



Plumpton Parish Neighbourhood Plan

2017–2030

Consultation and engagement



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1. Consultation and community engagement

The PPNP Steering Group has consulted closely with the local community, landowners, their agents, relevant statutory bodies and neighbouring parishes during the course of the PPNP preparation process, through direct communication and consultation, regular open Steering Group meetings, open consultation information events and community surveys.

The PPNP Steering Group organised several consultation events for the Parish community, to inform the development of the Plan, which were well attended. These were:

- First consultation drop-in 29 April 2014
- Second consultation drop-in 16 September 2014
- First landowners/sponsors meeting 6 January 2015
- Second landowners/sponsors meeting 3 March 2015

The Steering Group also organised a number of open consultation and information events where residents and interested parties could view and discuss the proposed sites, including two Regulation 14 consultations:

- Preferred sites drop-in event 15 September 2015
- 2016 Regulation 14 consultation
- 2017 Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation.

In addition, minutes from meetings, with associated documents, were published on the Parish Council website, together with all relevant documentation arising from the development of the plan.

Regular articles were also published in the Parish Magazine, which is delivered monthly to every household in the parish.

2. First consultation drop-in

The first consultation event was a drop-in on 29 April 2014 to launch the Neighbourhood Plan process to residents and gauge their views on the implications of the minimum housing numbers required by LDC.



The event was held in the village hall from 3.00pm to 7.30pm to allow as many people as possible to visit. A number of displays were created around six main themes and residents were invited to write comments on post-it notes and attach them to the displays. A total of 168 comments were contributed by 108 residents.

The displays covered six main themes (numbers in brackets denote numbers of responses):

1. Village identity:

- what makes Plumpton special? (15 responses)
- why do we live here? (24)
- how do we feel about living here? (23)
- what would we like for the future of Plumpton? (71)



2. Housing; (118)

3. Transport; (84)

4. Business; (28)

5. Leisure; (58)

6. Wildlife and public spaces. (31)

A further 85 comments related to other, associated matters.

Many people left responses to more than one question, so the numbers and percentages should be interpreted as indicating a balance of opinion, rather than absolute numbers.

Results

The full data can be found at appendix 1 (page 32).

1: Village identity

Overall, of 172 comments relating to village identity (What makes Plumpton special? Why do we live here?), 40% mentioned 'quiet, peaceful green landscape; 3% said 'safe'; 31%

said 'character/community'; 18% said 'facilities/location', and 8% said 'dark skies'. Many people used terms like 'love' and 'belonging' and 'home'; one even talked about being 'married' to the village. Plumpton people clearly feel very strongly about the village and its qualities, and the most important were countryside views and a strong sense of community.



2: Housing

A total of 118 post-it notes were left on this topic. Overall, the majority (81%) said that some development was acceptable, but with conditions; 19% were totally against any development. The conditions can be summarised as follows: sites should be small and spread evenly around the village (38%); brownfield sites should be used wherever possible and open countryside, views and wildlife protected (25%), and affordable housing should be incorporated (31%) to provide housing for young families and young people (33%) and older residents (28%).

Some concerns were expressed about infrastructure. Of 44 post-it notes, the need for gas and the cost of oil were the most common concerns (30%), followed by the lack of good broadband provision (27%) (this has subsequently improved). Other concerns included

water (20%), electricity (14%), facilities (11%), and 16% specified the need for eco-friendly alternatives.



3: Transport

A wide range of concerns were raised about transport issues, some in direct conflict with each other. Of 120 comments, the most common issue was the need for more parking space (33%); a further 20% wanted more control over parking and 18% specifically mentioned parking at the station; 19% wanted more speed limits, and 10% didn't; 19% were concerned about accidents; 14% wanted greener transport; 13% wanted more trains/bus services, and 11% mentioned the shop.

4: Business

There was a lot of support for local businesses and ideas for improving the economic activity of the village through tourism (cafe and cycle hire) in order to capitalise on the links to the South Downs National Park. Overall, of 28 responses, 64% were in favour of some development and change, and 36% preferred to maintain the status quo. Infrastructure again emerged as a concern, and space, broadband and utilities were all mentioned. Some people said they didn't want Plumpton to become a 'dormitory' village, with only commuters living here.

5: Leisure activities

Of the 82 comments about maintaining and developing leisure activities, 17% wanted better broadband access and utilities; 19% wanted more fitness activities; 16% wanted

more facilities and activities for young people, and 17% for older people; 34% wanted more access to green spaces; 12% wanted more support for clubs and societies, and 26% said there should be better use of/improved village facilities (village hall green and the sports pavilion) generally.

6: Natural spaces and wildlife

We asked people about what matters most to them in relation to natural spaces and wildlife. An overwhelming 90% of responses favoured conservation in some form as a village priority. The majority (39%) said they wanted to preserve wildlife, and 39% specifically expressed concerns about the effects of housing development; 29% wanted to preserve natural spaces; 26% wanted to establish nature reserves; 16% were concerned to preserve trees and hedges, and 6% specified that any developments should be carbon neutral. Two responses in particular highlighted a need to avoid overly managed open spaces, with an emphasis on natural, as opposed to 'green'.

7: Other matters

We asked a final open question about matters other than housing that concerned people in the village. Issues involving transport stood out as the most important (49%), with schools second (18%). Other concerns included infrastructure (6%), families (8%), older people (8%), businesses (4%), village GP (5%), and clubs and pubs (5%).



Conclusion

Broadly, what mattered most to residents was the rural nature of the parish, its green surroundings and tranquillity, and its strong community spirit and character.

The majority agreed that some new housing was necessary, but with the following caveats: any new housing should be clustered in small sites, on brownfield sites where available (38% support); it should include affordable housing for older and younger people (31%); and views and green spaces should be protected (25%).

Residents supported encouraging and developing existing and new businesses within the parish and improving the economic activity of the village through tourism (e.g. cafe and cycle hire) in order to capitalise on its proximity to the South Downs National Park.

Infrastructure adequacy was a concern, and loss of space and poor broadband connectivity and utilities were all mentioned. Some commented that they didn't want Plumpton to become a 'dormitory', with only commuters living in the parish.

Transport and parking were also of concern: 33% of these comments wanted more parking provision, and specifically parking at the railway station (18%). Lower speed limits in and around the parish were mentioned in 19% of comments (although 10% did not want reduced speed limits), and 14% wanted more encouragement for green transport. Better train and bus services were requested by 11% in total.

Asked about access to leisure activities, residents favoured preservation of green spaces (34%), followed by better use of and improvements to existing village facilities (26%).

On wildlife issues and preserving wildlife habitats, 39% of comments concerned the potential negative impact of new housing, and 39% said the protection of wildlife should be a priority. An overwhelming 90% of responses favoured conservation of wildlife in general, and also of trees and hedges and natural public space.

3. Second consultation drop-in

The second consultation event took place on 16 September 2014 and was again an open drop-in, from 3.00pm to 8.00pm at the village hall. A total of 109 residents attended, of whom 43 had also been to the first consultation event. We thus reached in total 174 residents over the two events.



We again used display boards and tables to invite residents to comment on the following questions:

- What would we like for the future? (85 responses)
- What do we like about Plumpton and Plumpton Green now? (92)

The following key topic areas were presented and residents' comments were invited on potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (responses are in brackets):

- economy and local business (23)
- environment (27)
- transport (24)
- housing (46)
- heritage (20).



Results

The full breakdown of responses can be found at appendix one (page 43).

The answers mostly echoed those in the first consultation event, although more people (58%) expressed concern about the prospect of housing development than felt more positively towards it (42%). The positive responses highlighted opportunities to invest in infrastructure and transport links, including pavements, as well as community life such as clubs and sports.

The most comments in relation to the future could be clustered under the themes of 'retain natural countryside and wildlife' (22%) and 'retain character of the village' (21%). Some 15% of comments supported 'small, discreet, affordable development'.

Asked what they liked about Plumpton parish now, again the majority (64%) of comments referred to its quiet/peace and landscape and its strength of community (41%).

On housing, the greatest number of comments related to the threats posed by any development: to the countryside, from flood risks, from increased road traffic and parking problems, and from damage to the village's rural character. There was also concern about maintaining public confidence if an existing covenant preventing development on one site was not honoured. Residents feared that existing services and infrastructure would not be able to sustain additional housing (19 responses). Opportunities identified included affordable housing for young and old, the opportunity to develop nature reserves, and improvements to flood defences (30 comments).



Overall, the event confirmed the conclusions from the previous consultation.

1. Sites should be small and spread evenly around the village.
2. Brownfield sites should be used wherever possible and open countryside, views and wildlife protected.
3. Affordable housing should be incorporated to provide housing for young families, young people who want to remain in the village and older residents who may wish to move on from larger homes.

4. First landowners/sponsors meeting

The next public meeting was an evening event on 6 January 2015 at the village hall, where we invited local landowners and/or their agents to present their housing development proposals to the PPNP Steering Group.

More than 100 village residents attended. There were six formal presentations:

- land south of Riddens Lane;
- land north of Wells Close;
- Fallbrook, Plumpton Lane (subsequently discounted as outside the development area);
- land at Little Inholmes Farm;
- land behind the school, North Barnes Lane;
- land to the rear of Oakfield, Station Road.



In addition, proposals for three sites for which no development plans had yet been prepared were informally presented to the PPNP Steering Group after the main meeting closed:

- land to the north of the Old Police House, Station Road;
- land at Inholms Farm, Station Road;
- land south of Inholms Farm, Station Road.



5. Second landowners/sponsors meeting

A second meeting with further owners/agents of land potentially available for development was organised on 3 March 2015. Parish residents were again invited to attend, and 110 came.

Proposals for development of a further six potential areas were presented:

- Glebe land and the Rectory, Station Road;
- land to the north of The Old Police House, Station Road;
- land at Inholms Farm, Station Road;
- land at Nolands Farm, off Station Road;
- land east of Plumpton Lane, south of the railway line;
- land south of Inholms Farm, Station Road.



Again, members of the PPNP Steering Group and parish residents were invited to ask questions and offer comments. These further sites were taken forward for detailed consideration by the PPNP Steering Group.



6. Resident questionnaire

In January 2015, the PPNP Steering Group distributed a questionnaire to all parish households. The questionnaires could be returned to a central collection site at the village shop or were collected personally, door to door, by PPNP Steering Group members. In total, 632 questionnaires were distributed and 358 returned – a 57% response rate.

Results

The questionnaire sought residents' views on where and what kind of housing development they would prefer, and what aspects of village life they wanted the Neighbourhood Plan to conserve and enhance. The summary findings were as follows (the complete raw data are available on request from the PPNP SG).

1. Village layout – Parishioners were asked: 'Plumpton can be described as a Scarpfoot or linear parish, being long and narrow and having developed from the foot of the Downs. Would you:

- a. Prefer to maintain this characteristic with any development on a north-south axis? Yes/No
- b. Prefer to see the shape of the village change and expand width-ways on an east-west axis? Yes/no'

The majority (63%) of respondents preferred a). However, a sizeable minority (39%) preferred b). The validity of this question was later challenged, as it is the case that developments within the settlement of Plumpton Green in recent decades have expanded the village widthways, not beyond the existing north and south planning boundaries.

2. Development priorities – 45% of respondents supported development that would allow people to work locally and that would encourage tourism in the village.

3. Village qualities – The vast majority (91%) of respondents wanted all valued aspects of current village life preserved – e.g. its dark skies (no street lighting), clubs and societies, bus/train services, post office and shop, school, sports pavilion and village hall. Additional aspects to be preserved include the church (19%), pubs (13%) and railway crossing gates (9%).

4. Quality of life – 95% of respondents said the countryside, footpaths and views of the South Downs significantly contributed to quality of life, but there was no significant interest in improving cycle access.

5. Wildlife – 90% wanted wildlife and habitat conservation measures incorporated into new developments.
6. Open spaces – The three most valued open spaces were: the playing field (22%); the South Downs (18%); and the network of footpaths (18%).
7. Development size and timescale – 87% favoured development phased over a long period of time and limited to no more than 10-20 units per site.
8. Type of development – The majority (74%) of respondents wanted medium-size (3-bed) units or a combination of small and medium-size units (81%); warden-assisted accommodation (77%); and retirement homes (71%). Most respondents (80%) were opposed to 4-5 bedroom homes and combinations of different-sized units that included 4-5 bed homes (61%). They were also opposed to flats in small blocks (60%). Respondents were ambivalent about including a care/nursing home, with 55% for and 45% against.
9. Community management – 68% supported a community-led approach to the management of village assets, including housing developments.
10. Business/employment – 69% wanted more business and employment opportunities. The employment most people wanted to see develop locally was agriculture, followed by trades, leisure, tourism, business support and retail. However, only 43% of respondents overall supported the identification of land for business development; 57% opposed this.
11. Business benefits – local business owners wanted better public transport, high speed broadband, and more patronage from residents. Least important to them were more parking provision, more housing, land for expansion and shared work/office space.
12. Roads and footpaths – 50% of respondents felt that local roads were poorly maintained; 54% said local footpaths were well maintained. But 82% had no particular view about cycle paths, and 84% thought the same about bridleways. Respondents were divided on whether pavements were well maintained. Most people either had no particular view (47%) about parking conditions or thought that parking areas were poorly maintained (41%).
13. Parking – 55% of respondents did not want parking charges at the station and 68% did not want parking charges at the playing field; 28% supported parking charges at the station and 18% at the playing field, and 16% had no particular view.
14. Renewable/sustainable energy – 56% had no particular view about sustainable energy or felt it wasn't important; 44% supported more use of sustainable energy by the community.

6.1 Young people's questionnaire

The questionnaire included a young people's section, 65 of which were returned. Their responses are summarised below.

1. What do you most like about living here? Mostly, the young people liked living in the countryside, the fields and the parish's proximity to the South Downs (33%); the friendliness of the community (29%); the playground and playing fields (17%); and the peace and quiet (17%).

2. What do you like least about living here? The largest number (9) said there was nothing or not enough to do; six said there was not enough transport; six had concerns about speeding traffic or dangerous roads; four were worried about development; four wanted playground facilities for older children.

3. Will anything stop you from setting up home in Plumpton when you grow up? Nine were concerned about high house prices/high rent; eight didn't want to stay in a small village; seven wouldn't want to stay if the village got too big; five said they wouldn't be able to find employment locally and three said they would move if new housing was built in the 'wrong place'.

4. Bus services. Only 13 said they used the local bus services, either to get to school or to go to Lewes or Haywards Heath. Five said they would use the service more often if it was more frequent and on time.

5. Events for young people. Respondents suggested a range of activities: a drama club; social activities for older children/teenagers; a cycling club; gymnastics; music; and swimming. They welcomed the new Youth Club (now closed), but wanted it to meet more frequently.

6. Facilities for young people. Respondents suggested a swimming pool, better provision for teenagers at the playing fields, including a covered/sheltered area where they could hang out, and a roller-skating rink.

7. Cycling and walking. Several said they were put off walking or cycling more by the speeding traffic, the poor surface condition of the roads and pavements, the lack of pedestrian walkways along Plumpton Lane and north up to the Plough public house, and the lack of cycle paths.

7. Preferred sites drop-in event

A final village consultation event took place on 15 September 2015 from 3.00pm to 7.00pm to present to the village the preferred sites that the PPNP Steering Group proposed to include in the draft PPNP. In total, approximately 154 residents visited the display.



The event presented:

- details of all the sites put forward for consideration for inclusion in the PPNP;
- how each was assessed on a range of objective measures of suitability, achievability, availability and acceptability;
- which sites were recommended for inclusion by the PPNP Steering Group; and the number of houses allocated to each site.

The selected sites at this time were:

- land south of Riddens Lane (16 units);
- land north of Wells Close (6 units);

- land to the north of The Old Police House, Station Road (12 units);
- land south of Inholms Farm, Station Road (12 units);
- land south of the railway, east of Plumpton Lane (12 units, plus provision for station parking).



These sites would deliver 58 housing units, slightly above the minimum 50 required by LDC.

The rejected sites were:

- Church Glebe land and the Rectory, Station Road;
- Nolands Farm, off Station Road;
- land at Inholms Farm, Station Road;
- land at Little Inholms Farm;
- land behind the school, North Barnes Lane;
- land to the rear of Oakfield, Station Road.

8. 2016 Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation

Prior to completion of the draft plan a further potential housing site at Plumpton Racecourse (for 19 units) came forward, which also offered the additional benefit of car parking for railway station users. The Racecourse proposed that the development was important for the future economic survival of the Racecourse. As the Plan had a policy on supporting the sustainability and growth of the racecourse, it was felt this site should be considered and a site assessment was carried out. This proved positive and the site was allocated in the pre- submission plan, and the Riddens Lane site moved to a reserve site.



The statutory six-week Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation on the draft plan began on 9 May 2016 and ended on 28 June 2016. There were public consultation events on 18 May and 12 June where members of the Steering Group were available to answer questions and receive feedback.

In addition to individual responses from 127 parishioners, the consultation generated six responses from statutory bodies, the most significant being that from LDC. LDC's response made clear that it regarded some of the sites in the draft plan as less sustainable than others included in the LDC Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

(SHELAA). Sites deemed suitable, achievable and available could still be given planning permission, even if not included in the PPNP or in Lewes District Local Plan. A concern to the PPNP Steering Group was that, if chosen sites were less sustainable in the eyes of LDC, then their inclusion in the PPNP would be less defensible, and raise the likelihood that other, more sustainable sites might successfully apply for planning permission in addition to the NP allocation.



LDC further advised in its response its opinion, based on its own assessment processes, that sites east of Station Road were the most suitable and sustainable.

In addition, the Regulation 14 consultation resulted in a number of responses challenging the principle established in the 2015 resident questionnaire of 'maintaining' the parish's 'characteristic Scarpfoot parish linear development'. While the parish itself is indeed linear, the Plumpton Green settlement long ago ceased to develop along those lines, and has in recent years developed only to the east and west. Linear development also contravenes established best-practice planning principles that discourage ribbon development and rural sprawl. In this respect, the questionnaire was misleading, as option b) did not represent change in principle, as this had been the prevailing planning policy for many decades, and reflects LDC's preference for sites to the east of Station Road as most suitable and sustainable.

Following the consultation, the landowners withdrew the site south-east of the railway and the racecourse site, retained initially, remained undeliverable, because safe pedestrian access could not be provided at the railway crossing, and was subsequently replaced in the final allocation by Riddens Lane, the previous reserve site.

For all these reasons, it was decided to review the site allocations and submit a revised draft plan for Regulation 14 consultation.



9. 2017 Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation

The production of a revised draft plan in 2017 necessitated further Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation events, which took place on 19 June 2017 from 7-10 pm and on 16 July 2017 from 11am– 4pm. Both events again took the form of open drop-ins, at the sports pavilion and the village hall. A total of 68 residents attended the two events.



The consultation ran from 19 June 2017 to 31 July 2017. All relevant documents were made available on the parish council website and in printed form at the two public events, with printed copies of the new draft plan publicly available at the station, the post office, the village hall, the church annex and at the Fountain and the Plough Inns.

In total, 48 individual responses were received from residents, 7 from statutory bodies and 10 from landowners/developers. A summary of the residents' responses and how the SG responded to them can be found at appendix 1 (page 72). The full responses are available from the PPNP SG on request.

Of the residents, 18 did not support the plan, 24 supported the plan and 6 either did not give an answer or said they would support the plan if one of the policies changed. Most respondents who supported the plan did not have any further comment to make.



Criticism from residents focused on seven particular issues (the full response sheets and the response from the SG are available on request):

Site at Racecourse	11 comments
Riddens Lane site (access)	8 comments
Density of sites 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4	7 comments
Proximity of sites to existing housing/screening	3 comments
Threat to historic centre around Church	4 comments
Inadequacy of infrastructure (sewerage)	3 comments
Parking at station/traffic congestion	4 comments
Prefer other sites (north/south; Nolands)	8 comments



The Steering Group responded to these concerns in an open letter in the Parish Magazine, as follows:

1. Why can't we put a cap on the numbers of houses?

Unfortunately, neighbourhood plans cannot dictate a maximum number of houses that can be built.

2. Why has the plan exceeded the 50 demanded by Lewes District Council?

This was always a minimum number, and LDC has told us that they may still have a shortfall in the total number of houses they are expected by the government to build in the planning period. Therefore, LDC is advising parishes preparing a neighbourhood plan to allocate housing above their minimum to ensure that the minimum requirement is fulfilled and protect us, if additional housing is needed, from speculative development outside the plan.

3. The sewage infrastructure is inadequate to cope with the extra housing.

Planning laws require that no development can be granted planning permission without the necessary infrastructure capacity in place. We are continuing to raise these concerns with Southern Water.

[NB. Subsequent to this, the PPNP was modified to further protect this site by routing access to site 6.3 via 6.4).

10. The three sites together, at Wells Close, the Glebe and Oakfield, exceed the residents' expressed wishes to have distinct, smaller developments.

Only two sites have a common boundary (the Glebe and Oakfield), and the Plan policies include the requirement that the developments should be separated by landscape buffers. The three sites will not be developed at the same time.

11. The racecourse site would give a precedent to further possible development on the site.

We recognise residents' concerns about this site. We also recognise the importance of supporting the survival of the racecourse. Unless the access problem is resolved, this site cannot go forward as the plan cannot recommend a site that is not deliverable.

Copies of the draft pre-submission plan were sent to 19 statutory bodies (listed below), and comments received from 7 (available from PPNP SG on request):

LDC
SDNPA
ESCC
Wivelsfield Parish Council
Chailey Parish Council
East Chiltington Parish Council
Falmer Parish Council
Streat Parish Council
The Coal Authority
Homes and Communities Agency
Natural England
The Environment Agency
Historic England
Network Rail
Highways Agency
Southern Water
South East Water
Plumpton Racecourse
Plumpton College

Comments in the main related to correcting errors of fact and statutory obligations, and reinforcing mitigation to historic and wildlife threats (the full responses and how the SG responded to them are available on request from PPNP SG).

The Neighbourhood Plan was modified in response to this feedback, and finalised for submission to Lewes District Council.