



Central Gowy (South)  
**Neighbourhood**  
**Development Plan**

**Document 1 - The Plan**

**2015 - 2030**

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- All residents who contributed, filled in forms and attended drop-in sessions,
- TG builders merchants

# 1 Introduction and Background

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This Central Gowy (South) Neighbourhood Development Plan is presented in two documents: the Plan and the Supporting Document.

**The Plan** (this document) defines the development control policies and summarises the reasoning upon which those policies were derived.

The **Supporting Document** includes the background evidential data (both publicly available through the 2011 National Census and that secured by local surveys) and the analysis of that data used to develop the Plan.

## *Purpose*

In April 2012 the Localism Act 2011 (the Act) amended the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 introducing new rights and powers to allow local communities to shape new development in their community by preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan that can establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in the neighbourhood. This document is a Neighbourhood Development Plan as defined in the Act.

The plan covers the period from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2030 and will be reviewed at 5 yearly intervals.

## *Submitting Body*

This Neighbourhood Development Plan (the Plan) is submitted by Hargrave & Huxley Parish Council, which is the qualifying body as defined by the Localism Act 2011.

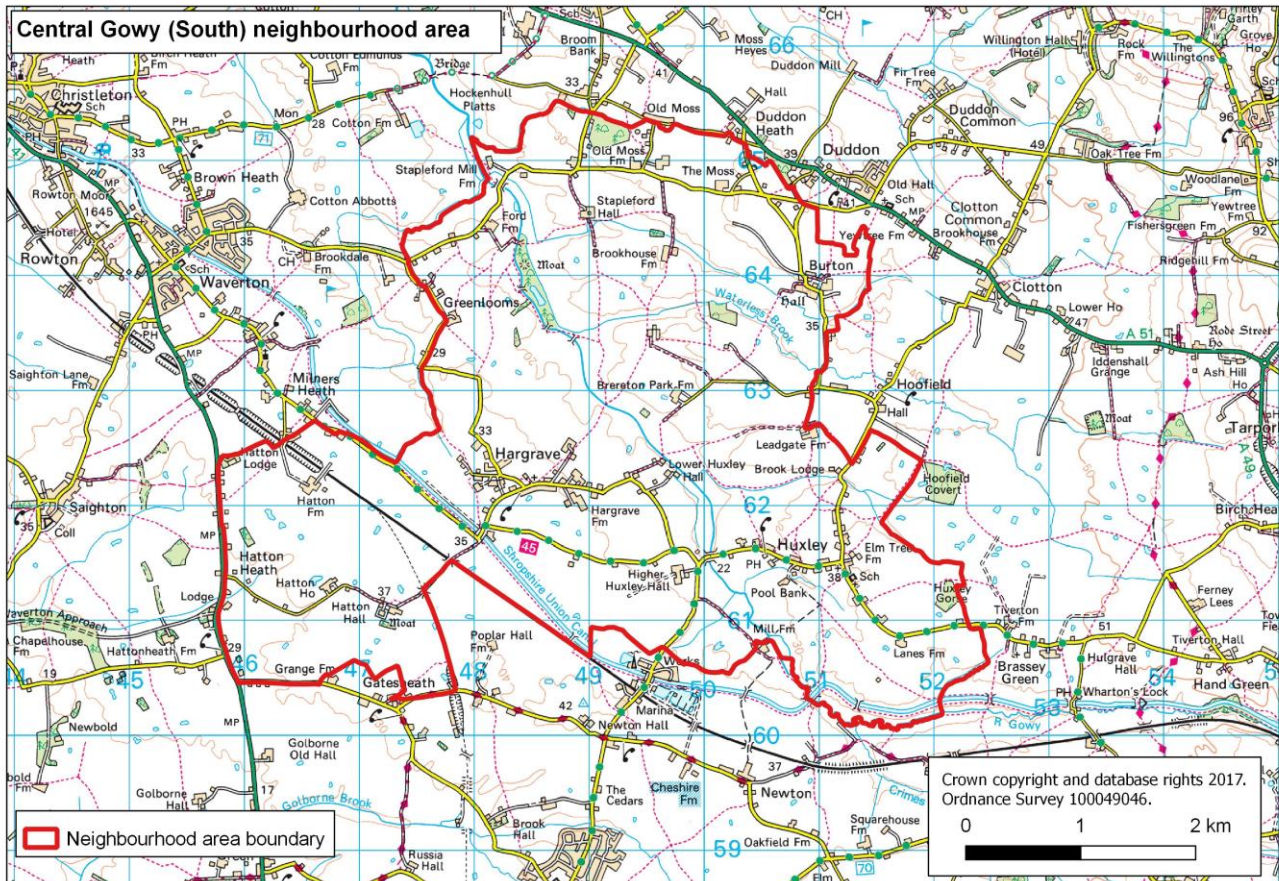
## *Neighbourhood Area*

The plan applies to the parish of Hargrave and Huxley as defined by the boundary changes made in 2015 other than that area in the south of the parish transferred from Newton-by-Tattenhall; together with the former parishes of Bruen Stapleford, and Burton – now part of Tarvin and Duddon respectively.

Huxley & Huxley Parish Council confirms that:

- i. This Neighbourhood Development Plan relates only to their parish as limited above together with the former parishes of Bruen Stapleford and Burton, and to no other Neighbourhood Areas.

- ii. This is the only Neighbourhood Development Plan in the designated area. No other Neighbourhood Development Plan exists nor is in development for part or all of the designated area.



The area of the Plan is shown in the map below (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Neighbourhood Area

## *The Context*

The Central Gowy (South) Neighbourhood Plan must:

- have appropriate regard to national planning policy;
- contribute to sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan for the local area; and



- d) be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements.

Central Gowy (South) forms part of the Rural Area of Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC). The parishes to which this plan applies are part of this Unitary Council established in 2009. It took over the western part of Cheshire.

The local strategic context is set by the CWaC Local Plan which was adopted in January 2015. Some policies in the former local plans are retained. These are in:

*Chester District Local Plan (adopted in 2006 and saved in 2009); and  
Vale Royal Borough Local Plan (adopted in 2006 and saved in 2009)*

## **The Area**

Central Gowy (South) is a rural area in the West Cheshire Plain, 8 miles south east of the city of Chester. Settlement is predominantly dispersed and has a generally low density with some clusters of more concentrated development. Central Gowy (South) covers an area of approximately 25 square kilometres. It has an estimated population of 702 giving a density of around 28 people per square kilometre. For comparison, there were 359 people per square kilometre for the whole of the CWaC area in 2011 (ONS) i.e. our area has less than 8% of the average population density of the CWaC area.



**Figure 2: Field boundary, Hatton**

The Area has limited facilities and infrastructure. Most residents use the facilities in Chester, or those of the key service centres of Tarvin, Tattenhall and Tarporley, all of which are about 3 miles away to the north, south and east respectively. The area lies between the A41 to the west and the A51 to the north east.

The Area is relatively flat, agricultural land with hedgerows and mature trees, and dairy farming predominates. There is little woodland and there are extensive views of the nearby hills, the Sandstone Ridge, and of the more distant Clwydian Hills in North Wales, (A Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester Borough, 2016). Full details are provided in the Supporting Document.

The Area includes two significant water features, the River Gowy and the Shropshire Union Canal.



## 2 Community Engagement

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This is a community plan and derives its objectives, actions and authority from the community. From the outset the Action Group strived to keep the residents informed and involved, with every opportunity to have their say in what they wanted.

Communication and consultation in various forms played a major role in formulating the plan.

*Meetings and open session*

*Questionnaire and leaflet*

*Happy Days display*

*Updates:*

- Village newsletter
- Parish Council website

Full details can be found in the Supporting Document.



Figure 3: 'Drop-in day', November 2014

## 3 Evidence Base Overview

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This plan is based on data that is explained in further detail through the Supporting Document that accompanies this plan. Only a summary of the most relevant data is provided here.

### 3.1 Population

For full data refer to Section 6 and Appendix F in the Supporting Document. A summary of key facts are:

- A reasonable estimate of the total population of the area is 702 persons living in 269 dwellings
- Approximately 16% of the population is aged under 16
- Approximately 62% of the population are of working age (between 16 and 65)
- The remaining 22% are aged over 65 with approximately 7% being aged over 75.
- 33% of those over 16 are single or live alone
- Approximately 97% of all residents were born in the UK and are 'white' and have English as their main language.
- Approximately 76% profess to being Christian
- Approximately 45% have level 4 and above qualifications.
- The activity of less than 4% of the population is limited by long-term health problems or disability.

A 'typical' resident may be described as being in good health, well qualified, middle-aged to retired, married, white and a UK national.

A resident's questionnaire was used to establish a good understanding of what is important and conversely not important to the residents, as well as to gain a picture of the demographic.

All information gathered has been used to develop the evidence base that informs the development of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and its policies.

### 3.2 Housing

For full data refer to Section 6 and Appendix E in the Supporting Document. A summary of key facts are:

- 73% of residences are detached houses
- 18% of residences are semi-detached houses
- 6% of residences are terraced houses
- 82% of properties are privately owned
- 60% + of properties are mortgage free
- Less than 13% of residences are rented

A majority of houses are owner-occupied, large and detached. This is reflected in a larger household size, and typically more residents living as a family with dependent children. There is however a variety of accommodation type and tenure. The population density of the Area is very low.

### 3.3 Facilities and Sustainability

The Area has the following facilities, see Section 2.2 in the Supporting Document

- A primary school in Huxley.
- A place of worship in Hargrave with a burial ground, and another burial ground in Huxley.
- 2 village halls, one each in Hargrave and Huxley.
- A privately-owned playing field and bowling green in Hargrave.
- A small area of private land in Hatton, set aside for the use of The Chester Astronomical Society to take advantage of the darkness of the southerly outlook and privacy in nature, for night time telescopic observations.
- A 2-hourly bus service through Hargrave and once a week through Huxley and Burton.



Figure 5: Huxley Primary School

Sustainability appraisals have been carried out for the 2 largest settlements in the Area, Hargrave and Huxley, see Appendix B in the Supporting Document. Both achieve low scores indicating that they are not sustainable locations for development. This is reinforced by the recent planning decisions, where applications were refused on the basis that they were not sustainable development.

In accordance with the Local Plan (Part One) paragraph 5.69 'there will be little if any need for additional allocations [of dwellings] to be made in the rural area'. A very limited amount of housing development, if any, should therefore take place.

### 3.4 Employment and Commercial Activities

As may be appreciated from Section 7 in the Supporting Document, approximately 79% of residents are aged between 16 and 75 and so may be considered of working age. Of that number:

- 29% are in senior management or are professionals
- 34% are self employed (more than 25% of all residents)

- 26% work more than 48 hours per week (probably reflecting the high proportion of farmers and other self-employed)
- 28% are economically inactive (18% being retired from active employment).
- 4% are students
- 6% look after the home and family on a full time basis.
- Unemployment is essentially zero.



**Figure 6: Agricultural businesses, Hargrave**

There are essentially two types of business in the Area: agriculture and the service sector.

In agriculture, dairy predominates, but there is some arable, meat and egg production, and related businesses such as an abattoir and insurance services.

The service sector includes the manned domestic waste site, retail (builder's merchants and interior design) and leisure (working flour mill, a couple of B&Bs).

The large number of self-employed outside agriculture work from home in a range of sectors; those sectors with numbers higher than elsewhere are construction, real estate and arts/entertainment.

## 3.5 Infrastructure

For full data regarding the issues listed below refer to section 8 of the Supporting Document

### Transport

Bus services are very limited in extent and frequency. The Area has a network of unclassified lanes with very few pavements; it borders an A-road and there are no B roads. Some of the lanes are designated as cycleways, but the cyclists share the carriageway with the other vehicles. Most residents rely on the private car for their day-to-day needs and travel to work; they regard it as essential. Car ownership is therefore higher than elsewhere.



Figure 7: Unclassified lane and cyclists

### Traffic

As evidenced by the data in Appendix D in the Supporting Document, traffic has increased significantly throughout the Area over recent years. Surveys have identified that the busiest route is that along Church Lane and Huxley Lane through Huxley before dividing onto either Red Lane or Long Lane towards either Tattenhall or Chester. The route is used as a 'rat-run' and traffic volumes have doubled over the last ten years to approaching 3,000 vehicles per day.

### Utilities

Mains water is provided throughout the area but there is no mains drainage. There is no gas supply. Residents rely on electricity, oil and bottled gas.

### Communications

Residents regard the telephone and broadband as essential. However the area does not have high speed fibre broadband connection. With a high proportion of residents working from home, this is an important concern.

### Leisure

There are a large number of public footpaths and many residents walk as a leisure activity. Some of the lanes are designated as cycleways. Both are also well used by visitors. Horse-riding is also popular amongst residents.

The Shropshire Union Canal provides a drainage function but is primarily a recreation/leisure facility that also provides a valuable wildlife habitat. It's towpath forms part of the network of footpaths within The Area (see plan No 08).

## 3.6 Landscape, Local Character and Environment

As evidenced in section 3.4 and appendix C of the Supporting Document, the majority of the Area is open countryside and the local character is derived from this. Most of the Area is characterised by the Landscape Strategy for Cheshire West and Chester as Landscape

Character Type 9 Cheshire Plain West, and within that, Landscape Character Area 9b: Hargrave, Hoofield and Beeston Plain. The key features of this are

- A broad and gently undulating plain landscape characterised by hedges and hedgerow trees providing limited vistas
- Low settlement density of small agricultural hamlets with loose-knit settlement form and freestanding farmsteads
- Absence of significant urban or industrial influence
- Cohesive and un-fragmented regionally significant historic landscape with extremely well preserved late medieval field systems and extensive ridge and furrow; abundant hedgerows and hedgerow trees creating a characteristic patchwork with preserved elements of the earlier medieval open fields and common land
- Wide areas of improved grassland for dairy farming and fodder crops
- Limited woodland, confined to isolated coverts and copses, although hedgerow oaks are important elements of the landscape
- Extensive network of small field ponds which are generally inconspicuous in the landscape
- The Sandstone Ridge presents a more elevated skyline to the east of the LCA.



Figure 8: Typical field pattern, looking North to Burton

As evidenced by the survey data in Appendix C in the Supporting Document, our local character is created by farming; there are open views within and through the settlements; there are undesignated features that are important to our local character such as orchards and ridge and furrow.

The River Gow, as well as being the main drainage conduit for The Area (see plan No 06), is an important wildlife corridor. However it is currently failing to meet 'good ecological status' under the European Framework Directive due to poor water quality (Environment Agency).





**Figure 9: Typical dispersed settlement layout**

Our surveys for the built environment have shown that the predominant features are

- Brick walls 75%
- Slate roofs 75%
- Hawthorn hedge boundaries with the road 61%
- buildings that are mostly parallel to the road 71%
- dark skies - because there are no street lights.

The Cheshire County Council landscape characterisation and our surveys for the Plan have shown that the following aspects of local character are significant but relatively unprotected. There are policies in the Plan to minimise the impact of development on them, thereby enhancing and preserving local character -

- The character of low density, dispersed settlements should be retained.
- The erosion of built environment character should be resisted; this includes the loss of historic buildings and vernacular character; the suburbanisation of rural properties and their curtilage; ribbon development and extensive in-fill.
- Hedgerows, ponds, small woodlands, copses and hedgerow trees should be retained.
- Open views from within and throughout the settlements should be retained.
- The predominant materials of brick, slate and Hawthorn boundary hedges, building size and orientation to the road should be used in development.
- The installation of street lights should be prevented and the use of security lighting in development minimised.
- Undesignated features which contribute to our local character, including traditional orchards, ridge and furrow, and wildflower meadows should be retained.
- 2 privately owned undesignated areas of public open space (bowling green and playing field) in Hargrave should be retained.

## 3.7 Community Engagement Results

The following data is summarised from the full analysis that can be found in section 4 and appendix A of the Supporting Document

### Community concerns questionnaire

The community were canvassed for their opinions by means of a general questionnaire seeking their concerns ranging from 'extremely important' to 'unimportant' over a variety of issues. These included:

- Character of the rural environment
- Maintenance of open views
- Dark skies at night



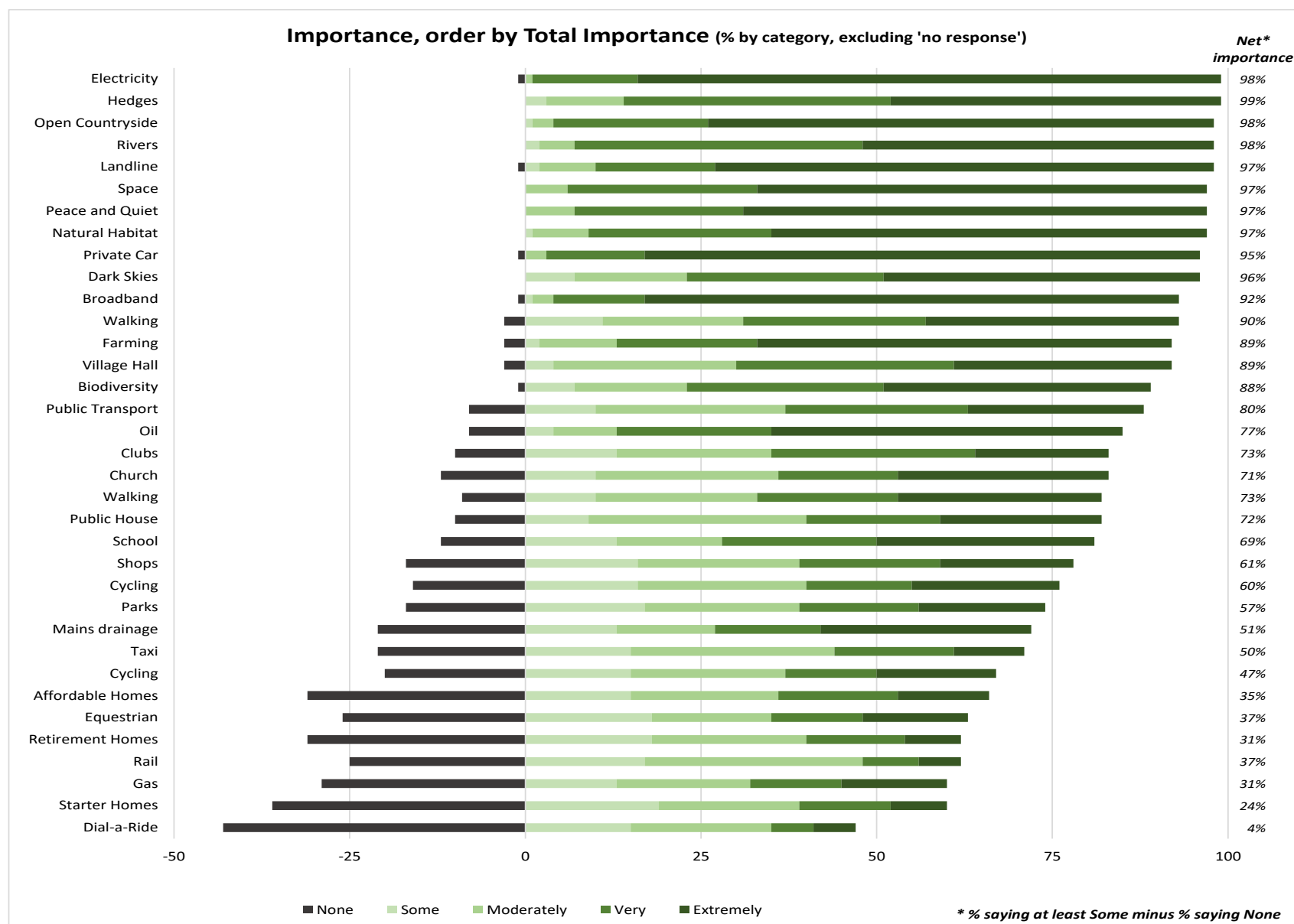
- Peace and quiet
- Farming and the management of the countryside
- Local facilities
- Transport
- Recreation
- Services
- Housing needs

It is recognised that some of the issues raised in the questionnaire are not capable of being resolved through the mechanism of a neighbourhood plan. However it was considered worthwhile to obtain the data since it informs the characterisation of the general condition of residents within the Area.

The results are described in full in Section 4 and Appendix A of the Supporting Document.

The results of the questionnaire can be summarised as follows –

- Around 90% think the open countryside and environment in which they live is very or extremely important; this is similar to the percentages for essential services such as electricity, broadband and the private car.
- All the community facilities are regarded as significantly less important, (62-42% very or extremely important), than the open countryside.
- Housing need is less important still, (22-30% very or extremely important), with higher percentages saying it is unimportant to them (36 and 31%).



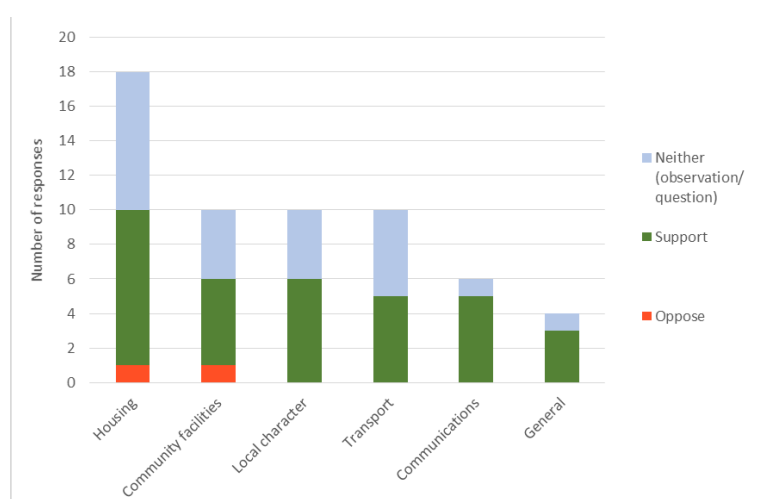
### Drop-in day feedback

Residents attending the Drop-in session were invited to provide comments on the draft Plan, and almost 60 responses were made. These have been categorised into those clearly expressing support for the policy, those clearly indicating opposition and those making observations or asking questions.

33 responses were supportive with 2 opposed. The remaining 23 responses raised questions or made observations and suggestions that were considered by the Action Group for inclusion in the updated Plan.

While the Drop-in session was not a formal consultation or vote, this suggested early in the Plan development that the approach in the draft Plan was in line with general views of the community.

The graph below summarises the responses for each Policy in the plan.



**Figure 2 Drop in Session Responses by Policy**

### Growth strategy questionnaire

The historic growth rate over the last 15 years and beyond has been shown from planning consents, and census data to be 0.5% per annum (see appendix A of the supporting document).

Residents were canvassed on their opinion as to the appropriate rate of growth that should be planned for over the period of this plan, related to their needs.

A clear majority of residents' responses supported an equivalent growth rate to that evidenced over the past 10-15 years. This would lead to a further 20 or so residential properties over the lifetime of this plan.

The full results can be seen in Appendix A.3 in the Supporting Document.

## 4 Vision

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To preserve the local character of the Area as being open rural countryside maintained through active farming.

### 4.1 Aims

Based upon the feedback from public consultations (see Section 4 and Appendix A of the Supporting Document) the aims of this NDP can be summarised as:

- To maintain and enhance the rural character of our small, dispersed communities.
- To ensure that community facilities continue for the benefit of all residents.
- To promote the re-use of existing buildings.



Figure 10: Beeston Castle

## 5 Neighbourhood Plan Policies

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The following sections lay out policies derived from the evidence base and goals and objectives set out in Sections 3 and 4 of this document.

The policies are presented in the following way:

- Purpose
- Rationale/evidence
- Policy:
  - a. policy itself
  - b. explanatory text (to clarify interpretation of the policy)

The Policies aim to provide a clear requirement against which development proposals may be assessed.

## 5.1 Policy 1 - Housing

### Purpose

To allow the growth which has been identified in the growth strategy (refer to section 3.3 of the supporting document). Growth in the area is anticipated to require the historic growth rate over the 15-year period covered by the plan (refer to Sections 3.3, 4.4 and Appendix A3 of the supporting document for further detail on how this was derived).

To accommodate appropriate growth whilst ensuring development maintains the local character of the area.

To ensure that development is 'sustainable' by re-using existing buildings.

To prevent scattered new build development in the countryside.

### Rationale/evidence

Consultation with local residents has demonstrated that no additional latent demand exists and that growth in line with historic figures should be allowed for.

Housing need was recorded as being *extremely* or *very* important by a notable minority of residents in their response to the questionnaire. In particular:

- 21% put 'starter homes' in those categories
- 30% put 'affordable housing' in those categories
- 22% put 'retirement homes' in those categories



Figure 11: Housing mix, Huxley

Facilities and services within the area are limited making living difficult for any other than those with access to private transport, as shown in the sustainability appraisals in Appendix B of the Supporting Document.

In addition, more than sufficient planning permissions have already been granted for housing developments in the rural area to meet the Local Plan (Part One) requirements. Paragraph 5.69 of the Local Plan therefore states 'there will be little if any need for additional allocations to be made in the rural area'.

Thus any provision needs to be in accordance with the above and a very limited amount of housing development, if any, should take place.

The policy is supported by:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs: 17, 28, 55, 111.
- Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan (Part One): Strategic Policies SO3, SO9, SO10, SO12, STRAT1, STRAT2, STRAT9, ENV2, ENV5, ENV6.



### Policy

1a There is to be no development of greenfield sites in the countryside, except that which is permitted by STRAT9 of the Local Plan.

1b In conformity with STRAT 9 of the Local Plan our criteria for housing development that will be permitted are:

- *Replacement dwellings*
- *Change of use of existing buildings (including barn conversions).*

1c *Development shall be well sited and designed in relation to the local rural character in accordance with Policy 3.*

### Explanatory text

Conversion and re-use of existing buildings, especially our traditional agricultural barns, will be encouraged. Given the current trend to rationalise agricultural holdings and the aging demographic of local farmers, the supply of existing brick and slate barns for conversion is likely to continue.

The NDP accords with the Local Plan policies for affordable housing and does not seek to modify those policies.

Design policies, derived from evidence of our local character, are provided later in this Plan.

## 5.2 Policy 2 - Community Facilities

### Purpose

This policy is to ensure that community facilities continue for the benefit of all residents.

### Rationale/evidence

In addition to the church and school, our community facilities include two village/church halls (one in Hargrave and one in Huxley), and a public house in Huxley which is currently closed for re-development.

The village halls are well-used and financially sustainable. They are meeting places for local groups and societies, Parish Council and other meetings, community social events such as regular film nights and private hire.



Figure 12: 'Happy Days' annual fete, Church field, Hargrave

Walking, cycling and the extensive network of Public Rights of Way ('footpaths') are considered important for recreation by our community. PRow's are therefore included in our community facilities.

A full list of community facilities is provided in section 2.2 of the Supporting Document. The public house, once re-opened, would be the only commercial community facility.

The policy is supported by:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs: 28, 70, 75.
- Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan Part One: Strategic Policies STRAT1, STRAT8 SO8, SOC5, SOC6, ENV2 and ENV3.

### Policy

2a The existing community facilities (as set down below) shall be protected and retained. Any development proposal that affects a community facility must not result in the loss of or have an adverse effect on the community facility concerned.

- St Peters Church, graveyard and adjacent Church hall, Hargrave
- Playing field and bowling green Hargrave
- Land at Hatton used by Chester Astronomical Society
- Huxley Primary School
- Huxley Village Hall
- Public House, Huxley (when opened)
- Graveyard of Huxley Methodist Chapel
- Telephone box Huxley
- Telephone box Hargrave

2b Opportunities will be sought to extend or enhance the Public Rights of Way network wherever possible.

### Explanatory text

Development that will result in the closure of these facilities will not be supported.

In relation to the potential closure of commercial community facilities, clear evidence will be required that the business is not viable, including evidence of marketing the business over a period of at least 12 months.

This policy will support local facilities, especially those for recreation that enable people to meet individually and as a community. This is because these facilities are particularly important in dispersed settlements where there are few neighbours nearby.

The evidence of the community consultation is that residents value open countryside more than all the community facilities. Therefore any application for development contrary to Policy 1, which is justified principally by retaining community facilities, will not be supported.

In relation to any development, our extensive network of existing Public Rights of Way must be preserved and enhanced.

## 5.3 Policy 3 - Local Character

### Purpose

To ensure that any development will maintain the local character of the area as described in section 3.4 and appendix C of the Supporting Document.

To provide design policy at the more detailed neighbourhood level, which cannot be provided by the Local Plan.

To encourage retention and improvement of the character of the countryside e.g. to keep the remaining ridge and furrow, hedgerows and ponds.



Figure 12: Ridge and furrow ('butts and reans')

### Rationale/evidence

Section 5 and Appendix D in the Supporting Document identify those features within the Area that are important to residents. Specifically these may be summarised as being its relative isolation and the peace, managed and natural habitats provided within its open rural landscape.

The policy is supported by:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs: 17, 58, 61, 109, 125.
- Cheshire West and Chester Council Local Plan Part One: Strategic Policies SO3, SO10, SO12, STRAT1, STRAT9, SOC2, ENV2, ENV5, ENV6.

### Policy

3a Proposals for any new development should not adversely impact the local character of the area (open views, the rural landscape, pervading peace and quiet, dark night skies and both natural and managed habitats).

3b Any development shall utilise building forms and materials consistent with the local character, and shall respect the relationship between scale, mass, volume, orientation and proximity to the road.

3c Landscape features and species which contribute to our local character such as ridge and furrow, hedgerows, ponds, ditches, Black Poplars, small Apple and Damson orchards, and Cheshire fencing should be retained. Development shall, where appropriate, include proposals for these features and species in accordance with the local character.

3d Urban features such as hardened pavements, kerbs, street lighting and signage shall be avoided, except where these features are necessary to make proposals accessible and safe.

3e The design, materials, landscaping and means of enclosure of the development shall complement the character of the area.

3f External lighting shall be minimised. Where lighting is necessary it shall be designed to avoid light spillage with as sharp a cut-off to the illuminated area as possible. Lighting shall be movement activated, time limited, and shall not be directed to fall outside the boundary of the property.

3g To maintain the existing drainage framework within The Area and to avoid any further deterioration to water quality in both the main river and canal.

### *Explanatory text*

Development that will erode local character will be resisted. The Parish Council will make representations to ensure compliance with this Plan, including the imposition and enforcement of Conditions.

The purpose of this policy is to reinforce local distinctiveness as promoted by the National Planning Policy Framework.