

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND COAST NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Introduction

As part of the development of a neighbourhood plan for the North Northumberland Coast, it has been decided to incorporate settlement boundaries for the three main settlements in the Plan area (Seahouses (with North Sunderland), Beadnell and Bamburgh).

This paper presents the detail and reasoning behind the decision to define a settlement boundary for Seahouses as shown on Map 1. This boundary will be incorporated into a Proposals map for the North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan, and formal consultation on the boundary will take place through the pre-submission draft (Regulation 14) consultation on the Plan.

The boundary has been defined within the context of a requirement for the Plan to deliver sustainable development in the Plan area. As such, it is based on the need to ensure there is sufficient housing land available within the settlement boundaries of all three settlements in the Plan area, to accommodate small scale housing growth, over the plan period up to 2031.

The evidence base for the Northumberland County Council Core Strategy contains detail about housing delivery targets for sub-areas in the County. Seahouses 'sub-area' is contiguous with the Plan area, and so the remaining housing requirement up to 2031 for that area currently stands at 110 houses (out of an overall requirement of 230, 120 of which have been completed).

There is enough land within Seahouses alone to accommodate this figure, as well as land within the proposed settlement boundaries of Bamburgh and Beadnell (in the same housing delivery area). The settlement boundary for Seahouses therefore seeks to positively promote the availability of land for some new housing delivery, whilst protecting the most sensitive areas (in particular the coastal strip) from new development. This is in partnership with a policy approach to promote new housing development for permanently occupied housing, in an attempt re-dress the balance of holiday homes which is gradually contributing to the loss of a 'sustainable community' in Seahouses. Although not as significant as the other settlements in the Plan area, second home ownership levels in Seahouses and North Sunderland are still significantly higher than for other comparative towns in other AONBs in the country.

The rationale behind the settlement boundary (as in all three Parishes) has been to steer development away from the sensitive coastline with its many nature conservation designations. The map below (from Magic) shows the proximity of coastal designations to the settlement of Seahouses. This has largely informed the approach to ensure that areas for future development are provided inland, and not seaward of any existing development in the town.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper



Figure 1: Extract from Magic showing designations close to Seahouses town

Seahouses Settlement Boundary

This report is divided into three sections: The north east facing boundary (coastal), the southern boundary, and the western boundary.

Coastal boundary (north east): The far northern settlement boundary begins at the junction of Broad Road and St. Aidan's road. It runs along St. Aidan's Road, with the cliff-top walk on the left (and outside the settlement boundary).



Photo 1: B1340 looking east (St. Aidan's Road). Land to left excluded, land to right

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

All land to the left is excluded. Along most of this stretch there is no development, with the exception of the harbour car park and house (excluded). The settlement boundary follows the Harbour Road down to the Harbour, and continues along Harbour Road, and Crewe Street (below)



Photo 2: Harbour Road, land to right of road excluded from boundary

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

The boundary therefore runs along St. Aidan's Road, Seafield Road, Harbour Road, Crewe Street, and then along the clifftop fence line of the caravan park, before turning inland, following the fence-line of the caravan park.



Photo 3: Caravan park in Seahouses - fenceline forms settlement boundary. Sewage works visible in background - field excluded

The boundary is then drawn tightly following the built development line of the Kingsfield Estate, until it reaches the main road (Kings Street).



Photo 4: Kingsfield Estate - settlement boundary to follow existing boundaries of properties

All land seaward of all roads is excluded from the settlement boundary. This is commensurate with the approach of reducing the impact of development on the coast, and focusing new development inland. It is in line with recommendations contained in the Shoreline Management Plan, and with recommendations contained in the Landscape Sensitivity Study,

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

which highlights the clifftop area of the Sewage Works (north east of Kingsfield) as being particularly sensitive in landscape terms.

This area eroding (slowly) but the Parish Council would also like, at some point in the future, to be able to use this land for car parking, in an attempt to partly solve the increasingly difficult car parking situation in the town centre.

Southern Boundary: The southern boundary is also drawn tight along existing built development. It starts at Quarryfields, follows the road, and then the rear gardens of properties along Quarryfields and Staple Court.



Photo 5: Southernmost point of settlement boundary at entrance to Quarryfields. Line to follow existing development to right of Quarry Walk

The area is inappropriate for further development in landscape terms, but also in practical terms, as the area is an old quarry (now Quarry Walk, and proposed as a Local Green Space).

Following the Quarry Walk, the settlement boundary encompasses the Sports and Community Centre, and the follows existing boundaries around the Middle School, enclosing the school and playing fields within the settlement boundary. It then follows natural boundaries along properties of South Lane (in North Sunderland), before joining Main Street. This point of the settlement boundary is the southernmost point (below).

Western Boundary: The western boundary allows for further development to the west of North Sunderland, by enclosing two agricultural fields within the boundary. These fields are not within the Northumberland AONB. This is commensurate with the supporting evidence which shows that development can be more easily accommodated inland, than on the coast.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

There is sufficient land here for a significant amount of new housing. It is not allocated as housing land in the Neighbourhood Plan, but is included in the settlement boundary.



Photo 6: Westernmost point of settlement boundary (round White House on right). Land to left included in settlement boundary as extension to North Sunderland inland

The boundary, following existing hedge and fence lines, joins existing housing development (Islestone Drive and Bamburgh View), and closely follows the rear boundary of those properties. It excludes the recycling centre, and then travels up Broad Road (land to the west excluded, land to the east included), until it joins the northernmost boundary at St.Aidan's.



Photo 7: Settlement boundary along Broad Road - all land to right included (east)

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

Appendix A: Extract from Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Study: Seahouses

Seahouses (and North Sunderland)

Seahouses and North Sunderland are identified within the emerging Northumberland Local Development plan as a 'Key Service Centre'. Consequently the settlement is identified to be a focus for meeting needs arising from the local area, reflecting its relative level of services in comparison to other settlements in the AONB. Housing needs arising in the local area will therefore be focused towards Seahouses to a greater extent than the other villages considered in this study. The scale of growth proposed for housing over the plan period had yet to be developed in preparing this report.

Landscape Context

Seahouses is located within landscape character area 4b Farne Islands Coast, within the wider Rocky Coastline LCT 4. North Sunderland lies within the adjoining landscape character area 3b Lucker, within the Farmed Coastal Plain LCT3.

Key Landscape Characteristics

The key landscape characteristics for the Farne Islands Coast landscape character area as recorded in the NLCA Part A, Annex A, are as follows:

Criteria	Key Characteristics	Summary
Landscape	Complex, strong topographical variety	Some low, islands and rocky headlands
Land cover	Varied, but lacking complexity	Beaches, moor and tympane
Scale	Medium	Focus on coastal edge and present views
Enclosure	Some enclosure	Some open areas and some enclosure within bays
Shelter	Varied	Headlands and rocky outcrops, although gentle rise inland
Views and landmarks	Landscape contains important landmarks, or is important in views	Bamburgh Castle and Farne Islands provide important features
Intervisibility	Intervisibility with some neighbouring landscapes	Some intervisibility, influenced by coastal aspect and rocky headlands
Reception	Frequent properties and views from main transport routes	Settlements and transport routes provide high level of reception
Movement	Occasional to frequent movement	Frequent use by visitors of coastal transport routes
Scenicness	Some human activity reducing sense of remoteness	Towns and coast important for visitors
Settlement	Occasional towns or frequent villages	Several villages
Industry	No industrial influence	No industrial influence
Vertical features	Few vertical features	Bamburgh castle on distinctive rise
Linear features	Few linear features	Coast north and coastal edge
Historic features	Historic features are a prominent aspect of the landscape	Bamburgh castle forms a distinctive landmark
Recreation	Important for recreation for locals and visitors, national designation or attraction	Bamburgh castle, beach and moor are important for recreation

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

Condition	Well managed with some elements in poor repair	Coastal landscape under pressure from tourism development
Distinctiveness	Distinctive to Northumberland	Bamburgh Castle, coast and islands distinctive
Rarity	A unique landscape within the area	Combination of castle, coast and islands is unique

The key landscape characteristics for the Lucker landscape character area as recorded in the NLCA Part A, Annex A, are as follows:

Criteria	Key Characteristics	Summary
Landscape	Simple, with occasional variety	Flat or gently rolling farmland
Land cover	Simple, with occasional variety	Predominantly arable with occasional woodland
Scale	Medium-large	Large scale fields
Enclosure	Generally open, enclosed in places	Some variation in topography, some enclosure by stonebanks or fences
Slopes	Largely simple, some variety	Limited variation in topography, some woodland
Views and landmarks	Landscape contains no landmarks and is not a feature in views	No views or landmark features
Intervisibility	Occasional views to adjacent landscapes	Topography limits intervisibility
Accession	Some visibility from main transport routes, more restricted	Landscape crossed by mainline railway and local roads between villages
Movement	Occasional to frequent movement	Occasional movement on local roads and railway
Sensitiveness	Some human activity reducing sense of remoteness	Farmed landscape with small villages
Settlement	Occasional towns or frequent villages	Frequent small villages and farmsteads
Industry	Very limited small scale industry	Mainline railway and farm buildings
Vertical features	Some prominent vertical features	Mobile phone masts, large agricultural buildings and wind and quartz at Bell Busk station
Linear features	Linear features, but lacking prominence	Mainline railway and local roads
Historic features	Historic features are a prominent aspect of the landscape	Few prominent historic features, some policy woodlands
Recreation	Low level informal or local recreational use	Network of local footpaths
Condition	Less well managed, with some elements in better repair	Lack of management as a result of agricultural intensification
Distinctiveness	Representative landscape of Northumberland	Not distinctive but representative of lowland agricultural landscape
Rarity	A common landscape across the area	A lowland agricultural landscape

Landscape Qualities

The key qualities of LCT 4: Rocky Coastline as listed in the NLCA Part B are as follows:

- Dynamic seascape environment
- Exposed coastal location, with dramatic views along the coast and out to sea
- Prominent natural and cultural coastal features including castles and the Farne Islands.
- Traditional cores of former fishing villages, often with distinctive pantiled roofs.
- Extensively accessible landscape with much tourist-oriented development.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

The key qualities of LCT 3: Farmed Coastal Plain as listed in the NLCA Part B are as follows:

- 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
- Coastal character, with views to the sea and coastal features and landmarks.

Constraints to Development

(i) Would new housing development affect the key qualities of the landscape as described in the NLCA?

Seahouses is a small 18th century port which has expanded inland in all directions from the distinctive harbour and historic village core. It is a focus for tourist and visitor attractions, particularly in relation to its role as gateway to the Farne Islands. With the exception of the immediate harbour area, which remains a working and functional place, the built environment of Seahouses is unexceptional, with significant growth occurring over the mid and late 20th century. North Sunderland is a separate settlement in its own right but is very closely related physically to Seahouses and effectively represents the western most element of the built up area. It does retain more of a distinct and characterful historic core, reflecting its past role as a small agricultural settlement, although this has been subsumed with mid-to-late 20th century housing development.

The landscape context of Seahouses' historic core is of note in relation to its coastal setting, nestling tightly around a semi-natural haven within the immediate rocky coastline. It lies across a low rocky promontory, contrasting with the sandy beaches and dune systems characteristic to the landscape immediately north and south of the town. The promontory presents a slightly raised area which is modest in elevation but significant in the context of its coastal plain setting, and is prominent on approaches from the south along the B1340. To the north of the harbour, ribbon development has extended behind the prominent and distinctive St Aidan's Dunes which continue north-westwards almost continuously to Bamburgh. Despite its relatively low elevation the town is prominent in the landscape from approaches from Bamburgh and from inland approaches, especially to the north-west.

Inland from the harbour and historic core of the town, the landscape context is unremarkable with its transition in to the generally less scenic Lucker LCT. This LCT is characterised by wide-open arable landscapes over flat or gently undulating land and with a relative absence of landscape features or landmarks apart from isolated farmsteads and shelter belts.

Accommodating necessary community expansion without further erosion of landscape character suggests that housing development should be directed away from the immediate coastal strip. Despite historical growth of the town along the seafront, the dunes and beaches remain as one of Seahouses' principal and distinctive landscape assets (along with vistas to the Farne Islands and the harbour area) and remain highly sensitive to further encroachment. In order to safeguard the recognised special landscape qualities of the AONB in this area, further development along the town's northern or southern coastal strips should be strictly controlled.

In combination with the relative prominence of the raised ground to the immediate south-east of the town and the sensitivity of the coastal strip north and south of Seahouses, landscape capacity for change in these areas is limited. Consequently the focus for new housing development should be directed towards inland areas of the settlement.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

Recent development and associated structural planting have presented a relatively 'soft' settlement edge to the southern fringe of Seahouses, whilst the older built environment of North Sunderland has a more established organic and irregular edge to its south. Development to the east of the B1340 on the raised land of the promontory has the potential for significant visual prominence. Together, these factors suggest limited capacity for change without harmful landscape impacts arising along the southern areas of Seahouses.

To the west and north-west of Seahouses centre, a significant area of land is bounded by a combination Main Street, Seafield Road, St Aiden's and Broad Road. Whilst falling within LCT 4 Rocky Coastline area, it reflects much more closely the characteristics of LCT3b, Lucker. The significant triangular parcel of land within this area falls very gradually from the south to north but is visually enclosed on its south, east and part of its west side by existing development. Significant advance planting has been established along its western fringe which, in time, should mature to provide an effective shelterbelt and visual screen to the site. The eastern part of this land is established as a large static caravan park. This is occasionally prominent in longer views from slightly higher ground to the northwest. The remaining area enclosed by the roads and existing land remains as open farmland. Despite relative proximity to the coast, in landscape terms this site is screened from sensitive coastal views by housing along St Aidan's Road. Consequently the site is of sufficient scale and low visual prominence that development to meet future town needs could be accommodated in this site without significant landscape character erosion.

Considerable capacity exists to the immediate north of Seahouses and North Sunderland to accommodate future growth needs without significant erosion of valued landscape character or special qualities of the AONB. Although the site will not be wholly screened in longer views from the northwest, these are not particularly important visitor areas, and delivery of high quality design, attention to roofscape, and on-going management of the existing shelter belts should mitigate any such limited impacts.

(ii) Would new housing affect other features of importance in landscape terms?

Development across the immediate north of the town centre as supported by this study would be unlikely to give rise to any significant impacts upon landscape features that are important to the special qualities of the AONB. Development may be visible from the tops of St Aidan's dunes, but this would be seen against a backdrop of the town and consequently be of limited additional impact, and would not be in the principle vistas which will always be in relation to views to the Farne Islands and up and down the coast, particularly to Bamburgh Castle.

Other areas of Seahouses' landscape context are potentially vulnerable to development along its southern fringe and particularly where land is slightly elevated.

(iii) Would new housing development affect zones of visual sensitivity around iconic landscape features or key views from important viewpoints?

Seahouses lies wholly within the zone of visual sensitivity of Bamburgh Castle. Distant views (4km) over the low-lying arable landscape are possible to the northern fringe of Seahouses from the castle's southern ramparts. Development across the northern edge of the town may therefore be seen from this important vantage point. However distance, low relief and intervening existing development would strongly suggest that additional housing in this area would not present a harmful impact on these vistas which are primarily drawn to the dramatic shoreline and Farne Islands. Delivery of development with sensitive use of materials, and particularly roofing material would further mitigate any residual visual impact.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

Seahouses also lies within the view cones of several identified important viewpoints:

- Farne Islands;
- Preston Tower;
- Ros Castle;
- CATERAN Hill; and
- Crag Hill

Because of Seahouses' low elevation and the distance of most of these viewpoints, housing development, even of a more substantial scale than elsewhere in the AONB, is unlikely to present significant or harmful visual intrusion to these view cones. Views from the low-lying Farne Islands are mostly limited by St Aidan's Dunes and the existing profile of the settlement.

(iv) Would new housing development affect other key views or views from sensitive routes?

Potential to view the northern fringe of Seahouses and North Sunderland does exist from viewpoints at Elford and the former railway track bed west of the town. These present possibly the most visually prominent vistas into the area recognised as having capacity for development. However, views from the west are limited by a marginal difference in elevation and will be mitigated as structural planting matures. Views from Elford are more elevated but also more distant. Prominence of any new development would be mitigated as landscaping matures, whilst the site would be viewed against the existing town. High standards of design and use of materials appropriate to the setting would further mitigate any visual impacts from these areas.

The B1340 between Seahouses and Bamburgh is identified as a route with sensitive key views. The importance of the views along this road are primarily in relation to views travelling north as the iconic profile of Bamburgh Castle grows in the landscape, and of the dunes to the east. Open views towards the northern edge of Seahouses are evident when travelling south on this route, but views into the area most appropriate in landscape terms for new development are limited by existing housing and landscaping around the junction of Broad Road and St Aidan's Road on the northern limit of the settlement. No significant detrimental effect on sensitive views would therefore arise as a consequence of development in this area.

Opportunities for Landscape Enhancement / Mitigation

(i) Are there opportunities for landscape enhancement or other mitigation measures associated with new housing development that could help strengthen landscape character?

Development of new housing to meet area needs on the northern fringe of Seahouses as described in previous paragraphs would have very limited potential for wider landscape enhancement. This study repeatedly stresses the importance of sensitive use of materials and reinforcement of local distinctiveness through design of new housing. Existing landscaping will mature to afford a softer interface between the town and landscape context in the medium-term which may afford localised landscape character and visual enhancement of Seahouses' northern edge.

Delivery of Recommendations within the NLCA Part B

(i) Would new housing compromise or help deliver the key guiding principle and the principle aims and land management guidelines for this landscape?

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

The guiding principle for the Rocky Coastline LCT is to protect the landscape. The vision statement in the NLCA Part B to achieve this is described as follows:

The guiding principle for the Farmed Coastal Plain LCT is to manage the landscape. The vision statement to achieve this is described as follows:

Vision Statement:

The principal aims of landscape planning policies and initiatives should be to arrest the erosion of character and loss of condition of landscape elements where this has occurred, and in so doing raise the general quality of the landscape. The coastal landscape and adjacent seascape is a key element of Northumberland's tourist economy, and requires a degree of protection.

Vision Statement:

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.

Integration of new housing to the northern periphery of Seahouses' built limits would be unlikely to significantly further or compromise these aims. Development will be localised and focus upon an area partly enclosed by development and screened by planting. LCT aims are focused upon protection of existing positive coastal landscape characteristics and the re-introduction of lost features over the arable landscape. However the continued management of the mixed species shelterbelt around the proposed area for growth would partly support objectives for the Farmer Coastal Plain landscape. Delivery of housing which reflects local distinctiveness and is well related to the existing settlement would also serve to further landscape aspirations for the Rocky Shoreline LCT.

Seahouses Settlement Boundary Background Paper

