

# GREAT AYCLIFFE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN



## Notes of a meeting of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan Retail Thematic Group, held on Monday 24 August 2015.

**Present:** Cllr B Hall  
 Cllr J P Hillary  
 Cllr Mrs W P Hillary  
 Mrs C Benson  
 Mr J Snowball  
 Mrs S Cooke  
 Mr S Barker – Prism Planning

**Officers:** Mrs CA Walton – Corporate & Policy Officer  
 Miss A Donald – Town Clerk's PA

Item No	Discussion	Action
1.	<b>Apologies for Absence</b> P Taylor, E French	
2.	<b>Introductions</b> Steve Barker of Prism Planning was present to offer guidance and to explain the limitations of the Neighbourhood Plan with regard to retail provision.	
3.	<b>Neighbourhood Planning Background</b> All members present were familiar with the background of the Neighbourhood Plan. It was emphasised that the Neighbourhood Plan would only add to the existing National Planning Policy Framework and the County Durham Plan and would therefore only cover items not already included in these documents. It was essential that all items included in the Plan should be viable, sustainable and clearly evidenced from public consultation.  Although improved retail provision had been a key feature of residents' responses to the NP questionnaire, a Retail Thematic Group had not been set up until the results of the Soft Market Testing were known.  It was agreed it would have been a waste of everyone's time looking into options that were then not viable or evidenced when the retail assessment was completed.	
4.	<b>Neighbourhood Plan Hand Over</b> Following the resignation of Angela Corner to take up a new position, all previous paperwork had been reviewed, in date sequence, and a detailed handover information sheet drawn up from this information.	



	<p>This was intended to indicate, to all Steering Group and Thematic Group members, objectives identified and the current position on every question and option that had been discussed to date. These had been categorised under the themes highlighted from the questionnaire responses and previously agreed by Steering Group members.</p> <p>The Housing theme had been expanded to include all information discussed to date and the former Objective 6 – Transport and Access had been incorporated into Housing to avoid unnecessary duplication. It was noted that parking issues inevitably covered both Environment and Housing themes.</p> <p>Two objectives had been identified from discussions regarding Theme 3 – Retail - and the issue of providing local jobs where possible had also been included in this theme as the most appropriate location. Theme 5 – Renewable Energy – was still under discussion with planning advisers and it was possible that this would be incorporated under the theme of Environment.</p> <p>In addition, columns had been included to indicate where items were already covered by existing planning policies, plus a column for further action to be taken. Where an item could not be dealt with under the remit of the Neighbourhood Plan, this had been clearly indicated in red typescript. Steve Barker, independent planning adviser, had reviewed both the information on and format of the handover sheet and agreed that the document would provide useful evidence for the planning inspector in due course.</p> <p>Working papers, which covered each theme in much more detail, were in the process of completion and would be available to the public for further reference if required.</p> <p>Steering Group members agreed that the handover sheets were a concise and accurate representation of discussions to date. It was emphasised that all Steering Group and Thematic Group members would receive exactly the same information so that everyone was aware of progress.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p><b>Soft Market Testing</b>                  The final report received from Sanderson Weatherall was circulated for members’ information. It was agreed that, while the results were disappointing, the evidence was</p>	



	<p>very clear that there was virtually no interest from retailers in locating a new store in Aycliffe.</p> <p>Comments received from residents from the retail section of the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire had been forwarded to a number of Freshwater contacts, in addition to the Town Centre Managers.</p> <p>A number of questions were directed to Steve Barker regarding the planning aspects of retail provision:</p> <p>Q – It was noted that other areas, ie Darlington, generally managed to fill their empty shops but Aycliffe did not.</p> <p>A – This is market led and unfortunately what is available does not always match what is required. The retail sector is undergoing many changes due to changing shopping habits. The recent decision of Sainsbury’s to pull out of the Middlehaven development on Teesside is a good example of this.</p> <p>Q – Smaller businesses seem to be migrating to the Business Park rather than using the Town Centre.</p> <p>A – This is a business decision – unfortunately, planning laws do not allow any control of this and a precedent has already been set.</p> <p>Q – Should we identify a local area/s for a retail development?</p> <p>A – There is no evidence that further retail development would be required. If a local site were to be identified and included in the Neighbourhood Plan, the independent inspector would reject this for lack of evidence. Furthermore, there would be a risk that the whole Plan could be rejected as unsound.</p> <p>There is a presumption in the NPPF towards new retail being located in the Town Centre as a priority, prior to other locations being considered. Sequential testing is used for this process and is followed by vitality and viability tests.</p> <p>It would be possible, in the Neighbourhood Plan, to support a small retail row of top-up services and shopping based on the Business Park but this was still being discussed with Durham County Council planners.</p>	
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	<p>Q – Will the expected new housing development and arrival of Hitachi in Aycliffe make a difference to the likelihood of retail investment?</p> <p>A – This is possible and it would therefore be advisable to review this aspect of the plan in perhaps 5 years’ time.</p> <p>It was suggested that the inclusion of a proposal saying local labour agreements are in place to ensure jobs are offered to local people first would be against the law.</p> <p>A – These are already in place and being used in a number of areas and are quite lawful.</p> <p>It was noted that many local businesses already use local labour agreements.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Your Issues, Our Proposals – Draft Consultation Paper</b> Initial drafts of this consultation paper contained only brief information, consequently each theme had been expanded and developed, using information from the handover summaries and working papers. It was emphasised that a careful balance had to be found between residents’ wishes and viable options.</p> <p>The theme of Retail had been explained in considerable depth in order to demonstrate that every possible effort had been made to address the concerns raised by residents in the questionnaire. Members present agreed that the wording explained the situation accurately.</p> <p>The Issues and Proposals consultation paper would be published in the Newton News as a pull-out, to allow residents to indicate their preferences. It would also be published on the Council’s website, in social media and via Survey Monkey. Paper copies would be available in the library and various public buildings and community centres, to allow the widest possible circulation.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>Character Assessment</b> An initial map had been received from the consultants carrying out this assessment, showing the parish divided into 15 distinct areas. An open consultation on this document had been advised by the consultants and this was planned for Thursday 1 October, 4.30pm-7pm, at the Youth Centre, as a drop-in session. Further details would follow when guidance was received from the consultants regarding the format the consultation should take.</p>	

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8.	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting</b></p> <p>The next meeting would be held on Thursday 1 October 2015 and would include members of the Steering Group and Thematic Groups. This would also form part of the Character Assessment consultation.</p> <p>The option of just having one meeting with all thematic groups and the steering group was discussed. It was agreed that as we were all now working on the same issues, joint meetings would be better.</p>	
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