

INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION

Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan

Report of Chief Officer – Planning & Climate Change

PURPOSE OF REPORT			
To request authorisation for the submission of the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan for independent examination and endorsement of the Council's response to the Regulation 16 Consultation.			
Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referral from Cabinet Member
Date of notice of forthcoming key decision	N/A		
This report is public			

RECOMMENDATION OF THE CHIEF OFFICER – PLANNING & CLIMATE CHANGE

- a. That the content of the Council's response to the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan (as set out in Appendix A of this Report) is noted and submission of the response to help inform the independent examination is approved.
- b. Following formal Regulation 16 consultation is completed that the submission of the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan for examination is approved.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Neighbourhood planning is promoted via the 2011 Localism Act as a method for communities to address planning matters at a very local level through the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. Such a plan can allow the community to plan positively for future growth allowing them to identify how and where new development should be promoted and tackle a range of planning issues which are pertinent to their area.
- 1.2 The preparation of a neighbourhood plan involves consultation with the local community and a range of other stakeholders, examination by an independent examiner to test its soundness and robustness and finally needs to be ratified by a local referendum.
- 1.3 Once completed, a neighbourhood plan becomes part of the local development plan for the district and is a material consideration in the decision-making process.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Scotforth Rural area is one of twelve areas within the district which have been designated for the purposes of Neighbourhood Planning. This designation was proposed by the Scotforth Parish Council on and subsequently approved by Lancaster City Council (City Council) on 27 January 2023.
- 2.2 Since the point of designation, Scotforth Parish Council have been working on the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for their area which seeks to tackle a range of planning issues. The Parish Council have been assisted by an external planning consultations that have provided planning support and advice in the preparation of their Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.3 The City Council, as part of the Neighbourhood Plan Protocol, offers assistance and support to Neighbourhood Plan groups. In relation to Scotforth Rural area, meetings and email/information exchanges have taken place since the area designation to assist with the preparation of the plan.
- 2.4 On 17 February 2025 the Parish Council published a draft neighbourhood plan for consultation in accordance with Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. Consultation concluded on the 31 March 2025.
- 2.5 The City Council provided an informal officer response to the content and direction of that draft plan, giving further information and guidance on how to strengthen its content. This covered matters such as their approach towards creating an Area of Separation around Bailrigg Village to protect its character, the creation of a character area around Lower Burrow and policy positions relating to the wider landscape, the natural environment, design, water management and cycling and walking. The intention of the response was to provide the Parish Council with the opportunity to address these matters as they sought to finalise their Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.6 The Parish Council has now finalised their neighbourhood plan and have submitted their completed plan to the City Council in accordance with Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. Now, under Regulation 16, the City Council is required to formally consult on the content of the neighbourhood plan with all interested parties and stakeholders.
- 2.7 Consultation began on the neighbourhood plan on Thursday 2nd October 2025 and will last for a 6-week period, concluding on Monday 17th November 2025. As part of the consultation process the City Council will provide a response in relation to how the Neighbourhood Plan addresses the basic conditions for neighbourhood planning. The basic conditions include:
 - a. Have regard to national planning policy and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - b. That the Plan contributes towards sustainable development;
 - c. That the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained within the district-wide local plan; and
 - d. That the plan does not breach EU Obligations.

3.0 SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

- 3.1 The neighbourhood plan is considered to provide a robust and appropriate response to planning matters in accordance with national and local planning policies. The Neighbourhood Plan policies build upon those in the Local Plan and seeks to delivery one of the principles set out in Policy SG1 of the Strategic Policies & Land Allocations DPD in regard to the definition of an Area of Separation around Bailrigg Village.
- 3.2 The Neighbourhood Plan also sets out the identification of a character area in Lower Burrow making use of a range of evidence to support its content. It is anticipated
- 3.3 The Plan includes a range of policy areas which seek to add further local detail to a range of issues, including the protection of the local landscape, retention of natural features such as trees, hedgerows and ponds, effective water management and the delivery of improved network for cycling and walking. All these matters are broadly consistent with both national and local planning policy.
- 3.4 As set out in the Council's detailed response (which can be seen in Appendix A) the Council have raised and described a series of minor matters which will need to be considered by the Examiner through the examination process. These comments are intended to ensure the clarification of a number of points which will ensure that the neighbourhood plan can be used effectively by the City Council when determining planning applications within the neighbourhood plan area. As part of the detailed response (in Appendix A) the Council have, where appropriate to do so, recommended where modifications could be made.

4.0 OPTIONS AND OPTIONS ANALYSIS (including Risk Assessment)

- 4.1 The City Council have the option to provide comments highlighting concerns over the robustness and soundness of the plan at this stage, or to provide no comment and allow the plan to progress to examination where these issues may or may not be addressed by the independent examiner.
- 4.2 Should the Council not provide a response to the plan then there is no doubt that the examiner will request the Council to clarify their position on the plan as part of the examination process. There is a risk that should the Council fail to set out their position prior to the examination that any issues and concerns are not fully addressed and the Council will be left to make use of a neighbourhood plan which is not fully fit for purpose in terms of determining future development and planning applications.
- 4.2 Given it is the duty of the City Council to provide advice and guidance to neighbourhood plan groups in order to give them the best opportunity of preparing a plan which will be found sound at examination, it is considered important that a response is provided so that any issues can be adequately considered by the independent examiner.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 It is hoped that the response to the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that any outstanding matters of concern can be fully considered by the independent examiner and satisfactorily addressed.

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Neighbourhood Planning contributes to the Council's corporate plan priorities, in particular, sustainable economic growth.

Once adopted, neighbourhood plans will form part of the Council's Lancaster District Local Plan.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, HR, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

A neighbourhood plan will directly impact local communities. However, this impact will be subject to the plans focus e.g. housing, local facilities, open space etc. Equality and diversity and sustainability impact assessments will be required as part of the neighbourhood plan development process.

Neighbourhood planning provides rural communities with an opportunity to shape future development in their area, as well as helping to protect and conserve their heritage and environment (in line with the District's Local Plan and national planning policy guidance).

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council's Legal duties are set out within the body of this Report and within the relevant sections of the Localism Act 2011.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the request to endorse the content of the Council response to the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan. Staff time has been / will be covered from within existing resources.

As noted in the original report back in 2015, the referendum stage will incur costs for the Council. These are funded by MHCLG and will be subject to a further report prior to commencement.

OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Human Resources:

Officer support has been put in place for neighbourhood planning.

Information Services:

None.

Property:

None.

Open Spaces:

None.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

BACKGROUND PAPERS	Contact Officer: Paul Hatch Telephone: 01524 582329 E-mail: phatch@lancaster.gov.uk
Appendix A – Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan (weblink only)	
Appendix B – Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan: Lancaster City Council Response to Regulation 16 Consultation (October 2025)	