

Higham Whole Estate Plan

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks endorsement from Members of the Higham Whole Estate Plan, put forward by Crosby Granger Architects on behalf of Higham Estate owner, Malcolm Wilson. The Higham Whole Estate Plan sets out the assets of the Estate and the opportunities and threats which the estate may encounter and describes plans for the future.

Recommendation that:	a Members agree to endorse the Higham Whole Estate Plan (Annex 1) subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the commitment of Higham Estate to produce an annual monitoring update for reporting back to this Committee,• the Authority issuing a statement to the Higham Estate outlining the outcome of the decision, and any requirements or/ and areas of concern.
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2 Background

- 2.1 A Whole Estate Plan is a non-statutory plan which demonstrates the overall position and aspirations of an estate. Plans do not have to cover a specific time period and may be updated to reflect changes in circumstance or withdrawn if appropriate. It is important to remember that this is the Estate's plan for the future but has been prepared in collaboration.
- 2.2 A Whole Estate Plan is designed to support an Estate which is generally a large landholding which includes complex commercial, social and environmental activities. They look to foster good working relationships with key stakeholders and facilitate better understanding of the issues surrounding sustainable rural estate communities – of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They are not focussed on or to be limited to planning matters but rather the entirety of the Estate – farming, woodland management, conservation, access provision etc.
- 2.3 An endorsed Whole Estate Plan will be a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide a solid understood contextual background to any development proposals. These Whole Estate Plans will help decision makers determine how much support and weight to give to Policy 19: *Agricultural and land-based rural business diversification* in the determination of a planning application, alongside other relevant policies in the Development Plan. Decision takers are used to weighing up different (and sometimes conflicting) policy considerations and material considerations in determining a planning application and there is no difference in the approach suggested with a Whole Estate Plan being a material consideration. The inclusion of a development proposal within a Whole Estate Plan however does not guarantee that planning permission will be granted and any proposal will still need to be comply with relevant development plan policies.
- 2.4 A Whole Estate Plan can also be used to help guide and support funding bids, future neighbourhood plan production, agri-environment and forestry schemes

and with other Natural Capital projects. Beyond the finished product, the Whole Estate Plan process also provides value in terms of relationship building; between the Estate and the LDNPA, the Lake District National Park Partnership, as well as the local community.

2.5 A Whole Estate Plan is comprised of these key components:

- Foreword
- Introduction
- The Estate's Vision
- Overview of the Estate – past and present
- Asset Review
- Challenges and Opportunities for improvement
- Action Plan

2.6 Where a Whole Estate Plan is endorsed the Authority will ask the Estate to report on their progress annually, in order to feed into a monitoring report that will be presented to Members to review progress.

Higham Whole Estate Plan preparation

2.7 The Lake District National Park Authority begun engaging in discussions with the Higham Estate in 2024. During initial pre-application discussions, the option to develop a strategic masterplan approach was informally discussed, in order to support the Estate in bringing forward their proposals. Through subsequent discussions and initial site visit, it was decided that the preparation of a Higham Whole Estate Plan would offer the Estate the ideal opportunity to not only set out the assets of the estate, as well as the opportunities and threats it may encounter, but also describe a plan for the future.

2.8 Between July 2024 and April 2025, officers have reviewed three iterations of the draft Higham Whole Estate Plan, culminating in the final Higham Whole Estate Plan, appended to this report in Annex 1. The draft report was also reviewed by Park, Strategy and Vision Members ahead of the February 2025 committee, and discussed as an away hour item to ensure that any feedback at this point of the plan preparation could be incorporated. The vast majority of suggestions made by Officers and Members during the drafting process of the Higham Whole Estate Plan have been incorporated, demonstrating a successful example of joint working in practice.

Higham Estate – location and context

2.9 The Higham Estate is a privately managed Estate located on the Northwest of Bassenthwaite Lake and near the villages of Embleton and Dubwath. The area covered by the Higham Whole Estate Plan extends to approximately 1,170 acres (475 hectares), predominantly classified of Grade 4 and 5 land (poor and very poor quality). The Estate includes two tenanted farms and several short term grazing licences across its entire area. In terms of buildings within the Estate boundary, there are three residential properties, which are let out, and a handful of properties let out for commercial use. Three of the five farms are no longer working farmsteads, out of those three farms, 11 of the 25 buildings are not in use. The oldest known historic archaeological features within the Higham landscape is the Elva Hill Stone Circle, with other visible landscape features and

hidden/lost archaeological landscape features present across the Estate. None of the buildings on the Higham Estate are listed.

2.10 The three farmsteads, with architectural interest and heritage significance area:

- Brathay Hill Farm
- High Barkhouse Farm
- Lowfield Farm

2.11 The Higham Estate and is located within two nationally protected environmental areas – Bassenthwaite Lake and the River Derwent, both designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). It comprises predominately of neutral grassland (260ha), modified grassland (106ha) and mixed woodland (83ha), with buildings/hardstanding currently occupying 3ha of the Estate. The Estate is mapped as having priority habitat areas of Hay Meadow, Lakes, Woodland, Ancient Woodland and Good Quality Semi-improved grassland. There are also a number of County Wildlife Sites within the Estate boundary, and the majority of land and woodland on the Estate is under Countryside Stewardship or Woodland Grant Scheme, there are no recorded Environmental Stewardship schemes on the Estate. The Estate is located within Natural England National Character Area 8 – Cumbria High Fells. According to Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre records, 257 notable species have been recorded between 1980-2022. Within the last 10 years, there have been 124 notable species have been recorded.

Higham Estate’s vision

2.12 The core visions for the Higham Whole Estate Plan:

- The central thread of the Higham Estate’s Vision is to rejuvenate the Estate into an inspirational model of a sustainable rural enterprise.
- A community dedicated to preserving and enhancing the spectacular landscape, wildlife, and cultural heritage in every action and decision, ensuring their sustainability for future generations.
- An organisation that plays a key role in fostering a prosperous local economy while supporting a vibrant, thriving community.
- A destination that complements and showcases a worldclass visitor experience, offering both educational and recreational opportunities.

Challenges and Opportunities

2.13 The Higham Whole Estate Plan seeks to provide a holistic overview of the Estate’s assets in addition to identifying the challenges and opportunities faced. A summary of those identified by the Estate through the Higham Whole Estate Plan preparation are included below.

Challenges	Opportunities
Financial costs	Diversification
Staffing	Improvement of Land Management
Public Access	Establish a prosperous local economy
Shoot impact	Establish a world class visitor experience
Farm tenancies	Local consultation
Agri-environment schemes	Public Highways Safety
Agricultural tendencies	Parking and Toilet facilities

Investment costs	Habitat connectivity
Absence of Historic Focal Point for the Estate	Environmental stewardship and resilience
Poor state of building repair	Natural capital
Building Use	Education about the Historic Environment
Bus Viability	Heritage Trails
Parking	Conservation of Historic Built Assets
External land use / land ownership	Active Travel
Marketing and brand awareness	Sustainable Transport Hub
Footfall	Public Access
	Local Farm Shop/Café
	Tourism offering

Action Plan

2.14 The Action Plan seeks to bring together the assessment of the Estate, alongside the challenges and opportunities to formulate a clear delivery plan for the future. The action plan sets out the action theme, description, timeline and key outcomes and benefits. The action themes are summarised as follows:

1. Heart for Higham
 - a. Pickup and purchase
 - b. Short-stay visitor attraction
 - c. Medium-stay accommodation
2. Homes for Higham
 - a. Homes for Higham – conversion
 - b. Homes for Higham – new build
3. The Farmstead
4. Rural Enterprise
5. Nature Recovery
 - a. Short-term – Habitat and biodiversity enhancements
 - b. Long-term – Habitat and biodiversity enhancements
 - c. Sustainable drainage and flood amelioration
6. Connecting communities
7. Working the Land
 - a. Farming strategy
 - b. Forestry and woodland management
 - c. Rural sporting activities
 - d. Renewable energy
8. Preserving our past
 - a. Preservation of Historic Environment and built assets
 - b. Built heritage conservation
 - c. Recording local history

2.15 The action themes seek to identify the ambitions of the Estate, balanced with demonstrating sufficient public benefit. The actions included within the Higham Whole Estate Plan could form of the basis of future planning applications, establishing a clear context for the proposals, but does not assume that permission will be granted on this basis.

Consultation

Previous Committee	Main Points discussed	Changes made
Park Strategy & Vision Committee – 4 th February 2025 (Away Hour)	<p>Public benefit – overarching feedback for the next iteration of the Higham Whole Estate Plan to ensure that sufficient public benefit is recognised through the plan thereby offering a balance to the Estate’s ambitions.</p> <p>Action Plan – It was discussed that a clear action plan would be crucial to members seeking to understand the benefits that would be brought forward as part of the Estates ambitions, and that these be measurable and time-bound where possible.</p> <p>Consultation – Feedback also requested that further consultation/discussions take place with local businesses including the distillery and Higham Hall, to ensure that these key stakeholders are sighted on the ambitions that the Estate wish to bring forward.</p>	<p>The revised version of the Higham Whole Estate Plan (Annex 1) seeks to address the main points raised at the previous away hour discussions on 4 February 2025. This includes the incorporation of a detailed action plan, setting out specific actions and related timeframes for implementation. Consultation with local businesses including Higham Hall, Lakes Distillery and Bassenthwaite Lakes Station has also taken place.</p>

3 Policy Context

- 3.1 The Higham Whole Estate Plan sets out how the Estate proposals and its own Vision will seek to align and contribute the objectives and ambitions of the Lake District National Park as set out in the Living Lakes Local Plan, Partnership Management Plan 2020-2026 and 2030 Vision for the Lake District.
- 3.2 The Higham Whole Estate Plan specifically identifies Policy 19: Agricultural and land-based rural diversification as a key policy driver of the Estate Plan, contributing to the special qualities and Outstanding Universal Value of the Lake District National Park.
- 3.3 It will also contribute to our Business Plan (2025-2028) priorities including:
- Climate Action
 - Farming and Nature Recovery
 - Sustainable Travel and Transport
 - Vibrant Communities and Prosperous Economy
 - Lake District for Everyone

4 Options

- 4.1 a) Members agree to endorse the Higham Whole Estate Plan and for this to be available as a material consideration for future planning applications.
- b) Members propose an alternative approach to overseeing proposals coming forward on the Higham Estate in a holistic and considered manner.

5 Proposals

- 5.1 Option a) is recommended to allow for opportunities for public benefits to move forward as part of the Estate's wider ambitions for improvements.

6 Stakeholder Consultation (where appropriate)

- 6.1 As part of the development of the Higham Whole Estate Plan, consultants Crosby Granger Architects have carried out consultation with the local Parish Council, Embleton and District Parish Council. They have also consulted with local businesses including Higham Hall, Lakes Distillery and Bassenthwaite Lakes Station. Summaries of some of this consultation can be found within the Higham Whole Estate Plan document (section 4.3 Community and Cultural).

7 Demonstrating Best Value

- 7.1 a) Challenged – Whole Estate Plans are not statutory documents but provide the opportunity for privately managed estates to make important contributions to delivering wider public benefits and help to deliver the Vision for the Lake District.
- b) Compared – the Higham Whole Estate Plan offers the opportunity to encourage open dialogue between the Estate and the National Park Authority, to look at land holdings holistically before individual applications come forward, thereby providing contextual background. We reflected on what has worked well with the Lowther Whole Estate Plan.
- c) Consulted – The draft Higham Whole Estate Plan has been shared previously with PS&V, to ensure the opportunity for feedback has been provided, and the Estate has consulted with the Parish Council and local businesses.
- d) Compete – Not relevant – Higham Whole Estate Plan procured by Estate owner not National Park Authority.

8 Finance Considerations

- 8.1 There are no significant financial considerations arising from this report.

9 Risk

9.1

	Risk	Consequence	Controls required
R1	Members seek to make further changes to the Higham Whole Estate Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higham Estate do not agree to suggested changes. Timescales to make changes may lead to long delays, other information in plan becoming out of date and Estate no longer wish to seek endorsement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes will need to be justified with explanation. Timescale for changes and future committee cycle for Higham Whole Estate Plan will need to be agreed.
R2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Authority has limited mechanisms to influence or control land management decisions. Seek to influence through collaboration in the Whole Estate Plan. If the Higham Estate Plan is not endorsed it may affect the opportunity for the Authority to build a positive working relationship with Higham Estate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority's influence and working relationship to secure public benefits is diminished. Reputational risk to Authority without justified reasons for non-endorsement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resource will be required to support and rebuild working relationship at the different interaction points of the Estate and Authority have e.g. rangers, commercial services, strategy advisors.

10 Legal Considerations

10.1 A Higham Whole Estate Plan is a non-statutory plan. Local Plan Policy 19 implementation guidance establishes that endorsed estate plans are capable of being a material consideration in the determination of an application. Decision takers for planning applications are used to weighing up different (and sometimes conflicting) policy considerations and material considerations in determining a planning application and there is no difference in the approach. We are able to impose planning conditions or planning obligations where required, and this may include linking an action or proposal in Higham Whole Estate Plan to a development proposal.

11 Human Resources

11.1 Future human resources to be considered as a result of endorsing the Higham Whole Estate Plan include:

Monitoring – LDNPA staff resource to monitor the progress of the action plan through discussions with the Estate team.

Development Management – LDNPA staff resource to consider planning applications for future proposals on the Estate (note that this resource would be required for any applications for future proposals without endorsement of the WEP).

12 Diversity Implications

- 12.1 There are no significant diversity implications arising as a result of endorsing the Higham Whole Estate Plan.

13 Sustainability

- 13.1 Higham Whole Estate Plan will seek to deliver positive environmental, economic and social effects.

Background Papers	Annex 1: Higham Estate Higham Whole Estate Plan
Author/Post	Abigail Patel. Strategy Planner
Responsible Director	Steve Ratcliffe, Director of Sustainable Development
Date Written	12 May 2025

Annex 1: Higham Estate – Higham Whole Estate Plan

[See Higham Whole Estate Plan document attached]