

Locality Grant

Stansfield Parish Council Meeting

Monday 20 February 6.45pm

We are holding a specially convened meeting to discuss the following

“How can the residents of Stansfield supported by Stansfield Parish Council, best utilise the £1,000 Locality Budget for the benefit of Community Engagement?”

The evening is designed to be an open forum for residents to discuss and put forward their views on future community projects for the village. Please note, an outline proposal is required by Stansfield Parish Council to highlight how the £1,000 would be spent in the coming year. West Suffolk Council (WSC) needs to process all financial commitments in good time prior to the pre-election period (Purdah). The acceptance form(s) confirming the proposed outline needs to be processed before 23 March 2023.

Background

Before setting out the proposals that have been investigated, I would like to give some background to how we arrived at this current position.

In 2020 Stansfield Parish Council (SPC) commissioned a Housing Needs Survey (HNS). As per the letter to all residents in November 2022, despite an excellent rate of response, and a range of views highlighted, the results of the survey were found to have errors and inconsistencies. This meant that we could not rely on the results. After protracted discussions it became apparent that we could not agree a way forward and Stansfield Parish Council negotiated a refund for the full cost of the survey - £2,288.55 plus VAT.

The money for this survey was funded in part by a locality grant of £1,000 awarded by WSC. This grant should have been returned to WSC but following consultations they agreed to allow us to keep this grant with a proviso that it be used for the benefit of Community Engagement, initially they suggested another Housing Needs Survey, a Neighbourhood Plan. Due in part to the high costs of both these proposals, they suggested a Parish Plan or another community engagement project.

Planning and Stansfield

Under the West Suffolk Local Plan, which is currently under consultation and due to be adopted in late 2024, Stansfield has been categorised as a Type B Village. These are small settlements and will have no housing allocations. WSC defines a Type B village as having a very limited range of, or no services and poor accessibility to public transport. It is likely that residents will rely on the private car to travel to meet their day-to-day needs. In these villages no sites would be allocated through the local plan and only limited infill development, or affordable housing exception sites would be permitted, to meet local needs within the village.

They do state that if the village wished to see some development take place this could be facilitated through an affordable rural housing exception site. These are small sites that are acquired for affordable housing where development would not otherwise be permitted. The aim is to provide housing for people who have a local connection to a particular village and who would otherwise be unable to afford housing within that village.

Local affordable housing need can be determined using housing register data and/or a housing needs survey. The recommended length of time between surveys is 3-5 years. There is no

requirement for Stansfield to undertake a housing needs survey, however, given that the housing register indicates very few with a local connection to Stansfield, if we did want to bring forward an exception scheme (specifically for local people) then a housing needs survey would be required to support this.

What was the purpose of doing the original Housing Needs Survey in 2020?

Following a controversial planning application, for which there were divided opinions, the council sought to establish a true picture of what all residents felt and to inform the PC's response to the draft Local Plan being prepared by WSC. Several options were looked at -

1. Neighbourhood Plan. This was not fully costed as the initial estimates were around £9,000. It was considered both too expensive and time consuming to produce.
2. A workshop run by Community Action Suffolk, with the aim of bringing people together to encourage them to discuss their visions and aspirations for the village. The idea was scrapped as the COVID pandemic and lockdown intervened which allowed for only online meeting and would preclude residents who either did not have internet access or only poor broadband access. The idea was never fully costed but was estimated to be around £1,000.
3. Housing Needs Survey – whilst not carrying as much weight with the planners as a Neighbourhood Plan, the survey does help clarify the viewpoints of the residents. I attach a copy of the original grant application. This was the option chosen and cost £2,288.

What has changed since 2020?

The planning application has been withdrawn and there is currently little prospect of a rural exception site being found.

Whilst we do have the £2,288 available, the council has funded two elections in 2022, at a cost of £2,314. This has reduced the reserves significantly. We have had to allow for another election to be potentially called in May which has increased the Precept.

Stansfield Parish Council proposals for the £1,000 Locality Budget

I have prepared options for 4 suggestions for consideration. Following the disappointment with the previous provider, I approached Cambridge ACRE who are undertaking a Neighbourhood plan with Wickhambrook.

Neighbourhood plan

Simply put, a Neighbourhood plan sets out planning policies for the neighbourhood area – which are used to decide whether to approve planning applications. It is written by the local community rather than the Local Planning Authority. It has the same legal standing as a local plan.

Cambridge ACRE estimate it will cost us between **£12,000 and £15,000**.

I spoke to both the Wickhambrook Parish Clerk and advisors at West Suffolk Council. Below are some points to consider.

Points to consider

- It needs to be an independent body and require a professional consultant.
- You need a committed group of residents and councillors to steer the project – Wickhambrook have 7/8 (including 1 councillor) on their group and they meet once or twice a month. They estimate it will take them up to 3 years to complete and cost them £20,000
- A Housing Needs Survey would be required.
- There were grants available, but there is no guarantee that these will still be available.
- It is not a tool for stopping development.
- Expensive.

Housing Needs Survey

Again, I consulted with Cambridge ACRE. The work would entail a consultancy fee of a minimum of £2,125 plus VAT. This allows their consultant to organise the survey, analyse the data and write the report. In addition, there is the charge for printing and postage of the surveys which they estimated at around £965. There would be a few other minor charges for freepost returns. This comes to around **£3,100**

Points to consider

- Does not carry the same weight as a Neighbourhood Plan
- Would need to be repeated every 3/5 years
- Expensive

A Parish Plan or a community led plan

A parish plan is an in-depth survey of a community undertaken by that community itself for its own benefit, to find out how it wants to see itself develop and identify action needed to achieve it. Previous plans can provide a starting point for a new plan.

A Parish Plan takes a more holistic view and can have a wider remit to develop community action plans. It could include social, environmental, or economic factors, but importantly it is up to the community to decide.

Stansfield undertook two Parish Plans in 2005 and 2016. The 2005 version cost **£914** and the report ran to 20 pages, it was driven by a steering group of 6 people. The 2016 version was less

comprehensive and was conducted via the Parish Council – costs of around **£30** towards stationery only. Both included short sections on housing and in the 2016 one there was a section about how the community engagement and how people viewed the council and wanted to engage with them. It was recently agreed that the Parish Council would look at improving how it communicates with residents.

What is a Parish Plan

Following discussions with Cambridge ACRE, they have now agreed that they can help Stansfield produce a survey. They would -

- Support the Parish Council with developing and agreeing a suitable questionnaire.
- Provide an online response option for households who wish to respond in this way.
- Input and analyse all returned surveys.
- Produce a written results report for Stansfield Parish Council.

The Parish Council would be responsible for the printing and distribution of surveys to households; promoting the survey locally and dealing with any enquiries about the survey process; and collecting completed surveys and for arranging for these to be delivered to Cambridgeshire ACRE for analysis.

Cambridgeshire ACRE estimates this work could be completed in 3.5 days at our standard consultancy rate of £425 + VAT per day. The total would therefore amount to £1,487.50 + VAT. We would have capacity to deliver this work between end May and mid-July.

Points to consider

- A Parish Plan has no statutory force, but it can help influence and encourage community involvement.
- Encourages community engagement.
- Reflects the views of all the community.
- Will cover a community engagement project which has been agreed within the parish council.
- Deals with items not directly related to planning.
- Reasonably priced.

A Parish meeting/forum

This idea was originally mooted in response to a planning application. As this application has been withdrawn, I do not see that it would serve any purpose. However, I would suggest that as part of the Parish Plan we should hold regular open forums for the residents to express their views outside the constraints of a Parish Council Meeting. If we allowed for 6 such meetings – the Village Hall rental costs would come to £120.

Points to consider

- Informal meetings could encourage people to express their opinions.
- Good way of building community engagement.
- People who are not comfortable about attending a Parish Council meeting, may feel more comfortable with this.
- Helps to inform the council what people are thinking.
- Inexpensive