



**NEWCASTLETON
COMMUNITY TRUST**

HOLM HILL

Community Consultation

Summary of Results

January 2024

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Introduction

Between 2 March and 25 November 2023, NDCT held two public events to collect the views of the residents, neighbours, and wider community.

Its aim was to seek feedback on refined plans for the proposed changes to Holm Hill.

All this work is part of the Active Leisure strategy which incorporates the relocation of Boosie plantation to Coulter Sike. The new proposed location at Coulter Sike was previously scoped with the community during 2022.

NDCT appointed consultants to identify final locations for new and upgraded walks and trails, forestry and woodland planting schemes, new and improved leisure facilities at Kirk Hill, Lord Walters Seat viewpoint as well as the provision of a new Active Leisure Hub and community garden space which links all the new facilities on Holm Hill.

The purpose of this report is to:

- Set out the engagement process undertaken and discuss the response.
- Summarise key themes/messages emerging from stakeholder engagement process.
- Identify woodland design features to be incorporated into the final woodland design masterplan.
- Identify key issues and concerns raised and propose suitable mitigation measures if required.

Background

Newcastleton District Community Trust (NDCT) purchased Holm Hill in 2020, this extends to approx. 250ha and includes a mixture of open hill ground, woodland, and lower lying fields.

NDCT acts as the umbrella organisation on behalf of the community investing in local regeneration projects to improve facilities locally, increasing social opportunity and widening the economic infrastructure. Its visions are clear; utilising where possible community owned assets and natural capital to help create a circular economy. In doing so, creating a better, more sustainable life for current and future generations.

Newcastleton offers a wealth of spectacular panoramic views and rolling hills offering amazing walking and riding, on bikes, on horses and on foot. Our aim is to make it easier to access this and to continue to build on remote rural tourism generating increased wealth for the community.

This consultation initially started as part of the community buy-out plans in 2019. This identified that the land could be used for several development opportunities, forestry, farming, tourism, renewables, and housing.

The development strategy has undergone a series of phases; original timing and plans have been altered to reflect community need, climate impacts on the community and most recently the cost of living and energy crisis. All these factors have dictated the pace of change and have fed into the current program of development on Holm Hill:

The Active Leisure Strategy is at the heart of planning the development of the lands, this provides the community with greater access to the land surrounding us, will include upgraded and new facilities which will also appeal to the day and overnight visitor sectors providing incomes to help sustain local hospitality businesses and increased employment opportunities.

FORESTRY

Boosie Plantation – the existing site, located immediately on the community boundary has been a cause of angst for many residents since trees began maturing. Its location has meant properties living in shadow and dampness. Part of the reason for purchasing Holm Hill was to take ownership of this site with a view to finding a more suitable location to alleviate the concerns of those impacted.

Relocation of Boosie was not due to happen formally until 2025-27 but Storm Arwen in Nov 2021 damaged an estimated 70-80% of the stock and remedial work was required to protect the remainder.

Management Plan – a refresh was commissioned providing a fresh look at the composition of the woodlands around the village identifying opportunities that work alongside other community projects, all designed to bring improvements to the area.

The balance of the remaining plantation woodlands will continue to be felled and replaced with either native woodland or species suitable for providing improved habitat for red squirrels, improved biodiversity, and flood mitigation measures.

Usage for the areas of land impacted by windblow already clear-felled post Arwen are still in consideration, these continue to be reviewed and will be considered in detail as part of the next phase of the community planning process.

New woodland location

- 1. Coulter Sike** was identified as being the best location to extend the woodland and relocate the windblow from Boosie, this site also has capacity to replant the balance in due course. It is on poor grazing land – potentially freeing the Boosie site to return to grazing or be explored for other opportunities. The site is adjacent to an established woodland (known locally as Crow Wood/Sawmill plantation running the length of the old railway line) and new planting will ‘merge’ into this in time making the woodland more vibrant and diverse.
- 2. Short Sike** will be largely about creating a woodland to help mitigate flooding. Riparian planting (Tweed Forum research Eddleston Water) will help to slow the flow of surface water and support efforts to reduce bank erosion, this coupled with installation of leaky dams on tributaries dispersing water across the land can slow waters by up to 4 hours.

Protecting our **Heritage and biodiversity** has been core to the development of the proposals. Results of all the surveys commissioned were shared during the consultation. This work has provided further insights and opportunities which will be incorporated into the walks, trails and paths enhancing the active leisure strategy.

The community also commented on the location and creation of a **new community garden space** which will be a reflective space that everyone can enjoy.

Summary

NDCT aim to make it easier to access the spectacular views and rolling countryside and to capitalise on remote rural tourism generating increased wealth for the community.

This includes the creation of two woodland sites replacing the (partially felled) Boosie plantation, a network of walks, paths and trails and a new community garden.

Two community engagement events were held in 2023, findings were used to make improvements to the plans which are now ready to be submitted for approval.

Methodology

1. Following the first phase of design in 2022 (phase 1) two public events were held during 2023: Buccleuch House, 4 South Hermitage Street, Newcastleton. TD9 0QR **Phase 2:** 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th March. **Phase 3:** 23rd, 24th 25th November. Dates/times included evening and Saturday session to maximise opportunities to attend.

The main goals of the consultations were:

- To share plans with the community on the development of the new woodland creation and land on the Holm Hill as part of our active leisure strategy.
- To provide the community with a variety of ways to express opinion and give feedback.
- To evidence all consultation feedback in a clear, streamlined way and share this with the local and wider community.

1.1 NDCT ensured that the consultation was accessible to all; promotion was via posters, website and social media. Feedback and comments were collected at the events via post it notes, forms attendance register as well as an email. For the 3rd phase consultation, there was also a press release in the E&L advertiser (Appendix 2).

1.2 Q&A session was held at NDCT AGM on Tuesday 5th of December and all information remains accessible on NDCT website. <https://livenewcastleton.com/regeneration/community-consultation-november-2023/>

1.3 Various community groups were targeted directly, and key landowners given the opportunity to meet at alternative times to discuss issues relevant only to them.

1.4 The consultations were advertised through websites, social media (Appendix 1) and posters in Newcastleton village. Email responses and stakeholder engagement

Additional community groups and stakeholders were contacted directly by the forest management team or the development officer for feedback. A full list is provided in Appendix 3.

As part of the stakeholder engagement the forest plantation plans were shared on 12th September 2023 (minute Appendix 4) to present the project and answer questions.

Key Findings

Phase 2 Consultation (March 2023)

Following the phase 1 consultation, the purpose of consultation at Phase 2 was to provide feedback and further detail / updates.



Key Findings:

Objective	Findings	Action	Mitigations
Fell Boosie Plantation	No objections	Actioned	n/a
Tidy Sawmill Banking / Crow wood	No objections	Actioned	n/a
Planting Jubilee Wood	No objections 1 request to help with pest control 4 requests to make planting a community event	Community planting event 25.3.23	n/a
Proposals for riparian Woodland	No objections 3 Requests for more detailed habitat survey	Proceed to planning	More detailed habitat and rare breed surveys to be commissioned
Planting at Coulter Syke	5 requests to make this planting more accessible for community benefit. 2 requests for detailed environmental surveys	Proceed to planning	JDM Woodland employed to commission all necessary environmental and archaeological surveys to refresh the existing forest management plan, consider a more diverse range of species which would improve habitats and benefit the community in other ways.
Leaky Dams	No objections	Can be actioned	
Active Leisure Plans	Full support for new walks, paths & trails. Location of paths to reduce incline easier access suggested.	Feedback incorporated into brief for final designs.	Archaeological and habitat surveys commissioned if required once contractor appointed

	Request for more historical and archaeological features highlighted		
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Community verbatims:

“The new paths and walks will add to visitor experience” J Blair (4th March 2023)

“Closures of the 7stanes trails (18months) has had damaging impact on visitor footfall resulting in a significant loss of local spending damaging our local economy, businesses need regular incomes to provide secure employment and to continue to invest” B Elborn (5th March 2023)

“New trails for walking and cycling will increase reasons to visit but providing them closer to the community will benefit everyone who lives here making them more accessible.” S Wilson (5th March)

Summary of Key findings Phase 2 consultation:

- 41 members of the community attended. Attendance was recorded through tally.
- Full support for new location at Coulter Sike but to make this more accessible.
- Full support for new walks, paths, and mountain bike trails, with ideas for where best to place these.
- Use these to incorporate key views and historical places of interest which maximise potential, commission more detailed surveys to do this.

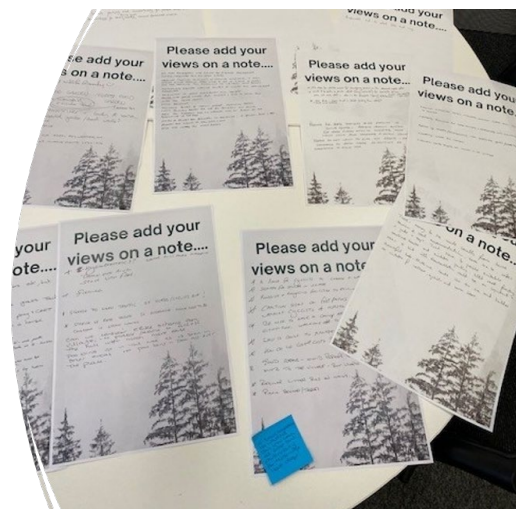
This feedback provided valuable feedback which led to expert surveys being commissioned to further scope/design plans.

These were shared in the 3rd phase public consultation before plans were submitted for formal approval.

Key Findings Phase 3 Consultation (November 2023)

NDCT shared and asked for views on

- **Forestry** Detailed woodland plans shared, including alternative species planting at both sites. (App 5)
- **Walks & Trails** (App 6) Details on new paths connecting Coulter Sike to The Pavilion and Viewpoint at White Gate



- **Bridleway** (App 7) – suggestions for a new route.
- **Heritage** Archaeological survey shared, highlighting local information. Community were asked, ‘*What does heritage mean to you?*’ An interactive station was provided to enable users to search sites on Pastmap and Canmore for own interest.
- **Community Garden** (App 8) – concept boards were shared, seeking feedback on type of garden wanted, what plants, shrubs and lighting preferred.

Following feedback from Scottish Forestry, NDCT collected names/email addresses from everyone who engaged in this phase of the consultation process. For GDPR purposes these are not contained in this report but are available on request. Summary of feedback and actions tabled:

Objective	Findings	Action	Mitigations
New Woodland Creation Plans	New forest plan with mixed species received 99% support. 1 request to consider “the bull ring” not be planted.	Forestry plans now able to be submitted for approval/action. Response provided to resident addressing concerns.	Meeting with complainant 11.12.23. Alternative grazing options proposed.
Archaeological Survey	Lord Walter’s seat – no issues Kirkhill fort reinstate path/potential bridleway – no issues. Positive feedback to the live demo ref areas of interest;	Both projects can be actioned. Incorporate more talks/engagement on local heritage. Expand learning to primary school fostering interest in local heritage	n/a
Habitat and Rare Breed Survey	Initial desktop survey shared; more detailed surveys now available	Surveys to website	Actioned
Active Leisure Plans	Positive support integrating walks & paths into new woodland. 2 comments received ref condition of existing paths. Positive support for new mountain bike trails. Discussion on maintenance of trails: can community be involved? Further opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ebike scheme 	New paths subject to consent. Implementation of mountain bike trails to be worked in phases minimise financial risk. Shared apprenticeship scheme in development which could be extended to	Submit archaeological report to path design team to double check that no areas of archaeological interest are disturbed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking and accessibility for featured areas • Picnic benches • Wash areas for mountain bikes • upkeep and maintenance sustainability <p>Proposed bridleway supported, suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsafe stretch on road • lack of road signage a frustration 	<p>other aspects of land management widening community benefit and employment opportunities.</p> <p>Unsafe stretch on bridleway can be addressed through the alternative, but this is not on community land</p> <p>SBC engaged in signage (council issue)</p> <p>Riding group formed to address specific issues</p>	
Community Garden	<p>Full support for community garden</p> <p>Participants were shown garden formats to select their preferred choice (Appendix 8) Wildflower most popular.</p>	<p>Landscape designer to be commissioned to design a garden suitable for chosen area. Wildflower and cottage garden design preferred.</p>	n/a

Summary of Key findings of Phase 3 consultation

- 91 members of the community attended.
- Attendees' names and email addresses were recorded
- Information was presented again at NDCT AGM on Tuesday 5th of December providing further opportunity for feedback
- All information available on community website after the event [Community Consultation November 2023 – Live Newcastleton](#)
- Feedback deadline extended to Friday 22nd of Dec 2023
- Email address also provided to give further feedback after reflection.



Conclusion

Following consultations, reviewing archaeological, ecological and habitat surveys; initial scoping for walks, paths and trails it has been possible to identify a list of key action points:

Key Action Points

- Coulter Sike Woodland planting scheme can now be submitted for approval by Scottish Forestry
- Discussions underway with other landowners into the possibility of a collaborative deer management approach
- Works to upgrade pathway to Lord Walters seat, widening layby area and improve access to Kirkhill fort will be actioned Q1 2024 using local skilled tradesmen and local materials where possible.
- Preparation of tender for construction of new trails being prepared.
- Specifications to deliver a shared apprenticeship scheme based on trail and paths building skills initially with modules for other land skills to be finalised.

The period of engagement with various stakeholders including SBC and all neighbours is now completed. Proposals submitted to planning and subject to approval. NDCT expects to complete forestry, paths and trails on Coulter Sike in 2024.

Appendix 1 PRESS RELEASE 20 Nov 2023 - Having a final say on Holm Hill

Newcastleton and District Community Trust is just about to carry out another vital phase of its community consultation programme.

At this stage, the Trust is seeking feedback from residents on community plans to deliver the active leisure programme on Holm Hill, land which was acquired by the community in 2020.

As part of a wider remit, Newcastleton and District Community Trust invests in local regeneration projects on behalf of the community to improve facilities locally, increasing social opportunity and widening the economic infrastructure base.

The initial consultation provided valuable feedback which led to expert surveys being commissioned to further develop the detail of these plans. The full results will be shared with the community from Thursday 23rd November until Saturday 25th November. Locals are invited to comment and provide feedback for the next phase of the plans, prior to them being submitted for formal approval.

Whilst this project will support Newcastleton's circular economy to generate increased tourism income, it is primarily about providing enhanced social assets for the community. The team are keen to stress its wealth of spectacular panoramic views and rolling hills which offer amazing opportunities for walking, horse riding and cycling. The aim of The Trust is to make it easier to access these assets and to capitalise on remote rural tourism, and in doing so, to generate increased wealth for the community.

Within the development proposals, careful consideration has been placed on heritage and biodiversity. The final Forest Management Plan and planting at Coulter Syke will also be shared as well as the new community garden space which will provide a reflective space that everyone can enjoy.

Archaeological surveys provide some interesting findings, and if there is support, it is hoped that these can be maximized to create new walks which will showcase local heritage. The Trust hopes to refresh the viewpoint from Lord Walter's seat which will be enhanced and include off-road parking spaces, enabling walkers and riders to stop and take time to sit and absorb the valley as well as provide panoramic views of the village. White Gate, as this place is known locally, is part of a new project aimed at capturing local knowledge and traditions. It is hoped that this stimulates a dialogue and that many more facets of local culture and heritage will be captured for future generations.

Vicky Hawes, Development Officer said:

"This community consultation is vitally important because the land belongs to everyone, and we want to hear everyone's views. As well as being used to refine our proposals, this consultation will hopefully also result in new information being incorporated too.

Land, how it is used and our relationship with Holm Hill is crucial to the village. It is our responsibility to ensure that if we change it, it is for the better and for the whole community's gain. We look forward to hearing the feedback and moving onto the next stage.

FURTHER INFORMATION

In Autumn 2020 Newcastleton Community Council negotiated sale of 750 acres of land known as Holm Hill from Buccleuch's Borders Estate to the Newcastleton and District Community Trust (NDCT) marking an exciting future for Newcastleton. Community ownership of land ensures local resilience and is integral to regeneration and sustainable development in Scotland.

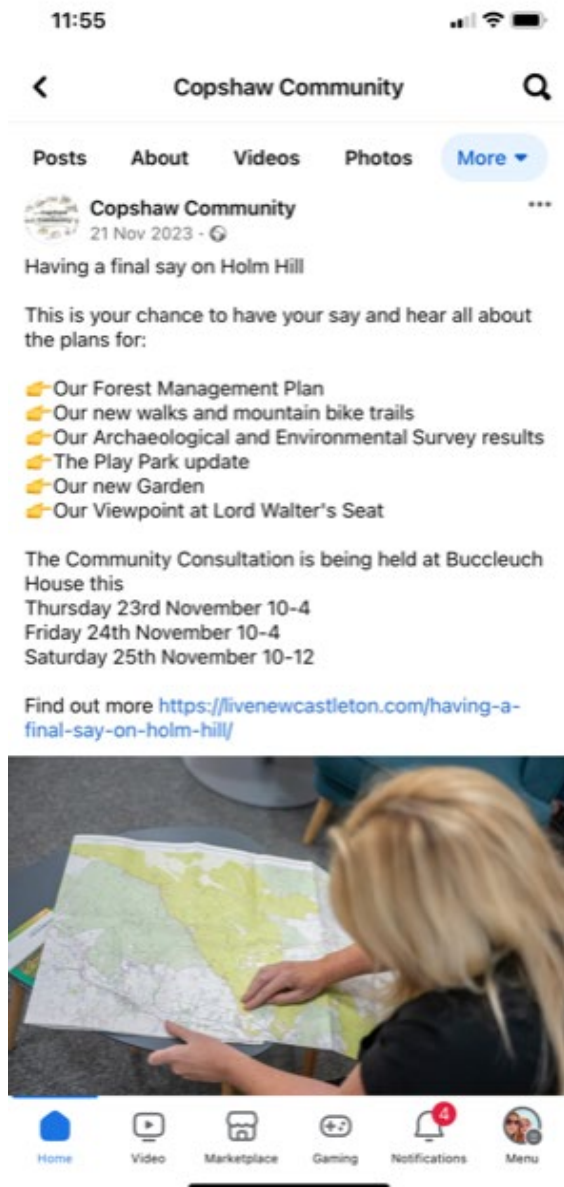
The Community buy-out enables the community to create a bigger, brighter, sustainable future, which include farming, with strategic plans to develop new leisure and renewable sectors spreading the benefits of community ownership to everyone who lives in the community.

Read more - <https://livenewcastleton.com/regeneration/holmhill-community-buy-out/>

This project is part-funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local businesses, and people and skills. For more information visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>



Appendix 2 Poster and Social Media Posts



Appendix 3 Neighbour/Stakeholder Letters with responses

Individual/ Organisation	Date contacted	Date feedback received	Response	Action
Newcastleton residents consulted by open drop-in event	2,3 & 4/3/2023	2,3 & 4/3/2023	Residents would like to see an element of conifer in the Boosie Plantation restock to support red squirrels. Feedback was 'can more be made of the forested land so the community would benefit and make it more accessible'.	Include NS and SP in NBL restock at about 15%. Plans now include new active leisure facilities – connected walking trails and cycle tracks.
SEPA	8/11/2023	22/11/2023	No issues. John Gorman very supportive.	n/a
NatureScot	8/11/2023	14/11/2023	No issues.	n/a
Scottish Borders Council Archaeology	8/11/2023			
Scottish Borders Council Biodiversity	8/11/2023			
Scottish Borders Council Roads	8/11/2023			
Scottish Borders Council Landscape	8/11/2023			
RSPB	8/11/2023	9/11/2023	Ensure low-density, small-leaved native broadleaves on northern boundary to benefit black grouse.	This area will consist of native woodland planted at low density, which should benefit black grouse on a site that doesn't offer very much at present.
Scottish Water	8/11/2023			
Historic Environment Scotland	8/11/2023	29/11/2023	No issues	n/a
Newcastleton Community Council	24/11/2023	1/12/2023	On agenda for next meeting	
Buccleuch Estates	24/11/2023			
Hospital Cottages x 3	24/11/2023			

Blackburn Farm, Newcastleton	24/11/2023			
Mrs B Scott. Pathhead, Newcastleton	24/11/2023			
Mr S Adamson, Dykehead, Newcastleton	24/11/2023			
Natasha and Chris Ruddock Tenants		1/12/2023	Concerns ref visual impact to village and economic impact of woodland creation within 'bullring'.	
Andrew Sheridan, Treestory	20/11/2023	23/11/2023	Need to discuss any potential fence lines on adjoining land.	
Stephen Adlard, Stephen Adlard Woodlands	20/11/2023			
Ed Downs, EJD Forestry	20/11/2023	By phone 3/1/2023	No issues.	n/a

Appendix 4

Community Council Minutes:

Newcastleton & District Community Council

Extract of Minutes of Ordinary meeting Tuesday September 13th 2022

7) Planning

I. Newcastleton Forest amendments – felling all agreed that the timing of the work was essential which was still unknown, efforts to establish when this might happen were providing challenging.

Extract of Minutes of Ordinary meeting (draft until Feb 11th) Tuesday January 11th 2024

Coulter Syke Forestation feedback - Report and link circulated. A strong consultation that has engaged the community reflecting the high number of respondents/attendees. This project provides direct benefits to the local community as well as additional attractions to attract visitors. CC strongly supports this project and looks forward to seeing it all come to fruition once planning approvals are forthcoming.

NDCT AGM No8 Montague Street, Newcastleton 5th Dec 2023 Extract of draft minute

8 trustees + 44 members of the public were present:

OVERVIEW OF HOLM HILL DEVELOPMENT PLAN; forestry, trails and paths, new active leisure hub
- Q&A & feedback

GC introduced Vicky Hawes, explaining her role as NDCT Development officer responsible for the implementation of the projects in play at any one time as well as the day-to-day management needs of operating BH, the bunkhouse and laundry. She manages the staff and reports to the board on all the work plans.

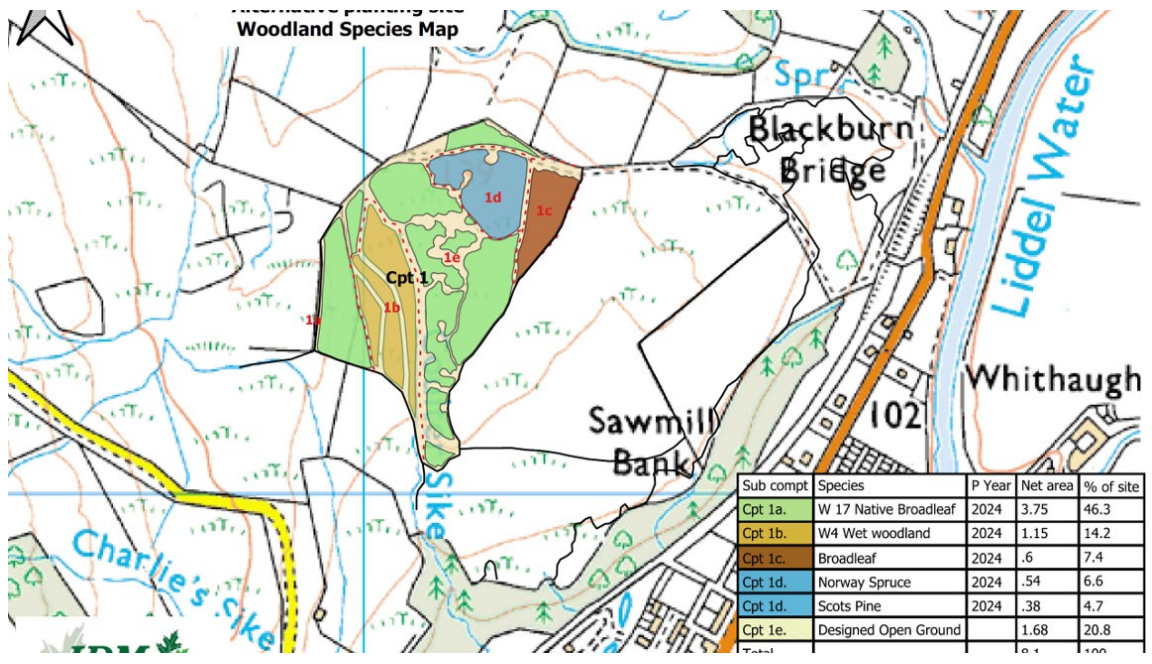
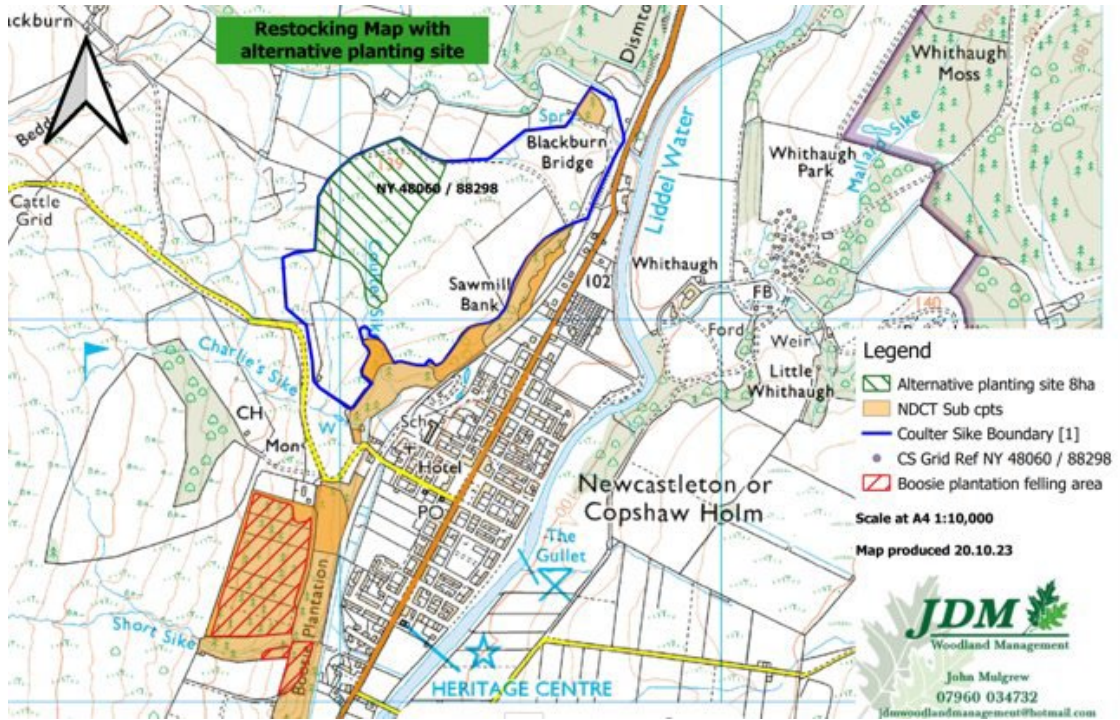
VH presented a summary of the plans recently shared on Forestry, trails & paths, Viewpoint, Heritage, and community garden. Theses can be found on <https://livenewcastleton.com/regeneration/community-consultation-november-2023/>

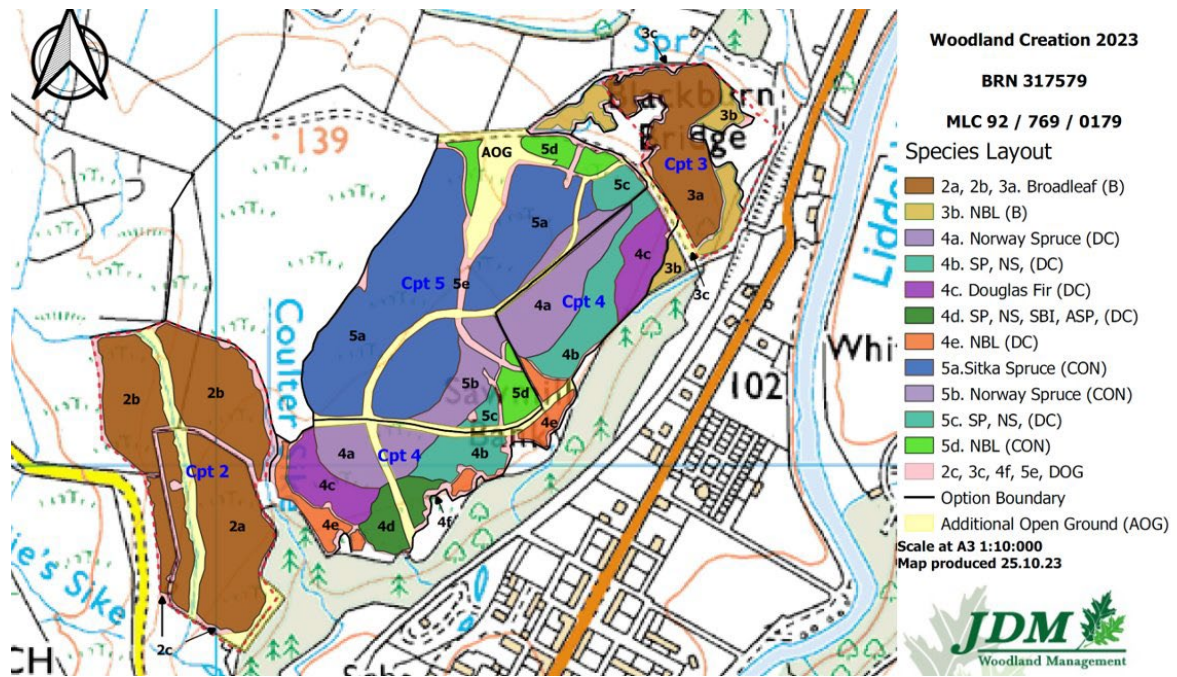
Consultation open for comment until Dec 15th for those who wish to respond. To date feedback has been extremely positive, many valuable insights had provided more detail to help scope out the projects in more depth.

Further work was now required to address this, and plans would be submitted to relevant authorities this month/early January. Walks/forestry were expected to commence first in Q2 2024. Other work not requiring formal planning would commence as soon as budget and practicalities allowed.

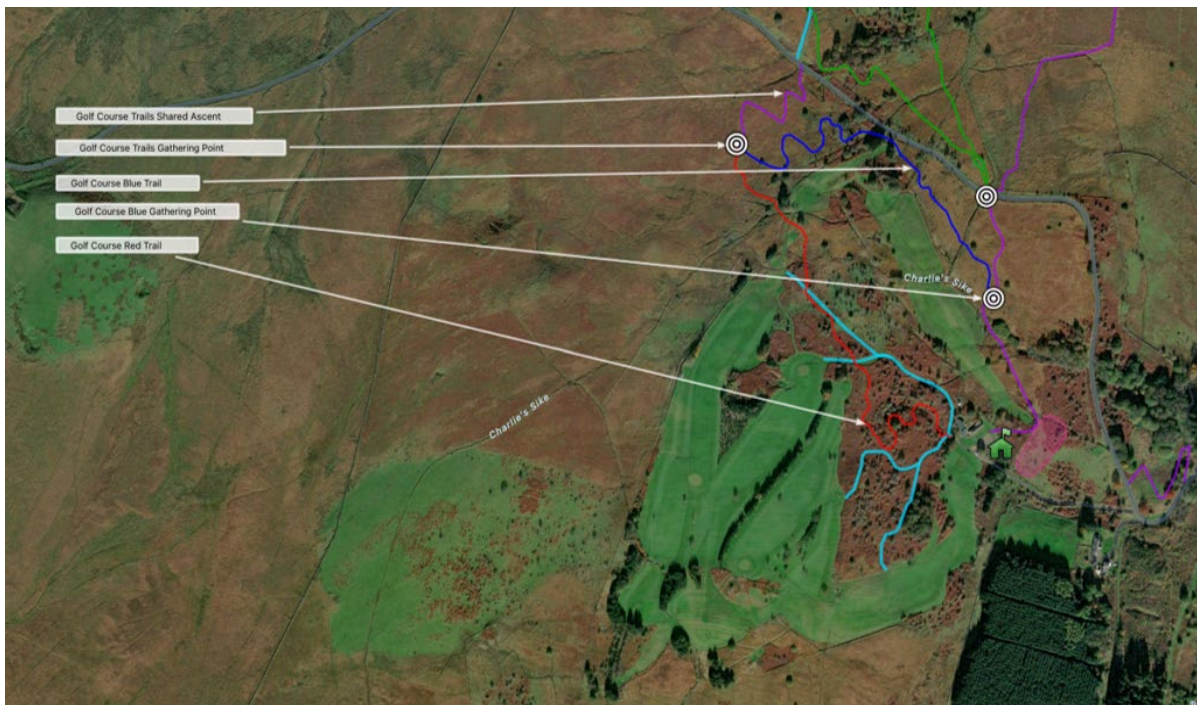
Question asked regarding riders/reference type of users – advised local horse group to take forward suggestions on developing this market locally.

Appendix 5 Woodland Creation Plans

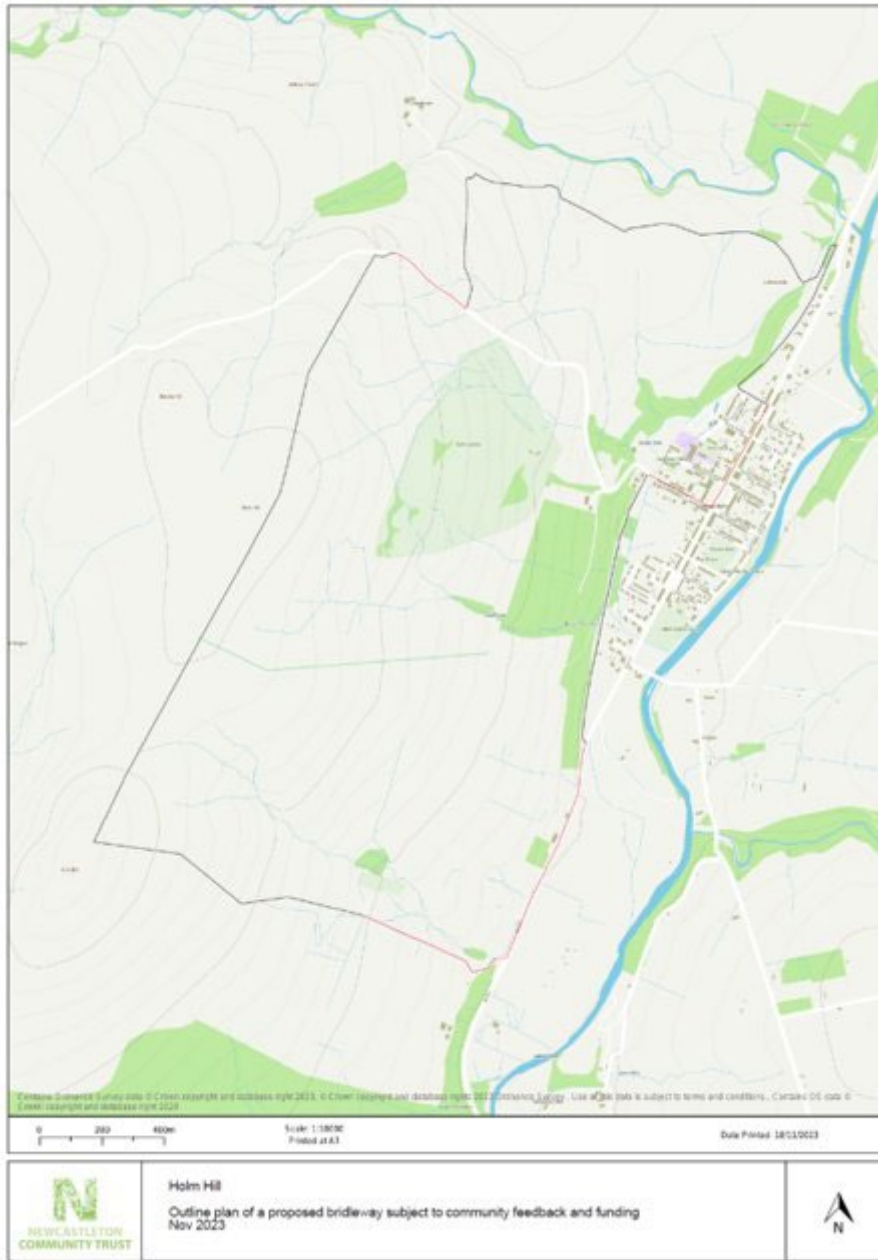




Appendix 6 Walks, Paths & Trails



Appendix 7 Proposed Bridleway



Appendix 8 Community Garden mood boards

