

Caton-with-Littledale Parish Council

REFERENDUM ON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Lancaster City Council (LCC) has announced that the referendum on our Neighbourhood Plan (NP) will take place on Thursday 4th May 2023. You can see the plan and official documentation on the LCC website (search for Neighbourhood Plans). The same material, plus a lot of additional background research, is on our village website on the Neighbourhood Plan tab. Printed copies of the plan may be consulted at the Victoria Institute and at Morecambe Town Hall.

The referendum results will be decided by simple majority and there is no minimum number of votes required. It is a simple Yes/No decision – no further changes are possible at this point.

There will be an opportunity to meet members of the NP Steering Group and others involved in the preparation of the plan on Monday 17th April 6pm-7pm in the Victoria Institute. They will be happy to explain and discuss the NP with you. Meanwhile we have compiled the answers to some possible questions here.

What is a NP and what does it offer residents? A NP gives residents the power to shape the growth and development of their local area. However, it must be in conformity with national and local laws and policies on planning matters, including those from central government, the Forest of Bowland AONB and LCC. It cannot be a “no growth” programme nor veto all development. This is because LCC has determined that Caton with Littledale is a sustainable settlement having certain facilities such as shops and a doctor’s surgery. Nevertheless without a NP local residents would have less influence over planned development.

What period does the plan cover? 2021 to 2031.

What area does it cover? The whole of the parish of Caton-with-Littledale.

Who prepared it and paid for it? The Parish Council set up a Steering Group to prepare the NP in 2016 and bought in professional advice from the planning consultants Kirkwells. All the costs have been covered by government grants. The final stage of the NP has been a rigorous examination by an independent examiner, who determined that the NP could proceed to the referendum stage.

How have the residents been consulted? After an initial meeting in 2016, there was a survey for residents (adults and young people in 2016/17. A formal consultation was held in 2017 and again in 2021. Along the way there have been several meetings and consultations with residents, as well as work with Lancaster City Council and other organisations such as the Forest of Bowland AONB. Work was delayed during Covid.

What weight does the NP have? Once adopted, our NP becomes a statutory document. Any future planning applications made to LCC must have due regard to the policies set out in our NP.

What spaces have been allocated for house building? Land to the west of Quernmore Road has been allocated for a small development of around 12 houses. Several other sites were put forward but rejected, generally because of their impact on the landscape (as the Parish is within the Forest of Bowland AONB), or because of poor access.

Will the NP provide affordable housing? Bungalows? Smaller homes? It is for developers to put forward plans to LCC; they and the Parish Council can then ask for more affordable houses or a different housing mix. The NP doesn’t release land or money for social housing or for smaller homes. However, it will require developers to take account of local housing needs.

What does the NP say about the look of new housing? There is a mix of different styles here already, so we cannot insist on traditional materials. However there is an expectation that new housing will be appropriate for its location and in tune with neighbouring buildings.

What about the wider landscape around our villages? Our position within the Forest of Bowland AONB is a key factor to be considered in any development within the parish. Large-scale developments are therefore unlikely to come forward. The NP commissioned studies on the natural environment of the plan area. Landscape assessments of all proposed building sites in the villages were also carried out, most of which were shown to have an adverse effect on the landscape and were therefore not included in our NP.

Will the green spaces between Caton and Brookhouse be protected? The NP sets out boundaries for the “Area of Separation” and will discourage building in this area. From our consultations at the start of the process it was demonstrated that this ‘Area of Separation’ was very important to the residents of the Parish. Any development could also adversely affect the landscape and views across the Lune Valley.

What about green spaces in the villages? Green spaces within the villages are important to residents, and are described within the NP. After advice from many sources, it was decided that they are already protected by LCC policies and by their position within the AONB. So there is no separate green spaces policy within the NP.

What other policies might interest me? There are policies on areas such as promoting biodiversity, reducing light pollution, improving drainage in new developments, reducing flood risk, encouraging rural businesses and farm diversification.

What doesn't the NP cover? The NP is about physical spaces – so although many people have commented about issues such as the loss of bus services, policing and better care for the elderly, the NP cannot address them. All the comments have been passed on to the Parish Council which has dealt with them or raised them with the relevant authorities.

Should I vote yes or no? That is for you to decide. If you have any questions or concerns, please come to our meeting the Parish Council and members of the Steering Group will try hard to address these before you make a decision. However, the Parish Council and residents involved in the NP have worked hard with our professional adviser to create a document that we believe provides a way forward for our parish. Within the constraints of national and local planning policy and regulations, it will give us greater control regarding the future development and landscape of the Parish.