**March Town Council**

**Proposed Neighbourhood Plan**

**Stage 2**

**Issues and Options Consultation**

**Saturday 19 July 2014**

**to**

**Friday 15 August 2014**



1. **Stage 1 - Town Wide Survey**

1.1 March Town Council (MTC) carried out a comprehensive town wide survey in November 2013 to start the process of helping to define the scope and content of the March Town Plan (MTP), which was effectively Stage 1 in the process of producing a Neighbourhood Plan.

1.2 The survey involved the distribution of a detailed leaflet to households and businesses in the Parish, which sought views on a wide range of land use planning issues. The survey prompted a healthy response, providing a good platform to identify the views and concerns of the community, which was set out in the Preliminary Results published in February 2014.

1.3 However, MTC noted from the profiling work set out in the Preliminary Results that more than 60% of respondents came from people over the age of 51, and took the view that additional engagement work was necessary to ensure a more balanced approach was achieved in moving forward. The focus of this work was primarily to be with the young people of the town and the business community. This resulted in extra engagement work with groups such as the Young People of March on 6 March 2014, the Neale Wade Community College on 7 March 2014, and the Chamber of Trade and Commerce on 14 April 2014.

1. **Issues and Options**

2.1 This section identifies the main themes from the initial survey work and sets out a number of key issues within each theme, along with three possible options for addressing them, and what this could involve. The theme headers are summarised below, and related issues within each theme are assessed more fully in Appendix 1.

* Housing
* Business and Employment
* Town Centre and Retail
* Traffic and Transport
* Environment
* Sport and Active Leisure
* Infrastructure

2.2 This exercise is intended to provide a basis for further consultation and will assist in leading to the production of the first draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan by informing the appropriate scope and context for the Plan along with other programmed consultation events.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Summary of Issues:**

**Housing**

Issue 1: The scale of housing development projects

Issue 2: The type and mix of housing coming forward

Issue 3: Location of future development

**Business and Employment**

Issue 1: The focus for employment and business coming forward

**Town Centre and Retail**

Issue 1: Achieving the right balance of town centre uses

**Traffic and Transport**

Issue 1: Reducing car dependency

**Environment**

Issue 1: Ensuring appropriate levels of open space provision

Issue 2: Maximising the use of renewable energy

Issue 3: The protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat

Issue 4: Reducing the risk from flooding

**Sport and Active Leisure**

Issue 1: Improving leisure facilities through new development

**Infrastructure**

Issue 1: Ensuring appropriate infrastructure to meet growth

**Housing**

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| **Issue 1: The scale of housing development projects**  The scale of development for the Town as set out in the Council’s adopted Core Strategy is acknowledged. However, the majority of respondents felt that this should be delivered by way of small-scale projects, with large scale and very large sale projects avoided. This is to try and ensure that approved schemes actually come forward, that essential infrastructure is provided so that development is absorbed sustainably.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing, acknowledging that the scale of housing projects may be driven by commercial viability? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of delivering smaller housing allocations as an aspiration of the NP and attempt to influence the scale, sequence and timing of development as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Ensuring that there is a masterplan for all new developments on larger sites that provide a clear timeline for the development of each phase.  Ensuring appropriate safeguarding conditions are attached to any approved scheme. | **Option 3:**  Produce policies as part of the NP that provide some clarity on the scale, sequence and timing of development within the broad strategic housing areas as identified in the Council’s adopted Core Strategy?  What this could involve:    Creating policies that prioritise development sites within the broad areas of search as set out in the Council’s Core Strategy with a phased approach to development, potentially linked to key infrastructure prerequisites.  Producing a development checklist for all schemes to meet in coming forward. |

**Housing**

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| **Issue 2: The type and mix of housing coming forward**  The majority of respondents felt that obtaining the right housing type and mix in new developments was essential, with the view that there was a high need for family homes and starter accommodation with least demand for executive housing, flats and social housing.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing, recognising that housing type and mix is driven by demand? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of achieving balanced housing developments as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Ensuring the type and mix of housing is fully in tune to local needs and properly justified as part of each scheme.  Resisting speculative development uninformed by housing need, particularly where acknowledged shortages in other categories remain. | **Option 3:**  Produce policies as part of the NP that will ensure the right type and mix of housing comes forward as part of housing schemes across the town?  What this could involve:  Working with the District Council to ensure there is an up to date housing need study for the Town to help shape housing provision.  Collecting data on housing provision against housing need to measure performance. |

**Housing**

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| **Issue 3: Location of future development**  The majority of respondents indicated that the town should be largely contained by the bypass to the west and the railway line to the east, with some support for growth beyond the railway line to the west and north.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing as these areas are largely within the areas of growth as set out in the District Council’s adopted Core Strategy? | **Option 2:**  Produce policies as part of the NP to supplement the strategic growth areas identified within the town where additional local sites for growth are deemed appropriate?  What this could involve:  Identifying additional sites for housing to those shown in the Council’s adopted Core Strategy where it is felt these would secure quicker and greater local benefits. | **Option 3:**  Produce policies as part of the NP that aim to maximise control over future development in the town?  What this could involve:  Applying for Local Development Order status on key housing sites and developing closer working relations with developers to secure local benefits.  Creating policies to improve design quality, including securing the provision of more private and public amenity space in new housing schemes. |

**Business and Employment**

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| **Issue 1: The focus for employment and business coming forward**  Many respondents felt that the town centre has suffered significant physical and economic decline but notwithstanding this, the vast majority of respondents felt that it should continue to be the main focus of employment and business, but with suitable provision on sites on the edge of centre and on the outskirts of town also.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing, accepting that we should be as supportive as possible of business and employment opportunities where ever they occur? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of protecting important employment sites as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Mapping all key employment sites across the town, defining their role and importance and where appropriate, resisting proposals that undermine their role. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP to assist with employment creation within the town centre focusing on the right scale and mix of office, retail and industrial uses to help with the regeneration of the town centre?  What this could involve:  Creating policies linked to a wider town centre regeneration masterplan that aims to create the right balance of town centre uses, and safeguarding designated uses.  Identifying sites for particular needs such as an indoor market. |

**Town Centre and Retail**

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| **Issue 1: Achieving the right balance of town centre uses**  The majority of respondents continue to use the town centre for the majority of their shopping and feel that it should continue to have a retail focus supported by the right mix of restaurants and leisure. Pressure for the loss of retail uses and increased charity shops should be resisted. There was a strong view that the appearance of the town needed to be improved.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing recognising that the Use Classes Order allows for the loss of retail and business units to other uses, and recognise that the traditional function of town centres is changing? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of creating a prosperous and thriving town centre as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Working with the District Council collaboratively to use established policy tools such as Article 4 Directions to restrict changes through permitted development. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP to assist in creating a prosperous and thriving town centre?  What this could involve:  Creating policies linked to a wider town centre regeneration masterplan that aims to create the right balance of town centre uses, and safeguarding designated uses.  Identifying a town centre retail core with supporting secondary areas and creating policies to protect the retail function.  Identifying sites for key retail anchors. |

**Traffic and Transport**

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| **Issue 1: Reducing car dependency**  For the majority of respondents, the car continues to be the main mode of transport in accessing work, services and facilities, with limited use of more sustainable modes of transport. There was a recognised desire to improve public transport (including rail services), protect public rights of way, provide more traffic management and off street parking.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing, recognising that people are unlikely to ever reduce the use of the car and that it is the responsibility of the County Council to address traffic problems? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of reducing car dependency as an aspiration of the NP and work closer with the District and County Councils to achieve better transport solutions as a consultee as part of the development Plan, LTP and planning application processes?  What this could involve:  Working collaboratively with service providers to improve public transport, cycling and walking facilities by prioritising investment and coordinating spending. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP to help address specific transport and traffic issues in the town, possibly as part of a master plan approach to the redevelopment of the town centre?  What this could involve:  The allocation of land for specific functions such as park and ride facility on the outskirts of town or a multi-story car park in the town centre.  The safeguarding of land for key infrastructure projects and traffic management/ calming schemes.  The introduction of focused local parking standards. |

**Environment**

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| **Issue 1: Ensuring appropriate levels of open space provision**  The vast majority of respondents highlighted a number of areas of public open space deemed to be of high recreational and visual importance, and highlighted the need to ensure adequate levels of provision in new development.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing on the basis that these are established areas that are unlikely to be lost due to the pressure of development? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of protecting and enhancing established areas of public open space as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Resisting proposals for the loss of existing public open space, or new proposals that fail to make reasonable on or off-site provision. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP aimed at protecting existing areas of open space value and maximizing the creation of additional space in new developments, including the contribution open space could make as part of a masterplan approach to the redevelopment of the town centre?  What this could involve:  Defining the role and importance of specific areas of open space and creating protective designations.  Creating policies linked to a wider town centre regeneration masterplan that aims to create the right balance of town centre uses, and safeguarding designated open spaces and amenity areas.  Working with the District Council to identify local standards of open space provision. Establish local deficiencies and allocate new sites to meet needs. |

**Environment**

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| **Issue 2: Maximising the use of renewable energy**  A high proportion of respondents recognised the importance of solar power as a source of renewable energy, but highlighted concerns with large scale wind power.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing in recognition that most householder renewable energy initiatives do not require planning permission? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of maximising appropriate types and scale of renewable energy as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Objecting to proposals for inappropriate renewable energy projects.  Objecting to proposals that fail to make reasonable on-site provision for appropriate renewable energy. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP to encourage appropriate renewable energy in all new developments, and resist inappropriate renewable energy projects?  What this could involve:  Designate areas of protection within and around the town to help prevent harmful renewable energy projects.  Identify the types and scale of appropriate renewable energy projects, and set local targets for delivery. |

**Environment**

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| **Issue 3: The protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat**  The majority of respondents recognised the importance of protecting and enhancing wildlife in and around the town and creating new accessible habitat as a source of recreation.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing in view of other more pressing priorities? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of protecting wildlife habitat and the creation of new accessible habitat as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Objecting to proposals that would result in the unacceptable loss of wildlife habitat or that fail to make reasonable provision in new schemes either on or off site. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP that help with the protection of existing wildlife sites and in the creation of new sites?  What this could involve:  Identifying areas of local importance and creating protective designations and exception tests.  Identifying areas of deficit and working with developers, public bodies and local pressure groups to identify ways of creating new wildlife habitat. |

**Environment**

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| **Issue 4: Reducing the risk from flooding**  Although the vast majority of respondents had not been directly affected by flooding there was an acknowledgement that there were areas in the town that flooded and that this may be linked to issues such as a failure to control surface water run-off and drain failure.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing in view of the low response rate to this issue in the original town wide survey? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of protecting existing and new development from flooding as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?    What this could involve:  Objecting to planning applications for development within areas vulnerable to flood risk that are not adequately justified in terms of the NPPF tests.  Work with infrastructure providers to influence spending programs to secure improvements in existing residential areas known to flood. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP that reinforce Government advice on the importance of reducing the risk from all types of flooding?  What this could involve:  Identify areas at risk of flooding based on Environment Agency data and create exception test criteria.  Identify areas within and adjacent to existing residential development that is known to flood and seek solutions through new development proposals where improvements to existing infrastructure is secured. |

**Sport and Active Leisure**

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| **Issue 1: Improving leisure facilities through new development**  The majority of respondents recognised a need for a new swimming pool and parks/open spaces in the town, followed closely by the need for more outdoor sports pitches and improved cycle routes. Respondents felt such facilities should be located both close to the town centre and out of town with parking provision. Follow-up work with the youths of the town recognised the need for more facilities for children.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing in view of the costs involved in provided such services? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of providing adequate sport and active leisure provision as an aspiration of the NP and work to achieve this better as a statutory consultee within the planning application process?  What this could involve:  Object to planning applications for development proposals that would result in the loss of leisure facilities, or that fail to make reasonable provision in new schemes either on or off site. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies as part of the NP that help with the protection of existing facilities and in the provision of new facilities?  What this could involve:  Identify the range and type of leisure facilities across the town and identify what is required in order to ensure there is a balanced supply of provision across the town that meets all identified needs. From this create policies that protect existing sites, provides exception tests for sites where there is an over supply and that encourages supply in locations and for types where there is a deficit. |

**Infrastructure**

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| **Issue 1: Ensuring appropriate infrastructure to meet growth**  In meeting the growth target as set out in the District Council’s adopted Core Strategy, the majority of respondents recognised the need for education to the north and west of the town, and health facilities as the main priorities.  *What should your Neighbourhood Plan do about this?* | | |
| **Option 1:**  Do nothing on the basis that development should not be permitted in any event if it cannot provide the necessary level of infrastructure provision? | **Option 2:**  Identify the importance of providing adequate infrastructure provision as an aspiration of the NP and work closer with the District Council in achieving this objective as a consultee as part of the planning application process, and in particular, through early engagement in the Section 106 process?  What this could involve:  Seeking to be involved in Section 106 discussions early in the development process and requesting regular updates on progress on both the completion of agreements, the commencement of development, and the delivery of infrastructure.  Objecting to planning applications that fail to make appropriate infrastructure provision.  Being consulted on arguments to reduce or waiver infrastructure provision on viability grounds. | **Option 3:**  Develop policies through the NP that identify and prioritise infrastructure requirements as part of all new development proposals?  What this could involve:  Producing a schedule of critical community infrastructure deficit and creating policies that both identify and prioritise the provision of such infrastructure in new development proposals.  Lobbying the District Council to adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and securing direct payment from this to enable MTC to provide local services and facilities, linked to appropriate policies.  Applying for Local Development Order status on large schemes to secure greater contributions paid direct to MTC to help meet infrastructure priorities, including direct delivery by developers. |