

In November or possibly early December you are about to get a chance to vote in a referendum about the Hoylake Neighbourhood Plan. The question will be:

**“Do you want Wirral Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Hoylake to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?”**

So what is a neighbourhood plan? We call it an NDP... a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Here's a good example of an NDP in action... when a developer applied recently to demolish Alderley Road Presbyterian Church, policies in the NDP were used as reasons to refuse the demolition.

So the NDP does already have an impact.

But what exactly is an NDP?

Well, when a developer, or the council, or anyone, wants to build something, or make changes to a building, or demolish something, they have to apply for planning permission.

A notification of this planning application goes on the Wirral Council website. It might also appear on a nearby lamppost... you may have seen one of those notifications wrapped in plastic, on white or yellow paper, strapped to a lamppost... getting more and more illegible by the day as the elements get to it...

But, really, how many of us get to know about what is planned. Do you look on the Council website planning pages every night? I hope not!

Do you do a walkabout every night looking for new signs on lampposts. I really hope not!

More realistically do you keep your ear to the ground on the local rumour mill and perhaps take everything you hear as gospel?

If you do I hope you by now realise that's not especially reliable!

And even if it is reliable, what can you do other than express indignation and frustration, blame the council, blame greedy developers, blame, well, anyone... and before you get a chance to really think about it the next application pops up... the next rumour starts circulating...

Look, the reality is none of us can stay completely on top of what's happening around us.

And that has been a problem for generations. Ordinary people just don't get the chance to hear about what is planned. Or if we do, it's often somewhat unreliable. And so we don't get a meaningful opportunity to have our say.

And for most people, coming out to meetings like this is just not something they want to do at the end of the day. They may have been at work, may have kids to deal with, may frankly have "better things to do".

So the status quo is maintained. Things happen. The places we live in change beyond recognition and we – the community - feel powerless to do very much at all.

It's true however that on occasion, someone in the community may be so frustrated by something proposed that they organise a petition.

But on the whole, petitions have a far from guaranteed success rate.

Petitions may have some, limited, impact. They may turn heads a bit at the council but, ultimately they don't seem to carry any real weight. Hundreds of names sometimes, and still no impact.

“Weight”. It's an important word in planning.

Some things carry more “weight” than others. Petitions signed in libraries and shops don't carry much weight. Individual letters carry more weight. What about the NDP?

That's where the NDP comes in to its own. The NDP carries a lot more weight, because it is a **STATUTORY** set of policies, created by the community, that **MUST** be taken into consideration when the council consider an application.

And, what's even better is that we don't have to think about it continually, we don't have to look out for these applications on a daily basis; scanning the pages of the local papers or the council website... or checking out every lamppost... deadly!

No, the NDP is just there, in the background, all the time, ticking away, doing what WE want it to do...

How? Because if enough people answer “yes” to that question at a referendum, the NDP will become a statutory part of the planning framework... it can't be ignored.

It's because the LOCALISM ACT 2011 recognises the NDP as a statutory document, that the council are legally obliged to take it into account when assessing new planning applications. They simply can't ignore it.

So if we think we want to limit the number of affordable apartments, or large houses, or new shops in a particular part of Hoylake, but to encourage them in another place, we can do that. We can say where things go.

Because it's not just about saying 'no'. It's about saying 'yes' too. You see, and this is important, there's a more positive aspect to this that really needs to be understood.

The NDP can say just as much about what we DO want as what we DON'T want.

So, when a developer comes along and proposes something that we get really excited about, that most people really, really want to happen, the NDP can say

*“if an application for something like this comes in, and in this place, then we are telling you to say, “YES!”*

But here’s the really clever bit... those opportunities can be publicised... so the community ... Hoylake... can attract the developers, entrepreneurs, business people and investors, who can make it happen.

It is saying, in clear, plain English, “Hoylake is open for business. Over here, this is what we’re interested in... and over there, this is what we’re not interested in”.

Without an NDP all of these decisions will be made by the council. And we may not like what we get.

So if enough people vote for the NDP this Autumn, and it therefore comes into force, you can expect more successes like Alderley Road. What is enough? 50% of those voting plus one.

If you are thinking “ this is the first I have heard of it!” then don’t worry, because the plan in its current iteration only lasts until 2020.

So we’re not just asking you to get out and vote at the referendum; we’re asking you to help us make the next plan for 2020-2025. We are going to start working on that straight away.

Take a look at what we have produced. Look at the NDP. What is missing? Policies on care provision for the elderly? Disability and access issues? Environmental protection? Provision for children and young people? Better protection for heritage buildings?

All of these things have already been identified as in need of attention. We have tried, but we know we’ve not achieved as much as we would have liked on these things.

And there’s questions. What about shopfronts in Hoylake? Or North Parade? Do you think Hoylake should be attracting visitors? If so, should there be more facilities? Would investment in the promenade benefit the High Street?

And the Localism Act gives us more powers too, with an NDP in place it makes all of the following much easier:

- The Community Right to Build: a new way for communities to choose for themselves where and when to build homes, shops, facilities and businesses.
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- The Community Right to Bid: a way to 'pause' the sale of buildings or land you care about such as your local pub, shop, library or football ground. It gives the community time to develop a bid to buy it.
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- The Community Right to Challenge enables communities to challenge to take over local services that they think they can run differently and better. The Right to Challenge could be used to run a wide range of local services.
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- The Community Right to Reclaim Land helps communities to improve their local area by giving them the right to ask that under-used or unused land owned by local councils and other public bodies is sold so that it can be brought back into use.



What's more, areas with and NDP in place can charge developers a higher rate of "community infrastructure levy": 25% rather than 15%... an amount the developer must pay to be invested in increased infrastructure: roads, schools, healthcare and so on...

What do you think? Get involved and let us know. But first, you need to vote in the referendum.

If more than 50% of those voting vote 'yes' the NDP comes into force.

If more than 50% of those voting vote "no" then the NDP is shelved and the community have the same, limited say than you have been used to. It's your choice.

I'm guessing the reason you're here tonight is because you want the community to have more control. If so, you know how to vote.

Whatever you do, please try to familiarize yourself with the plan, ask questions, and get out there on Hoylake Referendum Day and VOTE... and remember to tell everyone you know to do likewise!