

Craster Neighbourhood Plan

Referendum Version - November 2020



2020 - 2036

Foreword

Introduction from the Parish Clerk of Craster Parish Council

I am delighted that after much hard work, our Parish is now a step closer to having a Neighbourhood Plan for Craster and Dunstan.

Our Parish is a unique, beautiful, historic place and the challenges involved in devising a Neighbourhood Plan to preserve and enhance those qualities for generations to come have been considerable. To now be at the point of having a Plan for our Parish is testament to the time and effort of everyone involved in the process of gathering evidence, speaking to the public, businesses and other stakeholders and putting together the policy outlined in this Plan for the future of our Parish.

The theme of sustainability runs like a golden thread throughout this Plan. Once adopted, the policy set out in the Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that all new development will be required to have a restriction to ensure its first and future occupation is limited to use only as a principal residence and not as a second home or holiday let.

Our vision for the Parish is one that contains the right mix of housing that meets the needs of a revitalised local community and new developments will be permanently occupied by residents. But more widely, this Plan will contribute to a long-term sustainable future for Craster and Dunstan by ensuring a balanced relationship among environmental, social and economic outcomes.



Adam Shanley
Parish Clerk to Craster Parish Council

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1. Introduction

Background to neighbourhood planning

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

Planning context

- 1.4 As they are part of the development plan, neighbourhood plans have to be prepared in line with legal requirements. The way in which neighbourhood plans are prepared and the policies they contain are tested by an independent examiner who assesses whether the plan meets the ‘basic conditions’ to ensure they are legally compliant.

Neighbourhood plans must:

- Have regard to national planning policy and guidance;
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan;
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
- Be compatible with European obligations.

National planning policy and guidance

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

Development plan

- 1.6 Currently, the development plan for Northumberland consists of the saved policies of the former local planning authorities that made-up Northumberland before Local Government Reorganisation in 2009. For the Craster Neighbourhood Area, these are the policies contained within the Alnwick District Core Strategy (2007) and the saved policies of the Alnwick District Local Plan (1997).
- 1.7 Northumberland County Council (NCC) has prepared a new Local Plan which, once adopted, will replace the existing saved planning policies. The Northumberland Local Plan was submitted for examination in May 2019 and is currently subject to public examination.
- 1.8 The Craster Neighbourhood Plan ('the Plan') has been informed by the adopted planning policies of the former Alnwick District and the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

Sustainable development

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

European obligations

- 1.10 Neighbourhood plans must be compatible with EU obligations, specifically Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and The Habitats Regulations, through an Appropriate Assessment (AA). NCC provided a screening opinion on the need for both SEA and AA. The conclusion was that neither a SEA nor AA were required. The screening opinion is available on the county council's website¹.

Background to the Craster Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.11 On 29 January 2019 the parish of Craster was designated as a neighbourhood area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning, see figure 1.
- 1.12 The main driving force behind the decision of the Parish Council to prepare a neighbourhood plan was their concern at the level of second and holiday homes across the parish. During the summer of 2019 the Parish Council conducted a survey which was sent to all residential properties within the parish. The survey sought the views on the proposed approach to limit any new build residential development within the parish to that which would be permanently occupied.

¹ <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Planning-policy/Neighbourhood.aspx>

1.13 The feedback from the survey informed the preparation of a pre-submission draft plan, which was subject to consultation during January and March 2020. The draft plan identified:

- The context in which the plan has been prepared – an overview of Craster and the **opportunities and challenges** for the plan to address;
- A **positive vision** for the future of the Craster Neighbourhood Area; and
- How the vision of the Plan will be delivered through a **planning policy** that will be **used to determine planning applications for new residential development** within the Neighbourhood Area - providing a framework for sustainable development.

1.14 The period covered by the Plan is to 2036, this aligns with the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. During this period, the Neighbourhood Plan will be reviewed and updated where required.

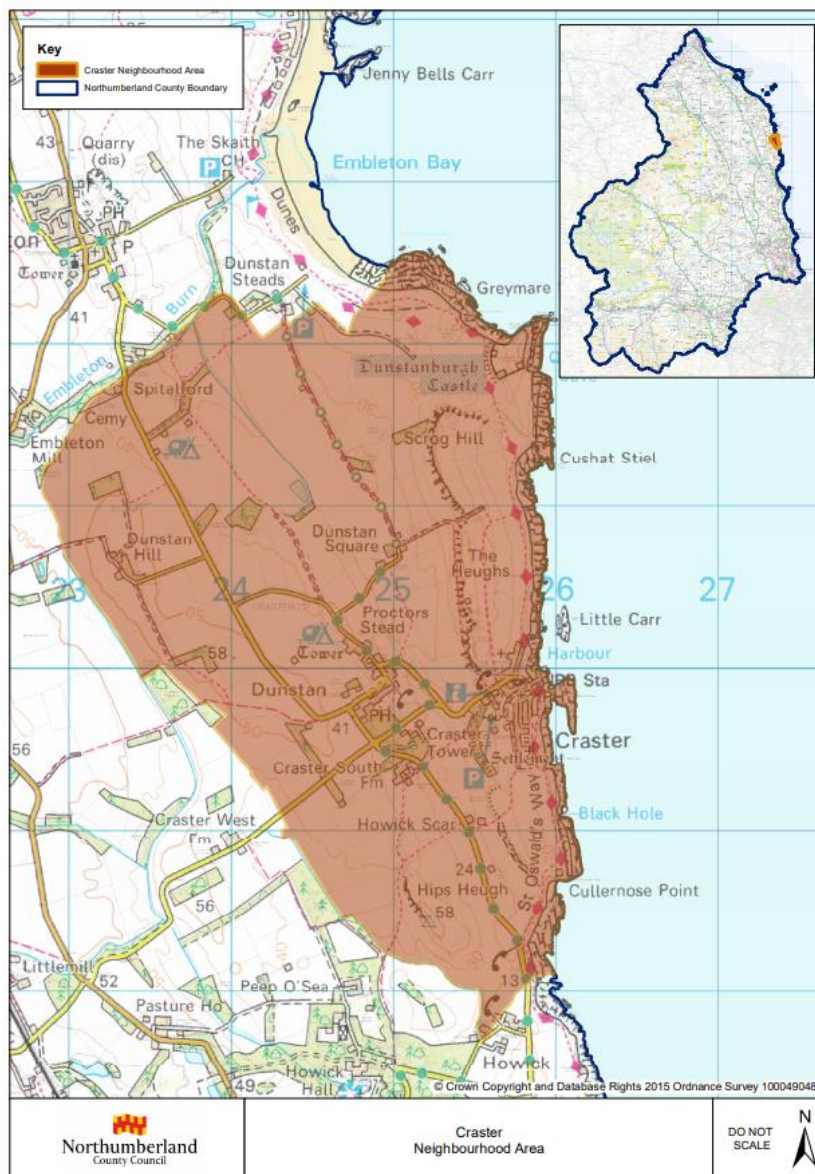


Figure 1: Craster Neighbourhood Plan Area

Next steps

- 1.15 The Plan was subject to independent examination in October 2020. That examination concluded that the Plan met all necessary legal tests, subject to some minor modifications being made. Those changes are incorporated in this version of the Plan which will now be the subject of a local referendum in which people eligible to vote in Craster Parish will be given the opportunity to decide whether the Plan should be brought into force legally and subsequently be used in making decisions on planning applications in the area.
- 1.16 Unfortunately, the referendum cannot be held until current restrictions on social distancing are removed. The Government has published regulations that prevent referendums being held before 5 May 2021. However, the Government has committed to keep these regulations under review. A referendum will be arranged as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 1.17 The Plan and background supporting documents are available on the County Council's website:
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Neighbourhood.aspx>

2. The key issues for the Craster Neighbourhood Plan

Background to Craster

- 2.1 The parish of Craster lies within the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a nationally important landscape. The parish lies midway along the Northumberland coast, with a rocky coastline to the east and rolling fields to the west. It has a long history, with an iron age settlement on top of Craster Heugh and medieval villages at Craster and Dunstan documented from the 13th century. Dunstanburgh Castle was built in the 14th century and is believed to stand on the site of an earlier Romano-British settlement.
- 2.2 Craster has been a fishing village since at least the early 17th century and until recently fishing was the most important part of the local economy. The creation of the harbour early in the 20th century helped to create an industry exporting whinstone from local quarries.
- 2.3 The Northumberland Coast AONB Management Plan (2014-19)² describes the special qualities of the area, this includes:
- Dramatic natural coastline of rocky headlands and cliffs, contrasting with extensive, sweeping sandy beaches and dynamic sand dune systems;
 - Dramatic coastal and riverside setting of iconic historic and cultural landmark features which provide localised vertical emphasis within a predominantly horizontal landscape and seascape;
 - Distinctive traditional coastal fishing villages clustered around small harbours;
 - Views inland to the rounded sandstone hills and Cheviot Hills provide a dramatic and dynamic backdrop to the coast;
 - Tranquillity and dark skies;
 - Nationally and internationally important ecological habitat and species; and
 - Significant cultural heritage.
- 2.4 The AONB Management Plan explains that Craster remains an important fishing village, with tightly knit buildings clustered around a small sheltered harbour. Also, that the crags on which Dunstanburgh Castle is seated supports a distinctive plant community called 'whin grassland' and examples of coastal whin grassland are restricted entirely to the AONB.
- 2.5 The chain of imposing castles at Lindisfarne, Bamburgh, Dunstanburgh and Warkworth are identified within the management plan as iconic historic features of national, if not international status. From the village of Craster, views along the coastline are dominated by the remains of Dunstanburgh Castle.

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http://www.northumberlandcoastaonb.org/files/Downloads/Northumberland%20Coast%20AONB%20Management%20Plan%202014-19_v1.2.pdf

- 2.6 The attractiveness of the area has resulted in a significant increase in people visiting and staying in the AONB. The AONB Management Plan explains that the use of housing as second and holiday homes is having a significant detrimental effect on many of the small villages in the AONB by increasing house prices and reducing the availability of housing for local people.
- 2.7 The Census identifies that in 2011 the plan area comprised 305 residents, living in 245 households. Across the parish 39.2% of dwellings had no usual residents, an increase of 13% from 26.2% in 2001. Council tax records from April 2016³, identify that 55 homes were second homes, this equates to 28.4% of the housing stock. Non-domestic rates information published by the county council in November 2019⁴ identifies that 44 properties within the parish were registered as self-catering holiday units.
- 2.8 With regard to the age profile of the parish: 46.6% of residents were aged between 25 and 64; 34.8% aged 65 and over; with 11.8% of the population aged 15 and under. Of those aged 16-74 58.4% were economically active, with 25.7% employed full time. Economic activity rates are significantly less within the parish compared to Northumberland (67.9%), with a large percentage of economically inactive people being retired (29.6% compared to 18.8% in Northumberland). Of those people who were employed, a lot less were employed full time (25.7%) than in Northumberland (37%), there were also a lot more self-employed people (14.6% compared to 9.5% in Northumberland as a whole).
- 2.9 Further details are included in the housing background paper⁵.

Feedback from the local community

- 2.10 Early engagement on the Plan illustrates that the majority of residents that responded to the parish wide survey, supported the suggested approach to introduce a policy to restrict the occupation of new dwellings within the parish. Feedback expressed concerns about the impact of second and holiday homes, including that: the village is a ghost town in the winter, there is no sense of community, there are few young families and a lack of affordable housing.
- 2.11 The majority of those who responded to the consultation on the pre-submission draft plan supported the policy approach, with a number of residents suggesting the Neighbourhood Plan should introduce further restrictions which go beyond the remit of the Plan.

³ <https://opendata.northumberland.gov.uk/datasets/>

⁴ <https://opendata.northumberland.gov.uk/datasets/>

⁵ <https://northumberlandparishes.uk/craster/documents/neighbourhood-plan>

3. The vision for Craster Parish

Vision

- 3.1 The vision sets out what the Craster Neighbourhood Plan intends to achieve over the plan period to 2036, it informs the policy contained within the Plan.

A Vision for Craster

By 2036 Craster Parish will contain a mix of housing that meets the needs of a revitalised local community. New residential developments will be permanently occupied by residents.

4. Managing second and holiday homes

Background

- 4.1 The NPPF⁶ requires planning policies and decisions to be responsive to local circumstances in rural areas and identifies the importance of maintaining the vitality of local communities. NPPG highlights that people living in rural areas can face challenges in terms of housing supply and affordability. The Alnwick Core Strategy acknowledges the growing demand and impact of second and holiday homes. This concern is also highlighted within the emerging Northumberland Local Plan, explaining that the prevalence is most stark along the north Northumberland coast. As a result, the emerging Northumberland Local Plan includes a policy which seeks to restrict the occupancy of new market dwellings in parishes where 20% or more household spaces are identified as having no permanent residents.
- 4.2 Section 2 of this Plan, alongside the information contained within the housing background paper, illustrates that whilst Craster does not have the highest levels of second and holiday homes in the county, the level has increased substantially between the 2001 and 2011 censuses (from 26.2% to 39.2%). Recent evidence from the County Council suggests that this level is continuing to grow. In addition, the population of the parish is ageing at a rate greater than the county as a whole, there are more households with people aged over 65, more one person households and significantly less economically active people. As a result, there are considerable concerns regarding the future vitality of the local community. This concern is strongly shared by the local community.

Policy 1 is to be applied throughout the whole of Craster civil parish which comprises the Craster Neighbourhood Area. It requires all new housing, apart from replacement dwellings, to be subject to an occupation restriction to be applied in perpetuity so that new dwellings may only be occupied as a principal residence. The development of new dwellings without this occupation restriction will not be supported. The policy defines a principal residence as that which is occupied as the resident's sole or main residence, where they spend the majority of their time when not working away from home.

- 4.3 The policy also requires occupiers to retain proof that they are meeting the terms of the restriction and that they will be obliged to provide this as evidence whenever the County Council requests this information. Examples of information that could be provided to demonstrate an occupier's compliance with the controls, could include: that they are registered on the local electoral register; registered with a local GP or other medical practitioners; that children attend local schools; and that they provide details of other property ownership and occupation elsewhere.

⁶ Paragraph 77

Policy 1: Principal Residence Housing

New housing, excluding replacement dwellings, will only be supported where occupation is restricted in perpetuity to ensure that each new dwelling is occupied only as a principal residence. New second homes will not be supported.

A principal residence is that which is occupied as the sole or main home of the occupants and where they spend the majority of their time when not working away from home.

The restriction will be secured through a planning condition or, if necessary, through a planning obligation secured under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, or any subsequent successor legislation.

The occupier will be required to provide evidence that they are meeting the terms of the occupation restriction whenever requested to do so by Northumberland County Council.