

Towards a Neighbourhood Plan for Heversham and Hincaster

Second Progress Report

October 2013

This paper provides a summary of the progress of the Neighbourhood Planning Group. It describes our approach and presents our ideas for development in the two Parishes

It is not a draft Neighbourhood Plan. It simply sets out our thinking so far and shares the ideas we are currently discussing.

The next stage is to listen to the feedback, comment and suggestions that emerge from our “taking soundings” process in November. We will then move towards specific proposals and the drafting of planning policies and design criteria.

That draft plan will then be put out for formal consultation. The final version of the Plan will then be put to a referendum, which is likely to be late in 2014

1. Introduction

A Neighbourhood Plan is the way local people can have real influence in shaping their community into the future. The Plans are a new concept introduced by the Localism Act 2012. They are developed by people who live and work in a community and once approved they form part of the statutory planning framework for the area.

Neighbourhood Plans have to support the strategic development needs of the wider area set out in National Planning guidance and the Local Plans drawn up by Local Planning authorities – in our case South Lakeland District Council. However, subject to this, those of us who live here can use the Plan to shape what kind of communities we want, how they should look and feel. Through the Plan local residents will have a large degree of control over where new buildings should go, what they will look like and how many there should be. The policies in the Heversham and Hincaster Neighbourhood Plan will be used by SLDC in the determination of future local planning applications.

Neighbourhood Plans are necessarily about development– but that does not mean that they are solely about new buildings. Development includes the development of the sense of place and community and how that will continue to evolve over the next decade or more. It can include the look and feel of the existing villages and what it is like to live in them – and should reflect what local people feel is important about them, now and into the future.

A new Infra-structure levy will be imposed on all new building developments, and the share of the levy available to Parishes will be higher where there is a Neighbourhood Plan. This creates a fund which can be a source of money to support wider community improvements. The Neighbourhood Plan can become the framework to identify and/or to support bids to the levy fund and to other sources which may be available over the coming years.

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group works on behalf of Heversham Parish Council and the Hincaster Parish Meeting. Our task is to develop a Plan which enables the people who live and work in Heversham and Hincaster parishes to shape the development of their community over the next decade or more – preserving and enhancing those things which they value and ensuring that any new building is of an acceptable scale, design and location, adding to the life and character of the community.

This means that, the Steering Group, we need to keep listening to what people want and reflecting back to them what we are suggesting. It also means that we have to make sure that the actual plan meets the standards and requirements set by statute. Once we have drafted a formal Plan, it must also be examined and found to be sound by an independent examiner. Then the final Neighbourhood Plan will be put to a local referendum of the local residents, where it must be supported by a majority vote to achieve formal adoption.

The Neighbourhood Plan will cover the two parishes. They are very different in their character but share significant facilities, amenities and activities as well as relating to much of the same landscape and wider setting. The Plan will therefore need to be developed so that it builds on that which is common, whilst preserving the distinctiveness and differences.

2. Developing Objectives

Through a questionnaire, open meetings and discussions in 2012, the Steering Group sought to build up a picture of what the community valued about the parishes and the scope people saw for development. We then used what we had heard to develop a set of high level objectives to lie behind a Neighbourhood Plan:

Heritage, Environment and Landscape

1. The plan should recognise and protect the rural and countryside aspects of the area and further enhance the natural environment, maintaining and developing vistas and sightlines from key points, and ensuring that sensitive areas are protected.
2. The plan should recognise, record and value the historical and noteworthy features of the area, such as the Canal Tunnel, St Peter's Church, the Athenaeum, and the many listed farmhouses and other dwellings.
3. The plan should encourage a sense of pride, well being and ownership that will enhance the quality and visual appearance of settlements.

Domestic and Business

1. The plan should be sensitive to the agricultural and rural nature of the locality and support development that assists farmers and landowners to thrive economically whilst maintaining the character and visual amenity for the whole community.
2. The plan should strengthen economic viability of the community by promoting the development of a mix of small-scale businesses, local employment and the area's tourism potential.
3. The plan should support small-scale housing development within the footprint of the existing settlements where it is deemed to enhance them.

Community and Social

1. The plan should encourage better social inclusion and communication of information within the villages and the wider area. Examples could include broadband, websites and newsletters conveying information about events and local organisations.
2. The plan should encourage and further develop active and inclusive social, educational and cultural opportunities for the community; for instance schooling, community education, special interest groups, University of the Third Age, and distance learning.
3. The plan should encourage and further develop leisure facilities and greater use of those already existing. For example, provision for teenagers and young people, sporting facilities and community open spaces such as woodland, orchards, gardens and seating.
4. The plan should support a well maintained foot and cycle way network, both along the main routes and through the countryside as well as identifying new routes and bridle paths that are attractive in their own right but also create useful links in the parishes and beyond.
5. The plan should seek enhanced public transport facilities between neighbouring communities, as well as the wider world, and improved traffic control within the area.

We circulated these to each household (through the Parish News circulation) in the two parishes for comment and feedback. The response we got suggested that the Objectives broadly reflected residents' views and opinions and we were on the right lines.

Our next task was to turn these high level and general Objectives into something more specific that could provide the basis for planning policies and proposals that would be incorporated in the Neighbourhood Plan, bearing in mind that they would need to be sufficiently concrete to engage the community and to feel real and relevant to them.

It is clear from what people have said that most residents value the existing social character and general physical form of the communities, their location and the peace and attractiveness of their setting. They are conscious that this could easily be destroyed by indiscriminate developments and building that is unsympathetic in scale and form.

We therefore decided to use the further enhancement of this sense of community and place as the core rationale to the Plan. We therefore summarised the objectives to focus on proposals that will further enhance the feel and look of the villages and will underpin their overall sustainability in their context. The aim is to:

- Ensure that the overall appearance of the villages makes them an even more attractive place in which to live/work/visit and enhances a sense of individual and community well-being
- Strengthen the sense of community through enhancing the established physical layout of the villages and the shared spaces and amenities
- Maintain the peaceful character of the environment, the informal character of the villages and their connection to the immediate and more distant landscape
- Support continuing small scale housing and employment developments in the villages and to preserve the scattered farmsteads and outlying building clusters
- Improve the condition of roads, lanes and paths

We have worked with these summary objectives in order to identify specific initiatives which could part of the Neighbourhood Plan and influence the planning policies to be developed within it. It is these ideas that we are now using as we take soundings through the Drop-in sessions planned for November and the electronic and written response mechanisms we have publicised. We will use the feedback (and new suggestions) in order to decide the content of the first draft of the Neighbourhood Plan itself.

3. Our ideas for Heversham

A central driver for our approach in Heversham parish is a vision for strengthening community through the improvement and enlargement of the places where residents and visitors can visit / meet / sit / rest / play / socialise. Linked with this is the potential for the creation of better physical links between the different parts of the parish and between areas of housing and the social/activity centres, in order to encourage more circulation for people of all ages. As these are both developed, we believe that there are opportunities to open up sight lines and to improve further the look of the settlements and their connection to the wider countryside.

The following are some of the potential elements of a network of spaces and places that we have identified as a basis for further discussion with the community and with the relevant landowners and other stakeholders.

The Village Hub

The Conservation core

The heart of Heversham village is the area around the church but there is little reason for anyone to just “be” there. It is an area you move (usually drive) through. Might there be scope for exploring with the Church and Church Farm what scope there is for creating a more open feel and perhaps locating seats in the area around the lych gate?

Church Park

Linked to this, might there be potential for developing the graveyard as a church park in an arc around the north and east of the church from Heversham House, through the “church field” (owned by the Rhoda Thompson Trust) to Woodhouse Lane (distinct from the current area which is still open for burials). The graveyard must be respected and its status as consecrated ground recognized, but it could be a significant parkland zone with explicit connection with its history and the lives of those buried there through some historical interpretation displays. Could it potentially be a peaceful area of easily maintained trees and grass whilst also being a through pathway having a more open frontage onto both the Village Street and Woodhouse Lane?

The Southern Spoke

Gateway

The Dallam School car park and its surrounding land are in a prominent position for people coming into the village from the south and help to set a tone and define it. We believe that there is scope for a park area in the apex, preserving the trees and developing seating and potentially shelter, perhaps with some sculptural features developed in conjunction with Dallam School.

The Sports quarter

Collaboration with Dallam School might open up some of the frontage of the school grounds and create additional young person’s activity area on the east of the road, linking with the tennis courts and potentially the redeveloped swimming pool. Is there the possibility of the hedge between the courts and road being reduced in order to open up and make more public the activity on the courts as part of the village scene?

The Northern Spoke

The Play Quarter

The existing playground is a significant facility. Would it be improved by removing/reducing the beech hedge on the village street just to the south of it, to make it more open and integrated in itself and offer a visual complement to the “church park”? At the same time, might changes in the parking arrangements in front of Crow Wood visually open up the area? We believe that it would be worth exploring whether the land adjacent to the playground could be developed to create a more open, family and recreational/visitor facility. Another possibility might be to relocate the Playground to a suitable alternative site and to utilize the area as a small residential development?

Leasgill Green

The crescent of more modern houses has a grassed area to its west against the village street. If there were to be new development to the west of the street, might this be in a complementary arc with a comparable area of open grass which would create a more visually coherent whole?

The Athenaeum quarter

The Athenaeum is a major asset to the village and used by a large number of people of all ages. The bowling green, just below it, is similarly a place that attracts many people and

where there is activity. Just above it is St Peter's Primary School – another of the perceived assets of the community. Currently these are three quite distinct buildings each in their own ground, although recent changes to the garden/hedge of the school has opened it up and better visually connected it to the village street. Parking can be a pressure, when there is an event at the Athenaeum and/or at the beginning and end of the school day.

We believe that there may be scope for exploring this whole segment as a single entity, creating a more open and integrated area, with through transit for the road but with appropriate parking and also green space and seating (including giving the Athenaeum more of an outside space/activity area). It could be a substantial scheme and expert advice may be required in order to identify potential options.

The Eastern Spoke

Park House Link

A park walkway (with trees and planting) immediately behind the Dallam School grounds linking Woodhouse Lane and Park House Drive would help establish connection and movement between Dugg Hill, Woodhouse Lane and (via the Church Park or Fluster Gap) the northern end of the village.

Tristrams Link

Dallam school's plans for Tristrams playing fields are based on encouraging the main traffic access to be from the Woodhouse end. The development of an established walkway along the southern boundary of the field to the south of Woodhouse Lane could connect the Park House Link, the proposed railway (along the former railway line) and Tristrams. This would provide a safe and appropriate walking access from the village to Tristrams and help to link it with the proposed new pavilion facilities there.

Trailway

The continuing development of the Trailway has been a valuable extension of the paths around the parishes. Creating a link between the two existing sections and an onward connection to the A6 at the south of the Heversham and then on towards Milnthorpe will make it of increasing significance and use.

The Western Spoke

The Blue Bell Inn

In our opinion the Blue Bell can be seen to be an under-performing amenity. As the village pub, it could and should offer much more to the social life of the local community. It has the potential to be a community hub and to be a social meeting place and quality hospitality venue for both locals and a larger passing/tourist market. As it is, it seems to be perceived as being of poor quality and is an adjunct, isolated by the A6 and offering little to village life.

As well as improvements within the pub, there is scope for the garden and immediate area around the Blue Bell to be made attractive in itself and with an open aspect towards the church and conservation core. As part of this traffic calming/speed control measures might be required in order to reduce the divisive impact of the A6 and reduce traffic speed at the junction.

Each of the above community spaces could have its own character and form, but would be easily and sensitively absorbed into the village as attractive enhancements. Each could have seating areas and explicitly form part of a signed walking route around the village particularly suited to older people and those with limited mobility. It might be that the schools and community groups could develop some artwork located at each point and around a linking theme.

The village walking route could also be explicitly linked to routes out of the village and/or forming larger circles - particularly connecting with a network of paths around/on the Head and explicitly linking to Hincaster and to the key cycle routes (including proper commuter cycle ways on main routes as well as recreational ambles). These local and more extensive routes could be signed and mapped so as to become an attractive asset for residents but also other recreational users, bringing additional life and interest to the villages – potentially even supporting some associated economic activity (eg cycle hire)

4. Our ideas for Hincaster

The Parish consists of the hamlet of Hincaster and a number of small satellite settlements; Greenside, Greenhead Farm, Viver, Well Heads Farm, Mabbin Hall and Sellet Hall; the latter two straddle neighbouring parish boundaries.

The parish is agricultural in the main, with some small enterprises and businesses run from residential dwellings and small 'utilitarian' buildings. The hamlet has no commercial facilities for residents so people need to travel for services.

Past responses to proposed developments suggest that residents are interested in guiding the quality of life in the Parish and this starts with wishing to maintain the character much as it is. However, planned and sensitive change and development could add to the amenities, communication and vibrancy of the parish and we need to use the Neighbourhood Plan as a vehicle to manage and control this development.

Residents value the peace and quiet of the environment and the friendliness of their neighbours, and see having to travel to school or work, and for shopping and leisure as part of the price one pays for living in the countryside. The bus service is important to some people and is something most people want to retain. The amount and speed of traffic and the condition of the roads, lanes and paths is an issue people feel strongly about.

Hincaster Core

A mixture of various ages and sizes of housing around the road junction forms the hamlet's 'centre' around the small, generally well kept green that still provides some focus for communal activities, despite the loss of the Parish Room. There is an adjacent small wooded area of land with a playhouse, climbing frame and rope swing but this is very informal and un-maintained. It could be a place for some development as a maintained and structured play area, subject to the landowner's agreement.

Lowfields and the Hincaster Canal Tunnel

This area, to the north of the centre, is of interest because it is a potential hub linking footpaths, roads and the canal. The Neighbourhood Plan needs to recognise the possibility of demand for 'leisure orientated' development should this stretch of the northern reaches of the Lancaster Canal be re-opened. The Hincaster Canal tunnel is an historic monument of significant industrial archaeological importance. Currently, access to the tunnel is not well maintained or particularly attractive or accessible to visitors other than determined enthusiasts. There are information boards and signposts but there is considerable potential to make the area more visually attractive. The Parish has ownership of a small adjacent strip of land potentially contaminated by past dumping, however, it could be developed for purposes such as community use or leisure linked to the canal developments at some later date. Tunnel Lane (Horses Walk) and the area at the eastern end of the

tunnel are maintained principally by volunteers from the Lancaster Canal Trust. These are areas where visitor access and information could be greatly improved, even before any of the proposed alterations to the canal itself takes place. Currently, neither end of the tunnel has any car parking facilities, although there are small laybys within reach of both.

The Neighbourhood Plan should recognise the impact of re-opening the canal and the potential need for well-considered visitor facilities in the area.

The Parish Walk continues west along the lane past Lowfields towards High Barns, passing Hincaster Hall, an historic house of note and the site of a business that has little detrimental impact on the village. It is important to balance the need for any development of the business with any potentially negative impact. The Neighbourhood Plan should include a policy to manage developments here or in similar situations.

Sellet Hall

Whilst Sellet Hall straddles the parish boundary between Hincaster and Crosscrake, the development of the canal in this area would come within the remit of Hincaster Parish. The Canal Trust has been engaged in clearing out the canal bed with a view to bringing water to the west of Sellet Bridge in the very near future.

Viver

Viver has developed from a farm, a mill and a few cottages to a small settlement through the development of substantial farm buildings into residential properties and a metal fabrication business at the southern end. Whilst there is probably no current demand for further residential development, there could possibly be a need to expand in the future with some limited potential for an expansion of the Mill buildings into the land immediately to the north and further utilisation of the existing non-residential buildings. The Neighbourhood Plan should include a policy for this (see section 6).

Greenhead Farm

This previously working farm is now a collection of residential dwellings utilising the old farm buildings. There are six houses in addition to the original farmhouse and another building that could potentially offer further small dwelling spaces. There is also potential for one or two new detached dwellings or workshop spaces in the separately accessed land to the north.

Well Heads Farm

As at Greenhead Farm, here there are three residential dwellings in the converted barns, plus the original farmhouse. There may well be potential to add to this and again, as with Greenhead farm and Viver, section 6 addresses this.

Greenside

The area known as Greenside is based on a large Victorian residential property, now divided into three dwellings, plus a number within the old coach house, stable area and lodge. Greenside Farm itself has a number of residential units in old farm buildings as well as the original farmhouse, providing a substantial community.

Currently, outline planning permission is being sought to build 18 new houses and bungalows on the area of Greenside Farm

Other amenities

The roads through the parish are popular with cyclists, walkers and horseback riders. Residents are keen to maintain the attractiveness and safety of these routes. There may be scope for more amenities for visitors.

The star amenity for walkers and riders is the Hincaster Trailway and it is important for the Neighbourhood Plan to support the development of this to connect with Heversham and, potentially, beyond to Milnthorpe and Arnside. The Trailway is a good example of localism at work. Funding has come from a number of sources; the development of the path has relied on the goodwill of local landowners; community groups and schools have been involved in design and planning; volunteer labour has assisted with construction and many people have been involved in fund raising.

The plentiful footpaths throughout the parish connect with popular and well used walking routes. There is scope to improve information and signage in some places. Continued maintenance is of paramount importance.

Part of Heversham Head Plantation lies within the Parish; a small section of the wood belongs to the Parish. Funding has been sought and to improve the access and entrance to the wood and this work will continue in 2014. The possibility of establishing a permissive footpath through the plantation to link Grievegate Lane to Heversham Head should be considered.

5. Our suggestions for New Building

Heversham

If the above "Spaces and Places" proposal were to be welcomed by the wider community, its development (and its beneficial impact on the look and feel of the village for residents and visitors) could provide the basis within which to consider new building developments within the parish, both for housing and employment.

People have made it very clear that they do not wish to see the existing community despoiled by substantial building developments. At the same time there is a clear wish to sustain the parish as a thriving community. Thriving communities evolve over the years. The Neighbourhood Plan provides a potential mechanism for managing and shaping that evolution, ensuring that in style and scale new buildings in the proposed development areas are sympathetic to the existing villages and add to the community, rather than damaging it.

A thriving community is one with a continuing population and generational mix. It is clear that the primary school is valued as part of the village life and the presence of children is generally welcomed. However the area is one in which there is an increasing shift in the balance of the population towards those who are older. This means that there is a particular need to attract additional families with young children.

People have told us that they value and want to protect the agricultural/rural character of the locality and its setting. A thriving community is also one which provides for small scale businesses and local employment and we see scope for this being particularly linked to supporting that rural character and perhaps utilising the area's tourism potential. In an area such as this (and subject to access to high speed broadband) it would seem likely that there will be an increasing number of people looking for home/work options and for small scale office/business buildings.

Over the next decade there will be pressures for some development of housing and other buildings within the parishes as part of their natural evolution. In addition there continue to be national pressures for increased housing to meet rising demand. SLDC's Land Allocation process no longer identifies Heversham or Hincaster as a site for major new developments but the risk of developers seeking permission for building significant numbers of houses remains. The Neighbourhood Plan can be a vehicle for setting limits on the number of new buildings locally. It can also incorporate design requirements, as well as setting planning policies that would determine appropriate building sites, exerting local control to protect the character of the present settlements.

In advance of this and in order to give some concrete indication of the impact that the Plan could have, we have used our Spaces and Places vision to provisionally identify a number of potential locations where there might be sympathetic development. The draft Plan could identify locations as being ones where, if planning applications of an appropriate scale were made in future, in line with the policies, they would be considered for approval.

The Gateway

If the park at the southern entrance to Heversham were to be developed in the apex, preserving most of the existing trees, there would be scope for a development on the main school car park area. This could contain a blend of single and double story properties, creating a positive pattern at the entry to the village and aligning with the existing buildings.

We are aware that another option that might be proposed by Dallam School is to re-locate the existing playground in Heversham Gardens to this car park area and to free the Heversham gardens site for new housing. It would be helpful to know whether residents have views about this.

Leasgill Green

There would seem to be potential for creating a balancing arc of a small number of family houses on the land to the west of the main street, with an open grass area fronting the street (and the houses being set down on the more westerly side of the field, backing on to the A6). These houses would not obstruct the outlook of the existing houses and would help consolidate the central area of Leasgill.

Athenaeum Quarter

There might be some limited scope for housing development in this area, recognising that this would generate some funding that would contribute to the cost of opening up and enhancing the vicinity and improving parking etc. The area to the west of the lane up to the old grammar school might be considered as suitable for a small number of family houses, recognising that there would need to be imaginative solutions to the access past the school. As part re-shaping the area outside the Athenaeum, might it be possible to include two or three new properties on the land between the Bowling Green and the Athenaeum (respecting the Tree Protection Order)?

Park House Link

As part of developing the Park House Link we think there may be scope for a development of 4 – 6 family houses, accessed from Park House Drive. The lie of the land would suggest that they would not obstruct the views from the existing properties in Woodhouse Lane and they could help facilitate the new Link (both to Woodhouse Lane and to the Trailway).

Land adjacent to Blue Bell/Heversham Hall

There would appear to be scope for sympathetic development which might well be employment related.

Heversham Hall is no longer an active farm. The older farm buildings would be well suited to conversion to small business units, with the potential removal of some of the more modern farm buildings. The land between the Hall and the A6 might be considered as a potential site for a limited number of purpose built small business units, subject to the detail of their scale, design and layout being consistent with their key location between the listed Hall and the conservation core of the village.

As part of the potential development of the Blue Bell, it might be that the land opposite the Hall and behind the Blue Bell would lend itself to development as a small caravan site (again with sensitive detailed planning). There is little doubt that a renewal of the Blue Bell would bring major benefit to the community and the proposals for potential development on the west of the A6 would both support that and have the effect of connecting it with the village.

Hincaster

Hincaster Parish is not scheduled for any housing development in the current SLDC proposals. However, the Neighbourhood Plan needs to consider housing, both new and conversions of redundant farm buildings and to determine policies to manage and control any development. It should also determine the number of affordable houses to be included in any development.

The site of the former egg farm at Greenside Farm currently has an outline application for housing before SLDC. It is possible that this matter will be settled before the Neighbourhood Plan is determined, but it might not be. Currently, the site is deteriorating rapidly, is an eyesore and probably impacts on sale of existing houses in the area.

Other sites for one or two dwellings would appear to be at Greenhead Farm, Well Heads Farm and possibly at Viver, and whilst there are no current plans for building at these sites the Neighbourhood Plan should have policies that determine and control any potential future development.

6. Outlying farmsteads and clusters in both parishes

People have made clear that they value the general pattern of outlying farms and building clusters within both parishes. With the changing patterns of agriculture it can be expected that farming alone will not sustain this pattern. It would therefore be intended that the policies in the Plan would support the maintenance of the dispersed pattern of farms and other existing buildings in the wider Parish area by enabling these buildings to be adapted and developed for new uses in changing circumstances. We envisage that such small developments would generally be within the footprint of what exists at present and be for residential and/or commercial use. The Neighbourhood Plan and the relevant policies within it would be designed to ensure that they were sympathetic in scale form and character.

7. Conclusion

Our task is to enable the Parish Council and Parish Meeting to develop a Neighbourhood Plan that takes advantage of the new planning flexibilities in ways that work to the benefit of the people who live and work in the parishes. Any such plan must be approved through a community referendum as well as passing external examination.

This update summarizes where we have got to as we take soundings before we begin drafting a formal Plan. As well as holding the drop-in sessions and publishing this report, we have started informal discussion with relevant landowners and other local stakeholders and will need further to develop these.

We hope that the feedback we now get will generate new suggestions and ideas that could be incorporated into the draft Plan, as well as giving us a feel about the support (or not) for the emerging direction of it.

Next year there will be a formal consultation on the draft Plan before a final version is submitted to the residents of the two parishes in a referendum, which will probably be held towards the end of the year.

How to give us your ideas and comments:

- **Fill in either the detailed feedback form or the comment card and either leave it in the box with the display or send it to the Steering group c/o**
 - **Peter Shaw, 25 Dugg Hill, Heversham, LA7 7EF**
- **Write to the Steering group at the same address**
- **Email the steering Group on**
 - **hevhincnplan@gmail.com**

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