

Report to Council

Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire and Initial Community Engagement

Purpose of Report

This report asks Council to agree the best way forward for the first stage of the Neighbourhood Plan work. The main point for consideration is whether to send out one combined questionnaire, rather than asking residents to complete a short survey now and a further, more detailed one later.

Background

The Parish Council has been considering whether to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Acresford. If progressed, a Neighbourhood Plan would give the community the opportunity to set out planning policies and priorities for the parish, subject to the required consultation, examination and referendum process.

I have looked at examples from other councils and best practice guidance to help shape an initial questionnaire. The draft questionnaire has been prepared to do two things: firstly, to ask residents whether they support the Parish Council moving forward with a Neighbourhood Plan, and secondly, to start gathering useful evidence about local priorities and concerns.

Considerations

Council could choose to send out a short questionnaire first, asking whether residents support a Neighbourhood Plan, and then follow this with a more detailed questionnaire later. This would be a reasonable option, but there is a practical point to consider. Residents may be less likely to complete a second questionnaire on the same subject, particularly if they feel they have already given their views. If the response to a later questionnaire was lower, Council may have less evidence available to support the early stages of the Plan.

For that reason, one combined questionnaire may be the more practical approach. It would avoid asking residents similar questions twice and would make better use of their time. It would still clearly ask whether residents support the Parish Council progressing a Neighbourhood Plan, while also collecting helpful information on issues such as housing, green spaces, traffic, heritage, community facilities and future priorities.

Recommendation

Council is asked to agree that the Parish Council proceeds with one combined Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire. This would ask residents whether they support the Parish Council moving forward with a Neighbourhood Plan, while also gathering the first stage of evidence needed around local priorities, concerns and future planning issues.

If Council agrees this approach, the questionnaire can then be finalised and issued to residents.