



# Developing a Plan for Alnwick

## Scoping Report



**DRAFT**

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**ARGYLE PLANNING CONSULTANCY LTD**

# **Developing a Plan for Alnwick – Scoping Report**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The foundations of the idea to prepare a plan for Alnwick arise from a desire to strengthen detailed planning guidance for the town, particularly in order to deliver a new High School and other projects within the town. In order to progress the thinking a multi-agency workshop was held in March 2011 to discuss and agree the principle of a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

1.2 As a result of this well attended workshop the Town Council decided to explore further the idea of a Neighbourhood Development Plan and approached Northumberland County Council to open discussions.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to scope the plan and ensure that everything involved in producing the plan has been properly considered. The report is accompanied by a proposed project plan to manage the stages involved in the process.

## **2. The Location and Context**

2.1 Alnwick and its Parish is located in the northern part of the county of Northumberland within the parliamentary constituency of Berwick-Upon-Tweed. Alnwick Town is the main centre serving a hinterland within a radius of at least 15 miles of Alnwick. The town is located approximately 30 miles south of Berwick and 35 miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne. Alnwick is a market town situated just off the A1 and with good access to the East Coast mainline – it therefore enjoys good transport links north and south to Edinburgh and Newcastle respectively. The location and extent of the parish is shown on the plan at Appendix 1.

2.2 The intention is that the plan should cover the full extent of Alnwick Town which, particularly with the development of industrial land and housing to the south of the town, means that the plan area also extends into the neighbouring parish into part of the area of Denwick (Detached). In addition the historic

landscape setting to the north of Alnwick and the A1 northern junction at Denwick both matters of relevance to the plan lie within Denwick Parish.

2.3 In the recent bid to DCLG to join the Neighbourhood Development Plan Frontrunner project it was agreed to define the geographic area in greater detail in this scoping report in consultation with Denwick Parish Council. In practice it is only the area of Denwick Detached that lies to the immediate south and south east of the town and a small area of Denwick Parish to the north around the A1 junction and the historic parkland to the north of Alnwick castle that needs to be considered for planning purposes along with the rest of Alnwick Town. It is therefore proposed that for the purposes of preparing the plan only part of Alnwick Parish, the northern section of Denwick Detached as far south as the C Road to Whittingham from the A1 opposite Deanmoor and the area of Denwick Parish west of the A1 and along the old Alnwick Bypass be included. See hatched area on plan at Appendix 1.

2.4 The plan area will therefore cover an area of approximately 30 square kilometres. It has a population of approximately 8500 people living in approximately 3000 households.

### **3. Form of the Plan**

3.1 The workshop held in the spring to consider the idea of a plan for Alnwick considered that the form of the plan ultimately should be a full Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) as envisaged in the Localism Bill as it was considered important, with the issues facing Alnwick, that any plan carries statutory weight.

3.2 However, given that final legislation and regulations around NDPs is not yet complete and partners wanted to progress the plan, it was felt that, if necessary, the plan could be developed in the form of a masterplan or planning framework. The plan would not be a masterplan in the sense of those prepared principally to manage development of specific sites or sectors and rather would consider a range of issues facing the town. It would be prepared following current legislation, policy and guidance and would be pursuant to the Alnwick

District Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy pending preparation of the Northumberland LDF. The work undertaken in preparing the planning framework would be translated to create a Neighbourhood Development Plan once the Localism Bill is enacted which would require the County Council to arrange the necessary public examination and referendum before adopting the plan.

3.3 The Alnwick plan would be a policy document to direct and control development and spatial change in the plan area and would include land allocations for new development if this is considered appropriate by the community.

3.4 Whilst the key output will initially be the planning framework and subsequently a full Neighbourhood Development Plan, the project will also explore opportunities to identify future delivery of Neighbourhood Development Orders following the principles set out in the Localism Bill.

#### **4. Project Governance**

4.1 Alnwick Town Council, as the statutorily elected lower tier council, is leading the project as the qualifying body under the Localism Bill. However, the project will run as a genuine partnership approach.

4.2 The key community partner providing support to Alnwick Town Council on the project is the Alnwick Community Development Trust, which is committed to continue working with the group. Together the Town Council and the Community Development Trust, having created the Alnwick Community Partnership, wish to use this body to widen the partner base to include a large number of community groups. Membership of the partnership is set out at Appendix 2. Alnwick Community Partnership is a strong and committed partnership with a good track record in community engagement and project development. In addition to this planning project the partnership has developed a detailed action plan for the town, which the Neighbourhood Development Plan can help to realise.

4.3 For practical purposes, and to make effective progress on the plan, a Steering Group of key players from the Partnership has been set up to take responsibility for the day to day work on preparing the plan, reporting to the Community Partnership and Town Council. Membership of the steering group is set out at Appendix 2. The Town Council will remain responsible for signing off all decisions regarding the plan.

4.4 The County Council has chosen to encourage and partner development of a community led plan-making project in Alnwick because it recognises that the community groups necessary to make rapid progress towards completion of a draft plan are already in place and it is anticipated that clear and meaningful outputs will emerge from the project in terms of lessons learned.

## **5. Resourcing the Plan**

5.1 Having taken the decision to produce a plan for Alnwick, the Town Council and Community Partnership need to ensure that it is adequately resourced both in terms of finance for core activities such as community engagement and professional and technical advice to prepare the plan.

5.2 Following the announcement that DCLG was inviting further invitations for Neighbourhood Planning Frontrunners, a bid for funding has been made in partnership with NCC, seeking support to develop and deliver a community based and locally-led spatial planning project.

5.3 The advantage of support through the frontrunner project is that it would give certainty to the delivery of the project by providing funding support to NCC as Local Planning Authority. This in turn will ensure that professional support, either using council staff or external private sector planning staff, is available to work with the community partnership in the delivery of the plan. With Frontrunner support, work can commence immediately on confirmation from DCLG. It is anticipated that with Frontrunner support substantial progress will have been made in producing a draft plan within 12 months of project inception.

5.4 Without the Frontrunner support, although the Town Council will still wish to proceed, alternative sources of funding will have to be sourced and the project may have to proceed at a slower rate.

5.5 Other neighbourhood planning projects have been successfully funded through a combination of bids to social enterprise and community funds, contributions from parish precepts or community based shares and business sponsorship. In respect of the latter this would be best operated as a small general levy on all businesses rather than sponsorship from particular businesses otherwise there is a danger of conflicts of interest. Initial research with Community Action Northumberland has identified Lottery Awards for All, Sir James Knott Trust and the Tyne and Wear and Northumberland Community Foundation as possibilities for funding and the Alnwick Community Development Trust is advised to research funding from these and other social enterprise and community funds. In addition, NCC has established contacts with Newcastle University School of Planning which could result in students assisting the Steering Group particularly in the community engagement tasks of the plan.

5.6 NCC is committed to working in partnership with Alnwick Town Council and the Alnwick Community Partnership to achieve a successful outcome. Notwithstanding whether resources through the Frontrunner project are available, NCC have indicated that a link NCC planning officer will be provided. Technical support could also be made available to assist in plan production (cartographic and other graphic production skills). Support will also be available from a Localities Officer to help develop appropriate community engagement. Support from a Housing Enabler within the Council's Housing Strategy Service could also be made available. The project could also draw upon other available specialist support from within the wider Council body.

5.7 Plan preparation can also draw from evidence recently collected by NCC in developing its LDF Core Strategy along with the evidence base associated with the Northumberland Local Investment Plan ( which was recently agreed with the Homes and Communities Agency and which specifically supports

community led initiatives); the Northumberland Housing Strategy; the Northumberland Economic Strategy; and the Sustainable Community Strategy.

5.8 The plan itself and the evidence required to support proposals would be coordinated and prepared by the local community led by the Alnwick Community Partnership and Alnwick Town Council. The County Council will assist in ensuring compliance with legislation on plan making and, in particular, will help in developing a Sustainability Appraisal of the plan and arranging examination and referendum at the appropriate time.

## **6. Planning Context**

6.1 NCC is the local planning authority for Alnwick. The Council was formed as a unitary authority following local government reorganisation in April 2009 when six former district councils and the former County Council merged. NCC is preparing a Local Development Framework (LDF) to replace the former district and borough council statutory development plans. Work is well progressed on various evidence base studies and it is anticipated that an Issues and Options Core Strategy consultation document will be available by autumn 2011. In the interim period the Alnwick District Local Development Framework comprising the Core Strategy (October 2007) and two Supplementary Planning Documents on Landscape Character and Renewables, together with saved policies (October 2007) from the Alnwick District-wide Local Plan form the development plan for the area.

6.2 In the context of the development plan, Alnwick is identified as a main service centre within the settlement hierarchy, where new development in the Alnwick District area will be focussed (Core Strategy Policy S1). Core Strategy expectations are that 33% of housing apportioned by the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) should be delivered in Alnwick (Core Strategy Policy S4). 57% of employment land will be focussed in the town (Policy S9) and major retail and town centre development should be focussed there (Policy S17). Emerging thinking on the Northumberland LDF Core Strategy retains Alnwick as one of

the 12 principal settlements in the County but at this stage the expected levels of development in these settlements has not been determined.

6.3 A very significant issue for Alnwick District in the recent past has been the restrictions on housing supply imposed by the RSS, which sought to prioritise housing growth in the Tyne and Wear conurbation and in the SE of Northumberland County. The result of this is that housing demand, considerably outstripped supply creating significant affordability problems. This is an issue that the recession has exacerbated. The Neighbourhood Planning project gives an opportunity for the community to reverse the issues arising from top-down planning and articulate its own wishes in relation to potentially competing spatial demands.

## **7. Issues to be Addressed in the Plan**

7.1 The discussion forum on a possible plan held in the spring discussed the the main issues facing Alnwick in a number of topic areas – Environment, Transport, Living, Working and Community, Leisure, and Culture. The outcomes from these discussions identify the starting issues for the plan. However wider community discussion in the autumn and discussion with partners may introduce additional issues or refine these further:

### *7.1.1 Environment*

- The need to both protect and improve the natural and built environment of the town and its landscape setting
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity in urban greenspace and countryside
- Reducing risk of flooding
- Improving cleanliness in the town
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and encouraging low carbon energy / use of renewables

- Promoting sustainable new building and retrofitting sustainability into our existing buildings

### *7.1.2 Transport*

- The relative isolation of Alnwick from major cities and vulnerability to high transport costs
- Reducing the need to commute and travel for services – achieving ‘self sufficiency’
- Increasing the opportunities for alternative methods of transport
- Linking Alnwick with Alnmouth as a rail / transport hub and developing park and ride opportunities linking to Alnmouth Station
- Increasing opportunities for cycle routes to benefit tourist visitors and locals
- Reducing vehicle / pedestrian conflict in the town centre and increasing pedestrian priority

### *7.1.3 Working in Alnwick*

- The need for an economic strategy that delivers diversity of jobs/employment at all levels and transport to jobs
- Strengthening the Chamber of Trade and business sectors
- Building on the uniqueness of local food / produce leading to manufacturing and retail job opportunities
- Building on Alnwick as a possible centre for green industries
- Building on Alnwick as a centre for heritage conservation industries
- The need to create a vibrant town centre – finding uses for unoccupied shops and extending activity in the market place.
- The need to have a retail vision – a choice and diversity of interesting shops
- Finding ways to extend the tourist season and its impact on the local economy

### *7.1.4 Living in Alnwick*

- The need to maintain diversity of service provision

- Providing housing development that gives the right product in the right place
- The need to recognise the reality of an ageing population and provide for retirement living whilst providing opportunities for affordable young persons' housing
- Ensuring we provide sustainable buildings that are going to be affordable to 'run' in the future not just affordable to purchase.
- The need for increased publicly accessible, quality open spaces around the town.
- Finding new ways of supporting local voluntary and charity groups possibly through a community trust fund.

#### *7.1.5 Community , Leisure, Culture -*

- The need to expand the town population both to retain existing level of services and provide others
- In a situation of under-funding and tightening financial circumstances – need for better coordination of community services and facilities and making better use of the facilities we already have - working together.
- Creation of new high school campus
- Limited open space and outdoor sport provision compounds a situation of limited opportunities for youth
- Difficulties of access to and absence of links between facilities making situation of limited opportunities worse.
- Retail businesses struggling to improve and expand in the face of high rents and competition from other centres
- The need to make more of our history in shaping our future.

## **8. Principles for Future Change**

8.1 Discussion at the spring workshop ended with a session asking the group to consider issues and opportunities they had identified and think about what that meant for possible future change in the town.

8.2 The group arrived at a number of principles which impact on the scope of the plan as follows:

- The plan should be aspirational but rooted in realism.
- Any growth of the town should be sustainable – growth in balance with service provision and employment provision.
- The provision of a new education campus and in particular a new high school is paramount.
- Expansion on the fringes of the town may be necessary but the town must not be allowed to sprawl outwards and should retain its compact form.
- If existing school sites are developed as part of providing a new high school this should be done in a way that retains some of the sites as green space/corridors to allow attractive car free links between parts of the town.
- The Plan should provide for a wide employment base possibly with some further employment expansion east of the A1 together with improvement of existing industrial estates.
- The Plan should promote increased pedestrian priority in the town centre – improved cycle and pedestrian links and better transport linkage generally in the town.
- Investing further in improving the Alnwick south A1 junction and in improved access to the west and south side of the town may be necessary if development is to be achieved on the south side of the town

## **9. Community Engagement**

9.1 The Plan if it is to reflect the intentions for the new Neighbourhood Development Plans needs to be developed and progressed in a way that is inclusive, working with and through the wider community to build ownership and a detailed programme of community engagement will be developed. In addition, any individuals or groups who are interested in working directly on the plan can join the Alnwick Community Partnership and they should contact the Alnwick Community Development Trust .

9.2 Early and wide consultation that the plan is underway is important and the new steering group intends to start this off in the early autumn with

press releases, dedicated interactive website content on the Alnwick Community Development Trust and Alnwick Town Council sites and development of a Facebook group and Twitter feeds to enable people to follow progress.

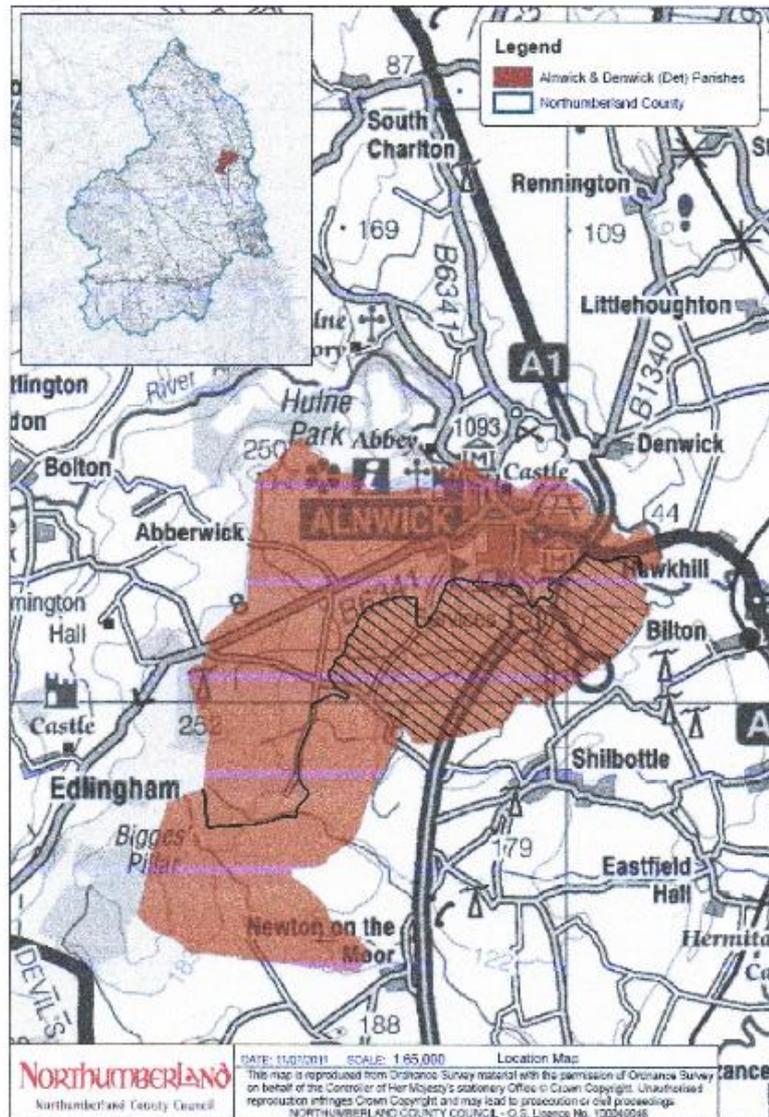
9.3 It is essential that people from different age groups get involved with identifying issues and options and the Steering Group intends setting up drop-in sessions at various events over the autumn including tapping young people's views at the youth celebration event at the end of October 2011.

9.4 Community involvement events will repeat when the draft plan is prepared and of course the ultimate endorsement of the plan, if the proposals in the localism Bill are followed through into legislation, is that formal neighbourhood development plans will be the subject of a referendum in which over 50% of those taking part must support the plan for it to be adopted.

***NB – The final scoping report will be informed by discussions with NCC and with the community within the plan area and a final draft will be prepared when these discussions have taken place in the autumn.***

PDB Argyle Planning Aug 2011

## APPENDIX 1 – PLAN AREA



## APPENDIX 2 - ALNWICK COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MEMBERSHIP

Title	First Name	Surname	Representing/Expertise	Note
Mr.	Phillip	Angier	Local Living/Markets	
Mr.	Colin	Barnes	Northumberland Estates	Steering Group
Mr.	Steve	Barrigan	Alnwick Youth Service	
Mr.	Kevin	Bartlett	NCC	
Mr.	Bill	Batey	Clerk to Alnwick Town Council	Steering Group
Mr.	Tim	Bendixq	Alnwick Scout Group	
Mr.	Carlo	Biagioni	Chair, Alnwick Chamber of Trade	Steering Group
Mr.	Peter	Biggers	Town Planning Consultant	Steering Group
Cllr.	Eileen	Blakey	Town Councillor	
Mr.	Tom	Bowes	Alnwick Tourism Assoc	Steering Group
Mr.	James	Boyd	Lionheart Community Radio	
Mr.	Robert	Brookes	Northumberland Gazette	
Mr.	Simon	Buist	RAF Boulmer	
Mr.	Tom	Carter	Resident	
Cllr.	Gordon	Castle	County Councillor, Town Councillor	
Mrs	Charlotte	Colver	NCC Planning	Steering Group
Mr.	John	Cooper	NCC	
Mr.	Mark	Massey	IDP Architects	
Mr.	Paul	Davies	Construction Consultant	
Mr.	David	English	NCC	Steering Group
Mr.	David	Farrar	Resident	
Mr.	Ed	Ford	Accountant	
Cllr.	Bill	Grisdale	Town Councillor	
Mr.	Ian	Hall	Engineer, Facilities Management	
Mr.	Richard	Hall	Alnwick Lions	
Mr.	Maurice	Hall	Headteacher Duchess's High School	Steering Group
Mr.	Peter	Halliwell	North Country Leisure	Steering Group
Cllr.	Martin	Harrington	Town Councillor/ Finance & Insurance	
Mr.	Paul	Larkin	Editor, Northumberland Gazette	
Ms	Karen	Ledger	NCC	
Mrs	Jean	Lovie	Resident	
Mr.	David	Lovie	Alnwick Civic Society	Steering Group
Mrs	Julia	Lyford	NCDN	
Mrs	Maria	Manion	ACDT/Tourism	
Mr.	Stewart	Manley	Barter Books	
Mrs	Mary	Manley	Barter Books	
Mrs	Jane	Mann	Bailiffgate Museum/Education	
Mr.	Moray	Martin	Finance & Business	
Mr.	Clive	Mattison	Freemen of Alnwick	Steering Group
Mr.	Ian	McLackland	Homes for Northumberland	
Mr.	Ian	Mcrae	Gallery Youth Project	

Mrs	Clare	Mills	Researcher	
Mrs	Hannah	Moeini	Alnwick Youth Service	
Cllr.	Ken	Moore	Town Councillor	
Mrs	Anne	Newbury	Resident	
Ms	Ellie	Noble	Transition Alnwick	
Cllr.	Sue	Patience	Town Councillor/Gallery Youth Project	Steering Group
Mrs	Audra	Peacock	Resident	
Mr.	Dick	Phillips	NCC Highways	
Mrs	Rachael	Roberts	Transition Alnwick	Steering Group
Mrs	Margaret	Robinson	NCC Highways	
Mr.	Richard	Sayer	Rook, Matthew Sayer / Surveyor	
Ms	Susan	Simpson	Resident	
Mr.	Tom	Spence	Aln Valley Railway Society	
Cllr.	Alan	Symmonds	Mayor of Alnwick	Steering Group
			Education/Music Festival	(Chair)
Mr.	David	Taylor	Alnwick Chamber of Trade	Steering Group
Mr.	John	Taylor	Councillor Denwick Parish	
Ms	Carys	Thomas	Chair, Alnwick Community Development Trust	Steering Group
Cllr.	Ritchie	Waddell	Town Councillor	
Cllr.	Sara	Walton	Town Councillor/Solicitor	
Cllr.	Geoff	Watson	Town Councillor, ACDT Trust	Steering Group
			Manager	
Rev	Michael	Webb	Christians Together	
Sgt	Neville	Wharrier	Northumbria Police	
Ms	Hala	Zaluczkowska	Fourth Action	