

**Report To:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> April 2013

**Lead Members:** Councillor Hugh Evans, Cabinet Lead for Economic Development, Councillor Huw Jones, Cabinet Lead for Tourism, Leisure & Youth (including Rural Development)

**Report Author:** Rebecca Maxwell, 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 describes how that will happen.

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

To seek approval for the process for expanding Town Plans into broader Area Plans incorporating smaller and more rural communities across Denbighshire.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That Cabinet approves the process for expanding Town Plans into broader Town based Area Plans as set out in this report, including specifically:

- The communities covered by each Plan, set out in Appendix 1
- The consultation arrangements, set out in Appendix 2
- The expectation that Area Plans are completed by September 2013

**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 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 the Area Plans look like?

#### Areas to be covered

- 4.4 In considering what area the Plan should cover, the Group considered two options – Plans covering Member Area Group areas, or areas incorporating the Towns and the communities that have a traditional or natural affinity to them. Given that 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 the second option – Towns and their Associated Communities – was preferred. Whilst slightly more complex to manage from a Council perspective, the Group felt that such Plans are more easily understood by residents. This approach is also in line with best practice in community led planning and economic 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 – the existing 7 Town Plans, the Rhyl Going Forward Programme for Rhyl and a new Plan for Bodelwyddan, to be developed if the proposed Local Development Plan is approved.

#### 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 and reflective of local needs and priorities. In order to ensure consistency of approach, the 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 Community Councils lead consultation and engagement at local level.
- 4.8 The Group recommends that Town Plan Champions, supported by their Support Officers, should draw up detailed consultation plans for the smaller and more rural communities to be incorporated into their Area Plan in line with this framework. MAGs will agree the local consultation arrangements.

- 4.9 A small number of Councillors will have communities within their wards incorporated in an Area Plan 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 are consulted by the Town Plan Champion on how best to consult with their individual communities
  - To inform the local consultation, local Members are invited at the start of the process to identify any key issues or priorities they are aware of within their communities
  - Local Members are 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 are likely to come forward at different paces depending on the complexity of local consultation. A target date of September 2013 for all Area Plans to be agreed is recommended however.

#### Structure of 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 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?**

A budget to fund priorities arising from the Town/Area Plans has been agreed. An initial allocation of around £600k was made to Town Plan Year 1 priorities in January.

The remaining budget was retained for allocation to early priorities emerging from the wider Area Plans and any projects emerging from the review of priorities for Rhyl. Recommendations for further allocation to emerging priorities will be made as Plans come forward to Cabinet for approval.

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

The Town Plan Co-ordination Group has discussed 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 the Community Scrutiny Committee will be made available to Cabinet at its meeting.

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.