Parish of Whicham
Community Plan
Cumbria

November 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

Parish plans are produced by and for local communities under government legislation. They provide an opportunity for local people to work together and develop a shared vision for the future of their community. Parish Plans will inform strategic documents at local, district and regional level.

The Parish of Whicham is dominated by a long coastline and the mass of Black Combe, which accounts for two thirds of the area. The sparse population is centred on the two villages of Silecroft and Kirksanton, and the hamlets of Whitbeck and Whicham.

This Community Plan is the culmination of individual residents' commitment, vision and love for a special place. For some in the community the relevance of this process has been heightened by the recent successful campaign against the proposed building of a new nuclear power station on a Greenfield site in this parish adjacent to the Lake District National Park boundary [2009-2010].

This document will explain the stages in the Community Plan process, from the underlying principles for having a locally driven plan, to the involvement of individuals, questionnaire development, consultation and summary of results. Finally, how the plan is taken forward with wider community involvement will be discussed.

WHY HAVE A COMMUNITY PLAN?

Under laws laid down by the Council for Europe *[Council of Europe Treaty Series no.176],* governments are requested to accept the need for long-term stewardship of each country's heritage, landscape and culture, while recognising the major issues facing society today. The underlying principles are:

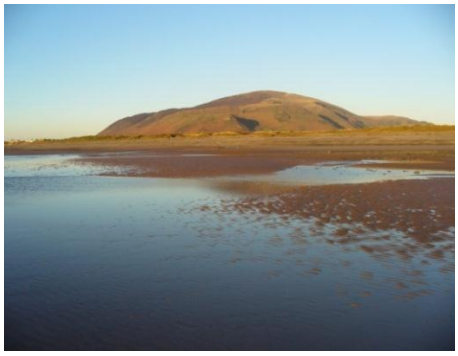
- Quality of rural life which is both dynamic and sustainable reflecting the environment and the heritage of the area.
- Recognition of the subtle variations in different geographical areas whatever their scale.
- Development of public policy led by the views, wishes, resources and energies of local people who have the best knowledge. Linking these views to those of government at all levels. *European Landscape Convention [E.L.C.]March 2004*

These views are further reinforced by:

- The Government's Rural White Paper "Our Countryside, The Future", 2000
- The Sustainable Communities Act, 2007
- Charter for Rural Communities, Carnegie Trust, 2008
- Cumbria Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2028
- Cumbria Landscape Character Guidance & Toolkit, Cumbria County Council, 2011
- The Localism Act, 2011.

2. OUR PARISH

The Parish of Whicham is situated in the remote south west corner of Cumbria, mostly within The Lake District National Park [LDNP], in the southern part of the Borough of Copeland. The area has one of the lowest populations in the region, on a par with Ennerdale. It is comprised of approximately 245 dwellings mainly located in and around the villages and hamlets. All settlements are located on the narrow coastal plain by the Irish Sea or along the Whicham valley. The bulk of the parish is dominated by Black Combe, a sprawling fell of 600m/1,970 feet which lies at the end of a ridge stretching from the mountainous heart of The Lake District, and is visible from Scotland, Wales and Ireland. In addition, the parish is unusual in having 11.5 km / 7.25 miles of the only 10 mile stretch of coastline situated within The Lake District National Park. It is comprised of safe sandy accessible beaches and is used by visitors and locals for a range of activities: swimming, dog walking, fishing, boating, horse riding, wind and kite surfing. This valuable tourism resource has the award of Blue Flag Status.



The parish is an area of hidden antiquity with megalithic standing stones, stone circles and ancient tracks. The coastal land has been inhabited from Neolithic times and has had a significantly large concentration of stone circles surrounding Black Combe. Most were removed during the 18th and 19th century agricultural revolution. The surviving ones are on Lacra and at Kirksanton.

Farming, fishing, peat and salt extraction and brewing were the main occupations. Hemp was grown by villagers for rope making. Today, farming still dominates, supplemented by tourism for those seeking simplicity and quiet. Horticulture and residential care have added to the rural economy. It is an area of mainly permanent residents many of whom commute out of the parish for employment. There are some second homes, mostly in Silecroft.

This landscape, set against the dramatic backdrop of Black Combe, has inspired some of our country's most acclaimed poets and writers - William Wordsworth, Branwell Bronte, Norman Nicholson and Alfred Wainwright - enriching our heritage at local, national and international level.

Access to the parish is by the A590/5092 from Kendal or A595 from Whitehaven, by the coastal Barrow-Carlisle railway line or locally by the A5093 from Millom. Due to

the geology of the area, which is bounded by the Irish Sea and the Duddon estuary, Whicham Parish has escaped urban development and remains a quiet rural place. Millom, the nearest town although not in our parish, is only three and half miles away from Silecroft and has facilities including schools, shops, supermarkets, health services, restaurants and an Industrial Estate. The railway via Barrow-in-Furness has links from Lancaster to the West Coast main line services.

3. THE COMMUNITY PLAN PROCESS

OUR MODEL

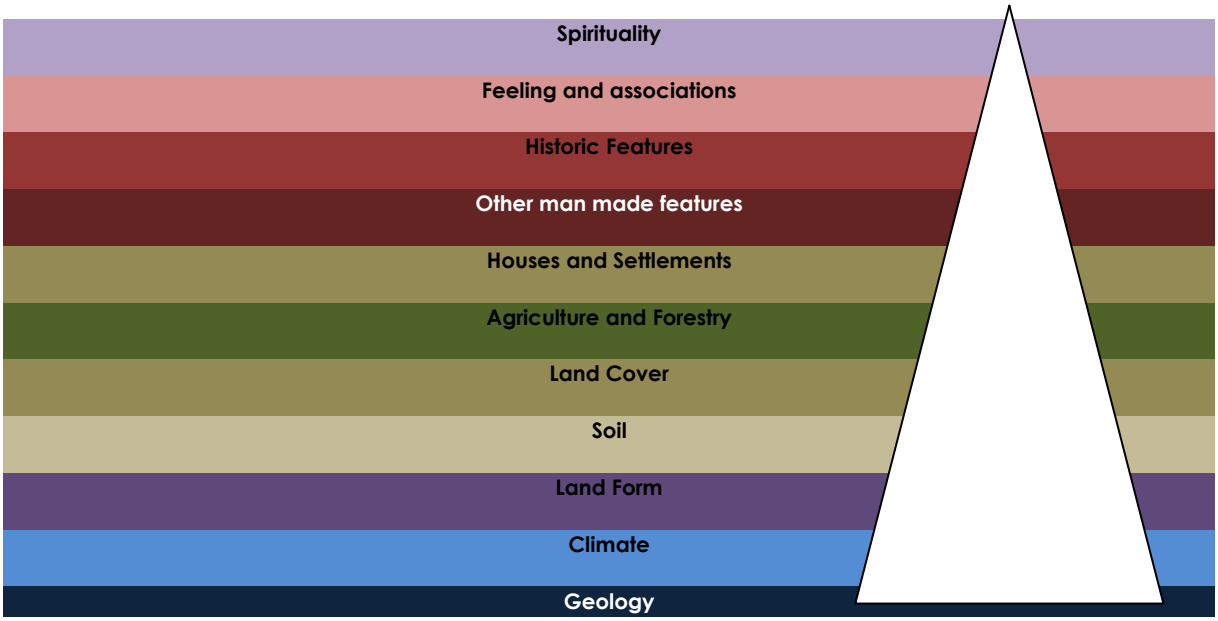
Many community plans and questionnaires look at key areas such as services, transport, economy and housing. Often they are prescriptive with each component being of equal importance.

Our community plan seeks to emphasise the overlapping relationship and interdependence of the key areas. These are seen in a wider three dimensional context and are therefore based on a spatial model. To clarify, our Parish is dominated by Black Combe where "landscape" [*Landscape Identification, ECOVAST 2006]* is the backdrop to our lives, culture, economy, history, feelings and spirituality.

On that basis we chose to devise a questionnaire which contained open, subjective, emotive questions as well as some focused ones. We feel we have been successful in getting a "sense of place" from the community, which will become our reference point and guide. It sets the scene in order to protect and manage the landscape. On this basis the community plan can be developed making this an even better place to live.

Landscape Identification.

A Guide to Good Practice; European Council for the Village and Small Town [ECOVAST 2006].



THE STEERING GROUP

The Community Plan Steering Group is the body that has overseen development of this Community Plan. The Chair of Whicham Parish Council, Edith Lister, invited members of the local community to form a steering group which was set up in January 2011. The group was chaired by local farmer and land agent, Robert Morris-Eyton. Participants are shown in Appendix 3.

Thank you to all the residents of Whicham, Whitbeck, Silecroft and Kirksanton who took the time to respond to the questionnaire and attend the open days.

CONSULTING THE COMMUNITY

The overall emphasis of The Community Plan Process has been to identify what the community itself feels should be the aspirations for the Parish of Whicham, while defining our "sense of place".

A questionnaire was developed to reflect this. Questions asked were:

1. Factual: demographics [a snapshot of the parish in 2011].

2. Reflective: feelings and emotions for our surroundings.

3. Personal views and aspirations: what we hope for and what we do not want.

To introduce residents to the idea of a Community Plan and the questionnaire, two open days were organised in March 2011 at Silecroft and Kirksanton Village Halls. An exhibition of photographs and information of life in the Parish past and present was organised by the Steering Group. Maps were available showing the 2010 change to the Parish Boundary, which had the result of moving the Kirksanton area away from the Millom Without Parish.

Wine, refreshments and a good crack with neighbours and friends added to a stimulating, thought provoking, and enjoyable start to The Process.

Questionnaires were distributed to all 245 households in the Parish the week before the open days. They were handed in at the open days or collected during April 2011. A good return rate of 30% was achieved.

4. RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHICS, TRANSPORT, EDUCATION and EMPLOYMENT

This information provides an interesting snapshot of the community in the Parish of Whicham 2011. The summary findings from the Community Questionnaire are:

Parish Age Groups

0 - 24 years 24% *25 - 59 years 38%* *60 + years 38%*

Our Parish Ethnicity is made up of 96% British and 4% as other with 65% of residents living in the Parish for 10+ years and 14% of responders reporting living with a disability.

Economic Activity & Employment

Our parish residents include 1% unemployed, 18% self employed, 32% retired with the remaining 49% being in full or part-time employment, pre-school, education, or home and family duties. Employment activity is based on 74% working outside the parish with the remaining high figure of 24% working within the parish.

Transport in relation to how we travel to work

64% use a car, 8% car and train, 8% train service only, 2% car share, 1% uses their bicycle, 6 % walk to their place of work, with the remaining 11% working from home. There is no bus service, and the train service, although highly valued, offers limited out-of-hours service.

The community response to what was most valued about living here, other positive things and people's feelings about their surroundings, emphatically stressed the quality of the rural environment and lifestyle. These highly prized qualities should be further protected and enhanced by our elected representatives in local and national government.

The majority of responses clearly demonstrated that the rural community and the tranquillity of the area, together with the outstanding landscape and wildlife, are what people value most. Statements which described caring, friendly neighbours and a sense of community, occurred frequently. The opportunity of walking on beautiful, unspoilt empty beaches or up Black Combe, with breathtaking views, all on our doorsteps, makes living here special. The serenity, clean air, clear night skies and open views of sunsets and sunrises are spectacular.

A Selection of Responses

"Perfect place to live" "Every day is joy" "Friendly" "Safe" "Happy" "Blessed" "Wish to stay here for the rest of our lives" "Nowhere we would rather be" "Lucky" "Good" "Wonderful place to live" "Freedom for our children to roam the countryside in safety".

5. WHAT RESIDENTS WANTED IN THE PARISH

The record of aspirations of the residents is taken from the answers to the Questionnaire on how the Parish could be improved, and on the most important changes wanted. For clarity, and to help in taking The Plan forward, the answers have been categorised. Some responses cover more than one category and have been put into the category considered to have the largest impact on the community. Each category is listed in descending order of frequency mentioned. For planning purposes some items may be easily achieved. Other improvements may involve small working groups of residents with particular interests and expertise, setting up a medium or long term project. Items that should be a "Quick Fix" are identified below.

ACCESS and TRANSPORT

Due to the isolated location, geology and land form of the parish, which have determined the patterns of settlement, access routes are restricted and transport methods limited. However this can add to many of the positive feelings associated with living here. Changes wanted focus mainly on improvements to footpaths and cycleways, utilising the flat coastal plain and ancient pathways. Safety on existing narrow roads is a key issue, while better signage would promote the natural, historic and amenity features. Improved public transport services would benefit the community while protecting the landscape.

Quick Fixes: Grit boxes in each village

Restriction on parking at Silecroft War Memorial

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The small population clustered around the villages of Silecroft and Kirksanton, the proximity to the town of Millom, and the predominance of agriculture, have all shaped the resources available. The area is already well supplied to meet the needs of locals and tourists. Currently there are two Church of England churches, two village halls, two public houses supplying meals and a few bed and breakfast accommodations, one of which is open to the public for evening meals. There are a number of self catering holiday accommodations, a large static caravan park with some touring pitches, two horse riding establishments, a golf course, two children's play parks, a tennis court and a village green. Within the parish there is motivation and willingness to enhance what exists and develop what is appropriate to the location. This reinforces the feelings expressed of a friendly, helpful "working" community where people from differing backgrounds mix. The main focus is on

maximising the use of the two village halls and the parish churches, including outreach services to meet a variety of social, individual and spiritual needs. A resource for buying basic items, such as newspapers and local produce, and a tea room, would benefit local residents and tourists. Facilities such as new public toilets near the beach at Silecroft would compliment this natural resource. An area designated for individual or community allotments would enable individuals to grow their own produce.

Quick Fixes: Better use and cooperation between Village Halls

Flexible use of Parish Church for community events

LANDSCAPE and CULTURAL HERITAGE

We live between the sea and the mountains in an area steeped in history and inhabitated for over 3000 years. The geology and landform have been shaped by glaciation as seen by the steep sides of Black Combe and Lacra, and the fertile

Whicham valley, coastal plain and beach. Stone circles, standing stones, later stone wall enclosures, and the ancient right of high fell grazing on Black Combe, have dominated farming heritage through the centuries. The nature of this parish has resulted in a rich diversity of wildlife. There are coastal areas designated SSSI / Ramsar status. The majority of the parish lies within the protection of the LDNP with the fell of Lacra designated 'Landscape of County Importance'. Environmental, wildlife and historic education through information boards and signage would help protect and increase awareness of our landscape. Restoration and reinstatement of natural features and our historic environment, such as native hedges, traditional stone banks, dry stone walls, wild flower meadows and tree planting, would help maintain and enhance the landscape. Protection of ancient scheduled monuments such as The Giant's Grave standing stones should be done in keeping with the heritage of the area and people's feelings and associations, which contribute to our "sense of place".

Quick Fixes: Clean up after dogs. Waste bins and signs

Environmental and Information boards

TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The close knit population within the parish may have the potential to make co-operative ventures feasible. Living in an unspoilt area close to nature, where there are clear skies, clean air and our own microclimate, residents are very aware of the

need for a more sustainable life style. Working together on such ideas reinforces community bonds and helps us reduce our carbon footprint as a parish.

SOCIAL and PERSONAL WELLBEING

The villages of Silecroft and Kirksanton with the hamlets of Whitbeck and Whicham all have distinct social groups, due in part to their geographic layout. The historic development of these settlements and continuity of land and farm ownership has resulted in a closely knit community. There is a growing population of younger children and an even age distribution of adults. There is awareness for the need to communicate what various groups have to offer across the parish and to look at different ways to do this. Involvement of younger people in decision-making is vital in protecting the special nature of this parish for the future. The need for some affordable housing is highlighted.

Quick Fixes: Involvement of younger people on committees and local council

Events and activities for younger people

Advertisements for local events. Community news

Improved communications between parish residents

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Friendly helpful neighbours, a permanent rural population and small clusters of housing, all contribute to a low crime rate. However the progression of Neighbourhood and Farm Watch schemes will reinforce this further and be reassurance for older or single residents or those living in isolated locations.

Quick Fix: Public bench at Silecroft heightened for older residents.

WHAT RESIDENTS DID NOT WANT

The respondents to the questionnaire listed a number of large scale out-of-character developments which would have an extremely adverse effect on our "sense of place" and erode a rural lifestyle and environment into a semi–urban or industrial landscape. It is the potential scale and nature of these developments that are seen as harmful. The impact on the nation's perception of this unique corner of The Lake District National Park would be altered, and our diverse ecology, cultural heritage, agricultural and tourism-based economy would be lost.

6. LIST OF COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

The following summarises the aspirations expressed by the community, in addition to those listed as major Projects in Section 7 below.

Access and Transport

1. Speed restrictions; traffic calming; 'Children Crossing' signs at bus stops
2. Public and community transport improvements; weekend service; community bus/car
3. Footpath between Whicham, Silecroft, Kirksanton
4. Street lights replaced with non-polluting lighting
5. Grit boxes in each village
6. Restriction on parking at Silecroft War Memorial
7. Improve Seldom Seen Lane

Community Resources

8. Shop / Cafe community venture
9. Better use and co-operation between Village Halls
10. Flexible use of Parish Church for community events
11. Refurbish Hall: disabled toilets and kitchen
12. Outreach services in Village Halls eg. Mobile Library
13. Allotments for residents

Landscape & Cultural Heritage

14. Clean up after dogs. Waste bins and signs
15. Environmental and information boards
16. Tree planting on waste ground
17. Restoration of wild flower meadows
18. Reinstatement of traditional native hedgerows
19. Protect landscape, natural features, historic environment
20. Biodiversity projects
21. Protect local birds and wildlife
22. Protect old bridge over Lazy River
23. Enhance Kirksanton green
24. Signs for Habitat and Wildlife

Towards Sustainability

25. Organised heating co-operative
26. Community energy project

Social and Personal Wellbeing

27. Involvement of younger people on committees and local council
28. Events and activities for younger people
29. Advertisements for local events. Community news
30. Improved communication between parish residents
31. Improved out-of-hours local health service
32. Improvement and increased use of communal facilities
33. Designated fishing areas along the river

Community Safety

34. Neighbourhood and Farm Watch Scheme
35. Re-siting dangerous Kirksanton postbox
36. Public bench at Silecroft heightened for older residents

7. ACTION PLAN for MAJOR PROJECTS 2012-2015

	Priority	Objective	Purpose and Implications	Action	Partners
Transport & Access	High	Transport links - provide safe cycle track between Kirksanton, Silecroft and Station. Potential for extension to Millom	Reduce reliance on car usage. Facilitate health and wellbeing. Encourage greater use of rail. Encourage visitor numbers.	Provision of cycleway and footpath	CCC. Tourism leads. Landowners
Community Welfare	High	Replace Current Silecroft Beach Toilet block with new build. Including retail outlet	Offer updated facilities. Encourage visitor numbers. Support social &tourism initiatives	Design, planning, construction	CBC LDNP Landowners
Access	High	Improve Signage and Access to bridle ways, footpaths, cycleways & Historic monuments	Ease of access to public rights of way will encourage community and visitor numbers	Review current signage. Update signage so that all bridleways,footpaths cycleways and monuments are shown on mapping and tourism data	Landowners Tourism Group CBC/MTC/Parish Councils Natural England
Community Cohesion & Involvement	High	Church Parking. Improve parking facility, especially access for older people	Encourage greater use of church through improved parking area	Survey potential parking areas. Implement preferred option	Church Local Contractors
Environment	Medium	Introduce a Parish re-cycling centre (not on beach)	Encourage more recycling to reduce landfill	Evaluate possible sites. Prepare document for Parish Council to review + approval. Obtain CBC and Planning approval.	Parish Council Landowners CBC Environmental department
Housing	Medium	Increase provision of affordable housing	Offer cradle to grave housing options to parish residents	Survey land owners. Initiate local architect assistance	Land &Property owners Parish Council CBC/LDNP

8. **TAKING THE PLAN FORWARD**

This Community Plan identifies the special nature of our area, the sense of place felt by the people, and the natural and man-made resources.

The results of the Community Questionnaire enable the Steering Group to prioritise key areas for further work and demonstrate how distinctive characters and features can be preserved. The Action Plan will be a shared vision for the future of the community over the next 5-10 years. The plan is not something fixed in time but is dynamic, in that it will be shaped by the involvement of parish residents. The plan will be presented to the Parish Council and parish residents through Open Days.

The delivery of the plan requires a range of actions principally led by residents.

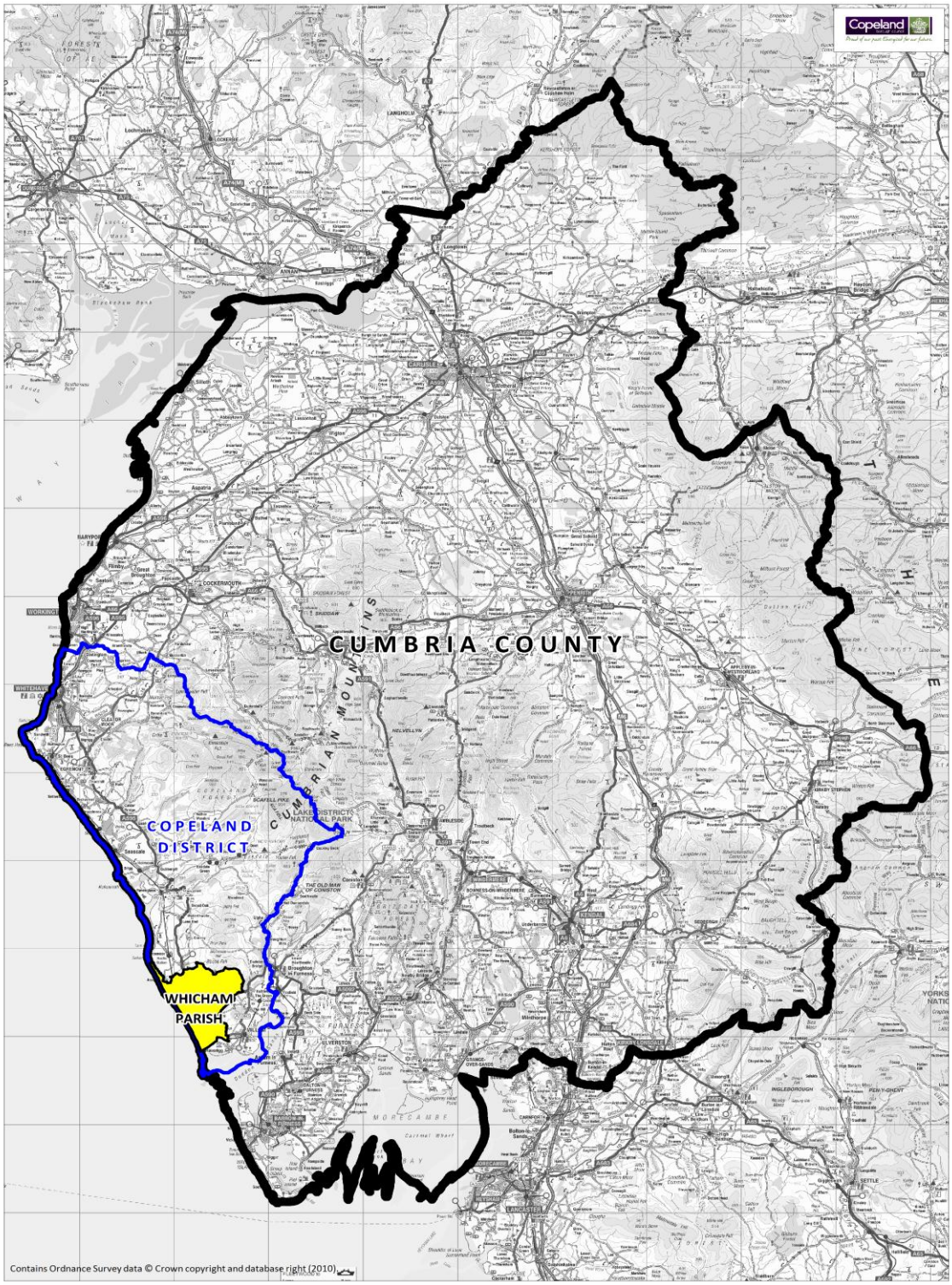
Our model with "landscape" at the heart will be the reference point for the plan.

Signed..... Robert Morris-Eyton

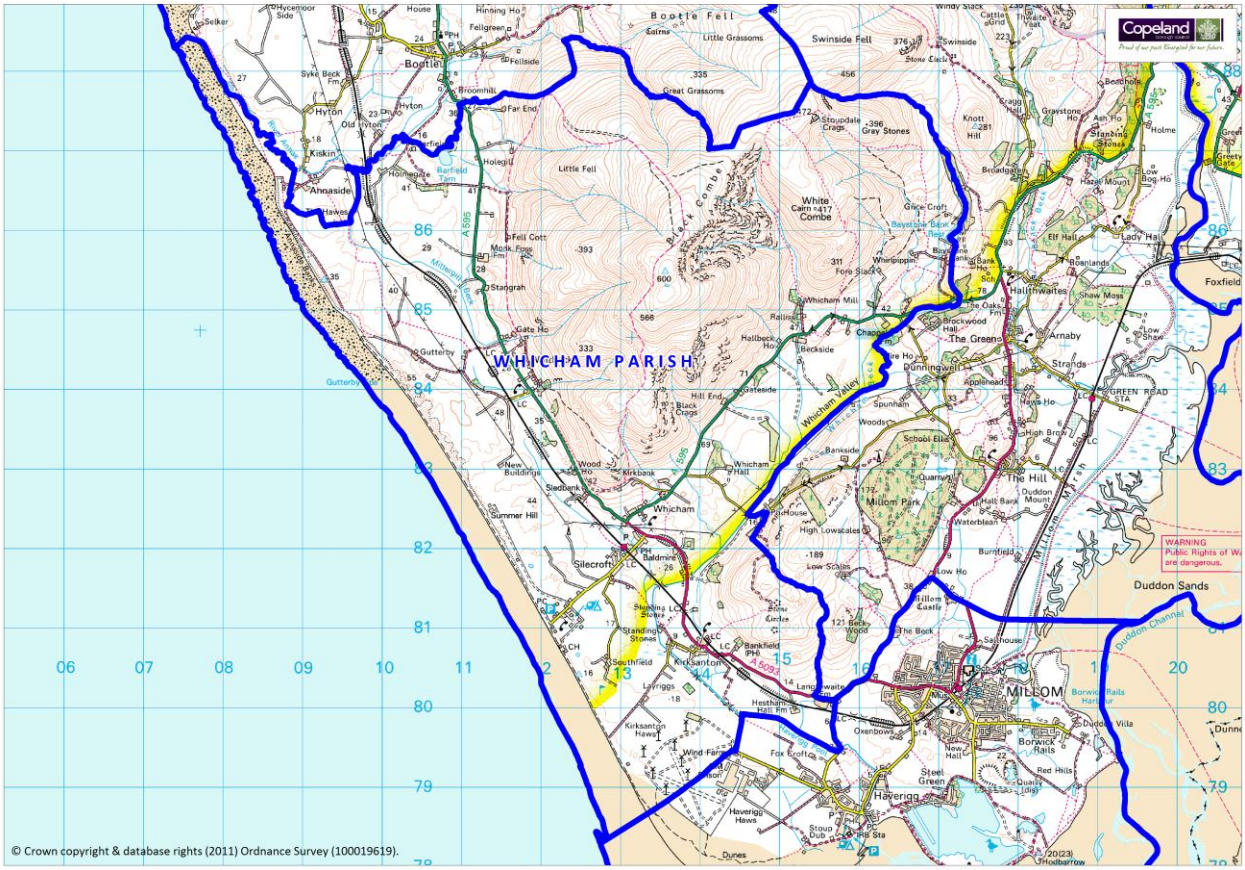
Chairman Whicham Community Plan Steering Group

Dated: 1st November 2012

APPENDIX 1: Map of Cumbria County with Whicham Parish



APPENDIX 2: Map of Whicham Parish



APPENDIX 3: Community Plan Steering Group Members

The residents listed have been involved at different stages in developing this Community Plan.

Margaret Cumming:	Holiday accommodation provider for people with disabilities, and smallholder.
Andrew Fell:	Farmer and Deputy Chairman Whicham Parish Council.
Helen Fell:	Town and Country Planning student, Newcastle University.
David Griffiths:	Parish Councillor and Church Warden St. Mary's Whicham.
Cath Jopson:	Parish Clerk and farm owner.
Edith Lister:	Chair of Whicham Parish Council, Chair CGP/Millom Without Trust Fund, Chair Silecroft Village Hall Committee.
Graham Mellen:	Committee member South Cumbria Sea Sports Association [SCSSA] and mechanical estimator Sellafield.
Robert Morris Eyton:	Chair Community Plan Steering Group, farmer, land agent.
Alick Nicholson:	Local retired businessman.
Pauline Preston:	Local horticultural business owner.
Dot Williams:	Bed and Breakfast accommodation owner and retired art teacher.

REFERENCES

* *Charter for Rural Communities, Carnegie Trust, 2008*
* *Council of Europe Treaty Series no.176*
* *Cumbria Landscape Character Guidance & Toolkit, Cumbria County Council, 2011*
* *Cumbria Sustainable Community Strategy, 2008-2028*
* *European Landscape Convention, 2004*
* *Landscape Identification, A Guide to Good Practice: ECOVAST 2006*
* *The Government's Rural White Paper "Our Countryside, The Future", 2000*
* *The Sustainable Communities Act, 2007*

Glossary

ECOVAST: European Council for the Village and Small Town

ELC: European Landscape Convention

LDNP: Lake District National Park

Ramsar: The Ramsar Convention, 1971, on Wetlands of International Importance - for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

SSSI: Sites of Special Scientific Interest - the country's very best wildlife and geological sites.