

RESPONSE : Tim Gresty

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* All materials available as e-files : on request by email to Tim Gresty.

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KEY POINTS SUMMARY

In my full response to the A+M Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire on 19th December 2014, I wrote :
“As one of the instigators of the original A+M Parish Plan (in partnership with the Parish Council Clerk Charlie Pointon), I will watch the development of this Neighbourhood Plan with both interest and a critical eye.”

This was noted in the A+M Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire Response Analysis v1.3 dated 6th May 2014
(Additional Comments Received Appendix)

1. These Notes summarise my response to the resulting A+M Neighbourhood Plan v1
2. I am critical of the research base and methodology used, and concerned with the depth, content and conclusions of the plan.
3. The following analysis lists those concerns and criticisms.
4. I suggest additional work on analysis and conclusions is necessary if the Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan is to provide a robust and appropriate framework for sustainable development within our Parish.

BACKGROUND

The Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan Section 2 (Scope) defines the reasons and rationale for the Plan to be:

The Astbury and Moreton Neighbourhood Plan sets out a series of policies which, once adopted, will be used to guide development and preparation of planning applications in the plan area. These policies will also be used in determining planning applications for all development proposals in the area.

The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared in general conformity with the strategic policies of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan and it will run for the same period up to 2030.

The starting point for any development proposals in the plan area will be the Neighbourhood Plan and the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan. Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will have the status of a Development Plan Document”*

A number of projects may be identified through the neighbourhood plan consultation process and these will be set out in an appendix to the plan and detailed in a separate Delivery Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan will be reviewed every 5 years or when the Local Plan is amended by Cheshire East and those changes have a material impact on the Neighbourhood Plan.

* A Development Plan Document is defined by The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations [2012] as :

A DPD is a document prepared by a local planning authority individually or in cooperation with other local planning authorities, which contains statements regarding the following—

- (a) the development and use of land which the local planning authority wish to encourage during any specified period;*
- (b) the allocation of sites for a particular development or use;*
- (c) any environmental, social and economic objectives which are relevant to the attainment of the development and use of land mentioned in paragraph (a);*
- (d) strategic policies in respect of matters mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (c) above; and (e) development management and site allocation policies, which are intended to guide the determination of applications for planning permission.*

The Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan v1 does not identify any specific sites for a particular development or use. It does not replace the existing Astbury+Moreton Parish Plan, produced by the community in 2005.

CRITIQUE

As a marketing professional with many decades' experience in market research, I have reviewed the Neighbourhood Plan Draft v1 and its basis of the Results and Conclusions paper and resulting Additional Comments Received Appendix, as published by the Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan group in May 2014 and accessible online :

Source : astbury-parish.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/nplan/Neighbourhood%20Plan%20Analysis%20V1.3.pdf

These notes reflect informed consultation with close colleagues with relevant experience :

- (1) Previous CEO of 4NW incorporating Regional Planning Board for Housing and Transport : appointed by DCLG : responsibilities included development of Regional Spatial Strategy. Subsequently CEO of NWRLB
- (2) UK and EU Consultant on Environment & Development Planning and Regulatory Issues : including housing development planning : Westminster and Brussels

The following Critique is sustainable and appropriate :

- A. It is recognised that a considerable amount of work by the local team of volunteers has been devoted to the planning and preparation of the Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan since 2013. Their work is applauded.
- B. The Neighbourhood Plan must be robust and unchallengeable in evidence, content and conclusion if it is to resist challenge from external parties, who might gain by its nullification. This applies particularly to principals, agents and advisors involved in housing development.
- C. It is noted that the Neighbourhood Plan is aimed to become a supplementary Planning Document produced to enable and guide development in the local community. It is tasked with working seamlessly alongside any existing community-adopted Parish Plan. The 2005 Astbury+Moreton Parish Plan remains valid in encompassing the community's aspirations, and has the potential to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. Source : CPRE : <http://planninghelp.cpre.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/shape-your-local-area/parish-plans>
- D. It is understood that professional support was provided initially by one or more community projects consultancies (eg Community Development Partnership, Locality). More recently, guidance and input have been provided by Consultant to the Steering Group Andrew Thomson of Bunbury-based Thomson Planning Partnership : a senior property planning and development Director (BNP Paribas Real Estate, DTZ Commercial Property, Broadway Malyan Architects, Preston Vision economic development project. The expertise of these parties lies in professional development planning advice. They are not experienced in focused market research aimed to explore a community's opinions, wants and needs, or in providing sustainable and dependable community-aggregated market research findings.
- E. There were considerable difficulties in obtaining adequate levels of response to the research questionnaire distributed to all residences in the community in October 2013. Total base was 90 responses.
- F. Significant shortcomings in sample size and profile make initial results and conclusions unreliable.
- G. Faults in technique, questionnaire format and content mean that the initial results and conclusions cannot be taken to robustly represent the views and needs of the overall community of Newbold Astbury cum Moreton.
- H. Overall community demand for housing development and for the reduction of traffic intrusion appear to have been significantly understated in response analysis and conclusions, against the yardstick of the more comprehensive 2005 Astbury+Moreton Parish Plan. This may be attributable to structural inadequacies in depth and profile of Neighbourhood Plan response-based sample, and its over-focusing on older members of the community, and particularly those aged 55-plus in 2013.
- I. The average age of the Astbury+Moreton Parish Council is 62. Their views as to the future of the Astbury+Moreton neighbourhood may not reflect those of younger residents current and future. Source : www.astbury-parish.org.uk, *Electoral Role, Companies House and other sources*
- J. Where a market research study aims to establish a Neighbourhood Plan extending nearly twenty years into the future, this significant under-representation of residents aged less than 55 in 2013 undermines the findings, and any resulting Conclusions.
- K. The questionnaire analysis should be expanded to provide a response profile matching more closely the demographics of Newbold Astbury cum Moreton, or weighted from the limited number of current responses to properly reflect that demographic profile. Without that, any resulting Neighbourhood Plan will fail to be robust and reliable : it will be open to challenge by those it seeks to constrain. That includes housing developers and retained planning consultants whose enthusiastic regional involvement in Neighbourhood and Local Plans is well documented by Cheshire East Council. Source : *Cheshire East Council : PS A001 Draft Hearing Sessions Programme via <http://cheshireeast-consult.limehouse.co.uk/portal/planning/cs/newsarchive>*

KEY FINDINGS & PROPOSALS

The Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan v1 does not provide a Summary of key Findings and Proposals. The following is a suggested list of Proposals for A&MPC action, abstracted from Neighbourhood Plan Draft v1.

1. Non-specific allocation of sites for new housing development limited to small rural exception sites of up to 4 houses, and selected infill sites of up to 2 housing units.
2. Sites to be sourced from (in order of priority) :
(A) brownfield sites (B) infill sites of up to 2 houses (C) rural exception sites of up to 4 houses.*
3. Total housing development of up to 50 houses in aggregate, in up to 23 separate sites*
4. Housing development should primarily provide choice for existing local needs. Immigration from adjacent parishes and further afield should be secondary.
5. Housing development design and construction should enhance the local character and quality of the area.
6. Promote and support existing businesses and enterprises in the Parish.
7. Support rural tourism and local facilities. No mention of heritage tourism (eg church, Conservation Area)
8. Support retention of existing shops and other facilities.
9. Reduce traffic speeds and improve road traffic segregation on main roads and local roads : based on concerns over traffic levels on existing roads within village, outlying hamlets and country areas.**
10. Provision of sustainable bus services for local needs, and for visitors from outside the parish.
11. Provision of high-speed Broadband and improved mobile telephone reception.
12. Retain local services that will sustain the community.

* It is noted that Astbury + Moreton lies wholly within the outer northern fringe of the Stoke-on-Trent Green Belt, created in 1965 under the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act to check the unrestricted expansion of urban and suburban Stoke-on-Trent. It includes the Astbury Conservation Area. It is therefore inevitable that the projected allocation of up to 50 houses on up to 23 separate sites will be built within the Stoke-on-Trent Green Belt, and possibly within the Astbury Conservation Area.

** Despite considerable feedback and documentation during the research and preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, and as established as a community need by the 2005 Parish Plan, there are no proposals within the Plan for the reduction of transit traffic levels through the Astbury Conservation Area, or on Wallhill and Brownlow Heath Lanes, by either alternative-route diversion or Bypass. *Source : A+M Neighbourhood Questionnaire Response Analysis v1.3 : 6th May 2014 : Additional Comments Received.*

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questionnaire Base and Community Representation.

As the key statistical base for the Neighbourhood Plan, a Research Questionnaire was circulated to all 216 residential addresses within Astbury + Moreton. These homes contain the Parish's 502 residents, 431 of which are aged 16-plus. *Source : 2011 Census : Office for National Statistics.*

Response totalled 90 completed Questionnaires. *Source : A+M Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire Response Analysis v1.3 : 6th May 2014.*

Effective market research requires the foundation of statistically-robust and representative samples.

The Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan fails to deliver this vital first stage :

- The research sample comprises just 90 Questionnaire Responses, from a resident community of 502 spread across 216 addresses
- This represents response levels of 17.9% all residents or 20.9% all residents 16-plus. Alternatively, if it is felt that a 'one per household' research response is adequate, this represents 41.7% homes – an unrepresentative sample for the varied views held by wide-ranging selection of individuals of varying ages, lifestage and interests.
- In contrast, the 2005 Parish Plan from which this Neighbourhood Plan evolved was based on 177 Questionnaire Responses. This represented a more representative 41.1% of all residents 16-plus, or an alternate 81.9% all homes.
- The age and activity profiles of the Neighbourhood Plan research sample do not match the demographics of Newbold Astbury cum Moreton.
- The Plan sample fails to provide an adequately robust representation of the community and its views.

1. Responses by Location and Age

Neighbourhood Plan Responses should be representative of the overall community, in geographic, social and age terms, or the results should be weighted to accord with the overall demographics of the area.

The Responses on which the Neighbourhood Plan is based are not representative of the demographics of Newbold Astbury. *Source : A+M Neighbourhood Plan Questionnaire Response Analysis v1.3 : 6th May 2014.*

For example, questionnaire response is heavily weighted towards older Residents. Younger groups are severely under-represented in the Questionnaire Response. This leads inevitable to skewed results, where the wishes and demands of older groups differ from those in younger groups.

1. 63.6% Responses were from 55-plus age group. This contrasts with national statistics for this age group (28.0% population) and local statistics for Astbury+Moreton Parish (44.2%).
2. For the 18 to 44 age group, the percentage Responses was 18.2%. This under-represents this community-vital group, versus National (36.9%) and Astbury+Moreton Parish (25.3%).
3. Where views are requested on such age-sensitive subjects as Requirements for Housing, Transport, Retail, Employment, Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour, Environmental Matters and Noise, this inbuilt bias towards older groups will affect results and conclusions.
4. The base should have been augmented by additional recruitment of Responses from the younger age groups, or statistical weighting applied in line with NACM overall age split, to balance results and conclusions.

2. Responses : Relationship with Parish and Appreciation of Features

- The "Relationship" tabulation is directly factual. It could therefore be of use in determining the views of sub-groups, such as those who run businesses in the Parish. However, the minimal base for "Run business in parish" (6 Responses) and "Work in parish" (4) does not facilitate this.
- The "What people think of Astbury cum Moreton" tabulation indicates that Respondents are overall neither overwhelmed nor disappointed in the listed aspects of living within Newbold Astbury cum Moreton.
- "Nice Environment", "Good employment opportunities" and "Good indoor leisure opportunities" scored below a 2.5 median rating. Of these, the poor scoring of "Nice Environment" is notable.
- In contrast with this rating, only "Sense of History", "Quiet/peaceful" and "Good housing" scored 3 or above.
- This could reflect the predominant views of the older age groups who dominate the research base

4. Housing Needs

Respondents rated the need for more homes as 2.2, below a median score of 2.5.

In contrast, approximately 62.2% Responses marked that it was appropriate to add houses to the Neighbourhood.

In balance, only 37.8% Responses marked “none”.

In the larger-sample and more robust Parish Plan responses, a significantly larger percentage endorsed the need for additional housing (72.5%), with only 27.5% marked “none”.

- Of that Neighbourhood Plan majority accepting the need for additional housing, a weighted analysis of amounts of housing deemed appropriate indicates a median number of houses at more than 50.
- The age bias of the Responses base towards the over-55 age group will have influenced this response pattern, and therefore underplayed the demand for new housing, and for affordable housing.. Where a further analysis weighted by age groups in line with the community’s actual demographic profile is carried out, it is probable that the percentage agreeing with new housing development will rise, as will their suggestion of anticipated appropriate housing numbers, thus bringing that media significantly above 50.

On the basis of this rating, the Neighbourhood Plan suggestion that there is “marginally less in favour of additional housing development” is unfounded and inaccurate. The majority of the age-skewed Responses endorse additional housing development.

- The analysis of “Housing Development – Type” includes the responses of all, covering those who marked against any housing development and those who endorsed such developments. It would be interesting to carry out a further tabulation, focusing on that majority of Responses which approved housing development.
- The claimed preference for “smaller homes” is not substantiated. The median score of 2.6 for this type of housing is only marginally ahead of “larger/family homes” on 2.4, and without statistical significance in this under-representative and age-biased sample.

5. Employment Needs

The significant under-representation of younger members of the community in the base for this research analysis, and the majority predominance of post-work older residents, make the conclusions in this section unreliable.

Similarly, the preferences for Types of Employment Development reflect this age imbalance.

- It would be valuable to provide a new tabulation focusing on the responses from younger age groups (particularly 18 to 44), or to weight the overall tabulation in line with the community’s actual demographics.
- This section does not address the local migration away from employment in agriculture, including equine and other linked occupations. The 2011 Census documents the decline to under 9% (23 persons employed), below Manufacturing (9.16%), Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles (9.54%), Professional Scientific and Technical (10.31%) and Human Health + Social Work (9.54%). Most employment of Astbury+Moreton residents is outside the Parish : in the absence of public transport, that compels environmentally-unsustainable car usage.

6. Infrastructure Needs : More Required

The provision of a limited and far-from-exhaustive list of alternative infrastructure developments limits the value of this tabulation.

The significant under-representation of younger members of the community in the base for this research analysis, and the majority predominance of over 55s, make the conclusions in this section unreliable.

Additionally, it does not reflect the clear conclusion of the original and more-representative Parish Plan that traffic is “the main concern of parishioners”, with over 80% rating parish roads as having “danger spots”.

- For example, the top-rated “needs” noted from the Neighbourhood Plan are Vehicle Restrictions (HGV) on 76.5%, Superfast Broadband tying on 76.6% and Traffic Calming on 73.0%.
- There is no mention of other key items, particularly those identified within the original Parish Plan such as Public Transport, Community Events, and the deletion of the “danger spots” problem by such measures as the prohibition of traffic within Astbury Village (eg Pedestrianisation, Bypass).
- The only option suggested within Vehicle Restrictions focuses specifically on heavy goods vehicles. There are no listed suggestions of restrictions aimed to reduce the predominant traffic problem caused by volume of cars.
- The lack of reference to community environmental sustainability, and particular sustainable energy generation for existing and new housing and employment, may reflect this absence of a voice of the younger groups for whom the Neighbourhood Plan for Astbury + Moreton is developed.

7. Infrastructure Needs : No More Required

The significant under-representation of younger members of the community in the base for this research analysis, and the majority predominance of over-55s, make the conclusions in this section unreliable.

- For example, the expressed need for more Local Shops (40.0% Responses) and more Local Health Facilities (39.8%) was probably amplified by the unrepresentative dominance of responses by over-55s.

8. Concerns in the Parish

Again, the significant under-representation of younger members of the community in the base for this research analysis, and the majority predominance of over-55s, make the results and conclusions of this section unreliable.

- For example, older age-groups are more concerned about Crime, Anti-social behaviour, Noise pollution and such intrusions as Litter and Fly tipping. This may be reflected in the ratings for these items.
- The limited list of defined problems omits a number of key subjects clearly defined within the original Parish Plan. These include Traffic Impact, rated by the community in the Parish Plan as its Number One concern.

CONCLUSIONS

As the total responses represents only 20.9% residents aged 16-plus within the Neighbourhood Area, and the resulting sample is not representative of the demographics of the area due to over-representation of the 55-plus age group, there is potential criticism that the resulting Neighbourhood Plan will not fairly represent the views, needs, plans and aspirations of the whole community of Newbold Astbury cum Moreton.

For example, for a resulting Plan to suggest that the overall community's Number One concern is fly tipping, that demand for additional housing is small, and that Traffic Impact does not feature substantially on their list of Concerns, does not fairly represent the views of the whole neighbourhood and its age-span of residents

Where the thoughts of younger age groups are not reflected in the resulting Neighbourhood Plan, those groups are likely to discount the relevance and importance of the Neighbourhood Plan, and its potential role as a planning guide and roadmap for the protection and enhancement of Newbold Astbury cum Moreton.

The problems of that inadequate and unrepresentative Response base are exacerbated by the failure of the Questionnaire to properly address the thoughts, needs and concerns of the community, as established in the 2005 Parish Plan on whose shoulders the Neighbourhood Plan is built.

For the Astbury+Moreton Neighbourhood Plan to emerge without those real and proper concerns reflected and explored is to miss an opportunity to safeguard and enhance our community – and to run the risk of failing to achieve the formal approval of the majority of those voting in the local referendum, as required by Government as an essential element in bringing that Neighbourhood Plan into legal force.

Credentials : Tim Gresty

Tim Gresty's long career in Marketing included senior management responsibilities for Market Research commissioning, management and analysis in the commercial, industrial and local authority sectors :

1. Business Studies Degree at premier league University included 2 years' academic study of Market Research
2. As a marketing manager with world-leading marketing companies Procter & Gamble and L'Oreal, responsible for the commissioning, management and reporting of many market research studies and marketing plans (eg Head & Shoulders, Crest, Ambre Solaire, Elnett).
3. As Director and principal of national and international marketing and advertising agencies, worked on individual and continuous market research studies for such professional organisations as British Airways, BT, British Army, Scottish Widows, Volvo, P&O and others.
4. For Telford New Town, North West Regional Development Agency and Greater Manchester Council, involved in research-based community consultation projects.
5. Housing development clients included Alfred McAlpine, Broseley, Crosby, Berkeley and Morris Homes
6. Director of and Investor in leading UK market research company Scantel International
7. For 12 years a visiting Lecturer in Marketing (including market research) at the premier league University of Manchester.
8. Professional acknowledgments included Marketing Society (past Regional Chairman), Chartered Institute of Marketing (Chartered Marketer and Fellow), Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (Lifetime Member).

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