

Newick Neighbourhood Plan: Importance of Adherence to its Housing Policies

1. Introduction

Newick's Neighbourhood Plan (NP) covers the period to 2030 during which time there will be many new Councillors, both of Newick Parish and Lewes District, who have to deal with planning proposals for Newick, some in line with and some contrary to the NP. Therefore it is important that such Councillors not only are aware of the content of the adopted NP, but also understand the strength of the case for fully adhering to the NP's policies and in particular its housing policies.

For this reason, all Councillors will need a full understanding of the degree of public consultation and the results of that consultation which, together with other work, led to the policies of the NP. Without this, they are unlikely to afford those policies the weight they deserve, and may consider wrongly departing from them when this is not justified. This could in turn jeopardise the future strength of the NP and leave Newick open to excessive unplanned development. It is important, in particular, that Councillors understand the method by which four sites out of the twelve available were selected for development, and how the number of homes per site were arrived at.

It is accepted that time does not permit many Councillors to fully study the numerous documents that resulted in the NP. It is also accepted that the results of the site selection process may be difficult to fully grasp from the lengthy Sustainability Appraisal and Development Site Selection report of February 2014. It is hoped that, by means of this short note, a sufficiently full but quick understanding of the site selection process and the housing policies developed from it will be provided.

2. Development Site Selection

Twelve sites were stated to be available for development by their owners or potential developers. To determine which of these should be developed, two separate routes were followed. Firstly, the opinions of the residents of Newick were sought; secondly, a detailed sustainability appraisal was carried out for each site.

2.1 Residents' Opinions

The views of residents had been sought previously in a rather quick and informal way at two NP Consultation Days, but they were then obtained more formally, and with greater time for residents' consideration of the matter, via a Parish Questionnaire. One copy was delivered to each Newick household in late June 2013. It included questions on a few other aspects and invited comments, all of which were reported on in September 2013 (Parish Questionnaire Results), but for the purposes of this note it is the level of public support for, and opposition to, each of the twelve sites that is most important. The questionnaire was a lengthy document but 41% of households responded with a completed questionnaire within the three weeks allowed.

2.2 Sustainability Appraisal

A detailed sustainability appraisal was carried out for each site. This had been developed with guidance from LDC planning officers and had twelve main objectives (subject headings), most with several indicators (questions), there being forty indicators in all. Residents' views on the acceptability of these objectives and indicators had been sought via the above-mentioned Parish Questionnaire and 90% of the responding households expressed a view on this, of which 95% supported their use. A scoring system recommended by LDC's planning officers was adopted and the appraisal was conducted with a planning officer present. This process was reported on in February 2014 (Sustainability Appraisal and Development Site Selection).

2.3 Results

The table provided on page 5 lists the twelve sites. The sequence in which they are listed corresponds to their overall relative suitability for development, determined as described below. The first column gives each site address and the second column gives the corresponding Site No as used on the map provided on page 6.

The third and fourth columns list the number of households in favour of each site (Yes Votes) and opposed to each site (No Votes) respectively. (For each site there were also a small number of abstentions, i.e. households that had no strong opinion either way.) It must be stressed that each 'vote' is the opinion of a household as opposed to an individual, and thus generally represents the agreed opinions of at least two adult residents.

The fifth column gives the ranking of each site in terms of its acceptability to residents, based on the number of households in favour of developing each site.

The sixth column lists the number of points for each site as given by the sustainability appraisal, and the seventh column gives the ranking of each site based on its sustainability appraisal points.

Finally, the eighth column gives the overall ranking of each site, this being calculated by taking the average of the residents' ranking and the sustainability appraisal ranking.

2.4. Conclusions on Site Selection

As can be seen, the results of the two methods of ranking sites differed little. Both put the same sites in 1st and 2nd place, and the differences between the results of the two methods were relatively small for all sites.

Inevitably there will always be opposition to any proposed development site, but the number of No Votes for each of the three highest ranked sites was smaller than for all other sites.

3. Housing Density

To conform to the requirements of LDC's Local Plan, a net gain of at least 100 homes had to be planned for (100 plus replacement of any of existing homes demolished in the process). It may be helpful to explain here how the number of dwellings on each development site was decided.

The number of homes proposed for the sites ranked 1st (Land East of Telephone Exchange) and 2nd (Land North of Cricketfield), 30 and 31 homes respectively (with one existing home on the 2nd site demolished), were based on a housing density of 25 homes per hectare (based on the net site area after deducting areas of required screen planting), a density which is considered suitable for edge of village locations.

Two homes were proposed for the site ranked 3rd (Land between The Rough and Vernons Road) because the site is twice the size of the plot occupied by each of the neighbouring houses.

The land available for the site ranked 4th (Ex-Wood Fruit Farm, South side A272) was larger than needed for the balance of 38 homes (or 39 if the existing house is demolished) required by 2030. As a result only the western end of the site, the end closest to the village, was proposed for development, this being large enough with the above-mentioned housing density of 25 homes per hectare. The fact that only just over half of the site was required suits the fact that of the four sites selected, this site had the least support and the greatest opposition (168 households voted No) in the questionnaire responses.

4. Referendum Result

At the referendum in February 2014, 49% of the electorate voted and of those, over 89% supported adoption of the NP.

5. Adherence to Housing Policies

A total of 100 homes (net gain) must be planned for this can be achieved if the housing policies of the NP are adhered to. Proposals for deviating from these policies risk invalidating the NP.

It has been proposed recently (April 2018), for example, that because of the opposition of residents living close to the 3rd site (Land between The Rough and Vernons Road), the number of homes to be built on this site should be reduced from two to one. In theory, this could be achieved by increasing the number of homes on the 4th site (Ex-Wood Fruit Farm, South side A272) and increasing the size of that site to suit, but as stated above this site had less support and far greater opposition from residents than the 3rd site. Any increase in the number of homes on the 4th site would inevitably risk far greater opposition than experienced in respect of the 3rd site.

If, alternatively, the housing density on one plot was increased to allow an additional home, this would set a precedent that would result in the developers of other plots demanding increased housing density. It would also be likely to engender considerable opposition from residents originally opposed to that site, and perhaps also from many others, once it was realised that it was happening to allow a reduction in development of the 3rd site.

The alternative of simply reducing to 99 the number of homes planned for is not viable, because this would make the NP non-compliant with LDC's Local Plan, and hence open to attack by the landowners and/or potential developers of the many other sites available around Newick. Indeed legal opinion has indicated that departing in any way from the NP would leave it open to attack from the proponents of unplanned development sites.

In conclusion, therefore, it is strongly recommended that the housing policies of the NP be adhered to in full. Based both on the referendum result and on the thorough consultation over the site selection process reported above, there is no justification for deviating in any way from this well supported NP.

Newick Parish Council, 29th May 2018

Site address	Site No. on Map	Residents' (Households' Questionnaire Responses) Yes Votes	Residents' (Households' Questionnaire Responses) No Votes	Residents' (Households' Questionnaire Responses) Ranking	Sustainability Appraisal Points	Sustainability Appraisal Ranking	Overall Ranking (Average of Residents' & Sustainability Rankings)
Land East of Telephone Exchange	2	328	56	1 st	11	1 st	1 st
Land North of Cricketfield	3	293	88	2 nd	9	2 nd	2 nd
Land between The Rough & Vernons Road	11	273	110	3 rd	8	3 rd equal	3 rd
Ex-Woods Fruit Farm South side A272	10	213	164	5 th	8	3 rd equal	4 th
Land East of Toll House North side A272	9	214	152	4 th	6	7 th	5 th
Bungalow & Orchard 55 Allington Road	4	205	179	7 th	7	5 th equal	6 th
Land South of 45 Allington Road	5	189	196	8 th	7	5 th equal	7 th
Garage, House & Garden 15 Church Road	6	209	164	6 th	4	8 th	8 th
Land at The Pines (West) 95 Allington Road	8	185	187	9 th equal	-1	9 th equal	9 th
Land at Point House 104 Allington Road	12	185	190	9 th equal	-2	11 th equal	10 th
Land at The Pines (East) 95 Allington Road	7	161	214	12 th	-1	9 th equal	11 th
Mitchelswood Farm Allington Road	1	181	212	11 th	-2	11 th equal	12 th

