

West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

Pre-Submission Draft

February 2021



Foreword

The West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan sets out the opportunities and challenges for our plan to address. It includes a positive vision, strategy and range of policies that will guide development in West Bedlington for the period to 2036. These include, but not limited to, the quality of life for our residents, community well-being, local economy and accessibility.

This draft West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan has been drawn up by a working group of town councillors with input from residents and community groups. We were due to consult on the draft plan in April 2020, however, this was delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our draft plan looks forward to 2036 and suggests policies and proposals that we believe will sustainably and effectively manage the future growth and development of West Bedlington and ensure our heritage and environment is protected and enhanced.

Once adopted, the policies within the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan will be used by planning officers at Northumberland County Council to determine planning applications. The plan will also be used by planning inspectors when deciding planning appeals. It will be part of the statutory development plan for the area and policies within it will supersede some policies in the old Wansbeck District Local Plan and provide further details to the strategic policies set out within the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

The working group have put in a huge amount of work to get to this point and on behalf of West Bedlington Town Council I would like to thank all those who have inputted to it.

The town council look forward to receiving comments on the draft plan.

Councillor Adam Hogg
Chair of Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

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1. Introduction

Background to neighbourhood planning

- 1.1 Neighbourhood planning is a right for communities introduced through the Localism Act 2011. Neighbourhood plans are community-led, prepared by town and parish councils. They set out guidance on how new development will be managed. They do this by creating land use 'planning policies'. Plans can deal with a wide range of issues like housing, employment, heritage and transport. In some cases, they may only focus on one or two issues that are of particular importance in a local area. Policies within neighbourhood plans cannot block development or support less than already committed in the statutory development plan. What they can do is shape where that development will go and what it will look like.
- 1.2 Neighbourhood plans can also cover issues which are not related to the use and development of land. They can provide a useful document in which a town or parish council can establish priorities for action to improve their area. These are often referred to as 'community actions'. However, the main purpose of a neighbourhood plan is to set policies for the use and development of land.
- 1.3 Once a neighbourhood plan has been: examined by an independent examiner; agreed at the referendum stage by the local community; and 'made' (brought into legal force) by the local planning authority it becomes part of the statutory development plan. Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning context

- 1.4 As they are part of the development plan, neighbourhood plans must be prepared in line with legal requirements. The way in which neighbourhood plans are prepared and the policies they contain are tested by an independent examiner who assesses whether the plan meets the 'basic conditions' to ensure they are legally compliant. Neighbourhood plans must:
 - Have regard to national planning policy and guidance;
 - Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan;
 - Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
 - Be compatible with legal obligations.

National planning policy and guidance

- 1.5 National planning policy and guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

Development plan

- 1.6 Currently, the development plan for Northumberland consists of the saved policies of the former local planning authorities that made-up Northumberland before Local Government Reorganisation in 2009. For the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan Area, these are the policies set out within the Wansbeck District Local Plan (2007).
- 1.7 Northumberland County Council (NCC) has prepared a new Local Plan which will replace the existing saved planning policies. This was submitted for examination in May 2019 and is now undergoing examination.

- 1.8 The West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan ('the plan') has been informed by the adopted Wansbeck Local Plan policies and the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

Sustainable development

- 1.9 The purpose of the planning system is to help achieve sustainable development as defined by the NPPF. This specifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be the basis for every plan and every planning decision. In brief, 'sustainable development' is about growth which delivers economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations. The basic conditions statement, that will accompany the submission plan, will explain how the implementation of the plan is expected to contribute to sustainable development.

Legal obligations

- 1.10 Neighbourhood plans must be compatible with legal obligations, specifically strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and habitats regulations, through an appropriate assessment (AA). The SEA is a way of ensuring that the environmental implications of policies are taken into account before plans are brought into force. The AA process aims to ensure that the plan will not result in significant damage to internationally important nature conservation sites. The SEA and AA process is on-going and informing the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. A draft SEA and AA are available for comment alongside this pre-submission draft plan.

Background to the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.11 On 3 May 2016 the parish of West Bedlington was designated as a neighbourhood area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning, see figure 1. The process of preparing the plan began in the spring of 2016, when residents were asked to respond to a survey about the local area. During 2016 and 2017, the work on the plan was led by the Bedlington Partnership, overseen by the town council. In Autumn 2018 the town council made the decision to take the lead on the preparation of the plan.
- 1.12 There have been four rounds of early engagement to obtain views of the local community and other stakeholders on the scope of the plan.
- Spring 2016 – online survey to capture issues for the plan to address;
 - Autumn 2018 – sought further feedback on issues for the neighbourhood plan to address;
 - Spring 2019 – engagement on a draft vision, objectives and policy themes for the plan; and
 - Autumn 2019 – engagement on areas to be identified as local green space and protected open space.
- 1.13 Early engagement has informed the preparation of this document, which is the pre-submission draft plan. This draft plan identifies:
- The context in which the plan has been prepared – an overview of West Bedlington, the **opportunities and challenges** for the plan to address;
 - A **positive vision** for the future of the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan area;
 - How the vision of the plan will be **delivered through planning policies** i.e. the policies that **will be used to determine planning applications** within the plan area - providing a framework for sustainable development; and
 - How the vision of the plan will be **delivered through community actions** i.e. measures which are **intended to encourage action and influence decisions** taken by relevant bodies.

- 1.14 Full details of the engagement undertaken that has informed the preparation of the plan will be included within a statement of consultation which will accompany the submission draft plan.
- 1.15 The period covered by the plan is to 2036, this aligns with the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. During this period, the neighbourhood plan will be reviewed and updated where required.
- 1.16 The background documents that have informed the preparation of this pre-submission plan are available online at: westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/.

How to get involved

- 1.17 The draft plan has been informed by community engagement and evidence work. We need your input to ensure the plan and policies we have drafted fully reflect the views of local people.
- 1.18 You can let us know your views on this draft plan in the following ways:
- By email to: nplanwbtc@gmail.com ; or
 - By letter to: West Bedlington Town Council, Bedlington Community Centre, Front Street West, Bedlington, NE22 5TT.
- 1.19 Comments must be received **by noon on 7 April 2021**.

Next steps

- 1.20 Following the end of the consultation period the town council will review the responses received and identify if any changes need to be made to the plan and its evidence base.
- 1.21 The current timetable for the next stages of the plan making process is:
- Submission of the plan to NCC for examination: spring/ summer 2021;
 - Consultation on the submission plan: summer 2021;
 - Examination of the plan by an independent examiner: summer/ autumn 2021;
 - Referendum: winter 2021; and
 - Neighbourhood plan 'made' by NCC: winter 2021.

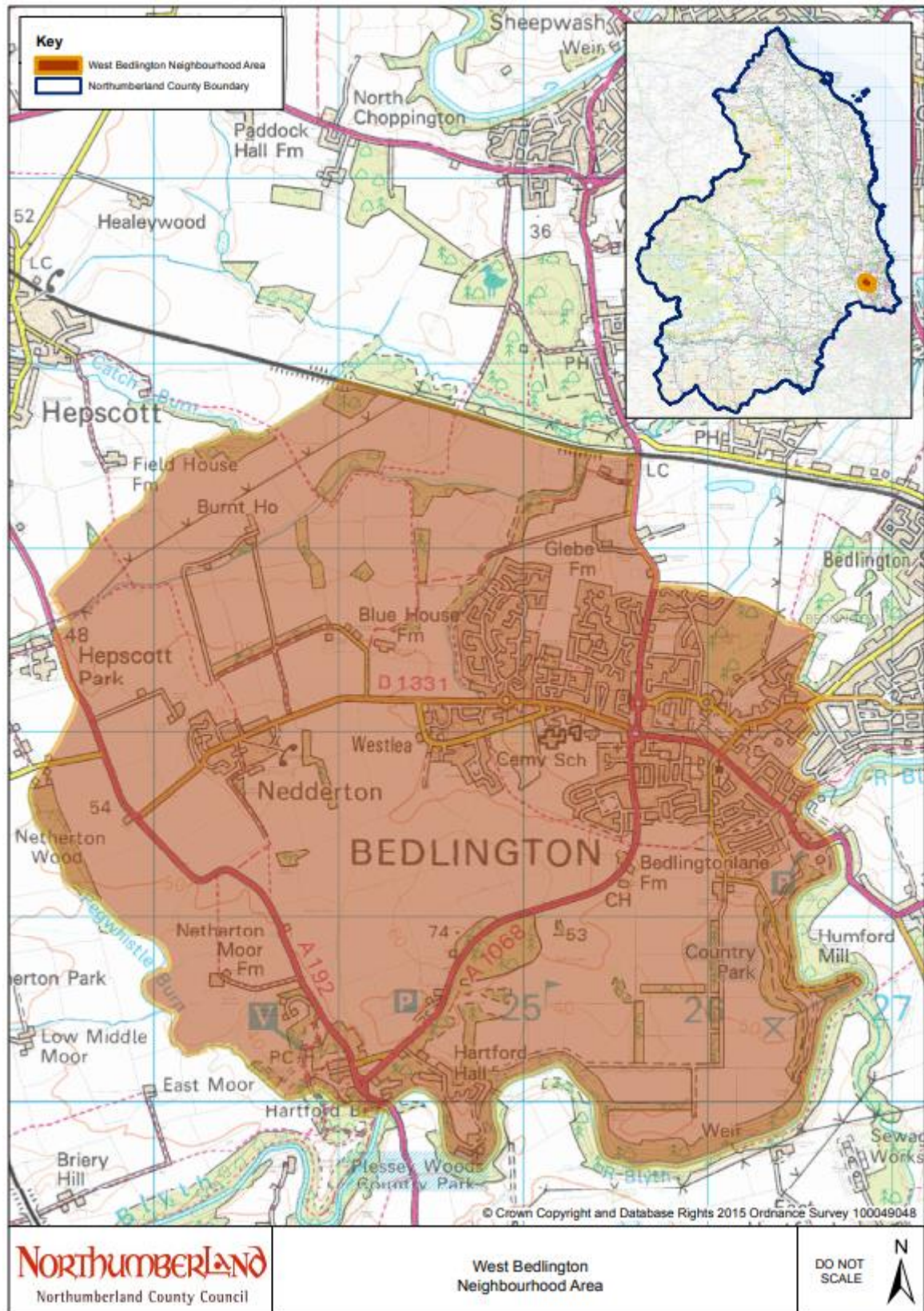


Figure 1: West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan Area

2. The key issues for the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

Background to West Bedlington

The growth of the town

- 2.1 West Bedlington has a long history with Saxon origins. There is a suggestion that the remains of St Cuthbert rested at the site of St Cuthbert's church in 1069. Bedlington was previously part of County Durham, until 1844 when it was made part of Northumberland.
- 2.2 In the 1730s the market town began to change its focus to that of the industries of ironstone and coal. Bedlington became pivotal to infrastructure production for the new railway industry led by the Stephenson's of Newcastle. Commerce, industry and housing flourished, plus churches, schools, institutions and many pubs were developed. By the late 1900s, collieries and miners' terraces were added to the town, as well as upmarket housing.
- 2.3 During the late twentieth century, modern housing and low-density development was built to the north. Over the last 5 years there has been a number of large sites granted planning permission for residential development to the north (Glebe Farm – 500 units) and west (Blue House Farm – 180 units) of the plan area.

Population and housing

- 2.4 The Census identifies that in 2011 the plan area comprised 9,951 residents, living in 4,375 households. With regard to the age profile: 53.6% of residents were aged between 25 and 64; 18.6% aged 65 and over; with 17.9% of the population aged 15 and under.
- 2.5 In 2011, 89.6% of housing was described as a whole house or bungalow, the majority of which (37.8%) were semi-detached, then detached (32.3%), with terraced properties comprising 19.5%. 10.1% of the accommodation stock was described as flats, maisonettes or apartments. 39.8% of households owned their home with a mortgage or loan and 31.4% were owned outright. 16.6% of households were in the social rented sector and 11.6% private rented.
- 2.6 Of those aged 16-74 (5,124), 70.6% were economically active, with 42.7% employed full time. The main industries that residents were employed in 2011 were: human health and social work (16.3%); wholesale, retail trade (13.2%), public administration (12.3%) and manufacturing (10.8%).
- 2.7 Parish level health information illustrates that 46.1% of the community consider they are in very good health, 32.6% consider themselves to be in good health, 14.9% in fair health, 4.8% in bad health and 1.6% in very bad health.

Services, facilities and connectivity

- 2.8 The plan area provides a number of services and facilities to meet the day to day needs of local residents, including: schools, convenience stores, public houses and social clubs, cricket and golf clubs, a community centre and churches. However, residents rely on neighbouring towns such as Cramlington and Morpeth to gain access to a wider range of services and facilities. The town centre includes a large vacant brownfield site with proposals for its redevelopment to improve the retail offer of the town now being taken forward.
- 2.9 West Bedlington is well connected to the strategic road network, with the A189 located to the east, this connects Bedlington to Ashington and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea in the north and

Cramlington and the Tyneside conurbation to the south. The A1068 also connects Bedlington to Ashington, while the A193 provides a link to Blyth to the east. The B1331 links Bedlington to the A192, connecting the town to Morpeth.

Environment

- 2.10 Residents of the plan area benefit from easy access to a wealth of green spaces, including Humford Woods, Attlee Park, Plessey Woods, Gallagher Park and Doctor Pit Park. There are also important environmental designations within the plan area, including ancient woodland, local nature reserves and local wildlife sites. The centre of Bedlington is designated as a conservation area and the plan area contains 33 listed buildings, three of which are grade II*.

Key issues

- 2.11 Early engagement on the plan identified that there were a number of important issues for the neighbourhood plan to look to address through planning policies, including the:
- Importance of conserving and enhancing the valued natural and built environment, particularly green spaces/ networks and the heritage of the area;
 - Need to support the creation of new employment opportunities;
 - Lack of services and community facilities, as well as protecting existing facilities;
 - Concerns over whether the provision of infrastructure will keep pace with the level of development across the plan area, particularly roads, school and health care capacity;
 - Lack of affordable housing;
 - Need to support improvements in the town centre – more attractive shops and restaurants; and
 - Importance of allotments.
- 2.12 In addition, feedback suggested that the following matters should be considered through the development of appropriate community actions:
- Need to continue to celebrate the important heritage of the area;
 - Desire for improvements to the local environment e.g., townscape enhancements;
 - Concern over increased levels of dog fouling;
 - Management of antisocial behaviour;
 - Protecting community facilities as assets of community value;
 - Parking; and
 - Access to toilets.
- 2.13 The feedback from early engagement informed the preparation of the vision and objectives for the neighbourhood plan as well as the planning policies and community actions, which present opportunities to tackle the issues identified.

3. Vision and objectives

Vision

- 3.1 The vision sets out what the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan intends to achieve over the plan period to 2036, it informs all the draft policies and community actions contained within this pre-submission plan.

A Vision for West Bedlington
<p><i>By 2036 West Bedlington will comprise a sustainable and cohesive community. There will be an appreciation of the importance of the heritage of the area, which is vital to the areas sense of place, as well as giving local communities a sense of belonging.</i></p> <p><i>Improvements will have been made to the local environment, employment opportunities, services and facilities which will enhance the quality of life of residents. Communities will be well-connected, via sustainable transport routes to major employment opportunities as well as greater services and facilities beyond the plan area.</i></p> <p><i>The important environmental and historic character of the area will have been maintained and enhanced by ensuring new development is of an appropriate scale and design, as well as reflecting the rural setting of the plan area. Important green spaces will be protected for the benefit of future generations.</i></p>

Objectives

- 3.2 To deliver the vision, four objectives have been developed. The objectives clearly relate to the issues identified through early engagement. The planning policies and community actions contained within this pre-submission plan will deliver the objectives.

Objectives
<p>Objective 1 – Quality of life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensuring new development is sustainable, contributing positively to the built, historic and natural environment of the plan area. New development will be managed to ensure that important green spaces are protected.
<p>Objective 2 – Community well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building on the strong sense of community across the plan area and recognising the diverse needs of existing and future residents, by: supporting the provision of different types of housing that people can afford and meet identified needs, including those of an ageing population; and ensuring the local community has access to the services and facilities they need.
<p>Objective 3 – Local economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting both existing and the creation of new employment opportunities across the plan area. Protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre as an important source of local employment and service centre.
<p>Objective 4 - Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoting access to sustainable modes of transport which connect local communities to employment as well as the services and facilities which they require.

Ensuring that the environmental quality of the plan area is protected by effectively managing traffic.

4. Quality of life

Background

- 4.1 The quality of life within the plan area is highly valued by local residents, this has been confirmed during early engagement on the plan. Local residents want to ensure that new development contributes positively to the built, historic and natural environment of the plan area. As well as achieving a balance between development and protecting important green spaces. This is recognised within objective 1 of the neighbourhood plan.

Sustainable development

- 4.2 The NPPF explains that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It highlights three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental) which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The NPPF therefore includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The neighbourhood plan has an important role in supporting the delivery of sustainable development. Policy WB1 requires all new development proposals to be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This policy will support the delivery of all of the objectives of the plan.

Policy WB1: Sustainable development

A presumption in favour of sustainable development will be exercised in the determination of development proposals. In seeking to ensure that development is sustainable, it will be necessary to consider, where appropriate, how the development would:

- a. Make efficient and effective use of land, by encouraging the re-use of previously development land and buildings where possible and viable;
- b. Minimise the impact and mitigate the likely effects of climate change, including flood risk;
- c. Minimise any impact on amenity for new and existing residents, business and other land uses in the vicinity of the proposed development;
- d. Protect or enhance the significance of heritage assets and their settings;
- e. Support the health and well-being of the local community;
- f. Ensure the quality of the biodiversity, natural and water environment is maintained and enhanced;
- g. Address contamination or land instability issues;
- h. Provide opportunities for sustainable travel;
- i. Ensure that all infrastructure necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms is either in place or can be provided prior to the development being brought into use.

Design

- 4.3 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, it creates better places in which people live and work. It is fundamental to what the planning and development process should deliver and will ensure that new development contributes positively to the local environment and therefore enhances the quality of life of local residents.
- 4.4 Policy WB2 encourages high quality and sustainable design and sets out the key principles that should be addressed as part of proposals for new development whilst seeking to ensure the

plan area does not place unnecessary restrictions on new development. The policy is cross cutting and will help to deliver all the plan objectives.

Policy WB2: Design

Development should conserve local distinctiveness by demonstrating high quality design which both respects existing character and responds to the character of the area. Development will be supported where it:

- a. Maintains and where possible enhances the character of the locality, paying particular attention to the appearance, size, scale and density of the proposed development;
- b. Uses materials which complement those of adjoining and surrounding buildings;
- c. Conserves the significance of heritage assets and their setting;
- d. Takes account of the topography and natural features of the site and considers the impact of the development when viewed from surrounding areas of countryside;
- e. Respects established building lines and creates boundaries and roof lines that are in keeping with the street scene;
- f. Demonstrates a commitment to sustainable design to minimise energy use;
- g. Provides adequate refuse and recycling storage, which is incorporated into the scheme to minimise visual impact;
- h. Adopts the principles of sustainable drainage, where appropriate;
- i. Ensures the development will not prejudice the amenity of its future occupiers or that of adjacent properties in terms of overshadowing, loss of light, dominance, loss of privacy, noise or general disturbance;
- j. Ensures that lighting associated with the development will not have a significant effect on residential amenity or wildlife;
- k. Will not result in unacceptable levels of noise, air or water pollution; or
- l. Creates a safe, accessible and well-connected environment that meets the needs of its users.

Where a design and access statement is required as part of a planning application, there should be a clear demonstration of how the proposal has responded to the above principles as an integral part of the design process.

General location of new development

- 4.5 The Northumberland Local Plan defines a settlement boundary for Bedlington in order to manage the location of new development and protect the countryside from unsuitable development, prevent the merger of settlements and maintain their character. The boundary seeks to maintain the separation between the settlements of Bedlington, Nedderton and Hartford Bridge. The NPPF identifies that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless specific criteria are met.
- 4.6 Land to the west of the plan area lies within the Green Belt. The Green Belt boundary excludes Nedderton and properties at Hartford Bridge, however properties at Hartford Hall are included within the Green Belt. Development proposals in the Green Belt will be considered against the requirements of the local plan and NPPF. The town council do not consider it is necessary to repeat the longstanding provisions of Green Belt policy within the neighbourhood plan.
- 4.7 Policy WB3 therefore seeks to focus development within the Bedlington settlement boundary that lies within the plan area. It also describes when development outside the settlement boundary may be appropriate. This policy will support the delivery of all of the plan objectives.

Policy WB3: General location of new development

To promote sustainable development, the focus of development across West Bedlington will be within the Bedlington Settlement Boundary, as defined within the Northumberland Local Plan.

New development outside the defined settlement boundary will be supported where it:

- a. Is directly related to the business and operational needs of agriculture, forestry or other land-based rural industries;
- b. Supports the sustainable growth of existing businesses and enterprises;
- c. Is a sustainable visitor attraction that is related to the experience or interpretation of the countryside, or a sustainable leisure development which respects the character of the countryside, only where identified needs are not met by existing facilities within the settlement boundary;
- d. Will provide local services or community facilities which support the rural community;
- e. Is a house, the design of which:
 - i. Is truly outstanding or innovative and of the highest standard, helping to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas;
 - ii. Reflects the highest standards in architecture;
 - iii. Significantly enhances its immediate setting; and
 - iv. Is sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area;
- f. Comprises an appropriately designed extension to an existing building or buildings. The extension should be subservient to and respect the scale and appearance of the host building; or
- g. Involves the conversion of redundant rural buildings. The building should be structurally sound and its conversion achievable without significant extension to the original structure. The conversion should be in keeping with the character and appearance of the building and its setting.

Where a site lies within the Green Belt, development proposals will be considered against the requirements of the Northumberland Local Plan and national planning policy.

Green infrastructure

- 4.8 The NPPF defines green infrastructure as: *'A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities'*. As a network, green infrastructure can include: parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include: streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls. As green infrastructure is close to where people live, it can play a key role in supporting the health of the local community. It also supports wildlife, climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as helping to improve air quality.
- 4.9 Policy WB4 therefore seeks to protect and where practical improve the green infrastructure network of the plan area, supporting the delivery of plan objectives 1 and 2. The network has been informed by allocations within the Wansbeck District Local Plan, the South East

Northumberland Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011)¹, Northumberland Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision Assessment (2011)² and the strategic allocations within the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

- 4.10 The green infrastructure identified on the policies map comprises: wildlife networks and corridors, connected open spaces and linkages to the wider countryside. The network includes Plessey Woods, Hartford Woods, Bedlington Country Park, the golf course, Gallagher Park and the green letch that lies to the north and west of the Hazelmere Estate. The green infrastructure network has a strong link with the public rights of way network and therefore provides vital linkages from the built-up area to the countryside.

Policy WB4: Green infrastructure

New development should seek to protect and where practical, improve and extend green infrastructure. When determining planning applications, consideration will be given to how development proposals:

- a. Protect and enhance green infrastructure assets;
- b. Provide high quality links between existing assets and/or provide additional uses for multifunctionality;
- c. Secure improved access to green infrastructure;
- d. Create a sense of place by protecting and/or fully integrating high quality, green infrastructure into the proposed development to reflect the character of the neighbourhood plan area;
- e. Integrate green infrastructure with sustainable drainage systems and the management of flood risk; and
- f. Address the management and maintenance of new and existing green infrastructure throughout and beyond the plan period.

Proposals that would include the loss of part of the green infrastructure network as defined on the policies map, should demonstrate that alternative provision, equivalent to or better than the green infrastructure proposed to be lost in terms of its quantity and quality, can be provided in equally accessible locations that maintain or create new green infrastructure connections

Biodiversity

- 4.11 The plan area includes a wide range of species and habitats³ including: Bedlington Country Park Nature Reserve, ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, woodland included on the national forest inventory and a traditional orchard (which is a priority habitat). Whilst there are no sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the plan area, the Willow Burn Pasture SSSI lies just outside the boundary, within Choppington Parish. The plan area lies within a priority area for targeting curlew and lapwing and is important for both farmland and sea birds. Policy WB5

¹ <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Studies%20and%20Evidence%20Reports/Landscape%20Green%20Spaces%20Studies/4.%20SE%20Green%20Infrastructure/SE-Green-Infrastructure-Strategy-October-2011.pdf>

² <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Studies%20and%20Evidence%20Reports/Landscape%20Green%20Spaces%20Studies/5.%20Open%20Space%20Recreation/Openspace-Sport-Recreation-Assessment-May-2011.pdf>

³ Information obtained from: Natural England (Magic Map)

therefore seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity across the plan area and will support the delivery of plan objective 1.

- 4.12 Paragraph 177 of the NPPF states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where a plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitats site, either alone, or in combination with other plans or projects, unless an appropriate assessment has concluded that the plan or project will not adversely affect the integrity of the habitats site. Within 10km of the plan boundary there are the following European sites: Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area, Northumbria Coast Ramsar Site and the Northumberland Marine Special Protection Area.
- 4.13 The appropriate assessment undertaken as part of the preparation of the plan identified that policy WB1: Sustainable Development is likely to have a significant effect on the Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site. This is because the policy supports an increase in residential units within 10km of the designated sites.
- 4.14 As a result of the international importance of this area there could be adverse impacts from new development in the plan area as a result of increased recreation related disturbance. These adverse effects could be avoided where developers agree to contribute to the Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service and that mitigation for impacts on coastal designations should be required for development that will cause a net increase in housing numbers or tourism accommodation within 10km of the coast in accordance with the detailed provisions set out in the Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service Strategy Document (2018). This requires financial contributions from all relevant development in the area up to 7km from the coast; and a lower contribution from major development (sites of over 0.5ha or for 10 or more units) in the zone between 7km and 10km from the coast).
- 4.15 The Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service is a developer-funded warden service that will provide a presence within the designated sites to educate and advise recreational users such as dog walkers, joggers, horse riders and sea anglers as to how they can enjoy the coast without causing excessive disturbance to important bird populations.
- 4.16 Policy WB5 therefore includes a requirement for new development which would result in an increase in residential units or tourism accommodation to make an appropriate financial contribution to the Northumberland Mitigation Service.

Policy WB5: Biodiversity

Development should protect and enhance biodiversity by seeking to ensure no loss or significant harm to biodiversity sites, protected species or their habitats. Where development would result in the loss or significant harm to biodiversity, applicants will be required to demonstrate that the adverse impacts will be adequately mitigated, or as a last resort compensated for.

Development resulting in a net increase in residential units and tourism accommodation within the zones shown on the policies map will make an appropriate financial contribution to the Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service or provide alternative mitigation of demonstrable effectiveness. This will ensure that adequate mitigation can be provided for the cumulative increases in recreational disturbance to the nationally and internationally important bird populations within coastal designated sites arising from such development.

All financial contributions required in accordance with this policy will be secured by way of a planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, or any subsequent amending legislation.

Local green space

- 4.17 Green spaces are a vital part of a vibrant and healthy community and are of great importance to the character and identity of a place. They are valued for a wide range of reasons including: visual amenity; historic significance; recreational value; tranquillity; and richness of wildlife. Uncontrolled changes to green spaces can irrevocably alter their special character or intrinsic value.
- 4.18 The NPPF enables neighbourhood plans to designate areas of local green space for special protection, thereby preventing development on these sites other than in very special circumstances. These spaces do not need to be publicly accessible but must be in reasonably close proximity to the community they serve as well as being demonstrably special to them, holding a particular local significance. The designation cannot be applied to an extensive track of land, so should be local in character.
- 4.19 The sites listed in policy WB6 and shown on the policies map are proposed to be designated as local green space as they meet the criteria set out within national policy and guidance. A background paper has been prepared to outline the reasons why the sites are of particular importance to the local community and to explain the process that led to their proposed designation⁴. The designation of the sites will assist with the delivery of plan objectives 1 and 2.

Policy WB6: Local green space

The following areas, as defined on the policies map, are designated as local green space and will be protected in a manner consistent with the protection of land within the Green Belt:

- LGS1 Front Street West;
- LGS2 Front Street East;
- LGS3 South Park/ 20 Acre Playing Field;
- LGS4 St Cuthbert's Churchyard and grounds;
- LGS5 Bedlington Cemetery;
- LSG6 Market Place;
- LGS7 Bedlington Country Park/ Humford Wood;
- LGS8 Attlee Park;
- LGS9 Doctor Pit Park;
- LGS10 Gallagher Park;
- LSG11 Acorn Bank; and
- LGS12 Green letch adjacent to Hazelmere Estate.

Management of any development within these local green spaces must be consistent with national policy on Green Belts. Development of the land will not be permitted other than where very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the local green space by reason of inappropriateness and other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

⁴ westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/

Protected open space

- 4.20 There are many areas of open space which are valued for their local amenity value and for formal and informal recreational purposes, but which do not meet the detailed allocation criteria for designation as local green space.
- 4.21 The sites listed in policy WB7 and shown on the policies map are proposed to be designated as protected as they are important to the local community. A background paper has been prepared to outline the reasons why the sites are important and to explain the process that led to their proposed designation⁵. Policy WB7 requires that any loss of protected open space resulting from new development should be replaced by at least equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, including amenity value. Importantly, the new provision should be in a suitable location. It is expected that when considering whether a location for the replacement open space is 'suitable', that a key consideration is whether the new space is easily accessible by the local community. It should therefore be in the near vicinity of the protected open space that it will be replacing. The designation of the sites will assist with the delivery of plan objectives 1 and 2.

Policy WB7: Protected open space

The following areas of open space, as defined on the policies map, shall be protected from development:

- POS1 Westlea Estate
- POS2 Redhouse Farm
- POS3 Westlea Park
- POS4 Hartlands;
- POS5 Meadowdale/ Chesters;
- POS6 Bishops Meadow/ Cumberland;
- POS7 The Chesters;
- POS8 Millfield Flats;
- POS9 Millfield Estate;
- POS10 Beaufront Park;
- POS11 Plessey Woods Country Park;
- POS12 Meadowdale Middle School;
- POS13 St Benet Biscop RC High School;
- POS14 Bedlington Cricket Club;
- POS15 Bedlingtonshire Golf Club;
- POS16 Whitley Memorial CofE First School;
- POS17 Hartford Road;
- POS18 The Golden Mile;
- POS19 A1068 corridor;
- POS20 Gallagher Park extension;
- POS21 Edinburgh Drive;
- POS22 West of Warwick Grove;
- POS23 Skipton Court;
- POS24 Alnwick Drive;
- POS25 Alnwick Drive/ B1331;
- POS26 Dunstanburgh;

⁵ westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/

POS27 Hessop Way (north);
POS28 Hessop Way (south);
POS29 Coverdale;
POS30 Milfield;
POS31 Schalksmuhle Road;
POS32 Adjacent to cricket club;
POS33 Hirst Head;
POS34 West Lea/ Netherton Lane;

Development that will result in the loss of protected open space will only be supported where the applicant has robustly demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, that the:

- a. Open space is surplus to requirements; or
- b. Loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by open space of equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, including amenity value, in a suitable location; or
- c. Development is for alternative open space provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

New development should provide, as a minimum, the standards of open and recreation space defined within the most up to date and relevant guidance.

Heritage assets

- 4.22 Heritage assets can either be designated or non-designated. Designated assets have statutory status within the plan area and include listed buildings and conservation areas. A non-designated asset is a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape of lesser significance.
- 4.23 The glossary of the NPPF defines a heritage asset as:
'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).'
- 4.24 The NPPF states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and requires them to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Also, that planning decision affecting a heritage asset are required to be based on a sound understanding of the significance of the asset and the impact of the proposal on that significance.
- 4.25 West Bedlington has a diverse heritage, with Saxon origins and links to St Cuthbert. Originally a market town, the focus of the town shifted to the industries of ironstone and coal in the 1730s. Bedlington played a pivotal role to infrastructure production for the new railway industry led by the Stephenson's of Newcastle. Local heritage is important to the local community, not only its designated heritage assets.
- 4.26 The centre of Bedlington is designated as a conservation area and the plan area contains 33 listed buildings, three of which are grade II*. The Bedlington Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2011) provides an overview of the historical development of the area, spatial and character analysis as well as information of loss, intrusion and damage to the conservation area. The management strategy seeks to guide the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area. It provides information and guidance on a number of matters including:

locally important buildings; demolition; permitted development rights; enforcement; areas of archaeological sensitivity; design; building maintenance and repair; regeneration and enhancement opportunities; and public realm, green spaces and trees.

- 4.27 Early engagement on the plan identified strong support for the protection and enhancement of heritage assets across the plan area. Policy WB8 therefore seeks to ensure that appropriate weight is given to the impact of a development proposal on the significance of a heritage asset supporting the delivery of plan objective 1.

Policy WB8: Heritage Assets

Where a development may impact on a heritage asset, applicants should provide information that describes the significance of any heritage assets affected by the proposed development, including any contribution made by their setting. The assessment of significance should be informed by relevant information.

In the determination of development proposals:

- a. Great weight will be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset and any harm or loss to its significance will require clear and convincing justification in accordance with national policy; and
- b. A balanced judgment will be required to fully consider the effects of any development proposals affecting a non-designated heritage asset, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area

- 4.28 There are a number of shops within the Bedlington Conservation Area. They are very prominent and comprise a large part of the floor space. The conservation area character appraisal highlighted the impact of poorly designed shop fronts to the significance of the area. Good design of any replacement shop fronts is important not only to the character of the area but also to ensure the town centre remains an attractive place for businesses to locate.
- 4.29 Policy WB9 therefore identifies criteria to guide the assessment of proposals for new or replacement shop fronts within the conservation area. The policy supports the delivery of plan objective 1.

Policy WB9: Shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area

New or replacements shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area will be supported where the proposed development reflects the architectural style, scale, proportions, materials and colour of both the host building and the surrounding conservation area.

In the determination of development proposals consideration will be given to the following:

- a. There will be a presumption in favour of the retention of shop fronts and other features which are of architectural or historic interest. Where it is not possible to retain the whole shop front, development proposals should aim to retain features which contribute positively to the character of the building and surrounding conservation area;

- b. The design and decoration of the shop front should complement the proportions, scale and characteristics of the host building and be informed by the characteristics of the surrounding conservation area;
- c. The design of the shop front should take into account the rhythm, lines and key characteristics of the street;
- d. Where a shop occupies the ground floor of more than one building, the design and proportions of each shop front should relate to each individual building;
- e. The shop front should not obscure any existing architectural features or decoration of the upper floors;
- f. The proportions of glazing should be appropriately balanced with the shop front frame and upper-floor windows;
- g. Security measures should be designed as an integral part of the shop front, avoiding the use of external roller shutters. If there is no alternative to an external roller shutter, ensure that it is open weave and the shutter box is contained behind the fascia.

5. Community well-being

Background

- 5.1 The NPPF identifies that the planning system has an important role to play in creating healthy, inclusive communities. NPPG defines a healthy community as a good place to grow up and grow old in, a community which supports healthy behaviours and supports reductions in health inequalities.
- 5.2 Plan objective 2 seeks to build on the strong sense of community across the plan area, whilst recognising the diverse needs of existing and future residents. It acknowledges that supporting the provision of different types of housing that people can afford, as well as that which meets identified needs, can support community well-being. In addition, objective 2 seeks to ensure that the local community has access to the services and facilities it needs.

Housing mix

- 5.3 The NPPF states that neighbourhood plans should positively support the strategic policies for the area and should not promote less development than is required by the local plan. The emerging Northumberland Local Plan proposes to allocate land to meet the identified needs of the plan area. A key role for the plan is to provide a policy framework to support the provision of a mix of homes to meet local needs.
- 5.4 The town council has concerns regarding the impact of an ageing population across the plan area and considers it is vitally important to look for ways which allow people to remain living independently within the community for as long as possible. The town council also considers that it is important that the plan supports the provision of housing for young families. As a result, where there is an identified need, the plan requires proposals for housing to provide an appropriate mix of affordable units, bungalows and family homes.
- 5.5 To ensure that a range and choice of housing is available, a mix of house sizes, types and tenures will be required to be provided through new development. An important element of the assessment of current housing needs is set out within the Northumberland Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2018). This should be used to guide decisions on planning applications. Policy WB10 requires consideration of the need for particular housing types as part of the consideration of development proposals, helping to deliver plan objective 2.

Policy WB10: Housing mix

The mix of housing types on new housing proposals should have regard to and be informed by evidence of housing needs, including the current Northumberland Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2018) and any subsequent updates. The only exception will be where the proposal is designed to meet a specific and identified housing need, which requires a particular type, format or tenure of housing.

Affordable housing

- 5.6 The NPPF states that affordable housing provision should not be sought on residential developments that are not major (less than 10 dwellings). However, where major development is proposed there is the expectation that at least 10% of the homes should be available for affordable home ownership, unless this would exceed the level of affordable housing required

in the area or significantly prejudice the ability to meet the identified affordable housing needs of specific groups. The town council consider the provision of affordable housing to be vital to allow young people and young families to get on the housing ladder and stay within the local community. Affordable housing could be available to buy or rented.

- 5.7 Policy WB11 therefore seeks to support the delivery of affordable housing where there is an identified need. This will support the delivery of plan objective 2.

Policy WB11: Affordable housing

All new development of ten or more open market residential dwellings or on sites of 0.5 hectares or more, will be required to contribute to the provision of affordable housing.

The level and type of affordable housing to be delivered on each site will have regard to up-to-date evidence of affordable housing needs, including the current Northumberland Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2018) and any subsequent updates.

There will be a presumption that the affordable housing contribution will be through the provision of affordable homes on the application site. Off-site provision or a financial contribution will only be supported where this can be robustly justified and the following criteria can be met:

- a. Off-site provision must be on a site that is agreed as being in a suitable location relative to the housing need to be met. Such provision will be secured and controlled by a planning obligation to ensure that the affordable housing is delivered alongside the housing on the principal site; or
- b. Where a financial contribution to off-site provision of affordable housing is agreed as an alternative to direct provision on site, the sum will be calculated at a rate to be determined at the time of the application by the local planning authority. The contribution will be paid to the local planning authority on commencement of development.

Any development proposal which involves the provision of affordable housing at a level below that required under the terms of this policy will need to be justified by an independent viability assessment of the scheme costs and end values.

The affordable housing provided in pursuit of this policy for rent, discount market sales housing, or where public grant funding is provided towards other affordable routes to home ownership, will be made available to people in housing need at an affordable sale or rental cost for the life of the property. Any planning permission granted will be subject to appropriate conditions and/or planning obligations to secure:

- c. The amount and type of affordable housing;
- d. That the housing will be discounted at an appropriate level to ensure it is affordable by people identified as being in housing need; and
- e. A mechanism for the management of the new homes to ensure that the first and subsequent occupancies are restricted to people in housing need.

Community services and facilities

- 5.8 Community facilities are identified in the NPPF as: local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. These facilities enhance the sustainability of local communities and residential environments.

- 5.9 There are a wide variety of community facilities across the plan area, including: schools, convenience stores, public houses, social clubs, cricket and golf clubs, a community centres and churches. These facilities are essential to support the strong sense of community that exists across the plan area. Policy WB12 therefore supports the provision of new and enhancement of existing community facilities, as well seeking to resist the loss of existing facilities, this will assist with the delivery of plan objective 2.

Policy WB12: Community services and facilities

Development proposals to enhance the provision of community services and facilities will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- a. The proposal will not generate unacceptable noise, fumes, smell or other disturbance to adjoining properties;
- b. The proposal will not have an adverse impact on highway safety; and
- c. Access arrangements and sufficient off-street parking can be satisfactorily provided where practical without negatively impacting on adjoining uses.

Proposals that result in the loss of buildings or land for public or community use will need to demonstrate that:

- d. The facility is no longer needed in its current form;
- e. A replacement facility of sufficient size, layout and quality is to be provided on an alternative suitable location; or
- f. It would not be economically viable or feasible to retain the facility and there is no reasonable prospect of securing an alternative community use of the land or building.

Allotments

- 5.10 There are two allotments in the plan area at Ridge Terrace and Doctor Pit. The allotments are valued by allotment holders and their families. They provide significant physical and mental health benefits as well as the provision of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Allotments are also part of the green infrastructure of the area. Policy WB13 seeks to ensure that existing allotments are protected, which will assist with the delivery of plan objective 1 and 2.

Policy WB13: Allotments

The following allotment sites, as defined on the Policies Map, will be protected from development:

- A1 Ridge Terrace; and
- A2 Doctor Pit

Development resulting in the loss of any of the allotment sites identified would only be supported where:

- a. The development provides significant social and, or economic benefits which outweigh the importance of retaining the allotment; and
- b. A replacement allotment of at least equivalent quality and quantity, in a convenient location for the users, is provided fit for use, prior to the loss of the allotment land or any part of it.

The provision of new allotments will be supported to meet locally identified demand.

Infrastructure

- 5.11 The infrastructure requirements of new development will vary depending on the type, scale and nature of the proposals. It could include the provision of: open space, public transport, education, leisure and medical facilities. The town council has particular concern over: the current provision of medical facilities; the lack of suitable indoor leisure provision; lack of provision for cycling across the plan area; and poor public transport connections in some parts of the plan area, particularly access to rail connections.
- 5.12 Policy WB14 therefore seeks to ensure that no significant adverse infrastructure impacts arise as a result of new developments, supporting the delivery of all of the plan objectives.

Policy WB14: Infrastructure

New developments will be required to provide or contribute to the infrastructure requirements that are related to them. The necessary infrastructure, including improvements to existing infrastructure, should be made available to serve the development within an agreed timescale.

6. Local economy

Background

- 6.1 National policy requires significant weight to be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity. Plan objective 3 seeks to ensure that the plan supports both existing and the creation of new employment opportunities across the plan area, as well as protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Employment

- 6.2 The economy of the plan area is diverse, ranging from retail, farming and some industry. There is also employment in the local schools, police station and magistrates' court. The businesses on Front Street provide a large amount of local employment to people who live in the area. However, most residents travel elsewhere to access employment.
- 6.3 Policy WB15 therefore seeks to support development proposals that result in the creation or protection of jobs and the sustainable economic growth of the plan area, assisting with the delivery of plan objective 3.

Policy WB15: Employment

Development proposals that support the creation or protection of job opportunities and the sustainable development and economic growth of the neighbourhood plan area will be supported where they comply with the relevant policies in the development plan and they can be achieved without significant impact on the built and natural environment and residential amenity.

Bedlington town centre

- 6.4 The emerging Northumberland Local Plan identifies Bedlington as a smaller centre and highlights that a positive approach is needed to facilitate modern retail floorspace on a modest scale. Specific reference is made to the need to consider new town centre development to the north of Front Street within the constraints of the conservation area designation. The town centre and other retail units across the plan area provide important employment to local people.
- 6.5 Policy WB16 therefore seeks to support proposals which help to maintain and contribute to the role, viability and vitality of Bedlington Town Centre, supporting the delivery of plan objectives 3 and 4.

Policy WB16: Bedlington town centre

New development located within Bedlington Town Centre, as defined on the Northumberland Local Plan policies map, will be supported where it helps to maintain and contribute to the role, vitality and viability of the town centre.

Proposals for main town centre uses outside the defined town centre which are of a scale that would be inappropriate in a less accessible location will be subject to proportionate and appropriate sequential testing.

If a more suitable central site cannot be identified, the proposal will be subject to impact testing where they are for: more than 1000 square metres of gross retail floorspace beyond the town centre boundary; or for more than 2500 square metres of gross leisure related floorspace beyond the town centre boundary.

Where it is demonstrated that the main town centre use can only be accommodated in an edge or out of centre location, priority should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre or connected to other existing services and where possible, well related to residential areas, existing services and public transport.

7. Accessibility

Background

- 7.1 The private car provides the principal mode of transport for residents of the plan area, with 79.4%⁶ of the working population traveling to work by this method. However, 21.5% of households within the plan area have no access to a car or van.
- 7.2 The NPPF encourages a reduction in congestion and greenhouse gas emissions through the introduction of measures which promote a decrease in the number of journeys made by car. Whilst the preparation of transport policy at a local level is primarily a matter for the local planning authority, there are a wide range of areas where the plan can have an influence on accessibility including supporting the protection and enhancement of active travel routes and accessibility in new development.
- 7.3 Plan objective 4 therefore seeks to promote sustainable modes of transport, to connect local communities to the services and facilities they require, whilst ensuring the environmental quality of the plan area is protected by effectively managing traffic.

Active travel routes

- 7.4 Active travel routes are those routes that are used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse-riders. They provide recreation and leisure opportunities and also promote healthy living. Routes can include established pathways and cycle routes, public rights of way, bridle paths and paths of a more informal nature. The town council is particularly concerned that there is a lack of suitable routes in the plan area. It is not possible to cycle to the nearby towns of Morpeth, Cramlington and Blyth without cycling on main roads.
- 7.5 Policy WB17 seeks to support proposals to improve or extend the walking and cycling network within the plan area, as well as protecting existing routes, supporting the delivery of plan objective 4.

Policy WB17: Active travel routes

Proposals to improve or extend the walking and cycling network within the plan area will be supported. The active travel routes identified on the policies map will be protected from development unless it provides replacement walking and cycling infrastructure.

Transport and new development

- 7.6 The NPPF identifies that planning policies should support a range of transport modes, with priority given to walking, cycling and public transport as well as consideration of disabled access. Policy WB18 therefore identifies the key considerations for development proposals across the plan area which will assist in the delivery of plan objective 4.

⁶ 2011 census <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20place/Parishes%20and%20towns/Parish%20fact%20sheets/FactSheetParishWestBedlington.pdf>

Policy WB18: Transport and new development

Proposals will be supported where it can be demonstrated that the development:

- a. Will provide safe vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian access;
- b. Will not significantly impact on traffic flows on the highway network or that appropriate mitigation measures can be secured and are undertaken; and
- c. Makes satisfactory off-road parking provision.

Annex 1: Community actions

As part of the process of developing the neighbourhood plan, some areas of community concerns were identified that cannot be addressed through the planning system. However, as part of the neighbourhood planning process they can become ‘community actions’, which are supported by West Bedlington Town Council. These proposals can be delivered in conjunction with other local organisations.

Community action 1: Celebrating our heritage

To develop a programme of community activities and initiatives to raise awareness of and continue to celebrate the important heritage of the plan area.

Community action 2: Townscape enhancements

Informed by the Bedlington Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy prepare a town enhancement programme. This will also consider issues outside the conservation area, including matters such as path/ cycle route maintenance.

Community action 3: Dog fouling

Work with Northumberland County Council to better control dog fouling across the plan area, including awareness raising, increasing the provision of bins and increasing patrols.

Community action 4: Antisocial behaviour

Work with Northumbria Police and Northumberland County Council to more effectively tackle incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Community action 5: Assets of community value

Work with the local community to compile a list of potential assets of community value for submission to Northumberland County Council.

Community action 6: Parking management

Work with Northumberland County Council to assess options for the introduction of parking restrictions, including residents only parking schemes, to improve parking management across the plan area.

Community action 7: Public toilets

Work in collaboration with local shops and community facilities to develop a ‘community toilet scheme’ where toilets are made available for public use during opening hours.