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WINSFORD TOWN COUNCIL – NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE

1. Background

- 1.1 The Localism Bill was given Royal Assent on 15 November 2011 and became the Localism Act. Under the Act, new rights will allow local communities to shape new development by coming together to prepare neighbourhood plans.
- 1.2 A Neighbourhood Plan will allow local people to say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go and what they should look like; what open space should be protected; the design and quality of new development and much more – including here in Winsford, a vibrant and successful town centre.
- 1.3 On 20th June 2011, Winsford Town Council, supported by Cheshire West and Chester Council and the Weaver Valley Regeneration Board decided to make an application to the Department for Communities and Local Government to become a ‘Neighbourhood Planning Front Runner’.
- 1.4 At the same meeting the Town Council set up a Working Group consisting of Councillors Brian Clarke; Ailsa Gaskill-Jones and Sue Langley together with Town Clerk Alan Warburton to form a Steering Group with other partners in overseeing preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Winsford in the event that the application for front – runner status was approved.
- 1.5 In August 2011 the Town Council’s application to become a Neighbourhood Planning front-runner was approved and Winsford became only the second local council area in Cheshire (Tattenhall was the first) to achieve this status. £20,000 funding was made available to support the development of a Neighbourhood Plan for Winsford.
- 1.6 This meant that the Steering Group could press ahead with its brief, which is to *‘manage the overall direction and progress of the project, ensuring that it is executed in accordance with the approved brief and that key deliverables are produced to the required quality and within the agreed timescale’*.

2.0 The Steering Group

- 2.1 The Steering Group is chaired by Councillor Brian Clarke. The full Group membership comprises:-

Winsford Town Council:

Councillor Brian Clarke,
Councillor Ailsa Gaskill-Jones,
Councillor Sue Langley
Alan Warburton, Town Clerk

Weaver Valley Regeneration Board

Catherine Turner, HCA
Geoff Hope-Terry

CW&CC Lead Officers

Jeremy Owens
Debbie Fifer
Jo Comerie
Other officers as appropriate

- 2.2 In September proposals were invited from suitably qualified and experienced consultants to undertake the production of a Neighbourhood Plan for Winsford. CWAC had agreed to meet the additional cost of the consultants on top of the £20,000 front-runner funding.
- 2.3 The plan will cover the next 15 years. It will also identify longer-term opportunities for the sustainable growth of the town. Once developed, the Plan will strongly influence future planning decisions in Winsford.
- 2.4 Over 20 proposals were received and the Steering Group then met to conduct a procurement exercise and evaluation of the tenders, which were first reduced to a long list of six, and finally to a short list of three companies, who were invited for interview.
- 2.5 On 17th November, the Steering Group interviewed three consultancy firms resulting in the appointment of the London based firm of Tibbalds. The Steering Group was very impressed with the firm's proposed approach overall and in particular with their innovative ideas for community engagement.

3.0 THE CONSULTANTS – WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

- 3.1 Members of the Steering Group held a scene setting meeting with Tibbalds on 12th December. The timeframe is tight, with the process up to preparation of a Final Draft Neighbourhood Plan expected to take no more than 12 months.
- 3.2 Tibbalds will be starting work immediately and are already putting together a profile of the town – how Winsford functions and the role it plays in the wider area. During the next 12 months, the key stages will be:-
- Preparation of the Town Profile (called the Report of Survey)
 - Production of a physical appraisal
 - production of a draft vision and objectives for the town. During this process there will be comprehensive consultation with the local community through a wide range of events and techniques
 - Production of a draft Neighbourhood Plan for 'testing' on the local community
 - Production of a Final Draft Neighbourhood Plan for independent examination
- 3.3 Following the examination and any subsequent amendments to the Final Draft Plan, a local referendum will be held for the people of Winsford to decide whether the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan should be adopted by CWAC as a development plan document.

4.0 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The fundamental difference between a Neighbourhood Plan and previous planning documents is that this will be a plan for the Town developed by the people of the town. Tibbalds are working on a comprehensive consultation plan to ensure that everyone who lives in Winsford – especially those groups which are notoriously hard to reach – have the opportunity to express their views at every stage of the process.

The Consultants have asked for details of all local community groups and major community activities such as festivals, public meetings and other events with a view to a constant drip feed of the Neighbourhood Plan message.

- 4.3 Although the Neighbourhood Planning process will not have significant financial impact on the Town Council's budget in 2012/13, there may be an impact during the following financial year as a result of the referendum process. However, during the next 12 months it is imperative that our communications and community engagement efforts are stepped up to ensure that our promise that the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan is a plan for the people drawn up by the people is met.

5.0 KEEPING THE TOWN COUNCIL INFORMED

- 5.1 Significantly, as Winsford Town Council is leading the process, there will be an update report to every meeting of the Town Council, starting with the January 2012 meeting. The updates may be verbal or written, but representatives from Tibbalds will certainly be attending from time to time.

Alan Warburton
Town Clerk/Finance Officer
December 2011