

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

Report to: Executive – 11 March 2020

Subject: Re-designation of Northenden Neighbourhood Forum

Report of: Strategic Director (Growth and Development)

Summary

The Northenden Neighbourhood Forum (the Forum) has applied for a re-designation of the forum as required by the relevant Act and Regulations. In November 2013 the Council designated a Neighbourhood Forum and a Neighbourhood Area in Northenden. The Neighbourhood Forum designation expired in November 2018, whilst the Neighbourhood Area designation remains extant. The current application, if approved, would re-designate the Forum for a new five year period.

The consultation on the re-designation, which ran from 17th December 2019 to 4th February 2020, elicited responses from nine organisations and individuals. Five responses objected to the re-designation, one was in support and three were neutral. The representations have been taken into account when making the recommendation in relation to the Forum's application.

The assessment of the re-designation application, based on the analysis of the representations in section 3 and the assessment of the Forum's application in sections 4 and 5 points to some concerns with respect to the prevailing situation with respect to the Forum. Notwithstanding the concerns identified the overall conclusion is that the Forum should be recommended for re-designation.

Whilst re-designation is recommended, it is clear that the Forum could benefit from some further guidance as set out in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of this report. This would help to improve the potential effectiveness of the Forum in working with elected members and the wider community in Northenden; and reinvigorate the Forum's efforts to develop their neighbourhood plan.

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

1. re-designate the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum organisation as a Neighbourhood Forum; and
 2. instruct officers to provide the feedback set out in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of this report to the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum.
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Wards Affected - Northernden

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the decisions proposed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

The designation of the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum will enable the group to continue their work on a neighbourhood plan for the designated area. The plan will need to ensure it contributes to the overall objective to achieving a zero carbon target for the city by 2038 at the latest. This will be achieved by the demonstration that the neighbourhood plan is in conformity with the strategic policies of the current Core Strategy (2012) and any subsequent emerging draft Local Plan produced by the Council.

Our Manchester Strategy outcomes	Contribution to the strategy
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	The re-designated Neighbourhood Forum would be able to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan for this area in accordance with the existing development plan. The group's constitution makes reference to supporting the development of commercial elements in the area.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Well-planned development can support delivery of training and employment opportunities.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Neighbourhood planning processes encourage residents to get involved and influence decision-making.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	The group's constitution refers to supporting the sustainable development of the area as a destination for a range of uses so that it increasingly becomes a place where residents and visitors can go to engage with other people in the community and where there are a variety of reasons to visit.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Well-planned development can make the most of the connections within an area.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

There are no direct financial costs arising from the re-designation of a Neighbourhood Forum. The Council can claim £5,000 from MHCLG for the first five Neighbourhood Forums designated within Manchester (including re-designation of forums). The initial designation of a Neighbourhood Forum in Northenden has been the only such designation in Manchester, therefore the Council will be eligible for £5,000 following re-designation of the Forum.

Once designated, a Neighbourhood Forum would be able to prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders, which would be submitted to the Council who must publicise these and carry out a consultation process. The Council would also have to bear the costs of independent examination of any Neighbourhood Development Plan / Development Order, and eventually of any referendum required by the Localism Act prior to the adoption of such plans and orders. It is likely that a large proportion of these costs will be covered by financial support from the government: currently set at £20,000 as a one off payment which is claimable once a date has been set for a referendum for a Neighbourhood Plan where one had not already been made for the area; and £20,000 p.a. claimable in relation to Neighbourhood Development Orders / Community Right to Build Orders once a date for the referendum on these has been set.

The Council is legally required to provide support and advice to Neighbourhood Forums throughout the preparation process for Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders. Whilst the 'Duty to Support' does not require the Council to provide financial assistance to neighbourhood forums, there will be resource implications in terms of staff time.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Northenden Neighbourhood Forum Application
- Executive report dated 20th November 2013 designating a Neighbourhood Forum and Neighbourhood Area in Northenden
- Executive report dated 14 September 2016 setting out a Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework with respect to the designation and operation of any proposed neighbourhood forums applied for under the relevant legislation.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In November 2013 the Council designated a Neighbourhood Forum and a Neighbourhood Area in Northenden. The Neighbourhood Forum designation expired in November 2018, whilst the Neighbourhood Area designation remains extant (a plan showing its extent is in Appendix 1 to this report). Since 2013 the Forum has begun work on a Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- 1.2 On August 30th 2019 the Council received an application for the re-designation of the Neighbourhood Forum. This application was 'invalid' as it did not include 21 addresses within the Neighbourhood Area for forum members living / working within the Neighbourhood Area. A valid application was received by the Council on 12th November 2019.

2 Background to Neighbourhood Planning

- 2.1 The concept of Neighbourhood Planning was introduced through the Localism Act 2011. It enables local community organisations (comprising at least 21 individuals) to initiate and produce Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders. In order to do this a community organisation must apply to the Council for the designation of a Neighbourhood Area in their locality; and also for designation of the organisation as a Neighbourhood Forum.
- 2.2 Further background to the Neighbourhood Planning process is set out in the report entitled 'Manchester City Council Policy Framework for Neighbourhood Planning', which was approved at Executive on 14th September 2016. That report sets out the Council's perspective on Neighbourhood Planning, the current legal requirements, relevant case law and the Council's Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework against which applications for the designation of Neighbourhood Areas will be assessed.
- 2.3 Following the expiry of the previous forum designation in Northenden, there are no designated Neighbourhood Forums within Manchester at present. In addition to the Northenden Neighbourhood Area designation there is a Neighbourhood Area in Castlefield which was designated in October 2016.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 The Council consulted on the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum (the Forum) application between Tuesday 17th December 2019 and Tuesday 4th February 2020. During this time the applications and supporting information were published online and a hard copy of the documents was available in Northenden community library. Stakeholders on the Council's planning policy database were notified and the weblink was circulated to community organisations in the Northenden area. Site notices were posted at three locations within the Neighbourhood Area.
- 3.2 Nine organisations / individuals made representations on the Neighbourhood Forum application, of which five were objecting to the re-designation, one was

in support and three were neutral. The representations have been taken into account when making the recommendation in relation to the Neighbourhood Forum application and are summarised below.

Neutral representations:

Sport England, Natural England and National Grid have all provided information to be taken on board in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, if a forum is re-designated.

Supporting representation:

Friends of Rose Hill – supports the application: the Forum is an open and thoughtful organisation which has developed real influence, the Forum has undertaken a range of excellent work over the last five years.

Objecting representations:

The five representations that set out objections are summarised below.

- Concerns raised about how representative the forum membership is of the wider community in Northenden – a specific example given in the representations was that when younger people asked for an area to hang out in, a skate park and covered benches the forum said no to all of these suggestions;
- Noting that meetings tend to attract a low turnout with only a core group of members regularly attending meetings despite the forum stating a membership of over 500 people;
- The core group in the forum making decisions without adequate consultation of the wider membership that has joined the forum;
- The fact that no neighbourhood plan has been produced as yet;
- The geographical focus of the forum is primarily around Palatine Road and the area around the river; and
- The production of the district centre report by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) from Manchester Metropolitan University represents a detailed and up to date plan for the community.

Council's response to representations

- 3.3 The Council's response to key issues raised in the objecting representations is set out below.

Transparency in terms of forum membership

The Forum application received by the Council included details of twenty one members, all of whom disclosed their age bracket. All members provided a residential or business address within the Northenden Neighbourhood Area. All bar one stated their ethnic background, and all apart from two provided information on their occupational background. In line with legal requirements, members have the option of this information being withheld from the version of

the application form which is published for consultation, but the Council has used the full information relating to the twenty one members to assess the extent to which the membership is drawn from different places in Northenden Neighbourhood Area and from different sections of the community in the area. Please see section 4 of this report for that assessment.

The forum is unrepresentative of the local community

When making a decision on whether to re-designate the Forum the Council is required to have regard to the extent to which the membership is drawn from different places in Neighbourhood Area and from different sections of the community in that area. This assessment is set out in section 4 of this report, and the report makes recommendations in terms of how the Forum could take steps to become more representative of the local community.

Local residents who are not members of the Forum would be able to give their views on the emerging Neighbourhood Plan as it is prepared, and ultimately there would be a referendum on whether any Neighbourhood Plan would be able to come into force.

Very low attendance at forum meetings in comparison to size of membership claimed

Legislation does not set out a requirement for the number of members who must attend forum meetings. Forums are required to have a constitution, by which they are bound and the submitted document sets out the requirements for meetings. The Council also has the power to withdraw a neighbourhood forum designation from a group if it considers that the group is no longer meeting the designation requirements. Therefore issues relating to how representative the forum is can be kept under review.

The forum has not produced a Neighbourhood Plan despite being designated for five years

Lack of progress with a Neighbourhood Plan does not provide a reason for the Council to refuse re-designation of the Forum. The Council can provide further guidance to the Forum as appropriate to assist with preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. Further discussion on this point is set out in section 5 of this report. The representations noted the production of the Northenden District Centre report by IPM. Whilst this has been produced for different purposes (i.e. it is not a land use planning document) there is merit in discussing further with the Forum how elements of the IPM work could be incorporated into a revised neighbourhood plan.

Forum priorities have focused on only a limited geographical area

A Neighbourhood Forum is required to consult during the preparation process for a Neighbourhood Plan, therefore if local residents consider that the policies in an emerging plan are too narrow, or that the plan is omitting certain issues

or geographical areas, they will be able to raise these concerns during the consultation process.

4 Assessment of the Neighbourhood Forum application against statutory requirements

- 4.1 The application for the renewal of the Forum has been assessed against the legal requirements set out in legislation¹. Moreover, it has been considered against the Council's Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework, agreed at Executive in September 2016.

Legal Considerations

- 4.2 The potential forum should be established for the purpose of promoting or improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of the neighbourhood area concerned.

Section 2 of the Forum's constitution sets out its purpose and meets this requirement.

- 4.3 Membership of the forum must be open to:
- i. Individuals who live in the NA
 - ii. Individuals who work in the NA
 - iii. Individuals who are elected members of a council whose area falls within the NA

Section 3(a) of the Forum's constitution states that membership is open to everyone who lives or works within the NA, and to representatives of the electoral wards and to MPs and MEPs whose constituencies fall within the NA, so this requirement is met.

- 4.4 Membership of the forum must be at least 21 people, each of whom falls into at least one of the categories above.

The application provides names and addresses of 21 members and evidence has been included in the application to demonstrate that the members included in the list of 21 people either live or work in the neighbourhood area. The application later states at page 7 that membership of the Forum is currently 540 people.

- 4.4 The forum must have a written constitution

The Forum does have a written constitution.

- 4.5 Whether the potential forum has secured (or taken reasonable steps to secure) that its membership includes at least one individual falling within the three categories above.

¹ Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Section 61F

The list of members in Q3 of the application form includes people falling within the first two of the categories (i.e. living within the NA, working in the NA). It does not include anyone from the third category (elected representatives). The application does state later on that the ward councillors are amongst the wider membership.

- 4.6 Whether membership is drawn from different places in the neighbourhood area concerned and from different sections of the community in that area.

An analysis of the addresses supplied with the application indicates that there is a reasonable spread of addresses across the neighbourhood area.

- 4.7 The Localism Act does not specify what is meant by “different sections of the community” in this requirement, but when the original forum application was assessed in 2013 an interpretation was derived based on issues such as age, ethnicity and occupational background. The table in Q3 of the application provides the ages of all of the 21 people it lists, ethnicity information for all apart from one person, and occupational background information for all apart from two people.

Age: all apart from two of the 21 people listed under Q3 of the application form are aged between 31 and 75, with around half aged 46-60. In addition there is one person aged between 16-30 and one aged over 76. The 46-75 age brackets are more heavily represented in the list of Forum members than they are in Northenden ward as a whole, with 72% of the 21 members falling within this age bracket compared to just 32% of the ward population derived from Mid-Year Estimates (MYE) 2017 data. The 2017 MYE data shows that 19% of Northenden ward is aged between 15-29 and the application for re-designation includes one member aged between 16-30 (5% of the 21 people listed in the application).

Ethnicity: 20 of the 21 people listed in Q3 have provided information on their ethnicity and all of these people are white British / English. Northenden is one of the least mixed wards in the city ethnically, with the 2011 census showing that 85.4% of people living in Northenden ward fall within white ethnic groups. 3.4% of the people in the ward are of mixed ethnicity, but beyond that no more than 2% of the population falls within one specific ethnic group in the 2011 census. Therefore, as apart from white ethnic groups there is no other ethnic group with a significant population within the ward, it can be considered that the Forum broadly reflects the ward.

Occupational background: a range of occupational backgrounds are represented.

- 4.8 The Forum was originally designated in 2013. The report to Executive (20 November 2013) that recommended the approval of the forum highlighted some concerns with respect to the composition of the forum’s identified 21 members as follows:

“The ‘Engagement’ section of the forum’s application demonstrates that the organisation has made a concerted effort to involve residents through invitations to community groups and posters in public buildings, shops, schools and churches. Therefore it is considered that, although no members fall within the younger age range, a reasonable effort has been made to draw members from different sections of the community and so the second part of this bullet point is addressed. However, this report recommends that the forum should be encouraged to recruit some members aged under 25 over the next 3 years from the date the Forum is designated. The Council may withdraw designation if the Neighbourhood Forum no longer meets the criteria set out at paragraphs 3.2 or 3.3 above.”

- 4.9 The approved Forum subsequently did make further efforts to broaden the membership. The application submitted to re-designate the forum states in section 7, *“Our membership is open to all who qualify and is free of charge. It currently stands at 540 and is drawn from residents of, people who work in and own businesses in, & elected representatives for Northenden. A number of other voluntary groups are represented amongst our membership, and our residential members’ addresses cover all parts of the designated area. The three local Councillors are NNF members.”*

5. Consideration of the Council’s Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1 The original application for the Forum was granted in 2013. The Council subsequently developed a Neighbourhood Planning Policy Framework, approved at Executive in September 2016.

- 5.2 The Framework covers three main aspects:

- Proposals for Neighbourhood Planning will be supported only where they complement wider Council policies and programmes for the regeneration of the City and its neighbourhoods.
- Proposals for Neighbourhood Planning will only be supported in areas that can reasonably be represented by Neighbourhood Forums in terms of population and strategic significance.
- Proposals for Neighbourhood Planning will be supported as a means of delivering the aims of the Our Manchester Strategy and those of the applying relevant body. The Council will promote the use of the most appropriate measures to achieve these aims.

- 5.3 With respect to the three aspects of the Framework, the consultation responses in section 3 and the assessment set out in section 4 of this report highlight some matters that need to be fed back to the forum.

- 5.4 The consultation responses note the following matters of concern:

- The representativeness of the Forum and in particular the attendance at meetings of the Forum
- The tendency for meetings of the Forum to focus on only parts of the designated neighbourhood area
- The perceived lack of progress in producing a neighbourhood plan
- Noting the separate production of a district centre document by the Institute of Place Management

5.5 The assessment at section 4 acknowledges the Forum's efforts to broaden the membership of the Forum. Notwithstanding this effort, it is suggested that the Forum may require some further guidance to ensure the Forum works effectively with locally elected members and the wider community in Northenden.

5.6 The Forum has developed a draft neighbourhood plan but progress over the last couple of years has stalled. It would therefore be prudent to also provide further guidance to the Forum on how it may expedite renewed progress on a neighbourhood plan, taking account of any updated evidence base including for example, the work undertaken by IPM on Northenden District Centre, and ensuring a robust community engagement programme.

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 The analysis of the representations in section 3 and the assessment of the Forum's application in sections 4 and 5 points to some concerns with respect to the prevailing situation with respect to the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum. Notwithstanding the concerns identified the overall conclusion is that the Forum should be recommended for re-designation.

6.2 Whilst re-designation is recommended, it is clear that the Forum could benefit from some further guidance as set out in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 of this report. This would help to improve the potential effectiveness of the Forum in working with elected members and the wider community in Northenden; and reinvigorate the Forum's efforts to develop their neighbourhood plan.

7. Next Steps

7.1 The decision whether or not to re-designate the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum is subject to Scrutiny call-in for a week. If the forum is re-designated and not subject to call in the re-designation of the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum will be publicised by the Council, as required by the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The Northenden Neighbourhood Forum's designation would last for five years, until 18th March 2025, unless it is withdrawn before that date.

8. Contributing to a Zero-Carbon City

8.1 The designation of the Northenden Neighbourhood Forum will enable the group to continue their work on a neighbourhood plan for the designated area. The plan will need to ensure it contributes to the overall objective to achieving

a zero carbon target for the city by 2038 at the latest. This will be achieved by the demonstration that the neighbourhood plan is in conformity with the strategic policies of the current Core Strategy (2012) and any subsequent emerging draft Local Plan produced by the Council.

9. Contributing to the Our Manchester Strategy

(a) A thriving and sustainable city

- 9.1 The re-designated Neighbourhood Forum would be able to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan for this area in accordance with the existing development plan. The group's constitution makes reference to supporting the development of commercial elements in the area.

(b) A highly skilled city

- 9.2 Well-planned development can support delivery of training and employment opportunities.

(c) A progressive and equitable city

- 9.3 Neighbourhood planning processes encourage residents to get involved and influence decision-making.

(d) A liveable and low carbon city

- 9.4 The group's constitution refers to supporting the sustainable development of the area as a destination for a range of uses so that it increasingly becomes a place where residents and visitors can go to engage with other people in the community and where there are a variety of reasons to visit.

(e) A connected city

- 9.5 Well-planned development can make the most of the connections within an area.

10. Key Policies and Considerations

(a) Equal Opportunities

- 10.1 All communities across the City have the opportunity to get involved in neighbourhood planning.

(b) Risk Management

- 10.2 As representations raised concerns it terms of how well the forum represents the population of the Neighbourhood Area there is a risk that local planning policies could be brought forward which sufficient regard to the interests of the wider community. This risk is mitigated by the proposal to maintain a dialogue with the Forum so that the designation can be reviewed if it becomes apparent

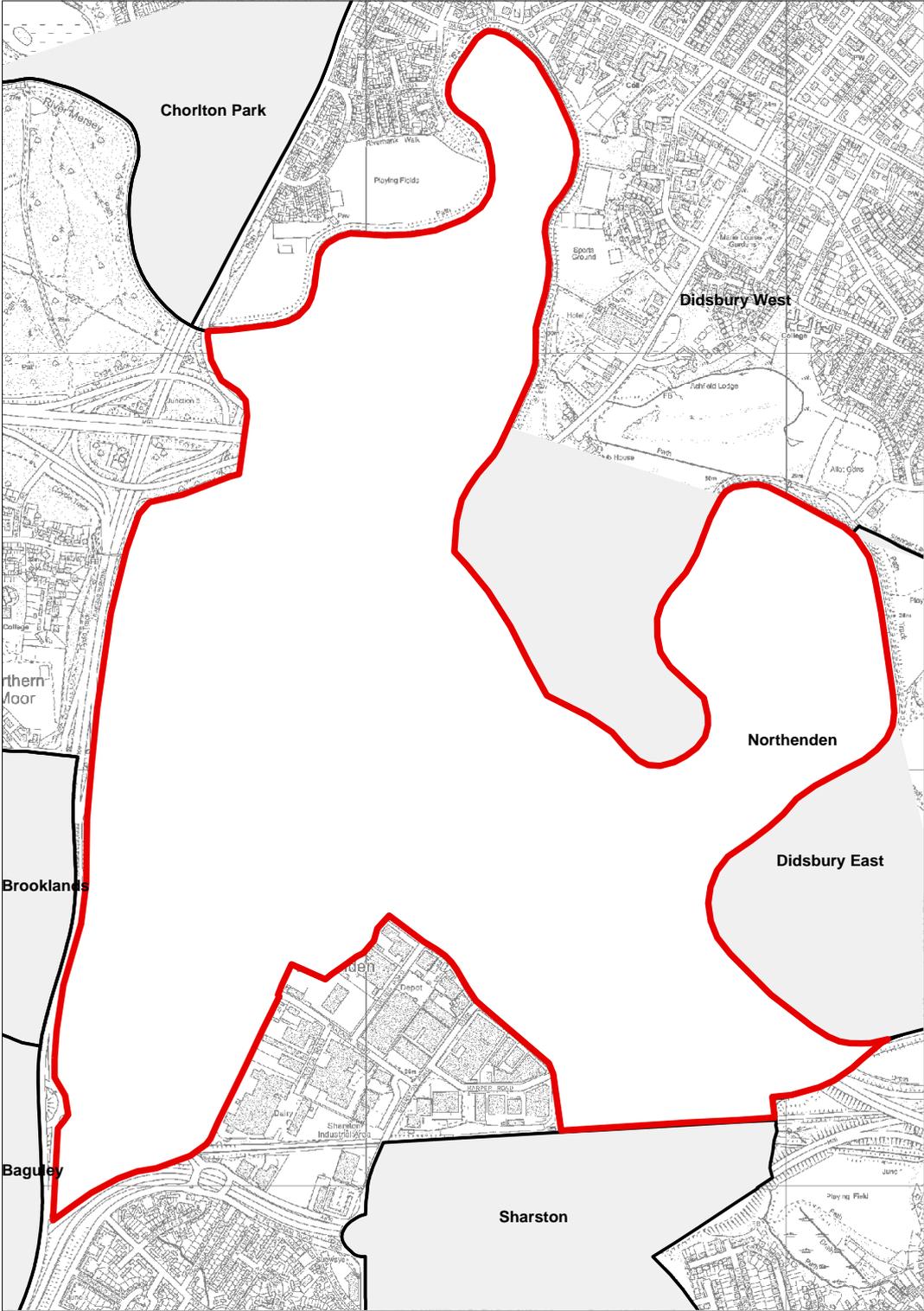
that the forum has become less representative and no longer meets statutory requirements.

(c) Legal Considerations

- 10.3 The Council has the powers to designate Neighbourhood Forums in line with the Act. This report sets out the matters to which the Council must have regard in making this decision.

Appendix 1 – Northenden Neighbourhood Area

The Neighbourhood Area below was designated in November 2013.



 Boundary of Northenden Neighbourhood Area designated by the Council on 20th November 2013

 Ward boundaries

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