

## **Analysis of Representations made on the Queens Park Neighbourhood Area and Forum Applications**

### **Introduction**

Northampton Borough Council formally received applications requesting the designation of the Queens Park Neighbourhood Area and Forum. In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) 2012 Regulations (6 and 9) Northampton Borough Council publicised both applications and invited representations from Thursday 11th January to 5.00pm on Wednesday 21st February 2018.

### **Overview of Findings**

39 representations were received. Of these 11 openly objected to Thornton Park being included in the proposed Neighbourhood Area and 9 supported the inclusion of Thornton Park.

The remaining 19 had no comment regarding the inclusion of Thornton Park, of which 9 supported the proposed area boundary, 1 was against the proposed area boundary but with different reasons and the remaining 9 had no comments.

24 representations openly supported the proposal for a Neighbourhood Forum/Plan, the remaining 15 had no comments. There were no representations openly against designation of the Queens Park Neighbourhood Forum.

### **Analysis in Detail**

#### **Neighbourhood Area: Thornton Park**

11 respondents objected to Thornton Park being included in the Neighbourhood Area (NA). However, the analysis of these responses indicates a lack of understanding about the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan and the benefit that would be brought to Thornton Park if it were included in the Neighbourhood Area (NA).

These are four main reasons cited for objecting to Thornton Park being in the NA:

1. Residents with properties much closer to the Thornton Park than the residents in Queens Park should not be excluded for making decisions on the future of the Thornton Park (8 responses)
2. Thornton Park (and the community centre) belongs to everyone and should not be confined to the proposed NA boundary (2 responses)
3. Excluding people outside of the NA from having a say on issues affecting Thornton Park is undemocratic / unfair (5 responses)
4. Residents in Kingsthorpe Village have a strong connection with Thornton Park. They should be included / not excluded from any decision making (6 responses)
5. Everyone should be able to have a say on issues affecting Thornton Park not just the people who live and carry on business within the proposed NA (1 responses)

Many of the respondents appeared to believe that if Thornton Park is included in the NA only the residents living in the NA get to propose ideas and make decisions about it. This is not how Neighbourhood Planning works. A good Neighbourhood Plan is founded on a robust programme of community engagement and a strong, proportionate evidence base. This approach makes sure that the Plan is based on a proper understanding of the area and of the views, aspirations, wants and needs of local people.

A Neighbourhood Plan is a community led framework for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of an area. Nobody is excluded from the community engagement process. Indeed engaging with the wider community right from the beginning of the plan making process will make sure it genuinely represents the range of wants and needs in the local area.

### **Neighbourhood Area – An Area of Benefit**

Interestingly many representations wanted to see Thornton Park removed from the NA. The preference to exclude Thornton Park from the NA indicates a lack of understanding about the advantages for including Thornton Park in the NA.

A NA is sometimes referred to as an Area of Benefit in reflection of the opportunities a Neighbourhood Plan can bring about. The Plan can develop policy that supports appropriate development opportunities (sport, leisure and recreational). Community proposals about the regeneration and enhancement of Thornton Park, for example enhancing pedestrian links; improving entrances and exits; creating key features can be contained in planning guidance developed to support Plan policy. This would mean community aspirations are delivered in line with community vision.

If the Community Infrastructure Levy continues, the Neighbourhood Plan can secure 25% of the funding arising though receipts from development in the Plan area. Some of this could be allocated to delivering enhancements to Thornton Park. In addition, NAs often attract funding streams from alternative sources in support of development, regeneration and enhancement.

### **Neighbourhood Area – Other Concerns**

During the publicising period, residents in Kingsthorpe expressed their concern that information about the consultation had not been disseminated to a wider area other than the Queens Park area and that the most residents in Kingsthorpe were not aware of the applications of the Queens Park Neighbourhood Area and Forum.

The Queens Park residents group, the Members of the Kingsthorpe Ward and Trinity Ward agreed to provide more leaflets of the consultation to the Tollgate Close, Mill Lane, Kingswell, Washington Street, Lincoln Street, Garfield Street and Thornton Hall Close.

Most respondents who expressed their disappointment of being excluded from the proposed Neighbourhood Area (NA) wish Thornton Park to be removed from the NA rather than themselves to be included in the NA. This would require the Qualifying Body to submit a new application for the revised neighbourhood Area to be designated.

However, as mentioned above, as preparation of the Plan is to be founded on robust community engagement those residents wanting to have a say about the development taking place in these areas can either:

- feed into the Neighbourhood Plan community engagement process, including the making of formal representations on the Neighbourhood Plan or
- make representations on planning applications through the Borough Council development management procedures.

One respondent who supported the designation of the Forum but did not express whether to support the proposed NA boundary wished to include the residential area bounded by Thornton Road, Kingsthorpe Road, Northgate School and Studland Road.

One respondent questioned why Thornton Hall Close was not included yet the community centre across the other side of the road was.

## **Conclusion**

39 representations were received in response to the publicising of the applications for the Queens Park Neighbourhood Area and Forum. Of these 11 openly objected to Thornton Park being included in the proposed Neighbourhood Area and 9 supported the inclusion of it. However, upon analysis, the similarity and content of the representations illustrated a lack of understanding about the neighbourhood planning process and the benefits that can be brought to a Neighbourhood Area.

There is obviously a strong sense of community and loyalty in matters which concern Thornton Park. However, excluding Thornton Park from the Neighbourhood Area would be to its detriment and miss opportunities for investing in its future as a leisure and recreational facility for the area and the town. It would be more advantageous for Thornton Park if the wider community were better informed on the benefits of neighbourhood planning. And that they were reassured that an inclusive and robust community engagement will take place to inform the development of the neighbourhood plan. This would lead to a neighbourhood planning exercise that will focus on the neighbourhood area as an area of benefit where all members of the local community who want to contribute to the neighbourhood plan are empowered to do so.