

## SUSTAINABILITY POLICY for DOWNHAM MARKET TOWN COUNCIL

### Background:

Public expectation with regard to the environment and sustainability has increased to the point where it is essential that Local Councils adopt the principles of sustainability in all areas of operation or where the council has influence to ensure 'quality of life' is maintained.

As a Quality Council, Downham Market Town Council is already committed to caring for the environment and must therefore now adopt the wider principles of sustainability. The Council, in partnership with the community it serves, local villages and parishes, recognises its responsibilities with regard to the environment as a whole in balance with societal needs and economic constraints, which together comprise the three pillars of Sustainable Development

Further background information can be found in the Appendix to this policy.

### Aim:

This sustainability policy outlines how Downham Market Town Council will manage its own affairs and wider relationships with others and sets out how it will seek to support delivery of Sustainable Development throughout all its areas of activity or influence.

In addition to putting our own affairs on a more sustainable footing, in support of Borough, County and Central Government policies and objectives, we will endeavour to support the continued prosperity, health and well being of the community we serve. We will ensure sound and defensible decisions are made to support local needs. We will aim to influence wider strategic planning so that sustainability concepts and sustainable development themes are at the heart of decision making. In all this we aim to provide a structure where people can experience a sound and fair society, not just from a local community perspective, but also for us to play our part for the ultimate benefit of society overall in support of wider national / global challenges and goals.

### Quality of life objectives:

The quality of the environment affects us all in our day-to-day lives and is an essential ingredient of well-being. We need to protect it now, plus respect and nurture it to maintain and enhance a quality environment for future generations.

One of our key objectives is to ensure our greatest asset, heritage in the natural and built environment, is maintained. This comprises not just our buildings and open spaces, but also our cultural heritage in the form of festivals and other community events which support social cohesion.

Whilst looking after our past is reassuring as it reminds us of our heritage, our main objective is to create a quality environment and a dynamic place to live which encourages future enterprise and growth. This requires **new** initiatives so that Downham Market Town Council is seen as **forward thinking** in its approach to sustainability and not entirely backward looking.

We will encourage vibrant events and activities aligned to sustainability to aid our community and help the locality build in 'resilience' and cope with these times of 'transition', potential hardship and change. Our principle goal then is to stimulate a **positive change** and **outcome**.

### Quality of life powers:

In addition to public expectation and European or national legislation on substantive requirements, recent initiatives encouraging change towards sustainable communities are:

- The Localism Act - places more power with communities to decide local issues
- Changes to the Planning Act – attempts to simplify the process
- Neighbourhood plans - defines local needs and aspirations

In addition to the above, all councils now have a 'Power of Well Being' to enact requirements. LGA 2000 S2 enables a Council to use the Power of Well Being which is a power of first resort. Once enacted and a resolution has been passed, this enables a council to do anything without any spending limit which it considers likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of: the economic, social or environmental [ie sustainability] well being of the area.

### **Implementation:**

We will apply sustainability principles across all our activities to the extent possible and encourage others to do the same. To achieve this we will:

- Actively promote new initiatives that provide real benefit to the community.
- Conduct community engagement and encourage participation.
- Facilitate workshops that support Transition and Resilience building.
- Consider smarter and more cost effective ways of using our assets and facilities.
- Nominate a "Sustainability Champion" within the council who can act as a source of advice and support using external resources as required
- Maintain the Sustainable Development Working Group in support of the above
- Periodically monitor and review implementation progress.

Suggested members of the Sustainable Development Working Group include;

- Nominated councillor as Working Group chair
- Other interested councillors
- Representatives of local parishes, community organisations and businesses
- Co-opted local residents who have expertise relevant to specific projects

### Key Principles:

In all our activities our aim shall be to:

- Pursue the social, health and economic needs of the local community while minimising environmental impacts
- Ensure local needs are met through local resources whenever possible
- Minimise the consumption of energy, water and other natural resources and ensure that those we use are used efficiently
- Minimise the production of waste and reduce the impact of its disposal
- Reduce or prevent pollution and minimise emissions of greenhouse gases wherever possible
- Protect and enhance the Biodiversity of nature

In our direct operations we will:

- Ensure Sustainable Development is at the heart of our strategies, projects and decision making and is factored into the operation of the council, its standing committees and working groups.
- Limit risk to the environment, identify and enhance sustainability issues where possible
- Ensure sustainability is factored into local development plans and planning policies ensuring enhanced standards with any new developments and projects
- Ensure sustainable procurement is adopted to the extent possible with our suppliers
- Ensure all employees have awareness training to encourage sound working practices
- Follow sustainability best practice and strive for continuous improvement

In our wider community relations we will;

- Foster a shared sense of purpose and responsibility in the wider community
- Work collaboratively with parishes, local groups and others we can influence
- Promote Sustainable Development within the community and raise awareness, eg at local events
- Encourage others to behave in a sustainable manner through example and best practice
- Use influence with our stakeholders, public bodies, businesses and individuals to encourage adoption of Sustainable Development principles and best practice

#### Performance reporting:

Sustainable Development matters will be considered in all council meetings and as this develops, become a standard agenda reporting item at full council meetings.

The Sustainable Development Working Group can in time become a mechanism for the Council to review its performance in this area to help identify and develop new initiatives.

#### Formal issue and review:

This sustainability policy for Downham Market Town Council was drafted initially at the request of the Planning and Environment Committee and then shared and developed with attendees at Sustainable Development Working Group meetings (19<sup>th</sup> March, 13<sup>th</sup> April, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2012). As Mayor I ask that all staff and Councillors implement and adopt these requirements wherever possible [within funding constraints] and provide assistance where necessary in support of this common objective.

Signature: *Mayor Cllr Robin Pegg*

Date: *12th June 2012*

## **Appendix - Why sustainability or the 'ability to sustain' is important:**

Survivability in the long term is not just about the environment which when in balance supports the delivery of our food chain, but it is also about the limitations of all the resources we consume. Diverse flora and mineral resources provide the primary ingredients of medicine, minerals provide ore for technology and abundant water is common to all processes and essential for life. Sustainability is about ensuring we do not abuse this and allow future generations their share.

With the exponential rise in global population [7Bil to 8Bil by 2025] pressures will increase with expectation and demands from society that are just not possible in the long term. The fossil fuel age and burning of hydrocarbons is [thankfully from a CO<sub>2</sub> perspective] also starting to end. Some scientists predict peak oil at 2012.5 where after increasing scarcity and cost will demand other ways of travel, energy and manufacturing away from globalisation to localisation in the community.

We are therefore in a period of '*Transition*' to new ways of doing things with new values and ideals, supported by new technology as it comes on line to build '*Resilience*' in the local community.

Transition - is the journey we must make because of the changes taking place around us; to fail to act is to move to reduced sustainability that will compromise wellbeing in our regional community and lead to increased stress and conflict. The Transition Network links local communities that are establishing their own transition processes. Our local group, Downham Market & Villages in Transition was officially recognised by the Network in 2009.

Resilience - is important when the wider environment is no longer stable and changes occur that make us more vulnerable. For example, communities need resilience to cope with extreme weather events [flood/storm]; infrastructure or supply failures; epidemic or pandemic diseases [flu virus]; public disorder [riots/demonstrations].

Sustainable Development [SD] is therefore the '*journey*' towards the ultimate '*goal*' of sustainability and is the key to overcoming these challenges making sure we all make the right decisions and for the right reasons. The well quoted '*Bruntland*' definition of Sustainable Development is:

*"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*

Sustainable Development comprises three pillars of the Environment, Society and Economy and is therefore about '*Quality of Life*' overall and joined up decision making because, in addition to shaping our society with strategic change via planning, construction and physical development, it also impacts on every subject, every aspect of life and how we manage our daily affairs.

Other information reference sources:

- Defra            Dept of environment, food and rural affairs <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/>
- CLG             <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/sustainability/>
- KLWNBC        <http://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=24956>
- IEMA            Inst of Environmental Management & Assessment <http://www.iema.net/>
- KLWNBC        Borough Council - Local Development Core Strategy
- NALC            National Association of Local Councils - Power of Well Being
- Nef              New economics foundation – <http://www.neweconomics.org/>