

SOWERBY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN



2019 - 2034



Vision

By 2034 Sowerby will be an inclusive community with housing that meets the needs of the local people both young and old. New development will be in line with community aspirations and Sowerby will have secured quality space for play, socialisation and recreation, to be enjoyed by all. Services and infrastructure will be in place to meet increased demand, contributing to a cohesive and sustainable community. The natural environment will continue to contribute to the physical, social and mental wellbeing of residents and visitors alike. The impacts of traffic and congestion will be eased and more sustainable methods of transport will be promoted.



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Section 1 - Introduction

The biggest question we faced when starting this process was

Why are you doing this?

And throughout the process we asked ourselves that very question several times. The answer kept us going and is very simple.

In the winter of 2015/6 St Peter's Church held an open day and one of the stalls was all about Sowerby Bridge Town Development Board. When queried whether this included Sowerby the answer came back – well they are the same aren't they? This led to a little more investigation into what was going on around us. It turned out that Ripponden Parish Council had applied to form a Neighbourhood Plan Area and Sowerby Bridge Development Board were working on the Town's development. Everyone assumed that Sowerby Bridge would just swallow the area between their boundary and Ripponden Parish Boundary but that is not what we, the residents, wanted.

Sowerby is in Ryburn Ward and is mainly rural whereas Sowerby Bridge is a Ward and Town in its own right and is mainly urban with industrial sites. We believed that while Sowerby Bridge would do their best; their interest lies with the town and its economic improvement which may be to the detriment of Sowerby. On discussion with the Ward Councillors and Development Board it turned out that they did not want to take Sowerby under their wing either.

This left us as, as a small area with no formal governance sandwiched between a large conurbation and a well-established and active parish council. A no man's land for local control. Therefore, we decided, if we want to influence what happens in our Neighbourhood, maintain its appeal, have well-built beautiful houses that our friends and neighbours can afford to buy and live in, we needed to organise ourselves. And so, the Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan Forum was formed.

Section 2 - Sowerby Context.

- 2.1. Sowerby is one of the original 12 hilltop Townships that were later formed into the Calderdale Metropolitan Area; Sowerby sits almost at the centre of Calderdale, although Calderdale sits at the far western reaches of West Yorkshire with Lancashire only 10km away.
- 2.2. Sowerby grew from a small settlement of only 9 villagers, 22 smallholders, 11 freeman and 3 priests in 1086 to a town around the early part of the 1600's with number of buildings including farms, cottages, churches, chapels, halls, schools and shops.
- 2.3. The hill top area that Sowerby is situated on forms a spur between the Rivers Calder, to the north, and Ryburn, to the south-east. The neighbourhood area encompasses a small area on Norland hillside which drops until it crosses the River Ryburn at 104m a.s.l. then it climbs the Sowerby Hill until it reaches its apex around Hubberton at approximately 255m a.s.l. Most of the Township is around the 200- 210m a.s.l. height.



The view down to Sowerby from Steep Lane (above) and from the other side of the valley (below) situating Sowerby on the hill above the valley



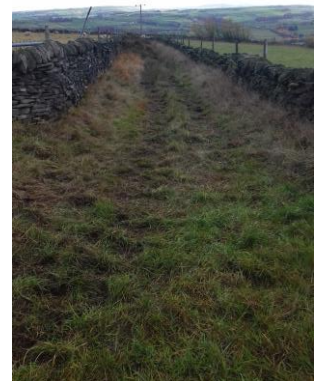
- 2.4. There is little in employment within the area; the majority of the population commute to their employment in Sowerby Bridge, approximately 1¼ miles to the east, Halifax, 3¾ miles to the north-east or Huddersfield 7½ miles to the south-east. All bus routes go via Halifax and the nearest train stations are at Sowerby Bridge and Halifax respectively which means that the majority of the commuting traffic leaves the area on one of the two roads that join together to link with the A58 in Sowerby Bridge.

2.5. The area is mainly rural with 72% of the land (218 hectares) designated as Green Belt; leaving 28% designated as urban areas. This is a major constraint for any development in the area as both greenfield and brownfield sites are few and far between.

2.6. The Beechwood Estate has several small areas of green communal space and Beechwood Park, located at Kingsley Avenue, which incorporates a large flat grassed area with a children's play park. Sowerby Town has no large community space and while surrounded on 3 sides by fields these belong to working farms so are not available to the public to use. At the moment the residents use Ryburn Valley School fields which are not available during term time.



2.7. This leaves the residents with few options; luckily, as we are an ancient Township whose prominence came from controlling the wool trade in the area, there are plenty of public footpaths that walkers can utilise. Several within the area and just outside it are still the traditional greenlanes, which are grassed areas (occasionally flagged with Yorkshire stones for wagons) between two drystone walls. Although getting to and from these footpaths can be quite hazardous as most of our lanes and roads have no footpaths.



Examples of Green Lanes within the area

2.8. We are well supplied by schools with 1 Nursery, 2 Junior Schools and 1 Senior School within the area and a further 2 Nurseries, 4 Junior schools and 1 Senior School just outside of our boundaries. Fortunately for residents all of our schools perform very well in the OFSTED

inspections. This means there is a very high demand for school places from outside of the neighbourhood area which leads to problems with students gaining places and a significant problem with congestion during the school run time period.

2.9. The Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan area was drawn up in consultation with Calderdale MBC (CC), it is formed using the Sowerby and White Windows polling areas. The boundary lines are formed by the ward boundary with Sowerby Bridge in the east, Luddenden Ward in the north, Ripponden Parish Council boundary in the west and the polling stations of White Windows and Sowerby to the south. The area can be seen at Appendix A.

2.10. There are 1,556 dwellings within the area of which 162 are situated in the Green Belt. Assuming average population density this would give a population of approximately 3,500 people. From the 2011 census the population is predominately white, English speaking, locally born with an average age of 40. A 2012 report calculates that approximately 16% of our population are over 65 and 9% under 25. Part of the Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan area is within the 1st decile of relatively most deprived areas in England. This has a significant effect on the ability of the local population to rent or buy homes.





Section 3 - What is a Neighbourhood Plan and how did we produce it?

3.1. Under the Neighbourhood Planning Act of 2017; which sits under the Localism Act of 2012, local communities are empowered to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan is written by the community and sets out planning policies for their Neighbourhood. It is written by the community to ensure that the people who know and love the area can encourage and support appropriate sustainable development when it is submitted in the right place.

3.2. Once completed the plan is subject to a public referendum and if the community vote to accept the plan it becomes part of the Local Authority's planning process and is used when deciding if new development should be authorised or not.

3.3. Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council produces the Local Plan (CLP) which sets out the 15-year plan for Calderdale. The Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan will mirror the CLP dates and will run from 2019 to 2034. Within this emerging CLP there are potential development sites already identified within the Neighbourhood Area (see Appendix A and D). Due to the limits of the area, as discussed in the context, it was decided that the sites within the CLP were the best available sites and when the CLP is fully adopted these proposed sites would be wholly supported by the forum.

3.4. The Neighbourhood Plan must follow and be in line with the policies laid out in the Local Plan and the National Planning Framework, the government's overall planning policies. It is a critical local document that planning proposals must be assessed against.

3.5. As Sowerby does not have a Parish Council the Forum had to apply for permission to incorporate as a qualifying body. This request was submitted to the CC and then after consultation with the community was authorised on the 26th of April 2017. As part of this process the extent of the Neighbourhood Area, see Appendix A, was also submitted and authorised.

3.6. The initial consultation was carried out between 24th February 2018 and 25th May 2018. It consisted of an open day, advert (at Document 1), and a questionnaire, that could be filled in online or in person. Over 150 people attended the open day meeting giving a variety of views with a further 84 questionnaires that were completed giving a total overall return of 7% for the area. These results gave the structure to the plan's themes and objectives. Full details of how the consultation occurred can be found in the Consultation Statement which is held on the Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan website and within the supporting document pack.



Initial consultation day

3.7. Specialised investigations into housing needs, heritage and a design code (Appendix C) were carried out with the assistance of Locality and AECOM; these reports then further defined the policies contained within the plan. The full reports can be found in the Appendixes. Combined with the specialist report, a heritage questionnaire was distributed among the community to identify non-designated sites and assets that the community want to protected.

3.8. One of the themes that came out of the initial consultation was the lack of community facilities, leading to an objective of improving the local shopping area. To identify the problems facing our local businesses we asked them to fill in a questionnaire or have a face to face meeting with a member of the forum. The three schools in the area are the biggest employers, followed by Calder Valley Skip Hire, the community shops, Tommy Topsoil and the two public houses. Employment in the area after that is mainly local farms and the self-employed. Of the 10 companies with business premises we received 4 questionnaires back giving us a 40% response rate.

3.9. A final community consultation was carried out from the 15th of December for 6 weeks, where all the evidence and the draft policies were provided for the residents, employees and employers within the area to read and comment on. These documents were also held at various locations around the area and on the website for a full 6 weeks with comments able to be sent via email or post to the forum.



3.10. Once the public consultation was completed all responses were reviewed and assessed to see if any changes needed to be made to the documents. The forum authorised all changes to the document.

3.11. From there a final consultation with the statutory bodies was conducted by CC. Feedback from this consultation was also fed back to the Forum and any changes required were implemented into the document.

3.12. The final external consultation check was conducted through AECOM. Feedback from this was sent to the forum and acted upon where it was felt appropriate. A copy of this report can be found on the Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan website and in the supporting documents pack.

3.13. Throughout the entire timeline there have been formal and informal meetings with CC Planning Department to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan remains in line with and in accordance with the current and emerging local development plan.

Section 4 - Key Themes, Objectives and Policies

4.1. While the Plan is written by and contains the concerns of the local community it must conform the CCs' Local Plan. As this plan has been written CC are in the process of changing from the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) to the Calderdale Local Plan (CLP). Every effort has been made to conform with the UDP as this is the current strategic local policy document. However, as the CLP is already at the Examination stage and will be the implemented local policy document throughout the period of the Neighbourhood Plan this has been the main focus of ensuring conformity.

4.2. The CLP was under draft form during this process of formulating the Sowerby Neighbourhood Plan. As changes and alterations were made to the CLP the Neighbourhood Plan policies were adjusted to remain consistent with the plan.

4.3. From the initial community meeting and subsequent questionnaires, the six themes most concerning the community were; in no particular order:

- Traffic and congestion
- Lack of community facilities
- Lack of community green space, play and recreational space
- Strain on infrastructure
- Local housing needs – in particular housing for individuals and the elderly.
- Sustainable housing, building sustainably as well as enabling sustainable transport.

4.4. From these themes the following objectives were identified which are addressed by the respective policies.

- Reduce traffic and congestion while improving parking provision.
- Secure green space, play and recreational spaces.
- Secure community facilities.
- Preserve and maintain the character of the current village and housing estates.
- Secure high-quality design, reflecting the distinctive local environment.
- Improve the local shopping area.
- Create and enhance services and facilities for the young and elderly.
- Preserve and enhance the natural environment.
- Protect local non-designated heritage assets.