Northumberland
County Council

Northumberland Local Plan

Publication Draft Plan (Regulation 19)

Policy Approach for Northumberland's Twelve Main Town Centres, based on Evidence

Technical Paper

Updated for the Publication Draft Local Plan (Regulation 19)

December 2018

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Introduction

1. This short technical background paper takes conclusions from the Northumberland Town Centre and Retail Study, 2011, as updated in 2013 and 2016[1], and projects them forward, considering the characteristics of the centres, to arrive at a set of requirements for Northumberland's twelve main towns.

Initial Conclusions on Quantitative Retail and Leisure Need

2. Figure 1 is based on the levels of convenience and comparison retail spending that each town retains, as a proportion of the total amount that could be spent in the town by people living there or within its catchment. Building in standard projections for household spending growth and population growth, it shows the scope for new floorspace if the proportion of spending retained in each town stays the same - i.e. if each town 'holds its own' in relation to other towns.
3. The coloured blocks indicate approximately when there will next be scope for more shops over and above what has recently come on stream or is being built.
   a. If the shaded block is at the left hand side (column headed 'By 2021') - there is scope for more floorspace in the very near future. This indicates that the floorspace in the town is, on average, trading at high levels per square metre compared with expectations and no new floorspace has come forward to soak up this spending potential;
   b. The further to the right the shaded block is, the more this indicates 'undertrading' - that is, stores in the town are not turning over the level of expenditure that might be expected and there is scope for the existing stores to absorb more spending for a certain number of years before there is a need for new shopping floorspace.
4. The less scope a town has for new floorspace in the near future, the more vulnerable it is likely to be to any new out-of-centre shopping facility diverting trade from the centre in a damaging way. The Council cannot restrict new floorspace on the grounds of need but it can use need as an indicator of how any new out of centre proposals might adversely impact existing shops in the town centre.
5. The column second from right in Figure 1 (headed 'Approx. Additional land for retail that may be needed by 2036') gives, for each town, a broad indication of the possible land take of the quantum of new retail floorspace for which there may be scope by the end of the Plan period. This includes possible car parking, servicing etc.
6. The right hand column (headed 'Approx additional land for leisure that may be needed by 2036') refers to large scale leisure facilities. The Northumberland Town Centre and Retail Study Update 2016 found that there could be scope for ten or more new cinema screens and upwards of 16 additional ten pin bowling lanes between 2014 and 2031, with these best located in SE Northumberland and/or Morpeth. The Study did not note any particular outstanding need for other types of large-scale leisure floorspace but

[1] All three studies were prepared for the Council by independent consultants WYG Planning & Environment (White Young Green).

suggested that such proposals coming forward (e.g. as part of a larger redevelopment) should be accommodated, if suitably assessed against the relevant policies.

7. The initial conclusions reached for each centre are indicated by the colour of the right hand boxes:

- **Red shaded centres** - **Cramlington** and **Ashington** would benefit from additional floorspace to service their populations and catchments in the short term and may require additional land - up to 5 or 6 hectares respectively - to accommodate new shopping floorspace and additional large scale leisure within the plan period. The leisure potential in Ashington may be higher as Cramlington already offers cinema screens.

- **Orange shaded centres** - **Berwick-upon-Tweed** and **Blyth** - would be appropriate for additional retail capacity in the short to medium term - particularly for comparison shopping, and additional land - up to 4 hectares in each of these two towns - may need to be found within the plan period unless an alternative solution can be found. In Blyth's case there may be an opportunity to meet unmet large scale leisure requirements. *However it should be noted that, at the time of writing, a large retail scheme adjacent to Morrisons, in the north of the town, is proposed. If implemented, this would push back the approximate dates when additional floorspace is needed, as indicated by the asterisks and it may fall back into the yellow category.*

- **Yellow-shaded centres - Morpeth, Hexham** and **Alnwick**, i.e. the remaining 'large centres', are reasonably well provided for but may have scope for more shopping floorspace in the medium term[2], (although Morpeth would benefit from further choice of <u>convenience</u> retailing in the short term). If the solution to this is to build additional new floorspace, up to 3 hectares may be needed by the end of the plan period, but this is certainly not an imminent need. Morpeth would also be in the area that might have an opportunity to provide for unmet need for large-scale leisure provision.

- **Grey-shaded centres - Amble, Bedlington, Haltwhistle, Ponteland** and **Prudhoe** - i.e. all of those Main Towns with smaller centres - currently retain relatively small proportions of the total retail spending potential of their populations. In Haltwhistle and Prudhoe particularly, current shops are few in number but trade well so that these centres would benefit from modest additional shopping choice in either the short or medium term but the land needed (by the end of the plan period) to fulfil this would be minimal - certainly less than a hectare in all cases.[3] It is unlikely (although not out of the question) that these towns would attract the type of large scale leisure outlets that would require significant additional land.

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2 This takes account of the scheme in Alnwick that has recently gained permission (in the Willowburn area on the outskirts of the town, (Application 17/04374FUL).

3 It can be noted that outline permission exists in Prudhoe for (potentially) upwards of 5000m2 of floorspace at Low Prudhoe, (Application 16/02082/OUT) with a detailed scheme currently under consideration, (Application 18/03945/REM). In Amble, a scheme of similar size is the subject of a current application (at Coquet Enterprise Park), (Application 18/03156/FUL). The effect of these schemes will be to push when additional floorspace may be needed back to beyond the Plan Period, (shown by asterisks in Figure 1).

Figure 1
Scope for additional retail and large-scale leisure as the Plan period progresses

		Approximate Date when additional retail scope becomes possible (over and above existing and schemes in the pipeline)					Approx. additional land for retail that may be needed by 2036	Approx. additional land for leisure that may be needed by 2036
		By 2021	2021 - 2026	2026 - 2031	2031 - 2036	2036 and after		
Main Towns - Larger Centres								
Alnwick	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison						1-2Ha	
Ashington	Convenience						2-3Ha	Up to 2Ha in SE N'land*
	Comparison						2-3Ha	
Berwick-upon-Tweed	Convenience					*	<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison			*			2-3Ha	
Blyth	Convenience						<1Ha	Up to 2Ha in SE N'land*
	Comparison						2-3Ha	
Cramlington	Convenience						1-2Ha	Up to 1Ha in SE N'land*
	Comparison						2-3Ha	
Hexham	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison						1-2Ha	
Morpeth	Convenience						1-2Ha	Up to 2Ha in SE N'land*
	Comparison						<1Ha	
Main Towns - Smaller Centres								
Amble	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison					*	<1Ha	
Bedlington	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison						<1Ha	
Haltwhistle	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison						<1Ha	
Ponteland	Convenience						<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison						<1Ha	
Prudhoe	Convenience					*	<1Ha	Negligible
	Comparison					*	<1Ha	

How other factors can moderate the floorspace needed

8. The above are initial conclusions but the policy approach for different centres should be adjusted to reflect a series of factors relating to potential demand and scope to accommodate the demand. These are:

   - New forms of trading;
   - The relative strength of centre versus the town as a whole
   - The potential for claw-back
   - Physical constraints; and
   - Physical opportunities

   These considerations are explained below and then Figure 2 scores the centres relative to each other, in terms of how these factors may or may not contribute towards their potential to grow.

New forms of trading

9. Online shopping and similar remote forms of purchasing may be seeing more rapid growth than was being predicted, even in the most recent comprehensive evidence study. Such a change could mean a downward adjustment in how much physical shopping floorspace will be needed in the towns and when.

10. This will not be evenly spread. Those centres which draw from a wide rural hinterland are likely to lose more trade than those with more tight-knit catchments.[4]

11. The Town Centre and Retail Study looked at the proportion of purchases made online for each type of goods by the zones defined. While the data is from 2015, the contrast between areas is clear:

    - Looking at the main food shop, the zone with the highest proportion purchasing online (at 10.5%) was that centred on Scots Gap, a zone without any main towns or service centres in the heart of rural central Northumberland. Next (at 8.1%) came the zone centred on Alnwick and taking in Rothbury, sections of the North Northumberland coast and large swathes of rural north-west Northumberland. Meanwhile the lowest proportions were in more urban areas - Ashington West (0.7%), Ashington East (0.8%) and Ponteland (0.9%).
    - For clothing and footwear, the contrast is even more marked: 21.5% of purchases by households in the Berwick catchment area (a wide area stretching over the Scottish border) were made online, followed by the west Northumberland zone including Haltwhistle and much of the North and South Tyne valleys, as well as the

[4] Nationally, studies show that the distance factor contributes towards the propensity to purchase goods online and that this is not necessarily cancelled out by incomplete broadband coverage in rural areas. (See for instance Graham Clarke, Christopher Thompson & Mark Birkin (2015) The emerging geography of e-commerce in British retailing, Regional Studies, Regional Science, 2:1, 371-391, DOI: 10.1080/21681376.2015.1054420 (https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2015.1054420).

wide area around Alnwick (both 16.9%). Meanwhile both Ashington zones registered below 4%.

12. The full analysis can be found in Section 5 of the 2016 update of the Northumberland Town Centre and Retail Study.

13 Based on the above analysis, Figure 2 scores the centres in relation to how any future spending and floorspace growth, within the centres themselves, are likely to be tempered by the future propensity for people within their catchments to increase the proportion of shopping that they do online. The more remote areas (based around rural market towns with large hinterlands) are most likely to be affected, while some of the more urban, less affluent parts of south-east Northumberland the least likely.

Figure 2 How moderating factors influence future plans for town centres

	How moderating factors influence future plans for town centres					
	Impact of new forms of trading	Relative strength of the centre within the wider town	The potential for claw-back	Physical Constraints within the centre	Physical Opportunities close in or alongside the centre	SCORE
Main Towns - Larger Centres						
Alnwick	Most (1)	Average (3)*	V. Low (1)	Signif. (1)	Limited (1)	7
Ashington	Least (3)	Average (3)	Low (2)	Less (3)	Signif. (3)	14
Berwick	Most (1)	Weakest (4)	Low (2)	Signif. (1)	Limited (1)	10
Blyth	Least (3)	Weakest (4)	V. Low (1)	Some (2)	Signif. (3)	13
Cramlington	Least (3)	Strongest (2)	Moderate (3)	Less (3)	Some (2)	13
Hexham	Most (1)	Average (3)	V. Low (1)	Signif. (1)	Limited (1)	7
Morpeth	Average (2)	Strongest (2)	Low (2)	Signif. (1)	Some (2)	9
Main Towns - Smaller Centres						
Amble	Average (2)	Strongest (2)*	Moderate (3)*	Some (2)	Some (2)	11
Bedlington	Least (3)	Strongest (2)	Moderate (3)	Some (2)	Some (2)	12
Haltwhistle	Most (1)	Strongest (2)	Moderate (3)	Some (2)	Some (2)	10
Ponteland	Average (2)	Strongest (2)	Moderate (3)	Some (2)	Limited (1)	10
Prudhoe	Average (2)	Strongest (2)*	Good (4)*	Some (2)	Some (2)	12

The relative strength of centre versus the town as a whole:

14. There are certain towns - most notably Blyth and Berwick - which have a high proportion of their overall retail and leisure offer located well away from their centre.[5] These centres are considered therefore to be weaker and more vulnerable to change. However this is not always easy to measure and monitor.[6]

15. Much work has been carried out to examine the health of town centres in particular years and some of this has informed the Northumberland Town Centre and Retail Study.[7]

16. Figure 3 looks at changes in vacancy rates over a four year period, albeit in a terms of the percentage of units, rather than floorspace. Such ‘snapshot’ surveys do not always give the full picture and should be treated with caution. It can be seen that Blyth and Alnwick have experienced notable increases in vacant units but those that have seen a reduction in vacancy may nevertheless be experiencing decline in other ways such as reduced footfall or a gradual lowering in the percentage of A1 retail uses.

17. Notwithstanding the difficulty of establishing clear trends over time in the health of particular centres, it is clear that step changes in out of centre provision in market towns the size of those in Northumberland will affect the traditional centres. The scale may not be such that the centre becomes irreparably damaged in terms of its vitality and viability but some trade will be diverted and any planned expansion of facilities (or aspirations to do so) could be postponed for some years.

18. Such effects can be exacerbated by the fact that yet further out of centre development may be found to be acceptable because much of its impact would be on other out of centre stores with which it would be competing - but it would still (inevitably) draw some of its spending from the traditional centre.

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5 This effect is likely to be even further exacerbated in Berwick if the retail park in the north of the town gets the go ahead, (Application 18/01184/FUL).

6 With further out-of-centre retail parks proposed in Amble, (Application 18/03156/FUL), Prudhoe (Applications 16/02082/OUT and 18/03945/REM), and such a centre in Alnwick already with permission, (Application 17/04374FUL), (see asterisks), these towns may move to a weaker category on this factor in future.

7 Much information of use can be found in Town Centre Health Checks Carried out by ‘Northumberland Infonet’ (also known as Northumberland Knowledge), which were supplemented and published by consultants WYG Planning and Environment in the first version of the Northumberland Town Centre and Retail Study in 2011, (see the evidence base page on the Council’s website at www.northumberland.gov.uk).
Subsequently, further heath checks were carried out by Action for Market Towns as part of Town Centre Benchmarking Reports. A summary can be found here: http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Studies%20and%20Evidence%20Reports/Economy%20Retail%20Studies/9.%20Individual%20Town%20Benchmarking%20Report/Northumberland-Market-Town-Benchmarking-Summary-2014.pdf but, unfortunately, the more detailed reports no longer exist in published form.

19. Based on the above, Figure 2 gives the highest scores to centres that are the weakest in relation to retail presence on their outskirts, based on the view that these towns would benefit the most from efforts to concentrate additional services in their defined centres.

Figure 3 Vacancy Rates in Centres 2013 to 2017

The table shows the percentage of units, rather than floorspace, based on health check information from 2013 and 2015 and the Council's own survey work carried out in 2017

Please note that the exact definition of the areas surveyed may vary slightly between the three sets of figures, so the results should be taken as indicative only in terms of the trends shown.

	2013	2015	2017
Main Towns - Larger Centres			
Alnwick	**7%**	**5%**	**11%**
Ashington	**11%**	**15%**	**12%**
Berwick	**9%**	**10%**	**5%**
Blyth	**9%**	Not available	**14%**
Cramlington	**8%**	**10%**	**4%**
Hexham	**8%**	**8%**	**1%**
Morpeth	**9%**	**10%**	**6%**
Main Towns - Smaller Centres			
Amble	**7%**	**2%**	**6%**
Bedlington	**11%**	**11%**	**15%**
Haltwhistle	**7%**	**2%**	**3%**
Ponteland	**7%**	**12%**	**9%**
Prudhoe	**2%**	**2%**	**4%**

The potential for claw-back

20. Some towns will have the potential to see a modest increase in the proportion of their catchment spending retained within the town - i.e. they may be able to 'claw back' leaking expenditure. The five smaller centres (Amble, Bedlington, Haltwhistle, Ponteland and Prudhoe) may, in particular have such potential but this would rely on a 'step change' in the retail and/or leisure offer - something which occurred in Morpeth with the redevelopment of the Sanderson Arcade area some years ago. This will not necessarily be easy to achieve - most of these small towns have seen proposals for significant new development or redevelopment of shopping facilities that have (so far at least) not come to fruition.[8]

21. In terms of Figure 2, the highest scores are given to the towns which are seen as having the greatest potential to claw back trade. Prudhoe is given the highest score of all, as it has a high population within the town but a small centre in terms of floorspace and spending retained in the town, due to leakage to Tyneside and elsewhere. The

[8] Current proposals in Prudhoe and Amble may have a claw-back effect - i.e. spending returning to the town, (see asterisks in column 4 of Fig 2). Neither proposal is in the centre of the town, however.

lowest scores are given to those centres that have already seen recent improvements in their provision and, being a bit further from the conurbation and/or not having a wide hinterland, will have lower potential to bring more spending into the town.

Physical constraints

22. In Northumberland, several of the main town centres are heavily constrained in terms of how they may be able to expand or extend physically, through their tight-knit historic fabric or poor road access.
23. In this case, the scoring given in Figure 2 is lowest for those with substantial historic areas (Hexham, Alnwick, Berwick and Morpeth), with the more modern, spacious Cramlington and Ashington town centre receiving the highest scores.

Physical opportunities

24. Notwithstanding the above, a number of the County's town centres offer opportunities for new development or scope for redevelopment in or close to their centres.
25. In Figure 2, the higher scores are give to centres where undeveloped and and/or opportunities for beneficial, comprehensive redevelopment remain - notably Blyth and Ashington.

Conclusions on the Approach for each Centre

26. Based on the analysis above, as summarised in Figures 1 and 2, the following conclusions can be reached for each centre, as to how additional shopping and leisure floorspace, for which there is scope during the plan period, can best be accommodated.

Ashington

27. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Ashington was that it has scope for additional comparison and convenience floorspace already and this will increase as the plan period progresses, to the extent that the town centre would benefit if there was land onto which shopping could expand of up to 6 hectares. Added to this, the likely scope for additional large scale leisure would need to be accommodated in SE Northumberland. As Cramlington already offers a cinema facility, Ashington could be a candidate for additional screens as well as other large scale leisure such as ten pin bowling etc.
28. Figure 2 shows Ashington to score well in terms of its potential to soak up additional floorspace:
    - Less of its catchment is isolated so that online shopping may have less of an impact than elsewhere;
    - While some of the existing offer lies beyond the defined shopping area, most is within easy reach, giving less urgency in terms of having a strategy to bolster shopping in the town centre relative to the outskirts;

- Ashington, being a large centre well within Northumberland will have limited scope to increase its share of retail spending, although a step change in the quantity and quality of the retail offer could achieve a degree of ‘clawback’;
- The centre is not strongly constrained physically;
- Future development sites in the NE quadrant of the centre have been identified through past planning options exercises

29. The conclusion for Ashington is that a strong effort should be made to deliver scope for additional floorspace and mixed facilities in the north-east quadrant of the Town Centre.

30. The fabric of the existing town centre is ageing with limited opportunity for the larger, modern footplates that may be required for larger retailers. It would therefore be beneficial if the policy approach allowed for some redevelopment to facilitate this to complement any development of the north-east opportunity area.

Cramlington

31. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Cramlington was that it has scope for additional comparison and convenience floorspace already and this will increase as the plan period progresses, to the extent that the town centre would benefit if there was land onto which shopping could expand of up to 5 hectares. Added to this, the likely scope for additional large scale leisure would need to be accommodated in SE Northumberland. As Cramlington already offers a cinema facility, this scope may be less than in other SE Northumberland towns.

32. Figure 2 shows Cramlington as scoring reasonably well in terms of its potential to soak up additional floorspace:

    - Less of its catchment is isolated so that online shopping may have less of an impact than elsewhere;
    - Virtually none of the existing offer lies beyond the defined shopping area, giving little or no scope to bolster shopping in the town centre relative to the outskirts;
    - Cramlington, being a large centre but relatively close to large out of town retail parks on Tyneside, will have some scope to increase its share of retail spending: a step change in the quantity and quality of the retail offer could achieve some clawback’;
    - The centre is not strongly constrained physically;
    - Future possibilities include one of expansion of the centre onto car parking space and land occupied by redundant buildings.

33. The conclusion for Cramlington is that a strong effort should be made to deliver scope for additional floorspace. There are clear opportunities for expansion of the existing shopping centre southwards, although there may be other opportunities around the defined centre.

Blyth

34. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Blyth was that it has scope for additional comparison retail floorspace already and this will increase as the plan period progresses, additional convenience floorspace will be required in due course but not immediately. If the additional needs are to be accommodated as a town centre expansion, between 3 and 4 Ha may be needed. Added to this, the likely scope for additional large scale leisure would need to be accommodated in SE Northumberland. As Cramlington already offers a cinema facility, Blyth could be a candidate for additional screens as well as other large scale leisure such as ten pin bowling etc.

35. Figure 2 shows Blyth to score heavily in terms of the need and scope for its town centre to provide additional floorspace:

    - Less of its catchment is isolated so that online shopping may have less of an impact than elsewhere;
    - A high proportion of Blyth's existing offer lies well beyond the defined shopping area, giving urgency in terms of having a strategy to bolster shopping in the town centre relative to the outskirts;
    - Blyth, being a large centre well within Northumberland will have limited scope to increase its share of retail spending, although a step change in the quantity and quality if the retail offer could achieve a degree of 'clawback' into the centre but most of this would be likely to be at the expense of stores in its outskirts;
    - The centre is physically constrained in certain directions due to residential and conservation areas, as well as the port;
    - There is some scope for expansion towards Keel Row car park and the bus station and depot, as explored through Supplementary Planning Documents in the past.[9]

36. It is concluded that Blyth would benefit from a strong effort to bring any additional floorspace into the town centre, possibly for mixed town centre uses. In part, this could be achieved on land north and east of Keel Row, with scope for redevelopment, relocation or refurbishment of uses such as the bus depot and bus station.

37. However the fabric of the existing town centre is ageing. Significant numbers of units are vacant, including along key frontages. It is thought that, rather than reflecting a complete lack of potential, this reflects a shortage of opportunity for larger, modern

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9 See especially 'Blyth Valley Borough Local Development Framework, Bus Depot Development Brief Supplementary Planning Document', June 2008 and 'Blyth Valley Borough Local Development Framework, Urban Design Guide and Public Realm Strategy Supplementary Planning Document', June 2008, both avaiable via the Northumberland Consolidated Planning Policy Framework - see http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Consolidated%20Planning%20Policy%20Framework/Northumberland-Consolidated-Planning-Policy-Framework.pdf.

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footplates that may be required for larger retailers. It would therefore be beneficial if the policy approach allowed for some redevelopment to facilitate this as an alternative for or ad ditional to new development being on an allocated site.

Berwick-upon-Tweed:

38. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Berwick- upon- Tweed was that it will have scope for additional comparison floorspace in the fairly near future and this will increase as the plan period progresses. If the currently proposed scheme goes ahead, [10] this will be met until about half way through the plan period. The Figure shows that additional convenience floorspace will be required in due course but not immediately. If the currently proposed scheme goes ahead, there will, on paper, be no further need for convenience shopping within the plan period. In total, the analysis shows that additional shopping and associated leisure needs could require between 3 and 4 Ha but this will would be nearer 2 Ha if the currently proposed scheme goes ahead.[11]

39. Figure 2, shows Berwick to score only modestly in terms of the need and scope for its town centre to provide additional floorspace:

    - Much of its catchment is isolated so that online shopping could make inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
    - An increasing proportion of Berwick's existing offer lies well beyond the defined shopping area, giving urgency in terms of having a strategy to bolster shopping in the town centre relative to the outskirts;
    - Berwick, being a large centre in an isolated location within Northumberland will have limited scope to increase its share of retail spending, although a step change in the quantity and quality of the retail offer could achieve a degree of 'clawback' into the centre from the outskirts but also with the possibility of some of this coming from towns in the Scottish Borders;
    - The centre is physically constrained in all directions and in terms of the historic environment;
    - There is little scope for any coherent expansion of the existing shopping area with new development. The whole of the centre and well beyond is a conservation area.

40. It is concluded that Berwick would benefit from a strong effort to bring additional floorspace and hence footfall into the town centre. Such an approach is increasing in urgency with additional out-of-centre proposals.[12] More floorspace would be difficult to achieve close to the centre due to a lack of sites of a suitable size. Instead, the appropriate approach is to allow for small scale opportunities for enhancement of the Conservation Area through partial redevelopment that would deliver some additional retail space with large floor-plates, preferably within 300m of the edge of the Primary Shopping Area. Clearly other ways of boosting footfall in Berwick's centre need to be

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[10] See Application 18/01184/FUL.
[11] See Application 18/01184/FUL.
[12] See Application 18/01184/FUL.

sought. At least part of the answer could come through the emerging Borderlands initiative, which identifies the town as a location for cultural facilities - notably exploration of the feasibility of a Berwick theatre and conference centre close to the River Tweed.

Morpeth:

41. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Morpeth was that it will have scope for additional convenience retail floorspace in the very near future and this will increase as the plan period progresses, additional comparison floorspace will be required in due course, if the town is not to leak spending elsewhere but this is not an immediate issue. If the additional needs are to be accommodated as a town centre expansion, between 2 and 3 Ha may be needed as the plan period progresses. Added to this, the likely scope for additional large scale leisure would need to be accommodated in SE Northumberland, with Morpeth as a possible location, being central and close to the bulk of the County's population. Cramlington already offers a cinema facility but Morpeth could be a candidate for additional screens and/or other potential leisure facilities, such as ten pin bowling.

42. Figure 2, however, shows Morpeth to score only modestly in terms of the ease with which the town centre could accommodate additional floorspace or indeed the actual need for it:

    - Some of the town's catchment is rural, so that online shopping could make inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
    - The centre has experienced a relatively recent step change in its offer and only a small proportion of the town's retail offer is away from its centre. It is performing strongly and there is no urgent need to bolster the centre's range of shopping;
    - Morpeth, having clawed back spending with the implementation of the Sanderson Arcade, a new large supermarket and the conversion of the old, will have limited scope to increase its share of retail spending, although there remains some scope to extend the range of choice;
    - The centre is physically constrained in most but not all directions and in terms of the historic environment;
    - Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan has defined quite a wide Primary Shopping Area that includes large car parking areas and shown some opportunity sites within the wider town centre. Some key frontages that remain vacant at present could, (within the parameters of the conservation area designation), provide opportunities to create additional coherent floorplates .

43 It is concluded that Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan provides sufficient opportunity for additional retail and leisure floorspace to establish in the centre to meet future needs. Efforts should be concentrated on allowing scope to accommodate additional floorspace within the existing fabric of the town's main shopping streets and within the parameters of the conservation area designation.

Alnwick

44. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Alnwick was that it currently has sufficient retail floorspace to serve local people to the extent that their spending remains in the town. Assuming all permitted floorspace goes ahead,[13] any additional scope for comparison floorspace will not exist until half way through the plan period and convenience needs will be served until the end of the plan period. If the additional retail and associated leisure needs are to be accommodated, the area needed will be up to 3 Ha, although the figure will be half this, once the development permitted in the Willowburn area goes ahead.

45. Figure 2 shows a low score for Alnwick in terms of the ease with which the town centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons why the level of the requirement over time may be even less than suggested:

- The town's catchment is rural, so that online shopping is likely to make inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
- A second focus of retail activity has been established in recent years in the vicinity of the A1, well away from the centre. While vacancy levels in the centre are low and confined to more peripheral streets, it would be beneficial if any future additions were as central as possible;
- Alnwick, being a main centre in an isolated location within Northumberland will have limited scope to increase its share of retail spending, although a step change in the quantity and quality of the retail offer could achieve a degree of 'clawback' into the centre from the outskirts;
- The centre is physically constrained in most directions and in terms of the historic environment;
- Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan has not identified retail opportunities in the town centre and acknowledges that allowing retail development outside the town centre along the corridor leading to the A1 may be necessary subject to sequential and impact testing.

46. It is concluded that, with no urgency for more retail capacity, sites do not need to be sought in Alnwick and that, in quantitative terms, the application of the approaches set out in the made Neighbourhood Plan and the Northumberland Local Plan will be sufficient to regulate supply. Efforts should be concentrated on allowing scope to accommodate any additional floorspace within the existing fabric of the town's main shopping streets and within the parameters of the conservation area designation.

Prudhoe

47. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Prudhoe was that it requires additional convenience and comparison shopping in order to add choice and prevent the existing shops from overtrading. The scheme approved in outline on the bypass, as now

[13] Application 18/03156/FUL

proposed, when implemented, would account for needs covering the plan period. It is therefore not considered that new land needs to be found, either for shops or leisure.

48. Figure 2, shows a reasonably high score for Prudhoe in terms of the ease with which the town centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons it would be appropriate to plan for an increase:

- The town's catchment is partly rural, so that online shopping may make inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
- Until the scheme that has permission on the bypass is implemented,[14] virtually all of Prudhoe's shopping floorspace lies within its centre; notwithstanding this fact, it would be sensible and reasonable to direct further additions to the centre itself;
- Prudhoe, being a smaller centre, underperforming in terms of the total spending potential of its population and being close to Tyneside, (to which much of the leakage of expenditure goes), offers the opportunity to bring about a step change in the quantity and quality of provision in the town centre and claw spending back into Prudhoe;
- The centre is physically constrained in terms of its topography and nearby housing;
- The centre does, however lend itself to some redevelopment and infilling opportunities to create additional floorplates.

49. It is concluded that a positive approach is taken to facilitating modern retail / leisure-related floorspace on a modest scale in Prudhoe Town Centre by allowing for further retail and associated development in backland areas off Front Street and affording the opportunity for certain frontages to be redeveloped to create larger footplates.

Haltwhistle

50. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Haltwhistle was that it requires additional shopping in order to add choice and prevent the existing shops from overtrading. This requirement will increase as the plan period progresses and there may be a corresponding modest need for additional purpose-built leisure. However, given the very low percentage of spending retained in the town, the land needed to accommodate floorspace would be up to 2 Hectares maximum.

51. Figure 2 shows a moderately high score for Haltwhistle in terms of the ease with which the town centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons it would be appropriate to plan for an increase:

- The town's catchment is wholly rural, so that online shopping is likely to make inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;

[14] See Applications 16/02082/OUT (with outline permission) and 18/03945/REM (details under consideration at the time of writing).

- All of the town's shopping floorspace lies within its centre; notwithstanding this fact, it would be sensible and reasonable to direct further additions to the centre itself, in order to bolster choice and vitality;
- Haltwhistle, being a smaller centre, underperforming in terms of the total spending potential of its population, offers the opportunity to bring about a step change in the quantity and quality of provision in the centre, although, at best, this might help claw back an element of (mainly) convenience spending that currently 'leaks' to Hexham;
- The centre is physically constrained in terms of conservation area status, tight-knit surrounding uses and, to a lesser extent, topography;
- The centre may lend itself to some redevelopment and infilling opportunities to create additional floorplates within the context of the Conservation Area status that spans much of the central area. It would be reasonable to allow for the possibility of overspill retail use on certain areas of land close to the centre.

52. It is concluded that a positive approach should be taken to facilitating modern town centre floorspace in or close to Haltwhistle Town Centre by considering possibilities on the edge of the centre, as well as facilitating the creation of larger floorplates within the constraints of the conservation area status.

Ponteland

53. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Ponteland was that it requires additional comparison shopping in order to add choice and prevent existing comparison shops from overtrading. This requirement will increase as the plan period progresses. However, Ponteland's central area is well provided in terms of convenience floorspace which is likely to be undertrading slightly at present, scope for expansion only coming later in the plan period. The scope for leisure provision is likely to be low, not requiring land allocations. Overall therefore, land needed to accommodate floorspace and retain spending levels in the settlement would be 2 Hectares maximum.

54. Figure 2 shows a moderately high score for Ponteland in terms of the ease with which its centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons it would be appropriate to plan for an increase:

    - Ponteland's catchment is only partly rural, so that online shopping is likely to make modest inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
    - All of Ponteland's shopping floorspace lies within its centre; notwithstanding this fact, it would be sensible and reasonable to direct further additions to the centre itself, in order to bolster choice and vitality;
    - Ponteland, is a smaller centre, underperforming in terms of the total spending potential of its population, and offering the opportunity to increase the quantity

and quality of provision in the centre. This could help claw back an element of spending that currently ‘leaks’ to places such as Kingston park on Tyneside;

- The centre is physically constrained in terms of conservation area status, tight-knit surrounding uses and, to a lesser extent, topography;
- The centre offers the opportunity for an element of redevelopment and infilling opportunities to create additional floorplates.

55. It is concluded that a positive approach should be taken to facilitating modern retail floorspace within Ponteland’s existing centre to encourage the creation of larger floorplates within the constraints of the conservation area status.

Amble

56. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Amble was that it will need an injection of additional comparison shopping in the next five years, in order to keep its position in the retail hierarchy and continue to keep those people who shop in its centre doing so. The Tesco that had been planned will not be implemented and the town actually has sufficient convenience floorspace to cover most of the plan period, (although this does not mean that additional choice and competition would not be beneficial). Land needed to accommodate floorspace and retain spending levels in the settlement would be minimal (between 1 and 2 Hectares - approximately the additional area that was to be occupied by the Tesco proposal and its car park). This would include any leisure requirement. Having said this, a current proposal for a mixed retail development at Coquet Enterprise Park[15] would provide more than sufficient floorspace for the whole plan period, based on current spending patterns.

57. Figure 2 shows a reasonably high score for Amble in terms of the ease with which its centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons it would be appropriate to plan for an increase, (from the current base):

- Amble’s catchment is only partly rural, so that online shopping is likely to make modest inroads into any scope for additional spending physically in the town centre;
- The vast majority of Amble’s shopping floorspace lies within its centre; notwithstanding this fact, it would be sensible and reasonable to direct further additions to the centre itself, in order to bolster choice and vitality;
- Amble, is a smaller centre, underperforming in terms of the total spending potential of its population, but offers some scope for an increase in the quantity and quality of provision in the centre. This could help claw back an element of spending that currently ‘leaks’ to places such as Ashington and Alnwick;
- The centre is somewhat physically constrained in terms of conservation area status, tight-knit surrounding uses and the riverside and port elements;

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15 See Application 18/03156/FUL.

- There are small scale opportunities for extension of the centre northwards towards the port including at the site that had been proposed for Tesco. There may be some opportunities to create larger floorplates within the main shopping streets subject to conservation considerations.

58. It is concluded that a positive approach should be taken to facilitating modern retail and leisure floorspace within Amble in order to encourage the creation of larger floorplates within the constraints of the conservation area status close to the centre.

Bedlington

59. Figure 1 shows that the initial conclusion for Bedlington, notwithstanding the closure of Tesco without a replacement, was that it will need an injection of both convenience and comparison shopping in the short to medium term. Failing that, the town will not maintain its position in the retail hierarchy or continue to keep those people who shop in its centre doing so. Land needed to accommodate floorspace and retain spending levels in the settlement would be minimal (between 1 and 2 Hectares as a maximum). The evidence that the likely scope for additional large scale leisure would need to be accommodated in SE Northumberland may be significant insofar as Bedlington is centrally placed within this area. Nevertheless it would be more appropriate and 'in scale' if such additions were to be made in a larger centre.

60. Figure 2 shows one of the higher scores for Bedlington in terms of the ease with which its centre could accommodate additional floorspace and reasons it would be reasonable to plan for an increase:

    - It has a small, mostly urban catchment so that online shopping may make less of an impact on the scope for additional spending physically in the town centre than might be the case in more rural centres;
    - The vast majority of Bedlington's shopping floorspace lies within its centre; notwithstanding this fact, it would be sensible and reasonable to direct further additions to the centre itself, in order to bolster choice and vitality;
    - Bedlington is a smaller centre, underperforming in terms of the total spending potential of its population and dominated by larger centres at Blyth, Ashington, Cramlington and Morpeth. Therefore it may have difficulty clawing back spending but there is likely to be some potential for an increase in the quantity and quality of provision in the centre - e.g. for day-to-day / 'top-up' needs.
    - The centre is somewhat physically constrained in terms of conservation area status, tight-knit surrounding uses and the riverside and port elements;
    - There are small scale opportunities for additions on the north side of the centre, including at the site that had been proposed for Tesco. There may be some opportunities to create larger floorplates within the main shopping street subject to conservation considerations.

61. It is concluded that a positive approach should be taken to facilitating modern town centre floorspace within Bedlington’s existing centre and possibly on its northern edge, in order to encourage the creation of larger floorplates within the constraints of the conservation area status.

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