

Neighbourhood Planning Advice Notes

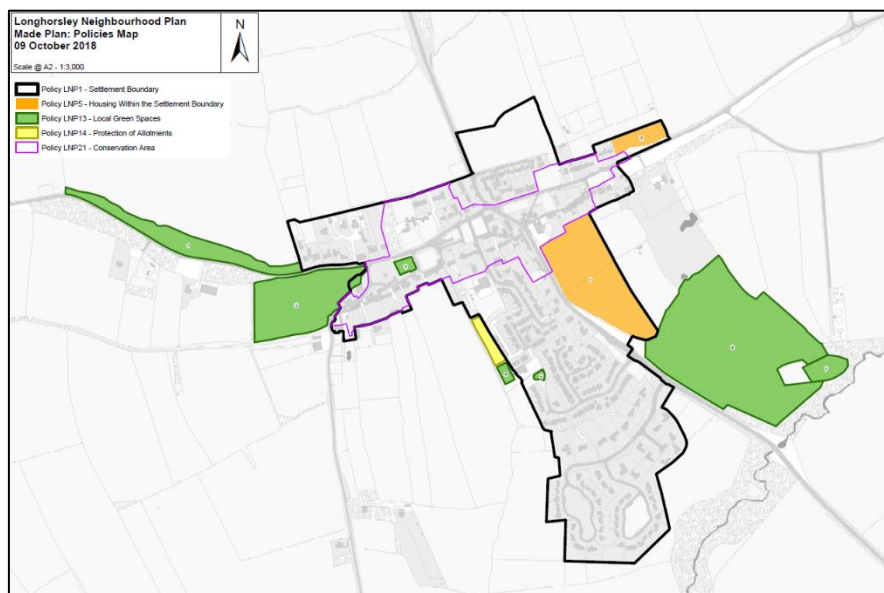
Settlement Boundaries

The delineation of settlement boundaries is a recognised and well-used planning policy tool for the management of development. This note explains the purpose of settlement boundaries and sets out a methodology that can be used to justify their inclusion in a neighbourhood plan.

1. What is a settlement boundary?

- 1.1 In simple terms, a 'settlement boundary' is a dividing line, or boundary between built-up areas (the settlement) and the land beyond built-up areas. An example taken from the Longhorsley Neighbourhood Plan is shown in figure 1. Although a settlement boundary does not preclude all development beyond the boundary¹, it does give clarity as to where new development should be directed and where it is likely to be acceptable in planning terms.

Figure 1: Longhorsley Neighbourhood Plan policies map



¹ A number of exceptions are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework including 'rural exceptions' housing sites, some business and employment related activities and some tourist development in the countryside.

- 1.2 Inclusion of land within a settlement boundary does not mean that all land within the boundary is automatically suitable for new development. There may be areas of land within the settlement boundary that are not suitable for development due to other constraints. This could include, for example, where land is protected as Local Green Space or other areas of special character such as the grounds of listed buildings or other areas that would have an impact on the setting of listed buildings.
- 1.3 Policies in the neighbourhood plan should define as clearly as possible what proposals are likely to be acceptable within the settlement boundary.
- 1.4 It is important to recognise that settlement boundaries should only be created through planning policies where they ensure adequate provision is made for land to accommodate the amount of housing needed in an area for a given period. They should not be used solely as a tool to prevent development in certain areas. The task of establishing the minimum amount of new housing needed in an area is a matter for the Local Planning Authority. Neighbourhood planning powers allow parish councils to plan for more housing than the minimum requirement should they wish to do that, subject to demonstrating such additional growth is reasonably necessary, can be delivered within the plan period and that it would not conflict with the strategic planning policies for the area.

2. What are the possible benefits of settlement boundaries?

- 2.1 The following benefits may result from establishing settlement boundaries through planning policies in a neighbourhood plan:
 - They create certainty for the local community and for landowners and potential developers by defining clear lines on a policy map where it is easy to distinguish the 'settlement' from the 'countryside', thereby allowing consistent interpretation and use of relevant planning policies.
 - Locally, settlement boundaries are an understood and accepted planning tool for guiding and managing developments.
 - They offer a more plan-led development management approach to future housing growth by supporting growth within settlements and generally only by exception in the countryside beyond.

- They serve to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside whilst allowing for development to meet established identified needs.

3. A methodology for defining settlement boundaries

- 3.1 The decision to define settlement boundaries will be taken by the Parish Council in consultation with the local community, in the production of a neighbourhood plan.
- 3.2 There is no single established methodology for defining settlement boundaries; however, the criteria used are generally similar from one local authority to another. The common factors that distinguish well defined and enduring settlement boundaries rely on two key characteristics being exhibited in the final policies:
 - i. The boundaries drawn on policy maps follow well defined and easily distinguishable features on the ground along which the settlement boundary runs in order to prevent any dispute in the implementation of appropriate policies covering development management within the settlement and development management within the countryside; and
 - ii. The land available within the settlement boundaries to accommodate housing development is at least sufficient to allow development to meet the housing needs for the area identified by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3.3 Provided those two key characteristics are respected the following matters will be relevant in determining the lines along which settlement boundaries should be drawn.

Previous settlement boundaries

- 3.4 Where recognisable planning policy settlement boundaries have been adopted and used in the past it may be appropriate to use these as a starting point. However, it would be correct to consider modification to accommodate any built development completed or approved since the original settlement boundary was created where that is contiguous with the previous defined settlement boundary.

Land is required to accommodate additional housing development

- 3.5 If land is required to accommodate additional housing development to meet the housing needs for the area identified by the Local Planning Authority an appropriate and transparent site assessment and selection process must be followed. Undertaking the assessment and selection process would be subject to a separate methodology. This would be likely to follow a similar approach to assessments undertaken by the Local Planning Authority in preparing their Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) as part of the evidence to support the Northumberland Local Plan. This approach ensures a fair and transparent process if sites are to be selected for development.

No additional development is required

- 3.6 In circumstances where no additional development is required to meet the identified housing needs, and particularly in rural areas if less dense development patterns exist within identified settlements, it would be appropriate to consider how buildings close to but separate from the identifiable main settlement, such as farm steadings, should be treated. More specifically, it will be important to consider the implications of including any undeveloped land between such divorced buildings within the settlement boundary.

Open land

- 3.7 The implications of including open land on the edge of a settlement within the settlement boundary will need to be considered. This can affect land such as parks, play spaces and other open spaces. Including such land within a settlement boundary creates different planning policy presumptions than those normally applied to land in the countryside beyond settlement boundaries.

The overall aims of the Plan

- 3.8 When defining settlement boundaries, it will be important to bear in mind and seek to respect and give spatial expression to the Vision and Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan. The definition of settlement boundaries must be consistent with the aims of the plan.

4. Evidence for proposed settlement boundaries

- 4.1 Evidence is extremely important as it ensures that the choices made in your neighbourhood plan are backed up by facts. Proportionate, robust evidence should support the choices made and the approach taken. The following types of evidence are likely to be useful in deciding whether to have a settlement boundary and if so, where it should be drawn.

The Northumberland Local Plan housing requirements for the Parish

- 4.2 The County Council will advise the Parish Council whether an adequate supply of land for housing is available to meet the needs of the Parish and to contribute towards the delivery of housing requirements in Northumberland. This advice will be given having regard to current housing development commitments in the Parish, both from extant planning permissions and from development that has been either completed or commenced since April 2016 (the commencement date for monitoring purposes for the emerging Northumberland Local Plan).
- 4.3 The County Council will advise if there is a requirement to provide land for additional housing in the Parish before the end of the proposed plan period (April 2036). *If there is no requirement, this means there is scope to draw relatively tight settlement boundaries, whilst allowing for windfall development on appropriate sites.*

Previously defined settlement boundaries

- 4.4 If a settlement boundary was defined under existing local plan policies, this will provide a starting point for establishing a new settlement boundary in a Neighbourhood Plan.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) data

- 4.5 The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is not a policy document and largely comprises sites identified by land owners who would like their land to be allocated for housing development through planning policies in the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. The Local Planning Authority is obliged to make an assessment of each of the identified sites, but

it does not determine whether a site should be allocated for housing, or whether it should be granted planning permission.²

Recent Planning Decisions

- 4.6 Planning decisions on proposals on the edge of the settlement also assist with defining a settlement boundary.

Local Features on the ground that provide recognisable boundaries

- 4.7 The proposed settlement boundaries should take account of defined features such as walls, hedgerows, watercourses, garden curtilages and roads and footpaths.
- 4.8 The Parish Council may take the decision to exclude development that is not well related to the settlement. Typically, this would include isolated dwellings; agricultural buildings; farm steadings; and recreational or tourism facilities.

² The Northumberland SHLAA Online Mapping System is available at:
<https://northumberland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=c1b801d50f8040efbf8c9bc9f916cfae>