

Thornham St John's Neighbourhood Forum – Statement for RMBC application

The Thornham St John's Neighbourhood Forum [TSJNF] has been established to promote and improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the TSJ Neighbourhood Plan (TSJNP) Area [see map attached]. This will be achieved by agreeing a vision for the TSJNP Area, preparing development policies (that conform with local and national planning policies) to achieve this vision and by preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Area (NPA) which embodies these policies and any other appropriate purpose agreed by the Forum.

Our values are to conduct Forum affairs ethically and observe the 'Nolan Principles', the seven principles of public life, namely Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership; and to pursue equality of opportunity in terms of its membership, its conduct and its proposed Plan.

Membership is open to all individuals who live, work, pursue recreational activities and carry out business in the area, ward councillors and individuals who are elected members.

The initiating group gained information about neighbourhood planning locally through the Rooley Moor Area Forum and more widely via Woodford Neighbourhood Forum in Stockport. Alongside this were conversations with the planning officers of Rochdale MBC. Information was also acquired from the Government's website (Locality) and Planning Aid. From this information base the proposed neighbourhood area was drawn up.

Prior to this a number of local residents had formed the SOS-Save Our Slattocks greenbelt group with a formal constitution, officers and a bank account.

The Area is a mixture of residential, business (including Stakehill Industrial Estate [SIE]), farmland, greenbelt and rail & major road links. Of particular note are a Grade II listed church, St John the Evangelist Thornham; Thornham Cricket Club; the Richard Bentley Smalley Memorial Hall (Charity no. 228619); the Rochdale Canal; and Gerrard Wood (described in GMSF draft October 2016 as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI)).

The vast majority of land within the proposed NPA is Greenbelt. Much of this is used for farming, principally grazing for sheep and cattle. There are both beef & dairy cattle which include a Holstein herd, noted for its high milk yield. Chicken egg production is also a thriving local farm-based business. Many of the local farms are owned and operated by local families with long associations with the area. Some parts of farmland are given over to game bird production and shooting. The lanes and public footpaths are regularly frequented by numerous walking groups, horse riders, cyclists, runners and individuals for recreation, general exercise and enjoyment.

There are three schools within the Plan Area, namely; Cardinal Langley RC High School & Sixth Form; St John's Thornham CE (VA) Primary School; and St John Fisher RC Primary School.

Businesses outside of the SIE footprint include a number of farms, hotels & a spa/fitness centre, residential and nursing care homes, bed & breakfast accommodation, skip hire, two garden centres, car sales, two public houses and a fuel station with convenience shop. The Area also has a number of licenced mobile kiosks for drinks/sandwich/hot food which are well used by local residents & workers, along with passing trade.

Stakehill Industrial Estate - the Forum fully acknowledge Rochdale Council's aim to focus on economic growth as part of its Adopted Core Strategy [Oct 2016] and we recognise the Council's wish to further enhance and promote employment within the Estate's current footprint.

We will, therefore, exclude the SIE footprint from our NPA but reserve the right to comment on and/or object to specific planning applications within the SIE footprint, as deemed appropriate by Forum members.

We also fully support the Council's aims in protecting the Greenbelt. We see the Greenbelt in our NPA as an important asset for both the local and wider community which should be fully protected as per local & national legislation.

The Area's housing is a mixture of social & private rented, owner occupiers and supported living accommodation.

A variety of professionals live in the area including construction & environment specialists, clergy, teachers, and medical & legal specialists.

An initial consultation on the principles of a neighbourhood plan has been carried out by small group discussions and email. This was followed up with a leaflet delivery to all residential and business properties in the proposed Plan Area. The leaflet [attached] invited everyone to a local meeting. At this meeting explanations of the process and presentations were given. A Q&A session followed. The first formal meeting of the Forum was held on 6th January 2018. This meeting formalised the Forum name, proposed Plan Area and elected a Management Committee in accordance with the Constitution [attached] handed out.

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A list of Forum officers and people who have agreed to be members to date is attached. They bring a range of expertise including, finance, marketing, tax, project management, information technology, education, medicine, accounting, logistics and sport, alongside business owners, walkers, equestrians, anglers and members of the clergy. The majority of these forum members live or work in the Area, plus a Ward Councillor and business representatives with their businesses dependent on the area.

As the Plan Area bisects two Parliamentary constituency areas [Rochdale and Heywood & Middleton] both Members of Parliament will be invited to join the Forum.

Members have expressed a desire to:

- Engage with residents, businesses and visitors so that their needs are taken into account;
 - Be open to development in the Area whilst protecting its assets for the benefit of both local residents and the wider community;
 - Look at ways to encourage sympathetic tourism and outdoor activity in the Area;
 - Continually look at ways to improve the area for the benefit of all.
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