

Watton Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Act 2011 allowed residents to have a say in the development of where they live and how their Town operates through Neighbourhood Plans. The Plan looks forward across two decades to 2040 and will be reviewed at regular intervals throughout this period. At that point it has statutory weight and must be referred to by the local authority, in our case Breckland District Council.

Consultation began back in 2017 following Neighbourhood Area designation involving five public meetings and five groups and association meetings, as well as a questionnaire with a 27% response. A number of studies and documents were conducted in support of plan development including a site assessment, market report, Town character appraisal and High Street Design Code. The NP Steering Group met on over 20 occasions to review relevant material, to consider priorities and opportunities based on needs with guidance and support provided by two specialist consultants.

The Plan covers Infrastructure and Services, Development Design, Housing, Natural Environment, Town Centre and the Economy, Built Heritage, Access and Transport, Community and Social Facilities.

The process is long and involved, as with all Neighbourhood Plans, but the draft plan was completed at the end of last year from when it follows a formal submission and consultation process.

The pre-submission draft of the Plan for consultation prepared and an initial pre-consultation with Breckland Council undertaken earlier this year. Consultation with residents began on Friday 18th March and ran until Friday 8th April. The Steering Group are currently reviewing feedback from 35 points raised by residents and the Breckland Council. These are under review for any changes and amendments to the Plan prior to submission for an independent examination in early summer, at a date yet to be determined. This summer the Council will hold a local referendum of the Plan and if a majority vote in favour of the plan the the Plan is 'made' by Breckland District Council - and assumes a statutory status.

Everyone on the NP Steering Group have given their time and services on a voluntary basis, which not only included meetings and consideration of approach and options but review of evidence, materials, provision of draft sections and editing. My thanks to the team, not least Michelle Thompson the Deputy Town Clerk, the previous Chair, Jane Fountain for her services and the rest of the current team - Keith Gilbert, Kathryn Stallard, Pat Warwick and Liz Whitcher as well as our consultant, Ian Poole.

Dr David Dent
Chair Watton NP Steering Group
Chair Wayland Chamber of Commerce