

Joint Alnwick Community Partnership with Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meeting

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 17th April 2012
The Northumberland Hall, Market Square, Alnwick at 6:30pm

Present

Cllr. Alan Symmonds, Mayor, Chairman (AS)
Sue Patience, Gallery Youth (SP)
Steven Temple, North Country Leisure
Ron Bernstein, resident
Anne Shilton, resident
Frances Allsop, resident
Katherine Williams, Portas Pilot Project consultant
Cllr. Gordon Castle, NCC
David Taylor, Alnwick Tourism Association / Alnwick Chamber of Trade
Peter Ballau, resident
Veronica Ballau, resident
David Farrar, resident
David Lovie, Civic Society
Rachael Roberts, Alnwick Friends of the Earth /Transition Alnwick
Barbara Woodward, resident
Cllr. John Taylor, NCC and Denwick Parish Council
Martin Murphy, representing transport topic
Marc Johnson, Community Action Northumberland
Sandra and Brian Renforth, residents
Joanne Doran, resident
Paul Russell

In Attendance

Peter Biggers, Project Coordinator (PB)
Bill Batey, Alnwick Town Council (BB)
Charlotte Colver, Planning Officer, NCC
John Cooper, Localities Officer, NCC

Apologies for absence

Pennie Perkins
Richard Allsop
Colin Barnes, Northumberland Estates
Phil Angier
Roger Styring
Ruth Dickinson
Maurice Hall
Clare Mills
Brenda Burdis
Iris Symmonds
David English, Planning Officer, NCC

1.0 Introductions

1.1 The Chair first welcomed everyone to the meeting of the joint meeting of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan (ADNP) Steering Group and the Alnwick Community Partnership, which last met in May 2011. Then introductions were made around the room and BB presented the apologies.

2.0 Neighbourhood Plan update

2.1 PB provided an update on the ADNP led by Alnwick Town Council, which is the 'qualifying body' in accordance with new Government Regulations, and carried

out by a Steering Group, appointed by the Alnwick Community Partnership at their meeting in May 2011. Tonight's meeting was the first opportunity to update the Partnership on progress of the ADNP as well as introducing it to local people, invited because they had expressed interest through recent questionnaire responses.

- 2.2 PB, appointed by the Town Council as Project Coordinator, explained that in line with the Government's Localism proposals, now incorporated in the Localism Act 2011¹, Alnwick had successfully bid to become a Neighbourhood Plan 'Frontrunner', one of the first in Northumberland.
- 2.3 Referring to the existing Alnwick Community Plan and Parish Plans elsewhere in the area PB explained that a Neighbourhood Plan would be different in that it had the potential to become a statutory plan adopted by the Local Planning Authority, the County Council. A Neighbourhood Plan would:
- be produced by the community
 - focus on the needs of the community and address issues that the community faces
 - carry statutory weight as a Planning document (if successful at local referendum)
 - provide a more detailed plan than the more strategic County Council plans and help to balance a tendency towards centralisation caused by recent local government reorganisation but
 - must fit within the National Planning Policy Framework² and
 - must fit within the County Council's Local Development Framework policies³.
- 2.4 This means that there is a lot of scope for a Neighbourhood Plan to deliver the community's needs but, in relation for example to the quantity of development, the Plan must agree with growth identified in higher level County and National policies. However the County Council's emerging Core Strategy is a very high level policy document that is unlikely to identify quantities of development for individual towns or Parishes. Potential development in Alnwick is more likely to be identified as a proportion of the overall distribution of housing and economic development across the north of the County and a successful ADNP may help to inform policies in the County's subsequent allocation phase plans.
- 2.5 The Partnership's Steering Group runs the day to day management of the ADNP project on behalf of the qualifying body, Alnwick Town Council with Denwick Parish Council playing a partnership role in the process because the regulations do not allow for two qualifying bodies for one plan. The successful Frontrunner bid provided the County Council with a grant, which is enabling a higher level of support from their Planning team than will be possible for subsequent Neighbourhood Plans elsewhere and will help the County carry out the essential referendum process.
- 2.6 Progress so far on the ADNP:
- spring 2011 - Partnership workshop to discuss Neighbourhood Plan potential, followed by meeting to set up Steering Group

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/nppf>

³ [Northumberland Consolidated Planning Policy Framework](#)

- early summer 2011 - start of the process with successful Frontrunner bid to CLG and 'scoping' the Plan to identify what issues might be covered
- autumn 2011 – first round of consultations, including questionnaire, with local residents and businesses to explore issues / topics important to people who live and work in Alnwick / Denwick
- February 2012 – identified Steering Group members and co-opted additional members to become 'leads' for specific topic themes
- March 2012 - Topic Leads consulted with other local groups sharing an interest in their topic and produced scoping reports that identified issues, interested parties and potential sources of information.

2.7 PB outlined the agreed programme of work, which will include:

- May/June 2012 – a 'hands on' session to allow local people to look at and discuss the topics in detail followed by
- writing up of issues and options for the plan
- preparation of a draft Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan followed by further local consultation
- submission of a final plan to the County Council for a compliance check with national and county policies
- examination of the plan by an approved independent professional
- local referendum
- and, if more than 50% of those taking part in the referendum approve the plan, the County Council must then adopt it.

2.8 PB suggested that while this sounds like a lengthy process it is in fact very fast compared to traditional plan making and he circulated copies of the Steering Group's project programme (Project Timescale version 2), which sets March / April 2013 as the deadline for production of a final draft ADNP, prior to referendum in October / November 2013 and County Council adoption in December 2013. PB also provided the meeting with a diagram from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) showing how a Neighbourhood Plan is prepared.

2.9 Thanking PB for his input as Project Coordinator and noting that the Town Council's financial support and Frontrunner grant enabled excellent support from the County Council has helped the Steering Group to make great progress on the ADNP, AS invited questions. These questions allowed PB to clarify how the ADNP will fit into the hierarchy of plans and there was some discussion on the merits and effectiveness of a referendum.

3.0 Community engagement update

3.1 AS introduced the head of the Steering Group's Engagement Subgroup, SP, who confirmed that the Subgroup is keen to see effective communication and balanced engagement to ensure that the ADNP that goes to referendum has adequately addressed all the right local issues and therefore cannot fail.

3.2 An early advert in the Cryer told local people that work on the ADNP had started and this was followed up by a questionnaire based on a wide range of issues derived from the recent Community Plan. The questionnaire was widely circulated through the Cryer and at three public engagement events: in the Market Place; at Willowburn Leisure Centre; and at the Alnwick Community Centre. AS and PB also made a presentation at a very well attended Denwick

Parish Council meeting. The questionnaire reached a wide range of people and 688 questionnaires were returned from the 4,700 distributed, which was considered to be an excellent return. Data from the returned questionnaires was processed by staff at the County Council.

3.3 SP circulated sheets with the key questionnaire feedback from each topic:

- Community facilities
- Economy, which includes retail and tourism
- Environment
- Housing
- Sports and Recreation
- Transport
- Heritage and Culture

3.4 SP noted that the questionnaires also invited information on any organisations or interest groups that the engagement process has missed and directed the meeting to check out links to the ADNP to be found on the Alnwick Town Council website. In responding to questions from the meeting SP also explained that the Town Council had funded the setting up of a dedicated ADNP website and agreed that it would be useful to explore the potential for engagement through social media and that plans were being made for a Facebook page.

3.5 Discussion about the kinds of issues raised in responses to the questionnaire led to concerns being expressed about sites such as the bus station and temporarily abandoned development site at the Maltings on Lagny Street which might be identified in a Neighbourhood Plan as areas to be resolved through Planning Application related Section 106 Agreements or the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy process.

4.0 Portas Review competition for revenue funding

4.1 BB explained how the Town Council had appointed Katherine Williams to place an entry to the Portas Review competition for revenue funding, which involved submitting a written entry and posting a short video by Mark Turnbull on u-tube.

4.2 In December 2011 Mary Portas submitted to the Government her review of what she considered had contributed to the decline of High Streets across the country. The Government accepted her recommendations and in late February announced that just over £1million would be made available to 12 pilot town teams who would each receive up to £100,000 to test the recommendations for:

- breathing life into High Streets and town centres
- responding to out of town shopping issues
- responding to internet shopping competition and
- how to make town centres multi-functional, social places bustling with people and services

4.3 The Town Council endorsed Alnwick's entry and formed a 'Town Team' of 10 organisations, including the Town Council, Chamber of Trade, Local Living, Northumberland Estates, Civic Society, Gallery Youth Project, Alnwick Friends of the Earth, Northumberland County Council, the Freeman of Alnwick and the Alnwick Tourism Association. The bid was particularly strong in its emphasis on the Neighbourhood Plan and the issues that had been raised through engagement and consultation.

- 4.4 Katherine's submission described our 'vision' as a "bustling, colourful, thriving town centre where people can shop, meet, chat, eat, play, work and trade at the heart of the community with a market place, which is really the centre of the town, not a thoroughfare. Two key organisations central to this are the Chamber of Trade, representing over 60% of local businesses, and Local Living, the market licensee."
- 4.5 The main opportunities listed were:
- our market place – aim to be the thriving centre
 - our independent and local shops (more than 50% are independent)
 - our historic architecture including Northumberland Hall offers much potential
 - the Chamber of Trade – while still in its infancy could be supported to become an influential leader.
- 4.6 Ideas presented were:
- high profile publicity campaign (town centre marketing, branding & improved signage)
 - feasibility study for the use and development of the Northumberland Hall
 - developing a concept plan for the Market Place
 - establishing a mentoring programme for new entrepreneurs
 - providing advice, training and master classes to existing business on things like promotion, internet marketing etc.
 - developing and supporting the Chamber of Trade
 - exploring ways to improve footfall and build trade in the Market Place
 - undertaking a trial community use of empty shops
 - developing a more coordinated events programme, which builds upon previous activity and encourages local businesses
 - encouraging young people as both consumers and potential entrepreneurs and
 - emphasising the improvement of the town through neighbourhood planning.
- 4.7 In all a tremendous effort was made in a very short timescale to submit the entry, which asked for £75,000 towards a £100,000 scheme with some funding to come from Northumberland County Council (NCC) and Alnwick Town Council. NCC agreed to be the accountable body; each potential town team organisation provided a letter of support; additional letters of support were received from other organisations such as the Gazette; over 65 local town centre businesses signed up to support the bid; and despite some lack of evidence about landlords, nine landlords signed up to the bid as well.
- 4.8 The Government will announce the 12 successful pilots in early May but has already announced that there will be second round in June 2012, which the team intends to enter if unsuccessful on the first round. AS thanked Katherine, Bill and Mark for their hard work on the Portas submission and everyone else for coming tonight.

5.0 Ways forward and date of next meeting(s)

- 5.1 There was unanimous agreement by the meeting to meet again to discuss the ADNP in greater detail at an engagement event, probably in mid-June. The Alnwick Community Partnership meeting closed at 8:15 and the Steering Group adjourned to the Alnwick Council Chamber for a brief business meeting. The business comprised a round-the-table catch-up on progress by Topic Leads on their themes and discussion with NCC staff about information sharing.
- 5.2 The next Alnwick Partnership meeting will be the 'hands on' discussion to be held in June 2012 with a date and venue to be agreed.
- 5.3 The next ADNP Steering Group meeting will be held on Tuesday May 15, 2012 at 6:30 in the Alnwick Council Chamber.