

ALNWICK & DENWICK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Topic Chapter - Community Facilities

1. Context

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to look at the issues and options surrounding the current and future provision of community facilities within the area designated by the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 Background

Alnwick is a market town situated on the river Aln, with a population of around 8,000. As one of the largest settlements in North Northumberland, Alnwick, and its smaller neighbour, Denwick, play an important role as a focus for a wide range of community activities and facilities.

In 2002 Alnwick District Council, Alnwick Town Council, The Countryside Agency and One North East commissioned a team of Consultants led by Shared Intelligence to prepare a health-check and regeneration strategy for Alnwick Town.

The objectives of the study were to prepare a long term (10 year) strategy to secure the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Town. Since this study there have been several 'Reports', the focus of which has mainly been the regeneration of Alnwick Town Centre. (See Appendix A).

Some of these 'Reports' have also highlighted the very real risks of social exclusion in rural communities often caused by limited access to jobs, services and facilities.

Following the formation of the Alnwick Community Partnership, a draft Alnwick Community Plan was prepared (Jan 2010) which brought together the previous reports into one document and produced a list of projects and activities which were seen as priorities. Highlighted in this Community Plan were some improvements to community facilities which are still relevant following the more recent results of the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan public questionnaire of 2011. Maintaining and developing the area's community facilities (eg community buildings, library etc) received a strong response in the questionnaire with 85.4% of respondents rating this at a 4 or 5 in terms of importance.

NCC Core Strategy Issues and options Report recognises that the provision of key services that people need to access during their lives is crucial to the health and wellbeing of communities.

1.3 Factors Constraining the Plan

Lack of availability of Public, Private and Charitable finance.

Community buildings difficult to improve due to a number of factors including ownership and the fact that many are listed buildings.

Poor communication between different parties, especially cross-sector communication, makes joint working difficult to achieve.

2. Objective

By 2025 the people of Alnwick and Denwick will have access to high quality community facilities that are fit for purpose and have the capacity required to maintain and improve a vibrant, inclusive and healthy society.

3. Issues & Options

3.1 Information, Advice & Support

Included in Information, Advice and Support are the Library, NCC customer contact centre, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Jobcentre, housing advice, youth advice, careers advice etc.

3.1.1 Issues:

NCC Core Strategy Issues and options states that the council is considering changes to the way services such as libraries and customer contact centres, are delivered including integration of services onto single sites, with a view to improving overall access to council services for the people of Northumberland. Proposals for key hub facilities, particularly in the tier 1 and tier 2 settlements, which include Alnwick, may be forthcoming over the plan period.

Services are based in a number of different locations within Alnwick. There is potential to benefit from joined up working and easier access to sites by integrating services.

Some of the buildings used to house these services are below the standard that would be expected for a public building. E.g. Alnwick Library.

Loss of services, such as Connexions, has meant that careers advice is now a much reduced service with only 5 hours of careers / job search advice from NCC Employability and Skills.

3.1.2 Options

The integration of council services should also include services that are not operated by the council such as Jobcentre+, CAB etc. There is also potential to include youth advice services in this integrated approach. The key players who would need to be involved in this are the

Department of Work and Pensions, Northumberland County Council and the Voluntary Sector for example CAB, Gallery Youth Project etc.

The potential exists to negotiate with building owners to use under-used buildings for key hubs to provide integrated services. Eg Fenkle Street Centre, Council Chamber, Northumberland Hall and TA Building in Lisburn Terrace.

3.1.3 Question 1:

Where the opportunities arise in the town centre, should Information, Advice and Support services be located together?

3.2 Community Buildings

Included in community buildings are buildings that are available for general community use for activities, meetings etc.

3.2.1 Issues:

There are a wide variety of community buildings in Alnwick & Denwick available for use by the community, these are owned, managed and run by a variety of different organisations. The quality of some community buildings is poor in terms of physical accessibility, energy efficiency, comfort and general repair and maintenance.

Alnwick & Denwick are well served by community buildings but information on what facilities are available in community buildings and how to book them is often difficult to find.

The planned new school could result in the creation of new space available to the community. This could impact on use of existing community buildings.

3.2.2 Options:

Conduct an assessment of the quality and accessibility of community facilities in Alnwick and Denwick recording this in a database and where buildings are of a poor quality provide support for those buildings to be improved.

Assess the current capacity and location of facilities and determine if this will meet, or has the potential to meet, future needs, especially in relation to planned housing development.

Make use of redundant and underused buildings Eg Corn Exchange, Northumberland Hall, TA Centre, etc.

3.2.3 Questions 2

Should there be a current database of community buildings and what they offer?

Should there be a database of redundant buildings that could be brought back into use?

The area has a wide range of community buildings, should these be retained and improved to provide better services?

3.3 Services for Young People

This includes services specifically focused on young people, such as, The Gallery Youth Project and services at the community centre.

3.3.1 Issues:

Responses to the questionnaire raised the issue of a lack of facilities for young people in Alnwick leading to problems at hotspots such as the bus station. There were conflicting responses as to whether a purpose built youth centre is needed.

At a recent mapping exercise of youth provision by the Alnwick Area Youth Practitioners Forum it became apparent that Alnwick is offering a minimum of 39 hours per week of targeted youth provision. Gallery Youth provides 29 hours of face to face session work with young people per week targeting 13 to 24 year olds. It provides advice and information, drop in sessions, supported housing and floating support, development work, and group work. It also runs sessions in the local high school through Citizenship, Sixth Form and Assemblies.

In the Alnwick area there are various clubs and activities aimed at young people operating from different venues, some of which are run by volunteers and others with paid staff. The main venues are the Duchess's Community High School, Alnwick Community Centre and Gallery Youth.

There is potential for youth work to be based at the new school complex.

3.3.2 Options:

Provision of facilities for young people to congregate without causing concern for residents and visitors. Facilities could include seating, shelter, lighting and open wifi access. This would need detailed consultation with young people to identify a suitable area in the town.

Provision of youth work in a purpose built centre e.g. in the new High School building.

Pub schemes – access for young people to socialise for soft drinks.

3.3.3 Questions 3:

Is there a need for more focused youth work on a smaller scale? Eg through local drop-in centres?

Will the proposed new High School site at Greensfield provide a good location to base provision of youth work and facilities for young people?

Should an area within the town be identified and developed to provide a youth shelter (to include seating, lighting and open wifi access)?

3.4 Services for Older People

Still work to do!

Discussion with Age UK Northumberland needed to complete this section.

3.4.1 Issues:

Services for older people were identified as an issue at the consultation event on the 24th of July.

Ageing population – national statistics forecast significant rises in the elderly age groups. There will be a 50% increase in the over 65s between 2008 and 2025 with the number of over 85 year olds doubling in the same period in rural Northumberland.

Age UK Northumberland – any mapping of services available in Alnwick / Denwick?

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3.4.2 Options

Potential for drop in centres in Alnwick and Denwick.

3.4.3 Questions 4

Is the extent and range of services provided for older people adequate for the next 10 to 15 years?

3.5 Public Toilets

Public toilets not only provide a facility for residents of Alnwick but are also an important facility for visitors.

3.5.1 Issues:

The public toilets in both The Shambles and Greenwell Road have been highlighted in responses to the questionnaire as being of very poor quality. This is an issue for both local residents and visitors to the town.

The lack of public toilets near to the bus station is an issue for people arriving in / departing from Alnwick by bus.

3.5.2 Options:

Development of new public toilet facilities close to the bus station. Potential for toilet block

or independent Superloo cubicle units as was available at the bus station a number of years ago.

Improvements to the existing main toilets in the town centre.

Encourage retail outlets and other buildings eg pubs and hotels to allow the public use of their toilets.

3.5.3 Questions 5:

Should the plan provide for improved and fully accessible public toilet facilities?

Where should new toilets be located?

Could existing retail / commercial premises be used to provide facilities?

3.6 Health, Social Care and Emergency Services

3.6.1 Issues

At present this part of the community facilities sector is in a state of flux with major structural changes taking place within the services.

The Northumberland Core Strategy Issues and Options Paper states that at present, the programme of health and social care development in Northumberland beyond 2015 is not known. Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities are due to be phased out by 2013 with GP consortia being introduced.

Fire service provision in Alnwick is also under review.

Until the various future strategies for these services have been agreed the spatial implications and changes necessary to built provision in Alnwick remain unclear.

3.6.2 Options

The main role for the neighbourhood plan will be to ensure that the necessary sites are identified for any new facilities and the future of any redundant sites is resolved through the proposals of the plan. To be successful in this the plan must be able to respond flexibly to needs.

In preparing the draft plan, further consultation will be undertaken with health, social care and emergency services to ensure all likely future development needs are catered for.

3.7 Market Place

3.7.1 Issues:

The future of the market Place is a genuinely cross-cutting issue for the plan. In terms of its

role as a community facility there is potential for the Market Place to be used as a facility for the community for both formal and informal activities. Eg Music Festival, socialising etc.

3.7.2 Options:

Encourage more events / activity through a regular programme of events. Potential for themes around local produce, French week etc.

Task a town team or Market Place forum with responsibility for activities and events

Regenerate the Northumberland Hall as a hub

3.7.3 Questions:

Should a Market Place forum be established?

3.8 Community Communication & Awareness

3.8.1 Issues:

Issues have been raised at the community consultation events around being able to find out what is going on in Alnwick and surrounding areas.

Communication – between partners, public etc. including feedback to participants is not as effective as it should be.

Community policing – has been productive in building up dialogue, and trust with young people. The future of this service is in doubt due to financial cutbacks.

3.8.2 Options:

Community website for Alnwick

Alternatives to website – community notice boards and use of empty retail space to promote community activity / use for community.

Welcome packs – matching interests of people including new residents with activities/volunteering opportunities/organisations.

Farmers Market Community Stall is available for not-for-profit organisations.

Geo-cache sites and open wifi hotspots in town.

3.8.3 Questions:

Should communication methods be improved by developing a local information website for Alnwick alongside other forms of communication.

4. Evidence Base

Alnwick Community Plan - Jan 2010

Health-Check and Regeneration Strategy for Alnwick Town - Shared Intelligence 2002.

Northumberland County Council Core Strategy Issues and Options Report – 2012