WANSBECK

Wansbeck Design Guide

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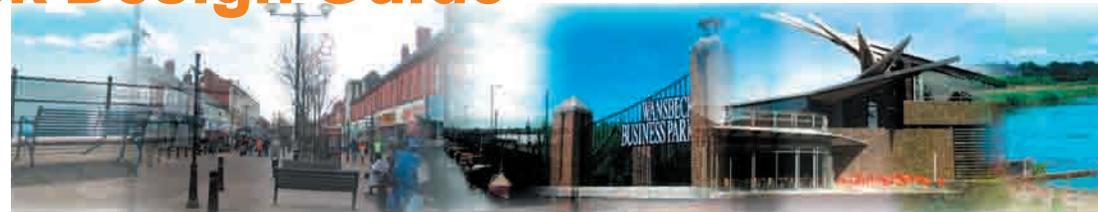
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design

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Preface

Wansbeck today is a series of distinctive and characterful communities. The way the place is reflects the past but also responds to what people want today, and to their hopes for the future. Everyone who lives in Wansbeck, who works here or visits the district, plays a part in this place making.

Wansbeck District Council have a particularly important role as local planning authority making decisions about the location and appearance of new development. The Wansbeck Design Guide and the associated detailed guidance on residential development and residential extensions will help the Council to do this consistently and well. It will also be invaluable to developers, architects and everyone who cares about improving design quality.

The variety and local distinctiveness of Wansbeck's communities is the core of the Design Guide. It starts with a detailed appraisal of this varying character and builds this into advice and guidance. We hope that together we can raise awareness of the importance of design, improve its quality and maintain Wansbeck as an area where people want to live, work and visit.

Alex Wallace
Councillor for Environment and Regulatory Services
Portfolio Holder and Design Champion

How to use the Design Guide

This Guide assists developers, applicants, local communities, the District Council's Members and Officers and other agencies by providing guidance on achieving a high quality of design. The Guide is sensitive to the variety in the built and natural environment across Wansbeck.

The Design Guide is in four sections:

- **Preface;**
  How to Use the Guide
- **Part 1;**
  Introduction and the Character of Wansbeck
- **Part 2;**
  Design Guidance
- **Implementation and Toolkit**

The **Introduction**, outlines the role of urban design and the purpose of the Guide. This includes a brief review of who is involved in urban design as well as key aspects. An overview of the national planning policy context and the Local Development Framework is also given.

The Character of Wansbeck, sets the context by describing the objectives of the Framework and the character of the District. A detailed Design and Landscape Audit identified eight character areas:

- Town Centres
- Sheds
- Housing
- Open Spaces
- Rural
- Coast
- Riverside
- Movement Corridors

The Design Guidance section covers four areas:

- **Character Area Guidelines:** to give a distinct and tailored response to the different types of area across the District.
- **Best Practice Principles**
- **Residential Development Guidance** to provide practical advice and design guidance for new residential developments in Wansbeck.
- **Residential Extensions Guidance** providing design guidance to anyone wishing to extend their house.

Implementation and Tool Kit, sets out a range of tools to assist in the implementation of the design policy and guidance. These include:

- **Design and Access Statements** (setting out their coverage and use);
- **Public Works Checklist:** to ensure public sector investment considers urban design objectives;
- **Design Review Committee:** to ensure all public works are well as private development projects contribute to the creation of high quality environments;
- **Future Guidance:** defining strategies, Guides, masterplans, design briefs, how these relate to the new development plan system; and
- **Further Reading:** listing key documents and guidance.

Introduction

This section of the Guide sets out the context within which it has been prepared and should be used. It provides an overview of urban design and the aspiration of the District Council to raise design quality across the District.

This Design Guide is part of Wansbeck District Council's commitment to achieving high standards of design quality in new development. It will assist professionals, developers and householders in preparing development proposals and is a set of guidelines which will help the District Council assess the design implications of planning applications. The Design Guide seeks to promote good design practice by all those involved in the development process.

The Status of this Document

This document contains practical guidance on design issues for development in Wansbeck. Ultimately its status is Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). As one of a series of Local Development Documents (LDDs) this guide forms part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) for the District as set out in the Council's 'Local Development Scheme' (LDS) January 2005.

The Design Guide is a key material consideration when determining applications for planning permission.

The Design Guide supplements the appropriate sections of the policies and proposals contained in the Wansbeck District Local Plan (2007), which with the Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan, the Northumberland Waste Local Plan and the Northumberland Minerals Local Plan, forms the development plan for Wansbeck.

All development will be required to have regard to the Design Guide. This also includes works and development in the public realm resulting from the Council's own activities including the implementation of the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The purpose is to achieve design excellence in all new developments.

Vision

One of the key aims of the Wansbeck Community Strategy and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is raising the quality of the housing and the physical environment, and improving quality of life. The challenge is to make Wansbeck a place where people choose to live, work and visit. This means developing new and exciting buildings and places whilst preserving the best of our natural landscapes and built heritage. Urban design is a key aspect of this.

This Design Guide for Wansbeck reflects the industrial heritage and varied landscape of rivers, coast and countryside in a widespread commitment to improve the quality of the natural and built environment. As part of an overall regeneration programme for Wansbeck, the aim is to create a special place, in overall terms, and many special places in the different localities.

Aims

The purpose of the Wansbeck Design Guide is to help developers, applicants, local communities, the District Councils' Members and Officers and other agencies with guidance on achieving a high quality of design in developing and restoring the many urban and rural areas across the District.

The long-term objective is to make Wansbeck a place of choice through the quality of the environment on offer. This approach also responds to the strong impetus from the Government to place urban design at the heart of the development planning and regeneration agenda.

In the late 1990s, the District Council produced supplementary planning guidance on two topics - new residential development and house extensions. This guidance has been updated and incorporated as part of this new style supplementary planning document concerning design guidance for all forms of new development.

In general throughout the District it is clear that urban design must play an integral role in all regeneration initiatives that are being pursued across Wansbeck. In line with national and regional initiatives there is an acknowledged need for the District Council to raise the quality of design.

Urban Design – What is it?

Urban design is the art of creating places that have that special quality, both in the new and in the regeneration of the old.

There is a renewed commitment led by the Government to create quality places and stop the monotonous, repetitive, dull developments of the last fifty years or so that have begun to dominate the character of our villages and towns.

This commitment to urban design is being embedded in planning and regeneration policy at a national level through planning policy guidance and the research and action of such organisations as Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). At the local level Council's are beginning to interpret and implement these policies with the principal aim of raising the quality of the natural and built environment.

This Guide is one example of how design quality can be raised and placed at the heart of the development process.

The Importance of Urban Design

The Guide and its outreach

The Design Guide seeks to:

1. Reach out to all those likely to be affected; communities, developers, regeneration agencies and the District Council itself;
2. Be concerned with the Council's spatial policies and actions;
3. Cover both design policy and guidance and how the policy can be implemented.

Who is involved in Urban Design?

In a word, 'everyone'. The processes of urban design involve local authorities, regeneration agencies developers and all the development professions (planners, architects, landscape architects, chartered surveyors and environmentalists for example). Above all, the processes should include the communities of an area: the authorities and developers working with them.

An important first step is to make urban design an integral part of planning policy and of its implementation.

Secondly, there is a strong duty of responsibility through the implementation of public sector investment plans (schools, health service, social housing, public realm works etc.) for the District Council and its partners to set the standards for urban design.

Key Issues

In adopting the approach set out in the Guide, the District Council recognises:

- The economic and social importance of creating attractive places for local people, investors and in the competitive positioning of the District;
- That inspirational and achievable visions and roles for the town centres, riverside, coast, commercial and industrial sites, housing areas, estates and villages are required;
- The need for urban design to be integral to all areas of public and private investment;
- That the industrial history of the District have resulted in a high level of severance between areas and uses and that the changing nature of the District now provides new opportunities for better linkages between areas and uses and a more cohesive and attractive environment;
- Urban design has been an under valued discipline to date and that a new culture is desirable to create quality places right across the District.

Key Aspects of Good Urban Design

Places for People
For places to be well used and well loved, they must be safe, comfortable, varied and attractive. They also need to be distinctive, and offer variety, choice and fun. Vibrant and successful places offer opportunities for meeting people, playing in the street and watching the world go by.

Enrich the Existing
New development should enrich the qualities of existing urban places. This means encouraging a distinctive response that arises from and complements locally distinctive patterns of development, landscape and culture.

Make Connections
Places need to be easy to get to and move around. Good urban design should promote accessibility and local permeability by making places that connect with each other through, putting people before traffic and integrating land uses and transport.

Public Realm
To promote public spaces and routes that are stimulating, attractive, safe, uncluttered and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.

Mix Uses and Forms
Stimulating, enjoyable and convenient places meet a variety of demands from the widest possible range of users and social groups. Good urban design should promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible developments and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs. The waterfront, town centre and other regeneration sites of Wansbeck provide important opportunities.

Work with the Landscape
Places that strike a balance between the natural and man made environment and respond to each site's qualities and resources - the climate, landform, landscape and ecology - to maximise energy conservation and amenity. Here, the river, the coast, the urban fringe and open space corridors are particularly important.

Design for Change
New development needs to be flexible enough to respond to future changes in use, lifestyle and demography. This means designing for energy and resource efficiency; creating flexibility in the use of property, public spaces and the service infrastructure and introducing new approaches to transportation, traffic management and parking.

Key Aspects of Good Building Design

Appearance
The building should demonstrate a high level of architectural ambition. The plans, sections, structural elements, environmental services, materials and detailing should be integral to the overall architectural expression of the building.

Context
The building should make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its neighbourhood. It should respond to the natural patterns of movement in and around the site, take advantage of potential views and vistas and be orientated to maximise efficiency of energy use.

Sustainability
The building should be constructed using efficient building techniques using materials from sustainable sources. The design should minimise the use of non-renewable energy sources.

Maintenance
The building should be designed to minimise repair, maintenance, energy, and security costs. The design should take account of all estimated costs over the whole life of the building.

Planning Policy and Design in Wansbeck

The following section highlights some of the key issues in terms of policy and best practice. This is not an exhaustive recital of policy but rather an overview. A full list of 'Further Reading' is included as a part of this Guide.

National Planning Context

In the last decade urban design and the promotion of good design through the planning system has become a central aspect of the Government's renaissance agenda. In the context of national Government guidance this is emphasised in Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1).

"Good design ensures attractive usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning. Planning authorities should plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings,

public and private spaces and wider area development schemes. Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted." PPS 1, paragraphs 33-34

Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Guides (PPS 12), provides a similar emphasis.

"Local development documents relating to specific areas could usefully inform the implementation of strategic design policies by including design policies that relate to local conditions and objectives." PPS 12, paragraph 1.14

In addition, "By Design" commissioned by DETR promotes higher standards in Urban Design.

Local Planning Context
The new Wansbeck District Local Plan has been adopted which replaces the first version of the Wansbeck District Local Plan adopted in April 1994. The new plan takes account of the Inspector's recommendations following a public inquiry into the re-deposit draft of the Replacement Local Plan (August 2005). Under new arrangements introduced by the Planning and Compensation Act 2004, the Inspector's findings are binding on the Council. Together with the Northumberland County and National Park Joint Structure Plan, the Northumberland Waste Local Plan and the Northumberland Minerals Local Plan, it forms the development plan for Wansbeck.

Within the new Local Plan there are a number of policies which relate to design. Some of the policies with direct relevance are outlined below.

- **GP30**: Developments will be assessed in terms of visual impact. Those which in visual terms would cause significant harm to the character or quality of the surrounding environment will be refused.
- **GP31**: The Council will require high standards of urban design in development proposals to: promote character in townscape and landscape and establish local identity; clearly define public and private spaces; and encourage accessibility; make places with a clear image; and promote diversity and choice through a mix of compatible uses.
- **GP32**: Developers are required to incorporate a high standard of landscape treatment into their developments.
- **GP33**: Public art will be required to be incorporated into developments.
- **GP34**: Developers will be required to address energy efficiency issues through design.
- **GP35**: Developers are required to demonstrate that they have 'designed out' opportunities for crime.
- **H5** : Seeks to ensure that new housing areas help to create sustainable communities, that they are well planned and well designed and that residents enjoy a high standard of living environment. It requires developers to think imaginatively about designs and layouts to create housing areas that fit with the surrounding area and offer a high quality network of streets and open spaces, a clear image and identity and a choice of housing opportunities.

It is proposed that the broad design principles of the Design Guide will form part of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy which will be published in the future'.

Core Design Policy
An overarching and core design policy is set out below. As with the broad design principles this will be incorporated as a part of the LDF Core Strategy.

Design Guide Policy CD1

Core Design Policy
Design is a core element of the Council's planning policy. This is to ensure that the quality of the urban and rural environments throughout the District are of the highest possible standard. The policy applies to both new development and regeneration.

Development proposals will be expected to contribute to the creation of a high quality, sustainable environments which enhance and complement the natural and built assets of Wansbeck. This will be achieved by:

- Promoting sustainable development of the highest quality and encouraging innovation and excellence in design to create places of distinction and a sense of place;
- Maximising the use of previously developed land and promoting good quality mixed use developments;
- Promoting design solutions that maximise the use of renewable resources and resource conservation;
- Providing for quality in the public realm through the use of imaginative design, quality materials and landscaping and imaginative use of public art;

- Maintaining and enhancing the amenities and character of residential areas, securing good relationships with existing development, and respecting the scale and nature of that development;
- Creating safe, permeable development and spaces that encourage walking and cycling;
- Safeguarding and enhancing the historic environment;
- Protecting and enhancing rural and urban open spaces and the biodiversity of the District; and
- Safeguarding and enhancing nature and conservation sites of international, national and local importance.

Design Statements will be required with most planning applications (see policy DS1). The Design Statement will require analysis of the physical context of the proposals, an account of options developed and their evaluation, and finally the proposals and why they provide an optimum design response to the site and its setting.

All development will be required to have regard to the Wansbeck Design Guide.

Study Process

Research
The research and background work for this report has been extensive. It has encompassed a District-wide Design and Landscape Audit and other local studies; defining development typologies, site and area characteristics right across the District.

At a local level, other studies commissioned by the District Council, development proposals and sites, other planning, regeneration and related studies and policies were examined together with the regional policy background.

At a national level, the relevant policy documents of the CABE and DCLG were studied. The Design Guide is, therefore, a product of this research.

Consultation
As a part of the preparation of this Guide, consultations were held within the District at Officer level as well as an initial round of community consultation. A 'Stakeholder' event was also held involving community, development, conservation and professionals interested and active in the area.

The preparation of the Guide has involved a series of presentations, workshops and events, these are summarised as follows:

- Officer Workshop to discuss content and coverage of the Guide;
- Public consultation events to raise the profile of design in the District and introduce the concept of the Wansbeck Design Guide organized through the Wansbeck Initiative Community Area Partnerships.
- Officer Site Visit to look at examples of new development and housing extensions across the District; and
- User Group Workshop to introduce a draft version of the Design Guide to stakeholders and professionals.

The Approach
Wansbeck's geography is very diverse: from town centres to suburbs of varying age and character, riverside and coast. An ordering mechanism is necessary for effective design advice in these different situations. This study has defined and analysed eight "Character Areas".

The Character Area analysis illustrates the variety of urban form and typology in Wansbeck and the issues this raises. The Guide includes:

- Best Practice Principles
- Character Area Design Guidance

These have been organised as design guidance for the character areas with generic/best practice principles cutting across all the character areas. This is illustrated below.

Urban Design Guidelines
In short, the Design Guide has the potential to act as the driving force for the District's commitment to quality, innovation and sustainability.

Area Guidelines

GENERIC GUIDELINES
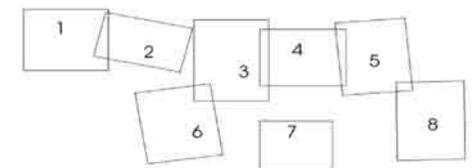
The Character of Wansbeck

Overview

Wansbeck is both urban and rural. A splendid coastline creates its eastern boundary and the River Blyth the southern. It has evolved over centuries: from fishing and maritime uses, to mining activity and more recently business and service industries. Settlements are set within a strong green space network, there are a number of listed buildings and three rich conservation areas.

The District has a varied character of gently undulating farmland falling towards narrow valleys carved by the Rivers Wansbeck and Blyth. The rivers flow eastward through the District to the North Sea coast with expansive sandy beaches and occasional rocky outcrops.

Several prominent signs of the District's industrial legacy remain. The Cambois peninsula (including Battleship Wharf and the site of the former Blyth Power Station) represents a major regeneration opportunity which is being progressed through the Blyth Estuary Development Framework.

The District benefits from a main north-south route, the A189 South East Northumberland Spine Road and a strong network of local roads. Connectivity is good both within the District and with other parts of Northumberland and Tyneside.

Public transport within and to Wansbeck is reliant on bus services. There are good links to Tyneside and between the towns of Ashington, Bedlington, Bedlington Station and Newbiggin by the Sea. However, some parts of the District, such as Cambois have few services. This exaggerates the remoteness of living on the peninsula for those who are reliant on public transport.

Passenger rail travel stopped within Wansbeck in the early 1960's. However the majority of the rail infrastructure within the District still remains as the lines are used for freight trains. This provides a possibility of reintroducing passenger rail travel through the Ashington-Blyth Tyne line.

The Challenge

The overall picture is one of opportunity and hope. The best can be conserved and the settings improved, while the worst can be addressed step by step by redevelopment and regeneration. New linkages and a new cohesion across the area can be created. The landscape has intrinsic quality and character. The many splendid elements of built heritage can be combined with new and improved development of quality to create an area really worth living in, visiting and investing in.

The vision is to create a series of quality places making the District a place of delight.

Roads and the 'shed' environment can be given better and stronger landscape edges to contain their negative impact. Open spaces and the coastline can be defined with new quality development where currently there are raw edges.

Redevelopment and rehabilitation of uninviting housing estates can enhance these areas, their built form, landscape and connectivity. Streets and squares throughout the District can be redesigned to create attractive local places Quality, identity and linkage being the themes.

This requires a wholehearted commitment to design quality in place making across the District. This commitment needs a new culture, shared by communities, the development industry and the public agencies to create quality places in all that is done.

The need for character areas design guidance

Post 1947 planning has until recently been largely land use/zoning based, and this has been reinforced by a whole range of measures which are land use specific (e.g. residential density; industrial plot ratios; parking and open space standards etc) with little reference to particular types of places or to design policies and guidance. It was a 'one size fits all' approach. Yet it is clear that different areas (riverside, inner Victorian housing area and outlying village for example) require approaches tailored to their specific characteristics.

The new planning regulations demand attention to local identity. Wansbeck can reinforce and celebrate its very variable urban geography by such an approach.

Key

Coast	
Town centres	
Shed environment	
Rural	
Open space	
Housing	
Riverside	
Movement Corridors	

Character area: Overall
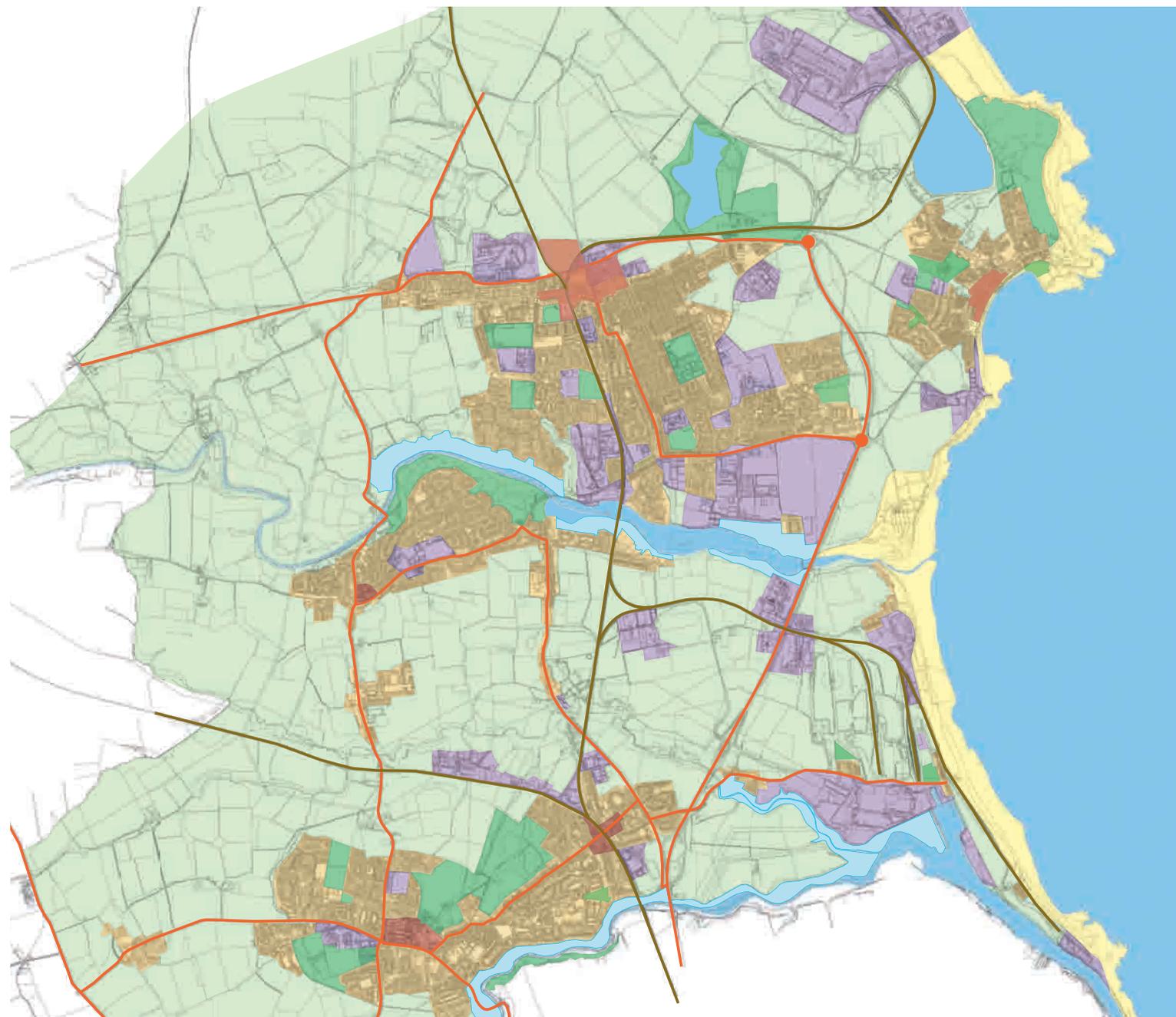
Identification of character areas

The District has a complex set of character areas, with the juxtaposition of housing and industry. The Design Guide has identified the following character areas:

- Town Centres
- Sheds
- Housing
- Open Space
- Rural
- Coast
- Riverside
- Movement Corridors

Each area has its own distinctive character – created by the interplay of physical elements, i.e. streets, built form, layout, permeability and open spaces. Each category requires a distinct design response.

These categories do not provide a definitive, blanket coverage, or consideration of every urban design element within the District; but they illustrate the variety of urban form, typology and issues. Some character areas encompass sub-categories, for example, the different town centres and the variety of housing forms.

The remainder of this chapter provides a description of each character area. A Character Areas Matrix summarises the areas against key design principles. A Character Areas Plan identifies the areas and their locations within the District.

Town Centres

Wansbeck has four principal settlements:

- Ashington;
- Bedlington;
- Bedlington Station; and
- Newbiggin by the Sea.

Each of these have important central areas providing a range of facilities and services for the local communities. They each present unique design issues and challenges.

Illustrations present two levels of analysis for the town centres:

- General plans illustrating the overall structure and uses within the town centre with emphasis on movement and relationships to adjoining residential areas; and
- Plans showing key areas of each town centre presenting the challenges and opportunities in more detail.

Ashington

Ashington has it's origins in the late 19th century as a coal mining settlement. Today the coal mining industry has gone but the fabric of a strong town centre surrounded by tight terraced streets remains.

In more recent times Ashington has expanded around significant transport corridors: the A197 to Morpeth and Newbiggin and the A196 North Seaton Road running parallel to the railway line with retail uses around the junction of Station Road – North Seaton Road.

There is an ongoing programme of public realm improvements which is gradually refreshing the image of the town. The shopping provision within Ashington town centre is good and includes three supermarkets. However only one of these (Netto on Woodhorn Road) is centrally located but in an inappropriate building whilst the other two (Asda and Lidl) are located in low quality sheds on the edge of the town centre and offering little visual benefit to the town centre. The co-op which was in a high quality neoclassical building of appropriate massing has recently closed. There is also a comprehensive range of retail and leisure services catering for the needs of the community. Wansbeck Hospital and Northumberland College are also within reasonable walking distance from the town centre.

The buildings on Station Road are mainly late 19th century 2-storey buildings interspersed with some high quality Victorian and Neoclassical 3-4 storey character buildings. The character of the centre is quite rich in terms of plot and height variety as well as a variety of styles. There are a number of feature buildings that reinforce the identity of the centre, but the overall appearance lacks coherence.

The urban blocks in the town centre are large and do not encourage pedestrian movement. Apart from the pedestrianised parts of Station Road, the streets are not pedestrian friendly with poor enclosure and their design aimed at traffic management rather than creating a pleasant environment for pedestrians. Footpaths are sufficiently wide but oversized junctions on the main street make the pedestrian circulation complicated.

The main retail area, Station Road, is characterised by fine grain plots with shops on the ground floor and some limited residential use above. Traffic calming and public realm works have been undertaken at the eastern end of Station Road which has created more of a pedestrian focus for the area. This is in addition to the main pedestrianised area at the western end of Station Road.

On North Seaton Road the retail units around the junction of A197-A196 are within walking distance of the main retail area in the Town Centre but the design and layout is geared more towards car users with extensive areas of parking. In addition the units fail to form a successful gateway into Ashington from the A179. The area has the potential for redevelopment which could provide improved integration with and links to the town centre.

See Indicative section of Station Road between residential and commercial use

with public and private spaces fronting onto the Road. The cross section illustrates a positive enclosure to this part of the centre with some 3-storey commercial blocks opposite fine grain 2-storey shops.

See Indicative section of Station Road showing shared surface environment and enclosure. The drawing below highlights the poor enclosure on North Seaton Road in an attempt to create private (left side) or public (right side) open space in front of buildings.

The public realm in Ashington town centre has a mismatch of materials and colours. At present there is no coherent identity and varies even within the same street. There have been some recent public realm works but there is no comprehensive approach to the entire town centre yet. Hopefully the public realm design guide will help to improve this.

Queen Elizabeth II Country Park and Wansbeck Riverside Park is within a reasonable walking distance of the town centre, but pedestrian access to these is not good. Ashington People's Park is the closest public amenity space to the town centre and green links to this could be enhanced. In general there is a shortage of public spaces and incidental green spaces.

Bedlington

Bedlington town centre stretches along Front Street, the centre is legible and picturesque with historic buildings, and incidental green spaces along the main road. It is clear there has been a public realm strategy which has enhanced character and quality.

The town centre is the oldest part of Bedlington as it is today, dating back to the early 19th century. Front Street and Market Place have maintained the town's historic character. Fragmenting elements of the otherwise successful town centre are the larger scale retail and civic developments such as Netto and Somerfield supermarkets, the Magistrates' Court and police headquarters to the north, with large areas of car parking and general lack of structure.

The town centre is linear and extends only on the frontage of Front Street and a small part of Glebe Road to the North. To the south of Front Street lie more recent housing developments.

See Cross section of Front Street. This captures the special character of Bedlington town centre with unfolding views and the separation of pedestrians from the road by using the level changes.

The town centre is relatively 'green' with car parking incorporated to the rear of Front Street. There are a variety of setbacks creating incidental spaces on the main street, including substantial areas of landscaping such as that in front of the District Council offices

There is an attractive public realm with well-maintained green spaces and a good balance of hard to soft landscaping. On-street car parking in Bedlington is less successful and is not organised or successfully incorporated. There is provision within the Local Transport Plan to improve car parking on Front Street including the introduction of short-stay.

There are a number of examples of new buildings which vary in scale and massing from the historic character of the town. This creates a mismatch in scale and styles which detracts from the inherent quality of the town.

The topography of Bedlington adds interest especially on Front Street where in places the shops and pavements sit higher than the street producing visually interesting spaces. The shopping and leisure provision in Bedlington is modest. There is a balanced mix of uses with some residential above shops, as well as a number of civic buildings. The urban grain is quite uniform in terms of heights (2-storey mainly with some single storey shops). The plot grain is quite varied due to the various civic buildings. The north part of Front Street presents a consistent frontage with integrated on street parking, whilst the south has various setbacks in front of important buildings with incidental green spaces, which adds variety and interest.

Bedlington is surrounded by rural areas to the north south and west, whilst the east boundary is formed by the river Blyth and its valley. This is a very attractive setting but not fully capitalised upon. Unfortunately the only access point to the river is at the extension of Front Street but there is no visual connection due to dense landscaping, and the town centre does not extend towards the river with leisure or recreation uses.

Bedlington Station

Bedlington Station is a smaller settlement situated around the railway, River Blyth and the transport corridor connecting Bedlington to Newbiggin. Most of the housing in Bedlington Station is quite recent, but the centre maintains some historic buildings with character.

The town centre is linear and stretches along Station Road and spans either side of the railway line. The majority of shops are to the east of the railway also expanding to Station Street and Ravensworth Terrace.

The quality of public realm in Bedlington Station is relatively poor. The footpaths are generally narrow and the streets are car dominated with a poor provision for car parking. Signage in the town centre is ad hoc and cluttered. There is also a lack of organised and incidental public spaces in or around the town centre.

In general terms the character of Station Road is not memorable and the area would benefit from general building repair works. The retail offer is limited but supplemented by hot food take-aways and pubs. Most buildings are 2-storey but there are also some single storey retail units.

Most of the housing to the rear of Station Street is recent and in general backs onto the rear of the shops, which is quite successful in terms of safety. However, the blocks are large and there are insufficient connections to the residential areas.

The River Blyth lies to the south of Bedlington Station. The only connection to the riverside is via Melrose Avenue directly off Station Road. The riverside area could be capitalised on more as leisure and recreation opportunity.

Newbiggin by the Sea

Newbiggin is an attractive seaside town, which, over the centuries, has made good use of its links with the sea. At one time the town was a thriving port but today just maintains a small fleet of the traditional Northumbrian fishing boats.

Today the town centre, dates from mainly around the second part of the 19th century when the village was experiencing higher levels of prosperity. Most of the housing in Newbiggin dates from the 1920s but there is also some more recent housing. The town has been popular as a holiday destination since the early twentieth century and this continues today, to a certain extent, with the caravan park and day visitors.

The town centre has a very strong character and this is demonstrated through variety in building eras. The varying character to the scale and streetscape results in a meandering alignment of the street. A key landmark just behind the town centre is the 13-century St. Bartholomew's Church

One of the main roads in the town is Front Street. This features good strong enclosure and the frontage to the coastline is also strong. The relationship between the main shopping street and the seaside promenade is not straightforward as views are inhibited by the level changes. The quality of the pedestrian routes to the coast are poor.

See cross section illustrating indicative section on Front Street – Square Street in front of the new band stand showing the

relationship of the town centre to the coast. The town is characterised by a variety in urban form with some areas are quite dense and fine grain and others characterised by larger buildings and open spaces. The area is also quite varied in terms of width and treatment (e.g. car parking, surfaces) The eastern part of Front Street has a consistent road frontage with buildings fronting directly onto the street, whilst Gibson Street has a more varied building line with variations in setbacks. The retail offer is relatively limited but in line with what would be expected in terms of retail hierarchy and proximity to Ashington.

There has been recent investment to the public realm in Newbiggin, with traffic calming measures on Front Street, high quality paving and shared surfaces and on-street parking. The bandstand on the square on Bridge Street is a successful feature. There is scope for further improvements in terms of signage and street furniture.

Whilst links to the residential areas to the north of Front Street and Gibson Street are regular, there is an issue with links to the coast. The urban grain is fine but most routes and footpaths lead to dead ends and they don't celebrate the proximity to the coast either with physical links or with views.

The major asset for Newbiggin is the coastal location and character. There is a heritage trail and visitors centre on the promenade. The area around St. Bartholomew's Church is a key asset providing spectacular views across to Newbiggin seafront, it is visible from a distance and has great amenity value.

Whilst lying outside of the town centre area, the Newbiggin Conservation Area contains a number of buildings of notable quality. The degree of its association and influence on the town centre is high and therefore consideration will need to be given to how this association can be drawn upon in improving the quality of the built environment in the town.

Character area: Town centres

Town Centre Sections
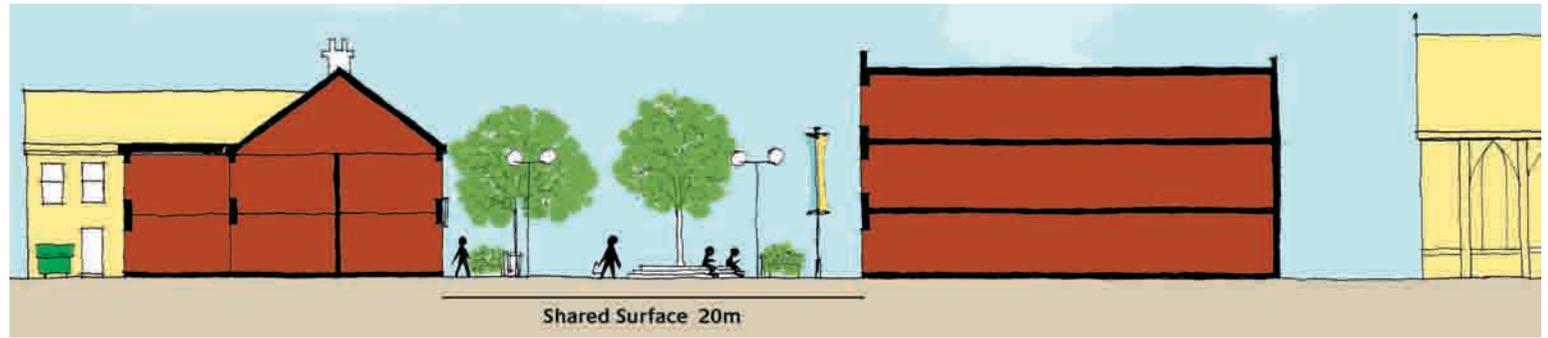
Station Road showing shared surface environment and enclosure

Indicative section on Station Road between residential and commercial use with public and private spaces fronting onto the road

Indicative section showing Bedlington Station – Commercial use with public and private spaces fronting onto the road

Town Centre Sections

Station Road showing shared surface environment and enclosure

Indicative section on Station Road between residential and commercial use with public and private spaces fronting onto the road

Town centres – Ashington

Station Road, shared street, Ashington

Difficult pedestrian movement and cluttered signage, Ashington Town Centre

Feature building, Station Road West, Ashington town centre

Attractive public realm in areas of the town centre

The Co-op superstore is an imposing building on Station Road

Variety of styles and grain

Town centres – Bedlington

Bedlington Front Street

Level change on Front Street

Attractive public realm in Bedlington Town Centre

Variation in setback and incidental green spaces

Fragmentation of town centre with large-scale development, Bedlington

Character buildings on Front Street

Station Road, Bedlington Station

Variations in height, Station Road, Bedlington Station

Marker buildings terminate vistas on Front Street, Newbiggin by the Sea

Band stand and square on the main street, Newbiggin by the Sea

Typical street off Front street towards the seafront, Newbiggin by the Sea

St. Bartholomew church as a landmark at "the point", Newbiggin by the Sea

'Shed' Environment

In common with other urban areas across Britain, redevelopment for non-housing purposes has become dominated by the 'shed environment', whether for retail, manufacturing or commercial uses. Developments are rarely of architectural quality with large car parks, unsightly service areas and little or no landscaping. The layouts are a matter of internal function and it is rare to see any regard given to the surroundings of the site, through linkages for pedestrians and access to public transport.

Wansbeck has undergone significant change in the local economy since the collapse of the coalmining industry in the early 1980's. The District now contains many large 'shed developments' that provide facilities for manufacturing, commercial and retail uses. The majority of these are located on large traditional industrial estates covering approximately 200 acres of land in the District. The main 'shed areas' in the District are located at:

- Lintonville, Ashington
- Wansbeck Business Park, Ashington
- Ashwood Business Park (under construction)
- Green Lane Workshops, Ashington
- Jubilee Industrial Estate, Ashington
- North Seaton Industrial Estate, Ashington
- West Sleekburn Industrial Estate, Cambois
- Barrington Industrial Estate, Bedlington Station
- Welwyn Electronics, Bedlington Station

The District also has two business parks: Wansbeck Business Park and Ashwood Business Park (currently under construction). Both of which provide a higher quality environment for employment purposes.

There are a number of existing employers in Cambois, which are important to the local economy. In addition the Cambois area remains allocated for future employment uses focused around Battleship Wharf. As well as meeting the needs of existing employers, the area has the potential to accommodate the expansion of other local businesses and new inward investment. The Port of Blyth is a potential catalyst with the Battleship Wharf site important for future development and expansion.

In general, the 'shed' developments in the District are not visually pleasing and the design of buildings and public realm are not sensitive to the location. There is an opportunity to increase standards in new development, raising the quality of the design of buildings and landscaping.

There is also the potential to capitalise on the natural beauty of, rivers and open spaces in close proximity to new and established shed areas. Recent initiatives have targeted the business environments, for example the INSPIRE Project (South East Northumberland Public Art Initiative) was launched in 2003. This seeks to improve the quality of the built and natural environments through public art and quality design. Artists have transformed the entrances of North Seaton and Jubilee Industrial Estates, by creating unique marker features. Similar schemes would improve many of the existing estates. In general the current quality of the 'shed' environment is poor, however reversing this problem could prove difficult, given that the land and buildings are under private ownership and there is often little or no incentive to make improvements.

Character area: Sheds

Sheds
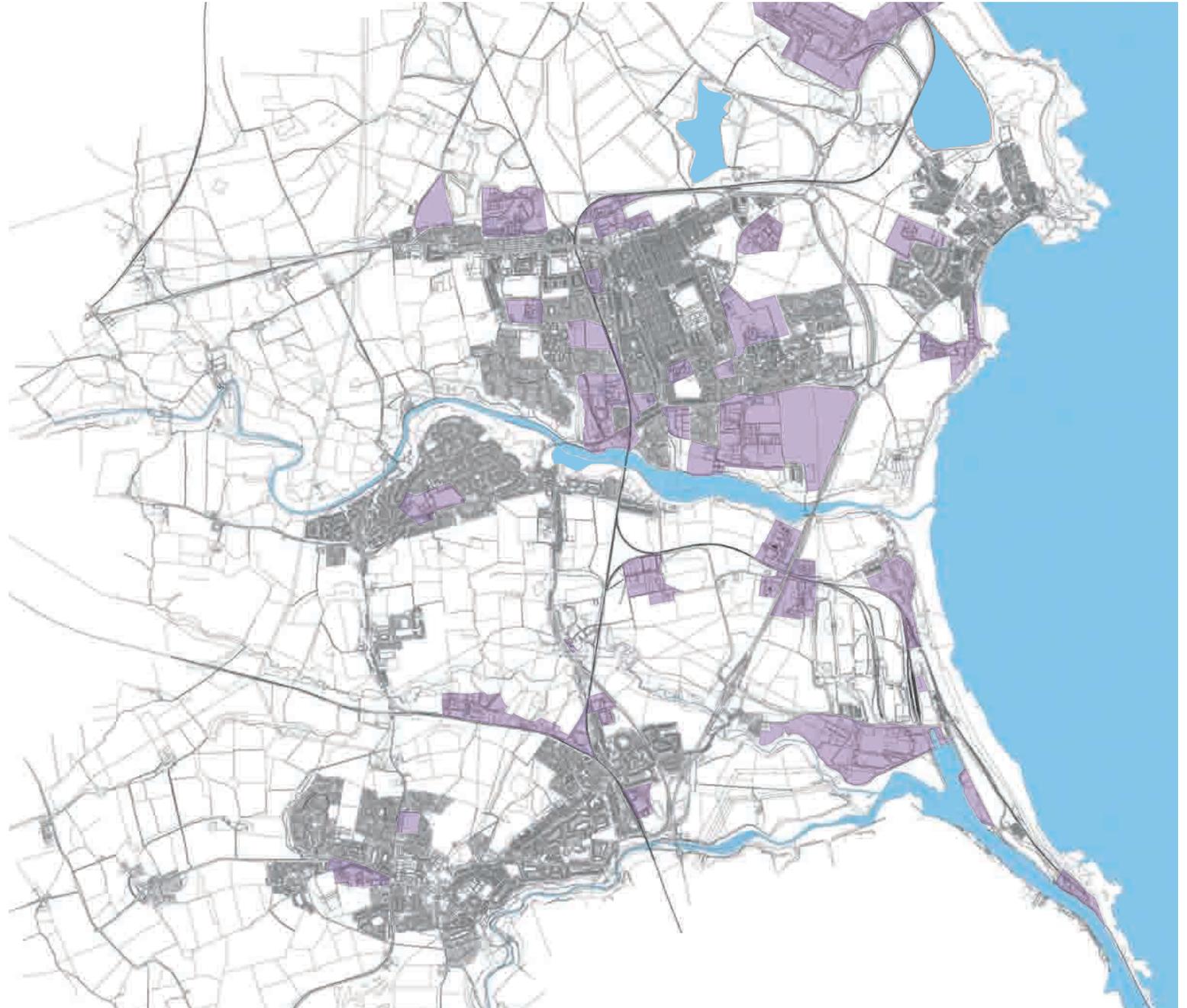
The NCFE – attempts made to improve the design of the buildings

Cambois - unattractive views and a lack of attractive landscape features

Jubillee Industrial Estate - Initative to improve the entrances with public art

North Seaton Industrial Estate - Similar building design makes it difficult to orientate within many of the estates

North Seaton Industrial Estate - Detail of external spaces create incoherent and unattractive places

North Seaton Industrial Estate - Initiative to improve the entrances with public art

Housing

Introduction

The District has a varied housing character. In broad terms, traditional terraces and historic settlements can be found towards town and village centres in established communities, and interwar and modern housing is mostly located within suburban, edge of town and rural areas.

There are contrasts in location, age and quality of settlements throughout Wansbeck, from more affluent villages such as Nedderton to communities that are struggling in isolated locations, such as Cambois.

Different local areas have unique strengths and weaknesses. There are neighbourhoods in Wansbeck that work very well in terms of their strong urban form and mature landscape and there are others that are failing to create a successful place with any identity. It is essential that when a regeneration opportunity arises within an established area, urban design issues are addressed.

There is a clear distinction between the age and character of housing. These distinct 'periods' will form the structure of the following sections.

- Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian housing (Historic);
- Interwar housing;
- 1950's to 1970's housing (Post-war); and
- Recent housing (Post 1980).

Georgian and Victorian development (Historic)

The District's historic housing is divided between the smaller former mining cottages, and highly cherished older properties, many within local conservation areas, such as Bedlington, Bothal and Newbiggin by the Sea. These latter neighbourhoods are known and loved throughout the District for their strong character and quality of architectural finish. High quality and durable local materials are often used and the attention to detail is very good. They have strong urban form: with housing fronting onto streets and spaces that create natural surveillance, varied corner and window details, period features. They have a building block structure that is easy to navigate.

There is a logical street network with a hierarchy of function and character. Main roads feel like main roads, with properties set back from the street to secure privacy. Tight enclosure in residential streets (the space between buildings) discourages through traffic and makes streets feel more intimate. These neighbourhoods are often located within a town or village centre, with easy access to community facilities and services; properties generally front onto public spaces like streets or greens, creating unique local character and community cohesion.

There are examples where traditional buildings are found outside or on the outskirts of settlements. These can be historic churches and houses (for example, Hartford Hall) or older farm buildings.

There are many traditional mining cottages and terraces, with the largest concentration in the Hirst area of Ashington. Smaller clusters are found throughout the District: Bedlington Station, North Seaton Colliery, Stakeford, Newbiggin by the Sea and Cambois. The terraces vary greatly in overall layout and there are a variety of garden solutions, access and orientation. The main difference is in the treatment of fronts/back relations. Some have fronts that meet other fronts but in other cases, fronts meet backs. In some instances, original backs become makeshift fronts that people use on a day-to-day basis, with a footpath only accesses the front door. The houses are generally in a reasonable to good state of repair, many terraces in the District have received external and environmental improvements as part of a group repair (enveloping) schemes.

The main weakness in large estates from this era is the rigid urban form. Traditional terraces rarely take advantage of topographical assets – maximising views or creating vistas (other than up and down the narrow rows). Another weakness is that because, in most cases, car parking is located on streets and because residential streets are often narrow, movement by car can be difficult throughout these neighbourhoods. As historic housing was not built to accommodate cars, lack of car parking is often a main concern for residents.

Future opportunities to enhance the high quality of historic settlements should be maximised, especially in central areas; the fronts of shops, churches and

community facilities. Improvements to public realm, surface treatments, open spaces and landscape features should be utilised; older neighbourhoods need continued investment. It is important that new developments and improvements to existing properties are complementary in scale and quality to the character of the area, making sure new additions do not detract from the overall quality of the place.

Interwar Development

Semi detached and detached properties are popular throughout the District. They are typically set within mature landscapes adding to the street character, with examples of tree-lined main roads corridors with separate parallel roads serving the houses. The larger estates are created to crescent and cul-de-sac layouts, fashioned on the "garden village" model.

The street patterns can be convoluted at times and links to community facilities are not always direct, although the areas are generally more permeable and pedestrian friendly than recent housing estates. Post war semis were designed as a reaction to the narrow terraced streets constructed in Victorian times; they often have generous gardens as well as off-street car parking and garages.

A key concern regarding the post war housing stock in Wansbeck are pockets of communal land at the rear of houses, intended either as communal gardens or car parking courts. These spaces can often become locations for vandalism and crime, because of their isolated location out of sight.

Popular estates with many houses extended and improved, often suffer from the "terracing effect " associated with these developments; thus losing the original street character. In future, opportunities must be sought to maintain the unique relation between houses and open space in interwar estates, through sensitive development control and good landscape management.

1950s to 1970's (Post war)

The main bulk of post war housing is found in or around Ashington and between Bedlington and Bedlington Station, most of these originally constructed as local authority housing stock. Additionally, there are areas of popular private developments from this period, and smaller areas of Council properties spread throughout the District.

The larger council estates were designed to the "Radburn" layout, popular throughout the country in the 1960s. In these areas, car and pedestrian access is often completely segregated, leaving houses with dual access and a confused front/back relationship similar to that in some areas of terraced houses.

The design and location of Post war housing can lead to distinct differences in popularity between areas of housing from this period. For example, the Highfield Drive neighbourhood in Ashington appears to be a popular, with a high proportion of tenants having exercised right-to-buy; many residents have extended or altered their properties. This contrasts with the nearby Northumberland Drive area does not seem to be as stable, possibly due to its location as it is essentially an island between two arterial roads into Ashington town centre.

Post war housing is often located in close proximity to open space, although this is not always taken full advantage of. The amount of public realm (i.e. hard and soft surfaces and spaces) is nearly always high, but frequently under cared for and underused.   The Northumberland Drive neighbourhood has several abandoned

green spaces and because there is little definition between public and private spaces, ownership and level of responsibility becomes very confusing for residents.

Although popular, neighbourhoods of this period are compromised by design issues, such as security, safety and the lack of clear fronts and backs. Opportunities to explore the redevelopment of left over and abandoned spaces and to reconfigure car parking should be explored.

Recent housing (post 1980)

Recent housing throughout the District, varies in quality, size and the design issues presented.

Briardene estate in south Ashington is an example of frequently occurring problems of quality of design, materials, layout, integration with existing housing, access and permeability.

Neighbourhoods built in the 1980s and 90s, although very popular, are frequently in isolated locations with a high dependence on car use. They are impermeable; have confusing road networks with lots of cul-de-sacs and long winding roads. Getting around is often difficult and estates tend to be monotonous with little variety in height or distinguishing features. They are also often poorly connected to local community services and public transport networks.

Some recent housing developments do take full advantage of their brownfield location, within established communities. A good example of such an infill development can be found at Sheepwash Bank in Guidepost where properties face onto the street: to give definition to the street and continue the safe pedestrian environment active frontages create.

Another example of new housing respecting its location and existing character, is the Hartford Hall development. This rural scheme, set in the grounds of the former Hall have been developed as private homes and apartments in a considered manner to respect the setting, the character of the Hall and the quality of its grounds.

New development should create strong urban form that respects the local character, ensures that residents can easily access local facilities and public transport and enhances its natural setting. It must, most importantly, ensure that the layout allows for integration with surrounding developments now and in the future.

Character area: Housing

Housing

Terraced streets, Hirst estate, Ashington

Victorian housing in Newbiggin Conservation Area fronting onto local 'village green'

A 'gated community' built with no relationship to its surroundings

Complementing rural character, through appropriate scale, form and materials

Underused and poorly designed public space within 1960's housing estate

Recent streetscape improvements; creating focal entrance points

Housing

Bedlington Conservation Area, Front Street

Infill development at Sheepwash Bank that continues strong urban form

Typical Victorian terrace fronting onto the street with on street parking, Newbiggin

Mature tree lined boulevard creates character within the street

Where back lanes act as 'makeshift' fronts

Out-of-the-way garages are perfect locations for anti-social behaviour

Open Spaces

Wansbeck has many accessible open spaces, which vary in character from sports pitches, play areas to woodland parks. For the purposes of this character assessment, they are categorised into two types – strategic open spaces and local open spaces.

The open spaces in the District provide a good amenity for its residents, particularly at the District wide strategic level of Country Parks. These parks provide many recreational and educational benefits for residents from the district and further afield. The strategic spaces also have good ecological value which will only increase as the parks mature. Pathways link many of these parks to others and to nearby urban areas. Large urban parks, such as Hirst Park, are well located and increasing their value to the residents who use them.

Wansbeck has numerous open spaces, particularly in residential areas, with limited function or purpose. These spaces, usually characterised by large areas of maintained grass and occasional trees, are underused by nearby residents and potentially a maintenance burden to the Council.

Concerns over security can lead to landscape design that is unimaginative and sterile in character. The level of landscape maintenance can also hinder the improvement of public spaces.

The Council has undertaken a PPS 17 Open Space and Recreation Study to assess current and future provision in the District.

Strategic Open Spaces

Strategic open spaces are of significance to the district as a whole and in this study comprise of Choppington Woods, Earth Balance and Queen Elizabeth II Country Park. In addition the extensive open space associated with the District's rivers, the Bedlington Country Park and the Wansbeck Riverside Park, overlap in this character type with that of the 'River' character area.

These strategic spaces all have ecological, recreational and educational value for the District. Mixed woodland provides a habitat for a wide number of animal, bird and insect populations. Some of these are relatively young habitats and their ecological value will increase as they mature. All of the strategic open spaces in Wansbeck provide recreational opportunities for walking, running and cycling – as well as passive activities.

Educational value of these spaces is also good, particularly at Earth Balance that has facilities on site.

Local Open Spaces

Local open spaces are widespread through the District and vary in the nature of use and in the quality of their design and maintenance. The most obvious of these are parks, but this character type also includes sport pitches, cemeteries and general amenity spaces.

Some of the larger parks within the District are notable for their quality, in particular the established Hirst Park in Ashington. This park, which is undergoing reinvestment, has a wide number of uses relevant to the needs of the urban population within its vicinity. However, many smaller parks particularly in residential areas, consist of expanses of grass and little else.

Some of the finest open spaces in the District are cemeteries. These mature landscapes are characterised by established woodland trees, stonewalls and headstones.

Character area: Open Spaces
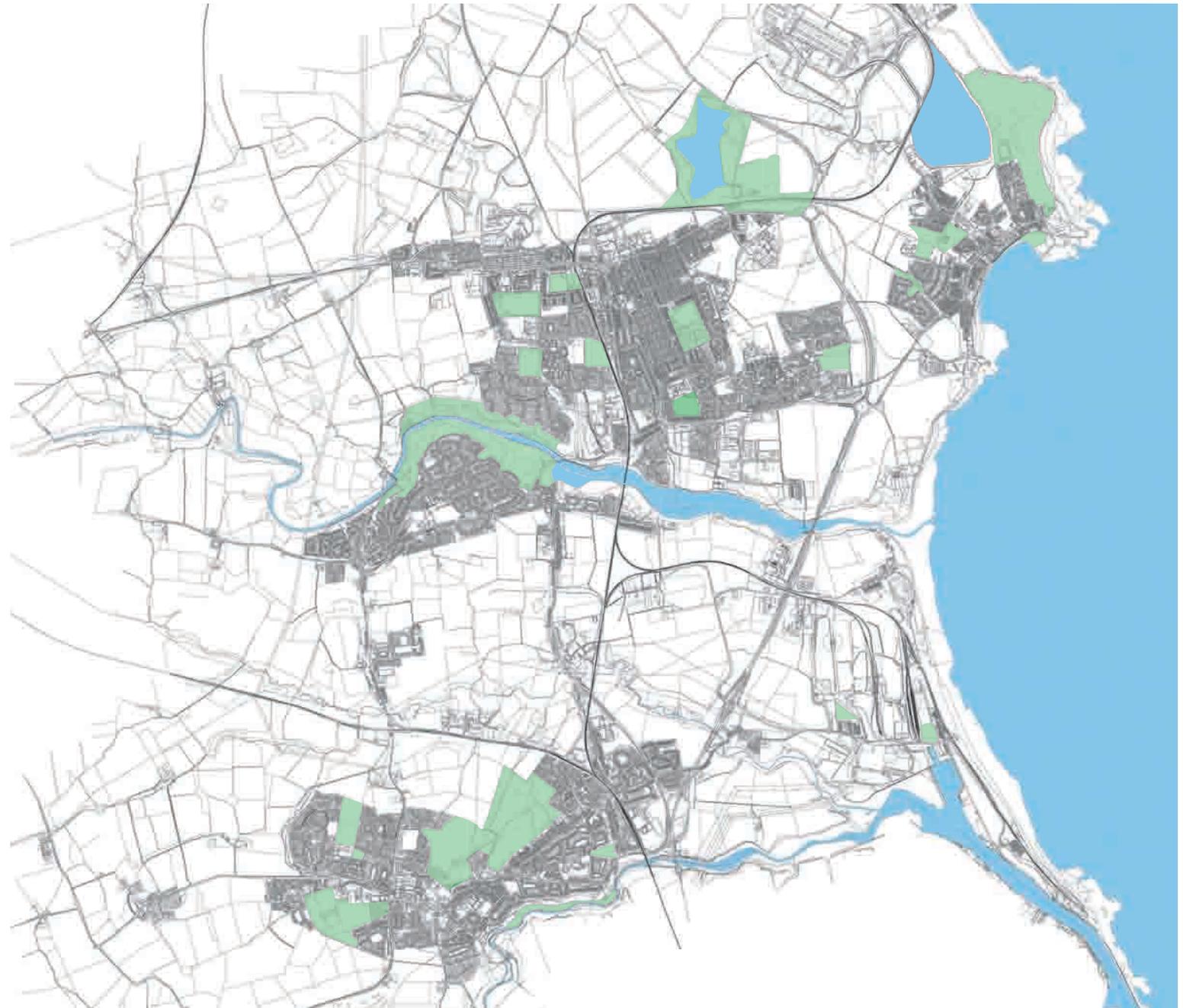
Open Spaces

Strategic open spaces on the site of former coal workings

Choppington Woods achieving balanced recreational and ecological goals

Urban Parks providing multiple uses to adjacent communities

Unsuccessful integration of play facilities with surrounding public space

Sports orientated parkland with potential for a greater range of uses

Woodhorn Churchyard, one of several established cemetery landscapes

Rural

The rural areas of Wansbeck can be broadly categorised into three general land uses of Farmland, Woodland and Post Industrial Heath.

Farmland

Farmland in Wansbeck predominantly consists of grazing pastures to the south of the River Wansbeck, around Bedlington and the less industrialised west of the district. Wansbeck also has several areas of arable fields on higher south facing ground north of the River Wansbeck. Both types of fields are mostly delineated by Hawthorn hedgerows and punctuated in places by mature field trees of maple, oak or ash. In some areas these hedges and trees have been replaced by post and wire fencing.

Woodland

The District has a relatively high proportion of woodland that plays an increasing role in defining its character. Mature deciduous woodland can be found in the deep-sided valleys upstream of the Rivers Wansbeck, Blyth and the Sleek Burn south of Choppington.

Mixed woodland has been planted on many of the districts former coal workings, remediating contaminated soil and providing an ecological and recreational resource. A sizeable coniferous plantation exists north of the Wansbeck Business Park (becoming pat of the South East Northumberland Forest Park) and new coniferous planting has been introduced as a windbreak along coastal areas of Cambois. The dominant tree species in the district are Ash and Pine, as well as Oak, Maple, Lime and in the Bothal area Beech.

Post Industrial Heath

Post Industrial Heath is used to describe the land which is now mostly confined to environs of Cambois and North Blyth. Industrial areas and railway lines have been abandoned here and subsequently reclaimed by wild grasses and small shrubs.

As with all landscapes, Wansbeck today is not static but a snapshot of many natural and man-made processes taking place. The reclamation of former industrial areas is an ongoing process that is changing the character of rural Wansbeck dramatically. As the naturalised habitats mature they increase in ecological value.

Wansbeck is notable for a high number of public rights of way that pass through rural areas. Footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways these connect urban settlements and places of interest

The countryside of Wansbeck is an important asset with particular agricultural, ecological, recreational and aesthetic value. Fertile land that escaped coal and heavy industrial uses provides the basis for the rural economy of Wansbeck. The ecological value of the district is increasing, with assisted natural reclamation of post-industrial land. These areas, notably of mixed woodland, combined with the network of rights of way provide an excellent recreational resource for the District.

Aesthetically, this transformation of industrial areas has a positive impact on views and the general visual character of the District as a whole.

Whilst the ecological value of post-industrial areas is increasing, the ecological value of farmland has been reduced in places by the removal of hedgerows and non-replacement of field trees. The prevalence of recently planted non-native species of tree (such as sycamore) in rural areas also lessens ecological value. The potential role of pathways and bridleways is not fully realised due to poor or non-existent signposting and variable maintenance of the pathways themselves.

Character area: Rural

Rural

Arable fields with high agricultural value but relatively low ecological value

The need for a balance between rural character and green field development

Transformation of rural character with extensive woodland planting

Juxtaposition between rural and industrial landscapes

Important historical views

A network of pathways with potential to be a first class recreational resource

Coast

The North Sea coastline of the District stretches 12 kilometres from the power station at Lynemouth south to the tip of the North Blyth peninsula and Seaton Sea Rocks. It includes three main landscape types: Beach, Rock Bed and River Estuary. Wansbeck's coastline is an important asset for the District, particularly in attracting numbers of visitors to the area. The large beaches, sand dunes and rocky points are ideal for bathing, walking and general recreation. Battleship Wharf continues to play a role in the industrial economy.

The legacy of heavy industrial use, particularly around Cambois has scarred the coastal landscape. Whilst demolition and natural reclamation has taken place, existing industrial infrastructure prevents the coastline from becoming the major recreational area that it has the potential to become. Sea defences at Newbiggin, whilst necessary have had a negative impact on the quality of the town's seafront character.

The reduced impact of industrial activities along its coastline opens up the potential of Wansbeck to play a much bigger role in encouraging recreation and wildlife along its shores. Improved access to the southern section of coast line would have a positive impact on the area as a whole.

Beach

Sandy beaches are found at Newbiggin by the Sea and from the mouth of the River Wansbeck south to North Blyth. The beaches are made up of a lightly coloured, fine grain sand with relatively small amounts of washed up pebbles and seaweed, making them attractive for recreation. Sand dunes can be found immediately inland of the beaches, particularly at Cambois. These landscapes play an important role in subduing coastal erosion and in providing habitat for a specific range of flora and fauna.

Rock Bed

Rocky shorelines exist in three specific points on the coastline of Wansbeck: Newbiggin Point, Spital Point and Crab Law. Large slabs of rock meet the waters edge, with occasional areas of rock pool and pebbles. These dramatic landscapes incur large waves in bad weather making them visually stimulating whilst dangerous if walked upon carelessly. Small rock pools provide important habitats for marine life.

River Estuary

The estuaries of the River Wansbeck, and in particular the River Blyth are unique components of the District's coastal character type. In contrast to this industrialised landscape of the Port of Blyth, the estuaries also boast areas of tidal mudflats, some of which have been designated as SSSI's and provide an important feeding ground for wading birds.

Character area: Coast

Coast

Broad sandy beaches providing recreational amenity

A network of coastal pathways that provide an important asset

Rocky beaches and rock pools

Newbiggin-bt-The-Sea bearing the brunt of North Sea conditions

Problems of costal erosion

Newbiggin sea wall playing an important role but creating poor urban quality.

Riverside

Two major rivers flow through Wansbeck District and into the North Sea; the River Wansbeck and the River Blyth. The only other substantial water course to be found is the Sleek Burn, a tributary that has its source in the west of the District flowing eastwards into the lower reaches of the River Blyth east of Bedlington.

The River Wansbeck enters the District from the west, having passed through Morpeth. In the District it flows through a lengthy stretch of steep side valley past the village of Bothal to Guidepost and Sheepwash. The valleys are covered in mature deciduous woodland with little access to waters edge. At Sheepwash and its bridge, the river is joined by footpaths passing Guidepost and the Wansbeck Riverside Country Park. Past this park the river and its valley widen, as woodland gives way to parkland either side, in close proximity to residential areas. After passing the railway bridge, the River Wansbeck flows through an area of low lying land, past West Sleekburn and North Seaton, before passing under the A189 Bridge into the estuary of sand banks and the North Sea.

The River Blyth, which marks the southern boundary of Wansbeck District, enters from the south through narrow side, deciduous woodland valley similar to that of the Wansbeck. It has good pedestrian and cycle access as it flows by Humford Mill and Bedlington Bridge to form the southern boundary of the town of Bedlington. After passing the town and several bridges, the river flows through estuarine sandbanks and heavy industrial areas to Blyth harbour and the sea beyond.

The Sleek Burn begins life draining the pastures in the east of the District. It flows eastwards through woodland at Willow Bridge to Earth Balance at Bomarsund before joining becoming tidal by the small village of East Sleekburn. At this point, the burn flows into the River Blyth.

All three watercourses provide an excellent ecological asset to the District. In particular, the wooded upstream sections of the Wansbeck and the Blyth are mature habitats for a wide variety of species of animal, insect and plant, whilst estuarine areas are valuable habitats for invertebrates and wading birds that feed on them. The recreational value of the rivers is high in specific areas, mostly near the towns of Ashington and Bedlington.

It is unfortunate that access to the rivers is not possible along their full lengths. Stretches between Bothal and Sheepwash, West Sleekburn and the Coast, and Bedlington and Cambois are notable for not having riverside access.

Character area: Riverside

Riverside

Mature deciduous woodland upstream that provides excellent natural habit

Need for better access to stretches of the waters edge

Sheepwash Bridge, one landmark of several along the River Wansbeck

River valleys revealing sweeping views

Railway bridge - a transition from the river valley to estuarine landscape

Riverside parkland that would benefit from design to incorporate more uses

Movement Corridors

The District is relatively well connected with other parts of Northumberland and Tyneside via a strong road network, however public transport links have been limited to buses since the withdrawal of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne passenger rail line in the 1960's.

The main movement corridors are:

- main roads (A189/A193): with high volumes and high speeds;
- local roads: streets and places with low volumes, low speeds, shared spaces, human scale and interconnectivity.

The road network is currently a mixed experience. There are good stretches of landscaped roads, however, in common with most of the rest of the country, there are parts of the road system where the roads are treated as engineering artifacts without a great deal of thought about how they work for road users other than the vehicle and their affect on adjacent development.

Over the past twenty years a network of cycleways and new roads has been established in the District. The development of dedicated cycle-ways provides a sustainable transport options (walking, cycling etc) that link numerous parts of the District together. Over the last eight years over 25 kilometres of cycleways have been developed.

The main roads (A189/A193) sever communities and sometimes have insufficient planting and landscaping resulting in a poor visual environment.

In an attempt to improve the roads within the District, Wansbeck District Council are part of the Greening for Growth partnership (now Groundwork), which is a broad based initiative aimed at delivering a long-term programme of environmental improvements. The partnership has identified the importance of the image of the A189/A193 and the surrounding landscape to the confidence and investment potential of South East Northumberland. High-profile gateway art features are proposed on roundabouts and bridges, as well as the restructuring of the existing planting along the highway corridor to complement this.

The re-introduction of passenger services on the rail line between Newcastle and Ashington should continue to be supported. The majority of the rail infrastructure still remains as the lines are used for freight trains and the re-introduction of passenger services between Newcastle and Ashington is currently being promoted in both the Local Plan and the County Council Transport Plan.

Realisation of passenger services on the rail line between Newcastle and Ashington will require support and investment from a range of bodies. Progress to a large extent would depend on external factors relating to the rail industry as a whole.

Character area: Movement Corridors

Movement Corridor Sections

Open Fields | Green Buffer | Slip Road | Green Buffer | A189 Highway (dual) Looking South | Green Buffer | Slip Road | Green Buffer | Garden | Housing Estate
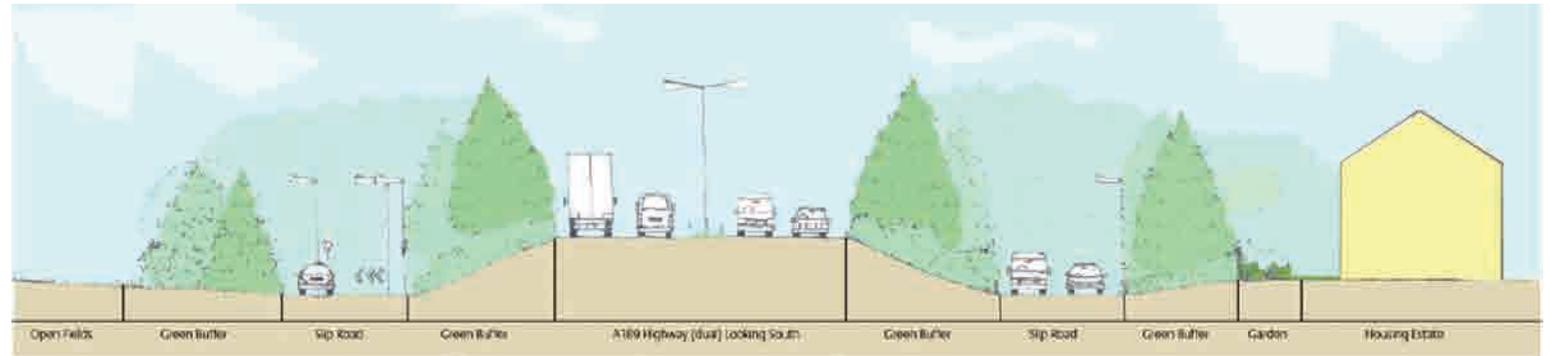
Indicative Section of A189 Highway
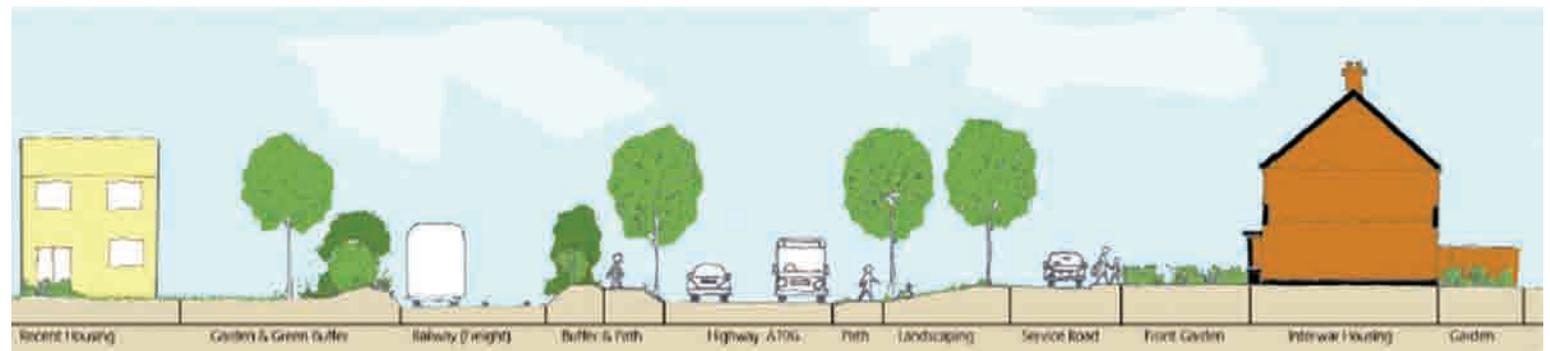
Recent Housing | Garden & Green Buffer | Railway (freight) | Buffer & Path | Highway A196 | Path | Landscaping | Service Road | Front Garden | Interwar Housing | Garden

Indicative Section of A196

Movement Corridors

Over the past eight years 23 kilometres of cycleway have been opened in the district

With the redevelopment of the former colliery and spoil heaps of Wansbeck came new roads

Rail infrastructure still remains as the lines are used for freight trains

Public transport links have been constrained since the withdrawal of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne passenger rail line

The District is in general a car-orientated environment

Outline designs have been formulated for A189, gateway features will be established on roundabouts

The Urban Design Character Area Matrix

	Create Places for People Public Realm	Enrich the Existing Quality and Character	Make Connections Permeability and Access	Work with the Landscape Capitalising on Natural Assets	Mix Uses and Forms Diversity	Design for Change Opportunity
Town Centres Ashington	- Public realm is a mismatch of materials and colours - No coherent identity - Cluttered by unattractive and poorly co-ordinated signage	- Rich in terms of plot and height variety as well as a variety of styles - Number of feature buildings that reinforce the identity	- North Seaton Road is an arterial road dominated by fast and heavy car traffic - Town Centre configuration is geared more towards car users with extensive areas of parking. - Oversized junctions on the main street make the pedestrian circulation complicated	- Links to Queen Elizabeth Country Park and Wansbeck Riverside Park - Green links to People Park	- Comprehensive range of retail and leisure services - Wansbeck Hospital and Northumberland College are also within walking distance	- Comprehensive public realm strategy - Extended traffic calming measures to improve pedestrian movement - Rationalisation of the shed area and reconfiguration as a gateway to the town - Improved public open space provision and green links to the river
Town Centres Bedlington	- Legible and picturesque with historic buildings, green spaces - A public realm strategy which has enhanced the character and quality of Bedlington - Well-maintained green spaces, a good balance of hard to soft landscaping	- Unfolding views and separation of pedestrian realm from the road through level change - Front Street and Market Square have maintained the town's historic character and buildings - Large-scale low quality retail and civic developments	- On-street car parking is not organised or successfully incorporated. - Conflict between traffic and pedestrians	- The topography of Bedlington adds interest especially on Front Street - Very attractive rural setting not fully capitalised upon. - No visual connection to the river, due to dense landscaping. - Town centre does not extend towards the river with leisure or recreation uses.	- Balanced mix of uses with some residential above shops, as well as a number of civic buildings.	- Rationalised and improved structure of car parks and large scale development to the north of the town centre - Improved connections to residential areas and general pedestrian movement - Improved links to the river and capitalising upon this as a major asset to the town - Introduction of positive open space with public amenity use
Town Centres Bedlington Station	- The quality of public realm is limited - Footpaths are in good condition, but they are generally narrow - Signage in the town centre is ad hoc and cluttering.	- In general the building stock is in poor condition and could benefit from a face-lift - Mostly 2-storey buildings but there are also some single storey shops with no distinct character	- Street is car dominated - Poor provision for car parking, which happens on street and there are railings to direct pedestrian movement - Insufficient connections to the residential area	- Poor connections to the River Blyth - Riverside is not capitalised upon as an asset or utilised for any leisure or recreation facilities	- Adequate range of retail; facilities	- Strengthen the character of Station Road with taller buildings and - refurbishment to facades of existing. - Improve public realm to accommodate car and pedestrian and enhance the shopping experience. - Improve links to the riverside and capitalise upon it as strength.
Town Centres Newbiggin	- High quality paving and shared surfaces as well as well as on-street parking - Bandstand on the square on Bridge Street is a successful feature - Scope for further improvements in terms of signage and street furniture	- Very strong character, relating to the various periods of development - High void rates and there is dilapidation of some buildings - Meandering alignment of the street - Key landmark j is the 13-century St. Bartholomew's Church	- Issues with links to the coast, with most routes and footpaths lead to dead ends	- Does not celebrate its proximity to the coast either with physical links or with views - Heritage trail and heritage centre on the promenade for visitor	- The retail offer is relatively limited but in line with what would be expected in terms of retail hierarchy and proximity to Ashington	- Improve linkages to the seafront and promote permeability of layout in the residential areas - Make more of the area around St. Bartholomew's Church - Improve public realm to express historic character (public art, signage)
Shed Environment	- Public exclusion. - Hard, impermeable edges. - Some attempts have been made to improve the public realm with public art and landscaping.	- Materials and the detail of external spaces and buildings often create incoherent and unattractive places - Some traditional industrial buildings, iconic features	- Ashington sites are accessible by bus and foot/cycles - Outside Ashington poor relationship with surrounding areas, services and facilities - Similar building design - Poor layouts make pedestrian and vehicular movement difficult	- Hard edge industry not sensitive to landscape or surrounding communities	- Chemical Industry - Heavy Industry - Storage - Light Industry - Port	- Positive impact on the local economy - Improve public access around and through where possible - Develop sensitivity to surrounding development - Character and Quality - Permeability and Access

The Urban Design Character Area Matrix

Housing Georgian and Victorian	- Active frontages - Strong urban form - Street suffers because of dominance of car parking and movement - Incorporation of public open space	- Period architectural features - Good quality materials and finish - Distinctive features, such as corner and entrance details - Incorporated with public buildings	- Traditional permeable street pattern - Hierarchy of main roads and residential streets - Dominance of the car on the street makes movement difficult in residential streets	- Built form does not always utilise on topography or views	- Mix of sizes – terraces, small and large houses - Public buildings – retail units and services	- Respect and enhance existing character - Ensure new development builds on local character - Resolve car parking provision
Housing Interwar	- Garden suburb and terraced urban form - Tree Lined boulevards - Car parking provided in isolated garages - Confusion between fronts and backs in terraces	- Private semi detached houses often rich in detail - Neighbourhoods have little distinctive quality, monotonous	- Terraces are permeable and garden suburb streets are often long and winding - Established pedestrian routes	- Terraces do not acknowledge local setting or character	- Similar housing types and sizes in garden suburbs - Terraces differ in size, quality and features	- Capitalise on open spaces within or in close proximity to estates - Redesign of car parking and improve public realm
Housing 1960 and 1970	- Confusion between fronts and backs - Left over spaces and isolated car parking provision - Undefined areas with uncertainty over ownership	- Little distinctive quality - Monotonous - Confusing layout and poor orientation - Lack of privacy	- Strong pedestrian network but often unsafe - Cul-de-sac and dead end streets - Lack of street hierarchy	- Does not relate to surroundings or natural setting	- Terraces, detached and semi-detached and bungalows - Smaller properties less popular neighbourhoods - Larger houses in popular estates	- Redesign of public spaces and green spaces – reuse or build - Improvements to public/private spaces and defensible spaces - Reconfigure car parking provision
Housing Recent	- Perception of attractive environment - Often top road surfaces unfinished - Car parking causes clutter and dominance of street life by cars	- Often lack of strong urban form or individual architectural detail - Little distinctive character or quality - Generally well maintained	- Impermeable layouts that do not allow easy movement - Geographically cut off from local services and facilities - Road layouts promote the use of the car, lack of public transport	- Hartford Hall respects local setting and rural character - Often inward looking, do not acknowledge natural assets	- Lack of variety – mix of semi detached, detached and bungalows - Little choice in market of materials, layout and architectural detailing	- New development must be permeable, create strong urban form and architectural quality - Sites must be prioritised to link with existing communities and transport networks
Open Spaces	- Mixed woodland parks - Urban Parks - Sports fields - Cemeteries - Play Areas - Amenity grassland	- Mixed woodland parks with networks of simple, well maintained pathways. Some strategic space include substantial man made lakes	- A network of footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways that connect strategic open spaces to one another and adjacent urban areas	- Establishment of naturalised woodland	- A variety of spaces and uses	- Strengthened linkage between spaces - Development of small, community orientated parks
Rural	- Footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways of asphalt, gravel or grass. - Roadways with pavements or grass verges	- Grazing pastures, Arable fields and Mixed woodland	- Public rights of way - Variable quality of construction and maintenance - Variable extent of signposting / awareness	- Agricultural use for meat, milk and crop production - Timber cultivation - Mature woodland, hedgerows and field trees	- Woodland, fields and post industrial areas	- Improved network of recreational pathways - Enhancement of ecological value of farmland
Coast	- Sandy beaches and pathways that provide a good public amenity	- Expansive beaches and rocky shores but visually influenced by remaining heavy industrial uses - Newbiggin Seawall detrimental to overall seafront character	- Some good coastline routes, but interrupted in places	- Good seaward views	- Recreation, industrial use and wildlife habitat	- Development of post industrial areas for a mixture of uses
Riverside	- Mature woodland with footpaths - Open grass parkland with pathways - Sandbanks and small beaches	- Steep sided valleys with established and attractive thick deciduous and mixed woodland	- Good river access in places, but interrupted riverside pathways	- 3 water courses, attractive in character - Mature woodland with several recreational opportunities	- Parkland of varying character	- Enhancement of open spaces, particularly at urban areas - Upgrading a better connected network of routes
Movement Corridors	- The majority of the road network is a car-orientated environment with hard edges and railings/barriers - Difficult for the pedestrian/cyclist.	- Fundamental lack of landscaping with few exceptions	- Roads sever communities and pedestrian/cyclist movement	- Traditional rural roads follow fields; soft edges/bends that slow traffic - Potential views of coast and riverside	- Great variety in roads: new/old, narrow/trunk roads, local/ national - Urban and rural routes	- Improve landscape - Enhance linkages and facilities for pedestrians and cyclists - Re-introduction of the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne passenger rail line

Introduction

The Design Guide provides the following:

- **Character Area Guidelines**: to give a distinct and tailored response to the different types of area across the District.
- Included within the character area sections are **Best Practice Principles** and incorporating national 'best practice' guidance alongside District-wide policy.

The guidance is designed to be enabling. It is not the final word but a stimulus to high quality design. It is long term and far reaching and includes:

- Areas which are largely public sector responsibilities, for example, the character of main roads, strategic open spaces etc.
- Areas where responsibilities are mixed and is of poor urban quality and remedial action is required: poor estates, weak linkages and so on.
- The briefing and assessment of new and regeneration schemes for different areas as they emerge.

Character Area Guidance

Character Area Guidance should be considered when preparing development proposals for sites and areas The **Character Areas Plan** forms the basis of the design guidance. Through reference to the plan and the following guidance, users of the Guide can understand the character of the different parts of Wansbeck and the guidance and principles that are relevant when developing proposals for sites and opportunities within them.
The following guidance applies to more than one situation:

- Relates to development and how applications will be assessed and judged; and
- To areas where the current environment fails in urban quality terms and thus where remedial action should be stimulated.

The Guidance is designed to be enabling. It is not the final word but a stimulus to high quality design. It is long term and far reaching, attempting to include:

- Areas which are largely public sector responsibilities, for example, the character of main roads, strategic open spaces etc.
- Areas where responsibilities are mixed but where remedial action is required: poor estates, weak linkages and so on.
- The briefing and assessment of new and regeneration schemes for different areas as they emerge.

A clear overarching policy for each Character Area concludes the guidance for each category. In summary, the Design Guide has identified the following character areas:

- Town Centres
- Sheds
- Housing
- Open Space
- Rural
- Coast
- Riverside
- Movement Corridors

The guidance also contains **Best Practice Principles** at various points. For any particular design for a scheme, there will be a need to refer and consider these principles. The guidance relates to the following:

- Urban Form & Structure
- Sustainable Development
- Landscape
- Movement & Connectivity
- Building Design & Materials

Building on context and local vernacular

Active frontage

20 units per hectare

50 units per hectare

80 units per hectare

120 units per hectare

Capitalising on renewable natural resources
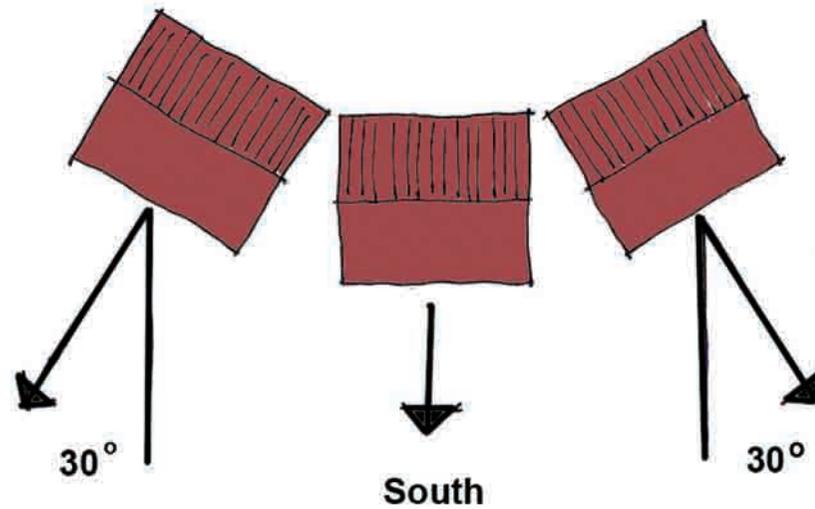
Orientated development to maximise solar gain
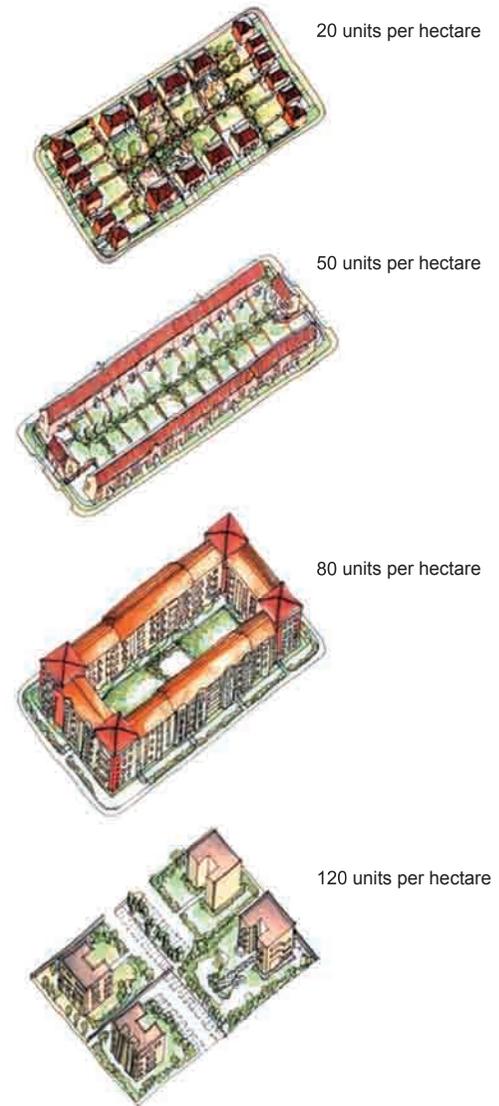
Explaining Density

Town Centres

There are four main town centres in Wansbeck each with a different character, structure and challenges.

Ashington

Ashington has it's origins in the late nineteenth century as a mining town, characterised by the tight networks of terraced streets. There has been little commercial investment in recent decades. There are, however, significant development opportunities to the north of the town centre. The area is currently fragmented, including shed retail developments. A coherent strategy for the town centre is required including public realm improvements.

Public Realm

A public realm strategy was prepared for the town centre of Ashington in 2004. this sets out the aspirations and principles for improvement. Part of the strategy has already been implemented and has begun to make a difference to the appearance of the town centre. There is an opportunity to extend the public realm works along Woodhorn Road which will help in giving some identity to the town centre.

The key principles are:

- Emphasise the importance of a coherent but also uplifting appearance with durable materials suitable to the character of Ashington.
- Signage in Ashington Town centre needs to be rationalised and provided only where necessary in a single coherent and subtle design with understated colours and materials that blend in with the architecture.
- Public art can be incorporated and be consistent with the signage and street furniture to minimise clutter.
- Make the town centre more pedestrian friendly through design in the public realm rather than railings that segregate movement in an uncomfortable fashion.

Quality and Character

The condition of a number of commercial premises in the town centre is relatively poor and there is a need to improve the general appearance of buildings and environment. Local character can be celebrated by framing important facades and preserving views of key buildings.

There are limited opportunities for new development in the town centre. Where new buildings are proposed there is a need to respect the grain of the existing, and try to avoid large-scale retail development on Station Road. New buildings should be of an appropriate height and scale to suit a town centre development, with single storey buildings considered inappropriate. For larger units, the roofscape needs to respect the existing and the rhythm of the street.

Active uses on the ground floor are essential with as rich a mix as possible on the floors above to ensure natural surveillance. At present there is very little activity on upper levels of buildings on Station Road, Woodhorn Road and North Seaton Road, and new uses on these floors should be encouraged with direct access from the street.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Sustainable Development
Often the design and implementation of sustainable development objectives can be complex requiring specialist technical studies. However, this complexity should not be taken as a reason for ignoring the following important issues:

- Solar design suggests orientating buildings 15 to 20 degrees of due south. This tends to suggest east-west street patterns. However, much of the solar potential can be realised through orientation of the roofs, if not the buildings, in this direction. Even if solar technology is not yet affordable, design should allow for retro-fitting. Architectural quality can be enhanced by windows varied to the orientation and height of the lower/higher floors.
- Recycling storm-water run-off through the use of sustainable urban drainage technology should be incorporated where practical. This has ecological as well as water resource benefits.
- Energy use and generation within new developments should also be considered. An examination in any substantial scheme of the potential for underground energy is worthwhile; both heat transfer and aquifer use is possible. In addition, larger schemes may have potential for CHP (Combined Heat and Power) or district heating.
- Wind can be used for natural ventilation and a possible energy source (even in urban areas!). More importantly, an adverse microclimate can result from ignoring wind direction and forces, and how these are directed by built forms

Best Practice Guidance
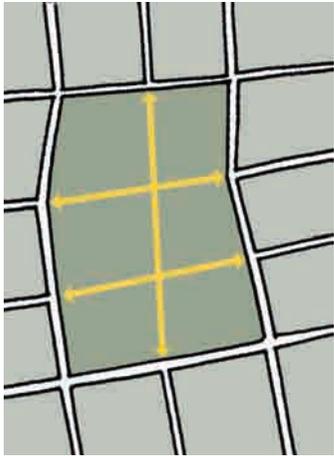
Perimeter blocks are more pedestrian friendly and integrated with the surrounding community
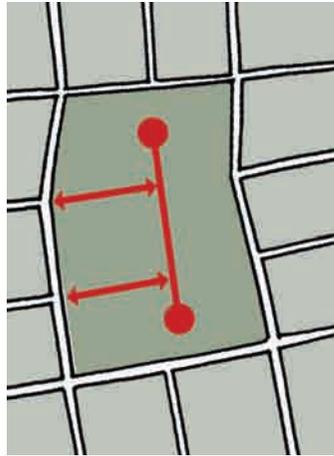
The typical cud-de-sac response creates an introverted layout; leading to isolated communities

Houses fronting onto local park - Hirst Ashington

Making it easy for everyone to appreciate unique local landscapes
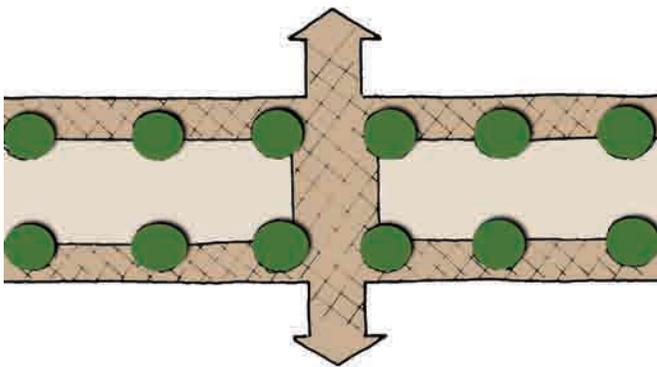
Wide crossings can improve safety and comfort for pedestrians

Providing natural surveillance

Local street designed with car parking and landscaping

and landscape. In addition, heat loss in tall freestanding buildings is affected by orientation to the wind.

- A further urban design/sustainability principal concerns movement. A permeable structure encourages walking and cycling and can improve accessibility to local amenities and public transport. Avoiding or overcoming 'blockages' to potential local routes is essential.

Regard should be given to 'Building in Sustainability - A guide to Sustainable Construction and Development in the North East' published by SUSTAINE.

Permeability and Access

The town centre of Ashington is divided by the railway line and the A197 and the A196. As a result of these major barriers, there are various sites that are isolated and have been developed in an introverted fashion, which adds to the fragmentation within the town centre and contributes to a general feeling of disorientation. An area requiring particular attention is Lintonville Road, at the northern end of the town centre, which lacks a consistent built frontage and is characterised by uses such as garages and retail sheds.

The roundabout at the junction of the A197 and Lintonville Road is an unsatisfactory gateway and arrival point for the town centre. The area is defined, at present, the roundabout is surrounded by car parking, open space and sheds which detract from a sense of arrival and a gateway. These key sites around the junction need to be considered for redevelopment with more substantial buildings, of commercial nature that will aid orientation and help signpost

Ashington from the A197 and direct people to the town centre. This redevelopment could extend south along Lintonville Road seeking to improve frontages and links to the town centre.

Another poor gateway point is the bus station which is located to the rear of Woodhorn Road. The link leading to the town centre from the bus station is of a low quality compromised by the recent Netto supermarket development.

The junction of North Seaton Road and Station Road is oversized, cluttered by signage and defined by railings and buildings lacking any significant character. The design of this junction should be improved to enhance continuity and improve the pedestrian conditions.

Traffic calming measures could be extended to Woodhorn Road which accommodates a variety of shops and services and is currently car dominated with narrow footpaths and a lack of parking provision. The Hirst residential area lies to the south of Woodhorn Road and does not benefit from good linkages across Woodhorn Road.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

The main natural assets of Ashington are Queen Elizabeth Country Park with the new Woodhorn Colliery museum, People's Park, the River Wansbeck and Riverside Park.

The town centre takes little advantage of all these and opportunities to link the green spaces. There is no legible and coherent green network which breaks down the barrier effects of the roads and the railway and this should be explored. One way

of achieving this, could be injecting the town centre with incidental green spaces and enhancing some of the north - south links through the centre as green routes connecting to Queen Elizabeth Country Park. In addition potential links through the town centre, to People's Park, and potentially down to the river and Riverside Park could be capitalised on.

There is a general lack of incidental open spaces within the town centre, which is dominated by hard landscaping. Any development opportunities should take this into account and aim to provide some green open spaces to soften the impression of the town.

There are some small pockets of leftover spaces, especially on Woodhorn Road, which could be transformed into small, yet valuable, incidental open spaces.

Diversity

Ashington is a relatively strong town centre in terms of shopping provision as well as other attractions nearby such as the new Woodhorn Colliery Museum and Wansbeck Business Park.

There is though a need to 'lift the heart' with higher quality buildings which would in turn assist the retail offer in the town. In general terms there is a need to improve diversity and quality in the town centre through, for example, improvements to shop fronts and building.

The character of Station Road is unique and different to the character of Woodhorn Road, North Seaton Road and Lintonville Road and this needs to be celebrated.

Development should respect the character of it's surroundings

Buildings create definition, enclosure and character to public spaces

A well-designed public space including planting
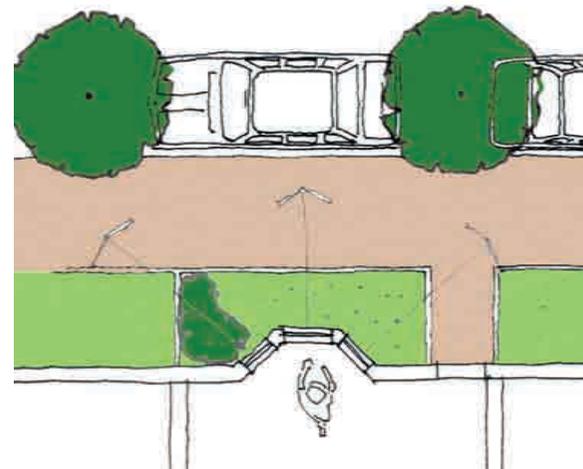
On streetcar parking can be a beneficial traffic-calming device

The public realm strategy will help to tie the town centre together with clearly defined edges. Key buildings need to be preserved, re-used and enhanced by their surroundings, for example the Co-op building on Woodhorn Road is currently framed by poor quality very low buildings, which expose its gables and make it stand out uncomfortably.

The quality of parking provision needs to be improved. Public transport, walking and cycling should be encouraged and taken into account in the design of the public realm.

Design Guide Policy TC1

Ashington Town Centre
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Improve the A197 / Lintonville Road gateway to create a sense of arrival and focus for the northern edge of the town centre.
- Infuse the town with green and incidental spaces working towards a network of green links to residential areas and between the main attractions in the town (Queen Elizabeth Country Park, People's Park).
- Explore the potential of infill plots sensitive to scale and context of the surrounding buildings.
- Implement a coherent pubic realm strategy to tackle the existing fragmentation and improve the shopping experience and identity of the town.
- Promote the reuse of upper floors of shops on Station Road and Woodhorn Road and improve activity on ground floors.
- Renovate shop fronts and building façades across the town to create a consistent quality and image for the town.
- Avoid inappropriate types of buildings such as sheds on Woodhorn and Station Road. Buildings should be sensitive to the local vernacular and add fresh quality to the built environment.
- Improve parking provision in qualitative terms.
- Deal with severance issues caused by the A197, North Seaton Road and railway line, to allow for improved pedestrian permeability.

All development proposals and projects must be delivered in a way that positively contributes to the continued regeneration and improvement of the quality of Ashington town centre, in line with urban design best practice principles.

Ashington: Uses, connections and key buildings

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industrial	
Business	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Public transport routes	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space	
Surface car parking	
Pedestrian links to be improved	
Missing pedestrian links	
Landscape buffer	
Landmark / building of note	
Vehicular links	

Woodhorn Colliery Museum

Wansbeck Business Park

A197 – Morpeth Road

A196 – Lintonville Road

Station Road

Woodhorn Road

North Seaton Road

Ashington: Opportunities

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industrial	
Business	
Development opportunity	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space (including leftover space, village green, golf courses etc)	
Private garden	
Car parking	
Tarmac Street	
Pedestrian links	

Improve fragmented structure with development addressing the roads

Need to establish a strong frontage - gateway into Ashington with commercial development of appropriate scale and quality.

Key gateway site. Development must address the road and any large car parking areas to be concealed to the middle of the plot.

Coherent network of footpaths making the retail accessible to pedestrians.

Isolated pocket of housing. This needs to be connected to the residential area to the south through development and street network.

Portland Park

Connect new development to the town centre

Establish a coherent network of streets linking up and connecting this commercial area to the town centre and the residential area to the south.

Well-integrated on-street parking

Footpaths are wide enough and pedestrian movement is unobtrusive

The area around Wansbeck Square needs a lift

Good delineation of circulation through change of materials

Surfaces tie in with the street but the space feels cluttered with street furniture

Use of durable, high quality and limited palette of materials livens up the area

Single storey low quality sheds should be avoided in the Town Centre

Development that does not respect the scale or roofscape of surrounding buildings

Environmental improvements will contribute to linking the housing to the centre

Variety of uses on upper floors should be encouraged

Bedlington

Bedlington is an historic and attractive small town with a number of historic buildings and green spaces. Opportunities exist to further develop the quality of the Conservation Area and rationalise and improve structure to the north of Front Street.

Public Realm

Bedlington is characterised by the various level changes, which define the character of the public realm. The centre features a variety of small organised spaces, with varied character. For example, Market Square is a hard landscaped space, offering some pleasant variation to the building line and public amenity. However, the quality of the development fronting this space detracts from the experience. Attention to detail is lacking in certain situations, for example the planters in the Market Square are of low quality.

The softer open spaces in front of the District Council offices and the adjacent to the Community Centre are positive but poorly designed and have low public amenity value. These spaces present opportunity to raise the profile of the town centre with an exciting public realm and landscape strategy.

Front Street itself is quite narrow and incorporates traffic in two directions and buses with regular stops. There is a substantial provision of on-street parking at 90-degree angle to the street most of which in for disabled access. Unfortunately, the footpaths are very narrow especially on the south of Front Street and segregated from the parking with bollards. On the southern side of Front Street there is a pleasant variation of setback of buildings to allow for open spaces especially relating to civic buildings and community facilities (District Council Offices, Bedlington Community Centre) however, pedestrian movement is again disrupted by a variety of access points and obstacles. There is an opportunity to rethink car parking provision and to improve the pedestrian experience. Whilst also organising the delineation of private, semi-private and public space through materials and design of public realm rather than bollards and railings.

There is a need for a strong public realm strategy relating to the historic nature of the town centre. The strategy should aim to raise the aspiration, draw on the individuality of the historic centre of Bedlington and incorporate durable and attractive materials

In addition, there is also the need for the shop frontage policy to be effectively enforced.

Quality and Character

There is a very distinct character to Bedlington town centre stemming from the historic context and reinforced through key landmark buildings, such as St. Cuthbert's Church and Bedlington Community Centre. The shops along Front Street, although smaller in scale, also add to the character through the materials, roof and window details. However the quality is variable and a number of buildings add little, if anything, to the town centre.

The buildings in the town centre are mainly two storey with some single storey buildings interspersed. A strategy for bringing vacant units back into use and increasing active ground floor uses should be pursued to "lift" the image of the centre as voids have a negative impact on the street and people's perception of their town.

There is therefore a need for clear guidance to be prepared to ensure that new buildings respect the historic quality of the town. At the heart of this guidance will be the need to ensure that all development proposals are sympathetic in terms of their scale and massing.

Permeability and Access

Permeability to the area north of Front Street is poor and this needs to be addressed in developments. This area lacks structure and grain, and it is has a fragmenting affect on the town centre by using up large proportions of space for car parking and various left over spaces. There is shortage of access points onto Front Street from the surrounding area creating a poor sense of arrival for those entering the town from the south. A strategy to encourage new and improved pedestrian links to residential areas should be developed.

There is an opportunity to improve Hartford Road which currently lacks a sense of enclosure and makes for relatively low quality retail environment. There is opportunity to improve the situation by building up the frontage to the west and rationalising existing uses and car parking. Development around the roundabout at the junction of Front Street and Hartford Road is poorly defined, with gable ends, and indifferent buildings with no active frontages

apart form the Red Lion Pub adjacent to this landmark building. Again, over time opportunities to improve such gateway areas should be explored.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

Front Street leads to the River Blyth and its valley to the south and east. Links to this area should be improved, there this could be achieved by introducing development around Front Street leading to the river or developing a network of open spaces, making the journey attractive for pedestrians.

Diversity

In terms of the offer within the town centre, there is currently a relatively good mix of provision including a niche market of specialised shops, which is in keeping with the character of Bedlington. There are though a number of vacant units and efforts should be made to introduce active uses in these situations.

There are a number of small supermarkets located within the town centre at present. Redevelopment opportunities in the future should be seen as an opportunity to add to the quality of the town through linkages and public realm improvements. Supermarkets in the town centre should seek to be small scale and incorporated in existing buildings or, if new build, sympathetic to the scale of the street and setting.

Design Guide Policy TC2

Bedlington Town Centre
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Introduce a landscape strategy for the Conservation Area.
- Rationalise and improve urban structure to the north of Front Street.
- Explore redevelopment opportunities for existing shed developments on Front Street.
- Set guidelines for massing, use and architectural quality of any new buildings on Front Street to prevent dilution of character and mismatch of scale.
- Improve gateway by making the most of the River Blyth valley.

Bedlington Station

Bedlington Station is a relatively small settlement to the north east of Bedlington and is situated around the railway, River Blyth and the transport corridor connecting Bedlington to Newbiggin. Most of the housing in Bedlington Station is quite recent, but there are some older buildings in the centre.

Public Realm

The town centre of Bedlington Station essentially serves a local function and performs well in this capacity The shops and facilities extend mainly across Ravensworth Terrace / Station Street, with secondary provision on Clayton Street. Some community facilities span to the east side of railway line on Station Road.

Despite narrow footpaths in places, the public realm on Ravensworth Terrace / Station Street features good quality paving and streetlights, albeit slightly out of scale. It may be possible to provide shared surfaces in certain areas which would make the environment more pleasant for pedestrians and improve disabled and cycle access.

The public realm and buildings around the former railway station is a critical opportunity and challenge. A public realm strategy should be developed based on the use of durable materials, including tree planting, lighting and street furniture (bus-stop, benches etc.).

The public realm strategy needs to recognise the varying character of different streets. This could be achieved by tree lining the residential frontage of Clayton

Street where the footpaths are wider than Ravensworth Terrace / Station Street.

There is a general lack of green spaces, with current open spaces in the centre currently giving the impression of leftover sites and spaces. A strategy which will aim to turn these small spaces into valuable public amenity should be developed.

Quality and Character

There are a number of key buildings within Bedlington Station including the Residents Association and St. John's Church. There are also many buildings of little character or architectural merit. The general height is two storeys with slight variations in roofscape, with some exceptions such as some single storey shops on Clayton Street, and the Residents Association, which is a tall and imposing building.

As with Ashington, there is a general need for a 'lift' in the appearance, character and setting of the centre. This should be investigated and attempts made to create a sense of identity that is currently lacking.

Permeability and Access

There is a substantial amount of interwar housing in Bedlington Station, which is organised in perimeter blocks. This leads to a reasonably permeable network of routes and in this respect the town centre is well connected to the adjacent residential areas.

Footpaths are narrow in places and there is currently no cycle provision. On-street car parking is informal and could benefit from some organisation. This could be improved by introducing home zones in housing areas close to the town centre.

There is somewhat less permeability on Ravensworth Terrace / Station Street which could be improved by introducing footpaths should opportunities arise through redevelopment.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

The main natural asset for Bedlington Station is the River Blyth and its valley to the south of the town centre. There is also a substantial area of parkland to the west and Sleekburn Vale to the east with significant landscape amenity value. Within the town centre there is a general lack of incidental and amenity spaces.

At present the image of the town centre does not reflect the local natural assets which have the potential to add greatly to the quality and feel of the centre.

There is a need to create a network of green routes linking up these two assets through the town centre. There is little opportunity to increase open space provision in the centre but some routes can be greened and leftover spaces can be improved to form part of a green network.

Diversity

The diversity of uses within Bedlington Station is reasonable for this size of centre. The plot sizes vary considerably as do the orientation of the shops, which in some case especially on Clayton Street are orientated with the wide elevations fronting the street.

There are some large and some very small unit sizes on Ravensworth Terrace therefore new development would need to consider carefully relationships to existing buildings.

Design Guide Policy TC3

Bedlington Station Town Centre
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

• Improve the appearance of retail units and introduce a coherent style.
• Make the most of the junction with the railway line in terms of potential redevelopment to improve gateways in the town centre and soften the divisive effect of the railway line.
• Improve pedestrian movement across the town centre with public realm works.
• Investigate options for greening the town centre and creating green links to the River and significant open spaces and Sleekburn Vale.

Part 2: Design Guidance

Bedlington: Uses, connections and key buildings

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industry	
Business (offices)	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Public transport routes	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space (including leftover space, village green, golf courses etc)	
Car parking	
Pedestrian Links	
Missing pedestrian links	
Structural landscaping (e.g buffer)	
Building of note (of architectural quality, exceptional height, marker building)	
Vehicular links	

Hartford Road

A1068

Front Street

Market Square

Council Offices

Community centre

St. Cuthberts Church

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industry	
Business (offices)	
Development opportunity	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space (including leftover space, village green, golf courses etc)	
Private garden	
Car parking	
Tarmac Street	
Pedestrian links	

Bedlington: Opportunities

The Law Courts present a defensive frontage to the streets and add very little to their surroundings

Underutilised back land serving as an oversized car park for supermarkets. Need to rationalise and improve block structure and connections with overlooking development.

Positive open space linked to Front street but poorly overlooked by backs of retail units. Housing or retail repairing the exposed backs could potentially maximise its amenity value

Pockets of leftover space can be returned to use with development of relevant use and character addressing the street.

Series of setbacks and open spaces fragmented by vehicular access. Need to rationalise access and improve public realm.

Some unsuitable uses and buildings for the character of this conservation area such as garages detract from the quality of the Town Centre

Lack of permeability to the south. Need to look into improving structure and extending network of footpaths

Car Park

Market Place

West End Front Street

Poorly coordinated and maintained public realm

Garages have a negative impact on front street both in terms of use and building quality

Mis-match of building styles and scales

Successful vista termination in a landmark building

View to underused open space from Market Place

Good use of materials and delineation of space

Pedestrian movement severed by inappropriate design and level changes

The space in front of the Council offices is in need of landscape improvements

Emptied building lacking character and displaying signs of neglect

Hartford Road has a different character with enclosure and public realm

Use of railings to segregate movement should be avoided

This type of refurbishment harms the character of adjacent building

Bedlington Station: Uses, connections and key buildings

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industry	
Business (offices)	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Transport links	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space (including leftover space, village green, golf courses etc)	
Rural open space	
Private garden	
Car parking	
Vehicular links	
Pedestrian links	
Missing Pedestrian links	
Structural landscaping (e.g buffer)	
Building of note (of architectural quality, exceptional height, marker building)	
Strategic link	

The public realm needs to be improve

The area could benefit from a shop front improvement strategy

Good quality materials but problematic pedestrian movment on Station Road

This junction needs improvements to public realm and building quality

Redevelopment opportunity as part of the gateway junction

The Residents Association is a key building in the town centre

Newbiggin by the Sea

Newbiggin town centre has a very strong image with varying scale and streetscape and a meandering alignment of the street. Key opportunities include improving links between the centre and the sea front, and exploring the potential for development opportunities to the north of the centre.

Public Realm

Front Street in Newbiggin is well enclosed and has an appropriate scale for pedestrians. Buildings are mostly two storeys with some accentuated exceptions. In general the character is varied and there is no consistency of roofline.

The existing materials in the town centre are in good condition, if a little uninspiring. The public realm is simple and lacks identity, but there is a consistency of materials and consideration has been given to on-street car parking. There is a significant need for a bold public realm strategy combined with public art that will embrace the town's identity as a pleasant coastal town. At the heart of this strategy should be improvement of links to the sea front.

The main public space in Newbiggin is the coast itself, which at present, is under exploited. It is well overlooked by a high quality terrace and the promenade is in good condition, but lacks animation

There is a need for better connections from Front Street to the promenade and the potential for incorporating leisure uses along improved links. The absence of connections is accentuated by the lack of visual connection due to the sea wall. Bridge Street Square with the bandstand provides a nice relief to the street scene and a positive connection to the seafront.

Opportunities for additional incidental spaces along Front Street which provide amenity and connections to the promenade should be explored. These spaces should have:

- a continuity of materials extending from the town centre to the promenade;
- animated side elevations with active frontages on ground floors turning the corner with positive overlooking;
- introduction of leisure use adjacent to Front Street that can spill out to the promenade.

The possibility to upgrade Front Street to a shared surface area should be explored, although the street functions as an important bus route. Introducing car parking, increasing pedestrian movements and introducing landscaping that is less regimented would develop the continuity between the seafront promenade and the town centre through a series of new spaces.

Signage does not over dominate at present, shop front design could be more sympathetic to some of the buildings. It would be beneficial for shop front signage to have a coherent character which would improve the identity of the centre.

Quality and Character

The quality of the built environment in Newbiggin is mixed. Most buildings date back to the late 19th century, there are examples of high architectural quality and also examples of buildings in a poor state of repair. The number of vacant units on Front Street detracts from the character of the street and a key challenge should be to bring these units back to use to "lift the heart" of the town.

Temporary uses on the ground floors could be encouraged where it is proving difficult to let properties. Residential uses above shops with direct access from the street should be also encouraged to assist in natural surveillance.

A number of buildings would benefit from cleaning and renovation and a colour scheme should be applied as part of the public realm strategy to avoid a cluttered and mismatched appearance.

The grain of the centre is about right, there have been no large-scale developments resulting in fragmentation. Any redevelopment proposals should respect the character and setting of existing buildings, in terms of plot width, height and roofscape. This will mean that the new development should be between the minimum and maximum along its stretch at shoulder/eaves level, follow the building line, be attached and present an active frontage on the main street and the side if it is a corner plot.

Permeability and Access

'Permeability' is the key word for Newbiggin. The key opportunity is to make the most of access to the seafront. The seafront, which in certain areas is essentially perceived as 'back land' has the potential to become a calm but flourishing mixed use area with activity and character with a coastal walkways and incidental spaces along the way. There is a real possibility of bringing both the historic

character of existing lanes and the hidden seafront back to the heart of Newbiggin. The aim is a clearly urban but human scaled environment with well defined streets that are active but not intensive.

There are many opportunities for links but only Bridge Street has been exploited. Watt's Lane and the narrow Lane in front of Old Ship pub present opportunities for new strong links of different character.

There is opportunity on the promenade to provide a dedicated cycle lane, which will animate the promenade and help connect it with the residential area to the west.

To the west of the town centre there is a lack of urban structure in the residential area around Woodhorn Lane. Existing links are not comprehensive and most lead to cul-de-sacs. A strategy to link existing pedestrian and vehicle accesses could be developed.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
The major natural asset for Newbiggin is it's seaside and fishing village heritage, although this is not properly exploited. In particular, St. Bartholomew's church, a major landmark, should be embraced by improving links and the quality of the environment around it.

The area to the north of the town centre is currently used and could, in the longer term be considered as a development opportunity for mixed use which could raise the profile of Newbiggin. New development should protect all views to St. Bartholomew's church, respecting its character and setting.
Diversity

There is a variation in plot sizes across the town centre ranging between 5 and 15 metres with few exceptions. High Street has more fine grain plots which are predominantly residential, this is similar to the southern end of Front Street where there are also significant setbacks. There is not a consistent roofscape which makes the environment varied and interesting, though most buildings are two storey.

There is a reasonable range of uses within the town centre, although there is a need to reinvigorate the town centre, broadening the offer and improving the retail provision.

Design Guide Policy TC4

Newbiggin Town Centre
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Reconnect the town to the coast through public realm and possibly development.
- Improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists to the town centre and the coast.
- Reuse vacant retail premises and improve the shopping provision.
- Improve pedestrian and vehicular links to the west.
- Ensure car parking does not dominate the street by investigating a shared surface environment on Front Street.
- Consider relationships to the adjacent conservation area.

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industry	
Business (offices)	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Transport links	
Transport interchange	
Connection severed by traffic	
Open space (including leftover space, village green, golf courses etc)	
Car parking	
Pedestrian Links	
Missing pedestrian links	
Structural landscaping (e.g buffer)	
Building of note (of architectural quality, exceptional height, marker building)	
Vehicular links	
Important Views	

Newbiggin: Uses, connections and key buildings

Newbiggin Bay

Front Street

Gibson Street

North Seaton Road

Newbiggin: Opportunities

Key

Retail / services	
Community facilities (Church, school, health, Community Centre)	
Residential	
Civic buildings	
Industry	
Business (offices)	
Development opportunity	
Pedestrian realm	
Shared surface	
Transport interchange	☼
Connection severed by traffic	⋌
Open space (including leftover space, Private gardenvillage green, golf courses etc)	
Private garden	
Car parking	
Tarmac Street	
Pedestrian links	→

Opportunity for new development wrapping around gable ends and animating the space

Need to treat these leftover spaces with a coherent and attractive public realm inviting movement between town and coast

Bring abandoned buildings back to life in conjunction with improved links to the coast

Opportunities to infuse the coastline with leisure uses spilling out onto the promenade and the footpaths

Meandering Front Street offering unfolding views with consistent building frontage

Bridge Street

Front Street

The colours in the façade of this interesting building are not sympathetic

Opportunity for animated corner with two elevations addressing the street

Shop front is not sympathetic to the character of the building

Positive enclosure and consistent frontage but it is swamped by cars and parking

Opportunity to improve this link to the coast with development and public realm improvements

Corners are well defined by buildings

Cafe Riviera addressing the square on Bridge Street is a positive example of a connection to the seafront

Opportunity for an improved link through a new square

Old Ship Hotel can be reused to animate this link to the coast

This square is a successful example of public realm improvement

Railings and signage are uninspiring and non-place specific

Variety of building heights and road treatment of Front Street

The Shed Environment

Wansbeck has many large 'shed' developments that provide facilities for manufacturing, commercial or retail uses. Landscape and the pedestrian environment are typically overlooked in such developments in favour of internal functionality and vehicle movements. Typically these are buildings of little or no architectural merit in a sea of parking with very limited landscape and no relationship to their context.

In the future, this type of development should be replaced by more attractive and accessible developments or screened by one means or another. In short, Wansbeck deserves good buildings surrounded by interesting landscape and good access by all modes of movement.

There is a new approach to the employment developments emerging, for example the recent CABE publication 'Better Places to Work'. Wansbeck should seize the opportunity to be at the forefront of higher quality employment developments either through new schemes or through the redevelopment of older facilities. A conscious effort needs to be made to ensure such characteristics as more permeable layouts, stronger landscaping and putting car parking and service areas in internal spaces.

Public Realm

Look to the design of surrounding streets and connect to the shed development.

Although it is difficult to change in existing sheds, future developments should not present blank walls to adjacent streets, but windows, entrances etc that face onto the public realm and enliven the street environment. Existing developments can improve their edges by soft boundary treatments – removing high, unattractive walls, tree planting, utilising climbers and other plants.
Design into the landscape places for people to sit, eat their lunch and chat to their colleagues. Even views to such places can provide pleasure. In new developments. Instead of building one large structure, consider breaking the development up into units to create a series of interesting outdoor spaces increasing access to light and creating a more stimulating environment.

Create internal car parks to lessen the visual impact of cars in these developments. In new areas, consider undercroft parking and locating servicing areas internally, which will also help to mitigate noise. In any event insist on dense planting of the open areas and boundaries.

Quality and Character

Future developments should not present blank walls to adjacent streets, but windows, entrances etc that face onto the public realm and enliven the street environment. Existing developments can improve their edges by softening boundary treatments – removing high, unattractive walls, tree planting, utilising climbers and other plants.

Typically 'sheds' are not building works meriting architectural acclaim. However, quality can be achieved through innovative and imaginative design solutions that consider building form, choice of materials and detailing etc. All new 'shed' developments should aim to achieve an excellent BREEAM accreditation.

Permeability and Access

Improve connections to new shed developments through consideration of public transport links and consideration of pedestrians and cyclists, as most prioritise the car. New development should ensure easy access for all and also put in place Green Travel Plans.

Employees working in shed environments typically are cut off from other services, such as cafes, banks, and other shops. In some cases it may be possible to retrofit services into the development. Pedestrian and cycle routes should be created to meet this need. In new developments, incorporate this type of development with complementary services, either by including them within the new development itself, or situating among established commercial areas.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Building Design and Materials
There is no stylistic imperative that should be applied to Wansbeck. Conversely, it is necessary to use good designers for the many different building types and locations, the form, materials and details varying place by place. However, buildings define the spaces. They provide the third dimension. These are generic guidelines, for building design and materials:

• Buildings should create enclosure and definition to the public and private spaces around them and should be appropriate to the character of the local area.
• There should be 'active' frontages: avoid long blank walls and buildings (entrances, public rooms, balconies, bays and porches for example) which 'reach out' to the street.
• Buildings should be good neighbours, respecting an area (or street)'s vertical and horizontal rhythms, building heights, built form, adjacent building heights, roof and cornice lines, local materials, and of course being first rate architecture.
• The exceptional is permissible as long as it adds to the magic of contrast, drama and innovation.
• Develop a material and detail strategy that responds to the local temperament – selecting materials that look good in all weathers.
• The number and composition of elements in a façade and the contracts between them, as seen up close and from afar, determine visual quality. Richness in detail, as viewed from any angle or distance is desirable. The richness can appear quite simple and effortless.
• Buildings have corners; these need careful consideration, and at corners in the layout, the built form needs to respond to this setting.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
Often 'shed' developments sit on large parcels of land. There is opportunity to conserve and enrich the wildlife habitat through planting and design. Utilise native species with habitat value. Furthermore, water can be a component of the landscape, with ponds used as retention basins for storm water, swales that allow natural infiltration of water, or simply grey water strips along the building. Ensure long-term maintenance of landscapes.

Diversity
Most shed development in Wansbeck is stand alone and isolated. There is no reason that sheds should not be integrated with existing development in form or in location. By locating them amongst other development, such housing, retail etc. These developments become part of the overall urban structure and contribute to a working community.

Design Guide Policy S1

Shed Environment
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

• Achieve higher quality through innovative and imaginative design solutions in terms of building form, choice of materials and detailing of public realm.
• Integrate new development within established commercial areas with variety of complimentary uses to ensure sustainable communities and transport.
• Enrich the environment of existing developments with landscape and wildlife habitats.
• All new 'shed' developments should aim to achieve an excellent BREEAM accreditation.
• Wansbeck should aim to become a leader in the design quality, energy efficiency and sustainability of this type of development.

North Seaton Industrial Estate

Poor layouts make pedestrian and vehicular movement difficult, this results in poor public spaces.

Some attempts have been made to improve the public realm with public art

Similar building design makes orientation difficult

Public exclusion with hard impermeable edges

No places for employees to sit, eat their lunch and chat to their colleagues

Fails to capitalising on the natural assets of the riverside

Wansbeck Business Park

Windows entrances etc that face onto the public realm and enliven the environment

Tree planting, climbers and other plants are utilised through the business park

Designed landscape for people to sit, eat their lunch and chat to their colleagues.

Close to Ashington Towns Centres services and facilities

Gateway Entrance

Housing

Housing includes a variety of building types, ranging from quality period properties to more recent estates; the good the bad and the ugly. This poses a variety of design challenges as each housing period has its own problems to overcome. Overall there is a need to improve the quality of housing and urban form in Wansbeck, especially within the Interwar and 1950s to 1970s developments. Community participation must lead any activity in these established communities. The following section outlines responses to each era of housing.

The Guidance has been structured as follows, presenting the variety in housing eras.

- Historic : Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian
- Interwar
- Post war : 1950's to 1970's
- Recent : post 1980

Further design guidance for new housing development is included within the Implementation chapter of this guide.

The Design Guidance for new housing developments requires applicants to design in terms of the Building For Life Criteria. All new schemes developed in Wansbeck must meet at least 14 of the 20 criteria as set out in the New Housing Development Guidance section. This will make ensure that schemes meet the Building For Life Silver Standard as a minimum.

Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian housing (Historic)

The older communities of the late Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods provide mature and quality environments for their residents. In these locations, the emphasis should be on respect and preservation rather than change.

Public Realm

The mature landscape of some older neighbourhoods with tree lined streets and formal planting is widely appreciated. These places can instruct and inspire contemporary design. Wansbeck would do well to look to these landscapes for future instruction and inspiration in the design of new public realm and open spaces.

For example, large deciduous trees of a single species along a street, provides and attractive canopy and a coherent look. Other planting in the public realm should be mainly formal in nature, composed of lawn, evergreen shrubs, and punctuated with perennial planting. Street furniture should be coordinated with existing. Annuals should be used sparingly in locations of importance and Tree Preservation Orders must be adequate.

Car parking forms a large part of many Wansbeck landscapes. A sensible approach to car parking should be considered according to street type and quantity needed for certain facilities. Car parks should fit into, rather than be designed apart from, the landscape.

Quality and Character

Historic communities should essentially be preserved in nature, with any new development fitting into the existing form and structure. The urban form, quality of materials and landscape (even if this consists singularly of private front gardens), all contribute to the distinct character of late Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian neighbourhoods.

In areas with gardens at the front of houses, serviced by footpath access only, careful attention should be given to extensions and high fences irretrievably altering the distinctiveness of the local environment.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Urban Form and Structure
An option appraisal and site opportunities and constraints analysis will be expected in order to demonstrate the optimum urban form for a given site. However there are certain general rules which are applicable in designing urban form and structure, they include:

- Buildings line, define and front the public realm of street, squares and open spaces.
- Private and semi private communal spaces (including off street parking and service areas) lie to the rear of the buildings.
- A grid pattern of routes (roads, walkways etc) where a perimeter building block lines the routes will provide the most appropriate form for most situations.
- Frontages should be as 'active' as possible: front doors, ground floor windows and public rooms, or where appropriate, differing ground floor uses, for example a shop with housing above.
- The 'built form', the three dimensional structure, will of course vary from area to area. There will be a need to demonstrate that the intensity of the layout and the proposed building forms and heights are appropriate for their setting.
- Car parking standards, design and management arrangements have a great impact on urban form. Most areas require a combination of measures; on street; off street (to rear) etc. Minimum rather than maximum standards should be applied and a means of minimising the visual impact of parking via landscape measure, parking courts, underground, well designed parking buildings etc.
- On street parking is a largely successful solution that can contribute to street vitality and safety. In most cases this is preferable to front garden parking that can visually interrupt the structure of the street as well as consume valuable open space.

Permeability and Access
By maintaining a traditional logical order to the street hierarchy, from main distributor road to private residential street, it is possible to identify the appropriate routes to local schools, community facilities, public transport and open spaces. Street closures, generally leads to impoverished access, more miles traveled, and diminished natural surveillance to sections of streets.

Well designed mixed use streets with integrated car parking will lead to a reduction in traffic speeds, and can greatly improve the safety and appearance of an area. There is a need to ensure streets have even surface treatments of a high quality and appropriate lighting levels.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
Older housing is well loved and cherished across the District for its strong urban form, interesting and varied corner details, classical features, character and structured permeable street network. Such urban form must be safeguarded and enhanced in any restoration or infill development within traditional streets.

The current single biggest threat to historic housing is a lack of demand in the lower end of the market, typically terraced properties, leading to high levels of private rented properties, frequent turnovers and voids. A continued investment in the public realm, housing improvement grants and improved local services, could help curtail this trend.

Diversity
Diversity within the housing from the late Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian eras lie within the mix of sizes – terraces, small and large houses and the use public buildings for retail units and services.

Design Guide Policy H1

Historic Housing
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Safeguard and enhance existing character, whilst ensuring new development and extensions respect and compliment this.
- Continued investment in the public realm, housing improvement grants and improved local services to ensure demand for this type of housing.
- Maintain street hierarchy to ensure legibility and connectivity of these areas of housing.
- Integrate car parking and good lighting to maintain the safety and appearance of these areas.

Historic mining terraces: Ashington Hirst

Active frontage on main roads

Various approaches to the issue of very narrow streets / In this occasion, landscaping

Backs are makeshift fronts

Variety of retrofitted car parking solutions

Very small gardens are characteristic

Variety of retrofitted car parking solutions

Rigid urban structure fails to turn the corner, this housing works mostly in one direction

Fronts face onto narrow footpath

Historic housing in convservation areas

Tight enclosure in residential streets differentiates them and encourages intimacy

Health Centre

houses front onto green and add character and distinctiveness

Houses are set back to maintain privacy but form a consistent building line

Good access to community facilities

Strong urban form : houses front onto the main street and are of appropriate scale

Legible and coherent street network

Good access to community facilities

Interwar

Interwar homes are popular and sought after both in the private and public sector. They are often associated with good access to schools and services. Wide streets and pavements, avenues of trees and small local parks, have contributed to their name: "the leafy suburbs". Generous plot sizes and flexible house layouts, gives ample opportunity for extensions and adaptations; making these areas hotspots for a variety of home conversions and individual expression.

Public Realm

Large front gardens and wide pavements provide the perfect opportunity to improve the streetscape, including a tree-planting strip (where there is none), integrated car parking, and street furniture where appropriate. Deciduous trees should be planted along roads, providing shade in the summer and light in the winter. They also help to frame the street, and slow traffic speeds.

On main roads or designated pedestrian routes, areas of seating and other amenities should be provided, such as improved lighting, rubbish bins, and concrete paviors. Street furniture should be contemporary and elegant to avoid street clutter.

Quality and Character

Interwar houses are typically built to a similar character and footprint across the country. Influenced by the arts and craft movement, housing was developed with good quality traditional materials and a high level of attention to proportions and detailing; decorative brickwork and stained glass windows are common features even in smaller houses.

Their local distinctiveness arrives from location, landscape features and level of mature planting. Interwar estates are easily distinguished from their historic neighbours by their "leafiness"; wide streets and semi detached houses with gardens front and back.

Permeability and Access

Some interwar cul-de-sac development acts as a barrier between traditional urban areas and surrounding countryside, often turning their backs to established recreation areas. This situation is common to suburban housing on the edge of urban areas. The impermeable structure should in the future be broken wherever possible, introducing new pedestrian and cycle links, while raw rear edges could be improve with landscaping and in some instances further developments.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

Large front gardens and wide pavements provide the perfect opportunity to improve the streetscape, including a tree-planting strip, integrated car parking, and street furniture where appropriate. Deciduous trees should be planted along roads, providing shade in the summer and light in the winter. They also help to frame the street, and slow traffic speeds.

On main roads or designated pedestrian routes, provide areas of seating and other amenities, such as improved lighting, rubbish bins, and concrete paviors. Street furniture should be contemporary and elegant to avoid street clutter.

Diversity

Although at the lower end of the market, interwar housing offers little variation in house types or features within each estate, elaborate road crossings with houses facing the junctions, landscape features and a variety in road structures, creates a unique and easily recognised character.

As the suburbs have evolved over the past 70 years the diversity and character of neighbourhoods has changed as extensions have been added, frequently this has detracted from quality and character of the area.

Design Guide Policy H2

Interwar Housing
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Allow for the ongoing upgrade of houses whilst at the same time safeguard the public realm from the visual impact of insensitive extensions.
- Where larger scale redevelopment opportunities do present themselves, rather than extending the problem of impermeable cul-de- sacs, introduce a hierarchical grid to improve structure and permeability to these communities.
- Where possible, forge links between existing developments and the new.

Intewar housing: Bedlington Station

Set in mature landscape

Crescent layout

Predominantlyly semi-detached housing

Communal land to the rear poorly overlooked and accessed

Poor integration of car parking

Rich and varied public realm

Permeable and pedestrian friendly network

Layout does not repsond to its surroundings: could be anywhere

Communal land to the rear poorly overlooked and accessed

1950's to 1970's (Post war)

Although stable in most areas in the District, post war estates can suffer from issues with regards to front/ backs and private/public areas: Fronts of some houses can often face the side or rear of others, leading to safety and security risks because there are no "eyes" or activity on the street. Public footpath networks are extensive, but in most cases are not well lit or overlooked and located to the rear or side of houses. This confusing layout is compounded by the fact that car parking is frequently provided in garage courtyards at the end of streets, which can act as a source of antisocial behaviour.

Public Realm

The first step in the revitalisation of such housing areas is to improve the public realm: streets and other public amenity spaces used on a daily basis. Developing new community buildings, regenerating old and creating functional public spaces and other open spaces will initiate change and encourage community interaction. Public realm strategies can identify appropriate places for intervention, and set out a limited palette of materials to be used in certain types of spaces. For example, a main shopping street should have more formal treatment than a residential street. However, all spaces should have durable, high quality materials to ensure long-term sustainability.

The transformation of leftover spaces into parts of green routes, community gardens or integrating spaces back into private gardens can all assist in improving the quality of the public realm. Sometimes it will be more appropriate to redevelop such sites to strengthen street corners and edges. The establishment of active frontages onto public spaces and creation of distinction between public and private realm should also be encouraged.

Main roads can be improved through strong tree planting and landscaping in areas of importance. High quality surface treatments, and contemporary street furniture can also make a real difference. Speed bumps should be avoided with traffic calming being dealt with by narrowing of road widths, textured surface treatments, street trees and marked pedestrian crossings.

Quality and Character

The housing of the 1950s, '60s and '70s is not very distinct, and in places built with low quality materials, construction methods and designs when compared to earlier periods.

Much of the housing is monotonous and this combined with confusing layouts, makes this orientation within estates difficult. There is also a general lack of privacy due to poor distinction between fronts and backs in the housing design.

Permeability and Access

Currently, many estates are isolated from the wider communities and surrounding area due to single route access and limited public transport. There is often a need to improve pedestrian links to public transport.

As with the Interwar suburbs, it is important to open up pedestrian links between properties that were originally planned for but never implemented. Ensuring these paths are of adequate width to provide pedestrian comfort and are overlooked by neighbouring properties. Hard edges, walls and fences can be softened by planting along these routes. Pedestrian crossings should be well-marked, visible and the carriageway narrowed where possible.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

In general, the suburbs do not capitalise on their location or natural setting. Opportunities should be explored to reconnect neighborhoods with the surrounding environment where possible.

Diversity

House types include terraces, detached and semi-detached and bungalows. Any further development should emulate this rich mix. The smaller properties tend to be located in less popular neighbourhoods, and larger houses in popular estates. There is a need to make sure a balanced approach is made when considering further development.

Design Guide Policy H3

Post War Housing
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Where possible rationalise and re-plan provision of parking within estates to create on street parking softened by tree planting and overlooked by housing.
- This incremental approach will eventually allow the redevelopment of traditional courts for community spaces, or perhaps new development.
- Fronts should overlook fronts and backs should meet backs. To that end, where possible, rearrange the orientation of gardens, building new front entrances, to create safer environments.
- In any new development employ a grid network to alleviate this problem.

Post war housing: Radburn

Lack of street hierarchy: every street is designed identical

Variety of open spaces of undefined use and ownership

Confused fronts and backs

Variety of open spaces of undefined use and ownership

Lack of consistent street frontage Poor relationship to context

Lack of street hierarchy: every street is designed identical

Monotonous layout / same everywhere

Strong and coherent pedestrian network but ususally poorly overlooked

Recent housing (post 1980)

Housing developed over the past 20 years frequently displays a number of design problems such as cul-de-sacs and impermeable development patterns. It is important that any new development complies with standards set out in this document, to avoid any future developments that will further weaken the urban fabric.

Public Realm

Some of the recent new build lacks attention to detail, when considering the public realm. Many new developments have sufficient room for tree planting and wide pedestrian pavements. Deciduous trees should be planted along roads, providing shade in the summer and light in the winter. They also help to frame the street and slow traffic speeds. On main roads or designated pedestrian routes, provide areas of seating and other amenities, such as improved lighting, rubbish bins, and concrete paviors. Street furniture should be contemporary and elegant to avoid street clutter.

Quality and Character

To break the monotony of homogenous building forms, provide a variety of building types. The local vernacular should be respected and visual clutter avoided. Traditional housing forms and layouts can provide an appropriate point of reference.

Building heights should typically be within the two – three storey range to fit in with most existing residential contexts.

Permeability and Access

Recent private developer led housing is often based on a cul-de-sac street network, and is typically orientated inwards, leaving inactive frontages onto streets. Where possible, new pedestrian routes should be opened up between properties. Moreover, it is essential that new development follows the guidance found within Section 3 Best Practice Principles, which if followed will establish clear permeability throughout all future development.

To provide a clear sense of orientation, hierarchy should be established in the street system. Main vehicle routes should be lined with large deciduous trees, have wide, high quality pedestrian and cycle paths, and be well lit. More residential streets should be smaller in scale, with footpaths and deciduous street trees where space permits. Discourage 'gated communities' by providing more than one entrance/exit and a choice of car, pedestrian and cycle routes that integrate into the existing street hierarchy.

A grid pattern of routes (roads, walkways etc), where a perimeter building block lines the routes, will provide the most appropriate of urban developments. This ensures active frontages onto the street are established, and will help to mend poor or broken edges and street definition. Follow the rules of 'front to front' and 'back to back' along both movement corridors and residential streets.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

Recent and future developments must blend into the existing landscape context. Wansbeck enjoys a variety of landscape types – coastal, river, rural, etc and each deserves a different response. Utilise established landscape patterns and vernacular materials to fit in with adjacent communities.

Diversity

There is a need for a greater mix and choice of housing, as well as diversity in architectural design. At present there is a lack of variety – mix of semi detached, detached, bungalow and little choice in materials, layout and architectural detailing.

Design Guide Policy H4

Recent Housing
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Raised expectations for new developments. Some recent developments do not meet best practice urban design principles.
- New development should follow the guidelines set out in the Best Practice section and the guidance on new housing development, in particular the 20 'Building for Life' principles.
- New development must be permeable, create strong urban form and architectural quality.
- Sites must be prioritised to link with existing communities and transport networks.

Recent housing: Guidepost

Infill development fronting the main road / positive relationship to school

Lack of allocated on-street parking causing cluttering

Lack of distinctiveness / same everywhere / poor orientation

Confusing layout and lack of connections

Impermeable layout constraining movement

Lack of strong urban form

Open Spaces

Wansbeck can be proud of many of its varied public open spaces. They provide an important amenity to local residents and visitors. All of the spaces have an important role to play in providing habitat for wildlife, supporting important ecosystems. As can be seen in spaces such as Choppington Woods and Earth Balance this also enables the opportunity for human interaction and the development of educational programmes.

Whilst many of Wansbeck's open spaces are of excellent quality and character, others, appear to be simply left over from development, lacking a clear function or design quality. These spaces require attention to identify their roles and to be improved accordingly.

Public Realm

New development should be designed to face onto public spaces and streets. Doors and windows help to activate public space reducing vandalism and crime through casual surveillance. Public realm must be designed with a realistic maintenance strategy in mind. Overly ambitious or extensive schemes can have a negative impact on a place if the maintenance levels required are not met. This is not an excuse for unimaginative landscape design. Careful planning, consultation and design can produce high quality public realm that is relatively easy to maintain.

A combination of stringent health and safety regulations and 'off the shelf' products in the market can make play areas dull places for children, leading them to choose less suitable places to play. The design of play areas must be taken seriously to ensure that they are well integrated with their surroundings, meet necessary safety requirements and most importantly that they are fun, inspirational places where children want to play.

Quality and Character

Along with architectural style, open spaces and streets play an important part in defining the identity of a place. Care should be taken to understand what makes a place memorable or special and for these elements to be maintained and/or enhanced. For example, a watercourse, a stretch of mature trees, an interesting wall or a popular seating area all contribute to identity and could form an important part of proposals.

Every open space can contribute to the ecological richness of an area. Firstly consider the space in its context. Design can enhance the ecosystem, for example by making physical connections via movement corridors or by providing habitat for a specific species or community. Secondly ecological objectives must be a part of the design or redesign of the site. For example, specifying a native species for an avenue of trees or introducing a less intensive grass-mowing regime to encourage meadow grasses and wildflowers to prosper, can be low cost yet highly effective.

Permeability and Access

There is an opportunity to strengthen the network of open spaces across the district. This would involve completing the 'missing links' between strategic spaces and adjacent urban areas. The provision of footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways is currently very good and would require relatively little work to provide even better linkage creating a first class network of open spaces. This improved linkage, combined with signage and awareness programmes could generate more use by local residents and visitors.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Landscape
Landscape analysis and design skills are of key importance from the beginning of any project. It is also important to consider the responsibilities for care and maintenance at the outset. This set of principles should be applied to all projects:

- Analyse intrinsic landscape characteristics of the site and its setting.
- Treat everything as landscape: buildings define the edge of space, while landscape occupies the space, whether it is a park, a street, a fence or a pavement.
- Work with and value what is already there.
- Use the intrinsic landscape positively in the design of new places. A fine tree can provide instant maturity in a new square.
- A copse of good trees or a fine old garden can provide the basis of a local park.
- Hedgerow trees and lanes can be used to line a new parallel road, and if there is an old lane, use this for access or a footpath.
- Visual links between say a hill or a fine building beyond the site can create 'view corridors'.
- Certain areas of site's skylines or overlooked areas may be best left undeveloped. Think about the playing fields, parklands, and schools and so on in these locations.
- Achieving safe and usable open space and maximising the benefit of looking onto it should be more important than simply meeting prescriptive standards for provision.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

The Public Realm and Detailing the Place
The public realm concerns the street, the square, the pavement and includes planting, surface materials, street furniture, lighting and public art. The detail of the interfaces between the horizontal and vertical, the fences, frontages, hedges, windows, doors and ramps is also of great importance. Use the following key principles in designing the public realm:

- The quality of detailing of these elements is crucial; it can make or break a place, create and retain value and it can ensure a distinctiveness of place.
- Define space, its functions and character. This involves the building line, set backs, the scale of enclosure and the active frontages. In addition, the visibility across spaces, orientation for shelter or sitting in the sun, informal play areas and the versatility of the spaces should be investigated.
- Distinctiveness can be created by inventive quality design of the details, using local materials and details, historic associations, seeing the floor space as an opportunity for public art, using plants of local origin and making places to last.
- In detailing the place, avoid or remove clutter. Select street lighting and other street furniture as a compatible design and 'family'.
- Public art can enrich a place, giving character and identity. And of course, avoid or remove the ugly. If there has to be a barrier or security fence make it a sculpture not a dull piece of functionality.

These principles will of course vary in their interpretation, area-by-area, scheme by scheme.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
Successful public open spaces capitalise on their existing natural assets such as topography and views, orientation, site features and vegetation. Topography and views can be particularly exploited along the coastline where expansive panoramas are available. The orientation / aspect of open spaces in relation to the sun is often overlooked by designers. It is important to position seating areas etc where they will benefit from the maximum sunlight available. Existing site features such as a natural rocks or a watercourse can provide an open space with interest and drama. Existing vegetation can also provide structure to an open space and to give an established feel

Diversity
Just like buildings, external spaces need a use, or ideally a mixture of uses to ensure they are active and vibrant parts of an urban area at different times of the day and week. Wansbeck has many seemingly left over spaces, usually characterised by flat expanses of grass, with very few uses and therefore little value to the people that live and work beside them. Visual relief on its own is rarely enough to make a meaningful public open space. Existing and new open spaces must have clear roles to play in the lives of the people who will use them.

Concentrating on fewer, high quality public open spaces is better than maintaining a large of quantity of open space to lower levels of quality.

Design Guide Policy OS1

Open Spaces
The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Local open spaces should be developed to truly serve the communities in which they are located.
- Soulless areas of grass should be transformed into small parks that provide for activities such as seating, walking, play, informal sports, summer picnics, barbeques and occasional special events.
- Get local people on board early in the planning and design stage to help instil a sense of ownership and increase the likelihood of success of open spaces.

Open space

Existing open space that provides a number of varied **ecological habitats**

High quality landscape materials as a long term investment in **public realm**
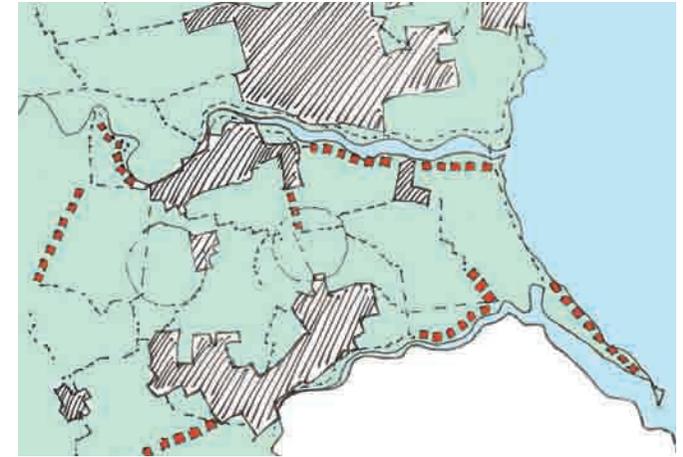
Completing the missing links within the existing network

Small community park, Freiburg

Public space should be well overlooked

Rural

The rural areas of the District have long provided a valuable asset – in terms of fertile agricultural land, a rich source of minerals and parkland for recreational use. The rural areas of Wansbeck also sustain wildlife with a number of varied and distinct habitat types.

Whilst the west of Wansbeck has seen little change in its character over the years, the now partly post-industrial east has experienced dramatic changes that are still ongoing today. A careful balance needs to be struck between the agricultural, ecological and recreational demands on rural areas, whilst finding new viable and sustainable uses for the post industrial landscape.

Public Realm
Rural public realm in Wansbeck takes the form of footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways. Their existence is a major asset for the District, allowing good, controlled access throughout the countryside. The quality of these routes is variable and can act a deterrent to potential users. Upgrading work is required to ensure the paths realise their full potential and are useable all year round.

Quality and Character
In the west of the District small focussed initiatives are required to maintain and enhance the areas attractive rural character. In places, character has been eroded by the replacement of hedgerows with fencing and the non-replacement of mature field trees that protrude from fields or hedgerows. Working with landowners to replace these important elements of

the countryside would enhance both the ecological and aesthetic value of rural areas with limited effect on agricultural land.

In the east, more substantial initiatives are required to establish a stronger character and identity for the area, based on bringing new uses to the land. Implementing a strong landscape structure via woodland and hedgerows can provide the physical framework for redevelopment to occur.

In some areas, rural character and quality has been affected by new residential and commercial development on the urban fringe. New development in or adjacent to rural areas should be carefully designed to minimise the negative visual impact on the countryside. Natural topography and manmade landforms as well as existing and new planting can all help to physically set new development into its countryside setting.

Permeability and Access
A strategic approach to upgrading and promoting the network of rural footpaths, cycle paths and bridleways throughout the district would greatly improve their attraction for recreational purposes. Thought as to where new paths should be created is required, ensuring that connections are made between towns, open spaces and other key manmade and natural features.

As well as upgrading the pathways to make them accessible all year round, improved signage and interpretation throughout the network is required.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
Wansbeck's most significant natural assets

are its coastline and the Rivers Wansbeck and Blyth. It must be ensured that rural areas of Wansbeck link physically and visually well with these important character areas, in addition to the District's urban centres.

Common with many other agricultural areas around the country, Wansbeck has some isolated pockets of woodland with very little linkage to other areas of the same makeup. This disconnection has consequences for the ecological value of these pieces of woodland. Where possible efforts should be made to link woodland areas together by planting woodland strips or as a minimum with hedgerows.

Diversity
The number of organisms supported by native plant species (Oak, Ash, Hawthorn etc) compared to non-native, or exotic species (Sycamore, Chestnut, Plane etc) are considerable. As plant life forms the base of nearly every food chain within multiple ecosystems, planting in rural areas should always be of native species.

Design Guide Policy R1
Rural The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications: • Develop a programme for ongoing improvement and maintenance of footpaths. • Continue to work to transform the post industrial landscape of Cambois. • Improve access to rural areas to ensure full integration with the rest of the District and the main urban centres.

The non replacement of field trees

A need to minimise the impact of development of rural areas
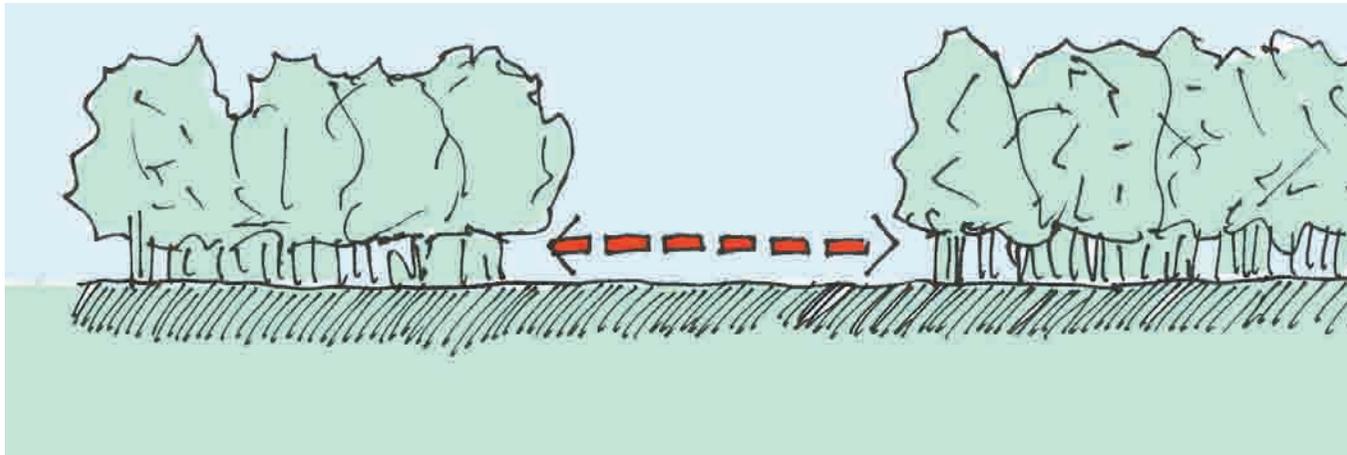
Linking isolated habitats

Native plant species support more extensive ecosystems

Coast

Wansbeck is fortunate to possess a picturesque stretch of coastline characterised by beaches, estuaries and occasional rocky outcrops. Whilst the coastline itself changes slowly over time, some of the land immediately in shore is undergoing a relatively rapid transformation of character triggered by the departure of industrial uses. How these areas are redeveloped will have a profound long-term effect on character of Wansbeck's coast.

Public Realm

It is important that the design of public realm is appropriate to the character of the area in which is located. Along the coast there are varied areas that require different approaches to detailed design. Pathways through areas of sand dune, in particular, need to be designed sensitively to minimise their impact. Commitment is required to ensure that all pathways are well maintained and clearly signposted which will ensure that they are well used.

The sea wall at Newbiggin on the Sea is a necessary measure that prevents flooding and coastal erosion. The negative impact the wall has on the quality of public realm is significant. Improvements should address the reactivation of the seafront buildings, the re-opening of seaward views, the creation of varied and useable outdoor spaces and the implementation of more appropriate landscape materials.

Quality and Character

Whilst much industrial use of the coast has now gone, measures are required to integrate remaining industrial buildings more fully with their physical surroundings. Visual impact assessments can identify key views and sightlines where industrial buildings most strongly influence the character of coastal areas. Visual impact can then be reduced through the use of manmade landforms, the appropriate use of mixed woodland planting and where possible, changes to the structure or surfacing / colouring of the buildings themselves.

Permeability and Access

The consolidation of coastal walking and cycle routes will increase the recreational benefit of the Wansbeck coast. As well as upgrading the physical route, signage and interpretation will be required.

There are opportunities to improve access to the coast from inland areas by establishing riverside walkways and linking into the existing network of footpaths and cycle ways east of Ashington and Bedlington. The benefit of this would be felt most strongly by inhabitants of villages along the coastline.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

Views to the sea are highly valued by residents and visitors. In the development of Wansbeck's coast, a balance must be struck that allows some buildings to benefit from seaward views whilst not damaging the character of the coastline in general. Particularly good viewing points on higher ground and on spits of land need to be identified and safeguarded early in the development process.

Diversity

Several important ecological habitats along the coastline are now protected through the planning system. This protection and conservation should be carried out in tandem with interpretative initiatives to increase awareness of their importance and to enrich the visitor experience. This could take the shape of interpretation boards, bird hides and shelters and potentially the creation of a visitor centre.

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Design Guide Policy C1

Coast

The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Enhance ecological and recreational value with the creation of parkland associated with beaches and river estuaries.
- Improve linkages to existing settlements, notably Cambois and North Blyth.
- Identify new forms of employment to replace departing industry integrated carefully within the character type so as not to reduce its overall value for other uses.
- Allied to physical change, concentrate on changing perceptions of Wansbeck's formerly industrial coastal areas.
- Explore a new identity and character for the coast and then work to develop it so that it becomes clearly evident. This identity can be nurtured in a number of ways and is linked to the shape and form new development takes, the way in which people access these areas and the quality of the environment once they have arrived.

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Newbiggin by the sea

Architectural treatments and landscape elements can help to conceal industrial buildings

Establishment of a continuous costal path
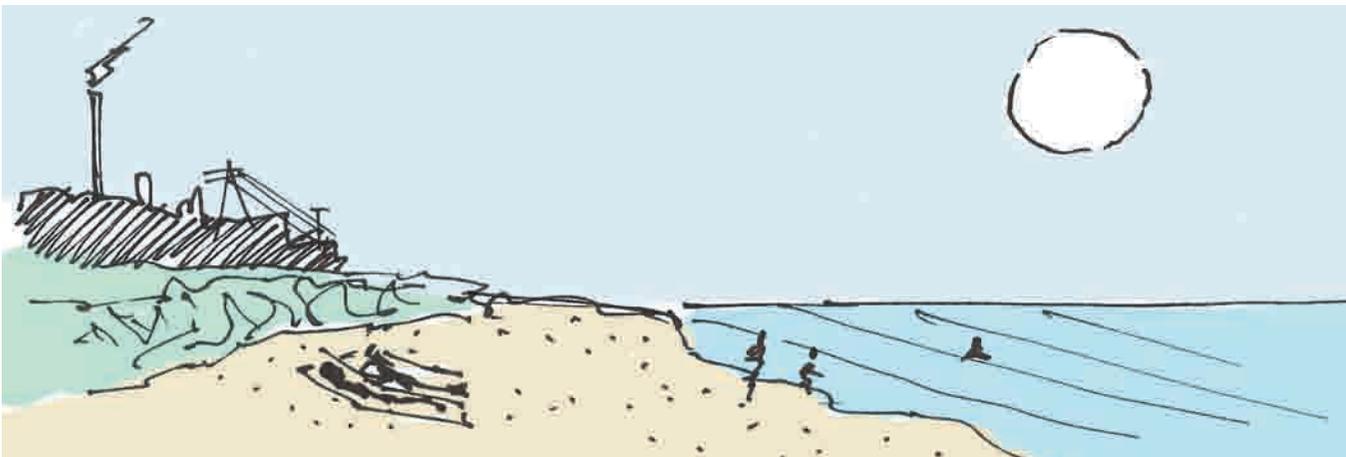
Existing juxtaposition of uses limits development potential

Riverside

Wansbeck's two rivers play in important role in defining the character and identity of the District as a whole. They provide an ecological and recreational resource that attracts users from near and far. However, potential exists for the River Wansbeck, River Blyth and Sleek Burn to play a greater role in the wider development of the District.

Public Realm

The provision of public realm along the rivers varies in extent and quality. A general move to improve the design and quality of all these spaces is necessary to increase use and value to local residents and visitors. As with all public realm, success is highly dependant on good management and maintenance structures being in place and resourced sufficiently.

Quality and Character

Whilst the more rural woodland parts of the riversides are of a high landscape quality, urban stretches of both rivers and particularly of the Wansbeck, have room for improvement. At present, this stretch is characterised by large expanses of flat amenity grass. A comprehensive landscape design project could help to improve the quality and function of these open spaces.

Continuing woodland management programmes are essential to ensure that the fine deciduous woodlands along both rivers are kept for generations to come. This will control the growth of invasive and or non – native plant species, ensure that access and conservation are appropriately balanced.

Permeability and Access

Whilst access along the rivers are in places very good, efforts should be made to complete these riverside paths (on both banks) so that they are continuous from upper reaches to the coast. This would be a major step in establishing a comprehensive network of pathways that maximise access to the waters edge and improve the attraction of Wansbeck as a whole to recreational visitors. In some areas, difficult planning issues and imaginative design solutions may be required to implement the paths along the full length. Care must be also be taken for the paths to have a minimum environmental impact on the rivers and their shores. Consideration for all users is also necessary, so that paths can be used by cyclist and runners as well as those moving at a slower pace.

For the rivers to play a bigger part in the lives of residents nearby, connections between Ashington and the River Wansbeck and between Bedlington and River Blyth need to be improved. Opportunities exist for streets and housing areas to be connected to the riverside with pathways and these should be further explored.

The potential for one or more pedestrian bridges across the river Wansbeck may be considered in the long-term to achieve greater permeability and connection between urban areas on either side of the rivers. A strategic study would be required to assess the most appropriate locations and care would need to be taken in the design of bridges to ensure they added to the areas character in a positive manner.

Capitalising on Natural Assets

At present Ashington, Stakeford, Guidepost and Bedlington 'turn their backs' onto the rivers that flow past them, with the majority of development facing in the opposite direction away from the river. This limits the visual impact of buildings onto the river corridors giving them a semi-rural character despite their proximity to major urban areas. It may be worth considering a different approach to either of both rivers by allowing well-designed and suitable development to face onto the river parkland. This would have the effect of integrating the rivers with the life to the towns more closely and add to the vitality and activity of open spaces on the edge of the rivers.

The rivers themselves provide some opportunity for uses such as fishing, boating and water sports. There may be suitable areas along the rivers for these to be developed, with due regard given to any environmental impacts.

A number of key views are present along the routes of the rivers. These should be identified and safeguarded where possible and opportunities to open up other views contemplated.

Diversity

The experience of walking up or down stream is characterised by movement through a number of contrasting areas and sub-character types. This visual experience of the river corridors can be strengthened by consideration of their spatial structure. How can different spaces along the river be strengthened, so to increase the contrast between different spaces and enhance the transition experience on moving between them.

Riverside

Harbour facilities finding new leisure uses as industrial demand lessens

The need to balance human and non human uses of the river

Opportunities to increase the richness of riverside open space
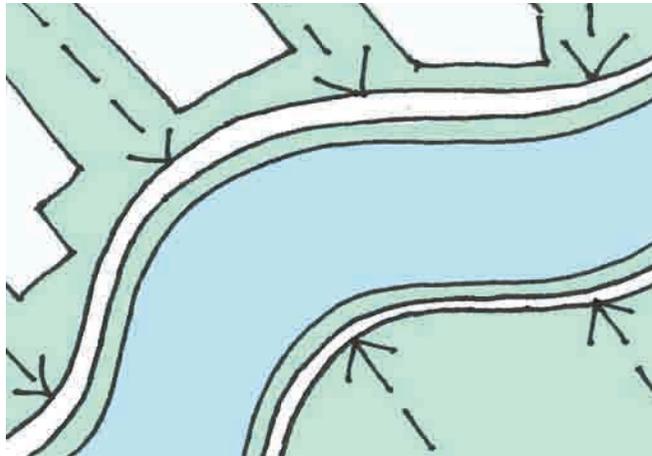
Continuous riverside pathways
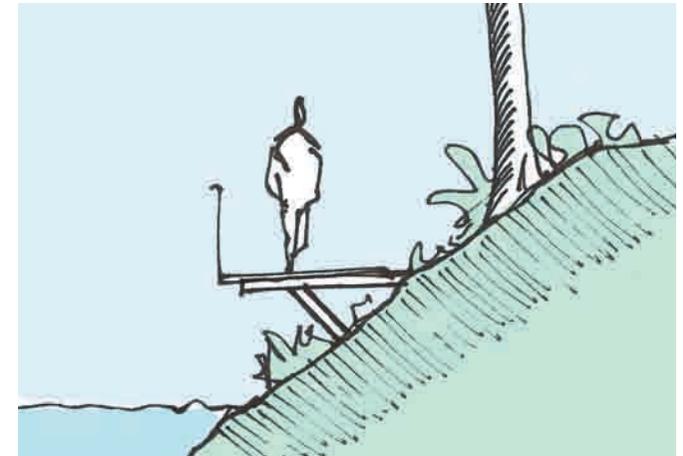
Imaginative design solution to implement pathways

As with other public open spaces in the district, clear uses and roles should be identified for the various spaces that occur along the rivers. How can their usefulness and be maximised to ensure they have value to as many people from across the district as possible.

Design Guide Policy R1
Riverside The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:
• Explore the opportunity for the rivers of Wansbeck district to play a greater role in the lives of people across the district and beyond.
• Improve connections to and along the rivers.
• Improve the design quality of public spaces to increase their value. Such measures would help to raise the profile of these places, which would bring wider benefits to the District.

Movement Corridors

The main roads of Wansbeck are an essential element of the perceived quality of the District. Roads can be simply engineered to meet highway standards or they can be designed as attractive features. Wansbeck has both. Overall, however, there is a need to reconsider how much of the main road network looks and works.

The rail infrastructure is also an important element of Wansbeck's movement corridors. With the support for a re-introduction of passenger services on the rail line between Newcastle and Ashington, there is a need to consider how much land may be required for the associated facilities and how to use this land in the meantime.

Public Realm
Planting, especially trees should be used to mitigate emission levels from cars. Planting along routes can also provide valuable corridors for wildlife when planting is contiguous and composed of native species.

Landscape enhancements, in the form of vegetation barriers, are usually aesthetic rather than acoustic, but they do provide psychological benefits to noise mitigation, and at the same time, improve opportunities for biodiversity and ecology.

Quality and Character
The main roads of Wansbeck should reflect the areas character, rather than appearing as every other main road in the country. Public art, surface materials, street furniture and signage, as well as landscape are elements to be considered in the design of roads and junctions.

The main roads run through different types of area. Thus they can change character; an urban avenue changing to a well landscaped rural route. The setting is a large element of the design composition of the route.

Permeability and Access
Every street is for all users, not only cars. The road should therefore be designed to suit a number of purposes, including cyclists and pedestrians. Even main routes for vehicle movement should be designed sensitively to:

- Minimize their negative effects on the area through which they pass
- Allow safe, pleasant and convenient use by pedestrians and cyclists

Pedestrian amenities such as benches, lighting and street trees for shade and aesthetic value should always be included in the design of main roads

On main roads, as on motorways, it is more difficult to meet the needs of all users. Indeed, where major traffic corridors intersect with pedestrian crossings can present a design challenge. In this case, wide landscaped crossings help to define and protect the pedestrian crossing from vehicle traffic. The surface treatment, lighting, signage, etc, should be used to define the pedestrian area; however, barriers should be avoided as they restrict ease of inevitable movement and only work to clutter the pedestrian space.

Capitalising on Natural Assets
Access to the coast and the riverside is variable – both along the banks and from the hinterland. Improving access would increase the public awareness of the coast and river, and help make the most of the Districts natural assets. However, retaining some relatively inaccessible areas of bank would provide a refuge for wildlife within the urban framework.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Movement and Connectivity

We judge a place by the sensory experience of using its streets (the feelings of safety, comfort, cleanliness, vitality and the visual character) perhaps more than any other characteristic. The street is made by three main elements; the building frame, the hard and soft landscape, and how the movement through it by all users (pedestrians, cyclists, vehicles) is accommodated. In designing movement and connectivity the following urban design guidelines should be applied:

- Streets should be well connected with the surrounding network; sometimes overcoming a barrier (a busy road or railway for example) is a key element of creating a well functioning street system. Remember, many key routes are not for vehicles but for creating a walkable area accessible to local amenities.
- Streets are multi-functional spaces with risks of conflicts between uses. There is a need to design for all the uses and users.
- Define street types by their capacity and character as well as function. In older areas with a homogenous characterless street system, restructuring on these lines can produce major benefits to the quality and sense of place.
- See the street surface between building lines as a landscape artefact, as a place, not just a road.
- Using the principle of tracking the carriageway relative to the buildings, keeping junctions tight, good wide pedestrian crossings, shared surfaces, 20mph zones and the parked car as a traffic calming device are just some of the approaches to make better streets.

Diversity

The majority of main roads is already in place and thus, can only be retrofitted. In such cases that standard solutions should be avoided, e.g. less road signs and barriers. Involve urban designers and landscape architects to provide a context-sensitive solution; one that considers the street as a complex system involving pedestrian, cyclist, vehicle movements, or a place where people meet and children play.

Design Guide Policy MC1

Movement Corridors

The following key principles will be addressed by the Council in implementing the Design Guide and considered when determining planning applications:

- Consideration should be given to the railway corridors in the District, whilst not seeking to compromise the long terms prospects of reintroducing the Ashington, Blyth, Tyne link;
- Explore opportunities to facilitate a green pedestrian cycle routes on former rail corridors;
- Explore opportunities to redevelop traffic junctions dominated by highway infrastructure, such as junctions of the A189 and transform them into gateways to the various settlements and town centres. These measures will help to ensure that space is not monopolised by infrastructure and will create a more attractive urban environment;
- On main roads use parking as a traffic-calming device, at the same time providing a buffer between the footpath and vehicle pavement, and meeting the needs of vehicle owners;

- Parking should be considered as one element of street design along with street trees, lighting, and benches;
- Parking on main roads should be positioned on either side of the carriageway, parallel and adjacent to the footpath. However, there are instances when angled or perpendicular parking may be appropriate, or when parking is better placed in a central boulevard.

Design guidance: Road and rail network

Severance at business/ employment sites from town centre & public transport networks

Town centre has poor routes to the shore (both visual & physical)

Ought to be key route to shore - but incohesive

Very positive pedestrian route along shore & housing frontage

Key route - needs stronger presence/strengthered route made more of

Severed area - poor frontage & pedestrian routes leading to safety issues. Underutilised natural asset

Highly severed area, by both road & public transport. Sites isolated

The main roads (A189 / A193) server communities

The majority of the rail infrastructure still remains as the lines are used for freight trains

Rail line restricts access to the coast

Lower-level streets and roads have positive landscaping features

Tree lining acts as a buffer as well as being visually attractive

Green space between paths way and the road acts as a buffer zone

Implementation & Toolkit

Introduction

The realisation of the design objectives set out in this Guide are critical to its success. A new approach is required to create a 'culture of concern' to form quality places. This chapter sets out a series of proposed mechanisms designed to ensure that the Guide is implemented in a fully committed way.

This Implementation Toolkit contains a number of mechanisms by which to begin to implement the Guide. These are:

- Design Statements (setting out their coverage and use);
- Public Works Checklist: to ensure public sector investment considers urban design objectives;
- Urban Design Review Committee: to ensure all public works are well as private development projects contribute to the creation of high quality urban environment;
- Future Guidance: defining strategies, Guides, masterplans, design briefs, how these relate to the new development plan system;
- Further Reading: listing key documents and guidance.

The contents of this Implementation section are designed to:

- be updateable;
- be added to with new guidance;
- be stand alone documents capable of separate publication.

Design Statements

Design and Access Statements

A Design and Access Statement is a report to illustrate the process that has led to a development proposal, and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way. Unless a Design and Access Statement is submitted with a planning application the Council will be prohibited from determining the application.

Statements will explain and justify proposals already set in the planning application, but they will also set out the principles and concepts that will be used when that proposal is developed in the future. For outline planning permission, applicants and local planning authorities should consider how they will ensure the relevant parts of the statement are adhered to for the drawing up and assessment of future details.

Statements are required for both outline and full planning applications. Limited exceptions apply, and include change of use applications and extensions to a house.

This guidance summarises the District Council's commitment to good design. The preparation of production of Design and Access Statements is an integral part of this. When reading the guidance set out below, reference should be made to Best Practice Principles and Character Area Guidance as set out in the Guide.

Within this guidance note are a number of Urban Design Checklists designed to enable District Council Development Control staff to identify the key urban design issues for a site. If there are, what they are, and what should be done. Where there is any uncertainty or doubt, the Development Control Officer must consult a qualified urban designer, preferably from within the authority's resources.

Developers and their designers can also benefit from these checklists. It is what the authority will be looking for. Time will be saved if the developer has produced his proposals with the issues identified here in mind.

What is a Design and Access Statement?

Design and Access Statements, setting out the design principles and concepts that have been applied, must accompany all planning applications.

In essence Design and Access Statements help to ensure that design is an integral part of the planning process. The overriding objective being to ensure high quality, well-designed development is built. They should primarily show that any given design has been informed by an assessment of policy, the site and its surroundings and a thorough evaluation of that information. It is suggested that a Statement's primary purpose should be justifying design decisions through evidence of a thorough design process.

Design and Access Statements provide a formal mechanism to explain the design process undertaken in preparing a scheme. It should demonstrate how the particular design approach has been arrived at and why it is the most appropriate.

"No two places are identical and there is no such thing as a blue print for good design. Good design always arises from a through and caring understanding of place and context." (By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: towards better practice).

The main aim of a Design and Access Statement is to enhance the design of all new buildings and public spaces. The Statement allows a more efficient and structured assessments of applications by local authorities. Design and Access Statements help to manage change, whether that change is major new development or just cumulative, small-scale additions and alterations.

How will a Design and Access Statement help?

- It provides a check that the context of the proposals has been fully considered;
- It can ensure all aspects of proposed schemes have been studied;
- The design principles of proposals are explicitly expressed for evaluation; and
- Provide a basis for assessing how proposals relate to the objectives and guidance set out in the Wansbeck Design Guide.

A Design and Access Statement has benefits for the client, designers, consultants as well as the local authority. The Statement should increase design awareness, provide a sound basis for constructive negotiations and lead to a high quality development. The Statement will also help individuals and the local community to understand why a particular design approach has been adopted.

A Design and Access Statement allows applicants to explain the design of their scheme in a structured way. It is an opportunity to demonstrate how the proposed design solution has been developed and how it makes a positive response to the site and its context.

The submission of the Statement will help the Council understand how a particular design solution has been developed and how a thorough appraisal of the site and its context has informed the design process. A clearly presented Statement will contribute to efficient and effective decision making and lead to an improved form of development.

Content of a Design and Access Statement

Government guidance (Circular 01/2006) provides guidance on changes to the outline planning permission process and the requirement for Design and Access Statements to accompany planning applications.

In addition, CABE have recently produced a best practice document "Design and Access Statements. How to write, read and use them" (2006). The guide is intended as best practice guidance and are effectively CABE's interpretation of government policy and should be considered best practice rather the statutory minimum. The CABE guide can be accessed at the following address :

www.cabe.org.uk/publications

Rather, than repeat in detail the CABE guidance, a short summary only is provided below. This is followed by a 'Checklist' to aid consideration of Design and Access Statements.

The suggested approach below falls under three key headings:

Appraising the Context
The Design Component
The Access Component

Key issues to be addressed in respect of each of these are also included below. These are based on the CABE publication ("Design and Access Statements. How to write, read and use them").

Appraising the Context

A Design and Access Statement must demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the proposed development. It is important that an applicant should understand the context in which their proposal will sit, and use this understanding to draw up the application. To gain a good understanding of context and to use it appropriately applicants should follow a design process which includes:

- Assessment of the site's immediate and wider context in terms of physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies. This may include both a desk survey and on-site observations and access audit. The extent of the area to be surveyed will depend on the nature, scale and sensitivity of the development.

- Involvement of both community members and professionals undertaken or planned. This might include, for example, consultation with local community and access groups and planning, building control, conservation, design and access officers. The statement should indicate how the findings of any consultation have been taken into account for the proposed development and how this has affected the proposal.

- Evaluation of the information collected on the site's immediate and wider context, identifying opportunities and constraints and formulating design and access principles for the development. Evaluation may involve balancing any potentially conflicting issues that have been identified.

- Design of the scheme using the assessment, involvement, and evaluation information collected. Understanding a development's context is vital to producing good design and inclusive access and applicants should avoid working retrospectively, trying to justify a pre-determined design through subsequent site assessment and evaluation.

Context: Key Issues

- Does the Statement show that the applicant has assessed the site's full context, including physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies?

- Has the applicant demonstrated how they have taken account of the results of any community involvement?

- Does the Statement show that the scheme has emerged from a rigorous assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process rather than trying to justify retrospectively a pre-determined solution?

The Design Component

A Statement should cover both the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed development and how issues relating to access have been dealt with. The Statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal – these are the use, amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance of the development.

Use

In the light of this understanding of the context, a Design and Access Statement should explain how this has been considered in relation to its proposed use. The use is the use or mix of uses proposed for land and buildings. Use cannot be reserved within an outline application. Statements for both outline and detailed applications should explain the use or uses proposed, their distribution across the site, the appropriateness of the accessibility to and between them, and their inter-relationship to uses surrounding the site.

Amount

The amount of development is how much development is proposed. The Design and Access Statement for both outline and detailed applications should explain and justify the amount of development proposed for each use, how this will be distributed across the site, how the proposal relates to the site's surroundings. Amount cannot be reserved within an outline application, although it is common to express a maximum amount of floorspace for each use in the planning application and for this to be made the subject of a planning condition.

Layout

The layout is the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces (both private and public) are provided, placed and orientated in relation to each other and buildings and spaces surrounding the development. If layout is reserved at the outline stage, the outline planning application should provide information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces proposed.

Scale

Scale is the height, width and length of a building or buildings in relation to its surroundings. If scale has been reserved at the outline stage, the application should still indicate parameters for the upper and lower limits of the height, width and length of each building proposed, to establish a 3-dimensional building envelope within which the detailed design of buildings will be constructed.

Landscaping

Landscaping is the treatment of private and public spaces to enhance or protect the amenities of the site and the area in which it is situated through hard and soft landscaping measures. The Design and Access Statement should explain and justify the proposed landscaping scheme. If landscaping is reserved at the outline stage the statement should explain and justify the principles that will inform any future landscaping scheme for the site.

Appearance

Appearance is the aspect of a place or building that determines the visual impression it makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture. If appearance is reserved at the outline stage, the outline application does not need to provide any specific information on the issue. In such cases the Design and Access statement should explain and justify the principles behind the intended appearance and explain how these will inform the final design of the development.

Design: Key Issues

Use
- Would the application help to create an appropriate mix of uses in the area?
- Would different uses work together well, or would they cause unacceptable annoyance?

Amount
- Is the density appropriate?
- Could the neighbourhood's services support the amount of development planned?

Layout
- Do all spaces have a purpose?
- Will public spaces be practical, safe, overlooked and inclusive?
- Will private spaces be adaptable, secure and inviting?

Scale
- Will the buildings sit comfortably with their surroundings?
- Will they, and parts like doors and windows, be of a comfortable scale for people?

Landscaping
- Has landscaping been properly considered from the start?
- Will it help to make the place look good and work well, and will it meet any specific aims for the site? AppearanceHow will the development visually relate to its surroundings?Will it look attractive?

The Access Component

The access component of the statement should relate to access to the development and does not extend to internal aspects of individual buildings. Statements should explain how access arrangements will ensure that all users will have equal and convenient access to buildings and spaces and the public transport network. For outline applications, where access is reserved, the application should still indicate the location of points of access to the site.

Context : Access

- Will the place be safe and easy for everyone to move around?
- Will it make the most of the surrounding movement network?
- Has the applicant clearly described their policy approach and consultation process, whether carried out or planned?

Statements and outline planning applications

At the same time as a formal requirement for Design and Access Statements was introduced, the rules about outline applications were also changed so that they must include a minimum level of detail on:

- what the buildings will be used for;
- how many buildings there will be;
- roughly how they will be laid out;
- minimum and maximum building sizes; and
- where entrances to the site will be.

The changes to the list of reserved matters, and the minimum information that now needs to be submitted at outline stage can be found in the Circular 01/2006. This provides guidance on changes to the outline planning permission process and the requirement for Design and Access Statements to accompany all planning applications.

The Statement accompanying the outline application should explain and justify the decisions taken so far but, very importantly, it must also explain the principles that will be followed when all the details are designed after permission is granted. The statement should set out the aims for the whole design, even if many of the details still have to be drawn up. The developer should keep within the parameters set out in the statement, and the outline permission may need to include conditions to make sure the ideas and aims in the statement are followed through as the design progresses.

Unless a new Statement is produced, the original one accompanying the outline application will be very important when reserved matters are drawn up and agreed. When reserved matters are approved, it may be appropriate to place further conditions on the permission that relate to detailed aspects of the statement submitted with the original outline application.

Checklist for a Design and Access Statement

The following checklist presents a framework for the preparation of a Design and Access Statement. It will help identify priorities and ensure nothing of importance

is omitted. This is a comprehensive checklist aimed at major developments .

Typically, a Design and Access Statement will include the following sections:

- Background information
- Project brief
- Policy review
- Site appraisal
- Design concept

Background Information

Background information will generally include:

- Brief project description.
- The project team including architect / developer / urban designer / agents / advisors etc.
- Brief description of the site including ownership details, site history, address etc.
- 1:1250 location plan.
- Photographs of the site including aerial photograph and the surrounding area (this information may form part of the site appraisal).

Project Brief

The project brief should clearly set out the aims and aspirations of the client and demonstrate how the principles of good design will be applied. Generally, it will include a series of statements relating to the following issues:

Development proposals

- What type of development is proposed?
- What is the mix of uses?
- What is the size and form of the development? For residential

developments, how many units are proposed and what density will be achieved?

- Is this a phased development? Are there any further developments proposed in the surrounding area?

Method of procurement

- What measures are in place to ensure a commitment to excellence in design and construction?
- How was the design team selected (architect, landscape architect, urban designer, planning consultant etc.) and what experience do they have?
- How will the contractor be selected?
- What is the project programme?

Sustainability

- Sustainability is a concept, which should permeate the whole design process. The client brief should demonstrate the concept of sustainability, in its widest sense has been identified as a key aim and objective of the development.

Design quality statement

- The design quality of all buildings and open spaces is fundamental to the success of any development. The design brief should include a statement referring to the client's aspirations of achieving design excellence.

Functional requirements

- What are the principal functions of the development?
- How will the development meet the functional requirements of all its users?

Accessibility

- How the development will promote accessibility and fulfil access requirements of all its users?

Community

- How the views of the local community will inform the design process?
- How the development will be of benefit to the wider community and improve social cohesion?
- What measures are in place to design out crime?

Policy Review

The Statement should identify relevant design guidance and planning policies and indicate how they have influenced the development proposals. See 'Further Reading' in the Design Guide for a list of relevant design guidance and policies.

Site Appraisal and Survey

The design process should begin with an analysis of the site and the wider area. This is factual account in the form of a written description, drawings (to scale) and photographs etc. Typically a site appraisal and survey will involve two key stages.

Desktop Study

A desktop study will include the collection of data such as plans showing the site and its surrounding area, aerial photographs and other relevant information e.g. the identification of utilities and services, land contamination, public transport, listed buildings, sites of archaeological importance and sites of nature conservation interest etc.

Site Survey

A site survey will involve the collection of data, such as townscape character, context, views and vistas, and patterns of movement. The survey will include a comprehensive photographic record of the site and its context.

Context

- What land use does the development site have?
- What are the adjacent land uses?
- What are the local land use policies on the site and the surrounding area?
- What is the development site area in hectares?
- What type of infrastructure exists on and around the site?
- What is the capacity of existing services available such as gas, electricity, water etc.
- What facilities are within close proximity of the site such as schools, shops, public transport etc?

Geology, Contamination and Pollution

- What are the soils and geology of the area? Is a geological survey required?
- Is the ground contaminated or has the site had a previous use that may have resulted in ground contamination? Is a ground contamination survey required?
- Is there a history of mining in the area?
- Is the proposed development in an area where there are unacceptable levels of air or water pollution?
- Do any parts of the area or site suffer from noise? Is a noise survey required?

Landscape Character

- What are the physical characteristics of the site e.g. topography, orientation, existing buildings and structures, watercourses and boundary etc?
- What is the ecology of the site and the surrounding area?
- What is the microclimate of the site?
- What boundaries and barriers are there at the edge of (or within) the area or site?

Built Form

- How did the site and the surrounding area develop? What are the ages of buildings and structures?
- What sort of street layout does the area have?
- Is the site of archaeological interest? Is an archaeological assessment or survey required?
- What is the distinctive character of buildings and structures on the site and the surrounding area?
- What distinctive architectural features and building techniques contribute to the character of the area?
- Is any part of the site in a Conservation Area?
- Are any buildings or structures listed for their architectural or historic value?

Movement

- What is the pattern of pedestrian movement in and around the site?
- What is the area's road network?
- What public transport routes and stops serve the area?
- What facilities for cycling are there?
- What current proposals for roads, footpaths or public transport might be relevant to future development?
- Will a green travel plan be required?

Views and Vistas

- What is visible from particular points within or around the site?
- Are there any notable views or landmarks?
- What buildings or structures (on or visible from the site) stand out from the background buildings?
- Are there places or features within or at the edge of the site which are seen (or could potentially be seen) as gateways to it?

Design Concept

This section will include a written statement and illustrations in sketch form to demonstrate how the project brief, policy review and the site appraisal have informed the principle design concepts of the development.

The final design solution should relate to the contextual site analysis and the assessment of development objectives. Where there are several design options these should be explored and explained, Planning Officers will discus these before an application is made. A design solution should not simply try to justify a pre-conceived design but arise from an explicit process of analysis and design.

Most applicants already go through this process in designing a proposal. Requiring a statement to be submitted with an application will help the District Council, neighbours, members of the public and you to understand the principles of the design of the proposal, and consider the proposal against national and local policies.

Planning Officers are willing to advise on Design and Access Statements and proposals. This is best done before the planning application is made.

Particular emphasis should be given to demonstrating how the key objectives of good urban design have been translated into the development proposals. These may include:

Character:

- How does the development respond to and reinforce positive elements of the local townscape and landscape character?
- How does the development establish a strong sense of place?

Built form:

- How does the development respond to and reinforce the built form character of the area?
- How does the scale, form, layout, continuity and enclosure establish an appropriate structure to the development?
- How does the development relate to the street and the public realm?

Public realm:

- Does the development provide safe, attractive and clearly defined public and private spaces?
- Does the development provide high quality amenity areas?

- What measures have been adopted to avoid the public realm being dominated by parked vehicles?
- Does the development include high quality landscape proposals? Is the landscaping easily maintained?

Movement:

- How does the development promote accessibility and permeability by making places connect and easy to move through?
- What measures are in place to make movement safe and attractive for all users?

Parking

Does the proposed development:

- Provide an appropriate amount of parking?
- Minimise the visual impact of parked vehicles within the public realm?#

Legibility:

- Is the development easy to move around? Does the development include gateways, landmarks, identifiable nodes etc?

Safety and security:

- How has safety and security been addressed? Does the development provide natural surveillance of public and private spaces?

Sustainability:

- How does the development minimise resource consumption?

Presentation

The applicant should choose the most effective form of presentation, as the contents of a Design and Access Statement will vary according to the scale and nature of the development and the site's characteristics. The Statement need not be an elaborate and lengthy document.

Illustrations must be easy to understand and clearly support the text. They may consist of photographs, sketches, figure / ground diagrams, photomontages, concept diagrams, computer based images and artists impressions. The applicant may also submit models or photographs of models. The illustrations should aim to explain the design approach rather than duplicate planning application drawings. Irrespective of the scale of development, the Statement must be supported by good quality and easily understood graphics.

Additional supporting information may include case studies and illustrations of similar developments. These may be local, national or international examples.

Public Works Checklist

The public sector (Central Government, local government, regeneration and development agencies) has two characteristics which are often ignored in our approach to planning and urban design.

First, design quality is often ignored; for example recurrent railings on the edges of routes and junctions. The purpose of such work is a departmental responsibility with little if any regard for the more general visual amenity and functional characteristics of the setting.

Second, public bodies spend money in fulfilling their responsibilities. A little thought on the design aspects of its spending brings more resources to improve the environment.

The public works urban design checklist has the following purpose:

- To raise awareness of the architectural, landscape and urban design issues that can be involved in public works;
- To provide a framework for greater liaison between departments and agencies;
- To empower the planning authorities to raise design issues with other public agencies and departments.

Category	Examples and Issues
New and refurbished buildings and sites	Hospitals, clinics, schools, colleges, community centres, police stations, fire stations • Site layout • Parking • Landscape treatment • Building locations and design
Routes, Streets and Paths	Repair, maintenance, improvements - particularly junctions • Review crossings • Barriers • Signage§Landscape setting • Floorscape treatment • Street furniture See the road as a visual composition in its setting, suitable for all users particularly pedestrians, remove clutter
Parks, Squares and Open Spaces	Maintenance and improvement Review boundary treatment, fences and gates; routes around and through spaces, seating, lighting, signage, address eyesores. Make the space or park a key accessible facility for the area it sits in; good gardening is often not enough.
Public Art	Encourage public art in all external works; fences, walls, floorscapes etc as well as 'features'.

CABE has a series of guidance documents on the above matters. These should be obtained, studied and used.

Urban Design Review Committee

The Council should work with key partners to explore the possibility of establishing an Urban Design Review Committee for major planning applications and significant public sector investment projects.

The outline proposal is for a committee of senior officers, chaired by either a Directorate Head or a senior local Councillor. The purpose of the Urban Design Review Committee (UDRC) is to ensure that major proposed works and projects by the District Council or in which the District Council is involved are monitored in urban design terms.

Thus, new or improved transport and traffic management schemes, open spaces and landscape walks, regeneration projects, town centre improvements, estate renewal, together with new or replacement facilities, (schools, colleges, hospitals, other health and public service uses and building; public art, street furniture, lighting, walls, fences, streetscape etc) should all be designed following an urban design appraisal and then be subject to a design review.

The reasons for this measure are:

- To ensure all public works are of a design character and quality fitting to their settings
- To ensure liaison between departments and between the different professionals in the design implementation and maintenance of all projects.

- To ensure the District Council sets an example and a lead in the procurement of high quality places, architecture, landscape and the public realm.

An external advisor to the UDRC (for example a CABE enabler) could help ensure that the urban quality objectives are pursued and that advice is given by a person independent from the pressures and priorities at a departmental level.

The UDRC could ultimately be developed as an internal consultation panel for major planning applications to provide a focused urban design response to significant development proposals.

Future Guidance

New material can be added to the Urban Design Guide; for example masterplans, design briefs etc will be necessary for particular schemes; these can be added to the this Implementation section, making it a dynamic evolving document useable for many years ahead.

In order to consider and implement this Guide it will be necessary for the District Council and developers to prepare a range of guidance documents for the District. This will come in various forms and will include: strategies, Guide plans, master plans, area action plans, development briefs and all should have a strong urban design content. These are a mixture of statutory and non-statutory in purpose, but the emphasis remains the same – to improve the quality of urban design across the District.

A brief summary of the role and nature of each of these is given below.

Strategies:
Usually best reserved where the area is large and most of the recommendations are likely to be concerned with improvements and enhancements rather than redevelopment, e.g. town centre strategy, coastline strategy, or where the output is likely to be generic rather than specific, e.g. public arts strategy, heritage strategy.

Development Guide:
Used for large sites with a long development   period and where development rather than improvement is the main expectation. These plans should be indicative rather than definitive of urban design and development expectations. A full coverage of all planning, urban design and sustainable development issues is required together with expressed principles about the development blocks and form, open space and landscape (including water), the outline uses, the access and movement proposals and phasing intentions. These exercises are frequently both a design/development exercise and a feasibility study concerned with costs, returns, development management and so on. It is suggested that this term is used by the District Council rather than 'Master Plan', which frequently is also used for similar exercises.

Master Plan:
This is a difficult term because it is used in a wide variety of situations. It is probably best to reserve this term for large schemes or substantial phases of large schemes where the output is expected to be definitive of proposals rather than indicative of possibilities/intentions. Thus, while the coverage is similar to a Development Guide, the design output should be finite, covering detailed architectural, landscape and engineering design and proposals for all other elements. The Master Plan should be an essential requirement of planning applications for major schemes.

Development Brief:
This is usually issued by a local authority or development agency to developers as a means of specifying the expectations of a bid for a site. This happens in two main circumstances. The first is for a major project where a development partner is being sought. This thus sets out the planning, urban design, transportation and sustainable development parameters for the preparation of a Development Guide or a Master Plan. The second is where a financial offer for a site is being sought; the acceptability of the offer depending on compliance with the planning criteria set out in the bid. Thus the bid is accompanied by a Master Plan.

Area Action Plan:
A central proposal of the Government's new planning system is the preparation of Area Action Plans. DCLG guidance (Planning: Delivering Fundamental Change, ODPM) states

"In their statement of core policies, local authorities should be required to identify where more detailed action plans should be produced. These are most likely to focus on areas of change where site-specific policies are needed to guide development. Equally, they might address conservation areas or village plans."

PPS 12 clarifies that, Area Action Plans should be used to provide the planning Guide for areas where significant change or conservation is needed. A key feature of area action plans will be the focus on implementation. They should:

- deliver planned growth areas;
- stimulate regeneration;
- protect areas particularly sensitive to change;
- resolve conflicting objectives in areas subject to development pressures; or
- focus the delivery of area based regeneration initiatives.

In areas of change, area action plans should identify the distribution of uses and their inter-relationships, including specific site allocations, and set the timetable for the implementation of the proposals. Further guidance, such as the layout of uses within these allocations and design requirements etc, may be provided in the relevant area action plan or in one or more supplementary planning documents in the form of a master plan.

Community Involvement:

The validity and acceptability of new proposals is dependent upon the level and form of consultation undertaken. "Delivering Fundamental Change" places great emphasis upon the "Statement of Community Involvement". Thus the involvement of the community needs to be planned into the use and adoption of the instruments outlined above.

Planning System:

The Local Development Guide should be in the form of a 'folder' of documents for regular updating. The LDF folder will include 'Development Plan Documents" and can include Supplementary Planning Documents. Thus as various strategies, plans and briefs are produced, they can be added to the LDF. Thus, the new system is enabling of an approach whereby urban design is an integral part of planning policy.

Further Reading

National Guidance

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (ODPM)

Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Guides (ODPM)

Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (DTLR)

Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the historic environment (DTLR)

Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation (DTLR)

Regional Guidance

Building in Sustainability - A guide to Sustainable Construction and Development in the North East (SUSTAINE)

Local Guidance

Adopted Wansbeck Local Plan and associated Supplementary Planning Guidance

Best Practice

Urban Design Compendium (English Partnerships / Housing Corporation)

Better Civic Buildings and Spaces (CABE)

Better Public Buildings (DCMS)

By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System (DTLR)

Places, Streets and Movements- Companion to Design Bulletin 32 (DETR)

Building in Context (CABE / English Heritage)

Guidance on Tall Buildings (CABE / English Heritage)

Celebrating Innovation (CABE / Rethinking Construction)

The Value of Urban Design (CABE)

What makes a good Building (Royal Fine Art Commission)

Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing (DTLR)

By Design: Better Places to Live, A Companion Guide to PPG3 (DTLR)

Places, streets and movement: a companion guide to Design Bulletin 32: Residential Roads and Footpaths (DETR)

Planning and sustainable access (DTLR)

Streets for all (English Heritage)

Designing streets for people (UDAL & ICE)

Towards an urban renaissance (Urban Task Force)