

Whittlesey Neighbourhood Plan
Vision and Objectives Workshop Report
November 2017

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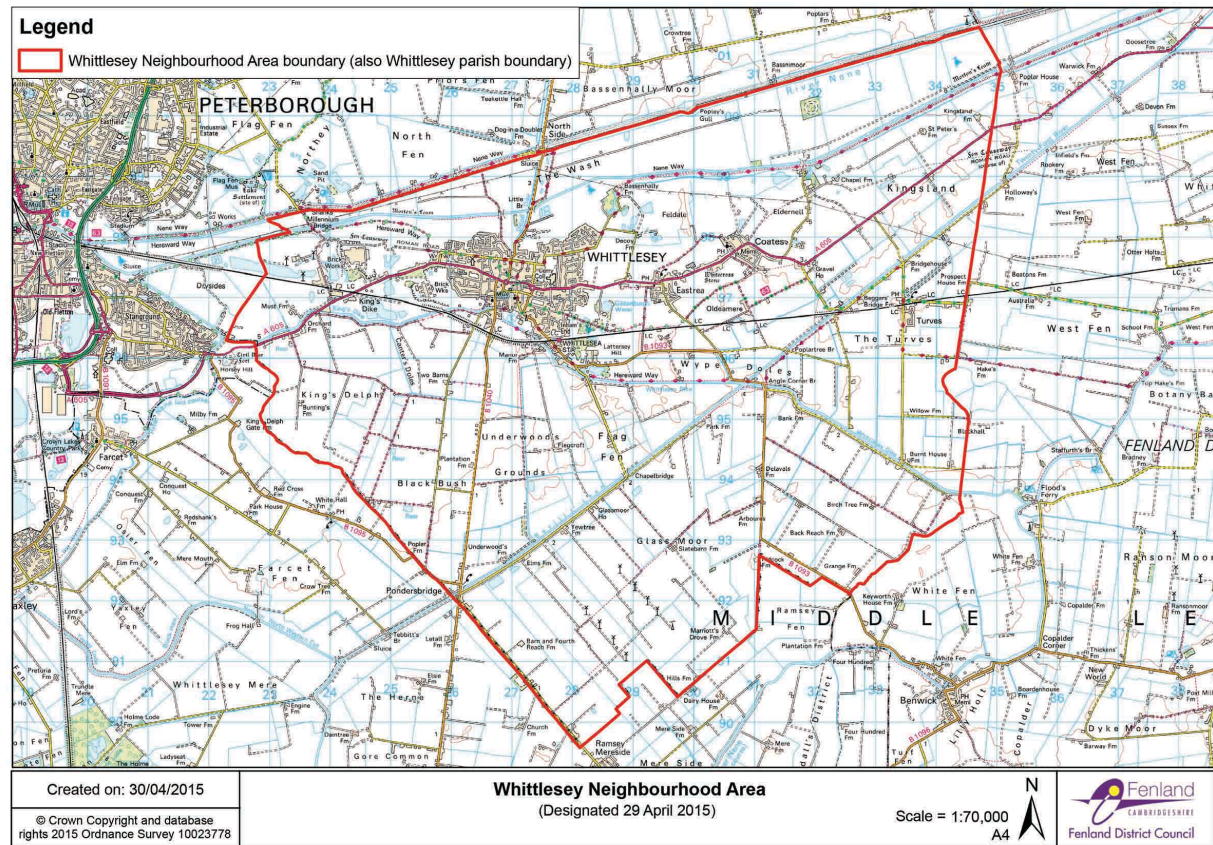
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Introduction

In 2014 Whittlesey Town Council decided to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish. Area Designation was applied for, with the boundary of the designation following the Parish Boundary. The designation was confirmed in April of 2015 and a Neighbourhood Plan Committee was set up to begin working on the Plan.

The aim is that Whittlesey Neighbourhood Plan will reflect the views and aspirations of those living and working in the Parish. To that end, public consultation is forming an early part of the planning process; an initial scoping questionnaire was delivered throughout the Neighbourhood Plan Area in March 2017 to identify the thoughts of the community before commencing production of the plan. This was followed up by a Vision and Objectives workshop to draw out key themes. This report details the findings of that workshop.



Methodology

Date	13 th October 2017
Time	12-2pm, 4-6pm, 6-8pm
Location	Whittlesey Christian Church
Total number of attendees	52 community attendees 2 URBED staff 7 Councillors 3 Christian Church Team

The purpose of the Vision and Objectives workshop was to start to get residents thinking about what the Neighbourhood Plan should be seeking to achieve and establish a vision for the future of the Parish. As the event took place on a weekday we ran three sessions to ensure everyone had an opportunity to participate, including “after school” and “after work” sessions. Each one offered exactly the same format and residents were free to come to any session that most suited them. The event was promoted by the Neighbourhood Plan Committee via advertisements in local publications and in the local area.

Format

Each session lasted for two hours and began with a presentation from URBED on the evolution of towns and the challenges facing them, an introduction to the Neighbourhood Plan process and a summary of the results of the scoping questionnaire.

Attendees were then invited to get into groups and answer a series of questions about the Neighbourhood Plan Vision and Objectives. Each group was facilitated either by a member of the URBED team or a local councillor.

Recording Results

During the session results were recorded on large flip charts. These comments were then collected by URBED and recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. URBED grouped the comments for each question into common themes and in this way were able to identify which topics or statement came up most frequently. The results in this report show the frequency of the general topics and comments to allow for some analysis of the data. These are also accompanied on some pages by a selection of direct quotes to provide a sense of the discussions that were taking place.

Vision and Objectives Workshop Reponses

Question 1: What do we know about the Parish?

Results

This question was designed as something of a warm up question, getting attendees comfortable with speaking and participating by sharing their knowledge of the local area. It was also a good opportunity for URBED as outsiders to learn more about the Parish from the residents themselves. We can see from some of the responses that people were very keen to begin drilling down into the issues straight away so there is some repetition here between answers to this question and later responses.

Responses were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and then grouped according to common statements. We can see below that a lot of the comments focused on a lack of services, vulnerability to flooding, poor retail choice and poor public transport. However residents also highlighted positives like a friendly and strong community and rich history.

Most Common Responses	
Lack of public services (GP, Dentist, School)	9
Vulnerable to flooding	7
Not enough retail choice/too many of certain shops	5
Poor public transport	5
Friendly/good community	4
Historic town	4
Commuter town	3
Generations of the same family	3
Need for more maintenance	3

Biodiversity/unique species	2
Festivals	2
Forgotten/Isolated	2
Parking Issues	2
Has a train station	2
High quality agricultural land	2
Market Town	2
Town centre decline	2
Traffic congestion	2
Unique culture	2

Active Town Council	1
Cheap land	1
Developable Land is physically constrained	1
Fenland Council has too much influence	1
Good business rates	1
Good Leisure Centre/Parks	1
High quality landscape	1
Independent shops	1
Lack of employment opportunities	1
Lack of police	1
Lots of small villages	1
Population is changing	1
Not enough infrastructure coming with development	1
Significant heritage	1
Affluent area	1
Unimplemented planning permissions	1
Used to be navigable by boat	1
Vandalism/antisocial behaviour	1

Question 1: What do we know about the Parish?

A selection of quotes/responses

“Historic brickworks, Bronze Age heritage at Must Farm.”

“Families been here for years”

“It’s friendly!”

“It floods!”

“Flooding can be a spectator sport: Fens skaters when the washes flood”

“Unique culture and events – Straw Bear, Whittlesey Festival and Music Festival.”

“An old medieval market town”

“The story of the Straw Bear”

“You could navigate it by boat – Eastrea and Coates used to be islands”

“The ‘forgotten entity of the UK’ that road links have always bypassed, leading to a form of isolationism.”

Question 2: What should the Neighbourhood Plan do?

Results

This question was designed to start drawing out the aspirations for what the Neighbourhood Plan might achieve. This question and subsequent questions prompted comments on a lot of non-planning matters that cannot necessarily be addressed by the Neighbourhood Plan. Facilitators in each group provided some guidance as the session progressed and the forthcoming workshop will include some capacity building in this area.

As this workshop was primarily about developing a vision and aspirations the non-planning statements have still been recorded as they tell a story about issues residents consider important. This report will attempt to provide some commentary on which statements can be considered planning matters. Non-planning matters will be fed back to the Town Council and can be pursued outside of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

Most Common Responses	
Improve public transport	8
Ensure enough GP/Dentist capacity	6
Reflect/highlight opinions of residents	6
Ensure enough infrastructure	5
Ensure enough school places	5
Improve business/employment opportunities	5
Protect and improve facilities for vulnerable people - young, old, those with additional needs	4

Consider a bypass	3
Promote the area/tourism	3
Protect and improve recreation/open spaces	3
Protect and improve the natural environment/views	3
Support/diversify industry	3
Consider utilities/water pressure	2
Improve policing	2
Improve sustainability/be more environmentally friendly	2
Reduce new housing	2
Support local retail	2
Address parking issues	1
Allocate sites and dictate appropriate types of development	1
Define identity for the area	1
Improve design of new development	1
Improve marketplace	1
Improve walking and cycling facilities	1
Include outlying villages	1
Increase funding for existing services	1
Prevent development to the north of Whittlesey	1
Protect agricultural land	1
Protect and enhance heritage assets	1
Provide social housing	1
Retain young people	1
Road improvements	1

Planning and non-planning matters

Neighbourhood Plan policies can only deal with the development and use of land. This is because, if it is successful at examination and referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the development plan on which planning permissions will be decided. Because it must deal only with the development and use of land a Neighbourhood Plan has limited scope to address non-planning matters like litter or policing.

However the process of producing a Neighbourhood Plan can really inspire people and local businesses to think of ways of improving their neighbourhood. Wider community aspirations like these can be included in a Neighbourhood Plan but must be clearly identifiable and separated in a companion document or annex.

Aspirations can also be turned into valid policies by looking at them differently. For example a desire for improved public transport could turn into a policy requiring new development to be close to bus stops, potentially increasing the number of users and prompting service improvements

Question 2: What should the Neighbourhood Plan do?

A selection of quotes/responses

Planning matters

“Specify locations of development and type of development.”

“Protect heritage assets – mud walls and Bronze Age features”

“Need for social housing”

“Better design”

Non- planning matters

“Improve police facilities.”

“improve leisure/sport facilities”

“Better marketing of Whittlesey”

Question 3: What should the Parish be like in the future?

Results

This question was designed to get residents thinking about the future of the area and in a more long term, strategic way. This question leads on to two follow up questions, which look at the potential barriers to achieving this future, and the assets that can help them achieve it.

We can see that respondents really value the sense of community in the area and do not want to lose this. While this isn't a planning matter as such it is a very positive aspiration to have when starting to develop a vision for the Parish. Common themes center around the idea of Whittlesey Parish being a thriving, vibrant and successful place, as well as being safe and well connected. These responses will help us to draw out a vision and set of objectives to inform the next stage of the Neighbourhood Plan.

There's a strong sense of community	5
The town centre is thriving	5
There is a vibrant market and associated events	5
There is a safe and secure environment	4
The area has a strong, unique identity	4
There are lots of different successful shops	4
There are places to meet and socialise in the evening	4
The area is well connected by good public transport links	4

The area is a destination for heritage tourism	3
Everyone's needs are cared for	3
There's a diverse and sustainable population with a mix of younger and older people	3
There's plenty of facilities and things to do for younger and older people	3
There's plenty of local arts, culture and events	3
There are new job opportunities and a high level of employment	3
The area is visually attractive	3

There is adequate infrastructure	2
The area is clean and well maintained	2
Parking is still free	2
There are plenty of school places, GP's and Dentists	2
Local people have control over local issues	2
Whittlesey has a bypass	1
Whittlesey is a commuter town with money being spent there	1
There's enough affordable and social housing	1
The area has local control of S106 spending	1
Traffic and congestion is not an issue	1
Crime is low	1
The area is part of Peterborough County Council - not Cambridge	1
Local industry is thriving	1
The town centre has a supermarket	1
It's a welcoming place	1
New development is well planned and well designed	1
Young people are engaged with local issues and involved in the Town Council	1

Portrait of a future Whittlesey Parish

It's the year 2037 and a visitor has arrived in Whittlesey. It's their first visit to the area - they were attracted by the fascinating heritage and are particularly keen to see the mud walls and explore the Bronze Age settlement at Must Farm.

Our visitor strolls down Market Street admiring the thriving town centre. There are many different shops and businesses and they don't seem to be short of customers! On rounding the corner they encounter a bustling market. The stalls are bursting with unique local produce and the visitor gets chatting to a friendly stallholder while sampling a local ale.

The stallholder has lived in the area all his life, as have several generations of his family. He's seen the area change over the years; new people have moved into the community, attracted by well - designed new housing in sustainable locations, great public transport access and excellent local services. New residents feel welcome and part of a strong community, and the population is now a sustainable mix of both younger and older people. The growth in population has helped to support local businesses, which is why the town centre and market are doing so well.

Question 4: What might the barriers be to achieving this future?

Results

This question was designed to provoke discussion about the potential limitations of the aspirations in the previous questions and to highlight any barriers to achieving the vision. The aim was to challenge residents to think critically and practically about what can be achieved.

Overwhelmingly responses to this question centred on a lack of local power and the dominance of the District Council in decision-making. In some ways this is a common position for a small town in a wider Local Authority but it did seem to be felt more acutely here. Residents were made aware that although the Neighbourhood Plan cannot contradict or undermine the Local Plan, it will form a statutory planning document and so will carry some weight in decision-making.

Residents also identified the very real financial limitations, recognising that a lack of funding and investment would limit the potential for drastic change.

Wider Policies and Politics/Not enough local power	14
Lack of funding/investment	9
Lack of facilities/services	4
Apathy/lack of motivation	4

Fenland District Council	3
Access/highways issues	3
Poor public transport	2
Plan may not reflect local views	2
Lack of political will/leadership	2

Resistance to change	1
Physical constraints	1
Non planning issues that can't be addressed by the NHP	1
Lack of skills	1
Lack of parking	1
Lack of land	1
Lack of infrastructure	1
Lack of commitment	1
Lack of affordable/diverse housing	1
Economic Uncertainty	1
Developer objections	1
Competition from surrounding area	1
Changing population	1
Business rates/rent	1
Brexit	1

Question 4: What might the barriers be to achieving this future?

A selection of quotes/responses

“Inability to change the system
(authority)”

“Local resistance to
change”

“Capacity of local services”

“Lack of doctors space and
school places won’t attract
families”

“Highway capacity issues – road closures
leave very few alternative routes.”

“Only some issues can
be addressed by NP”

“Not listening to local residents”

“Infrastructure restrictions”

Question 5: What assets do we have that can help achieve this future?

Results

Here we asked residents to think positively about their local area and consider the potential opportunities and assets that could help deliver the vision. The responses highlighted a real sense of pride in the local area and start to provide insight into what assets the Neighbourhood Plan might seek to protect.

Many responses focused on heritage assets, particularly Must Farm. Residents wanted these to be protected and to become a selling point for the area. Responses also highlighted the unique landscape and biodiversity of the Fens, as well as the unique local culture and festivals. The potential to make more of existing public transport links in the Parish was also mentioned frequently.

Heritage Assets	10
Motivated community and Councillors	8
Local Culture and Festivals	8
Waterways/The Fens	6
Environment/Landscape	6
Railway Station and Public Transport Potential	5
Good Schools	5
Biodiversity/Nature	4

Close to Peterborough	3
Fishing tourism	3
Available/affordable Land	3
Road Connections	2
Lesiure Centre	2
Drainage System/Water Management	2

Good Topography for cycling	1
Market	1
Local Businesses	1
Industrial Area	1
Independent shops	1
Hotels	1
Free Parking	1
Attractive Town Centre	1
Architecture	1

Question 5: What assets do we have that can help achieve this future?

A selection of quotes/responses

“Important waterways – used for leisure, tourism, narrow boats”

“Culture- there are things in Whittlesey that you don’t get anywhere else”

“Sunset/sunrise over the countryside”

“Committed individuals, enthusiasm of residents and Councilors”

“Unique culture/very specific identity – festivals, straw bear etc”

“Transport links possibilities”

“Closeness to Peterborough”

“Spire of St Mary”

“Wildlife of the Fens – herons, kites, adders, deer, cranes, owls”

Question 6: What assets do we have that can help achieve this future?

Results

The final question was designed to get residents thinking about the kind of policies that might be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. Most responses to this question did not directly suggest a particular policy or strategy. In grouping the responses to this question URBED have tried to reframe the statements that residents made around the idea of draft policies or strategies, to help with the next stage of the process.

We have not included the frequency of responses here as there was not such a clear hierarchy of importance, and actually all the suggested ideas are worth exploring further in the next stage. Again there are some policy suggestions that could be seen to deal with non-planning issues. These can be explored and refined at the next stage of the process and may need to be reframed or included as aspirations in a separate companion document.

More local autonomy/engagement
Require more/better consultation
Policy to prevent developers challenging CIL/S106/Affordable housing
Mechanism to spend S106 locally
More developer contributions/infrastructure to support development
Transport strategy
Design policy
Allocate land for industrial uses
Stronger policy on flood zone development
Policy on location of new development
Policy on parking provision for new development
Policy on housing mix
Arts and leisure policy
Encourage a Supermarket
Engage with developers
Heritage protection policy
Highways policy
Allocate land for housing
Housing density policy
Strategy to provide adequate infrastructure
Landscape/biodiversity protection
Policy on back garden development
Sustainability policy for new homes
Policy to support business
Village separation policy