

How much do you care about Housing?



It's a key issue of the
Neighbourhood Development Plan

Public Meetings

Rock 7pm Wednesday 18 October in Rock Church

Rennington 7pm Thursday 26 October in Rennington Village Hall

Why have a Neighbourhood Development Plan?

A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is a document that sets out planning policies: it can protect local green spaces, encourage better designed places and help get the right types of development, in the right place.

Currently, in Northumberland County Council's (NCC) Local Plan there is no requirement to build more houses in our parish. That does not stop NCC from approving speculative applications by developers and/or landowners. This is where the NDP can play its part. We believe it's important that everyone living in the parish should have a major say in how development proceeds over the next 15 years - the life-span of our proposed NDP.

Neighbourhood development planning was introduced to give communities like ours a much stronger role in shaping the areas in which we all live. Importantly a NDP - once approved at a local referendum - has legal status when it comes to considering planning applications.

This is why these public meetings for all residents are so important - if we want to influence what happens within our parish. That's why it's important you come along and have your say at every key stage in the plan's development.

The Working Party

Following the change in Chair of the Parish Council, the working party was reconstituted with a new and much expanded membership in June this year. Under the chairmanship of Alan Tremlett there are a further seven members - Stephen Baggott, Laurence Dent, Bob McKittrick, Karl Nielsen, Peter Purdom, Sally Roberts and Andy Sisson. Minutes of our meetings are available on the Parish Council website.

The work of the working party is supported by Jenny Ludman, a planning consultant, with technical reports produced by AECOM. To date all work undertaken by our consultants has been paid for by grants from central government.

The Initial Draft NDP

Our first task was to review the work undertaken by the previous group and very importantly discuss the feedback from the public meeting held on 3 May. This has resulted in less emphasis being placed on Affordable Housing. We also felt that if there is to be further development in our parish the emphasis should rather be on building smaller and therefore more affordable houses as opposed to building Affordable Housing especially as being in a rural setting, 25% of any new development of 10 or more houses needs to be Affordable Housing.

Following fairly lengthy discussion with our planning consultant, Jenny Ludman was asked to change the emphasis in the draft report to reflect this change in direction. This work is currently ongoing. This re-working of the initial draft will take some time - but we believe that getting it right and engaging residents every step of the way is far more important than meeting any arbitrary deadline.

Allocating Land for Housing

Allocating land for building is such a contentious issue with everyone that we decided to draft potential criteria against which potential land for building might be assessed. After lengthy debate we developed five potential criteria:

1. Safeguarding green spaces where appropriate.
2. Protecting the visual aspect and vistas within each settlement area.
3. Siting new homes next to existing dwellings.
4. Focussing on smaller developments.
5. Considering site accessibility, heritage, flood risk, traffic and general impact on local infrastructures

We then tested these criteria to establish how effective they were in discriminating between potential sites. Whilst the criteria were shown to discriminate effectively as between sites our testing process also demonstrated that there would need to be a judgement made in each specific case - balancing the relative weight of each criterion.

In reviewing our work with the NCC Neighbourhood Planning Team we decided that we needed clearer evidence-based criteria for site selection - particularly if the criteria were to become at some later date the subject of legal challenge and review. We will need to undertake a technical review of the draft criteria and assessment of all potential sites within the Parish against the revised criteria.

Once this work has been completed we will consult again with you before coming to any decisions. We are well aware that any decision on land allocation for housing may well have an impact on settlement boundaries.

And finally, we came to the view that there may also be a need for policies relating to:

1. Requiring primary residency for all new homes so as to prohibit their use as second homes and/or holiday lets.
2. Providing a variety of housing size to cater for the needs of differing income groups order to promote and sustain balanced communities.

Consultations with Landowners

A key element of developing our NDP is establishing the intentions of the principal landowners within the parish.

Northumberland Estates' preference would be to build 20 houses overall over the life of the plan. The discussion focussed on two sites for housing development and a third as a green space - land to be earmarked exclusively for a prospective new pond and NOT for building. They said that they would be willing to consider this 'green benefit' as part of a package going forward.

Rock Estates would be looking to make one new development in Rock - comprising 12 houses opposite the cricket pitch.

Stamford Farm would wish to build 8 dwellings on land west Long Row and also build on a 3 acre greenfield land - north of Stamford Cottages.

Additionally during the 'Call For Sites', a site for a single dwelling was proposed south/east of the B1340. The appendix shows the maps for Rock, Rennington and Stamford and highlights potential sites. The maps also include sites included in NCC's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for the parish. For the avoidance of doubt no commitments have been given to any landowner.

These sites and other potential sites will be included in the technical review.

Settlement Boundaries

Currently there is a settlement boundary for Rennington but not for Rock; Stamford and Broxfield are considered too small by NCC for a boundary.

NCC's Local Plan (policy STP 1) 'allows for a level of development within and adjacent to existing settlements' which include Rennington and Rock. Creating settlement boundaries for Rennington and Rock will make it more likely that speculative planning applications will be judged as being in 'open countryside' and refused. It's a safeguard that residents may feel that needs to be put in place for Rock. In the case of Rennington, the current boundary may need to be marginally extended to accommodate some additional - but limited - housing.

No decisions can be made on this contentious issue pending the technical review of land allocation for housing. When we ask for your views on the outputs from this technical review we will discuss with you where precisely the potential settlement boundaries for Rock and for Rennington should be drawn.

Design Code

A Design Code is a set of illustrated design requirements that provides specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of an area. As such it is a critical document that works in conjunction with our NDP. It is meant to set out local design expectations and requirements informed by a clear understanding of the area's qualities and opportunities. It will be appended to our NDP and be given due weight in decisions on any future planning applications within the parish.

AECOM have produced a draft Design Code for the parish. The working group and NCC's Neighbourhood Planning Team have a number of concerns over the draft in its current form. These concerns need to be addressed with AECOM before the document can be released. Once the Design Code is agreed by the working party it will be published on the Parish Council's website for future consultation.

Your Reactions and Views - Please!



We appreciate that there may well be a range of opinions on such important issues - especially if something impacts on you and where you live. That's why we've organised these two public meetings.

You're welcome at either or both of these events - wherever you happen to live within the parish. For the working party it's important that you attend and let us know your views and reactions. Our aim is to take the NDP forward and secure the best possible solution for residents.