

# Mendlesham Neighbourhood Development Plan

## Project Review Report

8 March 2017

### **Introduction**

Mendlesham Parish Council agreed in December 2012 that it should commence work on the adoption of a Neighbourhood Development Plan for the parish. Volunteers were then sought to join the newly organised Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee. Both residents and parish councillors (plus our local district councillor) were recruited to the committee which then managed the project.

The committee was headed by a chairman and reported progress regularly to Mendlesham Parish Council.

The Parish Clerk was also recruited to the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee and, with the chairman, had responsibility for ensuring that a clear document trail and archive was maintained.

### **Major stages within the project**

This was an unusually long project for the parish council in that it spanned not only five financial years but also the four year cycle of the parish council itself.

The major stages that were taken from the agreement to commence the project in December 2012 up to and including the referendum are shown in Appendix 1 - Major stages of work, at the end of this report.

### **How the work was done**

Both formal and informal meetings of the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee were held, the formal meetings handled the major stages of work and the informal meetings allowed committee members to get together to collect and present the various items and groups of data as required.

As each stage was completed it was reported to the Parish Council to give opportunity for agreement, comment and guidance.

### **The expertise that we needed**

The work involved in the compilation of a Neighbourhood Plan is quite wide ranging and requires a range of specialist abilities. The list below identifies the various areas of expertise that we drew upon.

Communication skills - the ability to discuss and negotiate topics with a wide range of people including residents, fellow committee members, district council officers and members, grant providers, external inspectors. Also includes the preparation of newsletters, presentations and social network interactions.

Project management - the ability to identify individual work tasks, assign them to committee members and keep track of progress. Keeping committee members included and promoting a team approach.

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Report writing - the ability to convert information gained into a readable and logical form. This also required word processing skills and the ability to communicate and share information with others by electronic means.

Archiving - the ability to ensure that all actions and reactions are clearly documented so that there is a formal record to back up assumptions, decisions and agreements should the need arise in the future. This area also includes document version control to ensure that the order of versions of the same document are clearly recorded.

Questionnaire generation and analysis - the ability to design and produce sets of questionnaires to elicit information from local residents about their thoughts and views. This also required internet skills and the ability to become skilled in using industry standard packages such as Survey Monkey.

Statistical analysis - the ability to convert data from questionnaires into tables and charts for clear presentation. This also required spreadsheet skills and the ability to communicate and share information with others by electronic means.

Internet based document handling - the ability to use the internet to prepare and maintain documents and spreadsheets shared with other committee members. We made use of Google Docs for the main archive of Neighbourhood Plan documents.

Planning - map presentations - the ability to manipulate maps to show local features pertinent to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Planning - general - the ability to understand the complex planning requirements and environmental issues associated with a local neighbourhood plan and produce documents as required.

Photography - the ability to produce local images to support the aims and presentation of the Neighbourhood Plan. Includes the ability to produce wide landscape images to show Visually Important Open Spaces. Also includes the ability to process and communicate these images electronically.

e-Document production - the ability to convert documents, spreadsheets and images into documents that are easy accessible and readable through the Internet.

Consultation - the ability to talk to local residents and businesses to explain the aims of the Neighbourhood Plan and solicit their views. We carried out an excessive amount of consultation over the duration of the project and were complimented by the Independent Examiner who said *"There has been an enormous amount of consultation and I am impressed by the innovative methods of communication. The consultation and publicity went well beyond the requirements and it is clear that the qualifying body went to considerable lengths to ensure that local residents and businesses were able to engage in the production of the Plan. I congratulate them on their efforts."*

Dogged persistence - there will be times when you question whether the whole process is worth going through. We are convinced it is, but there were times when we wondered. The latest Housing White Paper LAIS1396 underlines the importance of neighbourhood plans for the future.

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### **Interaction with the local district council**

A Neighbourhood Plan is produced in conjunction with the local district council, in our case Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC). It is the local district council that sanctions the holding of a referendum, organises it and pays for it.

Having agreed the Neighbourhood Plan boundary we then kept MSDC up to speed on our progress and looked to its officers for guidance and confirmation on what was required at each stage of the project.

We were fortunate that as one of the first parishes in MSDC to start on a neighbourhood plan we received good support from the MSDC officers. It's fair to say that neither party had a clear idea of what was involved in this new area and there was an amount of picking it up as we went along which meant that early progress was relatively slow.

Generally we got on well with the MSDC officers however two factors conspired to make the relationship difficult at times, one was the protracted length of the project which meant that officers changed and with the replacement officers came differing views about neighbourhood plans. This meant that on several occasions we revisited work that had been completed. The second factor was, and is, the fact that neighbourhood planning is continually evolving and differing emphasises are placed on parts of the work.

All of which did cause relationships with MSDC, on occasions, to be difficult. However such problems did not last for long and after a few frank discussions the project was brought back onto the right path.

One of our discussions with MSDC later on the project centred on the need for a health check. This involved commissioning a qualified third party to examine the latest draft of the Neighbourhood Plan and comment on whether it is likely to be suitable to go forward to referendum. We made the point that it is in both the parish council's and the district council's interest that a health check is carried out. This discussion ultimately resulted in MSDC agreeing to contribute up to £1,000 towards the cost of a health check (final cost was £1,050).

We were also given access to MSDC's map library and were able to use its copyright to produce the maps we required.

### **Lessons learnt**

We recognised early on that our document handling and archiving would need to be improved with the prospect of a large amount of documents being produced and maintained. Neighbourhood Planning requires good archiving for later evidential purposes. With the assistance of a committee member we began a move to the Internet based Google Docs that enabled central archiving "in the cloud" and much easier controlled secure access for those requiring access to the documents. It was a slow learning process but it paid dividends, not the least of which was removing the problem of having all important documents lodged on one home computer.

As described in the previous section the rapport with the district council is vitally important. The district council has to be satisfied with the quality of the neighbourhood plan otherwise it will not recommend it to go forward to a referendum.

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It is difficult to maintain momentum on a long project especially when all of the project staff are giving their time freely. Sometimes you just have to wait until someone has the necessary free time available to carry out the task they are assigned to. For some interest wanes, after a time initial enthusiasm can drop and in some cases just disappear. However we were fortunate that in a number of cases our short lived committee members did some excellent work for the project before departing.

We tried to use all committee members to do different pieces of work, which worked well early on but as the project progressed it started to rely on just 3 or 4 people as all of the documentation came together. What we then needed on a regular basis was good proof readers.

Neighbourhood Planning today relies a lot on electronic documentation. For the referendum we produced only 6 full paper copies for reference purposes, everything else was online. So this was another skill set that suddenly emerged (electronic document publishing), some of the expertise we had and the rest we commissioned from Gipping Press.

Overall we took a "record everything" approach, particularly our decisions. When we received feedback of any sort we recorded, formally, our response to it. This was an important part of our evidence of consultation in the final documentation.

### **The result**

The Mendlesham Neighbourhood Development Plan version 3.3 contains eleven new local policies and is 79 pages long.

The support documentation comprises 25 individual supporting documents totalling over 300 pages.

In the background are hundreds of working documents and thousands of e-Mails generated during the project.

The result of the Mendlesham referendum held on 2 March 2017 was as follows;

Votes in favour of adopting the Neighbourhood Plan	393	(94.25%)
Votes against adopting the Neighbourhood Plan	24	(5.75%)
Total votes cast	417	
Turnout		36.7%

All of the formal documentation can be found at  
[www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/MendleshamNP](http://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/MendleshamNP)

### **Project cost**

So what was the cost of the project in total? In Appendix 2 - Project costs at the end of this report there is a concise table showing the complete breakdown of costs incurred (and grants received) across the duration of the project.

There are three types of cost that need to be taken into account.

- A. Direct costs incurred e.g. through purchase of services (printing) or room hire.
- B. Cost of the Parish Secretary's time as she is an employee of the Parish and was paid for all hours worked including time spent on the Neighbourhood Plan.

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C. Cost of time given by members of the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee, that is impossible to quantify.

The final cost of the project is low because item C in the paragraph above has not been quantified. The planning related work would have been a significant cost (thousands of pounds) if we had to have commissioned it from an outside body. The overall cost of all the other "free work" given by committee members would easily reach 4 figures. It is extremely pleasing that so many gave the time freely and willingly making it truly a neighbourhood plan put together by the residents.

The gross cost to the Parish Council is £8,779.08 which includes the estimated cost of the Parish Clerk's time.

The net cost to the Parish Council is £3,477.62 after deducting the two grants totalling £5,301.46.

### **Project thanks**

Sincere thanks are due to all those members, past and present, of the Neighbourhood Plan Committee for their contributions.

In particular thanks go to Pete Dawson for his invaluable contribution to understanding and dealing with the planning requirements emanating from the Neighbourhood Planning process and his abilities to produce maps to support local issues.

Thanks to Sharon Jones (Parish Clerk) for keeping track of anything and everything to do with the project, to Helen Orton (immediate past chair of Mendlesham Parish Council) and to Mike Exley (current chair of Mendlesham Parish Council) for their continued and unwavering support of the project.

Thanks to Jonathan Free (MSDC) and Peter Freer (ex MSDC) who assisted us in "getting going" in the early days of the project. To Nick Ward (now ex MSDC) for his communication skills, listening to us, guiding us and being clear and open about the process and latterly Paul Bryant (MSDC) who took over from Nick and guided us through to the successful referendum.

Thanks to Gipping Press (Danny and Simon) who patiently converted our myriad of documents, maps and images into internet readable formats.

Thanks to Andrew Stringer our District Councillor who provided continual support and encouragement throughout the project and also provided the Committee with a mobile showroom to consult and inform residents about project progress at each of the last three May Fayres.

Finally thanks to our residents for their support, their views and for their assistance in distributing questionnaires and advertising materials.

Terry Moore  
Chair, Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee

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### **APPENDIX 1 - Major stages of work**

Date	Action
Dec 2012	Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan Committee set up.
17 Jun 2013	Neighbourhood Plan Area formally agreed by MSDC.
Oct 2013 - Feb 2014	Questionnaires (Household, Youth and Business) distributed to homes and businesses around the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Area.
Aug 2014	Additional short questionnaire distributed to homes around the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Area.
Nov - Dec 2014	Consultation with local residents over draft version 1.0 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan.
Jun 2015	Consultation with MSDC over draft version 2.1 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan.
Nov-Dec 2015	Informal consultation with external "interested parties" on version 2.2 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan
Jan 2016	Health check on version 2.2 of Mendlesham neighbourhood Plan carried out by NPIERS.
Apr 2016	Further consultation with MSDC on version 3.1 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan.
May 2016	Version 3.2 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan formally handed over to MSDC for it to consider and solicit responses
Sep - Oct 2016	Version 3.2 of Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan given to Independent Examiner to review.
Oct 2016	Independent Examiner approves Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan for local referendum subject to a series of recommendations.
Nov 2016	The recommendations of the Independent Examiner are accepted and version 3.3 of the Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan is prepared for consideration by MSDC.
Jan 2017	MSDC approves Mendlesham Neighbourhood Plan for referendum
2 Mar 2017	Referendum held

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### **APPENDIX 2 - Project costs**

Cost description	Cost	Notes
Room Hire	-£844.00	
Printing/document production	-£3,227.89	Includes cost of survey software
Promotional/advertising materials	-£1,068.19	
Other	-£1,200.00	Includes cost of health check
Parish Clerk's costs	-£2,439.00	Estimated hours
Gross cost	-£8,779.08	
NP locality grant	£4,301.46	
MSDC Health Check grant	£1,000.00	
Net cost	-£3,477.62	