Northumberland County Council

Northumberland Local Plan
Publication Draft Plan (Regulation 19)

Spatial Strategy
Technical Paper

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(Telephone) 0345 600 6400
(Typetalk) 018001 0345 600 6400

1. Introduction

1.1. The Local Plan's Growth Strategy[1] aims to support job growth across the county, with a particular focus on a number of key sectors. It also aims to boost the delivery of housing, to meet the diverse needs of Northumberland's existing and future population, and accommodate an expanded workforce. The spatial strategy sets out how this growth will be delivered in spatial terms, and considers the geography of the County as a whole, the size of settlements and their role and function. It informs the amount, and type of development that is proposed across Northumberland.

1.2. This paper sets out the rationale for, and justifies the Local Plan's spatial strategy which aims to deliver sustainable development across Northumberland. It explains a number of elements and approaches used to deliver the strategy, including a settlement hierarchy and settlement boundaries.

2. Spatial geography of Northumberland

2.1. In order to understand the rationale for Local Plan's spatial strategy, it is necessary to have an understanding of the geography of the County.

2.2. Northumberland, the largest unitary authority by geographic coverage, with the greatest area of Green Belt of any Local Planning Authority, is also the most sparsely populated in England. The County is however diverse, with different parts having distinct characteristics, functions and needs, contrasting from urban to rural, coastal to upland and well connected to remote.

2.3. The south east of the County is the most densely populated, containing the largest towns which act as main employment centres, drawing from a wider area than just south-east Northumberland. This part of the county contains a number of key employment sites, including some of strategic importance, which are key to delivering economic growth. The towns in the south east also provide a significant range of services including those that have a wider reach.

2.4. Beyond the south east, the County's market towns with significant rural hinterlands, are located along the Tyne Valley corridor, and on a north-south axis across the lowland coastal strip. The predominantly rural areas of the County are interspersed with smaller towns, as well as numerous villages, hamlets and isolated farmsteads. The market towns are

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[1] See the Council's Growth Strategy Technical Paper (Dec 2018).

also important employment centres, while the rural areas support a thriving tourism industry, and land based industries.

2.5.   Areas in the south of the County have the strongest relationship with the Tyne and Wear conurbation, while areas in the north and west of the County have relationships with Cumbria and southern Scotland.

3.   Spatial strategy

3.1.   One of the ways in which the Local Plan can contribute to a more sustainable future for Northumberland is by providing a spatial guide to the location of development. The spatial strategy sets out the overall approach to the distribution of development across the County.

3.2.   The Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal sets out five alternative spatial approaches that were considered in the preparation of the plan:

- Proportionate distribution;
- Proportionate distribution within the constraints of the Green Belt;
- Proportionate distribution with additional targeted growth;
- Dispersed distribution, and
- New settlements.

3.3.   The SA confirms that Distribution Option 2: Proportionate distribution within the constraints of the Green Belt, is the option taken forward and that it performs well in terms of sustainability.

3.4.   This approach focuses the majority of new development in Northumberland's key settlements with smaller scale development allowed elsewhere in order to support local services and the rural economy. It restricts the form of development in the open countryside.

3.5.   While focussing development in the most sustainable locations, this approach will leave existing Green Belt boundaries largely intact, ensure that the countryside in the Green Belt is safeguarded from encroachment, check unrestricted urban sprawl, prevent the merging of settlements, and preserve the character and setting of historic settlements.

3.6.   Given that Northumberland already has a significant amount of housing committed across the County, it is not considered that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the alteration of Green Belt boundaries for residential development. Therefore, while the plan aims to direct most housing to the larger settlements, and villages with a number of key services, this is done so without delivering housing in the Green Belt.

However, it is proposed that limited changes in previously defined Green Belt boundaries are required in a number of locations, to accommodate additional employment to support economic growth[2].

3.7. Whilst the more urban south east Northumberland, together with the County's market towns are where most development is focussed, the Plan also encourages development in rural areas to support the rural economy, maintain the vitality and sustainability of communities and the retention of services. This will enable local people to live in the communities in which they grew up.

3.8. The spatial strategy also gives recognition to the fact that the Green Belt extends across the part of the Northumberland countryside, which also happens to be the most easily reached from the conurbation. This area contains many farming and other small rural businesses. In order to not unduly stifle rural economic development or the local visitor economy, the Plan seeks to ensure that the Green Belt rural economy can thrive just as other countryside areas and aims to add value to Green Belt areas as a resource for visitors.

3.9. It is considered that this approach would contribute to the vitality and viability of the market towns and urban areas and assist the regeneration of town centres. It will support the economic ambitions of the Council both in the more urban south east, identified as the Industry Innovation Zone in the North of Tyne vision, and in rural areas, identified as the Rural Scale Up area. It would help to create a critical mass of development to ensure the delivery of new services, infrastructure and facilities. In some Green Belt settlements the level of development would be less than that which may be expected, when compared to similar sized settlements outwith the Green Belt.

3.10. The Local Plan defines four Delivery Areas with distinct characteristics. The amount and proportion of population, available employment land to be protected, and housing for each Delivery Area is set out in Table 1.

3.11. In accordance with the proportionate distribution approach, the amount of housing for each Delivery Area largely reflects the population in each area. The South East Delivery Area is apportioned significantly more employment land than may be expected under a proportional distribution approach. This is largely as a result of the strategic nature of employment sites in this part

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[2] See the Council's Growth Strategy Technical Paper (Dec 2018), and Green Belt Review Technical Paper (Dec 2018) for further details regarding the release of Green Belt for employment land.

of the County, many of which are key to delivering the Council's growth aspirations.[3]

Table 1: Spatial distribution of development across Northumberland's Delivery Areas

	Population		Employment land		Housing	
	Number	Percentage	Hectares	Percentage	Number	Percentage
South East	163,239	51.7	165.8	68.6	9,000	50.8
Central	78,976	25.0	41.8	17.3	4,450	25.1
North	53,585	17.0	31.8	13.2	3,390	19.2
West	20,228	6.4	2.2	1.0	860	4.9
Northumberland	316,028	100.0	241.6	100.0	17,700	100.0

3.12.   While the plan aims, to some extent, to align the provision of available employment land with the level of housing at the local or settlement level, local employment and housing market areas are not considered to necessarily align, so the above information is not provided at this geographical level.

4.   Settlement Strategy

4.1.   In order to support the overall Spatial Strategy, and provide a steer as the quantum and type of development which may be appropriate for different settlements, across and with Delivery Areas, the Plan sets out a settlement hierarchy which gives priority to identified Main Towns, Service Centres and Service Villages.

4.2.   This approach directs development to settlements which benefit from facilities and / or have the greatest potential to support new facilities and services, as a result of their location and / or a result of the size of the population within them. Such an approach will support economic growth, whilst protecting the countryside and character of settlements, and allow for limited resources to be allocated in an effective way that maximises access to facilities and services.

4.3.   There is no specific definitions of a Main Town, Service Centre or Service Village. The role of these settlements varies across the County.

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[3] As identified in the Council's Growth Strategy Technical Paper (Dec 2018), the North East Strategic Economic Plan, the North of Tyne Devolution Deal and the Council's Economic Strategy.

4.4.   In more urban parts of the County, where settlements are closer together, the roles of different settlements are less easily defined as residents utilise a range of services across different settlements. The catchment areas, for settlements of a comparable size in the southeast are modest when compared to elsewhere in the County. However, many of Northumberland's key employment areas are located in the south east, with employees being drawn from further afield including from outside the County. The pull of the Tyneside conurbation is more significant in the south east, both for work and accessing higher level services.

4.5.   In more rural parts of the County, the roles of different settlements is often more easily recognised, as there are fewer towns and villages with range of services and facilities. A Service Village may provide the focus for a spread of communities, over a wide catchment area and be the clear primary centre for local services. While Service Villages may include a primary school or a shop, residents would use a nearby Service Centre or Main Town for higher level services. For some settlements there is an obvious choice of higher level centre, while for others, residents may draw upon more than one main town for services, education or work. In some instances, the lower level centre will have a strong relationship with one larger settlement. In others, they may look to two or more settlements for higher level services.

4.6.   As a guide,

- **Main Towns** are the focus of larger scale development, and offer the greatest range of services including schools, healthcare facilities, leisure facilities, shops and employment opportunities;

- **Service Centres** also have a number of key services for their communities and surrounding areas, but the range and number is generally more limited than nearby Main Towns, so the amount of development directed towards them is also less;

- **Service Villages** generally have a school or a shop, and population of a size considered likely to maintain the viability of such services into the future. They have a reasonable level of public transport to enable residents to access some higher level services without the reliance upon private transport. A Service Village's settlement status is not reliant upon one specific criterion, and may be influenced by its close proximity to other settlements.

4.7.   Beyond the Main Towns, Service Centres and Service Villages, it is recognised that to support the rural economy, other smaller settlements

should be able to support an appropriate level of development, and that development in one village may support services in another. Therefore, subject to a number of criteria, small scale development will be supported in such settlements. However community support will need to be demonstrated if major development is to permitted.

4.8. A smaller settlement is defined as a cluster of dwellings and associated buildings which has a recognised name and identity, a definable village centre, and a church or other community building.

4.9. While development in rural areas is supported, in the open countryside, development will be restricted and need to demonstrate that it meets a policy test. The open countryside is defined as:

- Land beyond settlement boundaries, where they are defined on the policies map,
- Land not within, or immediately adjacent to the built up form of settlements where limits are not defined.

Table 2: Settlement hierarchy and development principles

Main Towns	
The main focus for employment, housing, retail and services.	Alnwick, Amble, Ashington, Bedlington/Bedlington Station, Berwick-upon-Tweed (Including East Ord), Blyth, Cramlington, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Morpeth, Ponteland, Prudhoe.
Service Centres	
Will accommodate employment, housing and services that maintains and strengthens their roles.	Allendale, Belford, Bellingham, Corbridge, Guidepost/Stakeford/Choppington, Haydon Bridge, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Rothbury, Seahouses/North Sunderland, Seaton Delaval/Holywell, Wooler.
Service Villages	
Will provide for a proportionate level of housing and be the focus for	Acomb, Barrasford, Bardon Mill/Henshaw/Redburn, Broomhill/Togston, Chollerford/Humshaugh, Ellington, Embleton,

investment in rural areas, to support the provision and retention of local retail, services and facilities.	Felton, Gilsland, Hadston/South Broomhill/Red Row, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Lesbury/Hipsburn/Bilton/Alnmouth, Longframlington, Longhorsley, Lowick, Lynemouth, New Hartley, Newbrough/Fourstones, Norham, Otterburn, Ovingham, Pegswood, Riding Mill/Broomhaugh, Seaton Sluice/Old Hartley, Seghill, Shilbottle, Stamfordham, Stannington, Stocksfield/Broomhaugh, Swarland, Wark on Tyne, Warkworth, West Woodburn, Widdrington Station, Wylam.
Other smaller settlements[4]	
Small scale sustainable development within, or immediately adjacent to the continuous built form of settlements will be supported, subject to policy criteria.	Settlements not listed above.
Open countryside	
Development will only be supported if it meets one or more policy criteria.	Land beyond settlement boundaries, where they are defined on the policies map, and land not within, or immediately adjacent to the built up form of settlements where boundaries are not defined.

5. Settlement boundaries

5.1. In order to enable the Local Plan to better control the location of development, settlement boundaries are proposed. While criteria based policies will also be used, it is considered that settlement boundaries will provide a higher degree of certainty to communities regarding future development. They will also help protect the countryside from ad hoc

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[4] As defined in the Local Plan, a smaller settlement is a cluster of dwellings and associated buildings which has a recognised name and identity, a definable village centre, and a church or other community building.

development and encroachment, prevent the merger of settlements, maintain the character and form of settlements, and protect historic and ecological assets and their settings.

5.2.   A number of previous Local Plan Documents which formed part of the Development Plan, included settlement boundaries. Boundaries were defined in the former Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth and Wansbeck Local Plan documents. A number of settlement boundaries are also defined in 'made' neighbourhood plans. These boundaries have been used to inform planning decisions, and direct development to the most sustainable locations. However, some settlements, in parts of the County where no settlement boundaries have been defined, have seen a significant amount of development built and/or consented in recent years. These developments, while supporting local services, have in some cases, changed the character of settlements.

5.3.   The Plan defines settlement boundaries for all Main Towns, Service Centres and Service Villages (except in the Green Belt where inset boundaries are defined) unless local communities, through the neighbourhood planning process:
   ● are defining boundaries;
   ● have specifically chosen not to define a boundary; or
   ● have indicated that they do not wish to retain a previously defined boundary.

5.4.   Except in these circumstances, all settlements which benefit from settlement boundaries in previous development plan documents, have retained their boundaries, albeit that, in some instances, they may have been adjusted due to more recent development or other changes that have taken place.

5.5.   In all of the Main Towns, Service Centres, and Service Villages, settlement boundaries are defined in order to support a level of housing and economic growth over the plan period which is considered appropriate to is size, role and function. In some settlements, housing allocations are proposed to support the delivery of a level of new dwellings appropriate to their role. In these instances, the boundaries direct development to the most suitable and sustainable locations, to protect the countryside from ad hoc incursion.

5.6.   Given that a significant level of residential development is already committed across the County, in a number of settlements boundaries are proposed to allow only for the commitments to come forward. In these areas of high development pressure, boundaries represent a degree of policy of constraint.

5.7. Unless previously defined in the development plan, settlement boundaries are generally not defined for smaller settlements. A criteria based approach which sets out the scale and form of development which may be acceptable will be relied upon to manage development. However, in areas where there is particular development pressure, most notably along the A1, A69, and A697 corridors, the north Northumberland coast, and just beyond the boundaries of the Green Belt, settlement boundaries are proposed for a number of smaller settlements. In these locations, boundaries are defined around existing commitments, to apply a policy of constraint to protect the countryside and character of these villages.

5.8. The methodology used for reviewing existing boundaries, defining new boundaries is set out in Appendix 4.

6. Conclusion

6.1. The above approach will support economic growth, provide the right homes in the right places, and protect the character of Northumberland's towns and villages and its valued countryside.

Appendix 1: Main Towns and Service Centres - Definition of settlement boundaries

Settlement	Approach to settlement boundaries			
	Defined in the Local Plan	Defined / to be defined in a neighbourhood plan	Not defined at the request of neighbourhood plan steering group or parish council	Not defined but settlement inset in Green Belt
Main Towns				
Alnwick	✓			
Amble	✓			
Ashington	✓			
Bedlington/Bedlington Station	✓			
Berwick-upon-Tweed	✓			
Blyth	✓			
Cramlington		✓		
Haltwhistle	✓			
Hexham				✓
Morpeth		✓		
Ponteland				✓
Prudhoe				✓
Service Centres				
Allendale			✓	
Belford		✓		
Bellingham	✓			
Corbridge				✓
Guidepost/ Stakeford/Choppington	✓			
Haydon Bridge	✓			
Newbiggin-by-the-Sea			✓	
Rothbury	✓			
Seahouses/North Sunderland		✓		
Seaton Delaval/Holywell				✓
Wooler			✓	

Appendix 2: Service Villages - Definition of settlement boundaries

Settlement	Approach to settlement boundaries		
	Defined in the Northumberland Local Plan	Defined / to be defined in neighbourhood plan	Not defined but settlement inset in Green Belt
Acomb			✓
Barrasford	✓		
Bardon Mill/Henshaw/Redburn	✓		
Broomhill/Togston	✓		
Chollerford/Humshaugh	✓		
Ellington	✓		
Embleton		✓	
Felton	✓		
Gilsland	✓		
Hadston/South Broomhill/Red Row	✓		
Heddon-on-the-Wall			✓
Lesbury/Hipsburn/Bilton/ Alnmouth*	✓	✓	
Longframlington	✓		
Longhorsley		✓	
Longhoughton	✓		
Lowick		✓	
Lynemouth	✓		
New Hartley			✓
Newbrough/Fourstones			✓
Norham	✓		
Otterburn	✓		
Ovingham			✓
Pegswood		✓	
Riding Mill/Broomhaugh			✓
Seaton Sluice/Old Hartley			✓
Seghill			✓
Shilbottle	✓		
Stamfordham	✓		
Stannington			✓

Stocksfield/Broomley			✓
Swarland	✓		
Wark	✓		
Warkworth	✓		
West Woodburn	✓		
Widdrington Station	✓		
Wylam			✓

**A boundary for Alnmouth is defined in the Local Plan. Boundaries for Lesbury,Hipsburn and Bilton are to be defined in the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan.

Appendix 3: Other settlements with defined boundaries in the Northumberland Local Plan[5]

Acklington	Kirkheaton
Bomarsund	Linton
Cambois	Matfen
Capheaton	Newton on the Moor
Cambo	North Blyth
Craster	Rennington
Cresswell	Scots Gap
Dunstan	Stobswood
East Sleekburn	Thropton
Gunnerton	West Thirston
Holy Island	Widdrington
Ingoe	

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[5] Woodhorn is the only settlement which previously had a settlement boundary which does not have one in the Northumberland Local Plan, at the request of Newbiggin Parish Council.

Appendix 4: Methodology for reviewing existing settlement boundaries and defining new settlement boundaries.

1. **Introduction**

   1.1.   As set out in this report the Plan defines settlement boundaries for all Main Towns, Service Centres and Service Villages (except in the Green Belt where inset boundaries are defined) unless local communities, through the neighbourhood planning process:

   - are defining boundaries;
   - have specifically chosen not to define a boundary; or
   - have indicated that they do not wish to retain a previously defined boundary.

   1.2.   It indicates that except in these circumstances, all settlements which benefited from settlement boundaries in the development plan previously, have retained their boundaries, albeit that, in some instances, they may have been adjusted.

   1.3.   Unless previously defined, settlement boundaries are generally not defined for smaller settlements in the Northumberland Local Plan. However, in areas where there is particular development pressure, boundaries are defined for a number of settlements.

   1.4.   This appendix sets out the methodology used to define new boundaries, review existing boundaries, how the Council has worked with Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups in defining boundaries, and how market pressure has been identified to justify boundaries around smaller settlements.

2. **Defining new boundaries**

   2.1.   In parts of the County where there are currently no settlement boundaries defined[6], new boundaries have been drawn. Although settlement boundaries defined in the Alnwick District Local Plan (1997) were not saved, these have been used as the starting point for defining new boundaries in the former Alnwick area.

   2.2.   The role of a settlement boundary is to define the built limits of a settlement and differentiate between what is considered the built form of a settlement where the principle of development is usually acceptable, and the countryside where, with limited exceptions, development is not acceptable. A settlement boundary is a planning designation only and has no other administrative relevance. Boundaries are defined to take into account the development needs of settlements over the plan period.

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[6] The former Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Tynedale Local Authority Areas.

2.3.   Boundaries have been defined around the built form of settlements, together with any development commitments that are in place, and any additional allocations required to accommodate the development needs of settlements over the plan period.

2.4.   Where possible these have followed defined features such as walls, fences, hedgerows, roads, and woodland. They have been defined in a way that they are logical and easily identifiable, normally following property boundaries. While boundaries for settlements are usually continuous, there are instances where it has been considered appropriate, given the nature and form of a settlement, to define two or more separate elements.

2.5.   There are some land uses, forms of development, and development commitments which have been included with settlement boundaries. These are generally of a more built up nature. Other land uses, while connected to a settlement are more akin to the countryside and have generally been excluded from the settlement boundaries that have been defined. The principle as to whether a land use or feature has been included or excluded are set out in Table A4a.

Table A4a - Land uses and features that have been included, and excluded from settlement boundaries

Included within settlement boundaries	Excluded from settlement boundaries and considered open countryside
● The main built up area of the settlement	● Open spaces, sports and recreational facilities which stand on the edge of the built form of settlements (existing or proposed),
● Existing commitments i.e. implemented permissions, and unimplemented planning permissions and minded to approve applications for housing,	● Isolated development which is physically or visually detached from the settlement,
● Existing and planned allocations: ○ New allocations proposed in the Northumberland Local Plan, ○ Allocations in 'made' neighbourhood plans,	● Sections of large curtilages of buildings (including gardens) which relate more to the character of the countryside than the built form,

○ New allocations proposed in Neighbourhood Plans which are at an advanced stage of preparation[7],	
● The curtilages of buildings which are contained and closely relate to the character of the built form, and are separated from the open countryside,	● Agricultural farmsteads which stand on the edge of the built form of settlements, unless they are well related to the settlement,
● Other land uses which are well related to the settlement and partly enclosed by built development, including schools, open spaces, recreational facilities and allotments.	● Camping and caravanning sites (including Gypsy, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople pitches) except where they are in year round permanent residential use, or where they are clearly related to, or partly enclosed by the existing built form.
	● Agriculture, forestry, nurseries, garden centres, equestrian development, minerals extraction, landfill, water features, public utilities (sewage treatment plants, substations).

3.   Reviewing existing settlement boundaries

3.1.   Where previously defined boundaries have been retained, these have been reviewed. Any changes to existing boundaries have been made to:

- Accommodate development needs for the plan period 2016-36 where necessary (Main Towns, Service Centres and Service Villages only);
- Take into account recent developments and extant planning permissions (and minded to approve applications); and
- Accommodate new allocations where they are considered appropriate,
- Make minor 'corrections' to align boundaries with defined features.

4.   Neighbourhood Plans

4.1.   Where a neighbourhood plan defines a boundary, this boundary will remain as defined and a boundary is not defined in the Local Plan. Where a neighbourhood plan is being prepared, and settlement boundaries are proposed, the Council has worked with the NP steering group to define the boundary. If through the neighbourhood planning process, it has been

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[7] When a neighbourhood plan has been submitted to the Council.

determined that a settlement boundary for a settlement is not appropriate, no settlement boundary will be included in the Local Plan. Clarification from neighbourhood plan groups and Town and Parish Councils has been sought to ascertain whether boundaries should be defined in the Local Plan.

5. Boundaries for small settlements - Market pressure

5.1. As set out above, unless previously defined, settlement boundaries are generally not defined for smaller settlements in the Northumberland Local Plan. The Local Plan does not steer development towards smaller settlements; however it is accepted all settlements, in principle can support a level of development.

5.2. However, in areas where there is particular development pressure, boundaries are defined for a number of settlements. These areas are most notably along the A1, A69, and A697 corridors, the north Northumberland coast where there is pressure from second and holiday homes, and just beyond the boundaries of the Green Belt. Settlement boundaries have been defined to prevent an unnecessary, and undesirable level of growth in such settlements.

5.3. Market pressure, for development has been identified where:

- There has been a significant level of development in recent years and/or there are a significant number of units with planning permission in place, or Minded to Approve;

- Additional sites have been put forward for consideration for housing in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) by developers, landowners and their agents.

6. Green Belt Settlements

6.1. Where settlements are inset from the Green Belt no settlement boundaries are defined. This applies to some settlements in the former Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck areas. This means that current settlement boundaries within the defined Green Belt (e.g. Ponteland) have not been retained. However, existing Green Belt insets will be retained.

6.2. Within the newly defined Green Belt extension in the Castle Morpeth area, existing settlement boundaries will not be retained. However, where settlement boundaries were previously defined, Green Belt inset boundaries have been defined (e.g. Belsay). The methodology for defining Green Belt inset boundaries is informed by work previously undertaken for the withdrawn Core Strategy and is detailed in a separate Green Belt Review Technical paper.