

NERCWYS & DISTRICT RURAL ASSOCIATION

CYMDEITHAS WLEDIG NERCWYS a'r CYLCH

**A Strategy to Guide Development within
Nercwys Parish**

November 2010

Introduction

Flintshire CC is due to formally adopt their Deposit Draft Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which provides both the strategic and detailed framework for land use planning in the County up to the year 2015. The UDP will have an overarching influence upon other FCC corporate plans and strategies to achieve sustainable outcomes. e.g:

- Local Transport Plan,
- Economic Development Strategy,
- Biodiversity Action Plan,
- Countryside Strategy,
- Waste Management Strategy 2009 - 2025

Following adoption of the UDP, FCC will commence the process of transition from the Unitary Development Plan to a Local Development Plan (LDP).

LDPs are to be land use planning policy frameworks and will be integrated with other policies, programmes and activities. A key aspect is that they are intended to be more responsive and effective in delivery of **local aspirations**.

The opportunity arises therefore for Nercwys to establish a local aspirational framework that may be used to inform FCC's long term policy and to act as a guide for Community engagement.

In this document the Nercwys and District Rural Association (NADRA) propose a set of strategy guidelines as a first step in the process of Community engagement. It reviews issues under primary headings used by the UDP and sets out a vision for appropriate development of the village and management of its facilities and services over the coming twenty years or so.

The document is to be submitted to Flintshire CC by NADRA as Stakeholder evidence and will be offered to the Nercwys Community Council (NCC) as a contribution to their proposed Village Plan.

These proposals will be tested and monitored against community opinion and it is recommended that they are reviewed annually.

Communications

Pre-amble

At present, transport links between Nercwys, Mold, Chester and Wrexham are adequate, but owing to the high level of FCC subsidies the bus services are constantly under review. Largely thanks to NADRA's efforts, plans to divert services away from the village were rescinded, but the level of usage remains low.

Apart from articles in the *Nercwys News*, bus services are not promoted within the village. NCC and FCC (along with its contractor GHA Buses) should be more proactive in promoting the benefits of public transport as well as considering lowering the fares to encourage greater usage, which if successful, could result in a lower subsidy.

Telephone and broadband connections are currently inadequate, especially outside the Village Settlement Boundary (VSB), as the Village is at the extreme range from the Mold Exchange for a viable service. NADRA supports the drive to encourage rural enterprise and inclusion through high quality information networks, and every effort should be made to ensure that the local telecommunication networks are developed to achieve this aim.

Traffic speed and shared road use within the VSB are a constant source of concern. Sections of the village road force vehicular and other road users to share the same road space. Whilst no serious accidents have occurred, there have been several incidents that could have been more serious. One of the consequences of this, and

no doubt a reason for the lack of accidents, is that is that pedestrians, especially with young children, are inhibited from walking through the Village.

Nercwys is not a through route for traffic other than busses and other public service vehicles. NADRA believes, therefore, that appropriate use of traffic calming measures, revised speed limits¹, variable road surfacing materials and a designated pedestrian priority route through the village would reclaim Ffordd y Pentre (Village Road) as a safe route for use by all users. It should be noted that, as the school, the church and the, currently closed, White Lion Pub are all located at the South end of Village Road the impact on pedestrian access is significant and no doubt contributes to some of the traffic congestion around the school and church. A safer walking/cycling route would encourage lower car usage for short trips through the village.

Outside the VSB, there have been a number of serious accidents, including fatalities, on the Mold–Eryrys Road (C107) and the Mold–Treuddyn road. Street lighting within the Village is variable but, on the whole, adequate. Only one section of Ffordd y Pentre (Village Road) to the north of the church gives cause for concern. NCC has been unable to find a suitable position for a street lamp and further effort needs to be made to resolve this anomaly.

The standard and type of lighting varies depending upon whether it is provided by the NCC or by FCC. NADRA believes that the recently installed ‘urban’ lighting’ along a section to the north end of Ffordd y Pentre is out of scale for the village and future lighting provision needs to be low intensity, appropriate for a lightly trafficked rural location.

In line with other energy conservation measures, low energy lighting should be installed for replacement or new lighting units.

Strategy

- Resist attempts to reduce the current level of public transport services,
- Resist proposals for fare increases and petition for fare reductions,
- Promote the use of public transport, and encourage NCC, FCC and their contractors to promote these services and provide better information,
- Support and encourage measures to ensure that broadband and telephone services for the VSB and outlying areas are of a high standard,
- Promote traffic calming measures at ‘pinch-points’ along and at the two main entrances to Ffordd y Pentre ,
- Promote reduced speed limits along Ffordd y Pentre,
- Promote reduced speed limits within the rural part of the Parish
- Promote a designated and identifiable pedestrian priority route through the Village where no separate footpath exists and the road is shared by all road users.
- Promote the use of low intensity, low energy street lighting,
- Support NCC’s efforts to address the poor lighting provision to the north of the church.

¹ This will be possible following WAG legislation on variable urban speed limits,

Community Facilities

Pre-amble

It is sad to note that, as in many other rural locations, community facilities within Nercwys have declined over the last few years and those remaining are under threat. The Village Store, Pub and Post Office have all disappeared. The Church and Chapel each have membership and finance challenges, attempts to finance a Village Hall have faltered and the school has survived several closure scares. Over the life of this plan, these issues are only likely to worsen.

These facilities are fundamental to the creation of community cohesion and every effort should be made to establish new and/or support the managed change of existing facilities.

It is recognised that these facilities are only likely to be secured and sustained through Community action and initiatives. Community development funds should be sought where available and FCC should be petitioned to offer low rates or rents to such enterprises.

Dual or triple use facilities should be encouraged, i.e. Pub / Post Office / Convenience Store within the same building, and the appropriate planning procedures made easier. It is accepted, however, that these are commercial ventures and the impetus, funding, maintenance and usage should come from the local community, with FCC acting as facilitators.

Existing play-grounds, play areas and playing fields should be protected from development. Sizeable new developments are normally required to include a play facility as part of the planning process. For the same reason, existing facilities should be given the protection and have the status of 'Green Spaces'.

An initiative to build a Village Hall has stumbled over the years due to a lack of capital and the risk of not being able to cover operational costs. A recent proposal has been made by Nercwys School in convert the unused old school house into classrooms. This would, in turn, recover the school hall for school activities, such as assemblies, gym classes, etc and make the hall available for community events. This offers a double benefit and should be promoted.

Strategy

- Promote and facilitate local initiatives for Community engagement and ownership,
- Promote initiatives that will generate community income, e.g. renewable energy infrastructure,
- Ensure that existing play areas, play fields and the village green are protected from development that restricts community use,
- Support the initiative for joint School/Community action to renovate the old school house and recover the school hall for joint school/community use.

Utilities Infrastructure

Pre-amble

Existing power distribution networks within the Parish have consistently been shown to be inadequate. NADRA has been instrumental in ensuring that this issue remains a priority for Scottish Power with some success. Future improvements will be constrained by the level of investment determined by Ofgem, and by the expenditure priorities set by Scottish Power. Pressure should be maintained on Scottish Power to ensure that making our local supply network fit for purpose is high on their agenda; especially as the future of Consumer Protection Organisations is under review. *[FCC is on record as stating that no Council money will (can?) be made available for network improvements, but FCC could offer non – financial assistance to local communities, who may be encountering problems.*

In some locations, the surface and foul water systems within Nercwys are inadequate and barely cope with present demands. Any expansion of the village will be constrained unless the drainage systems are upgraded. Some of the foul sewerage is un-adopted and currently outside the remit of Dŵr Cymru - Welsh Water. Government proposals to incorporate such systems into the public network are due to come into force next year. This will give Water Companies a large extra workload and it is unlikely, therefore, that they will address many of these outstanding issues without local pressure.

Strategy

- Continue to press Utilities to ensure a high quality service for the Parish, and
- Create a dialogue with the Utility Companies to establish capacity restraints within the infrastructure systems to help inform Development Plans and associated Planning matters.

Energy, Pollution and Waste

Pre-amble

Energy consumption, productivity, security, affordability and environmental impact are all under scrutiny worldwide. Governments at all levels from the EU down to FCC have implemented or are implementing initiatives to address these issues. The overwhelming evidence of the need to progress towards a 'low-carbon' future should be at the core of all decision making. Individuals are therefore encouraged to engage in establishing sustainable communities through appropriate lifestyle choices and local action.

Schemes to encourage and promote energy efficiency and conservation within and by the Community should be promoted with greater use of FCC's Energy Unit, the Energy Saving Trust, etc.

Uptake of local renewable energy resources should be promoted using the Government's 'Feed in Tariff' scheme for electricity and the proposed 'Renewable Heat Tariff' due to be implemented in April 2011. These two schemes, if implemented through Community action, could have a positive impact on the other strategy areas through generation of an income stream and by creating a focus for community engagement and empowerment,

Pollution within the VSB is not considered to be a widespread problem, though general litter and dog excrement is still evident. The provision of litter and dog mess bins by FCC has helped, but it is acknowledged that enforcement of legislation is difficult within small communities. Emphasis must be put on initiatives for education, community ownership, engagement and neighbourhood pride.

In the wider Parish area, both debris littering of the road and verges between Mold and the Nercwys household recycling site and fly-tipping in the wider area are issues

of concern. Pressure needs to be applied on FCC to ensure that these problems are kept under control through enforcement and regular clearance. As recycling demands and the cost of waste disposal increases, collateral littering and fly-tipping may be expected to become an increasing nuisance if not kept under control.

Extensions to FCC's recycling schemes and facilities are increasing and are to be encouraged. Commitment to the fortnightly collection service has been almost total within the Parish.

The pressure to reduce landfill and to recover materials will increase over the lifetime of this plan. NADRA will support extension of the recycling service to include materials such as plastics and food alongside efforts to reduce the amount of packaging and food wasted in the first place.

Strategy

- Support initiatives to facilitate transition to a durable, 'low carbon' village,
- Raise the profile of litter and antisocial fouling by dog (and horse?) excrement in public areas,
- Put pressure on FCC to ensure that the roads leading to the Waste recycling facility are regularly cleared of debris,
- Put pressure on FCC to ensure that fly-tipping is prevented through education and enforcement and, where illegal tipping has occurred, ensure that it is quickly cleared,
- Support initiatives to encourage greater recycling of household discards to reduce the amount of waste to landfill,

Housing

Pre-amble

Nercwys has been classed as a Category C settlement for many years, which, according to the draft Flintshire UDP, will allow for 0 – 10% growth during the timescale of the future LDP. The current UDP, as will no doubt, the future LDP, sets targets for house building within the County. Nercwys has grown 'organically' during the last thirty five years and it would be naive to expect this to change whilst opportunities for in-fill plots and farm building conversions exist.

So long as land owners are prepared to sell land within the current VSB, houses will continue to be built to sizes and designs to suit the individual purchaser (within planning constraints). Over the past forty years or so, all new buildings within the VSB have been of the 4/5 bedroom 'executive house' category.

Recent Village focussed surveys have indicated that there is a consensus within the village that this has created a demographic imbalance and that, in future, developments of two to three bed properties would be preferable to encourage young families to settle and contribute to the village. It is recognised, however, that it will not be possible to enforce this requirement on private developments.

In addition, house prices in and around Nercwys bring a premium and this is an additional barrier to retention of younger people and families in the village with the consequential impact on continuity, 'ownership' and long term engagement in the community.

Consideration should be given to supporting the provision of a limited extension to the amount of supported housing in the village to achieve an equitable demographic mix where a local need can be demonstrated.

In the proposed rearrangements of the Flintshire Electoral Wards, the Welsh Assembly Government has stated that the number of electors within Nercwys Parish is expected to increase by a total of four (*Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales - September 2010*). At the time of writing, four houses, two large and two

small, have been empty within the VSB for two or more years. Any expansion of the village should be resisted whilst there is a stock of long term (in excess of two years) empty properties.

The evidence, therefore, is that there is no pressing demand for additional housing and that there are significant Utility and access constraints to expansion of the village. Nevertheless, when viewing a long term (25yr) strategy it must be recognised that needs and pressures change. It is worth giving early consideration to how the VSB might be most appropriately extended should the demand arise. Continued 'organic' growth through appropriate in-fill within the VSB and conversion of disused farm buildings in the wider district may be expected to satisfy future needs. The village strategy should support this approach.

Recent housing development within the VSB has been restricted to the addition of individual or small groups of detached or 'executive' type houses along the village road. These properties have adopted designs that reflect individual taste and requirements, often with little or no acknowledgment of an indigenous style or character. New planning applicants should be encouraged to consider the impact of their designs within the context of the vernacular style.

Strategy

- Support continued 'organic' development of in-fill sites within the VSB, and farm building conversions in the wider district,
- Support limited expansion of the supported housing stock where a local need is demonstrated,
- Give consideration to how the VSB may be amended during the life of the strategy to allow organic growth to continue if the need arises,
- Discourage new development where existing housing stock remains unoccupied,
- Discourage new development in areas where the supporting infrastructure and/or access is inadequate,
- Encourage new developments to reflect the character of the indigenous housing stock.

Landscapes

Pre-amble

Throughout previous Clwyd and Flintshire Structure Plans, there has been a steady erosion of the protection given to open spaces. Sections of the Clwydian Range AONB have been threatened at various times and sometimes it has required the lengthy and expensive process of Public Enquiries to safeguard vital countryside. In the current LDP (North Flintshire Local Plan 1996 – 2005), included in the section on Landscapes is a short mention about the AONB, otherwise the only protection offered at a local level are 'Green Spaces' and twelve areas of 'Green Barriers'. These could be considered as poor substitutes for the superseded 'Local Landscape Areas' and 'Green Belts'. As shown during the slow process of the Draft UDP, FCC is not averse to whittling down these protected areas in order to meet their revised housing construction targets (which appear to be rarely achieved).

Therefore, it should be a matter of urgency that the surviving 'Green Barriers' are given the necessary protection and all recreational open spaces within the VSB should have 'Green Space' status.

Strategy

- The Landscape strategy should be to inform and support FCC Planning Policy to ensure that all recreational open spaces within the VSB should have 'Green Space' status.
- Resist downgrading of surviving 'Green Barriers' and ensure that they are given the necessary protection to prevent further erosion

Minerals

Pre-amble

Nercwys has been witness to, and to no small degree owes its existence to the extraction of various types of mineral for hundreds of years. However, most local sources are now significantly depleted. Despite this, there have been three major applications to continue, or to re-commence mining activities within the last fifteen years.

It is with great concern that FCC felt it necessary to include Mineral Protection Areas (MPA) in the latter stages of the UDP with no public consultation. MPAs are designated to safeguard, often small areas of deposits, some of which abut the VSB.

It is recognised that the LDP could be still in force twenty years hence and when indigenous mineral resources may be at a premium. However, increasing use of recycled materials and improvements to resource productivity (doing more with less) should ensure that the status of designated MPAs are downgraded where in conflict with the wider needs of the community for a healthy and agreeable living environment.

It is noted that there is no mention of minerals – extraction or usage – in the current LDP. Is it the intention to prevent discussion on this subject in any future LDPs, which are due to supersede the Draft UDP?

Strategy

- The minerals strategy should be to inform and support FCC Planning Policy to ensure that designation of MPAs in areas that conflict with current and future needs of the Community for a healthy and agreeable living environment are not compromised, and are reviewed and altered as and where necessary.
- Ensure that any mineral policies contained within future LDPs not only take account of the views of the industry, as represented by the North Wales Regional Aggregates Working Party, but also the opinions of the Community, whose lives and wellbeing will be directly affected by any operations.