Whittingham, Callaly and Alnham Neighbourhood Plan

Options Paper

Revision history

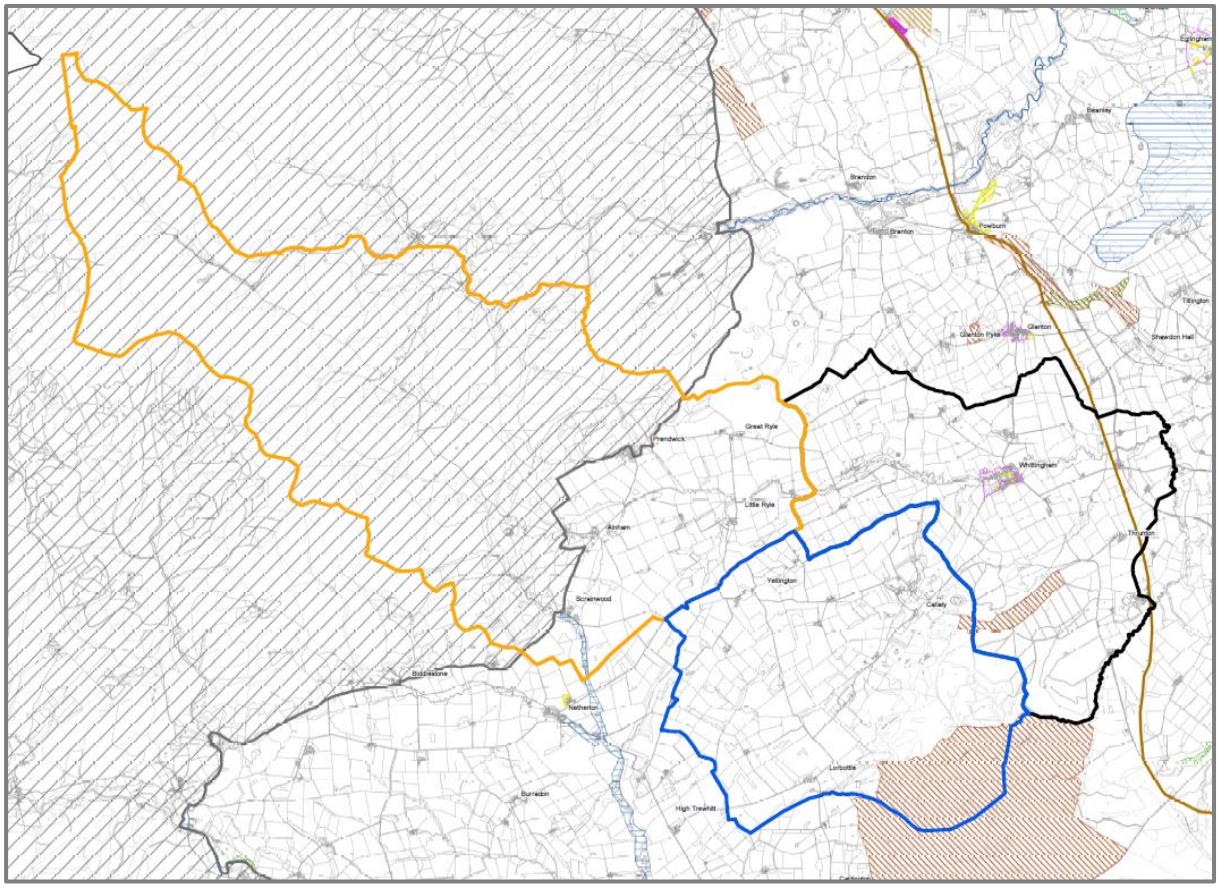
Version	Revision date	Details	Name	Position
v.1.0	Octoer 2024	Preparation of document.	Sarah Brannigan	Manager, Neighbourhood Planning Team, NCC.

Introduction

Whittingham, Callaly and Alnham (WC&A) Parish Council has taken the decision to produce a neighbourhood plan, which covers the whole of the civil parish (figure 1). The purpose of this options paper is to give clear guidance on what *could* be included in a neighbourhood plan (the 'scope'). The topics are all planning-related and the views expressed are based on our current knowledge and understanding of the issues and opportunities in the Parish.

*These are only **suggestions** at this stage* and it is ultimately for the Parish Council to decide what is included in the Plan. This may change over the course of the plan-making process.

1. The Neighbourhood Area



Who is responsible for the Neighbourhood Plan?

The Parish Council is the 'qualifying body' and is ultimately responsible for the Plan though a steering group should be given authority to revise the Plan.

The steering group and parish council should agree a 'terms of reference', which sets out the structure and detail of how the steering group will operate.

Link to guidance note on setting up a steering group:
Advice-Note-Setting-up-a-Steering-Group-July-2022.pdf (northumberland.gov.uk)

How is the community involved?

Community support and input into the process is vital: local people must be consulted on the draft plan and they will have a vote in the local referendum on whether the Plan should be adopted by the planning authority.

It is a good idea to devise a 'consultation strategy' to ensure that effective consultation is carried out throughout the process of reviewing and revising your plan.

How will the work be organised?

A Planning Consultant should be engaged to 'write-up' the Neighbourhood Plan, Consultation Statement and Basic Conditions documents to ensure they accord with the Northumberland Local Plan and national policy / guidance.

However, a lot of the 'ground work' will need to be done by the steering group / sub-groups of volunteers. The more front-loading of information provided to the consultant will mean a more detailed, effective and less generic plan for the Neighbourhood Area.

The Government provides support to neighbourhood planning groups. There are two types of support available:

- Grant (financial support); and
- Technical Support (professional assistance and advice).

This support is provided by 'Locality', the national membership network for community organisations, on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ('DLUHC').

A brief note on support is available here: Grant-Funding-and-Technical-Support-ACCESSIBLE.pdf (northumberland.gov.uk)

More information is on the Locality website: Home - Locality Neighbourhood Planning

What is the vision for the Plan?

A neighbourhood plan vision is an overarching statement, or series of statements, describing what you want your neighbourhood area to be like at the end of the plan period. It may cover what you hope the area will look like, what facilities it will have and what it will be like to live and work there.

Your vision should be concise and locally distinctive. A strong, positive vision will give people a sense of ownership of your neighbourhood plan and help you to secure community support.

ACTION: Steering Group (SG) to draft a vision.

What objectives will you set for the Plan?

Objectives set out what you want to achieve in order to help make the 'vision' a reality. For each element of the vision there may be one or a number of objectives. Detailed policies will then follow from these objectives.

Example:

Rural Service Centre *Strengthen Morpeth's role and competitiveness as a rural service centre, with a strong retail sector and a broad mix of local and visitor attractions.*

Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan

ACTION: SG to draft objectives to make the vision a reality.

What topics should you include in your plan?

The following is a summary of topic areas *based on your community engagement.* It is noted that feedback was solicited on a range of topics chosen by the steering group, namely:

- Settlement
- Traffic
- Landscape
- Design
- Heritage
- Sustainability

Settlement

Settlement Boundary for Whittingham **INCLUDE?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *There was strong support for a settlement boundary around Whittingham. Where the exact line of this boundary might eventually be was beyond the scope of the consultation. However, given the fact that Whittingham has already met the new housing targets set out in the Northumberland Local Plan there is scope for a relatively tight settlement boundary around the village which would still allow small scale "windfall" new housing developments within the boundary.*
>
> *The strength of opinion for a Settlement Boundary around Alnham however was much less strong.*

Planning context

Under Policy STP1 Spatial strategy (Strategic Policy) of the Northumberland Local Plan (NLP), the settlements of Whittingham and Alnham are classed as 'small villages'. In order to support the social and economic vitality of rural areas and recognising that development in one village can support services and facilities in other nearby villages, small villages will support a proportionate level of development.

Development in other settlements not identified as Main Towns, Service Centres, Service Villages or Small Villages (i.e., Callaly) will be limited to that within the built form of the settlement, and the conversion, extension or redevelopment of existing buildings unless it supports the sustainable growth of an existing business or the formation of a new business or provides for new or enhanced community facilities.

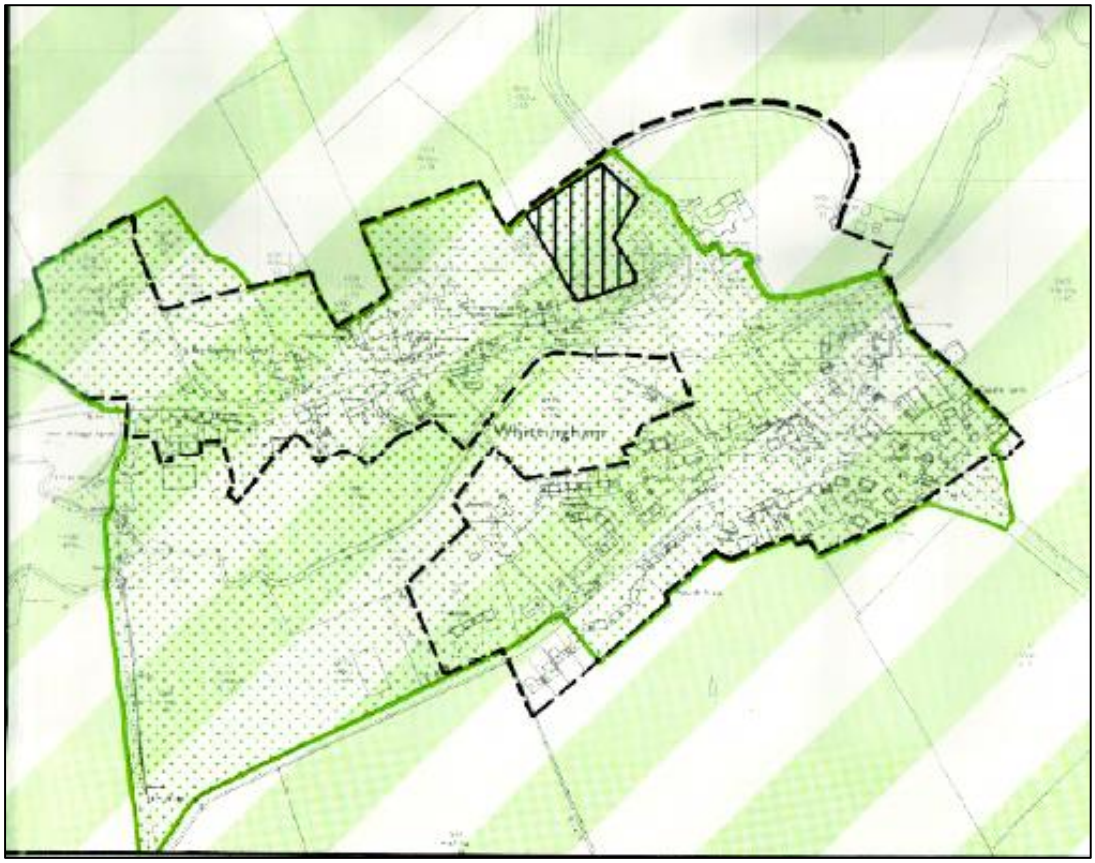
The Policy supports 'Sustainable development … within settlement boundaries defined on the Local Plan policies map.' Whittingham Village, which had a settlement boundary in the previous Alnwick District Wide Local Plan, does not have a boundary in the Local Plan (figure 2).

Since 2016, there have been 19 housing completions and there are permissions in place for an additional 20 dwellings (as at 31st March 2024). There is no minimum housing requirement figure for the Parish therefore there is scope to draw a relatively tight settlement boundary around Whittingham, whilst allowing for windfall development on appropriate sites, consistent with strategic planning policy.

However, that said, the Town Council could decide to look more closely in to housing need in the Parish via a Housing Needs Assessment. N.B. Currently, policy exists to support affordable housing development to meet an evidenced local need on sites adjacent to or well-related to an existing settlement. This is policy HOU 7 in the NLP.

A link to further information about settlement boundaries is here: [Settlement-Boundaries.pdf (northumberland.gov.uk)]

2: Whittingham Settlement Boundary (Alnwick District Wide Local Plan, 1997)



ACTION: Parish Council (PC) to decide if they wish to draw a settlement boundary around the village of Whittingham. N.B. The County Council has provided technical support for this to the steering group so some work will already have been done in building up the evidence to support having a settlement boundary and where it should be drawn.

Second and Holiday Homes **POSSIBLE?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *There was an overwhelming view (80% of respondents) that an increase in the number of second and holiday homes in the parish was not desirable. There was strong support for requiring future new homes in the parish to be occupied only as principal residences.*

Planning context

The Parish does not currently show 20% or more household spaces with no usual (i.e. permanent) residents, therefore Policy HOU 10 of the NLP (principal residence restriction) does not apply. N.B. From 1 April 2025, the County Council will double the council tax charge for second homes.

There could be scope to look to see if a principal residence restriction policy could apply to a smaller geography, for example, Whittingham village.

ACTION: PC to consider if they wish to investigate the issue of second homes and holiday lets in the Parish.

Traffic

Most of this topic is not planning-related and therefore should not be included.

Car park **POSSIBLE?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *There was a large number of responses bemoaning the lack of a dedicated car park in Whittingham and concern about the problems of parking near the school/ Memorial Hall/ church, especially at school opening and closing times, owing to the number of cars parked there all day and the number of parents and minibuses picking up and dropping off pupils.*

ACTION: PC to consider if they wish to investigate the issue of parking and the possibility of allocating a site for a car park.

Landscape

A landscape policy for the Parish **POSSIBLE?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *A very large preponderance of voters agreed that the landscape is a major asset to the parish, both financially and in respect of the quality of life. The same large majority agreed that 'Preserving the landscape should be a major goal of the Neighbourhood Plan.'*

Planning context

Landscape protection, management and enhancement are addressed in a number of policies in the NLP, especially Policy ENV3. There is scope for neighbourhood plans to go further to identify key features of the landscape which are special and are valued highly by residents and others. Eglingham Parish included a landscape policy in their plan that defined an area of 'high landscape value. This was supported by a detailed landscape study, which they paid for.

Technical support is not available for the specialist landscape assessment work required to take such an approach.

ACTION: PC to consider if they wish to include a more detailed, locally-specific landscape policy in the neighbourhood plan.

Renewable energy development **DISCOUNT?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *Votes were almost equally divided for and against renewable energy installations.*

Planning context

Unless the Parish Council wishes to allocate a site for renewable energy development, this subject is fully covered by NLP policy and national planning policy.

Design

A design policy supported by a design code **DISCOUNT?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *The responses strongly support the importance of design in considering development.*
>
> *The character of recent development attracted a polarised set of responses. This scepticism is also strongly reflected in the comments where the view was expressed that there has been a lot of inappropriate development.*
>
> *In addition to support for the idea that development should be 'in keeping' there is a preference for small scale development.*
>
> *Finally there is strong support for the requirement that all new development should meet excellent energy and insulation standards.*

Planning context

Design is important. However, unless the Plan is supporting more development, it is not worth including a policy or design code in the Plan. 'Good design' is supported via a number of policies in the NLP.

It is not clear what is meant by 'inappropriate development': it may be that concerns relate more to historic properties and the conservation area in Whittingham, in which case they would be better addressed though a heritage policy.

Energy and insulation standards are covered through Building Regulations not planning.

Heritage

A Conservation Area Policy for Whittingham **INCLUDE?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *There was little support for changing the current boundary of the conservation area [in Whittingham]. There was consistently strong support for the protection of the existing character, including small scale features such as boundary walls, listed buildings and the wider environment.*

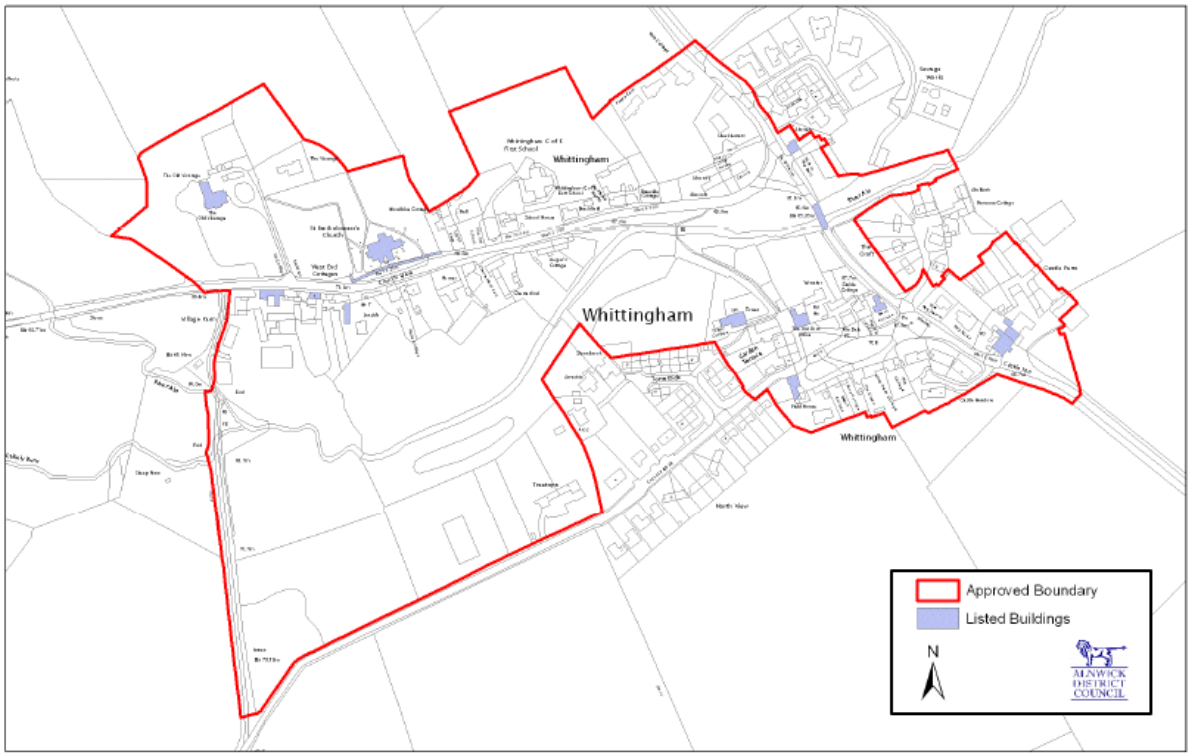
This support extends to a desire for protecting trees and for requiring green space and encouraging biodiversity in any new development. Consideration of the effect of building outside the conservation area is also supported.

The general thrust of this response to the questionnaire was supported by the additional comments that were made (see elsewhere). However, there were some comments suggesting that new development and design was not necessarily negative and that there was need to make the process of upgrading listed buildings, in energy performance for instance, easier.

Planning context

Policy ENV9 in the NLP sets out the approach to determining planning applications in Conservation Areas, including in Whitingham (figure 3). The Conservation Area Appraisal sets out what makes Whttingham an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

3: Whittingham Conservation Area



ACTION: PC to consider if they wish to include a more detailed, locally-specific conservation area policy in the neighbourhood plan. N.B. The County Council can provide further advice on this.

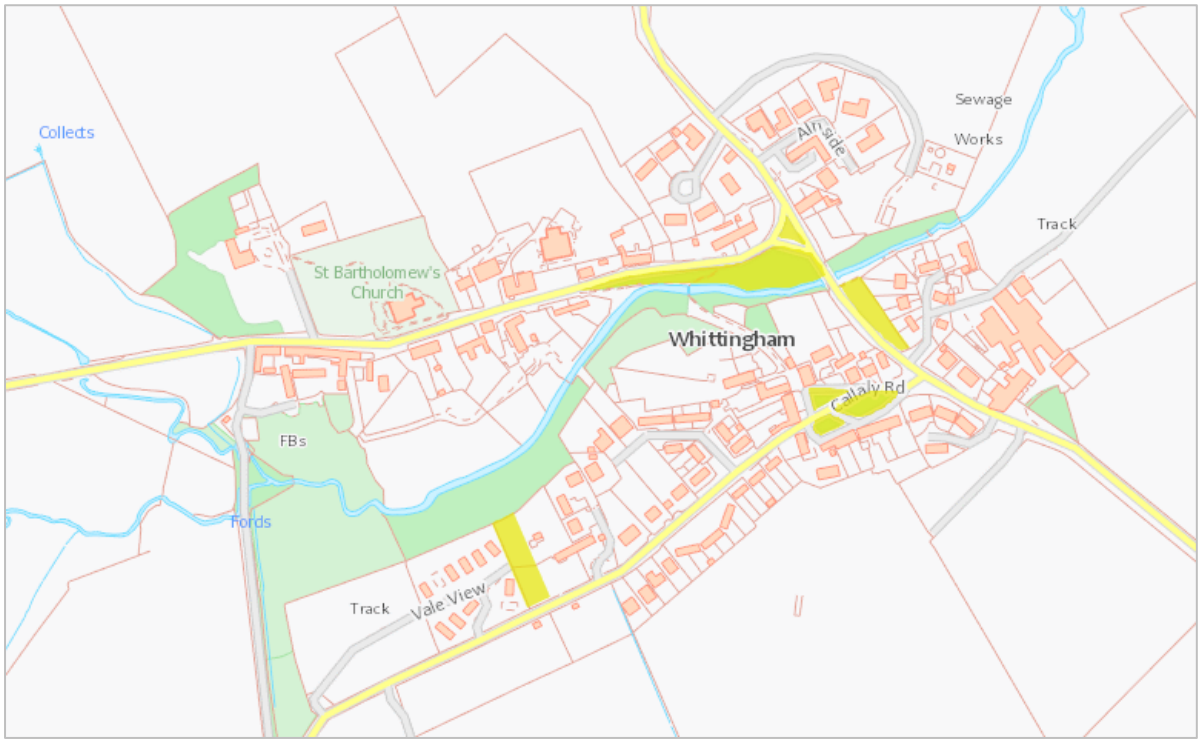
Local Green Spaces **INCLUDE?**

Planning context

Policy INF5 in the NLP identifies a number of sites within the village of Whittingham as protected open space (figure 4):

- Whittingham NSN
- Whittingham Nature Area NSN
- Whittingham AGS 2
- The Croft AGS
- Whittingham AGS

4: Protected Open Spaces in Whittingham



It may be desirable to upgrade these to 'Local Green Space' (LGS) **where appropriate** – this gives them a **comparable level of protection to Green Belt** land.

New Local Green Spaces can also be designated. This can be public or private land, access is not a necessity.

ACTION: PC to consider if they wish to include proposed LGS in the neighbourhood plan. N.B. The County Council has provided technical support for this to the steering group so some work will already have been done in building up the evidence to support LGS designations.

Sustainability **DISCOUNT?**

Feedback from consultation:

> *There is widespread concern about the effects of climate change and an agreement that it is difficult to know how best to tackle it in our rural community.*
>
> *There is a reluctance to move from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles, as there is to switch to full electric for dwellings; the greatest enthusiasm is for biomass.*
>
> *Surrounded by farms these communities were reluctant to see agricultural land used for solar panels and wind farms.*

Planning context

These are difficult topics to address through a neighbourhood plan unless the Parish Council is considering allocating a site for renewable energy development.

It may be better to consider 'community actions' supported by the Parish Council and the County Council's Climate Change Team.