

WOOLER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Submission Draft Version

**Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Examiner's
Questions and Clarification Note
by Independent Examiner, Rosemary Kidd**

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Wooler Neighbourhood Plan Examiner's Questions and Clarification Note

I must congratulate the community on the work they have undertaken in preparing a very comprehensive plan for Wooler and the surrounding area. The plan is supported by robust and clear assessments of sites and opportunities.

Following my initial assessment of the Neighbourhood Plan and representations, I would appreciate clarification and comment on the following matters from the Qualifying Body and/or the Local Planning Authority. In order to ensure openness and transparency of the examination process, these questions and the responses should be published on the Council's website.

This paper presents proposed revisions to address areas of concern and I would welcome feedback from the QB and/ or LPA on them prior to my completing the examination report.

I have received some comments from the QB dated 26 March. I would welcome any further comments that they may wish to make on the representations received in addition to those concerns I have highlighted in my questions below.

The recommendations will be made to ensure that the plan is clear and unambiguous and is drafted so that it can be applied consistently by decision makers.

1. It would be helpful to Plan users to include a paragraph on the strategic approach to development in the Plan area in the Introduction. Would the QB / LPA confirm that the following is acceptable:

“Wooler is a second tier Service Centre. It is a local hub for services for its satellite communities. It is the location for 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 defines settlement boundaries for Service Centres subject to decisions made by local communities through the neighbourhood planning process. Emerging Local Plan Policy STP1 The Service Centres states that Service Centres including Wooler will accommodate employment, housing and services that maintains and strengthens their roles.”

Would the LQ/LPA confirm whether a settlement boundary is to be defined for Wooler in the emerging LP. If so, should reference be made to it in the NP?

2. **Policy 1** - The policy is considered to be unnecessary as it provides no policy details about how the development is to be delivered. These are set out in subsequent policies. I am proposing to retain the text in the background information to the section on Supporting Sustainable Development.
3. **Policy 1A** - I am proposing to add an additional paragraph to Policy 1A to address SuDS as suggested by Natural England: ***“Where feasible, development proposals should incorporate a Sustainable Drainage System or demonstrate why such a system would not be practicable.”***
4. **Policy 2** - I consider that as Policy 2 repeats the National Park policy on major development and adds no locally specific details to the NNP policy, it is unnecessary

and should be deleted. I shall propose retaining paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 and revising 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 policies in the Northumberland National Park Core Strategy and/or Local Plan.**” Would the QB confirm that this is acceptable.

5. **Glossary** – The definition of Major Development does not accord with that used in the National Park. Does the QB wish to retain this for use outside the Park? I shall recommend including the definition from the National Park Plan: “**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**”. Would the QB confirm that this is acceptable.
6. **Policy 3** - I am proposing to combine the first paragraph and the penultimate paragraph to improve the clarity of the policy. Would the QB comment on the following new first paragraph: “**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.**”
7. **Policy 3 b)** refers to important views in general terms without identifying the specific locations of any. It may be helpful to plan users to include some explanation in paragraph 3.17 of the justification to aid the interpretation of this criterion by including reference to undertaking Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, where appropriate, along the lines of: “**Where appropriate a Landscape and Visual Assessment shall be undertaken to demonstrate how the development proposal will impact on important views.**” Would the QB confirm that this is acceptable.
8. **Policy 3 g)** - seeks to secure net-gain for biodiversity. Natural England has commented that the retention of trees etc is only part of the application of the mitigation hierarchy. I propose recommending that criterion g) should be revised by **deleting: “through the retention of trees,habitats.”** To explain how this criterion is to be applied, it is suggested that an additional paragraph should be added to the justification to explain how biodiversity net gain is to be considered with links to good practice guidance suggested by Natural England.
9. **Policy 3 g)** - Natural England has suggested that a definition of the term “Biodiversity Net Gain” should be included in the Glossary. Would the QB/LPA agree the wording to be included.
10. **Housing numbers** – Paragraph 3.25 states that Wooler PC want to plan for more homes than the Objectively Assessed Need of 170 dwellings but the WNP does not state the number that it is planning for. Would the QB set out the approximate / indicative housing number that is being planned for and provide an update of Table 1 of the Housing Site Selection Paper. I shall be recommending that the indicative minimum figure should be set out in the Housing section of the Plan. Would the QB and LPA comment on the figures (and update where necessary) in the tables below which I have collated from the plan and background evidence.

Site Allocations		
Site No	Site name	Housing nos / range
Site 1	The former First School	10 - 24
Site 2	Land south of The Martins	About 40
Site 3	Redpath's/ Ferguson's Yard	0 – 10 / 30+ ?
Site 4	Land at Burnhouse Road	10 -15
Total		60 – 89 / 109

The latest figures for housing delivery in the WNP area during the plan period are:	
Sites with planning permission (2019)	119
Windfall sites (at 4 pa)	64
Site Allocations	60-89 / 109
Total	243 – 272 / 292

11. **Policy 4** - It is considered that Policy 4 is unnecessary as it adds no details to the subsequent site allocation policies. I am proposing that it should be deleted and the sites listed in the justification.
12. Historic England has commented that the plan has not taken the opportunity to use the Historic Impact Assessment analysis to optimise the benefits to heritage on the sites assessed by incorporating amendments to the wording of site specific requirements. It is considered that it would not be appropriate to make significant changes to the site specific requirements at this stage. However, I am proposing to suggest that to assist plan users, it would be helpful to include a reference to the Historic 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.
13. **Policies 4.1 and 4.3** - I am proposing to recommend additional wording under Policies 4.1 and 4.3 (which are within or adjacent to the conservation area) similar the wording of Policy 4.4b). **“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.”** Would the QB confirm that this is acceptable.

14. **Policy 4.3** Redpath's / Ferguson's Yard. I note that planning permission has been granted for the distillery. Has the development been completed yet? If not, I am proposing to retain this policy in the plan.
15. **Policy 4.5** Is the statement in para 3.41 first sentence correct? The Basic Conditions Statement notes that this site was allocated for employment uses in the Berwick Local Plan but the policy has not been saved. Paragraph 5.45 of the emerging NLP states that "*for the larger village service centres, based on available evidence, other practical considerations and constraints, it has been concluded that no additional (new) employment land needs to be found over and above what is already part of employment land portfolios, (or allocated in the Alnwick and Denwick Neighbourhood Plan)*". Would the LPA and QB agree the correct planning status of this site.
16. **Policy 4.5 Site allocation deliverability**– Would you direct me to the evidence that demonstrates the need for this allocation as advised in the NPPG (paragraph: 044 Reference ID: 41-044-20190509) which states that "*A neighbourhood plan can allocate additional sites to those in a local plan where this is supported by evidence to demonstrate need above that identified in the local plan.*" I have read the Local Economy Background Paper which puts forward a suggestion that this site should be made available should a large firm be seeking to locate in Wooler. Further it states that "*Any large greenfield site would need public investment to bring forward for business uses, as such a project would not attract market*". Have you undertaken any research to demonstrate that there is likely to be a need for a site on this scale and whether public funding would be likely to be available to open up the site to attract development? If the evidence is not available, would the LPA and QB comment on whether the site should be identified as a "reserve site for a single employment user"?
17. **Policy 4.6** is a very general policy and I can find no evidence or community actions to justify it apart from the need to relocate the football field. Presumably further work is needed to identify the types of uses. If this is the case, it may be useful to include a sentence in paragraph 3.43 as follows: "***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.***" Would the QB and LPA comment on this.
18. **Policy 5** - NCC has highlighted the inconsistency between para 3.64 which states 1 and 2 bedroomed dwellings and the last line of Policy 5 which refers to 1, 2 and 3 bedroomed homes. Would the QB confirm which is correct.
19. **Policy 5** - NCC has proposed revisions to Policy 5 which I propose to accept. Would the QB confirm their acceptance.
20. **Policy 6f)** would the QB/LPA comment on whether reference should be made to the approved Parking Standards instead of the "needs of the occupiers"?
21. **Policy 7** – in the light of NCC comments, would the LPA and QB agree how this policy should be taken forward to reflect NPPF paragraphs 71 and 77.
- a. Would the emerging NLP Policy HOU7 provide adequate guidance?
 - b. If so, I will recommend that the policy should be deleted and an additional paragraph should be included in the background text on this topic to

- explain how entry level / affordable housing is to be delivered in the parish in accordance with the emerging NLP policy.
- c. Would you also confirm whether Policy 5 b) is intended to refer to rural exceptions sites only? As currently worded, market housing could be built on small scale sites on the edge of the settlement of Wooler and it may therefore be difficult to secure sites for entry level/affordable housing.
22. **Policy 9** – para 3.59 states that single dwellings will be supported in outlying settlements. The revisions suggested by NCC will place this limitation on new build dwellings under points a) and b) of Policy 9 and I will make a recommendation to this effect. However conversions and rural exceptions sites may result in more than one dwelling on a site. Would the QB comment on my proposal to revise paragraph 3.59 to read “**the provision of a limited number of dwellings....**”
23. **Policy 10** first sentence and points a) to e) repeat NPPF para 79 verbatim. This is unnecessary and I shall recommend that it be deleted and paragraph 3.75 be modified to state that “**Proposals for the development of isolated housing in the countryside in the plan area will be considered against national planning policy.**” Would the QB confirm this is acceptable.
24. **Policy 10** final paragraph on conversions is imprecise. Would the QB/LPA comment on the suggestion that additional text be added to the justification that conversions should be considered against emerging LP Policy HOU8. “**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 Local Plan.**”
25. **Policy 11** – The second paragraph supports proposals to extend the employment sites. Would the QB explain how it is intended to interpret this policy. Does it refer to extensions to buildings / premises within the employment area or the extension of the employment area onto adjacent land? If the latter, I consider that the wording is not sufficiently clear to enable decision makers to apply it consistently and I will recommend the deletion of this point.
26. **Policy 11** – The penultimate paragraph states that other compatible employment generating uses will be supported provided they do not involve significant levels of additional traffic generation. I note NCC’s concerns about this aspect of the policy. I am proposing to revise this paragraph to read: “**Development of non-B-Class employment generating activity on these employment sites will be supported as exceptions only in accordance with the policies of the NLP. Proposals should demonstrate that they will not give rise to an unacceptable increase in traffic generation.**”
27. **Policy 12** – Is it intended that the first paragraph should apply to sites in and on the edge of Wooler? If so, I shall propose this paragraph be revised to read “**Proposals forwill be supported within and on the edge of Wooler subject**

- to satisfying other policies of the development plan.***” Would the QB and LPA confirm this is acceptable.
28. **Policy 12** – The NPPF paragraph 83 refers to the sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas. I shall recommend that the word “sustainable” should be added to the second and third paragraphs of the policy. And that the words “open” and “existing” should be deleted from the third paragraph.
 29. **Policy 12** – to improve the clarity of the fourth paragraph I am proposing that it should be revised to read: “.....**which would not *unacceptably adversely affect the amenity of neighbours*.....**”. Would the QB confirm this is acceptable.
 30. **Policy 13** refers to Wooler Town Centre being defined on the Policies Map. However, only the extent of the frontages of the main shopping streets is shown on the Policies Map. Would the QB consider the comments made by NCC on this matter and provide a map to show the boundary of the town centre to be applied to Policy 13 with the evidence to explain how the town centre has been defined.
 31. **Policy 13** - Would the QB confirm the “area” to which that part of the policy on uses in upper floors is to apply.
 32. **Policy 15** – would the QB consider the comments made by NCC and agree revisions to the wording of the policy and justification on static caravans.
 33. **Policy 15** – The National Park Authority has suggested a more restrictive approach to the wording of the third paragraph of the policy in the NP. Would the QB/LPA comment of this. Would the QB/LPA consider the following revisions to criterion d) to flag up the need for particular care to be given to locations in / around the NP. **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;*”.**
 34. **Policy 17** – supports proposals for small scale renewable energy developments whereas paragraph 3.101 refers to larger scale proposals. In the interests of consistency I shall recommend that paragraph 3.101 should be revised to small scale. It would be helpful to plan users to include a definition of small scale renewable energy developments in the glossary. Would the QB/LPA agree a definition.
 35. **Policy 18** – supports the provision of small scale retail businesses. Would the QB confirm whether it is their intention that this should facilitate new build retail development or only changes of use as set out in Policy 13?
 36. **Policy 18** – Would the QB confirm whether there is an existing pedestrian footway along one or both sides of the South Road frontages. Would the QB explain how the policy is intending to deliver pedestrian access to the town centre. Are there footpath routes through Tower Bank woodland?

37. **Policy 19** – I am proposing to delete the final two paragraphs as unnecessary. Securing biodiversity net gain is set out in Policy 3g). The final paragraph of the policy repeats NPPF paragraph 175c.
38. **Policy 23** – I am proposing to recommend that Wooler Football Ground should be deleted from this policy as it is allocated for housing development and there are adequate safeguards under Policy 4.2.
39. **Policy 24** – I am proposing that the boundaries of the six community facilities should be identified on the Policies Map. The last paragraph of the policy to be revised to avoid the term “strongly resisted”: “....**will not be supported unless robust justification is provided that demonstrates that there is no longer....**”
40. **Policy 25** – I am proposing to incorporate the revisions proposed by NCC. Would the QB confirm this is acceptable.
41. **Glossary** – I am proposing to revise the definition of Wooler Town to read “**The built up area of the settlement of Wooler.**” Would the QB confirm this is acceptable

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