

# **Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan**

## **Lancaster City Council Response to Regulation 16 Consultation**

### **October 2025**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Lancaster City Council (Council) welcomes the submission of the Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Development Plan (referred to as 'the Plan' from this point forward) and recognises the significant amount of time, effort and work the local community has put into its production to date, taking a positive and proactive approach to plan-making. The council have been fully supportive of the Scotforth Rural Parish Council's (the Parish) decision to prepare a neighbourhood plan for their area and have provided support to aid the group's preparation of the plan.
- 1.2 Through dialogue with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group since the initial designation in January 2023, the Council have been aware of the wide variety of consultation events that have been held with the community. These events have helped identify issues which are important in the locality, gain consensus and draw conclusions to how such matters can be addressed.
- 1.3 This document forms the Council's response to the Regulation 16 consultation and is intended to support the Parish Council and the Independent examiner. For ease of reference, the comments set out in Section 4 of this response are according to the relevant sections of the Plan.

#### **2. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND NATIONAL POLICY**

##### **Legal Requirements**

- 2.1 When a qualifying body, in this case Scotforth Parish Council, submits a neighbourhood plan, the local authority is required to consider whether the legal process has been followed, whether the submission meets the requirements, to publicise the neighbourhood plan and arrange for independent examination.
- 2.2 The Scotforth Rural Neighbourhood Plan Area was designated on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023 following the consultation process which was required at the time. The Parish Council has followed the required processes including pre-submission Regulation 14 consultation and publicity between 17<sup>th</sup> February to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 2.3 The submission must include:
  - A map or statement identifying the area to which the plan relates;
  - The Neighbourhood Plan;
  - A Consultation Statement;
  - A Basic Conditions Statement (a statement on how the plan fulfils the basic conditions).

- 2.4 All the above documents have been submitted together with supporting evidence. The Consultation Statement and Basic Conditions Statement are considered to fulfil the requirements for their content.
- 2.5 The local authority is not required to assess whether the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions. That is the role of the independent examination. It is however expected to provide advice and support to help produce a plan that does meet the requirements. The basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4b of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) are as follows:
- (a) Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the order.
  - (b) The making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.
  - (c) The making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area).
  - (d) The making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations.
  - (e) The prescribed conditions are met in relation to the neighbourhood plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal. The prescribed condition in relation to Plans is:
- 2.6 The making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitat Regulation Assessment) in relation to the examination of neighbourhood development plans.

### **National Planning Policy**

- 2.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (referred to as ‘the NPPF’ from this point forward) was published in December 2024. Changes have also been made to the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and further changes are expected in regard to both documents during the course of 2025.
- 2.8 The NPPF sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. In doing so, it sets out the requirements for preparation of neighbourhood plans. All plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area, align growth and infrastructure, enhance the environment, mitigate and adapt to climate change. Paragraph 30 of the NPPF states,
- ‘Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies’.*
- 2.9 Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, neighbourhood plans should also have regard to the core planning principles that underpin plan-making set out in paragraph 16 of the NPPF. The key principles highlight that plans should be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development; be positively prepared (in a way that is aspirational but deliverable); be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory

consultees; contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals; be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentations and serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area.

### 3. LANCASTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN

#### Current Local Plan Position

- 3.1 The Council adopted a Local Plan for Lancaster District in July 2020 (Local Plan). This was then the subject of an immediate Partial Review to ensure the plan better reflected the Council's objectives in respect of climate change. The Local Plan (climate emergency review) was adopted by the Council in January 2025.
- 3.2 The Local Plan consists of two key components, the **Strategic Policies and Land Allocations (Climate Emergency Review) DPD (SPLADPD)** which sets out a series of strategic policies which will guide future development, in terms of scale, location and growth. The DPD also contains a series of land allocations to identify where future growth needs will be met and land which has been protected for its environmental, social or economic value. The second part is the **Development Management (Climate Emergency Review) DPD (DMDPD)** which sets out a series of generic planning policies which are used by the Council to determine planning applications. The policies of the DPD are applicable to all development proposals across the entire district (unless the plan directs otherwise).
- 3.3 In 2023, following the withdrawal of funding for major infrastructure, it became unclear how some of the objectives of the 2020 Local Plan, including the delivery of strategic housing growth in South Lancaster, could no longer be viably achieved. The loss of such a strategic housing delivery site, coupled with a persistent under delivery of housing against the targets set in the plan triggered the need for a full and comprehensive review of the Local Plan. This full and comprehensive review includes revisiting issues around the scale and spatial distribution of development, what areas should be protected and how the key issues such as the Council's ambitions on action of the climate emergency can be addressed.
- 3.4 Work on this Full Local Plan Review is ongoing and is being prepared in the context of the new plan-making system. The Council issued a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) setting out the anticipated timetable for Local Plan production and is available on the [Council's website](#). Until the completion of the Local Plan Review the starting point for planning decisions remain the content and direction of the 2020 Lancaster District Local Plan and where appropriate, supplemented by the 2025 Partial Review.

#### Relevant Strategic Policies

- 3.5 Policy SP3 of the SPLADPD sets out the development strategy for Lancaster District. The policy aims to meet the development needs of the district by promoting an urban-focused approach towards development, supplemented with additional large development sites in greenfield locations. The development strategy is further supported by development in 'sustainable settlements' as defined by the hierarchy set out in Policy SP2 of the SPLADPD.

- 3.6 There are no settlements in the Scotforth Rural Parish which fall into the ‘sustainable settlement’ category with the communities of both Bailrigg and Lower Burrow not identified in the settlement hierarchy. This means that these settlements are not considered to be sustainable locations for future development and where development will only be supported for small-scale development where there is a clearly demonstrated and evidenced local need.
- 3.7 The neighbourhood plan area is situated to the south of Lancaster and much of the area designation falls with a ‘Broad Location for Growth’ as identified in Policy SG1 of the SPLADPD. The Local Plan identifies this location as an area to explore the delivery of a new settlement – Bailrigg Garden Village – as a strategic option to deliver future housing needs in the district. It was intended that opportunities for growth in this area would be addressed in more detail through the preparation of a bespoke Area Action Plan for South Lancaster.
- 3.8 Whilst work began on the Lancaster South Area Action Plan in 2022 the delivery of development in this area was predicated on the provision of critical highways and transport infrastructure which would open the area up to the wide highway network. This infrastructure was to be delivered by Lancashire County Council (as highways and transport authority) and funded through a successful bid to the Government’s Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF). This bid secured in the region of £140 million to deliver highway and transport infrastructure in the South Lancaster area and facilitate the growth anticipated via the Local Plan.
- 3.9 However, through the course of 2022 and into 2023 the project suffered from the impacts of inflationary pressures, driving up project costs for the work. Whilst alternative options were investigated to bridge the growing financial gap around rising project costs, no realistic solution was found. It resulted in the HIF monies being returned to the Government and work on infrastructure improvement in South Lancaster being suspended.
- 3.10 As a consequence, this led to the City Council (as planning authority) ceasing work on the Area Action and triggering a Full Review of their Local Plan. The basis for the review was the loss of a key strategic housing delivery site and triggering the mechanisms for Review as set out in Policy LPRM1 of the SPLADPD.
- 3.11 The City Council are in the early stages of preparing that review, which will be undertaken via the new system of plan-making. Until such a time that the new Local Plan is in place, the content and direction for planning in the district remains the SPLADPD and DMDPD.
- 3.12 Therefore, the implications and direction of Policy SG1 in the SPLADPD still remains a starting point which still facilitates the opportunity for growth within the ‘Broad Location for Growth’.
- 3.13 In the context of this neighbourhood plan it is important to note the direction of Policy SG1 in regard to the provision of an area of separation. Point 6 of Policy SG1 states the following:

*‘The creation of sufficient areas of high-quality open spaces to provide a distinct sense of place and deliver a network of green corridors and walking and cycling routes across the South Lancaster area to the benefit of the local environment and residents. The delivery of such spaces and routes should make for distinct areas of separation between the new development and the urban edge of Lancaster, Bailrigg Village and Galgate and give potential to bring forward a new country park.’*

- 3.14 According, one of the key elements of this neighbourhood plan, specifically the delivery of an area of separation around the village of Bailrigg, is consistent with the direction of Policy SG1.

#### **4. SCOTFORTH RURAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

- 4.1 This section sets out the comments which the Council have on the Plan. The Council recognise and welcome some amendments which have been made to the Plan in light of responses made at previous stages.
- 4.2 The Plan sets out a positive approach to development within the Parish given its context as a rural settlement. The Plan does not seek to curtail the sites allocated for development in the Local Plan, promotes housing development that meets identified needs and promotes infill sites, previously developed land and conversion.

##### **Vision and Objectives**

- 4.3 The City Council supports the vision and objectives of the Plan which are consistent with the spatial strategy for the district. The objectives promote conservation, protection and enhancement of the local landscape, biodiversity, good design, promote sustainable transport, and measures to reduce flood risk.

##### **Policy SR1: Bailrigg Village Area of Separation and Development Boundary**

- 4.4 The aims of the policy are supported and, as suggested in paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14 of this response, are considered to be in broad conformity with the adopted Local Plan.
- 4.5 The Council have previously had concerns with elements of the detail around the proposed Area of Separation, specifically the lack of clearly defined boundaries and the evidence which has been used to support the designation. The Council and the neighbourhood plan group have sought to engage in a positive and proactive manner to explore these concerns both prior to and following Regulation 14 consultation on the neighbourhood plan.
- 4.6 The City Council would support the principle of an 'Area of Separation' in this area which is consistent with the sentiment of Policy SG1 and accept that the *Landscape Character Assessment and Evidence Base to Define an Area of Separation in Scotforth* represents a sufficiently robust and evidential approach to define the boundaries to this designation.
- 4.7 The Council note that further additional photographic evidence has been supplied in the Plan at Appendix 2 which is welcomed and provides further contextual information for readers and users of the document.
- 4.8 Paragraph 4 of the Plan indicates that Appendix 2 of the Plan includes a discussion note explaining how development proposals have influenced the extent of the proposed areas. The discussion note provides useful context for the reasoning around how development proposals influence the definition of boundaries.
- 4.9 However, the Council would remain of the view that further detail could be drawn out of the evidential assessments to further strengthen the case for the designation and, in particular justification for the boundaries. This could be as simple as including some of the conclusions to this work within Appendix 2.

**Policy SR2: Small Scale Development in Burrow Heights and Lower Burrow Local Character Area**

- 4.10 As part of the consultation on the Regulation 14 version of the Plan a number of points of clarification were requested in relation to this policy, particularly in its presentation on the policy map and defining references in the policy itself, for instance the term ‘drumlin top’. These points of clarification have been addressed, and the City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR3: Landscape Character**

- 4.11 The City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR4: Hedgerows, Trees and Woodland**

- 4.12 The City Council support the purpose and rationale for this policy and the importance of seeking to retain natural features in new development where it is appropriate and reasonable to do so. The Council recognise that the value of natural features can bring to new development in terms of delivering high quality design and placemaking.
- 4.13 However, the City Council have concerns over the realism of the sentiments set out in the first paragraph of the policy. There are circumstances where it may not be possible to retain all hedgerows and trees – identified in the plan or otherwise. The City Council consider the wording to be overly onerous and unrealistic.
- 4.14 It is therefore recommended that the wording in the first paragraph of the policy be amended to encourage the retention and enhancement of all trees and hedgerows whilst acknowledging that there may be a need to deliver additional planting, replanting and replacements. These are matters which will need to be judged on a case-by-case basis when considering individual planning applications.

**Policy SR5: Wildlife & Biodiversity**

- 4.15 The City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR6: Responding to Local Character**

- 4.16 The City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR7: Sustainable Design**

- 4.17 The City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR8: Reducing Flood Risk and Improving Drainage**

- 4.18 The City Council have no further comments to make on the content and direction of this policy.

**Policy SR9: Walking, Cycling and Horse-Riding**

- 4.19 Through the Regulation 14 process, the City Council raised concerns regarding the clarity of the mapping provided in Maps 5 and 6 of the Plan. These concerns related to the legibility of the map’s key and the routes which were highlighted on the maps.
- 4.20 Many of these concerns have been addressed in the finalised version of the plan, however an area of clarification still exist and should be addressed in the final version of the plan. On Map 5, the Parish Council (which is highlighted as a yellow line on the map) should be included on the map’s key for clarity.

**Monitoring Framework**

- 4.21 The inclusions of a monitoring framework in Section 11 is welcomed and the monitoring data identified supported in terms of how the policies will be measured.
- 4.22 However, the framework currently lacks information on who's responsibility it will be to monitor the plan (it will be the Parish Council to monitor the effectiveness of the Plan). There is also currently a lack of direction in the framework regarding when the Plan will be monitored. It is recommended that further wording be included to indicate the effectiveness of the plan will be monitored on an annual basis by the Parish Council. This would ensure that the Group are aware of the effectiveness of the policies with the opportunity for action should this be required.

**Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA)**

- 4.23 SEA and HRA screenings were carried out on the Plan (in January 2025) prior to its submission. The HRA screening concluded that the Plan would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of designated sites either alone, or in combination with other plans and policies. The SEA screening concluded that the Plan is unlikely to result in significant environmental effects. The 3 statutory bodies have confirmed these conclusions.

**Conclusion**

- 4.24 The Council supports the policies in the Plan and consider that they are in conformity with national and local plan policies and meet the requirements of the basic conditions. Notwithstanding this, there are some issues in relation to clarity that the Council have highlighted for the Examiner and Steering Group's consideration.
- 4.25 Should the examiner require further information, evidence or discussion on any of the matters raised in the response the Council will be happy to assist in this matter.