

Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Valued Landscapes Background Report

December 2022



Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Planning Policy and Landscape Protection	5
	Background and Definitions	5
	National Policy and Guidance	6
	Development Plan Policy	9
	Summary of Relevant Planning Policy Position	12
3.	Landscape Character Assessment: The Local Evidence	14
	National Landscape Character Areas	14
	Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010)	16
	Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010)	18
	Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2013)	21
	Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales: A Valued Landscape (2021)	26
	Summary of key features of the landscape	28
4.	Analysis and Conclusions	30

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by the Belford Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for Belford Parish Council. The report brings together and presents relevant evidence to support the creation of locally specific planning policies through the Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan to meet the intention of Objective 5 set out in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan. This expects that the Plan will, amongst other things:

‘...protect our most valued places through... protecting and enhancing the intrinsic character and beauty of our valued landscapes and green spaces.’

- 1.2 The Neighbourhood Plan provides the opportunity to create specific land-use policies that offer a high degree of protection to the valued landscapes in the Parish and to the important views that exist from within the Parish towards and across those valued landscapes and the defining and distinctive features located within and beyond the Parish boundaries.
- 1.3 The local community has indicated its support, through engagement events associated with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, for new development within the Parish where that can help to sustain a long-term future for residents and local businesses. However, this support sits alongside an expectation that proper recognition will be given to environmental conservation and protection in decision making on planning applications.
- 1.4 Significant value is attributed to the environment in and around Belford by the local community. In particular, the landscapes and distinctive views and vistas, including those from and towards iconic features in the local area that help to define the perceptual qualities of the area are considered by the community to be of great value. The value attributed to the local landscape is associated with an appreciation of the quality of the natural features in the area, the ecological assets, the contribution the landscape makes and its association with local cultural development, and its features of local, regional and national archaeological and built heritage significance.
- 1.5 Evidence that describes the distinctive character of the Belford Neighbourhood Area (see Appendix A) and the sensitivity to change of local landscapes is drawn from a range of studies which have assessed and characterised landscapes at a national and local level. These studies and associated reports are briefly described in Chapter 3 of this report which brings together the evidence that justifies the creation of an area of valued landscape and justifies the recognition and protection of valued views through development plan policy. Prior to that analysis, Chapter 2 sets out the policy and procedural background associated with landscape protection, and the current and planning policy framework regarding landscape protection as it applies to the Parish.

- 1.6 The evidence and analysis presented in this report supports the definition of a valued landscape in the Belford Neighbourhood Plan, and the definition of important views, is intended to support a conclusion at independent examination that the Plan meets the statutory tests prescribed in legislation for neighbourhood plans, known as the 'basic conditions'. This report is presented in a way that seeks to demonstrate that:
- having regard to national policy and guidance it would be appropriate to 'make' the Plan; and
 - the Plan contains policies that are in general conformity with the strategic planning policies in the development plan for the area.

2. Planning Policy and Landscape Protection

Background and Definitions

- 2.1 'Landscape' has been defined by the European Landscape Convention (ELC) as:

"...an area perceived by people whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors."

The ELC, introduced in March 2007, is the first international treaty dedicated to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe. It contains 18 Articles which, collectively, promote landscape protection, management and planning. The UK is a signatory to the ELC which is a Convention of the Council of Europe, not a part of the European Union (EU). Britain's association with the ELC is therefore unaffected by its departure from the EU.

- 2.2 The purpose and Articles of the ELC are recognised and supported by the Landscape Institute, the chartered body for the landscape profession, which is an educational charity that promotes the art and science of landscape practice. The Articles and definitions used in the ELC are therefore an appropriate starting point in looking at the creation of planning policy associated with landscape.

- 2.3 Article 1 of the ELC defines the terms used in the treaty. This defines 'landscape policy' as:

"...an expression by the competent public authorities of general principles, strategies and guidelines that permit the taking of specific measures aimed at the protection, management and planning of landscapes."

'Landscape protection' is then defined as:

"...actions to conserve and maintain the significant characteristic features of a landscape justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity."

- 2.4 Many other dictionary definitions of 'landscape' exist. A common feature of these is generally that, while a landscape can comprise a wide range of elements, both natural and man-made, the term landscape is defined by reference to what is visible and perceived by people. Describing or defining a landscape can therefore be achieved through the collection of information on the characteristics seen by people in an area which will help to define the character of that landscape and the value attributed by people to any given landscape. The process of landscape characterisation has been developed to articulate these perceptions.

- 2.5 The character of a landscape helps to define the self-image of people who live within or within sight of that landscape and can create a sense of belonging to a place or an area. Landscapes can be extremely important to people and form part of any community's cultural heritage. The concept of value derives in large part from these associations. Landscape helps to create a sense of place that differentiates one place from another. Articulating these differences, by reference to appropriate descriptive and perceptual evidence, is the basis of creating policy that recognises the public benefits of protecting valued landscapes.

National Policy and Guidance

- 2.6 In order to meet the 'basic conditions' it is necessary to demonstrate that, having regard to national policy and guidance, it would be appropriate to bring the Neighbourhood Plan into force. The main areas of national policy and guidance relevant to local landscape designation and protection are described in the following part of this report.
- 2.7 The merit of recognising the value that landscape offers to people is acknowledged in national planning policy and guidance. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the government's policy on all land-use planning matters. NPPF was last updated on 20 July 2021. Paragraph 20 sets out the purpose of strategic policies which must include:

'...making sufficient provision for...conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure...'

Strategic planning policies are contained in Local Plans prepared by the Local Planning Authority. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with relevant strategic policies in order to meet the 'basic conditions'.

- 2.8 In seeking to achieve well designed places, paragraph 130 of NPPF requires that:

'Planning policies...should ensure that developments...are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting...'

- 2.9 Paragraph 155 of NPPF supports policies that help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy, but requires that plans ensure:

'...that adverse impacts [of development] are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts)...'

- 2.10 Chapter 15 of NPPF deals with the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Paragraph 174 requires that:

‘Planning policies...should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes... (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services...*
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast...’*

- 2.11 Paragraph 176 of NPPF deals with the considerations that apply to decisions made on development proposed in nationally designated landscapes. This includes National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) where ‘*great weight*’ should be given to conserving and enhancing the landscape and scenic beauty of those areas. Paragraph 176 confirms that those areas have the highest status of protection in relation to the need to conserve and enhance landscape and scenic beauty, and requires that:

‘...The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.’

This therefore makes clear that in terms of assessing development impacts it is important to avoid or minimise impacts arising from development situated beyond the boundaries of the designated area.

- 2.12 Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is an online resource that provides further interpretation and guidance from government to supplement NPPF and includes a discrete section on landscape. PPG is separated into distinct referenced paragraphs. PPG notes that NPPF is clear in its intention that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. It states that:

‘Where landscapes have a particular local value, it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes...’
(Paragraph: 036 Reference ID: 8-036-20190721).

- 2.13 PPG provides advice on the assessment of landscape character. It recognises that, for designated landscapes (such as AONBs) the relevant management plan will contain information on the area’s particular character and beauty. However, it notes that:

‘Where appropriate, landscape character assessments can be prepared to complement Natural England’s National Character Area profiles...’

and

‘To demonstrate the likely effects of a proposed development on the landscape, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) can be used.’
(Paragraph: 037 Reference ID: 8-037-20190721)

- 2.14 PPG reinforces the obligation placed on Local Planning Authorities to have regard to the purpose for which an AONB or National Park was designated when making planning policies or in taking decisions on planning applications. These obligations are placed on all Local Planning Authorities and PPG confirms that this is:

‘...relevant in considering development proposals that are situated outside National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty boundaries, but which might have an impact on their setting or protection.’
(Paragraph: 039 Reference ID: 8-039-20190721)

- 2.15 PPG addresses the question of whether the management plans for designated areas need to be taken into account in preparing planning policies and in making decisions on planning applications. It advises that, while management plans do not form part of the statutory development plan

‘They provide evidence of the value and special qualities of those areas...’

and

‘They may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies...’
(Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 8-040-20190721)

- 2.16 The assessment of development impacts on the setting of AONBs is dealt with specifically in PPG which advises that:

‘Land within the setting of these areas often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and where poorly located or designed development can do significant harm. This is especially the case where long views from or to the designated landscape are identified as important, or where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary. Development within the settings of these areas will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account.’
(Paragraph: 042 Reference ID: 8-042-20190721)

- 2.17 The Northumberland Coast AONB is also defined as a Heritage Coast. These are recognised in NPPF (paragraph 178) and in the PPG as:

‘...stretches of our most beautiful, undeveloped coastline which are managed to conserve their natural beauty and, where appropriate, to improve access for visitors...’

(Paragraph: 043 Reference ID: 8-043-20190721)

Development within areas of Heritage Coast, where they align with an AONB, must be managed in a manner consistent with national policy set out in NPPF. It is expected that planning policies will be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. Major development within a Heritage Coast is unlikely to be appropriate, unless it is compatible with its special character.

Development Plan Policy

- 2.18 Neighbourhood plans are intended to create locally distinctive land-use policies. In order to meet the ‘basic conditions’ it is necessary to demonstrate that those locally distinctive policies proposed in a neighbourhood plan are in general conformity with the strategic planning policies in the development plan. The current position regarding strategic planning policies covering the Belford Neighbourhood Area, and specifically those relating to landscapes, is described further in the following part of this report.

Northumberland Local Plan (2022)

- 2.19 The Northumberland Local Plan (NLP) adopted in March 2022, forms the Development Plan for the County.
- 2.37 The Northumberland Local Plan includes within its ‘Vision’ for Northumberland that:

‘By 2036...The breadth, scale and quality of its special, varied landscapes and biodiversity will be conserved, enhanced and increased’

The Plan describes its anticipated ‘Key Outcomes’ (paragraph 3.9) which include that:

‘The landscape character of Northumberland will have been protected and enhanced, including protection of significant views, particularly to and from iconic heritage features in the landscape of Northumberland;’

And, in relation to Quality of Place (paragraph 3.18), the Local Plan recognises that:

‘The way in which we experience the places that we live, work and spend our leisure time in has a huge impact on our sense of well-being. Northumberland

has many very high-quality places and landscapes that are valued greatly by communities and visitors.'

2.38 The Plan sets out both 'strategic' and 'non-strategic' planning policies. This is particularly relevant to the preparation of neighbourhood plans since it is only the strategic planning policies against which a neighbourhood plan would be assessed in order to meet the 'basic conditions'.

2.39 Policy STP 3 sets out the principles for sustainable development. This is a strategic policy. In respect of landscape, it sets out the principles as follows:

'In applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development in Northumberland, and to deliver against economic, social and environmental objectives development proposals will be expected to adhere to the following principles where appropriate:

...

o. Anticipated impacts, including those from climate change, on the historic and natural environment, including landscape, biodiversity, ecosystems and water resources should be avoided by locating development elsewhere, adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, adequately compensated for.'

2.40 Policy QOP 1 is a strategic policy that sets out design principles. This requires that development proposals should:

'd. Respect and enhance the natural, developed and historic environment, including heritage, environmental and ecological assets, and any significant views or landscape setting.'

2.41 Chapter 10 of the Northumberland Local Plan creates policies that deal with the environment and establishes measures for addressing development impacts on the environment in its widest sense. Policy ENV 1 sets out the overarching approach to be applied in assessing the impact of development on the natural, historic and built environment. It is a strategic policy which requires the following:

'The character and/or significance of Northumberland's distinctive and valued natural, historic and built environments, will be conserved, protected and enhanced by:

...

b. Protecting Northumberland's most important landscapes and applying a character-based approach to, as appropriate, manage, protect or plan landscape across the whole County.'

2.42 This chapter of the Local Plan also includes a specific section on 'Landscape'. This sets out the non-strategic policy approach to be applied to the assessment of development impact on landscapes. The supporting text describes the general approach to landscape characterisation based on national character areas and subsequent more local assessments. Policy ENV 3 sets out how landscape, and its contribution to the

environment, communities and the economy will be recognised in decision making. Policy ENV 3 requires that:

'a. Proposals affecting the character of the landscape will be expected to conserve and enhance important elements of that character; in such cases, design and access statements should refer, as appropriate, to Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment and other relevant studies, guidance or management plans...'

and

'f. Where it is considered that landscape character may be adversely affected, or aspects of this character that warrant protection would be degraded as a result of a proposed development, the weight given to the harm caused will be in accordance with the importance of the designation...'

- 2.43 Policy ENV 3 also recognises that development close to the boundaries of existing settlements can impact the landscape. The policy requires that:

'e. iii. The impact on the setting and surroundings of the County's historic towns and villages will be assessed, ensuring that new development on the edge of settlements does not harm the landscape character of the settlement edge...'

- 2.44 Paragraph 10.26 in the supporting text of the Local Plan recognises that some locally detailed landscape assessments have been carried out, notably for the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. However, it advises that:

'A detailed, locally focussed character assessment will need to be carried out in association with proposals for certain types of development.'

- 2.45 Policy ENV 5 is a non-strategic policy that deals with the management of development in the Northumberland Coast AONB, and in areas that may affect the AONB. Policy ENV 5 requires that:

'2. When assessing development proposals affecting the AONB particular considerations will include:

- a. The sensitivity of local landscapes and their capacity to accommodate new development, including temporary structures such as caravans and chalets;*
- b. Intervisibility between the AONB, the seascape and the landscape beyond, including the Kyloe and Cheviot Hills;*
- c. Interdependency between the special qualities of the landscape and the marine and coastal environment, including the internationally and nationally important nature conservation sites and associated ecosystems, geology, species and habitats; and*
- d. The need to sustain and, where appropriate, enhance:*
 - i. The significance of heritage assets, including any contribution made by their setting;*
 - ii. A sense of remoteness, wildness and open views and dark skies;*
 - iii. The natural functioning of the coastline; and*

iv. A clear distinction between settlements and open countryside.'

- 2.46 The Northumberland Local Plan contains policies that address impacts associated with renewable energy development. Such development is known to have potentially significant impacts on landscapes. Policy REN 1 is a non-strategic policy that deals generally with renewable and low carbon energy development. This proposes that:

'3. Applications will be supported where it has been demonstrated that the environmental, social and economic effects of the proposal, individually and cumulatively, are acceptable or can be made acceptable. In considering applications, appropriate weight will be given to the following:

a. Landscape character and sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors including landscapes and views demonstrated to be of value at the local community level;...'

- 2.47 Policy REN 2 is also a non-strategic policy that deals specifically with onshore wind energy development proposals. This establishes criteria against which wind turbine schemes which are shown to have community support will be assessed. These are that:

'i. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on long and medium range views to and from sensitive landscapes, such as the Cheviot Hills, Northumberland Sandstone Hills, Northumberland Coast AONB,... the Northumberland National Park..., and lines of sight between iconic landscape and heritage sites and features, particularly where one or more feature is within the Northumberland Coast AONB,...or the...Northumberland National Park;

j. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on sensitive or well used viewpoints; and

k. There are no unacceptable adverse effects on important recognised outlooks and views from or to heritage assets where these are predominantly unaffected by harmful visual intrusion, taking into account the significance of the heritage asset and its setting.'

Summary of Relevant Planning Policy Position

- 2.48 National planning policy is clear that local valued landscapes defined in the development plan are an appropriate planning tool to aid in the management of development. The aims and policies in the current development plan covering Belford Parish are very clear in their support for landscape protection in certain designated areas. Policy in the new Northumberland Local Plan continues to recognise the importance of valued landscapes throughout the county. It does not go so far as to designate locally valued landscapes, primarily because the landscape assessments supporting that plan are, for the most part, less fine grained. However, policy in that plan clearly recognises the need for that finer grained assessment by placing a duty on

developers to undertake appropriate work to demonstrate development impact on landscapes.

- 2.49 The identification of 'valued landscapes' through development plan policy at a neighbourhood level can complement the 'case-by-case' approach adopted in the Northumberland Local Plan. This can help to ensure that decision makers are aware, having regard to an evidenced policy-led assessment, which areas within wider landscapes can be defined as being particularly valued. This approach has regard to national policy and guidance.
- 2.50 It is notable that the Local Plan recognises, in its treatment of renewable and low-carbon energy development, that the value attached to landscapes at the local community level is an important consideration in decision making. In dealing with impacts on the AONB and other nationally designated landscapes, including in the context of renewable energy development, the Local Plan also clearly acknowledges the impact development located beyond the boundary of those areas can have on the setting of the area, on important features within those areas and on iconic views.

3. Landscape Character Assessment: The Local Evidence

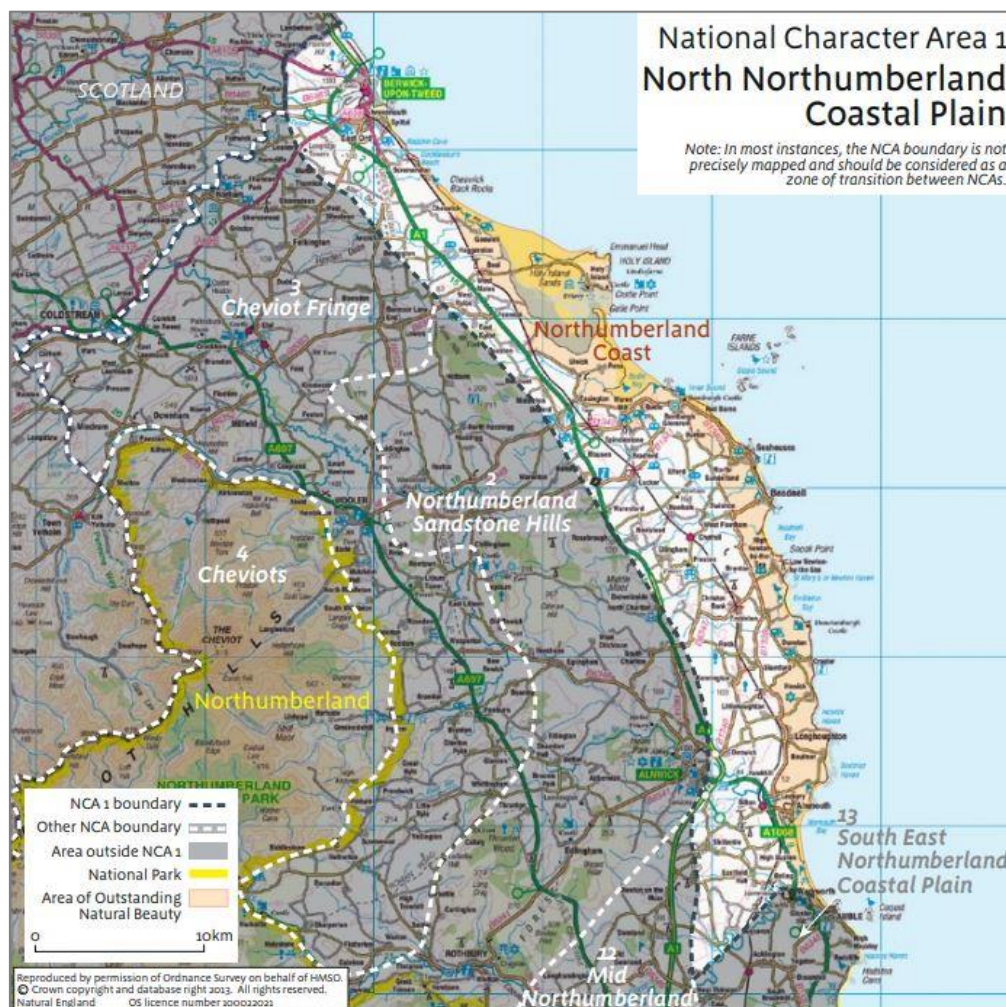
- 3.1 When seeking to establish evidence that justifies the creation of particular planning policy protection for locally valued landscapes it is helpful to begin with understanding the characteristics of those landscapes. This can be done at a large landscape scale and at a more detail finer grained local scale.

National Landscape Character Areas

- 3.2 At a national level, Natural England carried out a process of landscape profiling. This established National Character Area (NCA) profiles which describe the geographical, ecological and historical variations in distinct landscapes throughout England. The Belford Neighbourhood Area sits within two distinct National Character Areas: the North Northumberland Coastal Plain (NCA1); and the Northumberland Sandstone Hills (NCA2).

NCA1: North Northumberland Coastal Plain

Figure 1. NCA1 – North Northumberland Coastal Plain

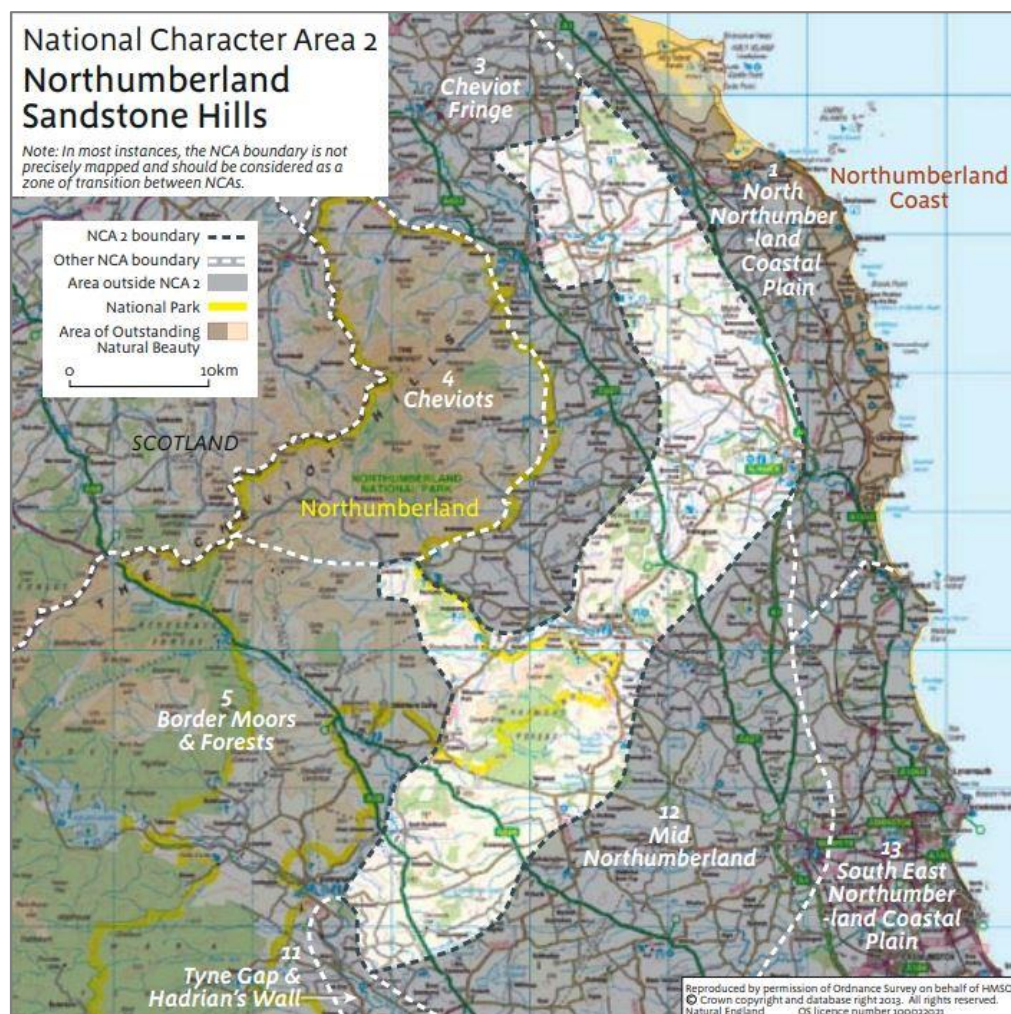


3.3 The National Character Area profile for NCA1 summarises the area as follows:

'The huge skies, striking views, tranquillity and natural beauty of this area draw large numbers of visitors and tourism is now a very important part of the local economy. Enabling people to experience and enjoy this area while ensuring that tourism and development are sustainable, that the essential qualities of the area are not eroded, and that sensitive habitats and species are not negatively impacted on will be some of the key challenges in this National Character Area.'

NCA2: Northumberland Sandstone Hills

Figure 2. NCA2 – Northumberland Sandstone Hills



3.4 The National Character Area profile for NCA2 summarises the area as follows:

'This area, with its sparse settlement, slow change and cultural continuity, is perceived as very tranquil, valued for its open vistas and dark night skies. The largely undisturbed landscape holds significant prehistoric and medieval

archaeological remains which together form some of the most interesting and nationally important archaeological landscapes in England.'

Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

- 3.5 Northumberland County Council commissioned Land Use Consultants to prepare a landscape classification and associated assessment of potential development impacts on the landscape in support of a countywide Local Plan. This work included creating more detailed landscape profiles for smaller 'Landscape Character Types' (LCT) sitting within the National Character Areas; and a further local distinction which created local 'Landscape Character Areas' within each of the defined LCTs.
- 3.6 The Assessment defines key qualities, forces for change and accompanying guidance on how to treat proposals which may impact on these positively or negatively for each LCT. This is defined as a 'vision statement' in the Assessment. One of three overarching guiding principles for the management of change associated with development is assigned to each LCT as follows:
- **Protect** - where conservation of landscape character is required in the face of pressures for change; or
 - **Manage** - where some change can be absorbed but changes arising from social, economic and environmental processes need to be managed; or
 - **Plan** - where important landscape character has been eroded and strong action is needed to enhance or restore it.
- 3.7 The Belford Neighbourhood Area sits within four Landscape Character Types:
- LCT3: Farmed Coastal Plain
 - LCT5: Sandy Coastline
 - LCT8: Outcrop Hills and Escarpments
 - LCT11: Sandstone Fringe Farmland
- 3.8 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment describes in greater detail the approach to the management of development advocated for each of these LCTs. This is summarised below.
- LCT3: Farmed Coastal Plain
- 3.9 The key qualities identified are farmsteads of traditional vernacular architecture, with brick industrial farm chimneys; shelterbelts of mature beech and pine; estate landscapes and associated semi-natural and plantation woodland; and the coastal character with views to the sea, coastal features and landmarks.
- 3.10 The guiding principle is to 'manage' this area. The vision statement advises that:

'The principal aims of landscape planning policies and initiatives should be to encourage improved custodianship of a landscape that has declined in quality as a result of agricultural intensification. The areas of this LCT are located between the A1 and the popular coastal strip, and have scope to accommodate on-farm tourism.'

LCT5: Sandy Coastline

- 3.11 This area comprises land entirely within the Northumberland Coast AONB. The key qualities identified are the dynamic seascape environment; sweeping views across the seascape and along the coastline; the prominence of historic features as landmarks; traditional cores of former fishing villages, often with distinctive pantile roofs; an extensively accessible landscape with much tourist-oriented development; and the intact sand dune and saltmarsh habitats.

- 3.12 The guiding principle is to 'protect' this area. The vision statement advises that:

'The principal aims for this landscape should be to conserve and enhance the key qualities of the landscape and adjacent seascape, and make their ongoing custodianship sustainable. The landscape should be managed to integrate conservation of the natural and cultural heritage resource, with sensitive development of infrastructure for tourism, and good freedom of access and preservation of the open sea and coastal views.'

LCT8: Outcrop Hills and Escarpments

- 3.13 The key qualities identified are the distinctive scarp hills with rocky outcrops on their western edge, forming relatively low but prominent hills, including Greensheen Hill; the relationship with the Cheviots, across the Cheviot fringe landscapes; its open, relatively remote, character; areas of uninterrupted, sweeping moorland; and the historic features, particularly concentrations of settlements, features such as cup and ring marked rocks. There are medium-scale forestry plantations.

- 3.14 The guiding principle is to 'manage' this area. The vision statement advises that:

'The hills are a distinctive feature of the Northumberland landscape, and have valuable landscape features which remain in good condition. The approach for this landscape should be to manage development, while maintaining the distinctive landform and moorland areas.'

LCT11: Sandstone Fringe Farmland

- 3.5 Within the Parish, this type forms the east dip slope of the Killoe Hills. The settlement of Belford lies at the eastern edge, and arable farmland with hedgerows occurs along

this lower edge. Estate influences around Belford include folly buildings. Further up the slope, post and wire fencing predominates, defining large semi-improved pastures. At the highest points are areas of grazed moorland and gorse. The key qualities identified are the distinctive, regular enclosure pattern of stone walls and hedges; smooth rounded skylines with extensive views and a sense of remoteness; wet/rushy pasture and areas of grass and heather moorland providing important habitats for breeding birds; areas of geometric coniferous forest and mixed woodland plantation; prominent rocky outcrops of the Whin Sill; and isolated vernacular farmsteads and important historical features including Romano-British farmsteads, prehistoric settlement and henges and deserted medieval villages.

- 3.16 The guiding principle is to 'manage' this area. The vision statement advises that:

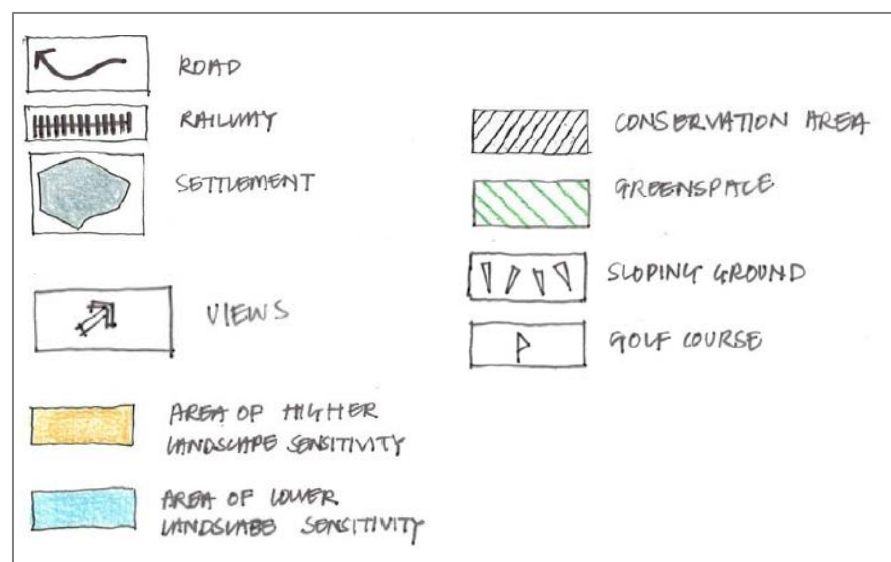
'This landscape has a strong identity and many valuable landscape features which remain in good condition. Although there has been some change such the planting of coniferous plantation and the decline in pastures, the landscape retains a consistent character. The overall approach for this area is to sensitively manage the landscape of the area.'

Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010)

- 3.17 Northumberland County Council commissioned Land Use Consultants to prepare an assessment of potential development impacts on the larger settlements across the county in support of a countywide Local Plan. This study included an assessment and conclusions on the sensitivity of settlement edges. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of those settlements, including Belford, in order to assess the relative sensitivity of the landscape surrounding the settlement.
- 3.18 The study is described as strategic in scale and does not look to provide a detailed local landscape and visual assessment for each settlement. The judgements about relative landscape sensitivity made in the study have served to inform the conclusions on guidelines proposed in the final report. The conclusions draw on the information collated in the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment. The conclusions and recommendations made for each settlement are guided by criteria defined in the report as follows:
- *Does the landscape play a role in contributing to the physical or functional relationship between the settlement and the surrounding landscape?*
 - *How important is the landscape in relation to key views from static locations, such as landmarks, hills and recreational areas?*
 - *How important is it in views from key transport corridors?*
 - *Does the landscape play an important role in the setting of other areas of landscape importance?*

- 3.19 This report notes that the area is characterised by a transitional landscape of gently rising farmland on the Northumberland coastal plain and sandstone ridges of the Kyloe Hills, as the landscape rises up from the coast to the distant Cheviot Hills. Rolling fields with large agricultural buildings, estate parkland, rock outcrops and raised moorlands are characteristic and are frequently interspersed by wooded burn valleys and scattered areas of woodland.
- 3.20 The study describes distinctive features and notes that Chapel Hill and the adjacent Chapel Crag feature in the landscape to the north of the settlement; and that Belford Hall is a distinct feature, set within associated parkland, to the east of Belford. The estate landscape is on the English Heritage *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England*. It also notes that the registered park and garden surrounding Belford Hall forms a large private open space which allows distinct views to and from the estate.
- 3.21 The study is helpful in its description of the features that bound the settlement of Belford, indicating that:
- ‘Woodland belts at Chapel Crag, around Cragmill Quarry and Belford Hall estate provide a strong edge to the north and east of the settlement, which is further defined by Cragmill Road and the A1. Southern parts of the settlement are characterised by modern housing estates, and the settlement edge here consists of private gardens adjoined by agricultural fields. The western edge of Belford is defined by the wooded slopes of Chapel Crag and coniferous hedgerows at Blue Bell Farm Caravan Park.’*
- 3.22 It is further noted in regard to the sensitivity of the landscape to change that:
- ‘Belford Hall Estate, Chapel Hill and Chapel Crag are key features in the landscape and are considered to be of higher landscape sensitivity. Views to and from these features are characteristic to the settlement and are sensitive to change within the surrounding landscape.’*
- 3.23 The report concludes with guidelines on landscape sensitivity to new development. The guidelines indicate relative sensitivity, and are intended to be applied when considering proposals for new development. These guidelines are presented in graphic form (see Figure 3 below) where the numbered guidelines align with the annotation on the indicative settlement illustration map as follows:
- ‘1. Areas of lower landscape sensitivity to the south of Belford have some potential for development.
2. Potential exists for enhancement of the western settlement edge through sensitive small-scale development.
3. Seek to retain characteristic views to and from Belford Hall, Chapel Hill and Chapel Crag.’*

Figure 3. Belford sensitivity to change indicative settlement illustration



Key for indicative settlement illustration

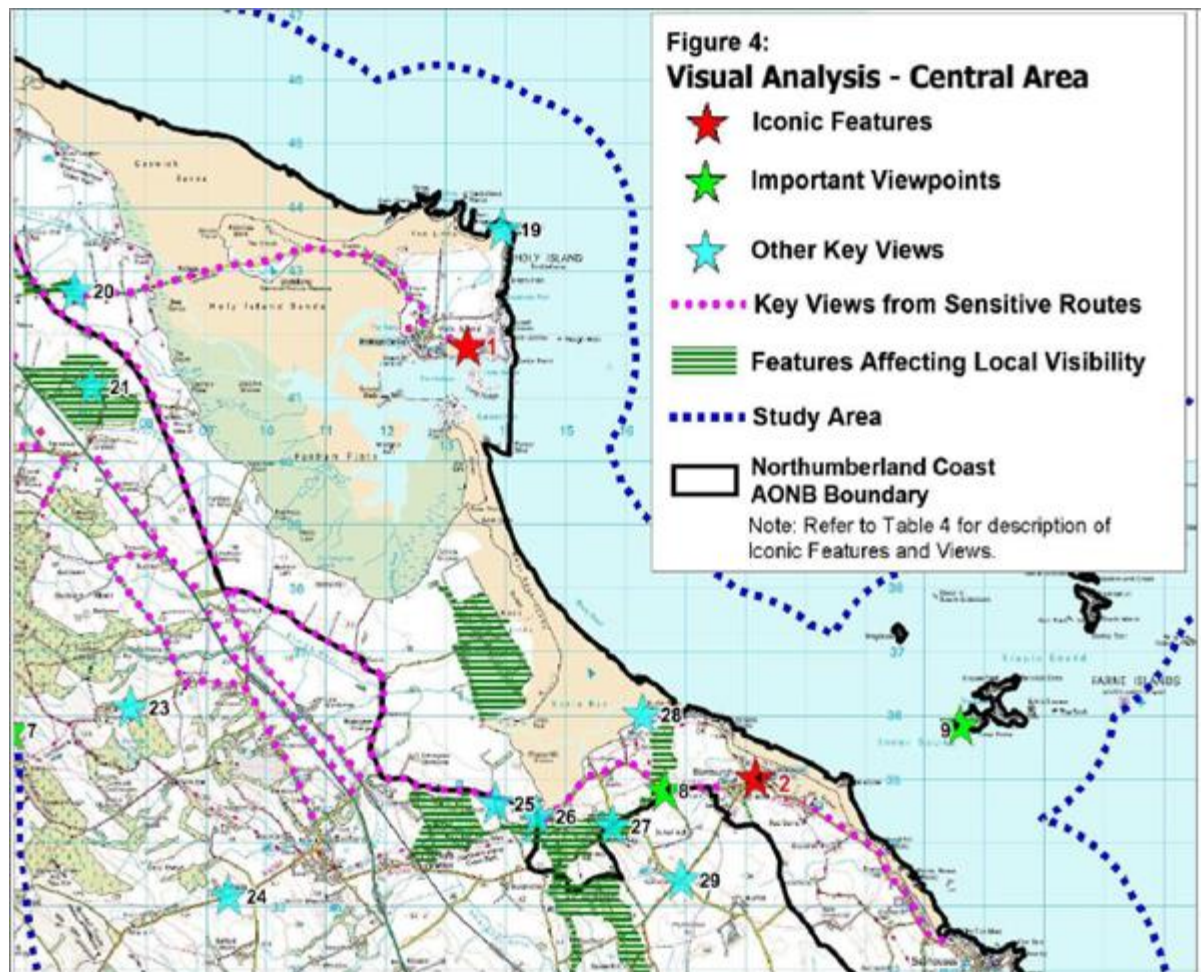
- 3.20 The report ends with recommendations that propose mitigation measures which would reduce the impact of new development in the locations indicated above and shown on the indicative settlement illustration map. The recommendation of particular relevance in considering the merit of introducing planning policy controls to manage and protect the landscape around Belford is:

‘Retain key views to and from the settlement and consider potential effects on key landscape characteristics as a result of new development.’

Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2013)

- 3.21 The Northumberland Coast AONB Partnership commissioned a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (August 2013) which is intended to inform decision making, shape forward planning and enable sensitive and appropriate developments in the future. The study was intended to facilitate organisations in achieving the primary statutory purpose of the Northumberland Coast AONB, that is: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. The study also sought to help deliver the recommendations contained within the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment.
- 3.22 The study assesses the sensitivity and capacity of the landscapes within the AONB and the wider study area (see below) in relation to the following specific development types:
- Camping/caravan/chalet parks;
 - Housing development;
 - Domestic / farm-scale wind turbines; and
 - Commercial wind farms outside the AONB.
- 3.23 The study identifies features that are of importance in landscape terms. It identifies constraints for development and opportunities for landscape enhancement of the AONB that could strengthen landscape character. It includes an assessment of key views of the AONB, identifying especially important/iconic features, views and vistas, and zones of visual sensitivity around them considered to be areas of the highest sensitivity where there would be a presumption against development.
- 3.24 While Belford village lies outside the study area of the Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, there is significant overlap between the Belford Neighbourhood Area, the extent of the AONB and also the study area. The study provides annotated maps identifying iconic features, important viewpoints, other key views, and key views from sensitive routes and features affecting local visibility, including those situated outside the boundaries of the AONB (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Visual Analysis from AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study



(Not to scale)

Iconic Features

1. Lindisfarne Castle and Priory – most sensitive visual cone extends in a 10km arc westwards to the Kyloe Hills (viewpoint 7).
2. Bamburgh Castle – most sensitive visual cone extends in a 12.5km arc westwards to the Kyloe and Chillingham Hills (viewpoint 11) and Cateran Hill (viewpoint 12) on Rosebrough Moor.

Important Viewpoints

7. Greensheen Hill – Dramatic views north eastwards to the AONB with a sensitive visual cone including Holy Island and Budle Bay across top corner of Middleton parish

Other Key Views

23. Greymare Farm – views predominantly eastwards to Holy Island
24. B6349 at Sionside – views along the coast and predominantly eastwards to Holy Island and Budle Bay, with distant glimpses to the top of Bamburgh Castle beyond intervening ridges and plantations.

- 3.24 Several sensitive receptors and routes, as well as features within and affecting the landscape are identified. A limited section of the B6349 between Belford and Sionside (24 on figure 4) is identified as having views of the coast and predominantly eastwards to Holy Island and Budle Bay, with distant glimpses to Bamburgh Castle beyond intervening ridges and plantations. Similarly, a section of North Bank, between Belford and Middleton also affords panoramic views of the coast, including Holy Island, Budle Bay and distant views of Bamburgh Castle. At Greymare Farm, near Datchent (23 on figure 4) there are panoramic views of Budle Bay and Holy Island. And, from Greensheen Hill, there are long distance views north east to Holy Island (7 on figure 4).

Photo 1. View east from B6349 west of Belford, just beyond the settlement



Photo 2. View east from B6349 west of Belford, at Sionside



Photo 3. View east from North Bank, to the north of Belford



Photo 4. View east from Greymare Farm, Detchant



Photo 5. View northeast from Greensheen Hill Trig point with Holy Island just visible in the distance.¹



¹ [File:Greensheen Hill Trig Point. - geograph.org.uk - 643698.jpg](https://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/643698) - [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Greensheen_Hill_Trig_Point._-_geograph.org.uk_-_643698.jpg)

Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales: A Valued Landscape (2021)

- 3.26 Alison Farmer Associates was commissioned by the Northumberland and Newcastle Society to prepare a detailed landscape assessment for land in north Northumberland between the Northumberland National Park in the west and the A1 in the east, and from north of Wooler, to Rothbury in the south. This report sought to identify gaps in the detail of existing evidence relating to the landscape in this area and specifically to determine whether land within the study area could be defined as a 'valued landscape' in accordance with national policy as set out in Paragraph 174a of NPPF; to define a boundary to such a landscape; and consider how it should be given recognition.
- 3.27 The study was commissioned to complete work identified as being required in the report 'Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study PART D Landscapes Potentially Requiring Additional Protection' in relation to the identification of specific areas of landscape value. The assessment was designed using the most recent emerging relevant guidance provided through the Landscape Institute, notably the Draft Technical Guidance Note (2020/21) which defines those factors to consider in identifying the value of landscapes.
- 3.28 The study established 7 distinct 'evaluation areas' and the report provides a detailed evaluation, including through field assessment, of those factors recognised through national policy and current guidance that contribute to landscape value within each evaluation area. This resulted in the definition of candidate areas within which boundaries could be drawn to define the extent of the valued landscape within the study area. Methodical assessment of each of the factors that contribute to landscape value in each evaluation area are presented in the report alongside a summary of relevant issues and a recommendation on the definition of valued landscapes.
- 3.29 The work also involved a detailed desk-based assessment of the history of landscape assessment and designation within and around the study area. This provides a helpful summary of current and past relevant designations and concludes that the designation history provides valuable information on the qualities of the area and an understanding of the degree of consensus as to the landscape's value.
- 3.30 Belford Neighbourhood Area sits within the 'Kyloe and Doddington Hills' evaluation area. The study recommends that there is a weight of evidence that supports the recognition of the Kyloe, Doddington and Weetmoor Hills as valued landscapes. There are caveats regarding the extent of this recognition, particularly regarding the landscape to the north of the area towards Lowick where wind turbines start to influence landscape value; and it is recognised that land between the ridges lacks the qualities of the more distinct Doddington, Weetmoor and Kyloe Hills.

- 3.31 The study describes the extent of proposed boundaries for an area of valued landscape. It recognises the value of the landscape to the north and west of Belford village, but notes that Belford is located on the edge of the Kyloe Hills and is close to the margins of transitional areas. Belford Hall parkland is noted as a feature of interest on the margins of the evaluation area, but it is recognised that the parkland is not intact having undergone change in the form of golf course development. It is noted that the parkland could not be included within a valued landscape designation without including the whole of the village, and that the village is located within a transitional landscape. The study concludes that, on balance, Belford village should be excluded from a designated valued landscape and that the boundary should be drawn conservatively to the west. The parkland of Middleton Hall is included because it lies to the west of a minor road which flanks the transitional slopes of the Kyloe Hills.
- 3.32 The study goes on to consider the proposed valued landscape as a whole, particularly those special qualities that distinguish it from wider countryside; and it looks at how the valued landscape could be formally recognised. The recognition given to the proposed valued landscape is set within the context of the special qualities that define adjacent nationally recognised landscapes in Northumberland National Park and in the Northumberland Coast AONB; and the report notes that the proposed Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales form an important setting to those areas.
- 3.33 The report confirms that the detailed evaluation of the study area has revealed qualities that distinguish the area from ordinary countryside and give it a significance at least at a regional level. The specific qualities are then summarised (at paragraph 7.2.6 of the Technical Report). The qualities in relation to Belford are:
- Magnificent long range panoramic views to the coastal AONB.
 - Strongly defined topography derived from sandstone geology and glacial processes.
 - Broad scale landscape where openness and large skies combine with distant unfettered horizons, giving rise to high levels of tranquillity.
 - Seasonally colourful and textured landscapes comprising a mosaic of semi-natural habitats such as parkland, lowland meadow and lowland heath and a patchwork farmland and woodland with few overt modern built features.
 - Strong unity to local vernacular comprising occasional sandstone villages and country houses set in parkland.
 - Historic structures and buildings such as country houses, form points of interest.
- 3.34 Issues affecting the area are then noted. In regard to development impacts the report notes the following issues that could specifically affect the valued landscape:

- Expansion of settlements which undermine landscape setting and sense of place;
 - Visual intrusion of large-scale man-made features which may interrupt unfettered skylines, undermining perception of scale and tranquillity; and
 - Ad hoc development along key transport routes causing gradual urbanisation.
- 3.35 The evaluation set out in the report provides the evidence that articulates the special qualities of the Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales as a whole valued landscape. On that basis, the report concludes that it provides the case for a locally defined valued landscape through planning policy either in a Local Plan or in neighbourhood plans. The report notes that it would not be appropriate to simply reinstate former designations as ‘Areas of High Landscape Value’ created through the Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan since current evaluation techniques and best practice exhibited in the outcomes of the current study identifies a slightly different area to that previously designated.
- 3.36 An area of valued landscape within Belford Neighbourhood Area is defined in the report and is shown on the map at Figure 5.

Summary of key features of the landscape

- 3.37 The following features have been identified in this report as contributing to the value of this landscape. They are:
- Magnificent views eastwards to the AONB and its iconic features:
 - from Greymare Farm –predominantly eastwards to Holy Island.
 - from the B6349 at Sionside views along the coast and predominantly eastwards to Holy Island and Budle Bay, with distant glimpses to the top of Bamburgh Castle.
 - Strongly defined topography derived from sandstone geology and glacial processes.
 - Broad scale landscape where openness and large skies combine with distant unfettered horizons, and give rise to high levels of tranquillity.
 - Seasonally colourful and textured landscapes comprising a mosaic of semi-natural habitats such as parkland, lowland meadow and lowland heath and a patchwork farmland and woodland with few overt modern built features.
 - Strong unity to local vernacular comprising occasional sandstone villages and country houses set in parkland.
 - Belford Hall Estate, Chapel Hill and Chapel Crag are key features in the landscape and are considered to be of higher landscape sensitivity. Views to and from

these features are characteristic to the settlement of Belford and are sensitive to change within the surrounding landscape.

- Woodland belts at Chapel Crag, around Cragmill Quarry and Belford Hall estate provide a strong edge to the north and east of the settlement.
- The western edge of Belford is defined by the wooded slopes of Chapel Crag and coniferous hedgerows at Blue Bell Farm Caravan Park.

Figure 5. Proposed Valued Landscape from Alison Farmer Associates report



4. Analysis and Conclusions

- 4.1 This Background Report provides information and evidence that seeks to support implementation of the Objectives set out in the draft Belford Parish Neighbourhood Plan. The Plan aims to ensure that the integrity of the landscape within the Neighbourhood Area is maintained, that its value is recognised in decision making on planning applications and that the places most valued by the local community are protected.
- 4.2 There is a long and clear history to landscape designation in and around the Neighbourhood Area. Strong evidence and a consensus on that evidence regarding the value of local landscapes and the longstanding planning policy protection afforded to the landscape is clearly articulated in assessments, evaluations and policy documents that support Belford Parish Council's aims regarding the landscape in the Parish. These are all documented with relevant extracts highlighted in this Background Report.
- 4.3 National planning policy is clear that identifying locally valued landscapes in the development plan is an appropriate planning tool to aid in the management of development. The aims and policies in the current development plan covering Belford Parish are very clear in their support for landscape protection in certain defined areas. Policy in the new Northumberland Local Plan continues to recognise the importance of valued landscapes throughout the county. However, the Local Plan does not go so far as to designate locally valued landscapes, primarily because the landscape assessments supporting that plan are, for the most part, less fine grained and require further local evaluation. However, policy in that plan clearly recognises the need for that finer grained assessment by placing a duty on developers to undertake appropriate work to demonstrate development impact on landscapes.
- 4.4 The identification of 'valued landscapes' through development plan policy at a neighbourhood level can complement the 'case-by-case' approach adopted in the Northumberland Local Plan. This can help to ensure that decision makers are aware, having regard to an evidenced policy-led assessment, which areas within wider landscapes can be defined as being particularly valued. This approach has regard to national policy and guidance.
- 4.5 It is notable that the Local Plan recognises, in its treatment of renewable and low-carbon energy development, that the value attached to landscapes at the local community level is an important consideration in decision making. In dealing with impacts on the AONB and other nationally designated landscapes, including in the context of renewable energy development, the Local Plan also clearly acknowledges the impact development located beyond the boundary of those areas can have on the setting of the area, on important features within those areas and on iconic views.
- 4.6 Evidence is described in this background Report that recognises and justifies local planning policy protections being created to ensure that decision making recognises

development impacts on important valued views, vistas and features within the landscape. This can include consideration of the impact development beyond the Neighbourhood Area may have on those matters.

- 4.7 The evidence set out in the 'Northumberland Sandstone Ridges and Vales a Valued Landscape Technical Report' (January 2021) provides an understanding of the special qualities of the area defined in that report as a 'valued landscape'. It provides an independent and comprehensive articulation of the special qualities that distinguish this landscape from ordinary countryside; and provides sufficient and qualified evidence that can inform policy making at a local level. The development of appropriate local planning policy is endorsed through that study and this should enable strong and informed decision making on development proposals within or affecting the proposed 'valued landscape'.
- 4.8 It is recommended that the evidence presented in this Background Report is used in support of creating planning policy in the Belford Neighbourhood Plan that defines an area of 'valued landscape'; and that planning policy recognition is given to defined important valued views within, to and from the Neighbourhood Area. Planning policies should be created through the Belford Neighbourhood Plan that support decision making that recognises and respects the particular importance of these clearly defined and justified matters.

Referenced Data Sources

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- BNDP.08 Landscape Institute, Technical Guidance Note 02-21 Assessing landscape value outside national designations (May 2021)
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- BNDP.09 Northumberland Local Plan Publication Draft showing proposed main modifications and additional changes (June 2021)
<https://northumberland-consult.objective.co.uk/file/5864019>
- BNDP.10 Natural England: National Landscape Character Areas (online resource)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-character-area-profiles-data-for-local-decision-making/national-character-area-profiles>
- BNDP.11 National Planning Policy Framework (20 July 2021)
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Appendix A: Belford Neighbourhood Area

