

Combined Responses to Questionnaires: Summaries

30 April 2023

Introduction

The consultation discussion documents provided to all who attended the Consultation Event in Whittingham on 11 March 2023 set out the key issues that are likely be addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan. The hope was that the responses would guide the steering group as to priorities and give some measure of confidence in moving towards draft policies. The questionnaire also asked for more unstructured views on issues of concern and suggestions which are summarised separately. These too are important in guiding the next steps. A summary of the responses to each theme presented at the consultation event is addressed below.

The numbers voting on each question, and the comments recorded on the questionnaires by respondents, are given in full on the long version (48 pages in length), also available on the Parish Council website. The present document is intended to give the briefest abstract of the major conclusions to be drawn.

The next steps

The responses to the event on the 11 March gave a detailed picture of the idea and concerns of the many people who attended. They cover a very wide range of issues. This was our hope. We now need to spend some time analysing the responses in detail in order to arrive at a balanced picture of residents' priorities.

The Neighbourhood Plan will only be able to address some of the issues raised, primarily because it is restricted to those developments and changes which need planning permission. Some things, like speeding traffic, obviously very important to people, cannot be addressed directly through the Neighbourhood Plan and so it is the intention to raise them in the appropriate forums, primarily the Parish Council but also other bodies such as the County Council, that can be expected to do something about them. In this way the ideas and concerns that were expressed can be given due consideration.

Once there has been time to draw up draft policies for the Neighbourhood Plan, hopefully reflecting these valuable responses, there will be another round of consultation — this time on the Draft Plan. The community will thus have a full opportunity to consider whether the proposals put forwards in this Draft meet its expectations, as expressed at the recent consultation event.

Landscape and Environment summary

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.'

Voters were similarly strongly against industrial and commercial development in the parish, and against commercial leisure pursuits and facilities. Votes were almost equally divided for and against renewable energy installations. Comments included strongly negative reactions to the Vale View development on the Callaly Road; mass housing developments, as at Longframlington, were clearly condemned.

Settlement Summary

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.

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.

Sustainability summary

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.

Design summary

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.

Heritage summary

Only Whittingham has a conservation area so the responses apply to the village only. There is no suggestion that Callaly or Alnham should have conservation area status. Designating Conservation Areas is strictly a local authority power and duty.

There was little support for changing the current boundary of the conservation area. 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.

Traffic summary

A large majority of responses concerned speeding traffic in Whittingham and a number of these related to lorries, forestry and agricultural vehicles speeding, particularly at school opening and closing times. Comments pointed to the increasing volume of traffic, the confusing multiplicity of speed signs and the frequent lack of compliance. Respondents from Callaly and Alnham were neutral on the issue of speeding.

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.

Lack of footpaths/pavements in and around Whittingham was highlighted in a number of responses.