

The Eglington Neighbourhood Plan – Overarching Background Document

N.B. This document is for guidance – those wishing to make representations in response to the Regulation 14 Consultation should ensure they do so by reference to the draft Eglington Neighbourhood Plan, itself.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Overarching Background Document summarises the evolution, to date, of the proposed Eglington Neighbourhood Plan ('ENP'); the steps taken up to now; the evidence supporting the recommended policies; and 'next steps'.
- 1.2. Eglington Parish Council ('EPC') resolved to pursue the adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan (*'the Eglington Neighbourhood Plan or 'ENP'*) on 1st May 2019. 'Covid', the protracted adoption of the Northumberland Local Plan and EPC's temporary hiatus have all, in part, held up the ENP's progress.
- 1.3. A Steering Group¹ ('the SG') was established to oversee its production and, at all times, acted with the authority of EPC.
- 1.4. The SG collated substantial background information in relation to the Parish area, for instance, the Parish's demographics, its socio-economic profile, economic and employment data, *'the Eglington Conservation Area Character Appraisal'* ('the ECACA'), details of the Parish's listed structures, DEFRA's register of important assets, the history of Settlement Boundaries in the villages of Eglington and South Charlton, key 'green spaces', important views, community infrastructure and the text of the (now adopted) Northumberland Local Plan ('the NLP').
- 1.5. With guidance from Northumberland County Council ('NCC'), the SG carried out an initial consultation in August 2019 to test the PC's ideas for the scope of the ENP's policies. The Background Paper to that consultation is at **Appendix 1.1** (though not the appendices to it). There were 103 responses and a summary of the broad views expressed is at **Appendix 1.2**.
- 1.6. Local opinion was tested concerning the issues that might be covered by or omitted from the ENP. This led to a focused set of proposals, supported by evidence and avoiding overlap and conflict with the strategic policies of the NLP.
- 1.7. A dedicated page was created on the PC's website and periodically updated to keep constituents and the wider public informed of progress. In particular, the webpage drew attention to the Design Code referred to at **Appendix B** and two landscape studies commissioned by, respectively, the Northumberland and Newcastle Society and the PC, referred to at **Appendices E1 and E2**.
- 1.8. At each meeting of the PC, a report of the ENP's progress was made with successive members of the PC able to interrogate the SG on issues arising. Minutes of PC meetings are published in Hearabouts, so, likewise, residents, local businesses and the general public had a continuing opportunity to ask questions about the ENP's evolution.

¹ Originally, David Alston; Andy Gray; David Biesterfeld; & Peter Ridgeway. The first three members were successive chairmen of Eglington Parish Council and the last is a former Chief Planner and Local Authority Chief Executive. Mr. Biesterfeld and Mr. Gray are no longer Parish Councillors but Mr. Gray is now the PC's Clerk. Mr. Alston resigned from the SG in 2022 but has been replaced by Parish Councillors Jamie Logan and Joanne Angus. Mr. Alston has helpfully continued to assist with certain aspects of the draft ENP and Julian Tyley has helped with the provision of some excellent photographs of the Parish's landscapes and buildings.

1.9. Through 'Locality', a Government-funded body, the SG has applied for and received both grant funding and 'Technical Assistance', for the following:

- The preparation of the Design Code at **Appendix B**;
- The completion of the landscape study at **Appendix E1**;
- The Strategic Environmental Assessment and its update at **Appendices H1 and H2**;
- General planning advice from retained planning consultants, Ludman Planning Ltd.

These inputs are referenced, below.

1.10. Certain policy areas required new or more localised evidence and/or research. This was collated by the SG and is also referenced, below. Throughout the development of the draft policies, the SG took into account both the National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF'), the provisions of the Northumberland Local Plan ('NLP'); the helpful guidance of Northumberland County Council ('NCC'); and the advice of planning consultants, Ludman Planning Ltd.

1.11. At its meeting on 18th April 2023, EPC:

- Approved the draft ENP at Appendix 2.1 and the associated policies map (with Eglington and South Charlton Village insets) at Appendix 2.2, based on this Background Paper and its supporting documents; and
- Authorised EPC's Chair and Clerk to initiate the consultation required by Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 ('the Reg. 14 Consultation').

2. Evidence by Policy

1) Policy 1 – Settlement boundaries for the villages of Eglington and South Charlton.

- i) The Steering Group took, as its starting point, the settlement boundaries applied to the villages of Eglington and South Charlton by earlier development plan documents, considered subsequent and prospective planning applications for development in the respective villages and applied the strictures of the NPPF. **Appendix A** comprises:

- (1) **A1:** The SG's '*Settlement Boundary Methodology and Background Report Eglington Neighbourhood Plan (December 2020)*'; and
- (2) **A2:** maps of the proposed settlement boundaries that the SG has recommended and the PC has approved.

As will be noted, the proposed settlement boundaries are based on earlier delineations comprised in the Alnwick District-Wide Local Plan (now superseded) but adjusted for subsequent developments. As the draft policy explains, the NLP (strategic policy HOU 3) identifies no housing requirement for the Parish of Eglington over the Plan period such that the suggested boundaries have been drawn fairly tightly. It is important to note that development may still be pursued within the boundaries and, per the policies, may, in limited circumstances, occur beyond them.

- ii) Later in the process, local soundings were taken as to the creation of a settlement boundary at North Charlton. In September 2021, a site visit took place at North Charlton, attended by a member of the SG, the North Charlton resident who had raised the issue and a representative of NCC. This led to a leaflet being prepared as a basis for an informal consultation in North Charlton. It was circulated to all North Charlton Residents. The only response was from the resident who had first raised the issue. The SG was subsequently advised that, on reflection, the establishment of a Settlement Boundary for North Charlton would offer no more, indeed probably less, protection against inappropriate development, there, than leaving the area classified as 'open countryside', as it is under the NLP.

2) Policy 2 - High quality and sustainable design.

- i) Through 'Locality' and using a Technical Assistance package for which the Steering Group applied, 'AECOM'² were engaged to review the Parish and nearby settlements, notably Chatton, and to prepare a Design Code. The Steering Group held a number of meetings with AECOM and drew their attention to examples of both good and bad design in and near to the Parish. Again, the NPPF was taken into account.
- ii) The result was '*the Eglington Design Code*' of June 2020 which comprises the evidence base for Policy 2. It is at **Appendix B**.

3) Policy 3 - Eglington Conservation Area.

- a) The village of Eglington is the subject of '*The Eglington Conservation Area Character Appraisal*' ('the ECACA'). Though somewhat out of date, the SG took the view that the ECACA remains broadly valid.
- b) Accordingly, while no additional evidence was obtained in relation to the Conservation Area beyond noting the impact of additional housing development, particularly along the Terrace, its findings were reviewed and it was used alongside the Steering Group's local knowledge, as the evidence base for Policy 3 – the ECACA is at **Appendix C**. The ECACA and the SG's local knowledge also fed into the landscape study referred to below. Reference should also be made to **Appendix E3** which comprises a list of important views divided between those relevant, respectively, to policies 3 and 5.

4) Policy 4 - Local Green Spaces in the villages of Eglington and South Charlton.

- i) Applying the *Neighbourhood Planning Advice Notes - Advice Note: Local Green Space*, the Steering Group identified a number of Local Greenspaces ('LGS's') in both Eglington and South Charlton and tested them against the requisite criteria.

² AECOM is the body appointed by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government ('MHCLG') to advise Neighbourhood planning bodies on the subject of Design Codes.

- ii) The proposed LGS's in each of those villages together with the justifications for their designation are at **Appendix D**.
- iii) The owners of land comprising the proposed LGS's have been advised of the proposed designations.

5) Policy 5 - Area of High Landscape Value

- i) A principal objective of the proposed ENP was always to restore policy recognition of the value of the Parish's special landscapes and to appreciate them not just for themselves but in their broader context. The professional evaluation of the Parish's landscapes and their settings was heavily supported through the first consultation.
- ii) While local people have the evidence of their own eyes on which to base their recognition of the remarkable quality of North Northumberland's landscapes, landscape evaluation is now a technical and highly developed 'science'. Accordingly, grant funding was secured by the SG for a professional evaluation of the Parish's landscapes and those surrounding them, by Alison Farmer Associates ('AFA')³, specifically to inform the policies of the ENP: *'Eglington Parish Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Assessment Final Report' - Alison Farmer Associates May 2021 (updated January 2022)* ('the ENP Study', attached at **Appendix E1**).
- iii) In fact, that ENP Study drew heavily on a much wider study carried out by AFA on behalf of the Northumberland and Newcastle Society: *'The Northumberland Sandstone Ridges & Vales – a Valued Landscape Technical Report' – Alison Farmer Associates January 2021* (as updated, post consultation, in January 2022 - 'the Wider Study' – see **Appendix E2**).
- iv) Reference should also be made to **Appendix E3**, a list of important views divided between those relevant, respectively, to policies 3 and 5, and **Appendix E4**, a collection of photographs kindly taken and collated by Eglington resident, Julian Tyley (the SG thanks him for his considerable assistance).
- v) The Wider Study and the ENP Study, which should be read together, were carried out not only by leading experts but applying the latest guidance from Natural England and the Landscape Institute. Both Studies considered the justification for the local designation of a 'valued landscape' and, based on the evidence on which they relied, recommended such a designation. In so far as the wider advised designation falls within the Parish, the ENP seeks to adopt it, calling it an *'Area of High Landscape Value'* ('AHLV') to provide consistency with terminology used in

³ AFA are leading experts in their field having conducted substantial work for National Park authorities and other specialist bodies requiring advice on landscape quality and related issues. AFA's work conducted for the ENP was an adjunct to a much wider study of, broadly, an area west of the A1 up to the boundary of the Northumberland National Park and stretching from just north of Doddington to Alnwick and across to the west of Rothbury.

the context of an earlier (though slightly wider) designation in the now defunct Alnwick District Wide Local Plan.

vi) Both Studies involved extensive desk-top research and, more importantly, detailed field work; input from a range of local people (including a number with specialist expertise); and were the subject of a consultation process through Parish Councils (including EPC) after which some of the initially recommended designation boundaries (but not those within the Parish) were amended to take account of additional evidence provided by consultees.

vii) In particular, it is to be noted that:

- (1) As mentioned, above, the entire Parish area, west of the A1, was locally designated as an AHLV under the former Alnwick District-Wide Local Plan (as was a substantial, contiguous area to the north-west of the Parish so designated under the former Berwick District Local Plan).
- (2) Prior to the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') in 2011 and in the context of the possible renewal, in whole or part, of that AHLV designation for the purposes NCC's then evolving planning policies, NCC were advised by their consultants engaged to prepare the *'Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment 2010'*, that such a renewal would require *'more detailed, local level study of each group of character areas, including field work and consultation, in order to establish broad support for, and robust justification of, the areas chosen [for potential local, protective designation]'* (para. 4.3). However, NCC did not pursue the question of local re-designation and, accordingly, did not act as the consultants advised. This left our treasured landscapes unprotected by any local designation. Worse, the absence of such a designation was used, by some, to argue that the former AHLV lacked 'value'. For those living in or visiting the area, that outcome was perverse.
- (3) The Wider Study and, for the specific purposes of the ENP, the ENP Study, applied the latest guidance of Natural England and the Landscape Institute and made good NCC's earlier omission. Their conclusion was that most of our Parish area and, indeed, areas beyond, were 'valued landscapes' in the context of the NPPF and worthy of local designation and protection, as such.
- (4) The work undertaken by Alison Farmer Associates referenced a wide range of other studies and reports, including *'Assessment of the Extent to which Existing Onshore Wind Developments in Northumberland have been Successfully Accommodated into the Landscape - Main Report and Findings, May 2015' - Bayou Bluenvironment and The Planning and Environment Studio'*, commissioned by NCC and used as part of the ENP evidence base (**Appendix E5**).

6) Policy 6 - Non-designated heritage assets.

- i) There is no need for the ENP to contain any policy protecting the area's nationally designated heritage assets as that designation already invokes national protection. Some of the Parish's non-designated heritage assets do, however, warrant ENP policy protection. This topic was researched by David Alston before his resignation from the SG (the current SG thanks him for his input on which the SG continues to rely). The SG subsequently reviewed and reduced the list of non-designated assets on the basis of the appropriate selection criteria and advice from the PC's planning consultants.
- ii) Research led to the listing of a number of those non-designated assets, above ground, as '*Non-Designated Heritage Assets*' and, below ground, as '*Sites and Areas of Archaeological Interest*'. These are respectively listed in Parts A and B of the document at **Appendix F**. Neither list is exhaustive, and there may be buildings or remains which are still of local historic interest that have not been listed. Those listed in Part A will be shown on the policies map but it is not practicable to show those in Part B, often due to the uncertainty of their extent. Development proposals affecting Non-Designated Heritage Assets and Areas of Archaeological Interest will be considered against Policy 6.
- iii) Respondents to the Reg. 14 Consultation are invited either to suggest additions to these assets, applying the criteria explained in the document and giving reasons for those additions, or to explain why they think a particular asset should be removed from the list.

7) Policy 7 - Assets of community value and community facilities.

The principal assets of community value are regarded as self-evident (so requiring no further evidence). They are listed at **Appendix G**.

8) Habitats and Species

- i) The ENP Study drew attention to a number of habitats and species within the Parish.
- ii) In addition, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and a Screening and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) were also required and obtained:
 - (1) NCC's ecologist produced the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Advice for the draft ENP in September 2021 and, as a result, the SG obtained a further Technical Assistance package through Locality which enabled the retention, again, of AECOM. Their SEA and update are at **Appendices H1 and H2**.
 - (2) NCC's HRA, in final form, is still awaited and will be added, as **Appendix H3**, on receipt (its absence does not impede the Regulation 14 Consultation that this Background Paper supports).

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. The Reg. 14 Consultation will take place over six weeks commencing at 9 a.m. on 25th April 2023 before the draft ENP, adjusted insofar as necessary after that consultation, is submitted to NCC for independent examination.
- 3.2. The draft plan will be publicised, through EPC's website, the Residents' Newsletter and 'Hearabouts', to people who live, work or run businesses in the area and, by direct notification, to requisite statutory consultees, including the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England, a list of which has been provided by NCC. Publicity will include details of the proposed ENP, where and when it may be viewed (at each of St. Maurice's Church, Eglington and St. James' Church, South Charlton and on-line, at EPC's website), and how to make comments on the plan and by what date.
- 3.3. A simple leaflet, setting out the main aims and the focus of the ENP's policies will, likewise, be circulated through/with 'Hearabouts' and via the Residents' Newsletter as will details of , planned 'drop-in' events, allowing people to ask questions or discuss the plan on a one-to-one basis with members of the SG. The draft plan and supporting documents have been uploaded to the neighbourhood plan section of EPC's website. Where necessary, the PC will assist the immobile to view the documents at one of the two Churches.
- 3.4. Any comments received by the end of the consultation period will be considered by EPC and a planning judgement taken as to whether or not to amend the ENP in response to them. The decisions on whether or not to amend the plan, and the reasoning behind them, will be recorded for inclusion in a 'consultation statement' prepared and submitted with the ENP when, as it will be, the ENP is sent to NCC.
- 3.5. On receiving the submitted plan proposal and supporting documents, NCC will check that the ENP has followed the proper legal process and is then responsible for publicising the plan, arranging for the requisite independent examination and arranging for a referendum to take place. That publicity gives people another opportunity to make representations that will be passed to the independent examiner.
- 3.6. The plan must then be publicised by NCC for a further 6-week period under Regulation 16. NCC will also notify anyone referred to in the consultation statement that the plan has been received. Any representations received will be passed to the independent examiner for consideration as to whether the ENP meets certain 'basic conditions'.
- 3.7. NCC will appoint an appropriately qualified and experienced person to carry out the independent examination of the ENP, the 'independent examiner' who has to be agreed with EPC.
- 3.8. If the ENP is found to be satisfactory, with modifications if necessary, then NCC will arrange for a referendum to take place, asking the following question: *Do you want*

Northumberland County Council to use the neighbourhood plan for the Eglington Parish area to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?

3.9. If more than 50% of those voting in the referendum vote 'yes', then the ENP will become part of the statutory development plan for the area.

Appendices

Appendix	Policy No.	Description	Comments	Link
1.1	N/A	Background Paper to the initial 2019 consultation		https://www.eglington.info/s/The-ENP-Background-Info-Final-300819-c3kw.pdf
1.2	N/A	Summary of views in response to that initial consultation		https://www.eglington.info/s/Summary-2019-consultation.pdf
2.1	N/A	<i>'The Eglington Neighbourhood Plan'</i>	Regulation 14 draft	https://www.eglington.info/s/Version-112-for-PC-approval-TCA.pdf
2.2	N/A	<i>'The Eglington Neighbourhood Plan' – Policies map</i> (this includes the insets referred to, below)		https://www.eglington.info/s/Eglington-Neighbourhood-Plan-Policies-Map-A1-inc-Policy-6.pdf
A1	1	Settlement Boundary Maps for the villages of:	(See insets mentioned above)	
		Eglington		https://www.eglington.info/s/Inset-1-Eglington-Village-A2-Apr23.pdf
		South Charlton		https://www.eglington.info/s/Inset-2-South-Charlton-A2-Apr23.pdf
A2	1	<i>'Settlement Boundary Methodology and Background Report Eglington'</i>		https://www.eglington.info/s/Settlement-Boundary-Paper-FINAL3.pdf

		<i>Neighbourhood Plan'</i>		
B	2	<i>'Eglingham Parish Design Code (June 2020)'</i>	Prepared by AECOM	https://bit.ly/41dYIKE
C	3	<i>'Eglingham Conservation Area Character Appraisal'</i>		https://www.eglingham.info/s/Eglingham-Conservation-Area-Appraisal.pdf
			See also supporting photographs at E4	
D	4	<i>'Local Greenspace: Methodolgy and Background Report(February 2023)'</i>	LGS: 1-6 – at S. Charlton. 7-21 at Eglingham	https://www.eglingham.info/s/LGS-designations.pdf
E1	5	<i>'Eglingham Parish Neighbourhood Plan Landscape Assessment Final Report' - Alison Farmer Associates May 2021 (updated January 2022)</i>	'The ENP Study'	https://www.eglingham.info/s/Eglingham-Landscape-NP-Final-Report-Jan-2022.pdf
E2	5	<i>'Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales A Valued Landscape - Alison Farmer Associates Technical Report January 2022'</i>	'The Wider Study'	https://bit.ly/40de3Em
E3	3 & 5	Important views divided between those relevant, respectively, to policies 3 and 5.	See also supporting photographs at E4	https://www.eglingham.info/s/Significant-Viewpoints-20-3-23.pdf
E4	3 & 5	Supporting photographs		https://www.eglingham.info/s/Supporting-photography-ENP.pdf
E5	5	<i>'Assessment of the Extent to which</i>	This study was	https://bit.ly/43yyChC

		<i>Existing Onshore Wind Developments in Northumberland have been Successfully Accommodated into the Landscape - Main Report and Findings, May 2015' - Bayou Bluenvironment and The Planning and Environment Studio.</i>	commissioned by NCC and is referenced by Alison Farmer Associates in their above work at E1 and E2	
F	6	<i>'Background Evidence Report – Non-Designated Heritage Assets and Areas of Archaeological Interest – Eglington Parish Neighbourhood Plan'</i>		https://www.eglington.info/s/ENP-Non-Designated-Historical-Assets-justification-Final.pdf https://www.eglington.info/s/Eglington-NP-Policies-Map-NDHA.pdf
G	7	Assets of community value and community facilities		https://www.eglington.info/s/Community-Facilities.pdf
H1	8	<i>'Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for The Eglington Neighbourhood Plan - Environmental Report March 2022 (AECOM)'</i>		https://www.eglington.info/s/Eglington-NP-SEA-final.pdf
H2	8	<i>'Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for The Eglington Neighbourhood Plan -</i>		https://www.eglington.info/s/eglington-NP-SEA_updated_Dec22.pdf

		<i>Environmental Report December 2022 (AECOM)' - update</i>		
H3	8	NCC's Habitats Regulations Assessment	To follow – NCC has advised that the HRA's absence will not impede the Reg.14 Consultation	