

EXTRACT OF MINUTES

209/25-26. TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2025.

Recommended: The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2025 were confirmed and signed.

210/25-26. NEIGHBOURHOOD AND PARISH PLANS (p).

On 3 September 2026 Councillor Graham Taylor emailed the Town Council to request that they re-look at the possibility of producing either a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Parish Plan (this had previously been considered in June 2017 (minute 89/16-17)).

Members considered the report detailing the potential benefits and the implications, benefits and financial / resource impacts of both a Neighbourhood Plan and a Parish Plan.

After discussion Members agreed that a Parish Plan was the most appropriate option for the Town Council although it was felt that care needed to be taken with regards to both Councillors and the public's expectations regarding the outcome and application of a Parish Plan.

Members also agreed that the first steps to take would be for a Working Group to be formed to meet 3 or 4 times over the next financial year (April to December 2026) to establish the feasibility/scope of the Parish Plan. This would then enable the resources required to undertake a Parish Plan to be considered and set by full Council during the 2027 - 2028 budget setting process (January to April 2027).

With this in mind it was proposed, duly seconded and unanimously agreed:

Recommended: That a Working Group to establish the feasibility/scope of a Parish Plan be formed at the scheduled meeting of this Committee on 22 April 2026.

211/25-26 The following planning applications had been received from Dartford Borough Council / Ebbsfleet Development Corporation / Kent County Council/ Gravesham Borough Council for Members observations (full details of these applications can be viewed via the Town Council, DBC, EDC GBC and the KCC websites).

DA/25/0102/FUL	Erection of a single storey rear extension. 16 Glasson Road, Swanscombe.
OBSERVATIONS:	No observations, please ensure all neighbouring properties are consulted prior to the decision of the application. The Town Council strongly urge that the applicant must take into account, and include mitigating provisions regarding the environmental impact on, and the needs of, the community for their development and, where possible, include the provision of EVCP's.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN v PARISH PLAN
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Background

In June 2017 the Regeneration & Quality Sub-Committee (minute 89/16-17 attached) were asked to consider whether the Town Council should undertake the works to produce a Neighbourhood Plan.

At the time the Sub-Committee felt that a lot of the areas within the Town were already primed for development with limited opportunity to influence change.

A Working Group was formed to further investigate and had brief meetings in September and October of 2017. Whilst these meetings did discuss the project further it was highlighted that engaging with the Principal Authority (Dartford) on the creation of their Local Plan might be a better way of improving development within the area of Swanscombe and Greenhithe.

Following this work undertaken in late 2017 the Town was subject to a Governance Review in 2018 when a public consultation was held on the future of the Town and its geography at Parish level. As a result of the referendum the areas under the jurisdiction of Ebbsfleet Development Corporation to the South and East of the Town were removed and the Council reduced from 20 to 13 Councillors.

Current Request

On the 3 September 2025 Councillor Graham Taylor emailed the Town Council to request that an item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the Planning Committee for the 24 September 2025 to:

'Given the change of Land ownership on Swanscombe Peninsula along with other development and infrastructure issues in the area I would like to table a discussion on revisiting the idea of consulting on a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the next PTE meeting on 24th September. I know the idea was rejected some years ago, but I feel it has merit to strengthen community involvement in strategic planning especially with local Government reorganisation looming'

Following discussion with Councillor Taylor and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Committee it was agreed that:

'An item will be placed for consideration at the next PTE meeting on the 24 September to discuss the options for Planning Strategy at Parish Level.

This will include the pros and cons etc of both Neighbourhood Plans and Parish Plans'.

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Neighbourhood Plans

Attached **(A)** for members information The Good Councillors Guide to Neighbourhood Planning. This gives an overview of the background and rationale for a plan along with the steps involved.

Below are extracts from GOV.UK covering information in relation to both the cost and timescales involved with producing a Neighbourhood Plan.

Cost Information

The estimated cost for a community to produce a Neighbourhood Plan ranges from approximately £20,000 to £86,000, though this can vary depending on the plan's scope and the community's resources. This cost covers the preparation of the plan, with the local authority typically covering the expenses for the independent examination and referendum.

Factors influencing the cost

- **Scope and content of the plan:** Larger, more detailed plans with significant community engagement will generally cost more to prepare.
- **Size of the area:** The geographical area the plan covers can influence the overall cost.
- **Volunteer skills and capacity:** A community with volunteers who have strong project management, communication, and organizational skills may reduce external costs.
- **Amount of new information required:** If extensive new evidence gathering is needed, this can add to the cost.
- **Support from the principal authority:** The level of support and resources provided by the local council can impact community costs.

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Timescale Information

Producing a Neighbourhood Plan typically takes between two and three years, though the time frame can vary significantly depending on the specific community and the complexity of the plan. The process involves several key statutory stages, including designating a neighbourhood area, consulting with the community, and an independent examination, before it can be approved and used to influence local development.

Stages of a Neighbourhood Plan

The process generally follows these steps, though the specific details can vary:

1. **Designate a Neighbourhood Area:** A local planning authority must designate the neighbourhood area after an application from a parish or town council or a neighbourhood forum.
2. **Develop the Plan:** This involves significant community engagement to define the local vision and policies for development.
3. **Community Consultation (Regulation 14):** The draft plan undergoes a mandatory consultation period, which must be at least six weeks long.
4. **Independent Examination:** The plan proposal is then submitted for an independent examination.
5. **Referendum:** Following a successful examination, the community holds a referendum to vote on the plan.
6. **Adoption:** If the referendum is passed, the plan is adopted by the local authority.

Local Comparison

Stone Town Council embarked on a decision to produce a Neighbourhood Plan in 2015. This plan was finally passed by both the Planning Inspectorate and Referendum, and put into effect, on 26 May 2022.

Funding

Until this year Locality have been administering a funding stream available to Town and Parish Councils to produce Neighbourhood Plans. This fund was split into two pots, with a £9,000 grant available for any Council to apply for who was undertaking a plan. The second pot was for up to a further £6,000 for specialist technical support as needed.

From April 2025, following the last spending review the decision was made to remove this funding stream, and no direct funding is available.

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Parish Plans

Attached **(B)** for members information is the Parish Plans – Information Pack, produced by Rural Community Council for Essex. This gives an overview of the background and rationale for a plan along with the steps involved.

The Town Council approached KALC for further guidance on Parish Plans which linked officers to Action for Communities in Rural Kent. This organisation has a brief overview of the process and links to a small pocket of funding to support the creation of Parish Plans but only for Councils in East Kent.

The guide created by Rural Community Council for Essex is a very thorough overview of the process.



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Comparison

The following table sets out some key elements of difference between a Neighbourhood and Parish Plans.

KEY AREA	N/HOOD PLAN	PARISH PLAN
The process is led by an independent steering group but facilitated by the Town or Parish Council.	X	X
Creation of the plan involves considerable community engagement.	X	X
It has a statutory role within the planning process.	X	
The production of the plan has a major cost associated with its creation.	X	
The production of the plan has a significant time demand associated with its creation.	X	
The finalised plan would setup a Town wide document focusing on defining needs within the community and actions to address challenges faced.	X	X
The created plan would result in an increase in CIL receipts to the Town Council.	X	
The finalised plan would be a useful tool in demonstrating community engagement and need in relation to external funding applications.	X	X
The finalised plan can be incorporated into the Local Plan from the Principal Authority.	X	X

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Neighbourhood Plan Summary

Whilst widely regarded as the top level for planning engagement at Parish and Town level, the withdrawal of funding, expected costs, resources and time implications and likely benefit from CIL receipts given the amount of land left to develop, it might be seen as an initiative that would not offer value for money.

A effectively created plan would assist with identifying infrastructure needs within the Town, whilst highlighting any areas for redevelopment, it is worth noting that the specific extracts from the Dartford Local Plan focusing on East Dartford cover some of these points in highlighting the importance of Swanscombe as a local shopping district, point out the access issues faced with Swanscombe station and specify potential brownfield sites that could be developed going forward.

Parish Plan

Whilst a Parish Plan has no weight in relation to decisions by the Planning Authority, it can form both an intention statement and policy intention for how the Town Council would engage with stakeholders in relation to anything effecting the Town.

A Neighbourhood Plan is set around specific targeted areas, whilst a Parish Plan does have the flexibility to look at wider concerns however small they may be that are identified by the community.

As set out in the guidance attached a Parish Plan gives the community the chance to become involved with identifying areas for improvement, areas for development and challenges facing the Town. The document would also enable the creation of an action plan, with time driven solutions. Whilst they may not be achievable, they can galvanise focus on the key issues raised by the community.

The big comparison point is the cost to create. It is worth noting that to create an effective plan a large amount of time and resources would need to be allocated and consultation, engagement, document creation and publicity. The actual cost to create the final works can be kept down as the detail of the output would not require direct engagement with planning consultants and specialists.

Recommended

To consider whether the Town Council should begin the process of creating a plan for the Parish, and if so, which route to pursue.