

**Application to Durham County  
Council to designate a  
Neighbourhood Forum and  
Neighbourhood Area**

November 2023

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# 1. Introduction

## Overview

- 1.1 This is an application for the Designation of a Neighbourhood Forum and Neighbourhood Area within Durham County Council's administrative area. This application seeks to meet the requirements prescribed by the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 1.2 A prospective Forum of 74 members has been identified to date, representing a range of people who live or work in the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area, or who are elected members of Durham County Council.

## Applicant contact details

- 1.3 Details are provided below for the applicant, who is a member of the proposed Neighbourhood Forum.

**Name: Mrs Christine Thomas**

**Address: Office 69 Viewpoint, Derwentside Business Centre, Consett. DH8 6BN**

**Email: [cthcanforum@gmail.com](mailto:cthcanforum@gmail.com)**

## 2. Application for the Designation of a Neighbourhood Forum

### Name of proposed Neighbourhood Forum

- 2.1 The name of the proposed Neighbourhood Forum is the '**Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum**'.

### Name of Neighbourhood Area to which this application relates

- 2.2 This application relates to the proposed **Consett Neighbourhood Area**. Consett lies within an unparished area. Designation of the Consett Neighbourhood Area is being sought alongside designation of the Neighbourhood Forum. The application for the Consett Neighbourhood Area is provided in **Section 3** and a map of the proposed Neighbourhood Area boundary is provided in **Appendix A**.

### Written constitution

- 2.3 A written constitution has been drafted and shared with members of the proposed Forum. A draft constitution was shared on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, and again at an informal consultation meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023. As soon as anyone expresses an interest in becoming a member, they receive the constitution as a starting point.
- 2.4 All the identified proposed Forum members have had a chance to view and comment on the drafted constitution, which has been developed using Locality's Neighbourhood Planning guidance.<sup>1</sup> As part of the in person meeting with 55 attendees on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at The Grove Club, Consett, we shared consultation documents that we created, where people were asked to comment on the areas we should include in the Neighbourhood Plan, the actual geographical 'Consett Area' that we should select and the constitution. Feedback has been collated and recorded and this informed our decisions moving forward. A submission version of the constitution was then shared with identified Forum members in advance of a meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023. With the aim of extending our reach, over the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023 we advertised the Forum across local community Facebook groups, and we have had a significant number of new members in this short period, who have all had access to the Consett Area map and the draft constitution, and they could comment on this, if necessary. The full written constitution can be found in **Appendix B**.
- 2.5 It is intended that the constitution will be formally voted upon, alongside election of the management committee, at the first general meeting of members following designation of the Forum.

### Compliance statement

- 2.6 This sub-section of the application seeks to explain how the proposed Neighbourhood Forum meets the conditions contained in Section 61F (5) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and is a 'relevant body'.
- 2.7 As identified within the written constitution (see Appendix B), the Forum is established for the purpose of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area and to promote and improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the area and its residents.

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<sup>1</sup> [How to establish a neighbourhood planning forum](#)

- 2.8 The constitution adopts an open membership which currently stands (as of August 2023) at 74 members: 49 individuals who live in the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area but do not work there, 18 individuals who both live and work in the Area, 2 individuals who work in the Area but does not live there, and 5 elected members of DCC, namely: Councillor Dominic Haney, Consett South, Liberal Democrat, Councillor Stephen Robinson, Benfieldside, Independent, Councillor Kathryn Rooney, Consett North, Liberal Democrat, Councillor Michelle Walton, Delves Lane, Conservative, Councillor Alan Shield, Leadgate and Medomsley, Independent.
- All the wards within the Consett Area are represented by a Durham County Council councillor.
- 2.9 Councillor Alan Shield is also a member of the Project Genesis board. (As a DCC representative)
- 2.10 In preparation for the creation of the Forum, Christine Thomas (lead applicant) met with Fiona Kelly of the Derwent Valley Area Action Partnership and Stuart Carter of the Spatial Policy Team at Durham County Council. Stuart delivered a presentation about the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan and advised on how to go about this in County Durham. Fiona Kelly could see why it was necessary but elected not to get involved, as the Derwent Valley Area Action Partnership wanted to be involved in an advisory role rather than as a member. Stuart Carter is the lead officer from Durham County Council and is acting as our main contact for the Neighbourhood Plan process. He has confirmed that a Forum needs to lead the Neighbourhood Planning process. Christine Thomas (lead applicant) also met with Richard Holden, the local MP for North West Durham on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023. He is very supportive of the plans and thinks that a Neighbourhood Plan would be a welcome addition to the improvement of the Consett Area. Based on a successful application to Locality for Technical support, Christine Thomas and some of the community team also had numerous meetings and discussions with Locality representatives, and their consultants AECOM, to ensure the approach being taken is correct for the area, and in line with the relevant legislation and guidance on Neighbourhood Planning.
- 2.11 As an emerging Forum, we have made concerted efforts to engage councillors, residents, community groups and businesses. We have held online and in person events, as well as shared the proposal on local Facebook groups, with the aim of raising awareness and to encourage and gather members. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023, a zoom meeting was held where Stuart Carter of the Spatial Policy Team at Durham County Council delivered a presentation about the establishment of a Consett Area and the creation of the Forum. He also held a question-and-answer session, where attendees could gain a better insight into the process of establishing a Neighbourhood Plan in Co Durham. Copies of other Neighbourhood Plans from Co Durham and Teesside were shared to give people an idea of what we are working towards. In February 2023, we held another zoom meeting to update interested parties of the progress we had made, feedback from our meetings with Locality, and to encourage them to share the concepts of the proposed Forum with others. These were minuted meetings. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023, we held an open, in person consultation at The Grove Club in Consett. The event was advertised through Eventbrite as a free event, and through word of mouth. It was a well-attended event, with 55 people. We asked attendees to complete a consultation form to allow them to discuss and give feedback about the areas of the Neighbourhood Plan the Forum should focus on, and what should be constituted as the Consett Area on the map. [Please refer to this document for the feedback](#). We also shared Locality packs with attendees that outlined the role of members and the variety of ways we can develop a Neighbourhood Plan. People worked in groups to discuss the questions, completed consultation forms (see above link) referred to in the creation of our formal documents We also held a question-and-answer session, where we could openly discuss ways forward and people could share ideas and concerns. There have also been numerous phone calls and meetings with community leaders, particularly in the Leadgate and Medomsley ward. Their feedback was incredibly positive and consequently, based on this, we agreed that this ward should be included in the Consett Area. Community leaders and residents from this ward have also joined this community group as members. We also liaised with Derwentside and Consett Rotary, and they now have representatives in this group. We have also approached local business networks and representatives, who have also joined us. Plus, to ensure as wide consultation as possible has been held, and to promote membership, we have shared the plans across social media and community groups, including: the Leadgate Village Group, the Say No to Consett Incinerator groups, Consett Trades and Recreation, Consett, Shotley Bridge and District Community, Greenways/Miller Homes Discussion Group,

Delves and Templetown against the planned developments, Consett Community 2021, The Official and Original The Grove Community and Residents Association, Watling Woods Friends, St Patrick's School, Everything Medomsley, St Bede's reunion for leavers 1983-1985, memories of English Martyrs School, Leadgate, and The Consett Chatterbox. Our current members are always encouraged to invite membership. Councillor Alan Shield, a member of the board of Project Genesis is a member of the Forum.

- 2.12 Attempts have also been made to establish early views of residents in the surrounding areas, for example, in Leadgate and Medomsley, through community groups and community leaders, where a positive response was received. A debate was held about the inclusion of Hamsterley Mill at the March in person consultation: a consensus was reached to include it because it is part of Medomsley and Leadgate ward represented by Forum members and would benefit from inclusion within the Neighbourhood Plan to address issues linked to traffic, the farmland and the Derwent Walk.
- 2.13 In a similar vein, the inclusion of Ebchester was discussed and the consensus was that the residents of this location wish to be included.
- 2.14 At the March 2023 in person consultation, some residents in Knitsley expressed concern that although they are classed as Knitsley, they are not in the parished area of Healyfield and could consequently be left between two areas - captured by neither the Parish Council nor Neighbourhood Forum. Consequently, they are included in the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area.
- 2.15 With regards to Dipton and Burnopfield, the concern was that this location is potentially too far removed from what would be considered the core of the Consett Area, to be included. Residents of Dipton and Burnopfield were approached, and local councillors were emailed, but no response was received. The consensus was therefore that this area would be excluded from the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area.
- 2.16 Furthermore, the constitution identifies that where the boundaries of the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area adjoin other designated Neighbourhood Areas or parished areas, the Forum will seek to establish mechanisms for joint working and planning on any 'cross boundary' issues.
- 2.17 The identified group of members is representative of the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area. Members reflect the varying geographies of the area representing each ward and are a mix of residents, businesses, ex-councillors and current councillors. We have aimed to ensure where possible, that all political parties have a representative on the proposed Forum and they have been encouraged to discuss the creation of the Forum with their constituents. As members, we have a wide demographic that includes a range of ages, as well as experience in community work and business in the wider area of Consett.
- 2.18 The constitution identifies that membership is open to all who are eligible without distinction on the grounds of age, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy or maternity care, disability, race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. Furthermore, the constitution identifies that the Forum will not be affiliated with any political party, religious or other organisation, and that all members will commit to act legally, promoting inclusivity and equality.
- 2.19 In preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, the prospective Forum seeks to undertake a proactive approach to new development, and to promote or improve the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the neighbourhood area.

## Neighbourhood Forum membership

- 2.20 74 members of the emerging Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum have been identified to date and are representative of the area defined as the Consett Neighbourhood Area in that they either live and/or work, or are councillors, in the designated Consett Area. We are open to cross-boundary negotiations, and to discuss the plans with agencies from outside of the area who have an interest in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. This meets and exceeds the requirement to have at least 21 members who live and/or work in the area or who are

elected members, as all prospective members fall into one or more of these categories. The constitution adopts an open membership to all who live or work in the Consett Neighbourhood Area or who are elected members of DCC.

- 2.21 In managing membership, the Forum recognises its duty to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). A member will be elected to be responsible for compliance with GDPR including protection of any digital data. A self-assessment has been undertaken to identify if there is a need to register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). This self-assessment identified that there is currently no need for the Forum (as a not-for-profit body) to register.
- 2.22 The membership application form for the Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum is provided in **Appendix C**, along with a full membership list as of August 2023. **Appendix C is not to be made public.**

## Declaration

- 2.23 I hereby apply to designate a Neighbourhood Forum as described in this application and any accompanying information.

**Applicant:**

**Name: Mrs Christine Thomas**

**Signature: Christine Thomas**

**Date: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2023**

## 3. Application for the Designation of a Neighbourhood Area

### Name of submitting body

- 3.1 The name of the submitting body is the **Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum**. The designation of the Forum is being sought alongside designation of the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area.

### Proposed name of Neighbourhood Area

- 3.2 It is proposed that the area outlined by the map in **Appendix A** will be formally known as the **Consett Neighbourhood Area**.

### Geographical extent of Neighbourhood Area

- 3.3 A map of the proposed boundary for the Consett Neighbourhood Area is provided in **Appendix A**. Consett is an unparished area, the boundary proposed reflects the extent and interest of residents within and surrounding Consett.

### Local Authority Area

- 3.4 The proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area falls entirely within the administrative boundary of Durham County Council (DCC).

### Relevant body

- 3.5 The designation of the Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum is sought alongside designation of the Consett Neighbourhood Area. The Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum is a relevant body as outlined by the compliance statement found in **Section 2**.

### Neighbourhood Area statement

- 3.6 Informal consultations have been held with residents and members of the prospective Forum. This has identified residents from the areas of Consett included in the map, including Medomsley, Leadgate, Butsfield Lane in Knitsley, Hamsterley, and Hamsterley Mill, who expressed interest in becoming a member of the Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum and promoting and improving the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the area and its residents.
- 3.7 Our starting point was the area outlined by DCC (which was used as a basis to begin investigation into the Neighbourhood Area boundary). A larger area, including the settlements at Dipton and Burnopfield, was considered during early conversations with the Council, however this was amended to cover the main Consett settlement area and is reflective of the geographical extent of residents and businesses that have expressed interest in the Consett Neighbourhood Plan
- 3.8 It is proposed that Dipton and Burnopfield are not included within the Neighbourhood Area boundary, as there are no representative residents within these areas that have expressed an interest in the Forum or development of the Consett Area Neighbourhood Plan. Without this representation, the development potential and directions of the subsequent Neighbourhood Plan may not be reflective of their local identity, character and needs, as well as resident wishes within these areas. The boundary between the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area and these areas is formed by existing electoral ward boundaries.



## Previous designations

3.9 The proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area is unparished and has not been designated as a Neighbourhood Area in the past. The applicant has not previously applied to designate the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area, or any part of it, as a Neighbourhood Area.

## Declaration

3.10 I hereby apply for the area described in this form and in the accompanying map (Appendix A) to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area.

### **Applicant:**

**Name: Mrs Christine Thomas**

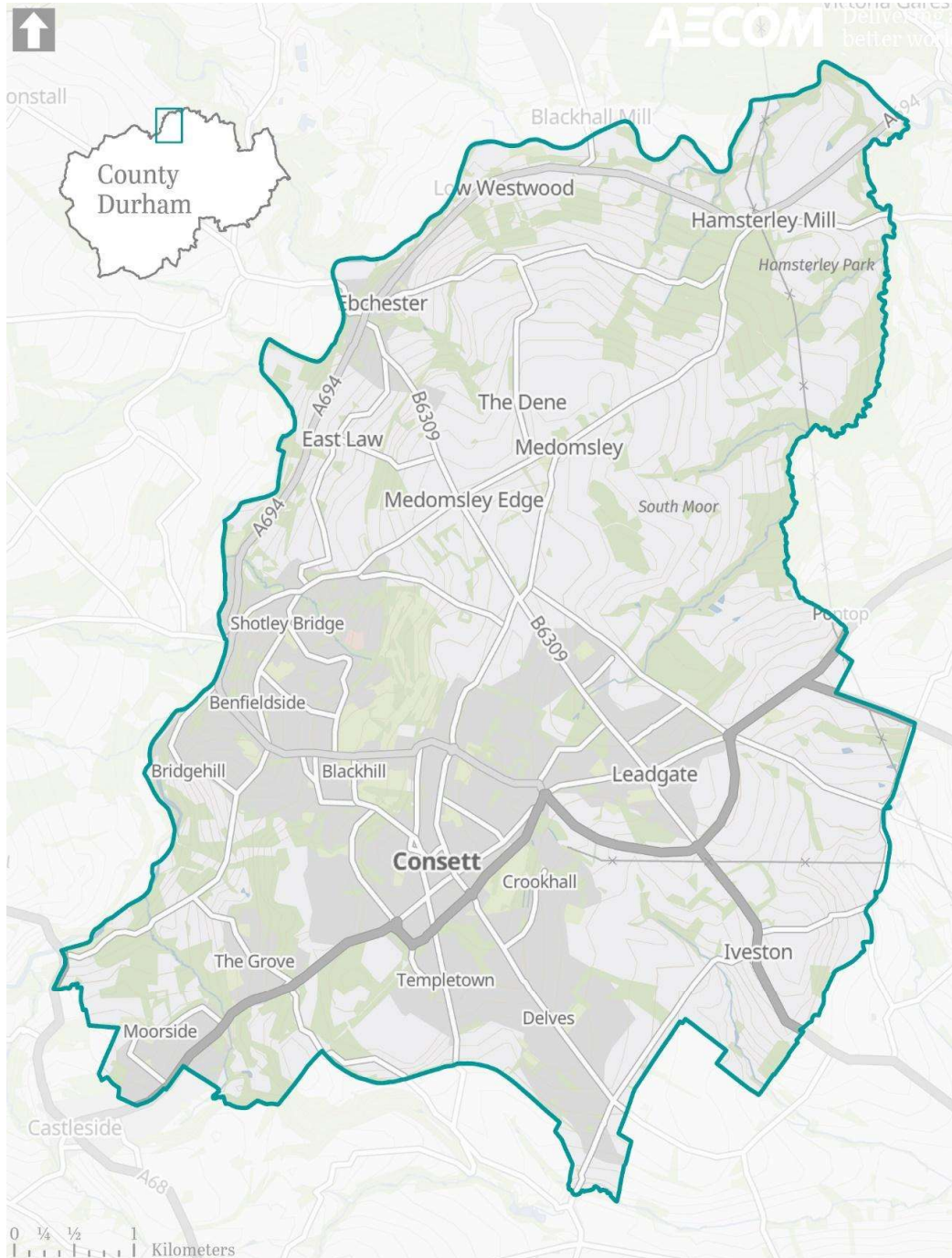
**Signature: Christine Thomas**

**Date: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2023**

### **Note added by Durham County Council**

**– two changes were made to the Constitution on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 to enable adoption (see delegated report for further details)**

# Appendix A - Map of proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area



## Consett Neighbourhood Plan

- Consett
- Neighbourhood Plan Area



# Appendix B - Written Constitution

## Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum Constitution

### Name of Forum:

The name of this Forum shall be “Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum”, hereafter referred to as “the Forum”.

### Neighbourhood Area:

The Forum shall cover the Consett Neighbourhood Area, shown on the map in Appendix A, subject to any amendments as may be agreed with Durham County Council in its capacity as the Local Planning Authority designating the Neighbourhood Area.

### Aim and Objects:

The purpose of the Forum is:

- To promote and improve the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the Consett Neighbourhood Area and its residents.
- To prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for the Consett Neighbourhood Area.
- To ensure full community involvement, from all sections of the community.
- To liaise with the County Council and its representatives on preparation of specific aspects of the Plan.
- To make necessary arrangements for the publication of the Neighbourhood Plan, including publicising the Plan.

### Inclusion/Equalities Statement:

The Forum:

- shall not be affiliated to any political party or organisation.
- is committed to a policy of inclusion of all members of the community and to the prevention of any form of discrimination such as age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religious belief.
- is committed to seeking out the views of those in the community who may be harder to reach, to maximise inclusion and participation in its activities and the decision-making process.

### Affiliations, Operations and Independence:

- All members of the Forum shall act in the best interests of the Forum and the residents of the area and shall follow the good governance guidelines set out in the attached guidance (and any subsequent updates): <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/>
- The Forum shall act in accordance with best practice and Government guidance in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, and shall seek to work collaboratively with the Local Planning Authority to achieve this.

### Powers:

In furtherance of its objects, the Forum may:

- Invite and receive contributions and raise funds where appropriate, to finance the work of the Forum, and to open a bank account to manage such funds.
- Publicise and promote the work of the Forum and organise meetings, training courses, events, or seminars etc.
- Work with Forums or other groups of a similar nature and exchange information, advice, and knowledge with them, including cooperation with other voluntary bodies, charities, statutory and non-statutory organisations.

- Employ staff, consultants, and volunteers as are necessary to conduct activities to meet the objects of the Forum.
- Take any other action that is lawful and necessary to achieve the aims and objects of the Forum.
- Seek to establish mechanisms for joint working and planning on any 'cross boundary' issues, where the boundaries of the proposed Consett Neighbourhood Area adjoin other designated Neighbourhood Areas or parished areas.

**Membership:**

- The Forum will comprise at least 21 individuals who live or work in the Consett Neighbourhood Area or who are elected members of Durham County Council.
- New members may apply to join by completing an online form, or in writing to the Forum Chair or Secretary.
- All members must complete an application form, where they agree to fulfil the constitution of the Forum, provide contact details and evidence of eligibility.
- Membership is open to all individuals who support the aims and objectives of the Forum and who live or work in the Consett Neighbourhood Area, or who are elected members of Durham County Council. Membership shall be accepted from different parts of the Consett Neighbourhood Area and different sections of the community in the Consett Neighbourhood Area.
- Membership is open to all who are eligible, without distinction on the grounds of age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.
- All members will be obliged to abide by the Forum's constitution, and will commit to act legally, promoting inclusivity and equality.
- Resignations from membership shall be submitted in writing to the Forum Chair or Secretary.
- Membership may be refused or revoked where an individual or organisation does not meet eligibility criteria or acts in a way which is contrary to this constitution. This decision will be taken by a majority vote of the Management Committee, and the reasons for refusal/revocation shall be provided in writing. Any such person or organisation shall have the right to appeal to a Forum General Meeting.

**Forum Meetings and Working Arrangements:**

- An Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held on an annual basis where Forum progress will be shared with the Consett Community.
- The Forum will meet a minimum of four times a year (including AGM). The quorum level will be set at 5 members (in addition to the Management Committee). Forum meetings shall be open to any member of the public to observe.
- In-person meetings will be held in appropriate locations throughout the Neighbourhood Area, in a spirit of open and inclusive membership and representation.
- The Officers may call additional meetings of the Forum from time to time as appears necessary to them.
- At least 14 days' notice shall be given to members of any Forum meeting to take place. Details will be publicised via email and the Forum website/social media.
- All Forum members are entitled to attend meetings to propose and vote for motions and to stand for election. Voting shall be by a show of hands.
- All decisions of meetings shall be minuted (by the Forum Secretary once appointed), distributed to members by email and approved at the start of the next meeting.
- An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) may be requested in writing by at least one third of the membership of the Forum, giving notice to the Secretary, who shall convene the EGM within 21 days of receipt of the notice.

### **Management Committee:**

- At its inaugural meeting, the Forum shall elect a Management Committee of four Officers, plus 6 additional committee members from the wider membership, who will direct the policy and management of the Forum.
- The Management Committee has day to day authority to make decisions about operational matters, but any decisions material to the Neighbourhood Plan must be ratified by vote at a meeting of the full Forum.
- The Forum will have the power to co-opt members if it wishes to use this power.
- Other members may be appointed to undertake responsibilities within the Forum.
- Sub Committees may be created to research and develop key sections of the Consett Area Neighbourhood Plan. Leaders of Sub Committees will demonstrate some knowledge and appreciation of the Neighbourhood Plan subject area they undertake to develop before being appointed in this role. A short proposal will be shared by those interested in leading a Sub Committee, setting out a brief summary of their relevant knowledge and appreciation, as well as any relevant experience relating to the subject matter with the Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum, and then a vote will be held to appoint the Sub Committee leaders. Following Sub Committee meetings, outcomes and plans must be shared with the full Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum.

### **Management Committee officers and roles:**

- **Chair:** responsible for calling and chairing regular meetings and have a casting vote on elections and resolutions, if required; acts on behalf of the Forum and represents it externally; has the power to take decisions on urgent matters between meetings of the Forum and interpret the Constitution.
- **Secretary:** responsible for organising meetings, maintaining the minutes, recording the decisions of the Management Committee and membership, updating the Constitution of the Forum, and making all these documents available to members.
- **Treasurer:** responsible for maintaining the accounts of the Forum and for presenting a budget annually for the following year to an Annual General Meeting. The Treasurer shall submit a summary of accounts to every full meeting of the Forum.
- **Data Protection Officer:** responsible for applying the relevant General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to all personal data held by the Forum, and the correct handling of any confidential information received by the Forum.

If the Chair is not present, another officer will chair the meeting. If the Secretary is not present, another officer will take the minutes.

### **Finances:**

- Any money raised shall be used to further the aims of the Forum and for no other purpose.
- A bank account has been opened in the name of the Forum, with a minimum of two signatories.
- The account will require two signatures on any cheque or other bank document (except paying in slips).
- A statement of the Forum's financial position will be produced and available at Forum meetings.
- Finances shall be tabled at the AGM.
- No member shall derive any financial benefit from the Forum, except for payment of reasonable expenses.
- No money will be paid out in the name of the Forum without a receipt being presented.

### **Declarations of Interest:**

Declarations of interest and potential conflicts of interest will be recorded and managed:

- Business interests that could result in any personal or business gain must be declared.
- Personal interests must be declared, where close family or friends could potentially benefit from any decisions made.

All ongoing declarations will be included in the minutes of Forum meetings, and they must also be included in individual membership application forms, where relevant.

**Conflict Resolution:**

At all times the Forum will recognise the primary need to encourage community involvement in, and support for, the Neighbourhood Plan. Where there are conflicts within the Forum, this will be minuted, and every effort made by the membership to resolve any differences by negotiation, and by consultation with the wider community. The final contents of the Neighbourhood Plan will be decided by a vote of the full Forum.

**Duration:**

The duration of the Forum is a maximum of 5 years from its inaugural general meeting.

**Amendments to the constitution:**

This constitution shall become effective upon approval by the inaugural meeting of the Forum.

If amendment(s) to the constitution are necessary, members will be informed in writing and given the opportunity to consider and vote on the amendments. The amendment(s) will be made if there is a two-thirds majority vote of members.

**Dissolution:**

If the Management Committee, by a simple majority, deem it advisable to dissolve the Forum, it shall call a meeting of all the members of the Forum, giving not less than 14 days' notice. If such a decision is confirmed by a majority of those present, then all the assets of the Forum shall be transferred to another Forum, local voluntary group, or community group with similar aims.

Signed:..... (Chair)

Signed:.....(Treasurer)

Signed:.....(Secretary)

Signed:.....(Data Protection officer)

Signed:.....(Committee member)

Signed:.....(Committee member)

Signed:.....(Committee member)

Signed:.....(Committee member)

Signed:.....(Committee member)

Signed:.....(Committee member)