

LAVENHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Local planning authority area:
Babergh District Council, Suffolk

**Parishes/neighbourhoods in the plan
area: Lavenham**

Timeframe

Inception: October 2012

Neighbourhood area designation: September 2013

Pre-submission consultation: July to September 2015

Submission: December 2015

What were the motivations behind developing the neighbourhood plan?

The overriding motivation was the need for a sustainable community. Early on in the process it became clear this would mean addressing:

- Local housing needs.
- Concerns that the unique character of the historic village of Lavenham would be adversely affected through inappropriate development both in the village and in the surrounding countryside.
- The uncertainty over what development and how much would be granted planning permission under the strategic context established by the National Planning Policy Framework and the district's core strategy, which was adopted in February 2014.
- Concerns that new development was not being successfully integrated or being accompanied by sufficient social infrastructure.

How the local planning authority assisted us:

There was ongoing outreach support via the Babergh District Council's community planning team.





Who else helped, and how?

- A critical friend role was provided by Planning Aid England (PAE) via the Government's Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme 2013 – 2015.
- Historic England officer gave input on the design policies.
- Bambergh officers from the Economic Development and Strategic Housing teams. At later stages there was help from the development management and planning policy teams.
- County council officers.

What local issues did the plan process identify?

- A need for affordable homes (as identified through community consultation and housing needs surveys).
- A need for smaller homes suitable for younger families, and older people wishing to downsize.
- The primary school is on a constrained site in the historic core of the village but was reaching capacity.
- There was strong resistance from the community to medium and large estate-type development.
- A high priority was attached by the community to the value of the historic core and the surrounding landscape. This included the early identification by the community of locally valued views into and out of the village of Lavenham.
- Completed residential development schemes were not achieving the level of affordable housing expected by the community.

What challenges were faced in its production?

One key challenge was getting to grips with the strategic policy context:

- How much growth was required to come forward within the Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan area? The core strategy planned for 1050 additional homes to come forward across all ten 'core villages' and their 'hinterland villages' but it was difficult to disaggregate from this a number for the neighbourhood plan area.
- Inherent flexibility of the Babergh core strategy. Policy CS11 allows for residential development proposals to come forward beyond the existing built-up area boundaries, subject to a list of generic criteria.
- Lack of locally specific evidence that could assist with the interpretation of strategic policy context within which the neighbourhood plan sits, such as landscape character assessment and an up-to-date conservation area character appraisal.

Another key challenge was getting to grips with the process:

- There was an instinct to drive the neighbourhood plan drafting process forward without first grasping the implications of the strategic policy context within which the neighbourhood plan sits, as well as the implications of the basic conditions (required of all neighbourhood plans).
- Managing community expectations.
- The local planning authority's desire for the plan to allocate sites rather than take a criteria-based approach versus the neighbourhood planning steering group's reluctance to allocate sites.
- The need for factual evidence, for example development viability within the neighbourhood plan area, to support the priorities arising from community consultation and the resource requirements related to this.

How were challenges overcome and how were these solutions identified?

We overcame the challenge of getting to grips with the strategic policy by:

- Continual dialogue with the Babergh community planning team, who were able to advise on strategic planning context.
- An ongoing critical friend role was provided by Planning Aid England and Babergh's community planning team, including training on the basic conditions and providing input on the draft neighbourhood plan as it emerged.
- Various iterations of the neighbourhood plan were shared with the district and county council at key stages and with the community as part of ongoing community engagement events and exercises.

We overcame the challenge of getting to grips with the process by:

- Commissioning a Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiners Referral Service healthcheck before the production of the pre-submission draft. This provided an independent and professional view by a neighbourhood plan examiner as to how the plan stacked up against the basic conditions and gave the neighbourhood plan steering group the confidence to drive the process forward.
- A process of proactive engagement between the parish council and the county council over education infrastructure constraints.

A key breakthrough came at an advanced stage of plan preparation but before the pre-submission consultation when a development management officer met with the neighbourhood plan steering group and explained how he would assess a planning application that came forward outside the existing settlement boundary. It became clear at this point that the neighbourhood plan needed to be informed by its own landscape character assessment.



How has the community benefited from developing a neighbourhood plan?

Together with the landscape character assessment, the neighbourhood plan now provides the much needed local specific context required, adding value to the more generic policies existing at the district and national level.

In addition:

- The parish council has established its own community land trust so that it may play an active role in the delivery of much needed affordable housing in the parish.
- The education authority and Lavenham Parish Council are now working together to re-house the primary school. A site for a pre-school has been identified, with planning consent granted, and a business plan is in production.
- A raft of non planning issues or projects have been identified for the parish council to pursue, such as traffic management.



Photo credits:

Page 1: The Crooked House in Lavenham: Mike Hodges

Page 2: Lavenham and Church Tower Open Day: Karen Roe

Page 3: View out of the historic core into open countryside identified for protection in neighbourhood plan: Bryan Panton

Page 4: Front cover of the submission Lavenham Neighbourhood Plan: Lavenham Parish Council, and front cover (showing photo by Karen Roe) of the Landscape Character Assessment 2015 prepared by Land and Sculpture Design Partnership

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