

Kirkwhelpington Community Action Plan

Survey Findings and Recommended Actions

Prepared for Kirkwhelpington Parish Council
September 2025

Executive Summary

This Community Action Plan presents findings from our parish survey conducted in summer 2025, capturing the views of 35+ households (39% response rate) about community priorities and aspirations.

Key Findings

- **Strong community pride** in existing assets, particularly the Post Office, Memorial Hall, and parish community spirit
- **Infrastructure challenges** consistently ranked as top priorities: electricity reliability, internet connectivity, and road maintenance
- **Transport connectivity** emerged as a significant concern, with calls for improved bus services
- **Environmental stewardship** valued highly, with particular attention to footpath maintenance and River Wansbeck
- **Specific local issues** requiring attention, notably the Knowesgate Garage site and A696 traffic concerns

Top 5 Priority Actions Recommended for the Parish Council

1. **Continue to liaise with Northern Powergrid** about the electricity supply, its reliability, and possible improvements
 2. **Coordinate broadband improvement campaign** with Northumberland County Council and other stakeholders, especially B4RN
 3. **Submit road maintenance priorities** to NCC Highways, focusing on A696 and key local routes
 4. **Support and promote existing community assets** through Parish Council backing
 5. **Continue to support footpath maintenance programme** using Parish Council powers and volunteer coordination
-

1. Introduction

Context and Purpose

Kirkwhelpington Parish Council initiated this Community Action Plan process in July 2024, choosing a flexible community consultation approach over the more formal Neighbourhood Plan route. This decision reflected our desire to understand resident priorities and develop practical, achievable actions that could enhance community life while respecting our rural character.

Our parish of 210 residents in 90 households sits beside the A696 between Otterburn and Ponteland, 22 miles north west of Newcastle upon Tyne. The River Wansbeck flows through the village, and our position offers both opportunities and challenges in terms of connectivity and development.

Intention of This Exercise

This plan aims to:

- Capture resident voices on community priorities
 - Identify specific, actionable steps the Parish Council can take
 - Distinguish between issues we can address directly and those requiring partnerships or approaches to other bodies
 - Provide evidence-based foundation for future Parish Council decisions
 - Create a framework for engaging with Northumberland County Council and other partners
-

2. Methodology

Survey Design and Distribution

The survey ran from June-July 2025, using both digital (Microsoft Forms) and paper formats to ensure broad accessibility. Distribution points included:

- Post Office and Brown's Larder
- Local churches and Memorial Hall
- Telephone collection option for completed forms

Response Structure

The survey comprised six key questions:

1. Most treasured community assets (tick 5 from list)
2. Priority ranking exercise (rank 9 infrastructure/service options 1-9)
3. Views on potential major development
4. Open-ended community concerns and suggestions
5. Ideal future changes
6. Potential resident contributions to improvements

Response Rate and Demographics

- **35+ responses** from 90 households = **39% response rate**
 - Mix of digital and handwritten submissions
 - Range of engagement levels, from brief responses to detailed commentary
-

3. Key Findings

Question 1. Most Treasured Community Assets

Residents showed strong appreciation for existing community infrastructure:

Highest Valued (most frequently selected):

- Post Office (critical community hub)
- Memorial Hall (central meeting space)
- Parish community spirit and social connections
- River Wansbeck (natural heritage and character)
- Local churches (St. Bartholomew's and others)
- Playground
- Kirkharle Courtyard (local business/heritage site)

Pattern Analysis: Responses demonstrate clear preference for assets that foster community connection and preserve local character, suggesting residents value quality of existing amenities over expansion.

Question 2. Infrastructure and Service Priorities

The ranking exercise revealed consistent patterns across responses:

Tier 1 Priorities (ranked 1-3 by majority):

- More reliable electricity supply
- Better maintained roads
- More regular bus services

Tier 2 Priorities (mixed rankings 3-6):

- More opportunities for young people
- Garden Waste collection
- Clearly marked footpaths
- Buses to additional destinations

Lower Priority (typically ranked 7-9):

- Better internet connection

- More car parking space

Note on Ranking Completeness: Many respondents ranked only their top 3-5 priorities rather than all 9 options, suggesting these top-tier issues represent genuine widespread concern rather than forced choices.

Analysis of Responses

Transport and Connectivity Concerns:

- Current bus service inadequate for accessing Morpeth, Newcastle
- A696 traffic speed and safety through village centre
- Limited parking affecting Post Office and business access

Environmental and Heritage Priorities:

- River Wansbeck water quality concerns
- Footpath maintenance and waymarking needs
- Preservation of rural character amid potential development pressure

Question 3. Specific Property/Planning Issues:

- Knowesgate Garage/Hotel site repeatedly mentioned as requiring attention
- Mixed views on appropriate scale and type of any new development; no clear mandate
- Concerns about maintaining village character while addressing housing needs

Question 4. Open-ended community concerns and suggestions

Community Cohesion Opportunities:

- Desire for better cooperation between existing community groups
- Interest in enhanced community events and activities
- Support for maintaining and improving Memorial Hall facilities

Question 5. Ideal future changes

Question 6. Potential resident contributions to improvements

4. Potential Actions - Prioritised by Response Frequency

Priority Level 1: Direct Parish Council Action Possible

4.1 Community Asset Support and Promotion *Based on: High valuation of Post Office, Memorial Hall, community connections and playground*

- **Partners:** Memorial Hall Committee

4.2 Footpath Maintenance Programme *Based on: Consistent ranking as priority; clear PC authority*

- **Partners:** Northumberland County Council Rights of Way team, local volunteers

4.3 Memorial Hall Enhancement *Based on: High community value; direct PC involvement possible*

- **Partners:** Memorial Hall Committee

Priority Level 2: Parish Council Advocacy and Coordination Required

4.4 Electricity Supply Reliability Campaign *Based on: Consistently top-ranked priority across responses*

- **Action:** Coordinate community representation to Northern Powergrid regarding supply issues
- **Rationale:** Most frequently cited infrastructure concern; requires collective voice

4.5 Broadband Improvement Initiative *Based on: Top 3 priority in most responses*

- **Action:** Continue to liaise with service providers and NCC

4.6 Road Maintenance Advocacy *Based on: Consistent high ranking; safety concerns noted*

- **Action:** Submit prioritized road maintenance schedule to NCC Highways
- **Specific Steps:** Document specific problem areas; coordinate with neighbouring parishes; formal submission to NCC; follow-up advocacy
- **Partners:** Northumberland County Council Highways, neighbouring parish councils

Priority Level 3: Long-term Partnership Development

4.7 Transport Connectivity Improvements *Based on: Regular bus service concerns; isolation issues*

- **Action:** Engage with bus service providers and NCC transport planning regarding service improvements
- **Specific Steps:** Usage analysis of current services; consultation with operators; explore community transport options; coordinate with regional transport planning
- **Partners:** Bus service operators, NCC Transport, neighbouring communities
- **Timeline:** 2026 and ongoing

4.8 Knowesgate Garage Site Resolution *Based on: Multiple mentions as community concern*

- **Action:** Engage with appropriate authorities regarding site improvement or development
 - **Rationale:** Repeatedly mentioned; affects community appearance and potentially safety
 - **Specific Steps:** Clarify ownership and planning status; consult NCC Planning; determine Parish Council role in any resolution
 - **Partners:** Property owners, NCC Planning, potentially NCC Environmental Health
 - **Timeline:** Investigation phase autumn 2025
 - **Sensitivity Note:** Property rights issues require careful handling; Parish Council role may be limited to advocacy
-

5. Implementation Considerations

Parish Council Capacity and Resources

Current Strengths:

- Established meeting schedule and communication channels
- Experience with community consultation
- Existing relationships with key community assets
- Small, manageable scale enabling focused action

Resource Constraints:

- Limited annual budget for direct interventions
- Volunteer councillor time constraints
- Dependence on external partners for major infrastructure

Recommended Approach:

- Focus on 2-3 major initiatives per year
- Develop partnerships early in planning process
- Utilise existing community volunteer capacity

Partnership Development Strategy

Primary Partners Identified:

- Northumberland County Council (highways, planning, digital infrastructure)
- Northern Powergrid (electricity supply)
- Service providers (broadband, transport)
- Community organisations (Memorial Hall, churches, local groups)

Engagement Approach:

- Lead with evidence from community survey
- Emphasise parish's strategic location and community cohesion
- Coordinate with neighbouring parishes where appropriate
- Present solutions and partnership opportunities, not just problems

Communication and Transparency

Resident Updates:

- Regular Parish Council meeting reports on action plan progress
- Annual review of achievements and updated priorities
- Website publication of plan and progress updates

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Share relevant sections with Northumberland County Council
 - Provide plan to community asset managers and service providers
 - Use as evidence base for funding applications and advocacy
-

6. Limitations of This Exercise

Response Pattern Considerations

Incomplete Rankings: Many respondents ranked only their top priorities rather than all 9 options, making precise priority weighting challenging. However, this pattern actually strengthens the case for top-ranked items, as they represent genuine priority rather than forced choice.

Varying Response Detail: Some respondents provided extensive commentary while others gave minimal responses. This creates richness in understanding but makes quantitative analysis challenging.

Anonymous Format: While protecting respondent privacy, the anonymous approach prevents follow-up clarification on interesting or unclear responses.

Representation Questions

Geographic Coverage: While achieving good overall response rate, we cannot confirm even geographic distribution across the parish.

Age and Household Composition: Survey did not capture demographic information, so we cannot assess whether responses represent all parish age groups and household types.

Seasonal Timing: Summer survey may have missed some residents and could reflect different priorities than winter concerns.

Scope Limitations

Budget and Resource Reality: Community aspirations may exceed practical Parish Council capacity for direct intervention.

External Dependencies: Many priority areas require cooperation from organizations beyond Parish Council influence.

Time Horizon Uncertainty: Survey captured current priorities but community needs may evolve, requiring plan flexibility.

7. Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall Assessment

This survey reveals a community with appreciation for existing assets and clear, consistent priorities for improvement. Residents demonstrate realistic understanding of rural challenges while maintaining ambition for community enhancement. The Parish Council has received a clear mandate for focused action on infrastructure reliability, community asset support, and selective advocacy for improved services.

Immediate Next Steps (Autumn 2025)

1. **Parish Council Review:** Present this plan to Parish Council for formal adoption and priority confirmation – November 4th 2025
2. **Partnership Contact:** Initial outreach to Northern Powergrid, NCC Highways, and broadband providers
3. **Community Update:** Publish findings summary for parish residents via website and notice boards

Medium-term Development (2025-26)

1. **Annual Action Plan:** Convert priorities into specific annual action plans with timelines and responsibility assignments
2. **Partnership Development:** Establish formal working relationships with key external partners
3. **Progress Monitoring:** Develop simple systems for tracking progress and reporting back to residents
4. **Resource Planning:** Align Parish Council budget and precept planning with action plan priorities

Review and Adaptation

- **Annual Review:** Assess progress and update priorities each summer
 - **Flexible Approach:** Remain responsive to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities
 - **Community Engagement:** Maintain resident involvement through regular updates and consultation on major decisions
-

8. Notes and Technical Details

Survey Administration Notes

- One respondent name accidentally included in initial digital submissions; appropriately redacted for anonymity
- Paper form responses required manual digitization; formatting variations accommodated

Response Pattern Observations

- Higher engagement levels in open-ended questions suggest residents value opportunity for detailed input
- Consistent patterns across both digital and paper responses indicate method neutrality
- Some responses showed internal tensions (development interest vs. preservation concerns) requiring careful interpretation

Data Handling

- All individual responses stored securely with Parish Council
 - Analysis focused on patterns and themes rather than individual attribution
 - Raw data available for future Parish Council reference while maintaining respondent anonymity
-

This Community Action Plan represents the collective voice of Kirkwhelpington residents as captured in summer 2025. It provides a foundation for Parish Council action planning and community partnership development while respecting both resident aspirations and practical constraints.

**Document prepared for Kirkwhelpington Parish Council
For discussion and adoption at future Parish Council meeting**