

**NEWTON ON THE MOOR AND SWARLAND
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP
REPORT TO PARISH COUNCIL
DECEMBER 2023**

1. Membership of the Steering Group

Donna Corbin (Chair)
Barry White (Vice Chair)
Liz Simpson (Secretary)
David Rixon (PC)
Rob Simpson (PC)
David Francis (PC)
Liz Clark (SNAC and PC)
Jackie Stent
Michael Corke
Alison Cowen
Lesley Selfe
David Arkieson
Jo Totton (on an advisory basis re housing)
Michelle O'Hara (on an ad hoc basis when needed)

2. The SG members

The membership of the SG has remained largely unchanged since my last report. Andrew Hastie has had to stand down due other commitments.

Jo Totton (CBE) has assisted the SG on two occasions since the last report, during interactions with the consultants AECOM on the subject of the Housing Needs Assessment.

3. Information gathering

You will recall from my last report that NP's have common themes and these include:

- (i) How the history of the designated area informs the process by demonstrating that which makes the area, in this case the Parish and all the vibrant villages within it, the special place that it is today.
- (ii) The preservation and enhancement of the environment both natural and built - including habitats of interest; climate change; the need for green spaces and protected spaces; the potential need for additional housing for downsizing and affordable housing; design codes for new housing.
- (iii) The protection and enhancement of footpaths.
- (iv) Transport issues within the Parish and wider concerns about road safety.
- (v) Businesses within and economy of the Parish.
- (vi) The protection of the vibrant communities within the Parish and enhancing the facilities afforded to them.

The SG have now compiled a considerable body of research and evidence with regard to all of the above areas: a fascinating in depth history of the Parish; a careful study of the natural and built environment; detailed consideration of climate change issues; a schedule of potential green spaces and potential spaces for protection as well as views with the potential to be protected; a traffic report; a complete breakdown of all the businesses within the Parish; a study of all the facilities and activities within the Parish.

We are waiting to receive a Housing Needs Assessment ('HNA') and also a Design Code ('DC') from the consultants, AECOM. The HNA is due to be delivered in draft form shortly. The DC will be sent in draft form in January/February. The two consultants for the DC have visited the Parish and spoken with Liz Simpson and me.

As a result of the work undertaken, we have been able to prepare a Vision Statement and Objectives from which the Neighbourhood Plan policies will emerge.

4. Vision Statement and Objectives

It is important that the beautiful rural and architectural environment, rich history and vibrant communities of Newton on the Moor and Swarland Parish are protected and enhanced. Whilst the Northumberland County Council do not envisage any new development in the Parish until 2036, save for sites where permission has already been granted, it is possible that there will be applications from time to time eg infill sites within the Settlement Boundary or a new application on a site that already has an outline consent, the decision in respect of which could be determined by the County Council on the basis of a Neighbourhood Plan that will sit as a statutory document alongside the Northumberland Local Plan and national planning policies.

Vision Statement

Our vision for Newton on the Moor and Swarland Parish is that we maintain the beautiful rural and architectural environment and protect the rich history that we all enjoy whilst embracing changes that will enhance our communities and the lives of everyone in the Parish.

OBJECTIVES

To deliver our Vision, the following objectives have been identified that will be included in the Neighbourhood Plan:

Objective 1 - The natural environment

To protect and enhance the rural nature of Newton on the Moor and Swarland Parish and the spaces that are important to the community and the character of the area. To plan for the protection, enhancement and creation of green infrastructure and biodiversity. To support community led projects that enable the Parish to deliver these objectives, and which contribute to reducing the Parish's carbon footprint.

Objective 2 - The built environment

To maintain and enhance the many heritage assets of the Parish whilst simultaneously ensuring that any new development conserves and respects the feel of the villages within the Parish, their buildings and places.

Objective 3 - Vibrant and Thriving Communities

To build upon the strong sense of community across the Parish by retaining and enhancing important community facilities and services.

Objective 4 - The Economy

To support existing businesses and new business ventures recognising the importance of agriculture and tourism/leisure sectors as well as working from home.

Objective 5 - Movement

To support improvements to access from within and outside the Parish by supporting safe road infrastructure.

Objective 6 - Connectivity

To support digital connectivity throughout the Parish.

Objective 7 - Tourism

To place controls on the level of tourism within the Parish in order to protect the natural and built environment, protect the communities and not place further strain on access to and from the Parish.

5. Public engagement

Several early engagement activities have taken place:

July 2023 Newton on the Moor coffee morning and September 2023 Swarland Show attendance to raise awareness of the neighbourhood planning process and engage with members of the parish;

With the Vision Statement and Objectives on prominent boards, in November 2023 two drop-in sessions were held to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by neighbourhood planning and enable the community to identify issues for the Plan. The event at Newton on the Moor was not as well attended as that a week later in Swarland. The event at Swarland was very successful with about 80 people attending and enthusiastically participating by ticking table top questionnaires and writing post it notes.

Articles continue to be published in the bi monthly Parish magazine The Column, on the community Facebook page and on the Parish Council website and these are keeping the community up to date on the progress of the Plan.

6. Raising awareness of the NP within the Parish

It is clear that, as a consequence of the work undertaken by the SG as above, the residents of the Parish are aware of the neighbourhood planning process and supportive of the work that is being undertaken on their behalf. At each public engagement, members of the SG have made attendees aware that there are some matters that can be dealt with in a neighbourhood plan and some that may form Parish actions. They have also been made aware of the fact that the Neighbourhood Plan, once made, will have statutory authority.

In January 2024 the SG will deliver a household survey to all addresses across the Parish to seek feedback on a number of key issues. The format of the questionnaire has been developed to ensure that it is easily read, understood and completed. The survey responses will be analysed in February and be referred to in the Plan.

We intend to approach a selection of local businesses and facilities in February/March to discuss the NP with them and invite their comments.

7. Next steps

The information that has been gathered and reports prepared form the basis of the draft Neighbourhood Plan. The draft of this has commenced with a bare bones outline of the matters that have to be included and information from the work already undertaken. A working group of SG members have agreed to work together in January and February to look at the format and complete the first draft for consideration by the SG. All SG members will be reviewing the draft plan, including the policies, as it evolves.

We are shortly going to seek the appointment of an AECOM consultant to review the draft Plan. It takes about 6-8 weeks from seeking support to the point at which we start to work with any AECOM consultant and this will mean that from the end of February, when the SG should have been able to prepare the first draft Plan, we will have professional assistance to finalise it.

8. Conclusion

As you will have seen from the above, much work has been undertaken and the SG is moving through the project plan. We hope to report to the PC again in March/April 2024.

Donna Corbin