

Crosthwaite & Lyth Parish Council

Neighbourhood Plan – Clerk’s Report to the Parish Council on 03 October 2022

I was appointed Clerk to this Parish Council on 01 September 2022. At its meeting on 05 September, the Parish Council undertook to provide a full report on progress with the Neighbourhood Plan and recommendations to the next meeting i.e. this meeting on 03 October and I was asked to help coordinate progress on this initiative.

In order to discharge my responsibilities for coordinating Parish Council activity and with no first-hand experience of the Neighbourhood Planning process in Crosthwaite, I had to assimilate a considerable amount of information on the proposed Plan as rapidly as possible - and not least because, as reported at the June meeting, there was a development session for Parish Councillors facilitated by Lorraine Smyth, Chief Executive of Action for Communities in Cumbria on the evening of the day of my appointment.

The purpose of that meeting, as I understood it, was to take advice on the practical steps the Parish Council should follow with regard to its Neighbourhood Plan. ACT has considerable experience in supporting parishes through the local plans process and a wide range of resources and guidance available. Lorraine Smyth underlined the serious, expensive and time consuming nature of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan which must be fully managed by the local Parish Council. In her view, the planning regulations in the Lake District National Park are clear and robust and it is unlikely that anything in a Neighbourhood Plan will provide more protection for the community. For these reasons she concluded with her genuine belief that: “..... you will have a better outcome from a Community Led or Parish Plan than from a Neighbourhood Plan.”

Councillors attending this session were impressed by the logic expressed by Lorraine Smyth which underlined the importance of meeting with planners from LDNPA to confirm its view on the respective merits of Community Led Plans versus a Neighbourhood Plan.

On the 5th September the Parish Council received an email from Mr Graham Paine expressing disappointment about the lack of progress with the Neighbourhood Plan. This email was read out at the meeting of the Parish Council that evening and it was confirmed that a response would be sent. That response explained that the Parish Council was seeking meetings with LDNPA in particular to gain further information from it on Neighbourhood Plans after which the Council expected to be able to put proposals to the meeting on 3rd October – i.e. this meeting.

As a result of the PC meeting on 5th September, I was tasked with gathering additional information from a wide range of sources and, particularly in the light of advice from ACT, to provide reassurance that a Neighbourhood Plan was the right way forward for this Parish. In the meantime, the Chairman wrote to the independent planning consultant, Louise Kirkup of Kirkwells.

On the 6th September and taking account of the advice from ACT, Louise Kirkup responded with strong support for continuing with the Neighbourhood Plan as the most appropriate means of securing local views in the planning process. She recommended applying for grant as soon as possible to prepare a draft Plan, accompanied by technical support for design codes. She undertook to prepare a new Fee Proposal which is required for the grant application and suggested that with grant in place it might be possible to have a draft plan and policies ready for consultation by the early Spring of 2023.

On 8th September I wrote to Steve Ratcliffe, Director of Sustainable Development at LDNPA and in overall charge of planning direction and policy, requesting a meeting with him or the most appropriate person in his Team. Steve was on leave so I immediately wrote to Andrew Smith, Head of Development Management who phoned me back on 12 September. Following a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of one plan over another, he confirmed the view that LDNPA would favour a Neighbourhood Plan over a Community Led Plan because the former allows planners to give greater weight to a locally agreed planning position. Subsequently I received an email from

Paula Allen (Strategic Planner, LDNPA) confirming that she remains the primary point of contact and proposing to meet later in October.

At the same time, I wrote to or telephoned Clerks at Pooley Bridge, Bootle, Millom Without, Whincham, Eskdale, Keswick, Coniston and Matterdale whilst receiving feedback via Malcolm Richardson from Heversham. Responses were mixed between preferences for a Community Led Plan, Neighbourhood Plan or for no plan at all and provided no definitive consensus of advice other than consistent references to time, cost and need for the Parish Council to manage the process effectively whether it be for Community-Led or Neighbourhood Plans.

Later in the month, I spoke informally to an ex-senior planner from LDNPA, now retired and working in a freelance capacity. They expressed a willingness to attend a Q&A session with the Parish Council on the construction of a Neighbourhood Plan relevant to the planning framework in the National Park. That initial session is likely to be free of charge.

On 28 September I summarised progress in an internal note and referred to the valuable information gathering taken place. In that note I concluded that despite suggestions that the Neighbourhood Plan might be reconsidered in favour of a Community Led Plan, the decision to proceed with the former has already been made as evidenced in Minutes:

- February 2022: It was agreed unanimously that The Parish Council will resume work on the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to conditions.
- May 2022: At the Ordinary Parish Council meeting it was confirmed that the new Terms of reference for the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG) had been circulated to Councillors and were agreed. (NOTE: These now need revising to take account of changed Clerk / RFO roles)
- May 2022: At the Annual Parish Council Meeting it was confirmed that work should continue on the Neighbourhood Plan.

That being the case, the Parish Council is now in a position to confirm next steps which are proposed as follows:

1. Amend the Terms of Reference to recognise the respective roles of the Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer (revisions to be agreed at the November meeting)
2. Maintain liaison with Kirkwells and instruct them to provide a revised Fee Proposal by 17 October.
3. Continue work (already commenced) on a new grant application for funding to support the production of a Neighbourhood Plan, agree this with Kirkwells and submit by the end of October.
4. The Parish Council to agree Councillors to be appointed to a Neighbourhood Plan Working Group in addition to the Chairman (ex-officio member). To be confirmed no later than the November meeting.
5. The Parish Council to circulate a call for volunteers to serve on the NPWG to comprise an initial total of seven members. Any appointments will be confirmed by the Parish Council at its next meeting. Volunteers will be selected by the Parish Council in line with criteria stated in the Terms of Reference.
6. Meetings with external advisers to continue during October to include LDNPA and freelance consultants.
7. This Report, together with any amendments to it as a result of discussion by the Parish Council, to be included as part of the Minutes of the October meeting and to be posted separately under the Neighbourhood Plan page of the Crosthwaite and Lyth Parish Council website.
8. A written report on progress to be included as part of the Agenda of the November meeting.
9. Assuming that 7 members have been appointed to the NPWG by the November meeting of the Parish Council, the Group will meet in accordance with the Terms of Reference to re-commence work on the preparation of the draft Plan as soon as possible after that Parish Council meeting.
10. The Clerk has offered to provide administrative support to the NPWG, but always reserving the right to step down from this role.