



A Feasibility Report
for a Neighbourhood Plan for Horwich



Background

Neighbourhood planning is a right for communities introduced through the Localism Act 2011. Communities can shape development in their areas through the production of Neighbourhood Plans. It is recognised that the plans produced cannot block development that is already part of the Local Plan. What they can do is shape where that development will go and what it will look like. They are a building block for the future as the research, community engagement and insight will form an evidence base to assist in the formulation of future planning strategies. Since 2012 NP's have really taken off and with over 350 now completed across England the government is keen to hear from more communities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600043/Notes_on_NP_edition_19_Accessible_Version.pdf>

Introduction

In the next 10 years Horwich is expected to see a 25% increase in its population, from the existing 20,000 to 25,000. This is as a result of approved planning applications for new residential developments, and there may well be other 'windfall' sites to add to this figure. The town therefore needs to have in place matching plans for new health, welfare, social and educational facilities to cater for this growth, as well as plans to safeguard the local environment and employment.

With a remit from Horwich Town Council, the NPAG was asked to prepare a report on the feasibility of a Neighbourhood Plan and associated tasks, leading to its adoption with specific objectives. These objectives were considered by the NPAG and researched by reading The Local Development Framework Core Strategy which was adopted in March 2011. This document lists a range of policies including Strategic and Area Policies, which describe how Bolton Council want the town to look like in the future, up to the year 2026 along with the planning policies that will be used to make it a reality. It reflects the spatial aspects of the work of Bolton Council and its partners.

The Area Policy for Horwich and Blackrod, Policy OA1 states;

Bolton Council and its partners will:

1. Continue to promote Horwich town centre as being suitable for a mix of retailing, leisure, employment and housing uses.
2. Identify Horwich town centre as serving the western part of the borough for retailing.
3. Ensure the local centre at Blackrod will continue to serve local needs.
4. Concentrate sites for new housing in Horwich town centre, at Horwich Loco Works and on other sites within the existing urban area.
5. Maintain current Green Belt boundaries.
6. Ensure Protected Open Land around Horwich and Blackrod remains undeveloped, except to the west of Horwich Loco Works where development will be allowed to support the regeneration of the Loco Works site.
7. Recognise the Community College site at Victoria Road as the principal focus for post-16 education in the western part of the borough.
8. Protect significant recreational areas in the West Pennine Moors and around Blackrod, including the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, from adverse development.

9. Conserve and enhance the character of the existing landscape and physical environment, especially the conservation areas at Horwich town centre, Horwich Loco Works and Wallsuches.
10. Ensure that development in Horwich and Blackrod respects street patterns, the grain and the form of predominant architectural styles and where possible makes sympathetic use of locally distinctive materials such as stone.
11. Ensure that new development does not harm the landscape setting and protects views from public areas to the surrounding landscape.
12. Develop new or expanded medical and health facilities at both Horwich and Blackrod.

The NPAG then went on to look at other Neighbourhood Plans in progress, and those which have successfully completed referendums and been adopted before setting out the following steps.

1. Consider the options and make recommendations, as to the area to be covered by a plan.

The options considered were

- a) part or parts of Horwich.
- b) the whole of Horwich Civil Parish, as defined by Ordnance Survey Maps.
- c) the whole of Horwich Civil Parish, as defined by Ordnance Survey Maps, plus the triangle of land denoted on plan, **Appendix 1** (This area is for consideration within the NP)

After considering these three options;

Option a was rejected because it would not be reasonable or fair to exclude parts of Horwich from participation in a community driven project.

Option b was considered but rejected because transport may be identified by the community for inclusion in a NP.

Option c is the same as option b with an additional triangle of land added for the following reasons:- De Havilland Way is a key arterial route connecting Horwich to the M61, the A6 and Horwich Parkway Railway Station plus the leisure facilities which are used by residents of Horwich. The proposed spine road connecting Rivington Chase to the Spirit of Sport roundabout will also lie within this triangle. Should traffic or modal assessments be required for the NP, these key junctions would form part of any assessment. The NPAG recommended this option be used to denote the area covered by the plan.

2. Consider any existing constraints including national policies, Local Plan and Regional Framework and identify how a Neighbourhood Plan could add to them. It is expected this will require consultation with both statutory bodies and advisory groups.

Existing constraints include:

NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework)
Local Development Framework (Bolton Council Core Strategy) Development Plan Document (March 2011)
Bolton Council Allocation Plan (December 2014)
Greater Manchester Spatial Framework

A Neighbourhood Plan must conform to national and local planning policy and cannot prevent allocated housing development. However, it can help to shape the mix of housing built and influence planning decisions so that any new housing meets the needs of local people, fits the character of the town and is sensitively and sustainably integrated into the town environment.

The following bodies have been identified as possible consultees:

- Bolton Council
- HMB (Horwich Means Business)
- The Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Bolton & District Civic Trust
- United Utilities
- GM and Lancashire Police
- Adjoining Parishes and Towns
- Woodland Trust
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust
- LCC West Pennine Moors
- Highways Agency
- Local Enterprise Partnerships
- Schools
- Local GP's and Health Centres
- Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group
- Bolton CVS
- Fire Service
- Ambulance Service
- Network Rail
- Bus Operators

This is not an exhaustive list, it is recognised that public consultation may identify additional bodies.

3. Consider the likely cost of producing a plan and make recommendations regarding the likely cost and benefits of production of a plan. Also to identify possible sources of funding.

Localism Act: Neighbourhood Plans and Community Right to Build, Impact Assessment published by Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2012 states;

There are common types of costs that will apply across all Neighbourhood Plans such as:

	Range of Costs	
Community Consultation	£5,000 -	£10,000
Publicity and Publication of Plans	£1,500 -	£7,000
*Independent Examination	£5,000 -	£8,000
*Referendum	£1.80 per head	

* Costs that fall to the Local Authority and for which funds have been identified

A presentation given by DCLG reported the average cost of a NP was £13,758. Blackrod Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group advise their costs up to Independent Examination will be within the £9,000 grant from mycommunity.org

Sources of funding:

There are two types of funding available for 2015-2018; a grant up to a maximum of £9,000 from mycommunity.org <http://mycommunity.org.uk/funding-options/neighbourhood-planning/> and an additional grant of £6,000 is available for technical support for groups facing complex issues, provided by AECOM. Horwich meets the 'high growth area' criteria for this additional grant as over 500 new homes are included in the Allocation Plan.

The NPAG do not anticipate needing any additional funding from Horwich Town Council, other than the initial funding of £500 proposed by the Town Council to cover administrative costs. The NPAG will seek any additional funding it might require through grant bids or look to get sponsorship from other sources, which may be of future benefit to HTC.

Other potential sources [should they be required] include:

- Lottery 'Big Local Programme'
- Local Business Sponsorship

The benefits of Neighbourhood Plans are well documented. They can provide the opportunity for communities to set out for how they want their community to develop over the next ten, fifteen, twenty years in ways that meet identified local need and make sense for local people.



Key benefits that could accrue:

Source: <http://locality.org.uk/resources/neighbourhood-planning-roadmap-guide/>

- Protect areas from types of change (such as too much of one type of business)
- Include policies to influence new building design, or alterations to existing buildings
- Can protect or propose the creation of open spaces (Green Gaps, Nature Reserves/Wildlife Corridors, Allotments, Sports Pitches, Play Areas, Parks, Gardens important Historic Assets)
- Enable the community to manage changes effectively. Ensure they benefit the community
- Allow us to encourage developers to build what the community believes our community needs and wants (eg. Affordable housing; developments more suited to elderly residents, single person accommodation)
- Can influence where and what type of development should happen.
- Local communities can benefit from additional funding for community facilities associated with having a 'made' plan.

It should be noted that an Impact Assessment of NP carried out by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) states;

Savings to Local Councils:-

- Less time and resources spent opposing 'unwanted' development.
- A statutory influence on planning application decisions
- Enhanced influence on the content of Local Plans.

Savings to Local Planning Authority:-

- No longer processing appeals against rejected planning applications.
- Officer time requirements reduced in processing planning applications.
- Reduced administrative costs and legal fees.

Resources

Once the neighbourhood area is designated by the local planning authority, the authority is legally required to provide advice and assistance to those bodies producing a Neighbourhood Plan in its area. This 'duty to support' could include:

- Making existing data and maps available for the evidence base
- Identifying key local strategic policies from the Local Plan
- Advising on relevant national policies/guidance
- Sharing information on key contacts, stakeholders and best practice plan-making activity
- Making available venues and helping to arrange community engagement activities
- Checking the plan prior to formal submission to give community confidence
- Serve to deliver a more sustainable and low carbon Horwich community
- Providing technical support, such as assistance in laying-out and illustrating a plan and writing plan policies

- Providing members for neighbourhood forums or more informal working groups
- Setting up a neighbourhood planning web page on the local authority's website.

A Project Plan and skill mapping will identify the key resources needed by the group to analyse data, identify key themes for the NP, present to community for consultation, write the plan etc. The Neighbourhood Plan will be an iterative process, as public consultation identifies what the community wants to be included in the NP.

Skills required can then be identified and filled by local expertise, which we are fortunate to have in Horwich NPAG (see the summary of skills and expertise of NPAG members on page 9), and if necessary, there are many organisations which can offer consultants to bridge any remaining gaps.

4. Determine the types of consultation and information gathering to be used to best obtain a wide-ranging response. Record details of consultations carried out and make them available to Council if required.

The NP would require a strategy to ensure effective communication and engagement with the Horwich community to facilitate a “bottom up” process, resulting in a plan which incorporates sound community policies.

It is important to recognise the mix of people in the community to ensure that everyone has the chance to engage in the process. Grouping residents and businesses into stakeholder groups will help identify what methods are needed to ensure their views are obtained.

Typical stakeholders groups include:

- Schoolchildren (aged 5-16)
- Young people (aged 16 – 30)
- Older groups
- Commuters
- Housing estate representatives/Residents Associations
- Community groups and societies
- Single parent families
- People with physical needs
- People with learning needs
- Faith groups
- People employed in the community
- Local businesses
- Black and minority ethnic groups

The following key themes were identified.

- a) Planning and aspirations for the future [inc. sustainability and a low carbon Horwich]
- b) Housing
- c) Conservation / Heritage
- d) Transport and Infrastructure
- e) Health and Welfare [inc. environmental quality of life aspects]
- f) Town Centre
- g) Education
- h) Ecology, Landscape and Open Spaces
- i) Sport, Leisure, Culture and Tourism
- j) Business and Employment

Types of Consultation and Information Gathering:

- Drop-in sessions at Horwich Library, Horwich Community Centre, Brazley Community Centre
- Suggestion boxes at each of the above locations
- Public meetings including question and answer sessions
- Online surveys
- Questionnaires and surveys taken
- Contact page on the web site and email address

We will draft an **Engagement Plan** in a structured format to include more detailed consultation and information gathering once we have gained approval.

5. Provide means by which the views of the community, statutory bodies and other consultees can be recorded either as public documents or as a private response to the Committee and the Council, should the consultees request it.

All electronic correspondence will be saved into a document repository on the Council's website. Written documents will be addressed to the Chair of the Steering Group and all written documents will be scanned and saved to the document repository and originals stored at the Council offices.

Conclusions/Recommendations:

1. Horwich Town Council is respectfully requested to approve this Feasibility Report as the basis for the NPAG to move forward with the development of a Neighbourhood Plan.

[Subject to the approval of stage 1 then move to stage two and three]

2. Horwich Town Council is respectfully requested to then ask Bolton Council to approve the plan area as defined in this report.

3. The NPAG would then wish to be re-constituted as a Steering Group and proceed to the Public Consultation stage.

[Subject to the approval of 2 and 3 then progress to stage 4]

4. Horwich Town Council is respectfully requested to apply for the appropriate grant support – as and when it will be required - set out in Section 3 of this report to enable the project to proceed to the next stage, Public Consultation).

Summary of Skills and expertise of Horwich NPAG members

Stuart Whittle	A retired Town Planner with over 40 years experience in Planning & Urban Design
Richard Shirres	40+ years as a Chartered Civil Engineer plus a degree in Applied Environmental Science
John Rigby	Economic Development Consultant with UK Gov and Euro Commission experience
Rod Riesco	Technical translator, Treasurer of local Conservation Group and Allotment owner
David Griffiths	President of Horwich Rotary, Governor of RBHS, CoE vicar, supports Urban Outreach
Steve Glover	32 yrs managing large scale Social Housing for both Local Authority and Housing Assoc's
Craig Rotherham	Creative advertising director/brand manager exper. in marketing communications
David Barnes	LA Services manager, keen conservationist and member of Horwich Harriers
Eileen Jepson	Retired 6 th form college lecturer & foster carer 25+ yrs experience with young people
Marie Brady	Civil Eng degree. 20 yrs Project Mgmt @ Railtrack. 10yrs construction business owner
Steven Rock	Former engineer, served as a councilor for Horwich for 20 yrs. Elected mayor twice
Jim Bullock	Former sales manager, Horwich town councilor and ex- mayor. Director of BRASS
Steve Chadwick	Administrator with good media skills, Sec. of community group. Horwich councillor

APPENDIX 1

HORWICH BOUNDARY MAP

APPENDIX 2

CPRE

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING