

WOOLER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Submission Draft Version

**A report to Northumberland County Council
into the examination of the
Wooler Neighbourhood Plan
by Independent Examiner, Rosemary Kidd**

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to set out the community's wishes for this parish which contains the market town of Wooler, outlying villages and the surrounding countryside.
- 1.2 I have made a number of recommendations in this report in order to make the wording of the policies and their application clearer, including improvements to the mapping of sites referred to in policies, to ensure that the Plan meets the Basic Conditions. Section 6 of the report sets out a schedule of the recommended modifications.
- 1.3 The main recommendations concern:
 - The deletion of Policies 1, 2, 4 and 10;
 - Clarification of the wording of policies and the supporting text;
 - Revisions to the Glossary; and
 - Improvements to the mapping of policies.
- 1.4 Subject to the recommended modifications being made to the Neighbourhood Plan, I am able to confirm that I am satisfied that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan satisfies the Basic Conditions and that the Plan should proceed to referendum.

2.0 Introduction

Background Context

- 2.1 This report sets out the findings of the examination into the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.2 The Parish of Wooler lies in the north of Northumberland with the south western part of the parish extending into the Northumberland National Park. Wooler town lies about 26 miles south of Berwick on Tweed. It is a rural parish with the historic market town of Wooler at its heart. At 2011 there were 1983 people living in 1095 dwellings.

Appointment of the Independent Examiner

- 2.3 I was appointed as an independent examiner to conduct the examination on the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) by Northumberland County Council with the consent of Wooler Parish Council in August 2019. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the WNP nor do I have any professional commissions in the area currently and I possess appropriate qualifications and experience. I am a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute with over 30 years' experience in local authorities preparing Local Plans and associated policies.

Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.4 As an independent Examiner, I am required to determine, under paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, whether the legislative requirements are met:
- The Neighbourhood Development Plan has been prepared and submitted for examination by a qualifying body as defined in Section 61F of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
 - The Neighbourhood Development Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004;
 - The Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, that is the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provisions relating to 'excluded development', and must not relate to more than one Neighbourhood Area; and
 - The policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated Neighbourhood Area in line with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Section 38A.
- 2.5 An Independent Examiner must consider whether a neighbourhood plan meets the "Basic Conditions". The Basic Conditions are set out in paragraph

8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as applied to neighbourhood plans by section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Basic Conditions are:

1. having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan;
 2. the making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
 3. the making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area);
 4. the making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations; and
 5. prescribed conditions are met in relation to the plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the neighbourhood plan. The following prescribed condition relates to neighbourhood plans:
 - o Regulation 32 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (various Amendments) Regulations 2018) sets out a further Basic Condition in addition to those set out in the primary legislation: that the making of the neighbourhood development plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- 2.6 The role of an Independent Examiner of a neighbourhood plan is defined. I am not examining the test of soundness provided for in respect of examination of Local Plans. It is not within my role to comment on how the plan could be improved but rather to focus on whether the submitted Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions and Convention rights, and the other statutory requirements.
- 2.7 It is a requirement that my report must give reasons for each of its recommendations and contain a summary of its main findings. I have only recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan (presented in bold type) where I consider they need to be made so that the plan meets the Basic Conditions and the other requirements.

The Examination Process

- 2.8 The presumption is that the neighbourhood plan will proceed by way of an examination of written evidence only. However the Examiner can ask for a public hearing in order to hear oral evidence on matters which he or she wishes to explore further or so that a person has a fair chance to put a case.
- 2.9 I have sought clarification on a number of factual matters from the Qualifying Body, the local planning authority and the national park authority in writing. I

am satisfied that the responses received have enabled me to come to a conclusion on these matters without the need for a hearing.

- 2.10 I had before me background evidence to the plan which has assisted me in understanding the background to the matters raised in the Neighbourhood Plan. I have considered the documents set out in Section 5 of this report in addition to the Submission draft of the WNP 2020 - 2036.
- 2.11 I have considered the Basic Conditions Statement and the Consultation Statement as well as the Habitats Regulation Assessment and the March 2019 Environmental Report and the Addendum Report of January 2020. In my assessment of each policy I have commented on how the policy has had regard to national policies and advice and whether the policy is in general conformity with relevant strategic policies, as appropriate.
- 2.12 In view of the advice on travel as a result of the coronavirus emergency I have not undertaken a site visit to the Plan area.

Legislative Requirements

Qualifying Body

- 2.13 The neighbourhood plan making process has been led by Wooler Parish Council which is a “qualifying body” under the Neighbourhood Planning legislation which entitles them to lead the plan making process. The Plan was prepared by the WNP Steering Group on behalf of the Parish Council.

The Plan Area

- 2.14 The Neighbourhood Plan area is co-terminus with the parish of Wooler. NCC has confirmed that the area was designated by Northumberland County Council on 23 November 2015 as a Neighbourhood Area. (It is noted that the dates in the Basic Conditions Statement are incorrect.) The designation was subsequently ratified by the National Park Authority on 19 January 2016. Paragraph 2.9 of the Basic Conditions statement confirms these dates. Paragraph 2.16 confirms that there are no other neighbourhood plans relating to that area.

Plan Period

- 2.15 A neighbourhood plan must specify the period during which it is to have effect. The front cover of the Neighbourhood Plan shows the date 2020 – 2036 and paragraph 2.14 of the Basic Conditions statement confirms this period.

Excluded Development

- 2.16 The Plan does not include provision for any excluded development: county matters (mineral extraction and waste development), nationally significant

infrastructure or any matters set out in Section 61K of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Development and use of land

- 2.17 The Neighbourhood Development Plan should only contain policies relating to the development and use of land. It is considered that the WNP policies are compliant with this requirement.
- 2.18 The submitted Plan contains a section headed “Annex B Community Actions” which is clearly distinguished from the land use planning policies.
- 2.19 I am satisfied therefore that the WNP satisfies all the legal requirements set out in paragraph 2.4 above.

The Basic Conditions

Basic Condition 1 – Has regard to National Policy

- 2.20 The first Basic Condition is for the neighbourhood plan “*to have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State*”. The requirement to determine whether it is appropriate that the plan is made includes the words “*having regard to*”. This is not the same as compliance, nor is it the same as part of the test of soundness provided for in respect of examinations of Local Plans which requires plans to be “*consistent with national policy*”.
- 2.21 The Planning Practice Guidance assists in understanding “appropriate”. In answer to the question “What does having regard to national policy mean?” the Guidance states a neighbourhood plan “*must not constrain the delivery of important national policy objectives.*”
- 2.22 In considering the policies contained in the Plan, I have been mindful of the guidance in the Planning Practice Guide (PPG) that:

“Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like.”
- 2.23 In order to ensure that a neighbourhood plan can be an effective tool for the decision maker, the PPG advises that:

“A policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous. It should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. It should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific neighbourhood area for which it has been prepared.”

- 2.24 The NPPF of February 2019 (as amended) is referred to in this examination in accordance with paragraph 214 of Appendix 1, as the plan was submitted to the Council in February 2020.
- 2.25 The Planning Practice Guidance on Neighbourhood Plans states that neighbourhood plans should “*support the strategic policies set out in the Local Plan or spatial development strategy and should shape and direct development that is outside of those strategic policies*” and further states that “*A neighbourhood plan should, however, contain policies for the development and use of land. This is because, if successful at examination and referendum, the neighbourhood plan becomes part of the statutory development plan.*”
- 2.26 Table 1 of the Basic Conditions Statement includes comments on how the policies of the WNP have had regard to national planning policy and practice. I consider the extent to which the plan meets this Basic Condition No 1 in Section 3 below.

Basic Condition 2 - Contributes to sustainable development

- 2.27 A qualifying body must demonstrate how a neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF as a whole constitutes the Government’s view of what sustainable development means in practice for planning. The NPPF explains that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental.
- 2.28 Table 1 of the Basic Conditions Statement highlights how the policies of the WNP have sought to deliver the three arms of sustainable development.
- 2.29 I am satisfied that the Plan has considered the future social, economic and environmental needs of the parish and therefore meets this Basic Condition.

Basic Condition 3 – is in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan

- 2.30 The third Basic Condition is for the neighbourhood plan to be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Development Plan for the area. The Development Plan relevant to the area outside the National Park comprises the saved policies of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan, adopted April 1999. The County Council is progressing the Northumberland Local Plan which was submitted on 29 May 2019 and is currently undergoing examination. Within the National Park, the adopted plan is the Northumberland National Park (NNP) Core Strategy and Development Policies adopted 2009. The National Park Authority is progressing the draft Northumberland National Park Local Plan which was submitted to the Secretary of State on the 30th September 2019.
- 2.31 Table 1 of the Basic Conditions Statement considers the general conformity of each policy with the adopted and emerging development plans. Paragraph 3.19 summarises the areas of conflict that have been identified. There are no

conflicts identified with the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. All conflicts are with the older local plans that pre-date the NPPF.

- 2.32 I consider in further detail in Section 3 below the matter of general conformity of the Neighbourhood Plan policies with the strategic policies.

Basic Condition 4 – Compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements

- 2.33 A neighbourhood plan must be compatible with European Union obligations as incorporated into UK law, in order to be legally compliant. Key directives relate to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives. A neighbourhood plan should also take account of the requirements to consider human rights.

- 2.34 Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations as amended in 2015 requires either that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is submitted with a Neighbourhood Plan proposal or a determination from the responsible authority (Northumberland County Council) that the plan is not likely to have “significant effects.”

- 2.35 A screening opinion for the purposes of Strategic Environmental Assessment was undertaken by Northumberland County Council in August 2018 on the Regulation 14 draft Plan. NCC determined that the WNP should be screened in and that a full SEA was required for the following reasons:

- 2.36 The Screening Report concludes in paragraph 5.01 that:

*“On the basis of the SEA Screening Assessment set out in Table 1 (of the screening report), and having regard to the responses received from the consultation bodies in relation to the County Council’s Screening Opinion, the conclusion is that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan **is likely to have significant effects on the environment** when considered against the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and will therefore need to be subject to SEA. The main reasons for this conclusion are:*

- The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan intends to allocate land for residential, employment and mixed-use development, at a scale and distribution above that in the existing development plan. The potential effects of the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan on the environment have therefore been found to be potentially significant;*
- The Wooler Neighbourhood Area includes a number of sensitive receptors including listed buildings and a conservation area, as well as a number of important environmental designations. The Plan will be subject to a separate Screening Opinion under the Habitats Regulations.”*

- 2.37 The three environmental bodies concurred with this conclusion.

- 2.38 The Environmental Report was prepared on the Regulation 14 WNP in March 2019 which assessed the reasonable alternatives for the WNP housing strategy including the housing growth target and the distribution and choice of

development locations. It also assessed the site allocations and the rationale for site selection. Section 5.11 of the Environmental Report sets out the summary of effects. Table 5.2 sets out three mitigation and enhancement measures as follows:

Issue / opportunity	Recommendations
Minimising impacts upon important local habitats and ensuring net gain of biodiversity	Development at sites 1 and 3 should explicitly seek to retain and enhance habitats, and implement buffer zones / green infrastructure to minimise the potential for negative effects (and contribute to the environmental net gain principle). <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Site 3 contains areas at risk of flooding	It is recommended that Policy 4.3 be updated to include specific mitigation measures relating to flood risk on site. <i>However, it is acknowledged that other policies within the plan could secure such improvements in applied successfully.</i>
Haulage related employment development could occur in the plan area	Policy 11 could potentially be strengthened by including a requirement for any proposal to demonstrate that there would be no significant impacts on the local highway network in terms of capacity/ safety and that appropriate mitigation is delivered where necessary. Employment sites should also be encouraged to be fit for purpose by providing sufficient parking and turning circles.

2.39 When the WNP and its Environmental Report were submitted in July 2019, the Council raised concerns about submitting the Plan for examination primarily because of the comments made by Historic England in relation to site selection and the corresponding SEA process.

2.40 An Addendum Report was prepared and dated January 2020 to address the following factors:

- a) Updated assessment of heritage assessment criteria for reasonable site options.
- b) Updated appraisal of the proposed site allocations in the draft Plan.

- c) Clarifications to respond to factual / typographical errors.
- d) Response to specific representations related to the SEA process.

- 2.41 Appendix C of the Addendum Report sets out the Heritage Impact Assessment which examines the potential impact on heritage of the development proposed in the WNP on 11 sites. The conclusions to the sites was that, other than site 7 which is not allocated in the WNP, there are no heritage reasons why the sites should not be allocated as proposed in the plan subject to a policy in the plan that reflects local and national policy on heritage.
- 2.42 Paragraph 4.9 of the Addendum Report states that broadly speaking any issues identified in the Heritage Impact Report can be mitigated through sensitive design. Paragraph 4.10 states that *“Therefore, the potential negative effects flagged in the initial Site Assessments can be avoided.”*
- 2.43 I have made a recommendation under Policy 4 that reference should be included in the justification to that section to the Heritage Impact Assessment in the SEA Addendum Report and the importance of considering the impact of development proposals on the conservation area and other heritage assets.
- 2.44 Consultation was carried out with the environmental bodies in March 2019 and on the SEA Addendum Report in February 2020. Historic England agreed with the broad conclusions of the Addendum Report that none of the allocated sites was likely to generate significant negative effects on the historic environment.
- 2.45 Natural England made a number of comments in their response to the 2019 Environmental Report and made further comments on the wording of policies in their representation on the Submission Draft Plan which I have considered in my report. They have concluded that with mitigation in place for the relevant policies, the WNP will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European Sites or interest features of the SSSI.
- 2.46 A Habitats Regulation Assessment screening report was prepared for the WNP and this concluded in paragraphs 6.4 - 6.5 that in the light of the implications of Case C 323/17 in the Court of Justice of the European Union (People over Wind):

“it is not possible to conclude at the screening stage that additional housing sites will not have significant effects on the European Site and the policies and objectives related to those sites require Appropriate Assessment, at which stage the mitigation measures can be considered. Accordingly, an appropriate assessment is required to determine if the above policies will have an adverse effect on the integrity of the interest features of the River Tweed SAC. None of the other policies will have any effect on any European sites and therefore cannot contribute to in-combination effects.”

2.47 An Appropriate Assessment of the WNP was therefore undertaken in August 2019. Paragraphs 8.2 – 8.8 set out the conclusions:

“that the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Submission Plan, August 2019 will have an adverse effect on the integrity of European sites without mitigation.”

2.48 Paragraph 8.4 states that *“An additional policy has been added, which is a general policy applied to all the policies in the plan. Policy 1A: Discharge into the River Tweed states ‘Development that requires any discharge through the Wooler Sewage Treatment Plant shall not be brought into use until work to install equipment to remove phosphorous from Wooler Sewage Treatment Works is complete and that equipment is operational.’ Therefore, mitigation is proposed for all policies within the plan which support development that may impact on European Sites.”*

2.49 Paragraph 8.7 concludes that *“Appropriate mitigation is proposed within the plan, with Policy 1A applying to all development within the Plan area, and preventing any new development being brought into use prior to the upgrade works to the Wooler Sewage Treatment Works being completed. Therefore, adverse impacts on the site integrity of the River Tweed SAC are not likely.”*

2.50 However paragraph 8.8 notes *“that this is an iterative process, and any significant subsequent changes to the Plan will need to be subject to further Habitats Regulations Assessment which will include further consultation with Natural England.”*

2.51 Natural England was consulted on the updated HRA and they concurred with the findings of the assessment. Their response is included in Appendix A of the HRA Assessment report.

2.52 Northumberland National Park Authority have confirmed that they are satisfied that the lead authority (Northumberland County Council) have carried out the Screening Opinions on SEA and Habitats Regulations Assessment to their satisfaction.

2.53 I am satisfied that the SEA Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment under Habitats Regulations Directive have been carried out in accordance with the legal requirements.

2.54 Paragraph 3.27 of the Basic Conditions Statement states *“The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan is fully compliant with European Convention on Human Rights. There is no discrimination stated or implied, or threat to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Convention.”* From my assessment of the Consultation Statement I am satisfied that the requirements on Human Rights have been satisfied.

2.55 I am not aware of any other European Directives which apply to this particular Neighbourhood Plan and no representations at pre or post-submission stage have drawn any others to my attention. Taking all of the above into account, I

am satisfied that the WNP is compatible with EU obligations and therefore with Basic Conditions Nos 4 and 5.

Consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.56 I am required under The Localism Act 2011 to check the consultation process that has led to the production of the Plan. The requirements are set out in Regulation 14 in The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 2.57 The first round of consultations was held in August 2016 when a household survey was circulated followed by events for young people in October. During 2017 surveys of businesses and community facilities were carried out and interviews with landowners. A Housing Needs Assessment was undertaken in November 2017.
- 2.58 There were a number of public events, with drop in events in February and April 2017, stands at the Glendale Festival in July 2017, Glendale Show in August 2017, and a series of targeted workshops on site opportunities in September 2017. These events were targeted at all residents and businesses in the Parish.
- 2.59 A number of consultation methods were used to publicise the progress with work on the Plan and consultation events including press releases, leaflets, posters and displays, a dedicated website and Facebook page and direct emails to those expressing an interest.
- 2.60 In February 2018 the Steering Group drafted a 'vision and objectives' document which was circulated to local businesses, landowners, community groups and organisations as well as a number of statutory consultees.
- 2.61 Work on preparing a draft plan involved a number of workshops and site-specific consultation events. In addition, meetings were held with Northumbrian Water to consider sewerage capacity issues and Northumberland County Council as landowner of some sites.
- 2.62 The Regulation 14 draft Plan was consulted on for an 8-week period between 1 March and 26 April 2019. The Plan and accompanying Policies Maps, along with all evidence base documents were put on the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan website. In addition, printed copies were available in a number of locations in the parish. Drop-in sessions were also held on 16 March in Glendale Hall, 19 March in Newton's Shop (46 High Street, Wooler) and on 27 March at the Cheviot Centre. An e-mail and postal address were given for respondents. Statutory consultees were informed.
- 2.63 The responses received during the Regulation 14 consultation have been recorded in Appendix B of the Consultation Statement, together with the responses and amendments to the final Plan document.
- 2.64 The Regulation 16 consultation on the Submission Draft Plan was undertaken by Northumberland County Council between 17 February and 30 March 2020. 9 responses were received.

- 2.65 From the evidence presented to me in the Consultation Statement, I am satisfied that the pre-submission consultation and publicity has met the requirements of Regulations 14, 15 and 16 in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 2.66 This report is the outcome of my examination of the Submission Draft Version of the WNP. I am required to give reasons for each of my recommendations and also provide a summary of my main conclusions. My report makes recommendations based on my findings on whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and provided the Plan is modified as recommended, I am satisfied that it is appropriate for the Neighbourhood Plan to be made. If the plan receives the support of over 50% of those voting then the Plan will be made following approval by Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland National Park Authority.

3.0 Neighbourhood Plan – As a whole

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Plan is considered against the Basic Conditions in this section of the Report following the structure and headings in the Plan. Given the findings in Section 2 above that the plan as a whole is compliant with Basic Conditions No 4 (EU obligations) and other prescribed conditions, this section largely focuses on Basic Conditions No 1 (Having regard to National Policy), No 2 (Contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development) and No 3 (General conformity with strategic policies of the Development Plan).
- 3.2 Where modifications are recommended, they are presented and clearly marked as such and highlighted in bold print, with any proposed new wording in italics.
- 3.3 Basic Condition 1 requires that the examiner considers whether the plan as a whole has had regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Before considering the policies individually, I have considered whether the plan as a whole has had regard to national planning policies and supports the delivery of sustainable development.
- 3.4 The Plan is clearly and coherently presented with policies addressing Sustainable Development, Housing, Local Economy, Landscape, Natural Environment, Townscape and Heritage, Community Life and Accessibility. The policies are clearly distinguishable by blue boxes. Six sites are allocated for various forms of development. Annex B sets out Community Actions.
- 3.5 The Plan contains Policies Maps of the whole parish and inset maps of Wooler and sites outside the village. The maps are clear and legible, and the key is linked to the relevant policies. There is a map showing the extent and location of Wooler Parish.
- 3.6 NCC has made a number of suggestions to improve the clarity of the text of policies and their justifications. I have asked the Qualifying Body for their comments on these and recommended them where appropriate as modifications under the relevant policies. As the policy numbers and content in the emerging Local Plan are likely to change, NCC has requested that they should not be referred to in the revised policies of the WNP.
- 3.7 Many of the policies in the WNP include criteria; in most cases all have to be taken into account in considering relevant planning applications. It is recommended that a consistent form of wording is used throughout the Plan. Usual practice is to add the word “and” to the penultimate criterion. In some policies, only one criterion has to be satisfied. In these circumstances the word “or” should be added after each criterion. I have added a recommendation to policies where applicable.

The Neighbourhood Plan - Policies

Introduction

- 3.8 The Introduction to the Plan sets out succinctly the process of preparing the neighbourhood plan and highlights the community's aspiration of using the WNP to ensure that Wooler will grow in a sustainable way.
- 3.9 Section 2 sets out the Vision for the future of Wooler and five key objectives. The objectives are clearly expressed and are delivered through the policies of the Plan. It would be helpful to plan users to include a table to link the objectives to the policies of the plan. The key issues raised by the community and other studies under each objective are clearly summarised.
- 3.10 Whilst reference is made to the statutory development plan in section 3, it would be helpful to plan users to include a paragraph in this section to set out the development strategy for the plan area from the Local Plan to provide the context for the scale and location of development proposed in the WNP.

Recommendation 1:

Include a table after paragraph 2.10 to link the objectives to the policies of the plan.

Include a paragraph in Section 3 to set out the strategy for the plan area from the Local Plan to provide the context for the scale and location of development proposed in the WNP as follows:

“Strategic Planning Context

“Wooler is a second tier Service Centre. It is a local hub for services for its satellite communities. It has an important cluster of agricultural engineering and construction companies. The level of development directed towards Service Centres is at a lower level than to Main Towns. The emerging Local Plan sets a minimum for 170 dwellings for Wooler Parish over the plan period. NCC is satisfied that this level of development will be met through existing commitments. Local Plan policy states that Service Centres including Wooler will accommodate employment, housing and services that maintain and strengthen their roles.”

Part I Sustainable Development

Policy 1 Supporting Sustainable Development

- 3.11 The policy sets out a summary of the types of development included in policies in the WNP that will contribute to the delivery of sustainable development. It is considered that it is not necessary to set this out as a policy as it provides no details about how the development is to be delivered. These are set out in subsequent policies. It is recommended that the text should be

retained in the background information to the section on Supporting Sustainable Development.

- 3.12 NCC has raised concerns about the application of this policy and has proposed that it should become a statement setting out the general strategy of the plan or only the first sentence of the policy should be retained.

Recommendation 2: Delete “Policy 1” from the heading between paragraph 3.8 and 3.9 and delete the heading “Policy 1: Supporting Sustainable Development”. Delete the penultimate sentence in paragraph 3.9 “Policy 1 sets out...” Retain the text within the background to this section.

Policy 1A Discharge into the Rivers Till and Tweed

- 3.13 This policy has been included as a mitigation measure under the Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Regulations. The wording has been agreed with environmental bodies. I make no comments on it.
- 3.14 Natural England has commented under Policy 6 that the opportunity to incorporate SuDS in new, non-residential development would be appropriate. I agree that the use of SuDS will assist in the management of drainage from development sites and support the national policy to reduce the risk of flooding. I recommend that an additional paragraph be added to this policy to address the matter.

Recommendation 3: Add the following to Policy 1A:

“Where feasible, development proposals should incorporate a Sustainable Drainage System or demonstrate why such a system would not be practicable.”

Policy 2 Major Development in the Northumberland National Park

- 3.15 The policy wording is very similar to that of Policy 4 of the NNP Core Strategy. The emerging NNP Local Plan Policy ST3 sets out a revised form of wording more closely reflecting paragraph 172 of the NPPF. The Northumberland National Park Authority has questioned whether it is justified to have policies in both the National Park’s Local Plan and the WNP for the same purpose.
- 3.16 Footnote 55 of the NPPF states *“whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined”*. The definition of “major development” in both the adopted and emerging National Park Plans is *“development is classed as major when its characteristics and*

specific impacts are likely to have a significant impact on the special qualities of the National Park”.

- 3.17 In the Glossary of the WNP, the term “Major Development” is defined using the definition from the Development Management Procedure Order. It is considered that this is not consistent with that used in the National Park Plans. If this term is to be retained for use outside the National Park, then a new term should be added to define “Major Development in the National Park”.
- 3.18 The final sentence of paragraph 3.12 states that “planning applications for major development will normally be refused”. It is recommended that this should be revised to better reflect national policy that “planning permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances”.
- 3.19 It is considered that as Policy 2 repeats the NNP policy on major development and adds no locally specific details to the NNP policy it is unnecessary and should be deleted. Furthermore, it is considered that the definition of Major Development in the WNP Glossary does not accord with that in the NNP plans and it is recommended that an additional item be added to the Glossary on Major Development in the National Park. It is suggested that that reference should be made in the background text to major developments in the National Park being determined in accordance with policies in the NNP Core Strategy and emerging Local Plan.

Recommendation 4: Delete Policy 2 and the words “Policy 2” from the heading before paragraph 3.12. Delete paragraph 3.13.

Retain paragraph 3.12. Revise the last sentence of paragraph 3.12 to read “...major development will be refused other than in exceptional circumstances in accordance with national planning policy and relevant policies in the Northumberland National Park Core Strategy and/or Development Plan.”

Add a new term in the Glossary “Major Development in the National Park - Development is classed as major when its characteristics and specific impacts are likely to have a significant impact on the special qualities of the National Park”.

Policy 3 Locally Distinctive and High-Quality Design

- 3.20 The policy sets out a number of principles of design that developers should consider in designing their proposals to respect the local vernacular. Each scheme will be judged on its merits and how well it achieves them. The final paragraphs of the policy include support for innovative design and the unacceptability of poor quality design.

- 3.21 NCC has commented that the first line of the policy and the penultimate paragraph have the potential to be misleading as other factors besides design need to be considered when determining whether a proposal is acceptable. I agree with these concerns and recommend revisions to the wording of the first paragraph and the deletion of the penultimate paragraph to clarify the policy.
- 3.22 Criterion b) states that *“full consideration is to be given to important views into and out of the town, particularly to its context within Glendale and the NNP and to views into and out of the Park”*. As the locations of significant viewpoints have not been identified in the WNP, it would be helpful to plan users if the justification to the policy explained in more detail how the criterion is to be interpreted and applied including reference to undertaking a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.
- 3.23 The National Park Authority has commented on criterion d). They consider that all forms of development should consider dark sky implications and that the word “nearby” should be deleted from the criterion. I consider that the revisions to the first paragraph of the policy will make the policy applicable to all forms of development. The word “nearby” is unnecessary and could be avoided by using the full name of the area.
- 3.24 Criterion g) seeks to secure a net-gain for biodiversity. Natural England has commented to suggest that a definition of the term should be included in the Glossary. They have also advised that biodiversity net gain relies on the application of a mitigation hierarchy to avoid, mitigate or compensate for biodiversity losses. The retention measures are only a part of this. A modification is recommended to criterion g) to delete the retention measures and add wording to reflect CIEEM (2016) Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development. An additional paragraph may be added to the justification to explain how biodiversity net gain is to be assessed with links to good practice guidance on the topic.
- 3.25 The adopted Berwick Local Plan does not include specific policies on design. The emerging Local Plan includes a number of policies (Policies QOP1 – 6) and a policy on Tranquillity and Dark Skies (ENV4). It is considered that Policy 3 accords with national planning policy and will complement the emerging Local Plan policies.

Recommendation 5: Replace the first paragraph of Policy 3 with the following:

“Development proposals should demonstrate how they have taken account of their setting and the local vernacular in order to create a high quality and locally distinctive design that will enhance the character and quality of the area. Proposals should demonstrate:”

Revise criterion d) to read: “.....local amenity and the *Northumberland International Dark Sky Park*; and”

Revise criterion g) to read: “...biodiversity, *demonstrated through mitigation, restoration and/or compensation measures demonstrated in a measurable way.*”

Delete the penultimate paragraph of the Policy “Development will be supportedthe way it functions.”

Add a paragraph to the justification to explain how biodiversity net gain is to be considered and achieved with links to good practice guidance.

Add the following to paragraph 3.17: “*Where appropriate a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment shall be undertaken to demonstrate how the development proposal will impact on important views within Glendale and into and out of the NNP.*”

Add a definition in the Glossary on Net Gain for Biodiversity: “*Development that adopts a biodiversity net gain approach seeks to make its impact on the environment positive, delivering improvements through habitat creation or enhancement after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible.*”

Part II Development Allocations

- 3.26 A comprehensive assessment of 39 potential sites was carried out by independent consultants. The Report concluded that there was a significant pool of sites for consideration for allocation in Wooler Neighbourhood Plan, with capacity for more than 300 new homes in addition to those with planning permission. The report advised that it is for plan makers and the wider community of Wooler to decide which of the sites are most appropriate to allocate to meet the future development needs of the parish.
- 3.27 The Environmental Report undertook an assessment of the reasonable alternatives for the housing growth numbers and strategy; then considered the alternative locations for directing all the growth to a single location; finally, it assessed the site options against environmental objectives. Table 4.2 of the Environmental Report sets out the rationale for site selection.
- 3.28 Making use of these assessments, the WNP SG considered alternative directions for Wooler’s future development during and beyond the Plan period. While growth could be accommodated in the short term within and adjacent to the built area of Wooler Town, in the longer term it was concluded in paragraph 3.4 of the Housing Sites Selection Approach Report that the most appropriate directions for development, taking into account the costs of service provision and the importance of the landscape setting of Wooler Town, especially on its western and south-western edges, were:
- Along the roads leading from Wooler Town, especially the Berwick Road, Chatton Road, Brewery Road and the A697 southwards.
 - In an area to the south-east of Brewery Road and the Martins.

- 3.29 The emerging Local Plan sets a minimum requirement for 170 dwellings for Wooler Parish over the plan period. The Parish Council has stated that they are keen to support growth in housing numbers as a means of contributing to the long term sustainability and viability of Wooler and the services the town offers.
- 3.30 Four sites are allocated in the WNP with the potential for housing development. The policies in the WNP set out a minimum figure for sites 4.1 and 4.2, a range for site 4.4 and no figure for site 4.3. NCC has provided me with approximate housing numbers that could be expected from each site which total about 70 dwellings.

Site No	Site name	Housing nos
Site 1	The former First School	About 10
Site 2	Land south of The Martins	About 40
Site 3	Redpath's/ Ferguson's Yard	About 10
Site 4	Land at Burnhouse Road	About 10
Total		About 70

- 3.31 Paragraph 3.54 of the WNP sets out the housing delivery figures at 2018. It is recommended (see under Part III Housing) that they are updated in accordance with the latest figures provided by NCC as follows:

Housing delivery in Wooler 2020 to 2036	
Completions (at 31 March 2020)	20
Sites with planning permission (2019)	140
Windfall sites	10
Deliverable SHLAA sites without constraints and excluding allocations proposed in the WNP (SHLAA sites 1203, 1231, 1243, 6939)	68
Total	238

- 3.32 The allocations in the Plan of about 70 homes will result in a considerable increase in the delivery of housing in the Parish in addition to commitments and other deliverable sites. NCC has confirmed that they support in principle the growth level and the housing allocations proposed in the WNP and are satisfied that this level of development is not of such a scale that it would give

rise to concerns about general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

- 3.33 The Plan recognises that there is uncertainty about the delivery of some of the allocated sites. The football ground will require relocation before site 2 can be developed. Planning permission has been granted for commercial use on site 3 which if developed would preclude residential use on the site.

Policy 4 Sites Allocated for Development

- 3.34 The policy allocates six sites for various forms of development. The following six policies set out details of the form of development on each site and any site specific requirements. It is considered that Policy 4 is unnecessary as it adds no details to the subsequent Policies 4.1 to 4.6. I am recommending that it be deleted although a list of the sites could be retained in paragraph 3.30 of the Plan.
- 3.35 A Heritage Impact Assessment was carried out to advise the Environmental Report and is included in the Addendum Report. Historic England has commented that the plan has not taken the opportunity to use the Heritage Impact Assessment analysis to optimise the benefits to heritage on sites assessed by incorporating amendments to the wording of site specific requirements suggested. I consider that it would be helpful to plan users to include a reference to the Heritage Impact Assessment and the importance of considering the impact of development proposals on the conservation area and other heritage assets in the justification to the Development Allocations Section. I have also recommended additional wording under relevant site allocations to prepare a Heritage Statement to consider the impact of the proposal in the conservation area and its setting in accordance with Policy 20.
- 3.36 The HRA identified that Policies 4.1 to 4.6 are likely to have a significant effect on the River Tweed SAC and that mitigation measures are required. Appropriate mitigation is proposed within the plan, with Policy 1A applying to all development within the Plan area, and preventing any new development being brought into use prior to the upgrade works to the Wooler Sewage Treatment Works being completed. Therefore, adverse impacts on the site integrity of the River Tweed SAC are not likely.

Recommendation 6: Delete Policy 4.

Retain paragraphs 3.24 – 3.30. Revise the second sentence of paragraph 3.30 to read: “The *following* six sites are *allocated* for development in Policies 4.1 – 4.6. *List of Sites 1 – 6 from the Policy 4 box.*”

Include an additional paragraph in the justification to refer to the Heritage Impact Assessment and the importance of considering the impact of development proposals on the conservation area and other heritage assets.

Delete “Policy 4” from the heading above paragraph 3.24.

Policy 4.1 Land at the Former First School Site off Burnhouse Road (Site 1)

- 3.37 This site of the former first school is allocated for a mix of uses including at least 10 dwellings, some community and/or recreational use with an extension to the cemetery on the northern greenfield part of the site. Small scale businesses may also be supported.
- 3.38 The QB has asked that the word “historic” should be added to the first paragraph of the policy.
- 3.39 The site lies adjacent to the Wooler Conservation Area and it is good practice to give consideration to the impact of proposals on the site on the Conservation Area and its setting. I am recommending a modification to require a Heritage Statement to be prepared as part of any development proposals to consider heritage matters in the design and layout of the scheme.

Recommendation 7: Revise Policy 4.1 as follows:

Add at the end of the first paragraph: “A Heritage Statement shall be prepared as part of the masterplan and subsequent planning applications to consider the impact of the development on the Wooler Conservation Area and its setting.”

Policy 4.2 Land South of the Martins (Site 2)

- 3.40 This site is a greenfield site currently occupied by a full size football pitch. It is allocated for at least 40 dwellings. The relocation of the football pitch is required before development can take place. The plan makers have included the site under Policy 23 which safeguards sports grounds unless alternative provision is made. However, I have recommended a modification to delete the site from that policy and as a consequence a modification is recommended to delete the cross reference to Policy 23.
- 3.41 NCC has highlighted the Highway Authority concerns about the difficulties in achieving a safe means of pedestrian access between development on the eastern side of the A697 and the town centre.
- 3.42 The policy sets out that a Transport Assessment should be undertaken to demonstrate how the scheme will satisfy the access requirements for the development of the site. At this stage it is not possible to comment on whether or not these will be deliverable or their impact on viability. In the circumstances, I am proposing no change to the policy.

Recommendation 8: Revise Policy 4.2 as follows:

Delete “as set out in Policy 23” from the last line of the policy.

Policy 4.3 Land on South Road known as Redpath’s / Ferguson’s Yard (Site 3)

- 3.43 This is a prominent brownfield site near the town centre and within the conservation area. It is allocated for a mix of uses in order to promote the redevelopment of the site. The QB has confirmed that planning permission has been granted for the development of commercial uses on the site; the site has been cleared but development has not yet commenced. I consider it would be helpful to retain this policy pending the completion of the development of the site.
- 3.44 NCC has commented that the first sentence of the policy reads like an aim and should be deleted. I agree with this comment and have recommended a revision to the wording of this sentence to emphasise the importance of designing development to create a positive impact on the Conservation Area. The requirement to undertake a Heritage Statement is also included.
- 3.45 The Environment Agency has commented that part of the site is in flood zone 2 and they advise the preparation of a Flood Risk Assessment for development at this site and that development is directed to the areas of lowest flood risk. I have proposed a modification to the policy wording and paragraph 3.39 to reflect this advice.

Recommendation 9: Revise Policy 4.3 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph of the policy to read: “*Development of the site shall be laid out and designed to have a positive impact on the character and appearance of this prominent site in the Wooler Conservation Area. A Heritage Statement shall be submitted as part of any planning applications to consider the impact of the development on the Wooler Conservation Area and its setting. Proposals.....site*”

Replace criterion d) with the following: “*A Flood Risk Assessment shall be prepared when considering development on the site. Development shall be steered to areas of lowest flood risk and away from Flood Zone 2.*”

Revise paragraph 3.39 to read: “*A small portion of the site lies within Flood Zone 2. A Flood Risk Assessment should be prepared for any development proposal on the site. Flood mitigation measures will be required if a risk is identified with development directed to the areas of lowest flood risk.*”

Policy 4.4 Land at Burnhouse Road (Site 4)

- 3.46 The site is a greenfield infill site in a part of the town where there is low density development and lies adjacent to the conservation area. A low density development of between 10 and 15 dwellings is expected through this policy. A Heritage Statement is included in criterion b). I make no comments on the wording of the policy.

Policy 4.5 Land East of the Auction Mart (Site 5)

- 3.47 The policy allocates a greenfield site known as The Mart Field for a variety of employment uses. The site is adjacent to the Mart Ground and the existing employment estate.
- 3.48 The site was allocated in the Berwick Local Plan for employment uses but the policy has not been saved. The site is proposed to be allocated in the emerging Local Plan for general employment land or flexible employment uses.
- 3.49 No evidence has been provided by the plan makers to justify the allocation of this greenfield site for employment uses. However, its allocation accords with its previous and proposed allocation in the emerging Local Plan. I make no comments on the policy itself.
- 3.50 The definition of wider employment generating uses in the Glossary should be consistent with that in the emerging Local Plan.

Recommendation 10: revise the wording of Wider Employment Generating Uses in the Glossary to be consistent with that in the emerging Local Plan.

Policy 4.6 School Farm Field, Weetwood Road (Site 6)

- 3.51 The policy allocates this greenfield site for recreational and community uses as well as some small scale employment/micro business uses. No information has been provided about the need for or possible type of proposed uses. Apart from the need to relocate the football ground, no recreational or community needs have been identified as part of preparing this plan and there are no community actions relevant to the subject.
- 3.52 Nevertheless as the site is currently leased by the Parish Council, the allocation provides the opportunity for the local community to bring forward a range of uses in the future to meet community needs and aspirations once these have been identified. It would be helpful to plan users to include a sentence in the justification to state that the type and mix of uses will be subject to further consultation with the local community.

Recommendation 11: Add the following to paragraph 3.43:

“Further consultation will be carried out with the community and local businesses to identify the type of recreational and community uses and the amount and type of small scale business development that should be provided on the site, and the sources of funding.”

Part III Housing

- 3.53 The WNP is taking a proactive approach to planning for housing to meet the needs of the community. A Housing Needs Assessment has been carried out and a Background Housing Paper prepared. Paragraph 3.53 of the WNP states that *“the housing requirement for the Wooler area (which is undefined) in the emerging Local Plan is for a minimum of 170 dwellings for the period 2016 – 2036”*. Paragraph 3.54 states that at late 2018, there were sites with planning permission for 130 dwellings.
- 3.54 Table 7.1 of the January 2019 Submission draft of the emerging Local Plan states that the indicative housing requirement for Wooler Parish is 170. This is confirmed in Policy HOU3. No housing allocations are proposed in the plan area in the emerging NLP. It is recommended that the wording of paragraph 3.53 of the WNP should be updated.
- 3.55 The WNP does not set out any information on the housing requirement of the Plan other than stating in paragraph 3.25 that it wants to plan for more than this minimum figure of 170 dwellings. Paragraphs 3.30 -3.31 above set out the figures provided by NCC of the expected number of dwellings on each allocated site and updated figure on housing delivery. The final sentence of paragraph 3.54 should be updated to reflect the latest figures available.
- 3.56 NCC has commented that the housing allocations in the Plan that cite a number are all over 10 dwellings and they suggest that it would be correct to describe the sites as “medium-sized” rather than “small scale”. A modification is proposed to amend paragraph 3.54 in this respect. A revision is also proposed to the fourth sentence to refer to “most housing development” rather than “major housing development”.

Recommendation 12:

Revise the first sentence of paragraph 3.53 to read *“The minimum housing requirement for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan area set out in the draft Northumberland Local Plan (January 2019) is 170 dwellings over the period 2016 – 2036.”*

Delete footnote 12.

Revise paragraph 3.54 third sentence to read: *“Most of the sitesare medium-sized.....”*

Revise paragraph 3.54 fourth sentence to read: “*Most housing development.....*”

Update the housing delivery figures in the last sentence of paragraph 3.54:

<i>Housing delivery in Wooler 2020 to 2036</i>	
Completions (at 31 March 2020)	20
Sites with planning permission (2019)	140
Windfall sites	10
Deliverable SHLAA sites without constraints and excluding allocations proposed in the WNP (SHLAA sites 1203, 1231, 1243, 6939)	68
Total	238

Policy 5 Housing Development in the Plan Area

- 3.57 The policy sets out the framework for considering windfall housing sites in the Plan area and for the provision of affordable housing on sites of 10 or more dwellings.
- 3.58 NCC has commented on the inconsistency between the size of property preferred in paragraph 3.64 and that set out in the final paragraph of the policy. WPC has confirmed that paragraph 3.64 reflects the findings of the survey. The policy also recognises the need for homes for young families and the QB has proposed an additional paragraph to be added to the justification to explain this. I agree that this would be helpful.
- 3.59 NCC has commented that there are inconsistencies in the policy wording and the justification on the scale of housing acceptable in the various locations. I agree with the points made and am proposing modifications to correct the wording of the policy. This takes account of my recommendation under Policy 9.
- 3.60 NCC has commented on the wording of the affordable housing policy. They consider that “*the requirement for 15% affordable housing is consistent with the proposed viability value areas approach in the emerging draft Northumberland Local Plan. Whilst the Local Plan is still under examination, the County Council’s viability evidence would support this Policy. However, affordable housing provision at a proportion higher than 15% fails to recognise the need to demonstrate this would be viable having regard to the requirements of paragraph 34 of NPPF. This requires that policies seeking*

affordable housing should not undermine the deliverability of the Plan. This is uncertain without appropriate evidence of viability at the plan making stage.

- 3.61 The plan makers have clearly identified a need for affordable housing in the plan area and the policy seeks to deliver an increase in its delivery. However no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that an increase in the rate of affordable housing above 15% would not impact on the viability and deliverability of the housing allocations. This aspect of the policy therefore does not accord with national planning guidance and therefore fails to meet the basic conditions. Modifications are recommended to delete this wording.

Recommendation 13: Revise Policy 5 as follows:

From the first sentence of Policy 5 delete "...small-scale..."

In the first sentence replace "in the following locations:" with "as follows:"

Revise criterion b) to read: "b) *small-scale schemes of up to 9 dwellings on the built-up edge of Wooler Town where.....edges.*"

Revise criterion c) to read: "c) a *limited number of dwellings in the outlying settlements.....identified in Policy 9; and*".

From the second paragraph of Policy 5 delete "A minimum of".

Delete the second sentence from the second paragraph of Policy 5 "Where there is robust...will be sought."

Add the following at the end of paragraph 3.64: "*In order for young families, both those already in the area and who may move to the area, the Plan also seeks to enable the provision of further affordable and modestly priced 2 and 3 bed dwellings*".

Policy 6 New Housing Development – Design Principles

- 3.62 The policy sets out design principles for new housing development which are in addition to the general design principles set out in Policy 3. It is noted that there is a degree of overlap with the design policies of the emerging NLP. Nevertheless, it is considered that the policy identifies those matters that are of significance to the design of housing development in the plan area.
- 3.63 NCC has made a number of comments on the wording of the policy:
- a) Criterion c) – that it is not necessary to include the requirement for safe vehicular access and safe cycle and pedestrian access set out in this criterion and in the site allocations policies. I agree that all the criteria in the design policies should be taken into account in drawing up proposals for the site allocations. However, it is helpful to plan users to identify those

requirements that are specific to the site allocation and I make no recommendations to revise the site allocations in this respect.

- b) Criterion c) the inclusion of the word “etc” introduces uncertainty in the interpretation of this criterion. I agree that this abbreviation should be deleted and the criterion should be made more explicit by including the needs of people with young children using buggies.
- c) Criterion e) – the wording “demonstrates why such a system would not be practicable” may not be sufficient. NCC suggests that it may be better to rephrase this in accordance with the wording from emerging Local Plan Policy WAT 4. Rather than repeat aspects of the emerging Local Plan policy, I am recommending that it should be referred to in the criterion. The word “Urban” is not necessary.
- d) Criterion f) – the term “to meet the needs of occupiers” has some potential ambiguity. I agree that when designing a new housing development, the needs of the future occupiers of the housing cannot be determined. It would be more appropriate to refer to the approved Parking Standards. The final sentence on demonstrating the use of the principles of Building for Life 12 in the evolution of the scheme is unduly onerous. I agree that the two sentences in the final paragraph are inconsistent. The first sentence “encourages” the use of the Building for Life 12 principles in all development. However, the second sentence states that planning applications “must” be accompanied by evidence of their use in the evolution of the scheme. I have proposed a modification to remove this requirement and to include reference to “housing” developments.

Recommendation 14: Revise Policy 6 as follows:

Revise criterion c) by deleting “etc” and adding “or buggies” after “wheelchairs”.

Revise criterion e) by deletion the word “urban” and adding “in accordance with the relevant policies of the Local Plan”.

Revise criterion f) by replacing “to meet the needs of the occupiers” with “in accordance with the approved Parking Standards”.

Revise the first sentence of the final paragraph of the policy to read “All housing developments.....” Revise the second sentence of the final paragraph to read: “Planning applications *should* be accompanied by evidence to demonstrate the use of those principles in the evolution of the design of the scheme, *where applicable*.”

Delete the word “and” from criteria a) to f).

Policy 7 Community-led and Affordable Housing

- 3.64 This policy supports community led housing and 100% affordable housing on small sites on the edge of Wooler. However Policy 5b) supports market housing on similar sites. I have concerns therefore about the deliverability of

community led housing / 100% affordable housing sites under Policy 7 as such sites usually rely on reduced land values on sites on the edge of and outside settlement boundaries which cannot be delivered for market housing.

- 3.65 NCC has commented that this policy is poorly drafted and does not reflect paragraphs 71 or 77 of the NPPF. I agree with these comments and have asked the QB and NCC to review the wording of the policy. The QB is keen to support community-led housing schemes and has a good track record of delivery particularly through the Glendale Gateway Trust. NCC has proposed revised wording for the policy which I have included in my recommendation.
- 3.66 The emerging NLP policy sets out a comprehensive policy on entry-level exception sites and small-scale rural exception sites.

Recommendation 15: Revise Policy 7 to read:

“POLICY 7: Rural Exception and Entry-Level Affordable Housing

“Proposals for affordable housing, including community-led housing schemes, delivered as ‘rural exception sites’ in accordance with the limitations and definitions for such sites as set out in national planning policy, on small sites on the edge of the settlement of Wooler will be supported where it has been demonstrated that the development:

a) will have no significant negative impact on the character and setting of the settlement;

b) will not harm the character, appearance or setting of the Wooler Conservation Area; and

c) will ensure that the landscape and scenic beauty of the Northumberland National Park is conserved or enhanced.

“Proposals for ‘entry-level exception sites’ housing schemes that accord with the limitations and requirements for such schemes as set out in national policy and guidance will be supported.

“The design and impact of rural exception sites and entry-level exception sites housing proposals will be assessed against the requirements of relevant policies in the development plan.”

Include the relevant definitions from the NPPF in the Glossary of terms.

Policy 8 Housing for Older People

- 3.67 The policy provides general support for the provision of housing for older people. NCC has commented that the policy is not consistent with other policies and fails to recognise the constraints established in national policy and guidance. I agree that the policy when viewed in isolation could be misinterpreted. I have therefore recommended modifications to the wording of

the policy to ensure that it is considered within the constraints of the other policies of the development plan.

Recommendation 16: Revise Policy 8 as follows:

Revise the first sentence of the policy to read “*Subject to compliance with other policies in the development plan, support...Wooler.*”

Revise the second sentence by deleting: “Support will be given to” and replacing it with “*This includes proposals...*”

Policy 9 Housing Development in Outlying Settlements

- 3.68 The policy lists the outlying settlements where limited housing development is to be permitted. The locations are not shown on the Policies Map; it would be helpful to plan users to notate the Plan with the names of the settlements.
- 3.69 Paragraph 3.59 states that the policy supports the provision of single dwellings in these settlements. NCC has suggested that points a) and b) should specify that new self-build and custom build housing sites should be for single dwellings. I agree that this would improve the clarity of the policy.
- 3.70 However conversions and rural exceptions sites may give rise to more than one dwelling on a site. To ensure that the justification is consistent with the policy wording, I have recommended a revision to the wording of paragraph 3.59.

Recommendation 17: Revise Policy 9 as follows:

Revise point a) to read “single self build dwellings”.

Revise point b) to read “single custom built dwellings”.

Revise paragraph 3.59 to read “the provision of a *limited number of dwellings....*”

Show the names of the outlying settlements on the Policies Map.

Policy 10 Housing Development in the Open Countryside

- 3.71 The first paragraph and points a) – e) repeat verbatim paragraph 79 of the NPPF. These points of the policy are unnecessary and I am recommending therefore that these points be deleted. Paragraph 3.75 of the WNP may be revised to refer to housing development in the countryside being determined in accordance with national planning policy.
- 3.72 The final sentence of the policy relates to the conversion of buildings to dwellings. It is considered that the wording is imprecise and adds no locally specific guidance. Local Plan and National Park Local Plan policies set out guidance on the conversion of non-residential buildings to dwellings and it is

recommended that the Plan should state that proposals for the conversion or re-use of redundant buildings should be considered against the development plan policies.

Recommendation 18: Delete Policy 10

Delete “Policy 10” from the heading above paragraph 3.75. Revise the title of this section to “Housing Development in the Countryside”

Revise paragraph 3.75 to read: “*National planning policy states that the development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided other than in the exceptional circumstances listed in paragraph 79 of the NPPF. Proposals for the development of isolated housing in the countryside in the plan area will be considered against national planning policy. Proposals for the conversion and change of use of non-residential buildings and the re-use of redundant or disused buildings to residential use will be considered against policies in the Development Plan.*”

Part IV Local Economy

Policy 11 Existing Employment Sites

- 3.73 The policy seeks to retain the two existing employment areas for B1, B2 and B8 uses and makes provision for ancillary uses related to the primary use. These estates accommodate a number of medium sized engineering, haulage, vehicle servicing and storage businesses.
- 3.74 The second paragraph states that proposals to extend these sites will be supported subject to consideration of other policies in the development plan. I consider this to be unclear and adds nothing to the policy. I am therefore recommending its deletion.
- 3.75 The policy also makes provision for other employment generating uses to be accommodated on the estates providing they are compatible with the existing uses and do not give rise to significant levels of additional traffic. NCC has commented that this differs from the requirement in emerging Policy ECN7 which states that new uses should not have a detrimental impact on the functioning of existing or future B-Class operators on the site; and they should ensure that B-Class uses remain the majority activity on the site.
- 3.76 I consider that the wording of the third paragraph of Policy 11 is imprecise and may not be capable of being interpreted consistently by decisionmakers. I am recommending revisions to the wording of the policy to consider non-B class employment generating uses. The caveat concerning traffic generation should be retained.

- 3.77 The final paragraph sets out a requirement for haulage sites to demonstrate adequate access, parking and turning provision. It is considered that the words “will be supported” are unnecessary and should be deleted.

Recommendation 19: Revise Policy 11 as follows:

Delete the second and third sentences from the second paragraph.

Revise the third paragraph of the policy to read:

“Development of non-B-Class employment generating activity on these sites will be supported as exceptions only if the development:

“a. Directly supports and is ancillary to the primary functioning of the site as a location for B1, B2, and B8 development;

“b. Will not have a detrimental impact on the functioning of existing or future B-Class operators on the site; and

“c. Ensures that B-Class uses remain the majority activity on site.

“Proposals should demonstrate that they will not give rise to an unacceptable increase in traffic generation.”

Revise the final paragraph to read: “Proposals for haulage uses within the existing employment site must demonstrate that there is.....highway network.”

Policy 12 Business Development

- 3.78 Paragraph 3.86 states that the policy seeks to support the development of small business units in Wooler. However, this is not made explicit in the first paragraph of the policy. I am recommending that the first paragraph should be revised to refer to locations in and around Wooler.
- 3.79 The second and third paragraphs refer to the outlying settlements and locations in the open countryside. The NNPA has suggested revisions to the wording of this part of the policy to better reflect the approach to business development in the National Park. However, this approach is more restrictive than that advised in the NPPF for rural areas. It may be helpful to plan users to include a paragraph in the justification to explain the nature of proposals that may be acceptable in the locations within the context provided by the NPPF.
- 3.80 The NPPF paragraph 83 sets out the types of businesses that may be acceptable to contribute to the “sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas”. To more closely align the policy to national planning policy, I shall recommend that the word “sustainable” should be added to the second and third paragraphs of the policy. The words “open”

and “existing” are unnecessary and should be deleted from the third paragraph.

- 3.81 The clarity of the final paragraph would be improved by revising it to read “unacceptably adversely affect the amenity of neighbours”.

Recommendation 20: Revise Policy 12 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “Proposals for new build and conversions.....will be supported *within and on the edge of Wooler Town* subject to satisfying other policies of the development plan.”

Revise the second paragraph to read: “Proposals for *sustainable* small scale employment and.....assets”.

Revise the third paragraph to read: “In the countryside outside the National Park, proposals will be supported which would enable the *sustainable* development and expansion of employment uses including:..... *Within the National Park, the proposed use should be compatible with and subsidiary to an existing farming or forestry activity in terms of physical scale, activity and function.* These uses should not detract.....assets.”

Revise the fourth paragraph to read: “.....which would not *unacceptably* adversely affect *the amenity of neighbours*.....”.

Add an additional paragraph to the justification to explain how the policy is to be applied outside Wooler.

Policy 13 Retail Development and Upper Floor Uses in Wooler Town Centre

- 3.82 The first paragraph of the policy states that “Wooler Town Centre is defined on the Policies Map”. However, the map shows what appears to be the extent of the frontages along the main shopping streets and does not define an area for the town centre. I have asked the QB to confirm their intentions for the interpretation of this policy. They have stated that the policy should refer to the “main shopping streets of Wooler Town” and not to a town centre area. I have recommended modifications to make the policy clearer in this respect.
- 3.83 NCC has noted that the use of the word “only” in relation to non-A1 uses is restrictive and does not accord with national planning policy which encourages a suitable mix of uses. I agree with this comment and recommend that the word “only” should be deleted.

Recommendation 21: Revise Policy 13 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph of the policy to read: “*The main shopping streets of Wooler Town Centre* are defined on the Policies Map.”

Delete “only” from the third line of the policy.

Revise the second paragraph of the policy to read: “On upper floors *along the main shopping streets,....*”

Revise the third paragraph to read: “....in areas *outside the main shopping streets of Wooler Town Centre.....*”

Policy 14 Tourism Facilities

- 3.84 The policy identifies five types of tourism related development that will be supported in the plan area provided they accord with policies elsewhere in the development plan. As planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, there is no need for the policy to stipulate this.
- 3.85 The NPPF in paragraph 83 states that planning policies should “*enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside*”. To ensure that the policy reflects the national policy, I am recommending the inclusion of the words “respect the character of the countryside” in the first paragraph.
- 3.86 To be consistent with my recommendation under Policy 3, I am recommending that the name of the Dark Sky Park should be given in full.

Recommendation 22: Revise Policy 14 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “.....will be supported where *that development respects the character of the countryside and where the development involves:*”

Revise criterion d) to read: “..to the *Northumberland Dark Sky Park designation;*”

Policy 15 Overnight Tourist Accommodation

- 3.87 The policy sets out criteria to be applied in considering proposals for tourist accommodation.
- 3.88 Paragraphs 3.97 and 3.98 note the concerns of the community about the scale of static caravan provision in the parish. NCC has questioned whether the controls on static caravan sites proposed through criterion d) would be sufficient to address the community concerns expressed in the justification. They have suggested that this could be addressed by deleting reference to static caravans from the policy. Consequently, any future proposals for such development would be dealt with on their merits having regard to other policies of the development plan and other material considerations. In

response to my questions on the proposed revisions to the policy, the NNPA has commented that a chalet site may have as much impact as a site of static caravans.

- 3.89 My concern is whether the policy as worded in the Submission Draft Plan is sufficiently clear that it can be interpreted consistently by decision makers in the assessment of the potential impact of the development proposals. In this respect I can see no reason why “static caravans” should be deleted from the policy.
- 3.90 The NNPA has raised concerns about a possible conflict with their emerging Policy DM7 part (5) and has suggested revisions to the wording of the policy to set out different considerations for sites in and adjoining Wooler and the outlying settlements; and sites in the countryside. I am not convinced of the need to set out different criteria for the different areas. However, I am recommending that additional wording be added to criterion d) to delete “is of a scale that” and to make reference to particular care being given to considering the impact on the landscape of the National Park.

Recommendation 23: Revise Policy 15 as follows:

Delete “and” from the end of criterion d) and add it to the end of criterion e).

Revise criterion d) by deleting “is of a scale that” and revising it to read: “... in the landscape *with particular care being given to the consideration of the impact of developments on sites in, or that can be viewed from, the National Park;*”.

Policy 16 Broadband Provision in New Development

- 3.91 I make no comments on this policy.

Policy 17 Renewable Energy Development

- 3.92 The policy provides support for small scale renewable energy projects provided they do not have an unacceptable negative impact on a number of factors.
- 3.93 It is recommended that the policy title and section heading should be revised to “Renewable and Local Carbon Energy Development” to be consistent with national planning policy and guidance.
- 3.94 The policy refers to “small scale” developments whereas paragraph 3.101 refers to “larger scale” proposals. A modification is recommended to paragraph 3.101 to refer to “small scale proposals” to ensure it is consistent with the policy. It would be helpful to plan users to include the definition of “small scale renewable and low carbon energy developments” in the glossary.

Recommendation 24: Revise Policy 17 as follows:

Revise the section heading and policy title to read: “Renewable *and Low Carbon* Energy Development”.

Revise paragraph 3.101 to read “*Small scale proposals.....*”.

Include the definition of “small scale renewable and low carbon energy developments” from the 2004 Energy Act in the glossary as follows:

“Small-scale renewable energy developments comprise sources of energy and technologies for the generation of electricity or the production of heat, which would cut emissions of greenhouse gases and whose capacity to generate electricity is no more than 50 kilowatts; and to produce heat is no more than 45 kilowatts thermal.”

Part V Landscape, Natural Environment, Townscape and Heritage

Policy 18 South Road, the Peth and the Gateways to Wooler Town

- 3.95 The policy supports development that will promote the enhancement of properties along South Road which is the main entrance route into the town. The frontages to the road contain the Station Road employment area and a number of buildings in employment use.
- 3.96 The second paragraph of the policy supports “small scale retail development” along South Road. It is not clear whether it is intended that the policy should apply to new build development or only changes of use as set out in the final paragraph of Policy 13. In response to my question the QB has confirmed that it is intended that both new build and changes of uses would be supported subject to satisfying other requirements. A modification is recommended to clarify the wording of the policy in this respect.

Recommendation 25: Revise Policy 18 as follows:

Revise the second paragraph to read: “Provision of small scale retail businesses, *through the change of use of existing buildings or through new building*, along South Road in Wooler.....”

Policy 19 Landscaping, Hedgerows and Trees

- 3.97 The first paragraph of the policy includes the word “normally” which introduces a degree of uncertainty into the interpretation of the policy. I am recommending a modification to avoid its use.
- 3.98 The second and fifth paragraphs of the policy include the words “will be resisted” which is insufficiently clear and introduces a degree of uncertainty

into the interpretation of the policy. I am recommending modifications to avoid its use.

- 3.99 The penultimate paragraph is unnecessary as the matter is included in Policy 3g). It is suggested that a cross reference to that policy should be included in the justification to aid plan users.
- 3.100 The final paragraph of the policy repeats NPPF paragraph 175c) verbatim and is unnecessary.

Recommendation 26: Revise Policy 19 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “New development should incorporate tree planting and landscaping *where possible* to ensure.....”.

Revise the first sentence of the second paragraph to read: “Development proposals should be *designed and laid out* to avoid the loss of trees and hedgerows.”

Revise the fifth paragraph to read: “...Conservation Area Character Appraisal, *will not be supported, except.....*”

Move the sixth paragraph to the justification of the policy and add the following “*in accordance with Policy 3g).*”

Delete the final paragraph of the policy.

Policy 20 Wooler Conservation Area

- 3.101 NCC has suggested minor revisions to the wording of the policy which I agree would aid its clarify its interpretation.

Recommendation 27: Revise Policy 20 as follows:

Revise criterion c) to read: “historic shopfronts *which* should be retained, restored.....”

Revise criterion d) to read: “the distinct *characteristics of the four* ‘character areas’ defined in”

Delete the word “and” from the end of criteria a) to d).

Policy 21 Development on the Western and South-western Edges of Wooler Town

- 3.102 The policy designates the sensitive settlement edge of the town and sets out an approach to assessing the impact of developments on the landscape.

- 3.103 The first sentence of the policy is a statement and should be included in the justification. The second sentence should be revised to designate the sensitive settlement edge and refer to the Policies Map. There is no need to include the street names.

Recommendation 28: Revise Policy 21 as follows:

Place the first sentence of the policy in the justification.

Revise the second sentence of the first paragraph to read: “*The western and south-western edges of Wooler are designated as a sensitive settlement edge and is shown on the Policies Map.*”

Part VI Community Life

Policy 22 Local Green Spaces

- 3.104 Six sites are designated as Local Green Spaces. The Wooler Local Green Space Assessment Report sets out the assessment criteria and demonstrates the reasons for designating each site. Site GS5 is 0.6 km outside the built up edge of Wooler; however, as the assessment demonstrates the importance of this area to local people, I consider that it is reasonably close to the community it serves.
- 3.105 I am satisfied that all the sites satisfy the requirements of NPPF paragraph 100 and the policy accords with national planning policy on managing development in Local Green Spaces.

Policy 23 Recreational Land and Facilities

- 3.106 The policy seeks to safeguard the grounds of four sports clubs and sets out the justification required to support their loss.
- 3.107 The site of Wooler Football Ground is included as a safeguarded facility. However, this site is allocated for housing development under Policy 4.2 subject to a replacement pitch and associated facilities being provided. It is considered that it is not necessary or appropriate to safeguard this site under Policy 23.

Recommendation 29: Revise Policy 23 as follows:

Delete “Wooler Football Ground (also allocated for housing under Policy 4.2)”.

Delete the site from the Policy Map.

Policy 24 Community Facilities

- 3.108 The policy identifies six community facilities which have strong community value. These locations should be shown on the Policies Map to improve the clarity of the policy.
- 3.109 The final paragraph of the policy uses the term “will be strongly resisted”. There is no need to attribute strength to controls in a policy. A recommendation is proposed to avoid this terminology.

Recommendation 30: Revise Policy 24 as follows:

Show the boundaries of the six community facilities identified on the Policies Map.

Revise the last paragraph of the policy to read: “....will *not be supported unless robust justification is provided that demonstrates that there is no longer....*”

Policy 25 New Community Facilities

- 3.110 The policy provides support for new community facilities and infrastructure. NCC has commented that the policy seems very permissive as there are no locational constraints or constraints in the policy on the scale of provision of any new community facilities. I agree that the suggestions proposed to revise criterion f) to refer to the development being sensitive to its surroundings and for criterion c) to include the words “where appropriate” would help to overcome this concern.
- 3.111 NCC has commented that on occasions there may be occasions where parking is already available or could not be accommodated on site and point d) should be revised to recognise this. I agree that this suggestion would assist in the application of the policy.
- 3.112 Criterion e) states that there should be no negative impacts on residential amenity. This is likely to be difficult to apply in practice. I am recommending that this be revised to read “no unacceptable adverse impacts”.

Recommendation 31: Revise Policy 25 as follows:

Revise criterion c) to read: “that, *where appropriate*, signage to provide clear links....”

Revise criterion d) to read: “..... on nearby streets, *is available or will be provided before the development is first brought into use;*”

Revise criterion e) to read: “that there will be *no unacceptable adverse impacts on the amenity.....*”

Revise criterion f) to read: “that *the development is sensitive to its surroundings and that any adverse effect on the environment.....*”

Delete the word “and” from the end of criteria a) to e). Add “and” to the end of criterion f)

Part VII: Accessibility

Policy 26 Footpaths and Cycleways

- 3.113 The policy provides support for improvements to the cycle and pedestrian network. It also seeks to avoid the loss of off-road routes through development proposals.
- 3.114 The second paragraph seeks financial contributions or direct provision of additional infrastructure for walking and cycling. Whilst paragraph 34 of the NPPF states that plans may include details of the contributions expected from development, it also states that such policies should not undermine the deliverability of the plan.
- 3.115 The PPG states that “*Neighbourhood plans may also contain policies on the contributions expected from development, but these and any other requirements placed on development should accord with relevant strategic policies and not undermine the deliverability of the neighbourhood plan, local plan or spatial development strategy*”. (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 41-005-20190509).
- 3.116 The strategic policies in the emerging NLP lend support to the improvement of cycle and pedestrian routes. However, no background evidence has been provided to assess how this requirement to provide, directly or through financial contributions, additional infrastructure will impact on the viability of the plan and the sites to be allocated. In any case the site allocation policies include the requirement to provide pedestrian and cycle way provision, where appropriate. It is considered therefore, that the second paragraph of the policy does not accord with national policy and guidance and I am recommending that it be deleted.
- 3.117 The third paragraph of the policy includes the phrase “will not be permitted”. Policies in neighbourhood plans cannot determine whether particular types of development will or will not be permitted as planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. I am recommending a modification to avoid this form of wording.

Recommendation 32: Revise Policy 26 as follows:

Delete the second paragraph.

Revise the third paragraph to read: “Proposals for development *should not result in the loss of off-road pedestrian access routes. Where it is unavoidable, an alternative link of similar distance and safety should be provided.*”

Policy 27 The Wooler Railway Line

- 3.118 The policy seeks to safeguard the line of the former Wooler Rail line and to secure its future use as a pedestrian and cycle route. The route is shown on the Policies Map. I make no comments on the policy.

Monitoring and Review

- 3.119 This section sets out proposals for the Parish Council to monitor and review the plan and the Community Actions.

Annex A: Glossary

- 3.120 NCC has commented on some of the definitions. I recommend modifications to update the Glossary in these aspects.
- 3.121 NPPF and NPPG are regularly updated and reference to the latest version may become outdated.

Recommendation 33: Revise Annex A Glossary as follows:

Delete the definition “Inset”.

NPPF: delete “The latest version dates from February 2019.”

NPPG – Delete the first sentence. Revise the second sentence to read “*The NPPG sets out guidance to aid the application of the NPPF.*”

Add a definition in the Glossary on Net Gain for Biodiversity: “*Development that adopts a biodiversity net gain approach seeks to make its impact on the environment positive, delivering improvements through habitat creation or enhancement after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible.*”

Delete the term “OAN”.

Revise “Open Countryside” to “Countryside” and use the same definition as in paragraph 3.75.

Revise the term “Pre-Planning application” to “*Pre-application advice*”.

Include a definition of “Main Town Centre Uses” from the NPPF adapted to local circumstances.

Add a new term in the Glossary “*Major Development in the National Park: Development is classed as major when its characteristics and*”

specific impacts are likely to have a significant impact on the special qualities of the National Park”.

Revise “Major Development” to read “Major *Housing* Development outside the National Park”

Add a new term in the Glossary “*Small Scale Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments: Small-scale renewable energy developments comprise sources of energy and technologies for the generation of electricity or the production of heat, which would cut emissions of greenhouse gases and whose capacity to generate electricity is no more than 50 kilowatts; and to produce heat is no more than 45 kilowatts thermal.*”

Include definitions for “Community Led Housing” and “Entry Level Affordable Housing.”

Revise the definition of Wooler Town to read “The built up area of the *settlement of Wooler.*”

Annex B: Community Actions

3.122 This section sets out a number of community actions that have been raised during the consultations on the WNP. The Parish Council is proposing to take the actions forward in partnership with other organisations. The section is clearly separate from the planning policies of the neighbourhood plan.

Recommendation 34: Correct Typographical Errors

Paragraph 3.24 second sentence – revise to read “...identifies six sites,”

Check that policies are worded consistently in the use of “and” / “or” at the end of criteria.

Renumber policies and text.

4.0 Referendum

- 4.1 The Wooler Neighbourhood Plan reflects the views held by the community as demonstrated through the consultations and, subject to the modifications proposed, sets out a realistic and achievable vision to support the future improvement of the community.
- 4.2 I am satisfied that the Neighbourhood Plan meets all the statutory requirements, in particular those set out in paragraph 8(1) of schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and, subject to the modifications I have identified, meets the Basic Conditions namely:
- has regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Development Plan for the area;
 - does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations and human rights requirements
- 4.3 **I am pleased to recommend to Northumberland County Council that the Wooler Neighbourhood Development Plan should, subject to the modifications I have put forward, proceed to referendum.**
- 4.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Neighbourhood Plan area. In all the matters I have considered I have not seen anything that suggests the referendum area should be extended beyond the boundaries of the plan area as they are currently defined. I recommend that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to a referendum based on the neighbourhood area designated by the Northumberland County Council on 23 November 2015 and ratified by the Northumberland National Park Authority on 19 January 2016.

5.0 Background Documents

5.1 In undertaking this examination, I have considered the following documents

- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Submission Draft Version 2020- 2036 (February 2020) and Policies Maps
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Basic Conditions Statement February 2020
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan SEA Environmental Report March 2019
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan SEA Environmental Report Addendum January 2020
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan HRA Screening Statement
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Consultation Statement February 2020
- Wooler Housing Needs Assessment 2018
- Wooler Housing Background Report September 2018
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan: Site Selection Approach January 2019 amended May 2019
- Wooler Neighbourhood Plan: Housing Background Paper 2017
- Wooler Local Economy Background Report March 2018
- Wooler Conservation Area Character Appraisal 2005
- National Planning Policy Framework February 2019
- Planning Practice Guidance March 2014 (as amended)
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012
- Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Local Plan 1999.
- Publication Draft Northumberland Local Plan January 2019
- Schedule of Proposed Minor Modifications to the Publication Draft Plan (Regulation 19) May 2019
- Northumberland National Park Core Strategy and Development Policies adopted 2009.
- Submission draft Northumberland National Park Local Plan submitted September 2019
- Building for Life 12
- CIEEM: Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development (2016)

6.0 Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Include a table after paragraph 2.10 to link the objectives to the policies of the plan.

Include a paragraph in Section 3 to set out the strategy for the plan area from the Local Plan to provide the context for the scale and location of development proposed in the WNP as follows:

“Strategic Planning Context

“Wooler is a second tier Service Centre. It is a local hub for services for its satellite communities. It has an important cluster of agricultural engineering and construction companies. The level of development directed towards Service Centres is at a lower level than to Main Towns. The emerging Local Plan sets a minimum for 170 dwellings for Wooler Parish over the plan period. NCC is satisfied that this level of development will be met through existing commitments. Local Plan policy states that Service Centres including Wooler will accommodate employment, housing and services that maintain and strengthen their roles.”

Recommendation 2: Delete “Policy 1” from the heading between paragraph 3.8 and 3.9 and delete the heading “Policy 1: Supporting Sustainable Development”. Delete the penultimate sentence in paragraph 3.9 “Policy 1 sets out...” Retain the text within the background to this section.

Recommendation 3: Add the following to Policy 1A:

“Where feasible, development proposals should incorporate a Sustainable Drainage System or demonstrate why such a system would not be practicable.”

Recommendation 4: Delete Policy 2 and the words “Policy 2” from the heading before paragraph 3.12. Delete paragraph 3.13.

Retain paragraph 3.12. Revise the last sentence of paragraph 3.12 to read “...major development will be refused other than in exceptional circumstances in accordance with national planning policy and relevant policies in the Northumberland National Park Core Strategy and/or Development Plan.”

Add a new term in the Glossary “*Major Development in the National Park - Development is classed as major when its characteristics and specific impacts are likely to have a significant impact on the special qualities of the National Park*”.

Recommendation 5: Replace the first paragraph of Policy 3 with the following:

“Development proposals should demonstrate how they have taken account of their setting and the local vernacular in order to create a high quality and locally distinctive design that will enhance the character and quality of the area. Proposals should demonstrate:”

Revise criterion d) to read: ***“.....local amenity and the Northumberland International Dark Sky Park; and”***

Revise criterion g) to read: ***“...biodiversity, demonstrated through mitigation, restoration and/or compensation measures demonstrated in a measurable way.”***

Delete the penultimate paragraph of the Policy ***“Development will be supportedthe way it functions.”***

Add a paragraph to the justification to explain how biodiversity net gain is to be considered and achieved with links to good practice guidance.

Add the following to paragraph 3.17: ***“Where appropriate a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment shall be undertaken to demonstrate how the development proposal will impact on important views within Glendale and into and out of the NNP.”***

Add a definition in the Glossary on Net Gain for Biodiversity:
“Development that adopts a biodiversity net gain approach seeks to make its impact on the environment positive, delivering improvements through habitat creation or enhancement after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible.”

Recommendation 6: Delete Policy 4.

Retain paragraphs 3.24 – 3.30. Revise the second sentence of paragraph 3.30 to read: ***“The following six sites are allocated for development in Policies 4.1 – 4.6. List of Sites 1 – 6 from the Policy 4 box.”***

Include an additional paragraph in the justification to refer to the Heritage Impact Assessment and the importance of considering the impact of development proposals on the conservation area and other heritage assets.

Delete ***“Policy 4”*** from the heading above paragraph 3.24.

Recommendation 7: Revise Policy 4.1 as follows:

Add at the end of the first paragraph: ***“A Heritage Statement shall be prepared as part of the masterplan and subsequent planning applications to consider the impact of the development on the Wooler Conservation Area and its setting.”***

Recommendation 8: Revise Policy 4.2 as follows:

Delete ***“as set out in Policy 23”*** from the last line of the policy.

Recommendation 9: Revise Policy 4.3 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph of the policy to read: “*Development of the site shall be laid out and designed to have a positive impact on the character and appearance of this prominent site in the Wooler Conservation Area. A Heritage Statement shall be submitted as part of any planning applications to consider the impact of the development on the Wooler Conservation Area and its setting. Proposals.....site*”

Replace criterion d) with the following: “*A Flood Risk Assessment shall be prepared when considering development on the site. Development shall be steered to areas of lowest flood risk and away from Flood Zone 2.*”

Revise paragraph 3.39 to read: “*A small portion of the site lies within Flood Zone 2. A Flood Risk Assessment should be prepared for any development proposal on the site. Flood mitigation measures will be required if a risk is identified with development directed to the areas of lowest flood risk.*”

Recommendation 10: revise the wording of Wider Employment Generating Uses in the Glossary to be consistent with that in the emerging Local Plan.

Recommendation 11: Add the following to paragraph 3.43:

“*Further consultation will be carried out with the community and local businesses to identify the type of recreational and community uses and the amount and type of small scale business development that should be provided on the site, and the sources of funding.*”

Recommendation 12:

Revise the first sentence of paragraph 3.53 to read “*The minimum housing requirement for the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan area set out in the draft Northumberland Local Plan (January 2019) is 170 dwellings over the period 2016 – 2036.*”

Delete footnote 12.

Revise paragraph 3.54 third sentence to read: “*Most of the sitesare medium-sized.....*”

Revise paragraph 3.54 fourth sentence to read: “*Most housing development.....*”

Update the housing delivery figures in the last sentence of paragraph 3.54:

<i>Housing delivery in Wooler 2020 to 2036</i>	
<i>Completions (at 31 March 2020)</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Sites with planning permission (2019)</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Windfall sites</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Deliverable SHLAA sites without constraints and excluding allocations proposed in the WNP (SHLAA sites 1203, 1231, 1243, 6939)</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>238</i>

Recommendation 13: Revise Policy 5 as follows:

From the first sentence of Policy 5 delete “...small-scale...”

In the first sentence replace “in the following locations:” with “as follows:”

Revise criterion b) to read: “b) *small-scale schemes of up to 9 dwellings* on the built-up edge of Wooler Town where.....edges.”

Revise criterion c) to read: “c) a *limited number of dwellings* in the outlying settlements.....identified in Policy 9; and”.

From the second paragraph of Policy 5 delete “A minimum of”.

Delete the second sentence from the second paragraph of Policy 5 “Where there is robust...will be sought.”

Add the following at the end of paragraph 3.64: “*In order for young families, both those already in the area and who may move to the area, the Plan also seeks to enable the provision of further affordable and modestly priced 2 and 3 bed dwellings*”.

Recommendation 14: Revise Policy 6 as follows:

Revise criterion c) by deleting “etc” and adding “*or buggies*” after “wheelchairs”.

Revise criterion e) by deletion the word “urban” and adding “in accordance with the relevant policies of the Local Plan”.

Revise criterion f) by replacing “to meet the needs of the occupiers” with “in accordance with the approved Parking Standards”.

Revise the first sentence of the final paragraph of the policy to read “*All housing developments.....*” Revise the second sentence of the final paragraph to read: “Planning applications *should* be accompanied by

evidence to demonstrate the use of those principles in the evolution of the design of the scheme, *where applicable.*”

Delete the word “and” from criteria a) to f).

Recommendation 14: Revise Policy 14 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “.....will be supported where *that development respects the character of the countryside and where the development involves.*”

Revise criterion d) to read: “..to the *Northumberland Dark Sky Park* designation;”

Recommendation 15: Revise Policy 7 to read:

“POLICY 7: Rural Exception and Entry-Level Affordable Housing

“Proposals for affordable housing, including community-led housing schemes, delivered as ‘rural exception sites’ in accordance with the limitations and definitions for such sites as set out in national planning policy, on small sites on the edge of the settlement of Wooler will be supported where it has been demonstrated that the development:

a) will have no significant negative impact on the character and setting of the settlement;

b) will not harm the character, appearance or setting of the Wooler Conservation Area; and

c) will ensure that the landscape and scenic beauty of the Northumberland National Park is conserved or enhanced.

“Proposals for ‘entry-level exception sites’ housing schemes that accord with the limitations and requirements for such schemes as set out in national policy and guidance will be supported.

“The design and impact of rural exception sites and entry-level exception sites housing proposals will be assessed against the requirements of relevant policies in the development plan.”

Include the relevant definitions from NPPF in the Glossary of terms.

Recommendation 16: Revise Policy 8 as follows:

Revise the first sentence of the policy to read ***“Subject to compliance with other policies in the development plan, support...Wooler.”***

Revise the second sentence by deleting: ***“Support will be given to”*** and replacing it with ***“This includes proposals...”***

Recommendation 17: Revise Policy 9 as follows:

Revise point a) to read “single self build dwellings”.

Revise point b) to read “single custom built dwellings”.

Revise paragraph 3.59 to read “the provision of a *limited number* of dwellings....”

Show the names of the outlying settlements on the Policies Map.

Recommendation 18: Delete Policy 10

Delete “Policy 10” from the heading above paragraph 3.75. Revise the title of this section to “Housing Development in the Countryside”

Revise paragraph 3.75 to read: “*National planning policy states that the development of isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided other than in the exceptional circumstances listed in paragraph 79 of the NPPF. Proposals for the development of isolated housing in the countryside in the plan area will be considered against national planning policy. Proposals for the conversion and change of use of non-residential buildings and the re-use of redundant or disused buildings to residential use will be considered against policies in the Development Plan.*”

Recommendation 19: Revise Policy 11 as follows:

Delete the second and third sentences from the second paragraph.

Revise the third paragraph of the policy to read:

“Development of non-B-Class employment generating activity on these sites will be supported as exceptions only if the development:

“a. Directly supports and is ancillary to the primary functioning of the site as a location for B1, B2, and B8 development;

“b. Will not have a detrimental impact on the functioning of existing or future B-Class operators on the site; and

“c. Ensures that B-Class uses remain the majority activity on site.

“Proposals should demonstrate that they will not give rise to an unacceptable increase in traffic generation.”

Revise the final paragraph to read: “Proposals for haulage uses within the existing employment site must demonstrate that there is.....highway network.”

Recommendation 20: Revise Policy 12 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “Proposals for new build and conversions.....will be supported *within and on the edge of Wooler Town* subject to satisfying other policies of the development plan.”

Revise the second paragraph to read: “Proposals for *sustainable* small scale employment and.....assets”.

Revise the third paragraph to read: “In the countryside outside the National Park, proposals will be supported which would enable the *sustainable* development and expansion of employment uses including:..... *Within the National Park, the proposed use should be compatible with and subsidiary to an existing farming or forestry activity in terms of physical scale, activity and function.* These uses should not detract.....assets.”

Revise the fourth paragraph to read: “.....which would not *unacceptably* adversely affect *the amenity of neighbours*.....”.

Add an additional paragraph to the justification to explain how the policy is to be applied outside Wooler.

Recommendation 21: Revise Policy 13 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph of the policy to read: “*The main shopping streets of Wooler Town Centre are defined on the Policies Map.*”

Delete “only” from the third line of the policy.

Revise the second paragraph of the policy to read: “On upper floors *along the main shopping streets,....*”

Revise the third paragraph to read: “...in areas *outside the main shopping streets of Wooler Town Centre.....*”

Recommendation 22: Revise Policy 14 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “.....will be supported where *that development respects the character of the countryside and where the development involves:*”

Revise criterion d) to read: “..to the *Northumberland Dark Sky Park* designation;”

Recommendation 23: Revise Policy 15 as follows:

Delete “and” from the end of criterion d) and add it to the end of criterion e).

Revise criterion d) by deleting “is of a scale that” and revising it to read: “.... in the landscape *with particular care being given to the consideration of the impact of developments on sites in, or that can be viewed from, the National Park;*”.

Recommendation 24: Revise Policy 17 as follows:

Revise the section heading and policy title to read: “*Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development*”.

Revise paragraph 3.101 to read “*Small scale proposals.....*”.

Include the definition of “small scale renewable and low carbon energy developments” from the 2004 Energy Act in the glossary as follows:

“Small-scale renewable energy developments comprise sources of energy and technologies for the generation of electricity or the production of heat, which would cut emissions of greenhouse gases and whose capacity to generate electricity is no more than 50 kilowatts; and to produce heat is no more than 45 kilowatts thermal.”

Recommendation 25: Revise Policy 18 as follows:

Revise the second paragraph to read: “Provision of small scale retail businesses, *through the change of use of existing buildings or through new building*, along South Road in Wooler.....”

Recommendation 26: Revise Policy 19 as follows:

Revise the first paragraph to read: “New development should incorporate tree planting and landscaping *where possible* to ensure.....”.

Revise the first sentence of the second paragraph to read: “Development proposals should be *designed and laid out* to avoid the loss of trees and hedgerows.”

Revise the fifth paragraph to read: “...Conservation Area Character Appraisal, *will not be supported*, except.....”

Move the sixth paragraph to the justification of the policy and add the following “*in accordance with Policy 3g*.”

Delete the final paragraph of the policy.

Recommendation 27: Revise Policy 20 as follows:

Revise criterion c) to read: “historic shopfronts *which* should be retained, restored.....”

Revise criterion d) to read: “the distinct *characteristics of the four* ‘character areas’ defined in”

Delete the word “and” from the end of criteria a) to d).

Recommendation 28: Revise Policy 21 as follows:

Place the first sentence of the policy in the justification.

Revise the second sentence of the first paragraph to read: “*The western and south-western edges of Wooler are designated as a sensitive settlement edge* and is shown on the Policies Map.”

Recommendation 29: Revise Policy 23 as follows:

Delete “Wooler Football Ground (also allocated for housing under Policy 4.2)”.

Delete the site from the Policy Map.

Recommendation 30: Revise Policy 24 as follows:

Show the boundaries of the six community facilities identified on the Policies Map.

Revise the last paragraph of the policy to read: “....will *not be supported unless* robust justification *is provided that demonstrates that* there is no longer....”

Recommendation 31: Revise Policy 25 as follows:

Revise criterion c) to read: “that, *where appropriate*, signage to provide clear links....”

Revise criterion d) to read: “..... on nearby streets, *is available or will be provided before the development is first brought into use;*”

Revise criterion e) to read: “that there will be *no unacceptable adverse* impacts on the amenity.....”

Revise criterion f) to read: “that *the development is sensitive to its surroundings and* that any adverse effect on the environment.....”

Delete the word “and” from the end of criteria a) to e). Add “and” to the end of criterion f)

Recommendation 32: Revise Policy 26 as follows:

Delete the second paragraph.

Revise the third paragraph to read: “Proposals for development *should not* result in the loss of off-road pedestrian access routes. *Where it is unavoidable*, an alternative link of similar distance and safety should be provided.”

Recommendation 33: Revise Annex A Glossary as follows:

Delete the definition “Inset”.

NPPF: delete “The latest version dates from February 2019.”

NPPG – Delete the first sentence. Revise the second sentence to read “*The NPPG sets out guidance to aid the application of the NPPF.*”

Add a definition in the Glossary on Net Gain for Biodiversity:

“*Development that adopts a biodiversity net gain approach seeks to*

make its impact on the environment positive, delivering improvements through habitat creation or enhancement after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible.'

Delete the term "OAN".

Revise "Open Countryside" to "Countryside" and use the same definition as in paragraph 3.75.

Revise the term "Pre-Planning application" to "*Pre-application advice*".

Include a definition of "Main Town Centre Uses" from the NPPF adapted to local circumstances.

Add a new term in the Glossary "*Major Development in the National Park: Development is classed as major when its characteristics and specific impacts are likely to have a significant impact on the special qualities of the National Park*".

Revise "Major Development" to read "*Major Housing Development outside the National Park*"

Add a new term in the Glossary: "*Small Scale Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Developments: Small-scale renewable energy developments comprise sources of energy and technologies for the generation of electricity or the production of heat, which would cut emissions of greenhouse gases and whose capacity to generate electricity is no more than 50 kilowatts; and to produce heat is no more than 45 kilowatts thermal.*"

Include definitions for "Community Led Housing" and "Entry Level Affordable Housing."

Revise the definition of Wooler Town to read "The built up area of the *settlement of Wooler.*"

Recommendation 34: Correct Typographical Errors

Paragraph 3.24 second sentence – revise to read "...identifies six sites,"

Check that policies are worded consistently in the use of "and" / "or" at the end of criteria.

Renumber policies and text.