

**WYRE COUNCIL ISSUES AND OPTIONS REPORT 2015**  
**RESPONSE FROM NETHER WYRESDALE PARISH COUNCIL**

**DRAFT**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 This is the written response from Nether Wyresdale Parish Council (PC) in respect of the Wyre Local Plan Issues and Option Report, published in June 2015. To assist in formulating the response the Parish Council has, as far as possible, gauged the views of the community. This has been achieved by the notification of individuals through e mail, where addresses were known and the placing of a 'Comments Box' in the village Post Office, so that individuals could deposit their opinions. Latterly, residents of the Parish were invited to an 'open forum' which was held on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, the date of the last Parish Council meeting, where the matter was discussed. Individuals were invited to express their opinions. Approximately 120 parishioners attended the meeting.

1.2 The comments made in this response are the result of:

- Opinions expressed at the Open Forum that were recorded as accurately as possible.
- Letters placed in the Comments Box, which are effectively summarised and incorporated within this response (these have also been forwarded to the Borough Council).
- An analysis of the Issues and Options Report itself, framing the response in respect of the overall Vision and objectives of the anticipated Local Plan, when it is finally adopted.

Individuals have been encouraged to make a written response to the Borough Council where they feel it appropriate to do so.

The steps undertaken and responses received should enable the Borough Council (BC) to take a rounded view of the overall opinions that have emerged from the Parish as a result of consultation.

Numbers within brackets refer to paragraph numbers of the Issues and Options Report.

**2. General Issues**

2.1 In general terms the Parish Council would agree with the overall 'Vision' and how the Borough Council would wish to foresee the area by 2031. It is agreed that Wyre has a number of constituent parts and settlement patterns and that these distinctive areas of the Borough require various approaches in respect of future planning. It would support the desire to have a strong and diverse economy securing employment growth in sustainable locations (3.20). However, in respect of small rural settlements, economic activity should only be considered appropriate if it meets locally generated needs and opportunities and where it is consistent in scale, supporting the function of the particular place/settlement. For this reason, speculative development with no connection to the role and function of the locality would be inappropriate. The PC would support the objective of protecting the heritage of the Borough and the distinctive character of its settlements, based on a thorough understanding of their character, quality, setting and function (4.10). The PC would also strongly support the protection of the countryside, the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) (3.22) and also concurs with the promotion

of the visitor economy where this is appropriate and compatible with the particular locations where it is to be promoted (4.7).

- 2.2 The PC would also agree in principle with the overall objectives as set out in the Issues and Options Report, particularly in ensuring that new development is located in areas that are able to support such development, having the appropriate infrastructure (Para 3.30). This would include issues of accessibility and capacity to accommodate development, but especially in taking account of the special nature, character and scale of existing settlements.
- 2.3 The PC notes and supports the BC (3.28) where it states that the Borough's towns and villages create a diverse environment. Of particular significance is their relationship to the surrounding natural environment, creating a distinctive character and image for the area. This is particularly the case with respect to rural settlements and no more so than in the case of Scorton. The PC strongly agrees with the BC where it states that it is essential in "ensuring that new development does not have an unacceptable impact on the special character and distinctiveness of (our) settlements and heritage assets" (3.28). Protecting local distinctiveness and heritage, as a cornerstone of the Local Plan is welcomed and supported (3.29). It is also noted that the suggestion is made that any development proposed in particular settlements should be 'proportionate' to its present size and scale. This would assume that development would be possible in the absence of particular constraints.
- 2.4 Paragraphs 3.25 to 3.27 relate to Climate Change and Flood Risk. The PC would support the severe limitation of development in recognised areas the subject of flood risk.
- 2.5 The Issue of housing is a key issue for the Borough as a whole and forms a major consideration in respect of the future distribution of development. It is noted that at this early stage of local plan preparation, three 'Options' are proposed and the PC would wish to comment on these in general terms.

### **3. Options for the Plan**

- 3.1 One of the key elements of the Issues and Options stage is understood to be one of establishing a foundation for the future spatial distribution of development. With the distribution of sites shown within the Report, it is not known how many dwellings such sites could accommodate, which would give the public a realistic expectation as to how many of the sites will ultimately be proposed or discounted. It is also not appreciated why various large sites have been included at this stage that seem so obviously contrary to the objectives that are proposed to underpin the plan as it develops. This has been a major issue for the public in Nether Wyresdale
- 3.2 Of the three Options presented, the PC would, as a matter of general principle, favour Option 1. It is considered that new development should largely be located where needs would naturally be generated i.e. natural population growth and household formation, supporting infrastructure providing economies of scale, service provision and recreational facilities. Employment markets and opportunities for business development are maximised and the potential for more sustainable transport and connectivity would result. The reuse of brownfield land could be maximised. In the case of other settlements, particularly in rural areas, it is considered essential that any new development should be generated primarily by local needs, where it can be demonstrated it would be required to support the on-going sustainability of a settlement. In

practice it is difficult to align new residential development and employment in a self-contained sustainable way within or as extensions to particular settlements. The location of speculative development inappropriately would probably result in out commuting, particularly in the absence of appropriate connectivity and in the absence of community infrastructure (3.30).

- 3.3 It is noted that in so far as Scorton is concerned 'Limited Development' is suggested, which is not defined. The Parish Council is aware that development opportunities around the village possess major constraints and that on previous occasions opportunities to develop particular sites were rejected in view of the potential impact on the character of the village ('Wyre Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2010 (SHLAA) (Final Report). The planning objectives set out in the Issues and Options Report, including the protection of the character of settlements, their distinctive character, surrounding landscapes, the AONB, infrastructure constraints and the protection of heritage assets, will no doubt be considered in detail following this stage of consultation.

#### **4. Scorton as a rural settlement**

- 4.1 Scorton is a small settlement of some 300 residents and is generally considered to be a very attractive traditional former mill village. It has a reputation as a picturesque 'gateway' to the Forest of Bowland and has a thriving visitor offer including café/restaurants and hotel, which are also major local employers. It is located on a national cycle route. The village has a thriving, inclusive community, the result, in many ways, due to its compact size. It is considered to be a well-balanced community in terms of population and household mix. Its present scale is seen as being in balance with its facilities and includes a local primary school that is nearing full capacity. It has a village hall, playing field with equipment, three places of worship and a post office/convenience store. It could, therefore, be considered to be a thriving rural community of a small scale. However, the village relies on the market town of Garstang for a broader range of infrastructure including medical facilities, secondary school, leisure uses, library, supermarkets and other service and commercial facilities. Therefore, its present 'sustainability' relates to and is in proportion with its size and function as a small rural community. Its relationship with Garstang as a service centre and market town is probably typical of what might be expected for such a small community. For its size, the village could be considered as being 'sustainable' to a level to be expected for its size. As such, it is considered that Scorton does not require new development to maintain its relative sustainability.
- 4.2 As a small village, Scorton depends on the use of the private car for communication and it has no bus service (2.34). Within Option 1, it is stated that development would be directed to those settlements where there are the most services and which are already served by public transport (6.18). Access to the village is generally poor, particularly in respect of its connectivity with the A6. Road access is by way of Station Lane, which in effect is a country lane with narrow sections, a single track 'weight restricted' bridge and an acute 'blind bend' under the West Coast main lane bridge. Similarly, access along Gubberford Lane is poor with a narrow bridge over the Wyre, a narrow poorly lit country lane with very limited forward visibility and a blind bend under the west coast mainline bridge. Traffic hazards are present within the village caused in part by extensive kerb side parking on the approaches, notably along Gubberford Lane. It is assumed that the County Council, as highway authority would not support any material increase in traffic volumes using these routes as a connection to the A6 and there is a particularly well known problem of access to the village by service vehicles.

- 4.3 One of the virtues of Scorton is the fact that it is a self-contained settlement and has a distinctive character. Founded as mill village it has since, developed 'organically' adapting slowly over time by way of small scale additions, the reuse of brown field sites and through the development of individual plots. For this reason, the character of the village and its historic layout has remained intact. Where new development has taken place, it is generally seen to have been small scale and ancillary to the built form that defines the historic character of the village, set within its rural setting. Thus, the historic core remains the dominant principal characteristic of the village. It is therefore considered essential to retain these very qualities that provides the village with its physical character and a resulting reputation that attracts considerable visitor numbers, which in turn are important to the local economy.
- 4.4 The distinctive character of the village provides it with a unique place within the Borough. The village is centred on a designated conservation area and contains a number of listed buildings. National and local policy would require that these assets be protected. In addition to a recognition of the architectural and historic value of the village, the landscape setting of the village (conservation area and its listed buildings) is also a defining characteristic. The open landscape that surrounds the village, including strategic views, skylines and approaches is critical to its character, perceived scale and setting. The open agricultural setting typifies its rural character and function and includes attractive undulating landscapes to the west. The relationship of the village to the AONB, where the upland landscape sweeps in to the village and forms an impressive backdrop, when viewed from the westerly approaches, is particularly significant. The village also has an important landscape setting from the south and higher ground to the east. Appreciating the important character, scale and setting of Scorton, the PC wholeheartedly endorses the objectives expressed in the Issues and Options Report (3.29 and 4.10), relating to the importance of protecting the special character of settlements and heritage assets and that villages remain set in attractive open countryside, with the AONB having been conserved and enhanced. This is particularly relevant to Scorton.
- 4.5 A number of residents have expressed a concern in respect of the potential impact of development on the environment within the centre of the village. In view of the nature of Scorton as a visitor destination, there are concerns that the practical and environmental implications of increases of traffic on the fabric of the village, its streets and spaces would have a detrimental impact on the quality of life for residents. From time to time, the residents of the village are subjected to significant levels of noise emanating from the M6 Motorway. Wyre will need to carefully assess the suitability of development where this could be in proximity to the Motorway. National Planning Practice Guidance identifies this issue and other practice notes give a categorisation method for the suitability, or otherwise, of sites that would be the subject of particular levels of noise. This would be a significant factor in assessing the practicality of including sites at the Draft Local Plan stage.
- 4.6 The Issue and Options Report identifies the issue of flood risk (3.25 onwards). Paragraph 3.27 notes that a substantial part of the Borough is already subject to high flood risk. The plans prepared by the Environment Agency (2.27) indicate that large areas to the west of the village are categorised as 'Zones 2 and 3' which in essence should not be developed.
- 4.7 The factors discussed above can be considered to be a local assessment as to how the sites proposed around Scorton, when taken collectively or in some cases individually would not meet

the objectives of the Borough Council itself. The overwhelming opinion as expressed through representations made to the Parish Council, including the Open Forum held on the 16th July is that the scale of development as suggested would be totally inappropriate and would overwhelm the character, form, distinctiveness and setting of the village. Access is poor and there are significant infrastructure constraints and sustainability issues as well as major physical constraints, including Flood Risk.

- 4.8 When asked to express an opinion at the Open Forum, of those residents who ‘voted’, a significant majority considered that as a small rural settlement Scorton has witnessed, proportionately, a significant level of new development in recent times. Reference was made to Priory Gardens and the Mill Lane site. The constraints as outlined in this response around the village set against the overall objectives of the Issues and Options Report, would appear to severely restrict development opportunities in any case. A smaller number of those who expressed a preference stated that if justified (presumably if planning issues were fully considered and satisfied) then some limited, small scale development might be acceptable. This would need to be well related to the character of the village, meet specific need, appearing as a natural built extension to the village and be of a high architectural standard.

## **5 An Evaluation of the sites included within the Issues and Options Report**

- 5.1 The PC notes that the Local Plan is at a very early stage in its production (1.5). However, the Issues and Options is a critical stage as this allows for early consultation and the opportunity to gauge public reaction. Paragraph 7.3 notes how the sites being put forward at this stage have not been decided. However, one of the key objectives of the Issues and Options stage is “to enable comments to be made on constraints that may inhibit development or matters that need to be taken into account and addressed before a site can be allocated.” The preceding sections of this response have outlined in general terms the broad issues that the PC ( guided by the community) consider relevant in determining the potential for the development sites as shown in the Report. It is hopefully clear that when set against the overall objectives of the plan as suggested in the Issues and Options Report, there are significant constraints and reasons why potential development of the scale as indicated is wholly inappropriate for the village of Scorton.
- 5.2 In respect of ‘identifying issues’ for the sites in question (7.3) each site is now considered in turn. It should be noted that the response relates to the sites based on their extent as shown on plan. As no indication is shown as to potential densities or uses (in the case of one of the sites), the comments given can only be of a general nature at this stage.

### **Site 10 – 91 : Land bounded by the Railway, Station Lane, the easterly edge of the Village and Gubberford Lane**

- 5.3 This is a very large site identified as having the potential for ‘Mixed Use’. No indication is given as to the potential development mix, density or to the proportion of the overall site that may be considered suitable for development. The size of this site could not be considered to meet the objectives set out in the Issues and Options Report. It would represent an essential doubling of the size of the village. Significant objection has been made to the development of the site. Some of the key reasons why this is considered to be the case include:

- The site is wholly disproportionate by virtue of its sheer scale in relation to the existing character and form of Scorton village, which has developed over time and in an organic manner. Its essential character would be compromised whereby contemporary development would overwhelm the existing settlement appearing as a 'detached' development, not complimenting the historic form, street pattern and built character of the village. This would run counter the objectives identified in the Issues and Options Report (Para 3.28).
- The open countryside character and setting of the village on its westerly side is considered essential to its distinctiveness. Paragraph 4.10 notes how villages should be set in an 'attractive open countryside'. This attractive area of open landscape is particularly important since the approaches to the village are abrupt, particularly from Station Lane, in view of the elevated railway embankment acting as a barrier. A panorama of the village and its setting emerges at this point and the foreground landscaping is an essential part of this character. The open landscape forms a rural setting for the village. The development of this site would therefore obscure this relationship with the open setting lost. This setting is also prominent from the railway itself.
- Each of the three 'Options' contained within the Report suggest that Scorton could accommodate 'Limited Development' and that any development should be proportionate to the size of the existing settlement (6.7). The development of this site would totally exceed any reasonable definition of 'Limited Development'.
- Additional development around the village is not required to achieve a 'sustainable settlement' It is considered that Scorton is presently sustainable form an economic, environmental and social point of view.
- The village does not have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the level of development as indicated (3.30).
- The site has very poor access to the A6 which should preclude material increases in traffic generating development. The development of sites will rely of the use of private transport and the village has no public transport facilities (2.34).
- This site is located within Flood Zones 2 and 3 (medium and high risk) where development should be avoided. This is considered to be no justification of this development that would override the principle that development should be directed away from such flood zones (2.27).
- The site makes a major contribution to the setting and distinctiveness of and views into the Scorton conservation area, defining its edges. The views of St Peters church spire (listed building) contributes to the appearance of the village as an attractive rural, traditional English village. The backdrop of the fells and tree cover strongly define the sense of place. This essential character would be lost if the development of this site were to take place (4.4) and 4.10). Of itself, the site is considered to be an attractive tract of land with gentle undulations, tree plantations, hedgerows and field boundaries. The open character of the site is also important in respect of the setting of the conservation area as a result of views from vantage points, outwards from within the village.

- Access to the site from Gubberford Lane is totally inadequate and would result in the loss of trees and hedgerow that help to define the 'soft edges' and approaches to the village.
- The development of this site would create significant traffic issues in the centre of the village which is already congested, particularly at weekends.
- It has been suggested that the sewerage system would not be able to cope with the potential development.

#### **Site 10 - 89 : Land bounded by M6, The Crescent and Long Lane**

5.4 In the context of the size of the existing village, this is a relatively large site, which would extend the village northwards, potentially suburbanising attractive undulating landscape. Attention has been drawn to the 'Wyre Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2010 (SHLAA) (Final Report)'. In assessing potential sites for residential development three sites on the edge of the village were discounted on the basis that the land would be "out of scale with the character of the existing village" (Appendix 1). This site was one of the sites. Overall the site as shown is considered to be of a disproportionate size as an extension to the village. In addition the further factors and constraints are considered relevant.

- The site lies within the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This AONB extends into the village, bounded by Long Lane and Factory Brow. This site is considered to be an attractive undulating area of land fronted by established hedgerow. Whilst the area is separated from the main body of the AONB in this locality by virtue of the M6, visually it appears contiguous from the frontage as the Motorway is set within a cutting. The Forest of Bowland Landscape Character Assessment (2009) recognises this site as part of Landscape Type G – Undulating Lowland Farming and Parkland. This site historically forms part of the Wyresdale Estate (G1 in the 2009 Report). The quality of the AONB should be recognised (4.10) and the significance of the development of the various elements of the historic landscape appreciated.
- In respect of the point directly above, it is understood that Wyresdale Park is recognised as a site of county wide significance as a parkland by the Lancashire Gardens Trust, therefore being an important heritage asset. The Estate has a strong historical relationship with the development of Scorton. This adds to the importance of the landscape character of the site.
- The site as proposed would result in a significant outward expansion of the village, impacting on its setting, approaches and distinctiveness.
- The Borough Council will also be aware of the local environmental impact of noise emanating from the M6 Motorway, which is a continuous source. The site lies alongside the Motorway and the issue, in respect of locating 'noise sensitive development' in this location would need to be addressed. As identified in National Policy Practice Guidance and related documents, noise exposure research would be required to appreciate the practical desirability of proposing residential development on the site.

- In view of land levels of the site there could be a significant impact of development on existing residents of The Crescent.
- Access to the site is problematic with the potential loss of frontage hedgerow and trees. Visibility is restricted.

#### **Site 10-90 : Land fronting Factory Brow**

5.5 This site was previously considered in the SHLAA Report (2010). It occupies part of the former mill site (lagoons) and is now overgrown. It would be contiguous with the Mill Yard site. Issues for consideration would include:

- The site lies within the conservation area and whilst overgrown it has an open character.
- The site would potential result in an outward extension, in a ribbon form, extending the limits of development and notably beyond that presently defined by The Crescent
- This site contains attractive trees on its boundaries including attractive frontage hedgerow that contributes to the rural character of the locality and the village edge, at this point.
- The site sits at a relatively high level and the impact of development of adjoining properties would be a major consideration.

#### **6. Other Issues**

6.1 The Borough Council are respectfully asked to carefully consider the issues raised as requested in the Issues and Options Report. The residents of Scorton are rightly concerned about the potential impact of the development on the character and distinctiveness of the village. The Parish Council, on behalf of the community will await the publication of the Draft Local Plan in due course.

6.2 In the event of any small scale development that may be proposed for the village in the future, where matters of planning principle were to be established, some comment was made in respect of development form. This suggests strong support for the principles of attaining high quality design, which responds to local character adding to the sense of place (3.29). This would include any development being of an appropriate character and based on a thorough understanding of the distinctive form, pattern and architectural traditions of the village. This should demonstrate reference to and including local design references, materials, boundary treatments and landscaping.

#### **7. Conclusions**

7.1 As a result of widespread consultation this response seeks to articulate the views of the local community in response to the Local Plan Issues and Options Report. It seeks to interpret the overall Vision and Objectives of the Spatial Plan and in particular draws attention to the views of the community. It seeks to highlight constraints and key planning issues that should be taken into account in taking the Local Plan forward (7.3).



- 7.2 Scorton is a unique conservation village within the Borough of Wyre. It is considered to be sustainable for its size and where development has taken place over the decades, this has been incremental and very small in scale and considered to be proportionate to the village environment. It has thus retained a social, environmental and economic balance. In view of its attractive character and location, it has established a reputation as visitor destination and a gateway for the Forest of Bowland. Its visitor offer and its residential status are presently in a relatively harmonious balance.
- 7.3 Notwithstanding its virtues, the development as proposed in the Issues and Options Report would overwhelm the village environment. Access in relatively poor and its amenities, including the local primary school, are virtually at capacity. The village is constrained by areas of flood risk and in a setting of high quality, including the AONB, which should be protected. Any new development as suggested is likely to largely result in speculative development which would not offer specific benefits in respect of the present community.
- 7.4 It is hoped that these comments are helpful and if further information is required this can be provided.