

## WITCHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The 2011 Localism Act introduced Neighbourhood Planning; an important and powerful tool giving communities statutory powers to shape how their communities develop and grow. Your chance to have a say over where new homes, businesses, facilities are built and what new buildings should look like. Maybe you want to protect and enhance specific areas of the village?

The project for the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan grew from interest expressed by people in the village during early 2022. The Parish Council facilitated the inaugural meeting of the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group which took place on 7 June 2022, followed by a meeting of interested people on 28 June. The Group meets monthly and is responsible for making monthly reports to the Parish Council on progress, together with any requests to meet expenditure commitments in accordance with the Budget and Terms of Reference of the Group.

The first consultation event was held in the Autumn at the Village Hall. There was strong support and several residents stepped up to help. There is support for maintaining the rural character and history of the village and protecting green spaces such as the droves (Byways) and surrounding lands.

Further details about how a Neighbourhood Plan is made is available at

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/neighbourhood-planning>

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/about/neighbourhood-planning>

### **Neighbourhood Plan Designated Area**

On the 9 January 2023, East Cambs District Council (ECDC) confirmed that an application submitted by the Parish Council on behalf of the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group had been successful and the Neighbourhood Area for the Plan had been Designated.

The Neighbourhood Plan will be a document that sets out planning policies for the area covered by the 'Designated Area'. This becomes part of the District Council's Local Plan specifically covering Witcham and will be used to decide whether to approve planning applications. It gives the community a powerful tool to ensure the right types of development take place in the right place in the village.

### **Support**

Locality, an organisation supporting local community organisations in Neighbourhood Planning, says

"The whole point of a neighbourhood plan is that it is community led.

Your neighbourhood planning group will need to talk to lots of people locally – residents, businesses, community groups, schools – to find out what's important to them about where they live, what they'd like to improve and what their vision is for the local area.

You'll also need to gather evidence to back up the ideas that the community want to see.

Using feedback and evidence, your next job is to write the planning policies that will make your community's vision a reality."

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/create-neighbourhood-plan-step-by-step-roadmap-guide>

## **Finance**

Current estimated costs £13,315 plus materials. Grants are available, up to £10,000 to cover some of the costs incurred in getting a Neighbourhood Plan made. In the last financial year £3475 was secured from Locality to meet the costs of engaging a Consultant, Places4People, to guide the Working Group in preparing the Survey and consultation processes. It is hoped the Government Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, (DLUHC) will work with Locality and provide grant funding for Neighbourhood Plans across the country for 2023/24 so that Witcham can complete its Neighbourhood Plan. Additional Funding, up to £8000, is also available to provide technical support for Design Code work for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan.

## **Design Code**

'Design codes are a set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should be proportionate and build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

Design codes can be applied to all development types including residential, commercial, mixed use, open space, landscape or public realm requirements. They can be adopted as a supplementary planning document, or appended to a Neighbourhood Plan, Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development order'.

You can find more information on design codes  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design#para008>

The Design Code support team visited the village in April and will produce a report in 2-3 months' time.

## **Next Stages**

Following the consultation meetings with parishioners, members of the Working Group have been working with the Consultants to develop the survey and this will be distributed to parishioners and available on-line. As part of the procedure for gathering evidence, the Working Group is organising the collection of photos, some of which will be included in the proposed Made Neighbourhood Plan. Minutes of meetings and details about the survey and engagement with parishioners for photos are regularly posted up on the noticeboard at the bus shelter by the Working Group.

After the results of the survey are known and the report prepared, the Consultant will assist with policy writing to create the Draft Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan regulations require the proposed Plan to be the subject of a 6 week consultation before it is submitted to ECDC for independent examination. All comments will be considered and where necessary the proposed Neighbourhood Plan be amended. ECDC will check that the proper legal process has been followed and that it meets legal requirements for consultation and publicity. They will also arrange for the Independent Examination and Referendum to take place. ECDC will formally bring the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan into force if more than 50% of those voting at the Referendum vote YES.

The Witcham Neighbourhood Plan Working Group meets on the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm at the Village Hall. Residents and village business representatives are welcome to attend. and to give assistance to the project. Representatives from the Group plan to have a pop-up stall at the Peashoot on 8 July for people to talk to them about the Plan and the processes.

Updates will appear on this website.