

## PARISH PLAN SURVEY 2021

### INTRODUCTION

A very big thank you to all who completed and submitted our Parish Plan Questionnaire. We wanted the results of this survey to guide the writing of the Parish Plan, taking into account as far as possible the views, ambitions and concerns of our residents.

A little fewer than one third of homes submitted a return but nevertheless we believe it has been possible to identify the main community wide issues which should be a focus for future planning.

This report sets down our analysis of the survey results to give you the opportunity to comment before we embark on producing the Parish Plan.

Lowick is a small rural parish, currently part of the wider South Lakeland District Council and Cumbria County Council. We are now in the process of establishing a new unitary council to supercede these two levels. Whatever its name is finally chosen to be, it will be the authority which directly governs our lives locally. We mention this because of the many ambitions and concerns you have raised, some are very specific to our parish and should be managed locally through the Parish Council and community action, while others lead to actions which should rightly be addressed by the new unitary council. We have tried to make clear in this report where responsibility would lie.

The Questionnaire was divided into seven sections

-Housing

-Environment

-Transport and Highways

-Community Groups

Communications

-Emergency Planning

-Extension of LDNPA Southern Boundary

The analysis of and conclusions for each of these areas is presented in the following sections. It is important to say that this analysis has only tried to reflect the views expressed in the responses. It has not tried to assess the likely impact, practicality or effectiveness of any of the measures identified in the survey.

### HOUSING

Housing strategy will clearly be a responsibility of the new unitary council. However, in Lowick we have our own views which should be input to the overall strategy.

Principal amongst the responses is the belief that there is nowhere within the parish in need of or suitable for significant new construction and that the wider strategy of the new council is not yet understood (or even developed). From this we would assume that in so far as residents are concerned, development is more likely to be through conversions and extensions/additions with some change of use.

The survey strongly supports the principle of local and affordable housing for local workers together with high standards of environmental performance. There is no wish to see the proliferation of second and holiday homes which have adversely impacted many other small parishes in the area.

We asked what further infrastructure would be needed to support any further housing development and an interesting number of ideas were raised the most significant of which was better public transport (see later). Other suggestions included

- children's play facilities

- support to the Farmers Arms as a community hub

- EV charging points (we judged charging from home would become more significant but a few rapid charging points close to community centres could be sensible)

- only a modest response for local shops, surgery etc perhaps recognising viability in a small community is difficult. Nevertheless, recognising that there could be better outreach to Lowick from surrounding facilities to reduce travelling and support the less mobile residents.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

Perhaps unsurprisingly this section probably generated the most interest. Ambitions and concerns ranged from the very local to much wider unitary council and national issues. There is a determined concern for our environment, in particular the challenging issue of climate change. While local initiatives help and people want to be active this is an opportunity to convey our concern and challenge county and national government. Key amongst the issues raised in this context were

- subsidies, support and information on solar power, heat pumps (ground and air), transport (public transport and electric vehicle infrastructure), home insulation and energy efficiency.

In respect of issues with more strictly local impact and solutions, there is general agreement that the current recycling arrangements are quite good but a number of possible improvements should be considered

- better information on how to consign waste and extend the range of waste that can be recycled

- provide more robust and larger recycling containers (bags and boxes)

- on line parish freecycling scheme

- construct compost bins for the allotments

- establish a local monthly village skip for unusual and occasional wastes to avoid many individual trips to (not so) nearby recycling centres and help more elderly residents.

Many issues were raised concerning the provision and maintenance of footpaths. Although specific mention was made of those from the Farmers Arm to Lowick Green, from Lowick Green to Woodgate and from Lowick Bridge to Blawith, a more general footpath survey seems to be needed together with a longer term plan for improvement and maintenance. Encouraging walking for local journeys is seen as both a health and environmental benefit. Issues ranging from overgrown vegetation, damage from illegal off roaders, poor access for children's buggies and even lack of a suitable path are evident.

Road side litter, both from passing cars and lorries and also from cyclists (energy bar wrappers, energy drinks and gels packaging) is seen as a problem. While more litter bins are suggested others judge this would not stop those who simply throw away litter and anyway bins would need regular emptying. Education (through county and national schemes) was offered as one solution together with a focus on event organisers (running, walking and cycling events being seen as a significant source of litter). Generally residents already do and appear willing to volunteer to take part in organised litter picking.

There appear to be a number of locations impacted by flooding during periods of heavy rain. Specifically mentioned are Beckbottom, Woodgate and the fell road to Broughton Beck. A key need is the planned and regular cleaning/maintenance of drains along roadsides, recognising the seasonal nature of some flooding. This could involve the parish lengthsman but needs to be integrated with Highways.

A number of concerns were raised about road signs becoming unreadable with degradation and/or obscured by vegetation. Although raised under the 'Environment' heading this is also clearly a 'Highways' issue and again should involve both the parish lengthsman and Highways.

Questions on group purchase schemes for energy and environment facilities generated considerable interest and should be followed up with some vigour. In particular these included group purchase schemes for

-oil

-LNG (calor etc)

-electricity (particularly renewable)

-septic tank emptying

-water quality testing

-log delivery

Finally, broadband registered in a number of responses as a community asset with environmental benefits (see later in Communications)

**TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS**

This section of the questionnaire raised key safety issues with very evident concerns about speed and driving standards on our local roads. When asked if the present 40mph speed limits on the A5092 from Silver Lane to the Old School and the A5084 through Lowick Green were effective or not the responses were fairly evenly balanced between yes and no. Most responses believed these sections should be extended to cover the A5092 south towards Penny Bridge and north towards Woodgate and the A5084 through to Lowick Bridge. There was no enthusiasm for local volunteer speed monitors along any sections of the roads.

In addition to speed limits, suggestions for automatically displaying speed measurements to oncoming vehicles were made for several locations. In particular, responses from residents close to Lowick Bridge made several observations about the speed of traffic on the A5084, the slight bends reducing forward visibility and the blind junction down to the bridge. Suggestions were made for additional measures such as double white lines either side of the junction.

A particular stretch of road between the Red Lion and the Community Hall was suggested for a 20mph limit. It is narrow, has many bends, is used as something of a 'rat run' between Woodgate and Lowick Bridge for Coniston and has many walkers.

All of these issues can only be taken forward through the new council and Highways England but the parish has a responsibility to make recommendations and pursue changes.

In respect of the state of the roads response varied between 'OK' at best to 'poor'. Damaged surfaces, poor drainage, potholes were highlighted in a number of areas. There is now a new on line reporting system for defects and part of the solution must be to utilise this to maximum extent. From individuals through to the Parish Council we need to press the new unitary council and Highways England on their response to issues raised and establishing an effective monitoring and maintenance strategy.

The state of footpaths alongside the roads was also considered 'OK' at best to 'poor' at worst. Responses were fairly evenly balanced between wanting more verge and hedge trimming for road and pedestrian safety or less trimming for bio-diversity reasons. We conclude it will always be a question of looking at individual sites and times and finding the best balance.

## COMMUNITY GROUPS

We believe that in a parish like ours the encouragement of local groups for leisure, health, entertainment, information, skill development and sharing, meeting and discussion are important. We asked people to tell us what community groups there were aware of or involved in. and this is what we found, in no particular order:

-Lowick Show

-Parish Council

-Lowick Green Committee

- Fitness Groups, Tai Chi, pilates
- Allotment Association
- First Responders
- Farmers Arms and Grisedale Arts
- Lowick Fest
- Young Farmers
- Lowick Toddlers

In addition, responses suggested groups for more social gatherings such as 'meet the neighbours', walking groups, litter picking etc. Interestingly although many judged the facilities offered by the Community Hall were excellent, its location was considered a little too remote from the centre of the parish.

Clearly although the Parish Council does not exist to organise and run community groups it does have a role in supporting and encouraging them.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Most responses indicated a generally satisfactory level of communication through the Coniston and Crake Valley Newsletter. However, there was a significant number of responses who preferred a paper copy or did not access material on line. Although broadly welcomed, some responses felt the newsletter was, perhaps inevitably, biased towards the larger population of Coniston with insufficient news concerning Lowick. Responses point towards the need for a careful assessment of the ability to reach all parishioners with meaningful local content through email, the parish website, Facebook, community Whatsapp group, parish notice boards and paper through the door if preferred.

In respect of content responses demonstrated a wish to be informed of, for example

- road works and closures
- planning applications
- local politics
- local events

Several responses judged more specific Lowick news including for example celebrating individual achievements of parishioners.

Clearly, the results indicate a need to review of the current approaches.

We asked about the adequacy of local broadband recognising this has a key part to play in communication for both information, leisure and business. Many responses were 'adequate' or 'satisfactory' but some recognised that a step change in improvement was possible with fibre straight to each home. B4RN is a local business most involved in making this possible in north western rural communities. The parish council is supportive of their initiative. The current system provided by Openreach of fibre to substations (green cabinets) and copper wire to each home seems to be considered adequate by some people. For others who live some distance from the substation(s) with long length copper wire, the system is currently less than adequate and the concern is that the system is simply not future proof.

#### EMERGENCY PLANNING

Road accidents resulting in serious injury and damage to property and infrastructure are among the most mentioned hazards. Speed limits, clear signage and road /junction line painting are seen as the main defences.

In respect of natural hazards floods predominate in the survey. Beck Bottom and Bark House in particular are mentioned as increasing sources of concern but generally failing to keep gullies clear is another. River flooding, in particular by the Crake and Langholm Beck at Lowick Bridge is a specific risk for nearby households.

High winds and snow fall are both mentioned. Loss of electrical power either through a system fault or damage to overhead lines can be a problem as some key utilities for individual properties, eg water supply, do need electrical power. In addition to the main roads, more gritting of minor roads, particularly where there are exposed sections such as the Fell Road to Broughton Beck, is believed to be needed

Overall there was no strong feeling for a register of vulnerable households. We might assume this reflects the independent nature of parishioners taking responsibility for their individual circumstances.

The point was made that we should look to learn lessons from the pandemic which resulted in significantly increased isolation in an already sparsely populated community. Measures taken to maintain contact and ensure needs were kept satisfied might have a future purpose.

Overall, responses indicate that a simple emergency plan identifying a central contact person(s), a community evacuation centre (eg Lowick Community Hall), links to district and county councils and national authorities, contact telephone numbers and internet addresses for key utilities and services should be provided for all households.

#### EXTENSION OF THE LDNPA SOUTHERN BOUNDARY

-At the time of preparing the Questionnaire, Friends of the Lake District supported by a number of Cumbrian parish councils submitted to Government a proposal to extend the boundary of the National Park in a southerly direction which would include the whole of Lowick as well as much of the south of Copeland, Furness north of Barrow and the Cartmel/Grange peninsula.

We thought it would be useful to take the opportunity to ask how Lowick residents felt about such a proposal.

About 2/3 of the returns were broadly in favour of the proposed extension with around 1/3 evenly split between undecided and broadly against. Many registered that little information was available to better understand the potential advantages or disadvantages.