

**Report to:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2013

**Lead Members:** Cabinet Lead for Economic Development and  
Cabinet Lead for Tourism, Leisure & Youth (including Rural  
Development)

**Report Author:** Corporate Director: Economic & Community Ambition

**Title:** Moving from Town to Area Plans

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**1. What is the report about?**

During 2011/12, Denbighshire County Council developed and agreed Town Plans for the County's seven principal towns, excluding Rhyl. A similar exercise was carried out in Rhyl to develop the Rhyl Going Forward Delivery Plan. The Town Plans have allowed community needs and priorities to be identified for each major settlement. They have not yet, however, addressed the needs and priorities of smaller and more rural communities. In January 2013, Cabinet agreed to expand Town Plans into broader Area Plans. This report sets out proposals for how that will happen.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To seek views from Communities Scrutiny on the process for expanding Town Plans into broader Area Plans incorporating the smaller and more rural communities across Denbighshire.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

Communities Scrutiny Committee is invited to review and comment on the proposed process for expanding Town Plans into broader Town based Area Plans as set out in this report, including specifically:

- The communities associated with each Plan set out in Appendix 1
- The consultation arrangements set out in Appendix 2

**4. Report details.**

Background

- 4.1 During 2011/12, the Council conducted a major exercise to compile Town Plans for the County's seven principal towns, excluding Rhyl, in order to identify community needs and priorities. A similar exercise was carried out in Rhyl to develop the Rhyl Going Forward Delivery Plan. The Town Plans for Corwen, Denbigh, Llangollen, Prestatyn, Rhuddlan, Ruthin and St Asaph were approved by Cabinet between December 2011 and March 2012.

- 4.2 At its meeting in January 2013, Cabinet approved an initial allocation of funding for projects identified as Year 1 priorities in the Town Plans. At the same time Cabinet agreed to consolidate and expand the Town Plans into broader Area Plans.
- 4.3 Since 15<sup>th</sup> January 2013, the Town Plans Co-ordination Group has considered the appropriate process for expanding the existing Town Plans into broader Area Plans. In doing so it has addressed 3 main questions:
- a) What is the appropriate 'area' for an Area Plan?
  - b) How should the Area Plans be developed?
  - c) What will they look like?

#### Areas to be covered

- 4.4 In considering what area the Plan should cover, the Group consider two main options – Member Area Group areas, or areas based on the Towns and the communities that have a traditional or natural affinity to them. Given that Town, and now Area Plans, are intended to enact the Council's commitment to community based planning and its ambition to be Closer to the Community, Group members concluded that second option – Towns and their Associated Communities – was the preferred option. Whilst slightly more complex to manage from a Council perspective, the Group felt that such Plans were more likely to be easily understood by residents. This approach is also in line with best practice in community led planning and the development of market towns.
- 4.5 Appendix 1 sets out the communities to be covered by each Plan. These have been discussed and agreed by Member Area Groups and are believed to represent the 'best fit' natural links between communities and towns.
- 4.6 The Town Plan Co-ordination Group also considered the question of how many Plans there should be. The Group concluded that in total there should be 9 Plans, comprising the existing 7 Town Plans, the Rhyl Going Forward Programme for Rhyl and a new Plan to be developed for Bodelwyddan and its associated communities once decisions regarding the Local Development Plan have been confirmed.

#### Developing the Plans

- 4.7 The Town Plan Co-ordination Group recognises that good local consultation must be at the foundation of the new Area Plans if they are to be truly community based plans, reflective of local needs and priorities.
- 4.8 The Town Plan Champions, supported by Town Plan Support Officers, will draw up detailed consultation plans for the smaller and more rural communities to be incorporated into their local Town and Area Plan. In order to ensure consistency of approach, the Town Plan Co-ordination Group has agreed a broad framework for consultation. This is set out in Appendix 2. In keeping with the Town & Community Councils Charter, proposals have been designed to ensure that Town/City and Community Councils lead consultation and engagement at local level.
- 4.9 A small number of Councillors will have communities within their wards relating to a Town outside their Member Area Group. Since MAGs will have

an important role in the development of the new Area Plans, the Town Plan Co-ordination Group has considered how best to handle this and recommends the following:

- Local Members will be consulted by the Town Plan Champion on how best to consult with their individual communities
- To inform the local consultation, local Members will be invited at the start of the process to identify any key issues or priorities they are aware of within their communities
- Local Members will be invited to attend relevant MAG meetings when the Area Plan is being considered for approval. If they are unable to attend, the Lead Member for Tourism, Leisure and Youth, acting in his role as Rural Champion, will ensure the interests of all rural communities, including those not normally covered by a MAG area, are adequately incorporated into the emerging Area Plans.

4.10 Area Plans will be developed by the Plan Champions based on the local consultations carried out and will be reviewed by MAGs. Once agreed by the MAG, the Area Plan will be referred to Cabinet for approval. Funding for early priorities can also be allocated at that stage.

#### Area Plans

4.11 The new Area Plans will have 3 broad sections – one identifying the vision and priorities for each Town, a second identifying how smaller and more rural communities relate to the Town, and a third setting out any specific needs or priorities for the smaller and more rural communities. The consultation proposals discussed above and set out in Appendix 2 will focus on the second and third sections of the Plans.

4.12 It is not intended to revisit the Town Plan section or priorities at this stage, although future phases of consolidation and strengthening of the Plans will allow issues and priorities to be reviewed as circumstances change. A potential route map for future stages of development is suggested in Appendix 3.

### **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1 The Corporate Plan identifies vibrant and economically active towns and communities as essential components of a strong local economy. The consolidation and expansion of Town Plans into broader Area Plans extends this work into smaller and more rural communities.

### **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1 In adopting the Town Plans approach, from 2012/13 the Council identified a £175k annual budget to support implementation of the emerging priorities. Previously the Council also allocated £100k revenue and £480k capital budgets to provide funding for local and community projects. In January, Cabinet agreed that these should combine into a single source of funding for Town and Area Plan priorities. For 2012/13 and 2013/14 **combined** this provided a funding pot of £1.275M, taking into account underspend carried forward from 2011/12.

6.2 An initial allocation of around £600k was made to Town Plan Year 1 priorities in January. The remaining £600k was retained for allocation to early priorities emerging from the wider Area Plans and any projects emerging from the review of priorities for Rhyl.

## **7. What consultations have been carried out and has an Equality Impact Assessment Screening been undertaken?**

The Town Plan Co-ordination Group has developed the proposals outlined in this report. Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council (DVSC) has also been consulted on engagement of the voluntary/Third Sector in development of the Area Plans.

Communities Scrutiny will review the proposals at a special meeting on 2 April 2013. Comments from Scrutiny Committee will be made available to Cabinet at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2013 when the proposals are presented for approval.

Consultation arrangements for developing the Area Plans are as set out in the report.

## **8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The development of town plans is important to provide a process to allow investment in key community and town projects.

## **9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The risks associated with implementation of the wider Area Plans are:

- Failure to address the needs and priorities of smaller and more rural communities
- Uncoordinated spend on projects with little or unclear strategic or local benefit
- Failure to fund identified priorities

These risks are addressed through the process outlined in this report, and specifically the consultation proposals set out in Appendix 2.

The risk of not delivering the actions identified for completion in the early years of the Town Plans has been reduced by creating the roles of Town and Area Plan Champions to drive the delivery of the priorities identified within the relevant Town and Area Plans and by allocating budgets to enable priority actions to be funded which otherwise could not be delivered through existing service budgets.

## **10. Power to make the Decision**

Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 gives the Council the power to do anything which it considers is likely to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

Articles 6.3.1, 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 of the Council's Constitution set out scrutiny's role in policy development and matters affecting the area and its inhabitants.

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