

To consider

Item 5c: Neighbourhood (Development Plan)

Background

In July 2023 the decision was taken not to produce a formal Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) for Coddenham, but instead to develop a parish plan, a format then promoted by MSDC when an NDP was deemed inappropriate. The reasoning was written up at the time and is attached.

Housing in mid-Suffolk

Revised annual housebuilding targets – those for MSDC are increased from 535 to 734, with a 5% buffer 15,500 new homes over a 20 years period – and an updated National Planning Policy Framework, means greater pressure for housebuilding sites. MSDC (or whatever replaces it) has set out a timetable to review its joint local plan for adoption from April 2029.

As a start point MSDC has allocated the overall 20 years house build target to parishes based on their existing number of households. Coddenham's allocation is 90. Currently, across the whole parish there are 295 homes of which 214 are in the village. Over the coming months, this number will be refined. It is likely to fall based Coddenham being hitherto treated as a secondary village for housing but may then rise again as it becomes clear that some primary settlements cannot take on their allocated numbers and because the main arterial roads in mid-Suffolk the A14/A140 bisect parts of the parish.

Neighbourhood Development Planning

A NDP is the only statutory instrument that a planning authority must consider representing the views of local people to development.

Of 123 parishes in mid-Suffolk, twenty-nine have produced NDPs. None of the North Bosmere or the Claydon and Barham ward parishes has produced an NDP to date.

Whilst grant funding of £10k is available (£18k for NDPs for joint NDP for more than one parish), they require considerable effort within a community and are parish council led. The NDP phases are summarised below.

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| 1 | Neighbourhood Area Definition | For a single parish, this is a formality of agreeing the parish boundary with the district council. |
| 2 | Evidence Gathering | Land use, current housing, demographics, parish survey including housing needs and what young people wish to see We have much of this already. |
| 3 | Draft Plan Preparation | Plans are usually c.60 pages long, plus appendices. Again, we have a head start with our current plan; maybe 50%. |
| 4 | Draft Plan Consultation | With residents, the district council, other stakeholders (businesses, adjoining parishes etc). The need to build consensus. |
| 5 | Submission to District Council (Unitary Authority) | Formal submission, requiring local sign-off within the parish. |
| 6 | Further Consultation | Feedback from the district council and others and iteration of the plan. |
| 7 | Formal Independent Examination | A crucial step to ensure that the plan is sensible, fair to all stakeholders and meets the standards set. |
| 8 | Parish Referendum | The final plan is then put to a residents' vote. This is a formal referendum organised by the district council. |
| 9 | Plan Completion and Adoption | |

The whole process is overseen by a parish steering committee, led by the parish council and end-to-end is a 24 months exercise on average. Steering groups are usually made up of 6-10 members of the community, including two or three councillors. Often sub-groups are appointed for specific areas e.g. green spaces, development and community engagement.

Recommendation

Having spoken to our district councillors and MSDC's NDP expert, the recommendation is that we don't pursue an NDP at this time. We don't have councillor bandwidth and the reasons for not developing an NDP in 2023 still hold good.

However, we should continue to monitor MSDC's joint local plan review progress and keep our evidence base up to date. In future if we decide an NDP is appropriate, we believe that we understand the process and how to move forward, so long as there are residents willing and able to step forward to assist in a common and constructive manner.

In Coddenham we are fortunate that with the affiliation known as the Coddenham Community Response Group (CCRG), made up of all parish organisations and the group behind the current parish plan, we have access to a cohort of volunteers across the parish, some of whom may wish to become steering committee members. We are in a much better position than in many parishes.

Cllr Mills

4th May 2025

Neighbourhood (Development) Plans

1. Neighbourhood Plans is short form in the Act for Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP). They are a product of the Localism Act 2011. The relevant section of the Act is unchanged since enactment, as far as I can see.
2. Page 12 of the Plain English Guide to the Act issued by Communities and Local Government sets out the background to and summarises Neighbourhood Planning. It states that “Neighbourhood Planning will allow communities, both residents, employees and business, to come together through local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like”. Provided due process is followed and the community votes in favour of the plan in a referendum, then the local authority will bring it into force. Funding and advice will be provided.
3. As MSDC has set out, there are alternatives to an NDP, including Parish or Community Plans, where an NDP is regarded as inappropriate. Choosing an alternative does not preclude it being turned into an NDP later if circumstances change.
4. Research was undertaken of NDPs when deciding on the format of the Coddendam Plan, with that for Walsham-Le-Willows being the main one of reference, as it was the most recent in Suffolk at the time. There are currently 16 NDPs on the MSDC website, all of which are, unsurprisingly driven by housing development, with many for communities alongside the A14, where the bulk of MSDC’s housebuilding is taking place.
5. With no pressure from MSDC or from the community at large, through Survey responses (response rate was almost double that at Walsham at just over 50%), for ‘development’ in Coddendam Parish, an NDP offered no benefits over a Community Plan. Coddendam is not designated a Neighbourhood Planning Area.
6. Progressing areas of importance to residents could be achieved, including access to grants, without the need of a NDP. Renewable Energy, for example is open to grant funding using a vehicle such as a Community Benefit Society and the support of SCC/MSDC, a path we are now going down, having been selected as one of the Suffolk projects. Help with ‘traffic’, on the other hand is unlikely to benefit from any NDP financial assistance unless it is linked to ‘development’. It’s quite possible we will receive some funding for traffic measures notwithstanding the lack of an NDP, given the long-standing issues in Coddendam, provided the community can settle of a practical and cost-effective scheme. This is ‘work-in-progress.’ (Questionnaire drafted. Awaiting Rob’s return and the re-establishment of the Roads Working Group. Lots of interaction with SCC and the Police).
7. As the Localism Act had been in place since 2011, in the absence of being able to have proper dialogue, given the ill feeling between many Coddendam residents and some former councillors, by dint of the lack of evidence that previous Councils hadn’t sought to produce a NDP, we assumed that they had drawn the same conclusions as we had.
8. The discord between community and the Parish Council had a distant secondary bearing on the decision of NDP vs Community Plan. NDPs are Town/Parish Council led, albeit that they draw in the wider community. Conditions weren’t right for the Council to lead on anything. At that stage, better we were involved (and rebuilt relationships) and indeed we ended up doing much of the heavy lifting, but it was clear to the community it was being done with them, not to them.
9. Much of the community Plan and the work to develop it can be used to convert it to an NDP, if that is something that the Council and the community desire.
10. Whilst drafting the Plan, Babergh and MSDC made us aware of a new plan type, the People and Places Plan that it was trialling alongside six other councils for the Department for Levelling-up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). We were at final draft stage by then. Rather than await the outcome of a national pilot and the drafting of formal guidelines/amendment to the Localism Act, we proceeded with what we had. Again, a conversion would likely be straightforward. However, it maybe sometime before this becomes an option.