

Neston Neighbourhood Plan

First monitoring report April 2018

Introductory Memorandum

1. It is our pleasure to submit the first Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Report (of which this memorandum is a part) for consideration at the Places Committee on 17th April. Attached is the Summary of Findings and a more detailed Review of Policies and Proposals.
2. We would first like to say that positive change is taking place and the work of members of the Town Council, CWaC and many others, acknowledged in the Review of Policies and Proposals, is recognised in helping to bring it about. We also recognise the scale and ambition of the Plan, reinforced by recent legislation, that puts the Town Council in an advantaged position as it seeks set Neston on course for the next thirty years. This Report seeks to position the Town Council to manage implementation and updating to best effect and drive it forward over that period of time.
3. We are, however, concerned that the Town Council has apparently lost sight of the Plan for the moment, which is understandable given the press of business, but we would like to raise its profile. In particular, we propose the appointment of a town councillor with lead responsibility for oversight and reporting and for the relationship between policy proposals and NNP objectives be made explicit in agenda reports.
4. We would like the Town Council to arrange for this Report to be looked at in more detail with our involvement. A number of potential action points are identified in the Review of Policies and Proposals.
5. Every Town Councillor should have a personal copy of the March 2016 version of the Neighbourhood Plan as well as access to all the other supporting documents of which the Appendices are the most important. They are all available on line but paper copies make for easier reference.
6. We would like the Town Council to fill vacant councillor seats on this Group and to support us in filling vacant resident seats.
7. We also request administrative support without which it will be difficult to deliver over time monitoring to the required standard.
8. Obviously, there is a lot to do but taken systematically over a period of time it should be manageable with the continuing support of the Monitoring Group.

Signed on behalf of Neston Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group

April 11th 2018

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Summary of findings

- (i) Plan Delivery and Implementation:** In Section 8 of the Neighbourhood Plan the Town Council promises a series of actions. While some things are happening, it is not clear that they are being systematically pursued in a coordinated way.
- (ii) Plan Monitoring and Review Annual:** In Section 9 of the Neighbourhood Plan the Town Council is committed to ensuring that the Plan is 'proactively monitored and reviewed over its lifetime' from its first adoption by the Planning and Environment Committee and reported to the Town Council on an annual basis. The Town Council adopted the NNP on 5th September 2015. There was no annual review in 2016 or 2017. This is the first.
- (iii) Plan Monitoring and Review Monthly:** Also, in Section 9 of the Plan, the Town Council is committed to monitoring on a monthly basis and reporting the application of NNP policies to its recommendations to the Planning Authority as well as decisions by the Planning Authority and any appeals. We are not aware that this has been happening; indeed, under the present arrangement applications are not considered formally unless someone queries them or they are regarded as significant.¹
- (iv) Neighbourhood Design Review Panel:** Section 9 of the Plan also makes provision for a Panel of persons with relevant professional expertise to advise the Town Council on design issues and to monitor relevant applications and report annually. It has not been set up. We suggest that the Town Council would find it potentially useful for applications of any size other than the most insignificant.

The Plan set out policies and proposals under nine headings in Section 7. This is a brief account. More detail is provided in the accompanying Review of Policies and Proposals.

- A. Strategy:** Protection of the Green Belt was strongly supported by the community and the NNPMG has seen no evidence that it is being seriously eroded. However, there have been applications, some successful, and substantial unrealised proposals by developers, so we think that Town Council should be aware of Green Belt exceptions and look carefully at all applications.

¹ Planning Application Procedure 19th August 2017, Neston Town Council; Guidance on Neighbourhood Planning 2016, Appendix A; CWaC

- B. Housing:** By March 2017, 190 new homes had been completed in the Plan Area so the CWaC Local Plan minimum target of 200 new homes in Neston between 2010 and 2030 has almost certainly been exceeded. However, of 190 completions a maximum of 39 (20.5%) are 'affordable' homes, significantly short of the Local Plan target average of 30 percent.
- C. Employment:** Some local job creation can be inferred from visible private investment and efforts are being made to improve and extend Clay Hill Business Park. The NNP proposals for small businesses is not being addressed, nor is the proposal for improved electronic connectivity.

The joint CWaC/Town Council Delivery Group set up in 2016 is charged with delivering the Neston Economic Development Plan and we have been additionally briefed by its Chairman. However, the Town Council's website shows no evidence of the follow-up that this promised.

- D. Neston Town Centre:** There has been beneficial private investment and renovations but premises in poor condition, not in keeping, some empty, remain visible. What impact retail and other changes have had upon the large proportion of residents who do their main food shop outside the town centre (70 per cent in 2003) is not known. The Friday market continues but others have failed. There has apparently been no interest in the NNP-proposed Brook Street Development Opportunity but there have been commercial lets on the site and the ex-Wetherspoons premises have become available for letting. Not-for-profit organisations have been allowed to use empty shops but this is not a permanent solution to such a dominant problem. Small changes and improvements have been carried out including at the railway station. A number of improvements remain outstanding. The 2013 Neston Town Centre Action Plan helped shape the Neighbourhood Plan but the extent to which this is still driving current action is unclear.
- E. Tourism:** Apart from the private investment referred to above, the Ropewalk car park in Parkgate and repairs to the sea wall, together with some small-scale infrastructure projects especially in Parkgate, major proposals in the NNP to enhance tourism assets have not been addressed.
- F. Movement and Travel:** We have been additionally briefed by the chairman of the Transport Group. While the main Sustrans routes are established and signed, other proposals for cycling, including safety issues, and the walking network are not being achieved. The minimum user requirement for buses and trains in the Town Council's 'Sustainable Transport Standard' produced by its Transport sub-group is not being met.
- G. Design:** The NNP sets out criteria for good design but we do not know how these are applied in practice by the Town Council. The proposed Neighbourhood Design Review Panel has not been established (see above). Policies proposing environmental improvements to main transport corridors have not been progressed.

- H. Landscape and Environment:** We have looked at the deliberations of the Neston Looking Better Group. It is good to find that 'Friends' organisations, and other local partnerships are sharing the care of some parts of Neston's Green Infrastructure. Trees have been planted in Drake Road, the Ropewalk car park and the Ropewalk playground. We have not been made aware of significant threats to trees and woodland but the lack of any monitoring makes it impossible to comment. Proposals for a review of locally-listed buildings by the Town Council has not been taken up.
- I. Community:** Apart from all banks having closed, community assets essential for a 'key service centre' have been largely retained. The diversification of Neston Youth and Community Centre as a multi-function community resource is welcomed. The new Neston High School Academy building has recently re-opened. The modernisation of the Recreation Centre which was a high priority for the community is taking place. There remain some related issues identified in the NNP for consideration. In the context of demographic change the NNP seeks to improve the health and well-being of the population through the application of a number of its policies; this aspect has not thus far been considered by the Town Council although Brio and CWaC are developing proposals.

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Review of Policies and Proposals

BACKGROUND

In the Referendum² on May 5th 2016, Neston voted by an 84 per cent majority (2930 for, 475 against) for the Neighbourhood Plan (NNP) to become part of the long-term statutory development plan for the civil parish. The *Localism Act of 2011* as well as accompanying regulations and guidance sets out the statutory basis of neighbourhood planning. The Plan was ‘made’, ie adopted, on 8th June 2016³ by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC). In the following year the *Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017* confirmed that neighbourhood planning is here to stay and that local planning authorities, in our case CWaC, must provide support. The same legislation allows for appropriate modification of NNPs thus enabling the Town Council to respond to changing circumstances within the time frame of the current programme. Consequently, the NNP is potentially the most effective instrument available to the Town Council in shaping the future development of the Area. We propose that the implications of this new legislation for Neston are reviewed as part of the follow-up to this Report.

The NNP was some three years in the making during which time an independent Community Steering Group (CSG) undertook research involving consultation and data analysis. It was adopted by the Town Council in September 2015 and submitted to CWaC, which, in turn, undertook required consultations with statutory undertakers and other bodies before scrutiny by an Independent Examiner whom, on 16th March 2016, subject to small amendments, recommended it should proceed to the Referendum referred to above.

MONITORING

Section 9 of the Plan requires the Town Council to ensure that the NNP is ‘pro-actively monitored and reviewed on an annual basis’ from the date when it was first adopted by the Town Council in September 2015. There was no monitoring report in 2016 or 2017. In order to fulfil this duty, the Town Council has established the *Neighbourhood Plan Monitoring Group (NNPMG)*, reporting to the Places Committee. Three changes of chairman and revised terms of reference including membership, as well as procedural delays, has constrained the exercise. Given the size and complexity of the Neston Plan we request that consideration is given to administrative support for the NNPMG.

² Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012

³ CWaC Decision Statement pursuant to Localism Act 2011 Schedule 38A(9) and Regulation 19 of the Neighbourhood Plan (General) Regulations 2012

It also requires a monthly scrutiny and report of the NNP's impact on local planning applications including design considerations.

APPROACH

This report looks at the bigger picture asking whether there is evidence that Neston is moving in the right direction at an appropriate pace. It can only deal with specified policy objectives. We have tried to write from the perspective of residents, rather than becoming entangled in the processes.

SUSTAINABILITY

During the original consultations, members of the public were asked what kind of a place they would like Neston to be in 2030. The changing population including more older residents and fewer younger ones, the decline in local employment and a shortage of lower-cost homes was creating the risk of an unbalanced population with consequences for services. People understood that doing nothing was not an option; when asked, 82 per cent⁴ voted for change so that Neston would remain sustainable. The NNP objectives are based upon their aspirations.

BIG MESSAGES

- **There are already signs that some of the NNP objectives are being progressed but the Town Council seems to have lost sight of the bigger picture; there are significant gaps.** Neston has had many reports but the NNP is the only comprehensive, researched, consulted-upon strategy that carries real authority so it is essential that it does not gather dust on a shelf like the ones that went before.
- **Things are changing for the better although it is still early days.** Yet implementation feels relatively fragmented and needs coordinating and directing more proactively. We suggest that the Town Council's strategic objectives should be fully-aligned with those of the Neighbourhood Plan. Also, while, in practice, implementation is delegated to separate standing committees, we propose the appointment of a town councillor with responsibility for oversight and reporting with the continuing support of the Monitoring Group.
- **Investment by local business, and voluntary action supported by local councillors and officials, and by town councillors, exemplified in this Report, is making much of the running in the short term plus we have been fortunate in major public investments at the High School and the Recreation Centre.** The higher-level infrastructure goals in the NNP that are less-well progressed, such as job creation, transport and housing, are long-term and depend traditionally on public authorities. We have become aware that the reducing capacity of public services is shifting us towards more local self-sufficiency and the NNP delivery plan should be prepared to consider local initiatives in service

⁴ Neston Neighbourhood Plan 2010-2030 Consultation Statement

sectors traditionally regarded as the remit of higher authorities.

CWaC is moving to take account of Neston's specific needs and opportunities. At a local level this Report exemplifies how officers and councillors have become productively engaged with local initiatives. At a higher level, the CWaC *Rural Regeneration Strategy*⁵, updated in a more recent report⁶ includes Neston in its aspirations; CWaC co-commissioned the *Neston Economic Development Plan*⁷ and there are to be some new one-bed flats. Yet, housing remains a significant weakness, as does transport, the visitor economy and economic development. We would like the Town Council to discuss with CWaC how its local agenda can be fully aligned with the NNP agenda and for it to be systematically reviewed.

POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

This section cross-refers strategic objectives set out in Sections 5 and 6 of the NNP with the policies in Section 7 together with some policies from the *Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan*, to provide a coherent range of objectives against which progress can be measured. The headings are those used in Chapter 7 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

A: STRATEGY (Strategy 7.1; 7.2; Policies NNDS1; NNH3)

We have no evidence that the Green Belt has been eroded but there have been applications and submissions seeking to designate Green Belt land for housing. Conversion of outbuildings at Hinderton Hall have been approved. The question of *Rural Exception Sites* (Local Plan SOC 20), which can be created where local housing need is not being met, has not yet arisen. It has not been possible to analyse retrospectively Green Belt applications as the information is not readily accessible without disproportionate effort. Protection of the Green Belt was accorded a high priority in the community consultations and we urge the Town Council to adopt a more proactive approach and put in place the monitoring proposed in the NNP. We further propose that a town councillor is appointed as portfolio holder with responsibilities for reporting compliance.

B: HOUSING (Strategy 6.4; Objectives 7.13-7.15; Policies NH1; NH2; NH3; SOC1)

The CWaC Local Plan quota for Neston of a minimum of 200 new homes is almost certainly exceeded at this juncture. However, they are mostly larger, detached properties of which Neston already has a high proportion. The NNP call for affordable,⁸ lower-priced homes, for sale and rent, especially for younger people and families and older people, is not being met and current trends suggest that these objectives

⁵ Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan 2011

⁶ Rural Growth Strategy 2016

⁷ Neston Economic Development Plan, Nexus Planning 2016

⁸ 'Affordable' housing = (i) properties offered for sale at a discount, (ii) shared ownership, (iii) affordable rent, (iv) social rent, (v) help to buy.

will not be met in Neston without more proactive intervention. A detailed housing needs analysis by *Cheshire Action Group*, with CWaC funding, is taking place now and will provide bench-marking evidence. Whilst recognising that CWaC plans for eight one-bed apartments at Romney Close is good, we urge the Town Council to use its influence to secure more smaller, lower cost dwellings for younger people and families and to exploit the provisions of the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 which particularly seeks to promote the needs of elderly and disabled people and, additionally, allows for appropriate amendment of existing neighbourhood plans.

C: EMPLOYMENT (Vision 5.3; Strategy 6.5; Objectives 7.3; 7.4; 7.41; 7.42; Policies NNE3; NNE4; Appendices C2 and M;

The CWaC Rural Growth Board publication of an investment prospectus is a step forward.⁹ The NNP aim is for the creation of more, higher-value, local jobs to rebalance the present situation where many commute, often some distance, impacting upon carbon footprint and air quality. At this level, economic development is primarily the responsibility of CWaC and Regional Development Agencies. We propose the Town Council seeks an early meeting with the Rural Growth Board to explore how NNP objectives may be progressed.

Some local job creation is visible. For example, one new employer in the hospitality industry estimates that sixty new posts have been created. It is more difficult to quantify employment gains at larger facilities, for example, the Aldi Distribution Centre, and other employers, and we cannot quantify losses.

The creation by the Town Council and CWaC of an Economic Plan for Neston¹⁰ based on the NNP is welcomed as is the establishment of a joint *CWaC/Town Council Delivery Group* comprising town and borough councillors and officers including the Council Manager. We understand that the Group has met a number of times; most recently in November 2017, but the Town Council website provides no information on proceedings. The NNP's identification of small businesses, especially knowledge-based and internet-based, as appropriate for Neston's demographic and limited employment land, involving small business development support and suitable accommodation, is not being considered.¹¹ We propose a review against NNP objectives.

Clay Hill Business Park comprises industrial and commercial units. Council-owned units are fully let; there are unoccupied units in the private sector. It is good to see it included in the *Rural Growth Board Investment Prospectus* mentioned above. Because Clay Hill is the only 'employment' site in Neston the NNP seeks to protect it. Change of use, from User Classes B1c, B2 and B8 to, for example, A1 and A2, retail and professional, should be resisted. The NNP also seeks to enhance the landscape, to improve access, including for pedestrians and cyclists, and public transport. Improvements to the quality of units that do not meet modern specifications and standards are specified. Five vacant sites are identified with potential for employment uses; CWaC is currently undertaking site investigations in Long Acres Road. The *Economic Plan Delivery Group* reports on a CWaC-led Action Day with tenant involvement to clean up the site; it certainly looks better, although there remain issues which will continue to be addressed

⁹ Spaces that Inspire - Invest in Rural West Cheshire; Cheshire West and Chester Rural Growth Board 2016

¹⁰ Neston Economic Development Plan Jan 2016

¹¹ We are aware of one business support company in Neston and another providing accommodation and services in Ness.

through partnerships. One initiative including a business tenant is leading to the installation of cctv. The extent to which Clay Hill still favours B1c, B2 and B8 as against other User Classes needs investigation. So does the NNP proposal for upgrading sub-standard accommodation and exploiting the opportunities provided by vacant sites.

Electronic connectivity, improvement of which is an NNP objective, to cater for modern business requirements, remains unaddressed as does the poor mobile phone service and lack of public wi-fi. The exception, potentially, is the Ness area which is included in plans for very high-speed, wide bandwidth broadband to the south of Plan Area, (the BARN Project). Its focus is on small business needs in rural areas and we suggest that enquiries should be made to see if it or something like it is feasible for the rest of the Plan Area.

D: TOWN CENTRE (Strategy 6.2; Objectives 7.52-7.60; Policies NR1; NR2; NR3; ECON2; Appendix M; also, Town Centre Action Plan)

The Town Centre Action Plan¹² helped shape the NNP objectives. The Town Council no longer has a Town Centre Manager and the extent to which the Action Plan is driving current activities is unclear.

New bars, restaurants, cafés and other businesses have appeared, some a result of investment by local people. It is good news; this kind of development moves the town centre in a more sustainable direction. Nonetheless, empty premises, some of long-duration, and others out of keeping with an historic market town, remain visible. The impact of the new town centre boundary redrawn by the NNP, to allow peripheral shops to become dwellings, cannot be appraised as the information is not collected. The Town Council/CWaC might consider an occupancy survey of the town centre to see how it has changed as well as finding out why businesses have closed.

The NNP ‘Brook Street Development Opportunity’ has not, apparently, yet attracted interest from developers although CWaC has been in touch with landlords which has led to the successful letting of most of the retail units. By changing its planning status, the NNP aimed to replace a range of unsightly, under-used buildings with a mixed development more in keeping with the Design Guide. Short-term licenses allowing free use of premises in Brook Street are acknowledged but they are not a permanent solution. The Weatherspoon’s building is currently being advertised which is also a step forward.

We do not know how local shopping patterns have changed. The proportion of people resident in the Plan Area who do their regular food shop in the town centre had fallen to around 30 per cent in 2003.¹³ The effect of the arrival of *Sainsbury’s*, *Aldi* and a travel agent, the closure of *Iceland* and *Carson’s*, and bank closures, as well as contextual change, eg internet shopping, is not known. Reports in 2013 and 2014, provide partial benchmarks.¹⁴ We propose for the Town Council to carry out a repeat shopping survey to determine appropriate policies.

¹² Neston Town Centre Action Plan; Neston Town Council 2013

¹³ Neston Shopping Study: A Review of retail Issues, WYG, 2003

¹⁴ Diversity of Retail Uses; Lynne Little, 2013; AMT Town Bench-Marking: Neston Report 2014

The Friday market continues, improved by attractive, uniform stalls, entertainment and special events but rental income suggests that it is not gaining ground.¹⁵ The Saturday Producers Market and a Craft Market have not succeeded. Traditional street markets are in decline nationally and we propose that the Town Council considers research to identify appropriate corrective action.¹⁶

The town centre looks better for the enhancement of some town centre premises. Much has also been done with flower beds, baskets, lamp-posts and community art to the extent that Neston was joint runner-up in the 2016 Large Village category of the *Cheshire Community Pride Awards*. At the railway station, efforts by the Adopters, supported by *Arriva Trains Wales* and the Town Council, have been 'Highly-Commended'. On the other hand, persistently unsightly premises and sites let the side down so we are pleased to report that CWaC has been actively engaged with owners and landlords in this regard.

Town centre signage was criticised by the judges in the 2016 Community Pride competition. Signs have been placed in the town centre for *Sustrans* national cycle routes, some indicating shared pedestrian use, and the heritage finger posts add to the ambiance though there is still scope for improvement. However, the town centre continues to lack local information/interpretive plaques in key locations as proposed by the NNP, an existing couple of small, out of date maps being no substitute.

Off-street parking continues not to be a problem thanks not only to private car parks but also the fact that CWaC has chosen not to impose, here, the charges that are appearing elsewhere.

Neston has retained most of the features that make it a 'Key Service Centre',¹⁷ including two post-offices, the Town Hall, the Civic Centre, the Library with its CWaC Access Point, the Recreation Centre, a quality secondary school, medical and dental services, supermarkets and some independent shops, as well as bars, pubs and restaurants, together with a strong voluntary sector; the NCYC is becoming an important multifunctional resource. The losses have been of Parkgate Post Office and all the banks. It is possible to speculate that compelling customers to travel to Heswall or West Kirby to access bank branches might impact negatively on local shopping but the rapid advance of technology and the service provided by the post office may lessen it in practice. We have not carried out an impact assessment; the proposed repeat shopping survey could include it. Regarding public assets, we await the findings of the *CWaC Community Assets Framework* consultation that is looking at rationalising facilities which CWaC owns, including the Town Hall (Town Council) and the Civic Hall (Brio Leisure). So far as we are aware, no use has been made of the provision that permits designation by the community of premises as '*Assets of Community Value*' that brings some protection from developers to allow alternatives to be explored.¹⁸

E: TOURISM (Vision 5.3; Strategy 6.3; Policies NN1; NNT2; ECON3; Appendices G and M)

The visitor economy is seen by the NNP as well-suited to employment creation in the Plan Area and the *CWaC Rural Regeneration Strategy* also identifies it as an opportunity.¹⁹

¹⁵ Neston Town Council Resources Committee Meeting 20 June 2017

¹⁶ See for example: Review of Street Markets, Flintshire County Council, 8th March 2018

¹⁷ Key Services Centre Background Paper; CWaC August 2012

¹⁸ The Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012

¹⁹ Ibid; p 4

There is a defined trajectory for improvement in Parkgate, signposted by the *Parkgate Vision*, (developed by the ward councillor and the Parkgate Society) as well as investment in bars, cafés and restaurants that improve the visitor (and resident) experience. They include the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit on The Parade, the Ropewalk car park improvements, repairs to the seawall along The Parade, the Donkey Stand improvements, improvements to public lavatories, a Heritage Trail, planters, signs and the Middle Slip feature. St Thomas' church garden achieved a *Little Gem Award* in the 2016 Cheshire Community Pride competition. The Parkgate Action Group, led by the Borough ward councillor, brings together CWaC officers, the Town Council, local businesses and the Parkgate Society. NNP proposals to improve safety and access and to alleviate congestion on The Parade, are areas for development.

In the town centre, similar investment in bars, cafés and restaurants potentially improves the visitor experience but, despite its rich history, proximity to the estuary and beautiful countryside, the casual tourist, passing through or near the town centre, is not presented with a strong invitation to stop, look round and use services. NNP proposals for a cycling/walking hub in Station Road and a visitor centre are areas for development.

The NNP does not have anything to say about visitor accommodation; it was not identified as a key issue because the Plan Area is best-known as a destination for day visitors. People who stay longer spend more so any future revision of the NNP should consider visitor accommodation for inclusion.

The Plan Area sits astride important walking and cycling routes, connecting the area to Merseyside, North Wales and Chester, which is why the NNP identifies their potential as an economic asset benefitting visitors and local people alike. Plan supporting papers speak of an integrated network of footpaths and 'dispersed localities'²⁰ marketed to visitors as an attraction. Given that Natural England is commencing survey for the England Coast Path in this area in April 2018, emphasizing the Plan Area's uniqueness as the only sea-facing resort in Cheshire and bringing resources, and noting CWaC plans to develop 'Recreational Routeways'²¹ it would seem a good time to be acting on this proposal and to set up an action group involving key actors.

Tourist information is an important part of the economic infrastructure. We take the view that visual, paper and electronic media have parts to play and, in Neston's case, all need development. There is no official visitor guide and, with exceptions, existing leaflets need renewal; there is no distribution system. Literature displays in the Town Hall and Library are inaccessible when closed and are not signed. Local initiatives, like the plaques associated with the Heritage Trail in Parkgate, forthcoming boards with QR codes in the redeveloped Ropewalk car park in Parkgate, and the waymarked Countryside Trail in Neston, are welcome. So is the Town Council website, www.neston.org.uk, which has enhanced its visitor information; it has further potential although it is thought not to be well-known. Parkgate Sea-Front features positively as a destination on *Trip Advisor* and on the *Visit Wirral* website. The CWaC-outsourced local tourist board, *Marketing Cheshire*, offers little to the Plan Area. Coverage on its website and in literature is poor. We propose discussions with *Marketing Cheshire* to see what can be done to improve its relevance.

²⁰ Lees Lane Ponds is an example of a dispersed location. Ness Gardens is another one.

²¹ CWaC Local Plan Policy REC7

F: MOVEMENT AND TRAVEL (Strategy 6.7; Policies NNM2; NNM3; NNM4, Appendix M)

Sustrans cycle routes through the area are well-established. Route 568 has been modified in Tanks Field to reduce cyclist-pedestrian conflict thus meeting one specific NNP proposal but safety issues generally for on-road sections and cyclist/pedestrian conflict on shared routes (eg Green Way and Wirral Way), identified during NNP consultations, have yet to be addressed systematically. The slogan '*Neston Cycle Town*' seems to have lost energy except possibly within cycling circles. We propose a review of the 'Cycle Town' policy to see if it can be re-enlivened.

Work on footpath infrastructure by CWaC seems largely reactive because of a lack of funds. Signage has been improved on footpaths in the Cuckoo Lane area as a result of problems with non-permitted horse-riding. Resurfacing of FP10, connecting each end of Manorial Road, has been enabled, but with local funding only (Town Council, Borough councillor and Elan Homes). We also note the deployment of offenders from the Community Payback Team on the Wirral Way. Otherwise the Wirral Way and linking paths, as well as main rights of way, are in very poor condition and we are told that maintenance on the Green Way is a problem in places. Given the importance of walking both for residents and to the visitor economy and noting, by way of example, improvements to stiles in Willaston and the Wirral Way in Wirral MBC, we propose the Town Council seeks discussions with CWaC and the *Wirral Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society* and relevant others about the best way forward.

'A Sustainable Transport Standard'²² produced by the Town Council Transport Sub-Group after consultation, sets out a minimum user requirement for trains and buses, defined in terms of accessibility over the whole day and fair fares. This imaginative approach makes clear demands on transport planners and provides an excellent benchmark for campaigns. It is some time since the Standard was established and we suggest that it is revisited by the Town Council.

Bus services do not meet the *Transport Standard*. Parkgate has lost its weekday (487) service to Liverpool. Ness has gained a weekday (487) service to Liverpool. There are no early or evening services to Chester or Hooton (to access trains). There is no real time information. The 487 is now the only service subsidised by CWaC. All the others are in the hands of private operators which make their own commercial decisions. On-demand services, such as *Plusbus* and *Community Transport*, are available to some people in need.

Rail services do not meet the *Transport Standard*. Apart from infrequency and unequal fares, the Border Line has been classified as one of the most unreliable services in the country. Hope is vested in the current Welsh Government procurement process which refers to better services on this line but tenders have yet to become public; the contract is due to be let in October 2018. In this context, the TC is a member of the *Deeside Business Forum*. In the longer term (20 years) the line is included in *Merseyrail* plans.

Improvements to travel infrastructure, including safety, present a mixed picture. As already noted, the Neston Station *Adopters Group* has received an award. Retention of free car parking and the redeveloped Station Road car park in Parkgate are recognised. The station has real time train information and cctv is being installed. Public tyre pumps on the Donkey Stand and at The Cross

²² A Sustainable Transport Standard, Transport Sub-Group, Neston Town Council 2016

proclaim an innovative welcome (if you know they are there) as do cycle racks in the few places where they may be found. We have not been able to discern progress with the NNP's proposal for a multi-modal transport hub. Lighting and seats in bus shelters remain a need. From a safety perspective, the only telephone help-point is at the side of the town hall. Real time bus information remains unavailable. The Chester Road Car Park still falls short of the NNP's aspirations, including the non-functioning public lavatory, although access from Chester Road has been improved. Modifications are being carried out to mitigate the risks associated with the Raby Park Road/A540 junction. However, broader safety concerns for cyclists and pedestrians remain. We support and encourage the Town Council's dialogue with CWaC in these regards and reinforce their proposal for a traffic review.

G: DESIGN (Strategy 6.8; Policies NND1, NND2, NND3), ENV6)

The NNP sets out to ensure new developments and alterations protect and enrich the existing townscape and landscapes as well as requiring measures that improve energy efficiency. Community consultation shows that 91 per cent agreed that all new homes should be built to high architectural and design standards. It cites the *Neston Town Centre Public Realm Design Guide*²³ which provides detailed design proposals and an action plan. The NNP says it should be consulted on proposals in the town centre though we believe it has more general application. There is a need to clarify how design principles are being applied to planning applications.

The establishment of a *Neighbourhood Design and Review Panel* is proposed in Section 9 of the Plan. It would be composed of members of the community with relevant professional backgrounds for example in planning, urban design, architecture, engineering, surveying and environmental fields. The Panel would advise the Town Council on design issues and monitor and report annually on resulting changes. It has not been set up. As envisaged, the Panel is for 'large scale' applications but 'large-scale' is undefined. We propose that the Town Council would find a *Neighbourhood Design and Review Panel* potentially useful for applications of any size whether related to buildings or landscape.

Seven environmental improvement corridors are identified in the NNP for public realm improvements but it is not clear that they are being tackled.

LANDSCAPE AND ENVIRONMENT (Strategies 6.9, 6.10; Policies NNLE1, NNLE2; NNLE3; NNLE4; Appendix M. SOC 6; ENV 2-5)

Designated Local and Amenity Green Space as specified in the NNP has not, as far as we know, been threatened by development. Landscape and public realm improvements are promoted and coordinated by the Town Council's *Neston Looking Better Group*, by the *Parkgate Action Group* including the *Parkgate Society Community Spirit Group*, and by the community in Ness. Care of planters and baskets is outsourced by the Town Council. A positive development is the 'Friends' community organisations,²⁴ intent upon the preservation, protection, enhancement and enjoyment of provision for outdoor recreation and other local partnerships such as at Sytchcroft Park and Parkgate. They are often

²³ Neston Town Centre Public Realm Design Guide, CWaC 2011

²⁴ Park Fields, Stanney Fields Park, West Vale, Lees Lane Ponds

supported and assisted by CWaC Locality Officers and elected members from the Town Council and the Borough. Whilst maintaining the autonomy of sub-area action groups we think it would be appropriate for the remit of the *Neston Looking Better Group* to be extended to the whole Plan Area for monitoring and coordination purposes.

Some woodland and trees are protected by tree preservation orders. We are not aware of any significant threat to woodland or hedges but there is no accessible monitoring data. Trees have been planted in Drake Road, the Ropewalk car park and the Ropewalk playground.

Listed Local Wildlife Sites and other sites of importance for nature conservation are listed in the NNP for protection. The Friends of Lees Lane Ponds have, under the chairmanship of a borough councillor and with business sponsorship, been enhancing the natural history of that site with the support of the *Wirral Country Park Ranger Service*. Key actors in the Area include the *Cheshire Wildlife Trust*, the *RSPB*, *Ness Gardens* and the *Dee Estuary Conservation Trust*. Otherwise, the Plan Area is without any local nature conservation focus.

Local Heritage Assets in the Plan Area include seventy-four Grade II* and Grade II listed buildings as well as Ness Gardens. There are three conservation areas. In addition, the NNP commits the Town Council to an exercise to identify further appropriate listings to add to the local listing which affords them some protection from inappropriate national and local planning decisions.

H: COMMUNITY (Vision 5.4; Strategy 6.11; Objectives 7.136; Policies NNC1; NNC2; NNC3; NNC4; NNC5; SOC 6)

Apart from banks, services for residents have been largely retained, as reported above. They make Neston a community and ensure self-sufficiency. Although banks closures attracted much public discussion, it is not clear that it is a major inconvenience except for, perhaps older people and local cash-handling traders. We have also noted the emergence of the *Neston Community Youth Centre* as a multi-purpose resource including the CAB, the Job Centre, the Children's Centre and adult education, training, social and health initiatives. We would add the NCYC to the list of assets that make Neston a 'key service centre'.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on new development (not change-of-use or conversions) is paid directly to the Town Council for infrastructure support at a higher rate of 25 per cent because Neston has a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan but has yet to bring in any new money.²⁵ CIL is in addition to the 'Section 106' obligation which is now confined to mitigating the effects of development.

The Neston High School development was in hand before the NNP was made. It is good to see the new building is open, the old one demolished and plans for sports and recreation facilities, including a shared all-weather pitch funded in part by compensatory s106 receipts from the Mostyn House development. Some issues to do with pedestrian and cycling access and traffic congestion in Raby Park Road remain to be addressed. The NNP aspires for any surplus land following demolition of the old school to be made

²⁵ Planning Act 2008 and associated Regulations

available for affordable housing and, as the development moves to its conclusion, we wish to reinforce that potential outcome.

The Neston Recreation Centre is currently being modernised (an NNP priority) together with playing fields, in association with the High School. *Brio Leisure* plans a more extensive range of services including health initiatives; the withdrawal, by CWaC, of funds to support free access by people aged 75 and over is noted.

Health and Wellbeing remains an issue for some in the Plan Area. The impact of poor health in parts of the Plan Area, an ageing population and the fact that accessing some health services take people across the border into the Wirral clinical commissioning area, requires consideration. The NNP identifies the impact of several aspects of the NNP on wider determinants of health such as transport, open space and child care provision. Addressing some of this, CWaC is setting up a public health initiative called '*Healthy Happy Neston*'. We would like to see a local forum where health and social care needs can be considered.

end

DEMOGRAPHY: NESTON CIVIL PARISH

Age	2001 Census		2011 Census		2015 mid-year estimates	
0-15	2744	20.8%	2313	17.5%	2350	15.3%
16-64	9389	59.2%	9337	59.1%	8930	58.1%
65+	3030	20.0%	3571	23.5%	4010	26.1%
TOTAL	15,163		15,221		15,380	
Dwellings	6545		7097			

Comment: Within a small, unsurprising, population increase, the mid-year estimates show that the trend towards an older community continues with the proportion of children (0-18) still reducing. It is for this reason that the NNP puts a premium on affordable housing and upon local employment.

Members

Phil Baker, resident, resigned 11 April 2017

Trish Derraugh, resident

David Johnson, resident

Robina Hetherington, resident

Robin Hughes, resident

Cllr Pat Kynaston, Town Council

Terry Nolan, resident

Mike Shipman, resident, resigned 18 January 2018

Rob Ward, resident

Unfilled seats

Town Council - 2

Residents - 4

Specialists - 3

Terms of Reference

Membership

- No fewer than five and no more than 10 residents of Neston not eligible for appointment under any other category below, appointed by the Council.
- No more than three Members of Neston Town Council.
- No more than three persons with specialist knowledge or skills deemed by the group to be of value and appointed by it.
- The Chairman (and Vice-Chairman should the group consider such an appointment necessary) shall be appointed by the Council on the recommendation of the Group for a period not exceeding a normal council year and shall be eligible for re-appointment.

Purpose

- To monitor the implementation of the Neston Neighbourhood Plan.
- To draw the attention of relevant groups via the Council's Proper Officer to opportunities for the implementation of policies and recommendations within the Neston Neighbourhood Plan.
- To undertake on behalf of Neston Town Council other aspects of the implementation and promotion of the Neston Neighbourhood Plan as the Council, or the Council's relevant committee, sees fit.
- To report to the Council via its relevant committee(s), at least annually, on the extent to which the Neston Neighbourhood Plan is being implemented or observed.
- To bring forward to the Town Council or its relevant committee any proposals for amendment to the Neighbourhood Plan consistent with the terms of the 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act that it considers advisable.