ONH
Planning for Good

CLIENT ADVICE NOTE

Project: Grappenhall & Thelwall Neighbourhood Plan
Ref: 4024_011
Date: 9 May 2024

SCOPING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Purpose

1. The project steering group (PSG) met on 30 April 2024 to consider the potential scope of the new neighbourhood plan project (GTNP). The agenda was structured around a slide pack (published separately) circulated in advance by ONH to inform the discussion. The PSG is managing the project on behalf of Grappenhall & Thelwall Parish Council (GTPC), the 'qualifying body'.

2. The purpose of this advice note is to summarise the discussion and to make recommendations to the PSG on an initial policy scope for the GTNP, including actions for exploring policy ideas further.

Discussion

3. The following key points were noted:

- The community is generally proud of the Parish – it has a special character (not just in its Conservation Areas) and functions reasonably well
- It has some formal and informal green spaces but they are becoming increasingly busy and difficult to maintain as a result of an increase in the local population given the large number of new homes built in the last decade or so
- It has reasonable access to schools and other local public services, but this may change as new capacity is created in the area over the next 20+ years
- Nearby Stockton Heath is a busy local centre with a range of smaller independent shops and bars/restaurants meeting many local needs, but there remains a dependence on locations further afield for main convenience and comparable goods shopping, more than may be expected of this type of suburban area
- There is relatively high car dependence, and the Parish is located on busy routes into Warrington, which have bottlenecks given the limited places to cross the canal – this discourages cycling and bus use although both are safer and easier to use out of peak hours in many parts of the villages and surrounding roads
- Although there are no designated Air Quality Management Areas in the Parish, this effect from traffic generation is felt to be worsening and there are Areas on the nearby M56 and M6 – when the M6 is blocked by an accident, a fairly

frequent occurrence, all M6 traffic is funnelled through the Parish, creating air quality issues, particularly as such traffic is inevitably slow moving or gridlocked
- The countryside in the south of the Parish has been an appreciated green asset (crossed by a couple of public rights of way) by the community – the loss of part of it to the two main new developments will be keenly felt if improvements are not made to what remains
- The local population is reasonably diverse in age but its elderly demographic is increasing, which may require new facilities, though the school age population will also significantly increase with planned new homes
- It was considered that the Parish is reasonably climate change resilient in terms of its exposure to extreme weather events but higher summer temperatures may place a greater pressure on the publicly accessible parks and green spaces in what is a generally urban area
- In general, the Parish population was considered to be becoming more out of balance with its supporting infrastructure (the 'sustainability spectrum' in the slide pack), a trend that could significantly accelerate with the proposed housing growth (approx. 4,500 homes) if new infrastructure is not delivered on time, to spec and in the right place

Policy Context

4. The provisions of the recently adopted Warrington Local Plan 2021 – 2039 (WLP) were noted. It is reasonably comprehensive in its policy coverage and detail, leaving limited opportunities for the GTNP to add value (through filling in gaps and refining more general WLP policies). Importantly, all of the land outside the defined villages in the Parish lies within the Green Belt and there are no means, even if desired, to amend Green Belt policy or boundaries in the GTNP.

5. It was noted too that Government intends to introduce national development management policies that will curtail much local policy making but there remains a national drive for community-based design coding and guidance.

6. By far the most significant WLP proposals relate to the South East Warrington Urban Extension (SEWUE), including the committed but separate Grappenhall Heys schemes), and Thelwall Heys (TH) development allocations. Its policies MD2 and MD4 respectively set out a series of land use requirements and general development and design principles. The report for GTPC ('Appraisal of the policy context for allocated and major development sites in Grappenhall and Thelwall', Groves Town Planning Ltd, 9 February 2024) highlights a number of ways in which the GTNP may help with the planning of both sites.

7. It was noted that a planning application for TH is expected to be made in 2024 but the masterplanning of SEWUE will take much longer, with a draft masterplan not expected until at least summer 2025. It was also noted that both Warrington Borough Council (WBC) and Homes England (HE) had given GTPC encouraging signs that they may welcome the GTNP assisting in that masterplanning work, especially in design coding. On the other hand, it may be that the TH proposal is determined before the GTNP is able to offer any influence with any weight.

8. Finally, we noted that there is an increasing volume of publicly available data across every plan making subject. It shows the potential for layering data for example to aid further green infrastructure planning within the major development sites and connecting across the Parish and beyond. There is also a wealth of past design appraisal work in the Parish to inform any future design coding work.

Insights

9. Without doubt the greatest challenge facing the local planning system is in getting the two major development schemes right. Together with the development built out over the last decade or so, which has not yet led to any significant upgrade in local infrastructure, these schemes will profoundly change the character and functioning of all of the urban Parish and much of its countryside. If successfully planned, this change could address many of the increasing problems in the Parish. If not, it could exacerbate many of them.

10. An observation is that the WLP focused, as would be expected, on the change expected within the respective site boundaries. It is somewhat unclear about how their stitching together with the existing urban form will work and how the whole will function for the better for existing as well as future residents, businesses and other organisations. Although the SEWUE is very much the larger of the two, the TH scheme is large enough and close enough to be planned for as part of this whole.

11. Further, without further policy intervention, it would be expected that the TH application and SEWUE masterplan will also focus on the land within them rather than pay too much attention to the wider area. Their respective surveys and assessments may not fully tackle their cumulative effects and they are unlikely to seek to exploit any spatial opportunities outside their boundaries (e.g. shared travel plans) even if their work identifies such.

12. The GTNP policy opportunities appear to take two forms: shaping at least one or both of the major development proposals within their boundaries, and managing change in the existing urban Parish, some of which may be prompted by those proposals. In respect of the first there are important challenges:

- The TH scheme may come forward before the GTNP has reached a point where it carries sufficient weight in decision making – in which case, can enough be done quickly to at least engage with the applicant and WBC in the ‘pre-app’ process to share early insights and to spot the potential for suboptimal proposals? What work can be done inside this project to inform that engagement?
- Only one third of the SEWUE lies within the Parish with another third in the designated Appleton Parish Thorn Ward (APTW) neighbourhood area and the remaining third in Appleton Parish but not in a neighbourhood area – in which case, assuming WBC and HE would expect a singular approach to neighbourhood plan making across the allocation, how could GTPC and Appleton PC (APC) work together to make this happen? What are the options and what policy opportunities are in play?

13. To answer the last question, there are two options for GTPC to consider and decide:

1. GTPC and APC to apply to WBC to de-designate their respective NP areas and to designate a new GTNP area comprising all of SEWUE, with GTPC inviting APC to join the core PSG (see below) and leaving APC to apply to designate a new neighbourhood area (minus its part of SEWUE) if it wishes to refresh, modify and/or extend its made APTW NP in due course

2. The respective NP areas to remain as they are but GTPC and APC form a separate joint project team to lead on liaising with HE and WBC on all SEWUE matters, including any design code, for inclusion as policies in the GTNP and any future modification of the APTW NP

14. In respect of the remainder of the Parish there are a number of conventional policy opportunities that most neighbourhood plans include:

- Design coding – by refreshing the Conservation Area appraisals and by assessing the rest of the urban area to deliver a code with comprehensive coverage to manage design matters from householder applications up to major windfall development proposals
- Green infrastructure – by defining a network of existing and potential assets and their connectivity for biodiversity gain, local nature recovery and climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Local heritage – by identifying additional buildings and structures for the Local List and 'areas of local architectural or historic interest', often both done as a subset of the design coding work but expressed as separate policy
- Housing type and tenure mix – by assessing the present housing stock to identify anomalies against projected supply and demand for open market and affordable housing types and tenure products (e.g. First Homes)
- Local green spaces – by identifying those public or private spaces that meet the tests of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) §206 for additional protection from inappropriate development, often carried out as part of the green infrastructure mapping work but expressed as separate policy
- Site Specific provisions – by identifying the key development and design principles of vacant, underused and/or brownfield sites where change is anticipated during the plan period, but not to meet any 'housing target' and so not technically 'site allocations'
- Infrastructure investment priorities – by identifying a small number of priority projects to which S106 funding should be directed

15. The specific actions for taking these ideas forward are set out in Annex A.

16. Note also that this is not an exhaustive list and some new ideas may emerge and others on this list may not go forward in due course.

17. As the PSG has already formed two task teams (for Grappenhall and Thelwall) it can decide if they are suited to all of the recommended actions in Annex A, or whether a new task team or the PSG itself may be better suited. In any event it is recommended that it sets up a task team or sub-group to devise a communications plan for the project.

Recommendations

18. It is recommended that the PSG:

1. Considers this note and reports to ONH any errors or omissions for correction
2. Reviews its project management arrangements with a view to forming a core group for pragmatic decision making and stakeholder liaison purposes

ANNEX A: ACTION PLANNING

Design coding – by refreshing the Conservation Area appraisals and by assessing the rest of the urban area to deliver a code with comprehensive coverage to manage design matters from householder applications up to major windfall development proposals

1. EITHER secure a Design Code technical support package via Locality OR procure the ONH design code product OR set up a new task team to carry out the process itself
2. Draft the code in readiness for potential input to the SEWUE and/or TH coding and for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
3. Draft a GTNP policy
4. Finalise the code and policy for Reg 15 submission

Green infrastructure – by defining a network of existing and potential assets and their connectivity for biodiversity gain, local nature recovery and climate change adaptation and mitigation

1. Task team(s) to use public data (e.g. Magic Map), Google Maps and local intelligence (e.g. surveys) to map all known GI assets (paper, Parish Online or qGIS)
2. Using that mapping identify opportunities for improving connectivity or habitats by using apps like Landmark BNG or engaging with Cheshire Wildlife Trust
3. Produce an annotated digital map showing existing and potential GI network
4. Identify where that network crosses future development land and what this might mean for the layout, open space, BNG and/or landscaping requirements of the development scheme
5. Identify if there are opportunities for habitat banking in the rural Parish and add them to the maps
5. Convert all the above outputs into a short report for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
6. Draft a GTNP policy
7. Finalise the report and policy for Reg 15 submission

Local heritage – by identifying additional buildings and structures for the Local List and 'areas of local architectural or historic interest', often both done as a subset of the design coding work but expressed as separate policy

1. Task team(s) to review the existing WBC Local List and identify missing candidate buildings and structures using the same criteria, perhaps by engaging with the local history society
2. Photograph and describe the specific local heritage interest of each candidate, i.e. what is it that an applicant must consider in their proposals
3. Produce a schedule of that information for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
4. Draft a GTNP policy
5. Finalise the report and policy for Reg 15 submission

Housing type and tenure mix – by assessing the present housing stock to identify anomalies against projected supply and demand for open market and affordable housing types and tenure products (e.g. First Homes)

1. EITHER secure a Housing Needs Assessment technical support package via Locality OR set up a new task team to carry out its own assessment
2. Draft the report in readiness for potential input to the SEWUE and/or TH coding and for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
3. Draft a GTNP policy
4. Finalise the code and policy for Reg 15 submission

Local green spaces – by identifying those public or private spaces that meet the tests of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) §206 for additional protection from inappropriate development, often carried out as part of the green infrastructure mapping work but expressed as separate policy

1. Task team(s) to carry out a Local Green Space assessment either as part of the Green Infrastructure task or separately using the Locality guidance
2. Produce a schedule of that information in readiness for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
3. Draft a GTNP policy
4. Finalise the code and policy for Reg 15 submission

Site Specific provisions – by identifying the key development and design principles of vacant, underused and/or brownfield sites where change is anticipated during the plan period, but not to meet any 'housing target' and so not technically 'site allocations'

1. Task team(s) to identify sites/land
2. Produce a schedule of information on each site with a photograph, description and any key land use and development/design factors that may be important in shaping a future development proposal in readiness for publication alongside the Reg 14 GTNP
3. Draft a GTNP policy
4. Finalise the code and policy for Reg 15 submission

Infrastructure investment priorities – by identifying a small number of priority projects to which S106 funding should be directed

1. Task team(s) to identify candidate projects and to describe each in terms of its nature, benefits and delivery partner(s) and the means by which it could be funded
2. Agree a shortlist of up to 3 and prioritise based on community engagement
3. Draft a GTNP policy
4. Finalise the code and policy for Reg 15 submission