

ALNWICK AND DENWICK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Topic chapter – Education

1. Context

1.1 Background

Access to first class educational facilities is the aspiration of every community. Alnwick has been in the forefront of educational provision and reform since the early 19th century and presently offers a wide range of schools and adult educational facilities. Some schools St Paul's and St Michael's are faith based, others reflect former ducal patronage, and all but St Paul's are primarily state funded.

It may be helpful to distinguish between the provision of statutory educational facilities for young people and other forms of adult education, some of which are more recreational in nature. Additionally, educational facilities for young people are supplemented by community youth work schemes, whose aim is to provide social outreach and out of school support.

The future of education in Alnwick depends to some extent upon the development of government policies, yet there is a strong move towards greater parental choice and involvement, none of which is within the scope of a planning document. What is within the scope of the plan are the implications of choices made on the key matters of educational change in the town, on the future use and development of vacated school sites and on the provision of communal sports and recreational facilities, residential amenity, and transport methods and links.

1.2 Current Planning Approach

Alnwick District Core Strategy (ADCS)

For the present and until the Northumberland Core Strategy is adopted, the former Alnwick District Core Strategy remains the principal policy document.

Policy S18 seeks to secure the provision of new and improved social and community services and infrastructure developments to facilitate the spatial development strategy. The release of land for development will be dependent on there being sufficient capacity in the existing services and infrastructure to meet the additional requirements of development.

In terms of school sites specifically, Policy S19 allows for redevelopment of school sites only where replacement facilities are already provided and redevelopment delivers a range of uses that responds to community needs. Priority will be given to the redevelopment of the previously developed parts of school sites and all proposals for new and restructured school sites must allow for dual use of facilities.

2. Neighbourhood Plan Education Objectives

To ensure that development taking place in the town is supported by sufficient quantity of school places and a high quality of education provision.

3. Issues and Options

3.1 Ensuring quality in statutory education provision

3.1.1 The Issue

The quality of schools provision is a key consideration, not just for residents, but also for families considering a move and employers looking to establish or relocate a business and thus attract employees. If Alnwick's population is to grow then schools must have the capacity to accept increased numbers and meet rising parental expectations. Falling rolls in some rural schools have not so far reduced pressures on secondary education in Alnwick. The Duchess's Community High School is projecting increasing pupil numbers over the next few years and is preparing to move to a new site.

Alnwick schools have, since 1978, been modeled on the 3 tier system, comprising a single Local Authority (LA) comprehensive secondary school, The Duchess's Community High School (1100 pupils), and two LA middle schools, The Duke's Middle School (250 pupils) and Lindisfarne Middle School (400 pupils) plus St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Middle School. Primary education is provided by 1 LA First School, Alnwick South First School, St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School and St Paul's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided First School. Both the first and middle elements of St Paul's have recently co-located on a single site at South Road. Secondary school Roman Catholic students presently travel to Bedlington.

The D.C.H.S. in addition to being a full 5 year high school also offers BTEC training in various subjects using off site venues and external providers. These include Construction and Engineering. The school also links in with an organisation called 'Choysez'. The aim of the Choysez service is to support young people who have been excluded from or struggle in the more formal education system.

'Choysez' offers an alternative to mainstream education by providing an inspiring mix of indoor and outdoor activities as well as a variety of recognised qualifications and accredited courses.

All five LA schools suffer from serious problems linked to dilapidation of buildings, which are not fit for purpose and/or are in unsuitable locations. However, the educational performance of the schools is invariably a great deal better than might be expected from the physical condition of their facilities. In particular, The Duchess's Community High School, located on 2 separate sites, is to be replaced in the next few years by a new school funded mainly via a Government grant in recognition of its extreme unsuitability and dilapidation. Whilst there was much controversy over former proposals to replace the 3-tier system with 2 tiers, (Northumberland is almost unique among LAs in retaining the 3 tier model) there are presently no plans for the LA to impose such a solution on Alnwick schools.

The Duchess's Community High School has, however, embarked on a process of converting to Academy status, but no final decision has yet been taken.

The Duke's School occupies land leased from NE in a primarily residential area of the town, whilst Lindisfarne Middle School occupies land owned by the LA, also in a primarily residential area. Both schools, Lindisfarne Middle in particular, cause acute congestion at peak school arrival and departure times mainly because of bused in pupils but also because many arrive by car. Such

problems in Swansfield Park Road and Howling Lane have become intractable despite the LA's best efforts, and safety concerns seem well justified.

Out of school activities are widely available in Alnwick, but students from rural areas are compromised by the limitations of public transport and the remoteness of many homes within the catchment area of Alnwick Schools.

3.1.2 Options

It is intended that the Duchess's Community High School will be replaced on land to be leased from Northumberland Estates (NE) at Greensfield, West of the Alnwick Cricket Club.

Although funding appears to be sufficient for only a high school replacement, there have been calls for a single all age learning facility on this site, comprising at least the additional middle school complements. This would have the advantage of concentrating education provision on the edge of the town where traffic can be more easily accommodated but the down side of concentrating everything in one location is that for pupils on the north of the town it makes travelling to school by sustainable means difficult.

3.1.3 Question

Do you think the site identified at Greensfield for the development of a new High School should also be considered for an all age education village involving relocated middle schools

- Yes
- No
- Don't have an opinion

3.2 The Future of School Sites

3.2.1 The Issue

Northumberland County Council (NCC) owns the main site of the present High School, and the land on which Lindisfarne Middle School is situated. These two sites together with the land at the Dukes School owned by the Northumberland Estates and the Bailiffgate Annexe buildings present significant opportunities for re-use and redevelopment to the benefit of the town.

3.2.2 Options

The Duchess's High School Howling Lane, and Lindisfarne sites could be developed for a variety of uses. Bailiffgate Annexe and the Dukes School as important listed buildings are slightly more constrained in terms of their future use but nevertheless offer potential for reuse and sensitive development within their curtilages. The housing section of the plan identifies the possibility of some of the school sites being used for housing but other uses including community services, business, leisure developments etc are all possibilities. However the school sites are currently composed of buildings and a substantial element of greenspace. Given the lack of publically accessible greenspace in the town and the role these sites play in providing a 'green lung' for surrounding residential areas a substantial part of these green areas should be retained as public open space.

3.2.3 Question

What would you like to see the vacated school sites used for?

- 🍏 *Housing*
- 🍏 *Sport and recreation facilities*
- 🍏 *Community facilities*
- 🍏 *Business and employment generating uses*
- 🍏 *Maintained as green space*
- 🍏 *A mixture of these uses*

3.3 Dual use of facilities

3.3.1 The Issue

Plans for providing a mixed use outdoor sports facility for Alnwick sporting clubs are being developed very close to the intended new school site at Greensfield, around which Alnwick Town Football Club presently has a number of pitches. At the same time the existing schools currently provide venues for various community activities in particular adult education activities.

3.3.2 Options

The Greensfield sports complex will provide excellent pitches and courts for football, tennis and hockey immediately adjoining the new school site. It makes eminent sense to capitalise on this proximity by allowing school students to use the facilities rather than duplicating provision and sharing the burden of maintenance between community and school. Similarly internal space and facilities at the school should be offered to the community outside of school hours.

3.3.3 Question

The plan should require new school buildings and the Greensfield sports complex to be operated on a dual use basis to the benefit of both schools and community.

- 🍏 *Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*

3.4 Other Educational Facilities

3.4.1 The Issue

Nurseries and post school care for younger children are mainly provided by The Rainbow Nursery for 2 to 5 year olds (118 registered), and The Castle Club for children up to age 11 between 3 to 6pm (24 places). Similar facilities exist in smaller settlements around Alnwick, and there is a Surestart Children's Centre next to St Michael's First School providing a range of pre school activities.

Adult Education is organized under the NCC Adult Learning Service and provided at Lindisfarne Centre, or one of the centres at Rothbury, Amble and Berwick, with a comprehensive range of courses categorized as follows:

- Further Education

- Adult and Community Learning
- Leisure Groups and Clubs

Those in receipt of benefits or on a low income may receive financial support for fees from a discretionary fund.

The Pottergate Centre – situated on Howling Lane, provides a day service for adults with learning disabilities who live in Alnwick and the surrounding area.

It offers a wide range of activities aimed at encouraging independence, the right to choice and to make decisions.

Barndale House School – based in Barndale House off Howling Lane, Barndale House School is a special school for pupils aged 3 – 19 years with severe and profound learning difficulties and children on the autistic spectrum.

Residential provision is provided from Monday to Thursday during term time.

Youth Clubs and Organisations

Gallery Youth Project. Located near the old Corn Exchange building, this was set up in 1996 to provide assistance to young people, and now includes organised activities, advice, housing support for young people up to the age of 25 who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless and support generally for vulnerable young people.

Alnwick Community Centre. This long established facility was originally established to provide supervised communal facilities for children and families in a deprived ward of Alnwick, and it now has a resident youth worker and a full programme of events through the year. Faith based Youth Clubs operate from a variety of locations within Alnwick as well as a multi-faith outreach programme which provides a contact point on a Saturday evening between 10pm – 1am in the Alnwick Market Place.

Other youth facilities include the traditional RAF and Army cadets, scouts and guides, and various offshoots of adult sporting organisations directed at younger participants.

University of the 3rd Age

U3A offer a range of informal learning activities for the over 50's, in various locations within Alnwick.

3.4.2 Options

The future of all these education related facilities are vital in supporting development in Alnwick and Denwick and the plan has a role to play in promoting their retention

3.4.3 Question

The plan should promote the retention of facilities and services supporting statutory education, special needs education and lifelong learning and encourage development required to sustain these services.

🍏 *Strongly Agree / Agree / Neither Agree nor Disagree / Disagree / Strongly Disagree*

4. Evidence Base

4.1 Documents

Alnwick District Local Development Framework - Core Strategy - July 2007

Northumberland Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation Document - May 2012

Alnwick Locality Profile – Northumberland Infonet

Northumberland Annual Monitoring Report 2010/11

Northumberland Local Investment Plan 2010-2020

4.2 Partner Discussions

Alnwick Federation of Schools Governing Body