administrative support

The government backed organisation “Locality” can provide various levels of funding for NPs. Currently the maximum support offered to produce a basic NP is £9,000. Additional support is available, should matters like the designation of new housing sites be included in the plan – this isn’t something the SG is currently considering.

You can make more than one application per financial year or spread your applications over several years. The grant application must be made on-line by the PC, using the “Locality” template. Once commenced the application must be completed within 15 days or it lapses, and you must start again. If a “Locality” grant isn’t fully spent in the financial year it’s offered, the unspent balance must be returned. Given there will be only 5/6 months left of the 2019/2020 financial year, by the time the Markfield application is approved, it makes sense to apply for a proportion of the grant now and the balance the following financial year. Essentially tailoring each application as close as possible to the estimated financial year spend.

It should be noted that “Locality” will not fund: general administrative costs; salaried posts (employing the RCC/Associate planner is permitted); retrospective costs; capital items; non-NP related work and general contingencies.

The grant application requires quite a lot of technical detail, which the SG chair will be able to provide, the parish’s officer with. It would be beneficial for the chair and the officer to work together on the application.

Assuming the grant application has been correctly completed, “Locality” then involved their agents “Groundwork”, who contact the PC to complete the

process. Only once that's satisfactorily completed is the grant offer confirmed. Groundwork will require regular progress reports from the PC along with all necessary invoices, approvals etc. for payments made. The SG's treasurer will be able to assist the PC with all matters financial.

To meet with the NP's timetable the 2019/2020 grant application should ideally start a.s.a.p. after the September PC meeting. The 2020/2021 grant application would then be made in April 2020.

Whilst it is expected the "Locality" grant will cover the majority of the anticipated NP costs between now and the end of the 2020/2021 financial year, there will be a need to establish a contingency pot to cover cost over-runs and expenditure "Locality" won't cover. To this end the SG requests the PC allocated funding as detailed below in the estimated costs.

In addition to assistance with the "Locality" grant application, it would be of great help to the SG if the PC could draw on administrative support in areas like:

- Routine printing for SG meeting
- Printing related to public displays
- Possible assistance with inputting data from the questionnaires

Estimated costs

2019/2020 Grant application

RCC estimated costs (ex-vat) - £1,746.25

Questionnaire printing (exc vat) - £765

Questionnaire envelopes - £220

Room hire for display/questionnaire help session £60

Display material - £100

Event refreshment- £20

Total value of 2019/2020 grant application - £2,911.25

Potential additional costs not forming part of the grant application, to be covered by the PC

Contingency allowance – 1 extra day for RCC and 0.5 for associate planner
£649

Other costs £300

Total funding sought from PC - £949

2020/2021 Grant application

RCC estimated costs (exc vat) - £8,096

Limited printing run for final report - £200

Room hire - £60

Poster/display printing - £100

Event refreshments - £20

Total of above costs - £8,476

Total value of 2020/2021 grant application (£9,000 - £2,911.25) £6,088.75

Potential additional costs not forming part of the grant application, to be covered by the PC

Contingency figure – 1-day RCC and 2 days associate planner - £1,399

Shortfall in “Locality” grant aid - £2,387.75

Total funding sought from PC - £3,786.75

Recommendations

1. The PC notes the progress made to date with the NP and continues to support the work of the SG.
2. The PC supports the SG with the “Locality” grant application and sets in place appropriate procedures to monitor NP expenditure and provide the required progress reports
3. The PC provides administrative support for the NP process as detailed above
4. The PC makes financial provision for at least the potential additional costs as detailed above.

Tony Lockley (Chair NPSG)