

Wooler Neighbourhood Plan: Housing Site Selection Approach

Produced by:
WNP Steering Group

January 2019 (amended May 2019)

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1. Introduction

1.1 Five sites have been allocated for development in our Plan. One further site has been allocated in the Plan for community used. Four of these sites have a housing component. This Note explains the reasons for the allocations. It sets the national and Northumberland context, summarises our development strategy and the review of housing sites undertaken for us by AECOM in early 2018, and provides details of each site.

1.2 Two sites are allocated for housing uses only. Two have the potential for more than one use or a mix of uses. One site is allocated for employment uses. These sites are in addition to sites which already have planning permission. Three sites currently have permission for ten or more dwellings: *North of Weetwood Road*, *Behind High Fair* and the *Ryecroft Hotel* site.

1.3 All reports referred to in this Note can be found on the Wooler Neighbourhood Plan website (www.woolerneighbourhoodplan.org).

2. National Planning Policy and Northumberland Planning Policy context

Housing requirements

2.1 The *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* (July 2018) states that where it is not possible to provide a requirement figure for a neighbourhood area, the local planning authority should provide an indicative figure. This figure should take into account factors such as the latest evidence of local housing need, the population of the neighbourhood area, and the most recently available planning strategy of the local planning authority.

2.2 Based on this, the emerging Local Plan for Northumberland identifies a requirement for Wooler of 170 dwellings over the Plan period (1st April 2016 until 1st April. 2036). This equates to an annual provision requirement of 8.5 dwellings per year. (see Annex 1: *NCC Housing Distribution Technical Paper* Dec 2018 for their calculations).

2.3 This figure is below the level of the period 2005-2015, which was around 14 dwellings per year, but above that achieved annually since 2015. Given the continuing inflow of people into our area, our WNP Strategy of encouraging steady growth while catering for locally-arising needs and the role Wooler plays in relation to the housing needs of the north part of the National Park, our working assumption in allocating sites is to ensure there is capacity for between 10-14 dwellings per year, or 170-210 dwellings over the life of the Plan (see *WNP Housing Background Report para 5.3*).

Employment Land

2.4 A site (the Mart Field) was allocated for employment uses in the Berwick Local Plan 1999. This is on land opposite the existing Wooler Industrial Estate on the Berwick Road. This proposal is carried forward in the emerging Local Plan for Northumberland, and is also allocated in Wooler NP, as Site 5 (Policy 4.5). The intention is to provide land should a significant employment use be unable to find an appropriate site on the Wooler Industrial Estate.

3. Our Approach to allocating housing sites

3.1 When work started on WNP Neighbourhood Plan, NCC's then emerging Core Strategy had suggested that land would be needed for around 280 dwellings over 20 years, ie 14 per year, ie higher than the need identified in the replacement emerging NCC Local Plan. WNP Steering Group (Housing Sub-Group) reviewed census material and other studies on housing issues in the Wooler area. We also reviewed all the issues about housing raised in the various consultation events during 2017. This gave us a broad idea of demands and needs affecting the housing market and housing development in our Parish, identified particular needs and suggested that more variety of opportunities should be encouraged (see *WNP Housing Background Report*, and paras 3.38-49 of the Plan). We sought to provide land for between 10-14 dwellings per year during the period of our Plan. In parallel, other sub-groups looked at Local Economy; Landscape, Townscape, Natural Environment and Heritage; Community; and Accessibility issues.

3.2 The overall strategy of our Plan is to encourage steady growth in the Parish in order to ensure the future sustainability of our community and its services. In addition to meeting existing needs and given the continuing inflow of people from outside our area, this means that that more land is needed for housing development. Our consultation and analysis also indicated strong support for providing sufficient land for employment expansion in various forms (see *WNP Local Economy Background Report*). As our landscape, townscape, natural environment and heritage were also strongly valued by our community - in itself and as an asset for the future, any land allocations had to be set within a sensitive appreciation of how particular sites fitted into the landscape.

3.3 With these considerations in mind, in 2017 we reviewed all the sites listed in the NCC *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments*¹ and other sites where we knew landowners were interested in possible development. This resulted in a total of 39 possible housing sites. Most sites reviewed were only suitable for housing development. A few sites, notably the First School Site and Redpath's/Ferguson's Yard, were suitable for housing, but also for other uses, and for a mix of uses. Several sites already had planning permission which, if all were developed, would provide for over 120 dwellings, though in some cases the development prospect did not seem assured. We then asked AECOM to review all the sites we had identified, specifically with housing uses in mind.

3.4 In reviewing sites, we 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 we concluded 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.

These conclusions are in line with NCC studies of *Key Land Use Impacts* of settlements across Northumberland conducted in 2010.

¹ The most recent used was that of 2015

4. The AECOM Site Assessment

4.1 In early 2018, the AECOM team reviewed all sites with housing potential, using our site list and the *Housing Background Report*. They also went round all the sites with members of WNP Housing Sub-Group. In their assessment, 16 sites were not reviewed as they already had planning permission or had been already assessed in the SHLAA (now updated to Feb 2017) as appropriate for housing development.

4.2 Through the assessment, some sites were seen as inappropriate for development due to location, site constraints or the claims of other uses. (See AECOM *Sites Assessment Report*, pp-35-41). 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 (see Table 4 of the Report, pp 42-46) in addition to those with planning permission. They advised that:

“It is for WNPSG and the wider community of Wooler to now decide which of the sites are most appropriate to allocate to meet the housing, employment, leisure and burial ground needs of the WNP area and to contribute to the wider needs of Northumberland. It is advised that the WNPSG discuss the shortlisted sites and emerging policies with NCC to ensure that these would be supported by NCC as the local planning authority” (AECOM Site Assessment Report 2018,p.8).

5. Housing site selection

5.1 Two large sites already have planning permission for housing, one of which is very likely to go ahead in the near future. The proposed conversion (now underway) of the Rycroft Hotel will also generate 10 housing units. If these schemes are completed in the Plan period, this would provide for 119 dwellings (see Table 1 below and Annex 1). There is, however, some uncertainty about the development on one of these sites. We therefore sought to provide opportunities for between 50 and 90 dwellings elsewhere.

5.2 Some of this will come forward within and adjacent to the existing built-up area of Wooler Town and within the Outlying Settlements as ‘windfall’ sites. These locations are allowed for in Policy 5 of WNP. This flow is unpredictable, however, and we are also aware that several sites have permissions which so far are not being implemented. We decided that, in addition, a few sites should be allocated in the Plan (see Policy 4) to encourage development to come forward in the Plan period, in succession to the larger sites already with planning permission. We sought to provide opportunities for significant numbers of affordable housing units, as well as some higher priced market housing. Other policies in our Plan encourage quality and variety in housing provision as well consideration of the needs of older people.

5.3 In selecting these sites, we kept in mind the strategic considerations about location summarised in para 3.4 above and the likelihood that development would come forward in the period of the Plan. We then held detailed discussions with NCC planning, estates and transport sections and with representatives of Northumbrian Water Ltd, with respect to land ownership and infrastructure issues. Through these discussions, it became clear that some of the constraints which led AECOM to exclude a site from assessment could be overridden.

5.4 The outcome of these discussions was the allocation of the sites listed below.

Site 1: The former First School Site. This site has potential for housing, but also for community and employment uses. Minimum expectation for housing: 10 units (maximum 24, allowing for cemetery expansion). This site is a brownfield site within the built up area of Wooler Town. (see Policy 4.1)

Site 2: Land south of the Martins: This could accommodate around 40 dwellings. The site is in NCC ownership adjacent to an existing housing area and likely to come forward for housing during the Plan period. Good opportunity for affordable housing. Relocation of the Football Field essential prior to any development. Development at this location could also link up to future development to the east and south in this area. (see Policy 4.2)

Site 3: Redpath's/Ferguson's Yard. Allocation in WNP will replace that in the Adopted Berwick Local Plan which will itself be succeeded by the emerging NCC Local Plan. The proposal in the Plan is to encourage a range of uses, among which an element of housing is one possibility. There is currently a planning application to develop the whole site for a Distillery and associated uses. (See Policy 4.3). If approved and developed, this will exclude any further housing development opportunities on this site.

Site 4: Land south of Burnhouse Rd. This is within the built area of Wooler, and due to topography and access, is suitable for a relatively low density development (up to 12 houses). (See Policy 4.4)

5.5 Two sites are allocated in the Plan for other purposes (see Policies 4.5 and 4.6). Both sites were assessed by AECOM.

5.6 In summary, as Table 1 below shows, our allocations ensure that the Plan more than meets the NCC Local Plan's requirement, allows for a variety of housing projects to come forward, and includes an allowance for uncertainty about some sites.

5.7 Sites selected by AECOM as possible housing sites which have not been allocated are listed in Annex 3.

Table 1: Provision for additional housing units up to 2036 (WNP guide figure: 150-210; NCC Guide minimum: 170)

Status	Site	Nos of units	Notes
Sites with planning permission (10 units +)	Weetwood Road north	73	Progress of High Fair site uncertain
	High Fair	36	
	Ryecroft Hotel conversion	10	
		Total: 119	
Sites within/adjacent to the built up area of Wooler Town and Outlying Settlements			

(estimate max 4 pa)		Total: 60	
Allocated Sites	Site 1: First School Site Site 2: Land south of the Martins Site 3: Ferguson's/Redpath's yard Site 4: Land South of Burnhouse Rd	10 40 0 12 Total: 62	(minimum) Longer term Depends on outcome current proposal Longer term
Total Capacity		241	(a maximum figure, given uncertainties re some sites)

Annex 1: NCC Local Plan Regulation Housing Distribution for Wooler December 2018

Baseline Proportionate Distribution	90
Proportionate Distribution of Local Plan housing Numbers	111
Pre-Plan period Delivery 2011-2016	31
Completions 2016-18	17
Outstanding dwellings permitted or minded to approve at 9.18	152
Housing Commitments: Total at 9.18	169
Draft Reg 19 Local Plan Distribution	170

See NCC Report *Northumberland Local Plan: Housing Distribution Technical Paper* (December 2018) for full details of definitions etc.

Annex 2: Live Planning Permissions with housing implications as of January 2019 (10 units or more)

Site	Dwelling Units proposed
Land North of High Fair (6 units pa proposed from 2020/21)	36
Ryecroft Hotel (Development underway)	10
Land East of 3 Weetwood Road (Originally proposed as 83 units; revised permission Jan 19 provides for 73 units). Development start anticipated for 2019, phased as 20 and then slightly less pa to 2023)	73
Total	119

Annex 3: Details of allocated sites

Site 1: Former First School Site

Address	Ryecroft Way, Off Burnhouse Road, NE71 6EB
Site Area	1.36 Has
Description	Brownfield site on edge of Wooler Town Centre. School and Sure Start buildings, with open land beyond. Former school site, which is no longer in use and is owned by NCC. Redevelopment now being considered. The land contains a number of disused buildings, carpark areas and sports / recreational areas. It is fairly flat, with access to Ryecroft Way and is within close proximity to most facilities within Wooler, with exception of the schools. Has good potential for any kind of housing. WPC seeks expansion of burial ground and also interested in community and smallscale business uses.
Amount of Development	Could accommodate significant housing numbers if no other uses. Minimum set in WNP Policy 4.1 as 10 units
Planning Policy	No specific prior planning policy. See WNP Policy 4.1
SHLAA Status	Reference 1129. Identified as an operational School, but School now closed. (NCC considering sale for housing)
Opportunities	A very well-located site for future development, within the existing built up area of Wooler Town
Constraints	Condition of existing buildings (damaged when tested by prospective purchasers in 2018)
AECOM Site Suitability Assessed?	Yes
- Assessment Conclusions	
o Suitable	Y
o Available	Y
o Achievable	Y
Anticipated timescale of delivery	6-10 years or earlier
Conclusions	Allocate site in WNP, with possibility for a range of uses (see Policy 4.1)



Site 2: Land south of The Martins

Address	South of The Martins, NE71 6RP
Site Area	1.70 has
Description	Field south of the Martins used currently as a football ground. Screened by trees from Bridgend Park and the A697
Amount of Development	42
Planning Policy	Designated as open space in BLP, which will soon be overtaken by NCC Local Plan and WNP. Not allocated as open space in these plans, but see WNP Policy 23 re Football Ground.
SHLAA Status	1133 Suitable. SHLAA July 2018: The capacity of Brewery Road is limited. Capacity of junction with A697 may require improvement. Restricted sewerage capacity within the wider area, requires further assessment. Much of site is open space leased to Wooler FC. <u>Conclusion</u> : Site is deliverable, pending any necessary highways network improvements and resolution of sewerage capacity issues within the wider area. Relocation of Wooler FC .. would be required before the site could be developed. NCC owned site, considered for provision of affordable housing and has potential to deliver in the medium to long term.
Opportunities	Has been in consideration for affordable housing for some time. Could help to open up land to the south and east primarily for housing in the longer term.
Constraints	See SHLAA comments above
AECOM Site Suitability Assessed?	No. Draft SHLAA 2018 assesses as suitable, available and achievable.
- Assessment Conclusions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Suitable o Available o Achievable 	Y Y (if football field can be relocated satisfactorily) Y
Anticipated timescale of delivery	6-10 years or longer.
Conclusions	Suitable site, once constraints overcome, and alternative site found for football field. There are several possible such sites, some in NCC ownership. See Policy 4.2



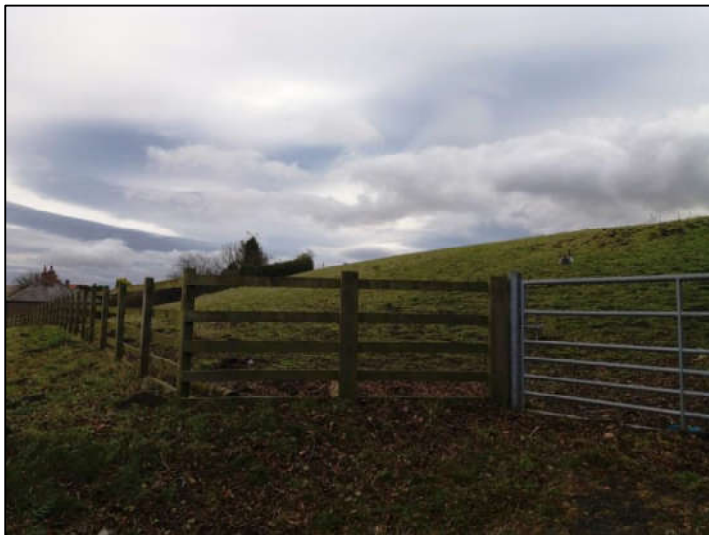
Site 3: Redpath's/Ferguson's Yard

Address	30, South Road, NE71 6NJ
Site Area	1.03 has
Description	A derelict, brownfield site immediately north and west of two main roads within Wooler (The Peth and the A67). Positioned to the south of the fire station, the topography of the site is mostly flat and there are Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) to the western edge of the site. The site is within the Conservation Area and has interesting stone buildings.
Amount of Development	Several uses and mixes of uses possible, including housing (higher density possible)
Planning Policy	Berwick Local Plan had policies focusing on tourist development, with conservation of some stone buildings. BLP will lapse when WNP is 'made'. WNP supports proposals including housing, retail, employment, tourism and recreational uses (see Policy 4.3). A current planning application proposes a distillery and associated uses.
SHLAA Status	Reference 1110. Seen as suitable, available and achievable
Opportunities	Development would remove a large derelict site at the southern entrance to Wooler Town
Constraints	Conservation area considerations, TPOs, likely contamination on site.
AECOM Site Suitability Assessed?	Y
- Assessment Conclusions	
o Suitable	Y
o Available	Y
o Achievable	(unlikely for housing if Distillery goes ahead)
Anticipated timescale of delivery	0-5 years for Distillery project
Conclusions	Allocate for several alternative uses, or a mix of uses. A housing element excluded if current planning application goes ahead. See Policy 4.3.



Site 4: Land at Burnhouse Road

Address	Land between 53a and 45 Burnhouse Road, Wooler, NE71 6EE
Site Area	0.93 has
Description	Greenfield infill site in the western part of Wooler Town, with steeply-sloping land and high visibility. Access would be available onto Burnhouse Road, which is narrow, especially due to parking congestion. Planning permission was granted here in 1970 for 12 houses, although these were not built and the permission has since lapsed. The site is within close proximity to most facilities within Wooler, with the exception of the schools.
Amount of Development	Up to 12 housing units possible
Planning Policy	WNP accepts low density development in this area, with attention to landscape impacts.
SHLAA Status	Reference 1093. Considered to be suitable and achievable
Opportunities	Greenfield site, within the built up area of Wooler Town, enabling medium to low density development
Constraints	Topography and visual impact, on sensitive edge of Wooler Town.
AECOM Site Suitability Assessed?	Y
- Assessment Conclusions	
o Suitable	Y
o Available	Owner has no immediate intention to develop
o Achievable	Y
Anticipated timescale of delivery	11-15 years?
Conclusions	Allocate in WNP. See Policy 4.4



Annex 4: Sites assessed as *available* and *appropriate* for housing by AECOM but not allocated. (see pp 42-46 of the AECOM Site Assessment Report). See below for Site Map used by AECOM

Site (numbers and names refer to AECOM report)	Indicative capacity (no. of dwellings) AECOM calculation	Comment (WNP SG)
3. Land on Burnhouse Rd, east of Highburn House	5	Land already allocated in this area nearer to Wooler Town Centre (see Site 4.2). A possibility beyond 2036. Policy 5 and Policy 21 apply.
4. Land north of Common Rd, above High Fair	12	A longer term possibility, but potential heritage constraints. Concern not to put too much more pressure on Ramsey's Lane. Wait until future of nearby High Fair site already with planning permission clearer. Policy 21 applies.
6. Land south of Common Road	20-30	Significant site constraints, especially access. A future possibility within the context of Policy 21
7. Land South of Common Road	20-32	Site has no current road access and significant landscape constraints. Policy 5 and 21 apply if any development proposal which overcomes these constraints.
9. Horsdon Farm Field	15-24	No availability at present, so rejected by AECOM, but could be suitable if footpath through site and sewerage issues addressed. Covered by Policy 5. Possibility for the longterm
11. Land at Victoria Road	5-6	Site developable on flatter land. Not allocated as within the built up area of Wooler Town and covered by Policy 5
16. Land on either side of the A697	??	At present, too far from the core of Wooler Town Centre, and not adjacent to the built up area of Wooler Town. Possible for development in the long term if Wooler continues to grow, but will need careful attention to access for cars, pedestrians and cycles to Wooler Town, and to design in relation to pylons.
18. Land north of Coldmartin Croft	30	Has been assessed as available in the past. Needs assessment of access and road transport implications along Brewery Road and the junxtin with the A697, and careful design of layout due to pylons. Policy 5 applies. Development not anticipated until after 2036. With the longterm future in mind, would be helpful to encourage development layout which links to development possibilities on Site 16.
21. Land at Brewery Farm	54-109	Housing a possibility in the longterm, if careful attention to the pylons. Possible for development in the long term if Wooler continues to grow.
22 Land south of Weetwood Road (School Farm field)	16-32	Allocated in WNP for non-housing community and recreation uses (See Policy 4.6).
23 Land south of Weetwood Road and East of Site 22	20	Currently not adjacent to the built area of Wooler Town Possible for development in the long term if Wooler continues to grow.
25 Land Adjacent to the Auction Mart field	100	A possibility for housing in the long term. Currently not adjacent to the built up area of Wooler Town along the north side of the Berwick Road.
27 Auction Mart	19-31	Housing one possible use here. Within the built up area

		of Wooler, and subject to Policies 5 and 12.
30a Land North of Fenton Grange	21-42	On the outskirts of Wooler. Road access issues for development in this direction. See also Policy 27 (railway line!)
30b Land north west of the Old Vicarage	56-113	Road access issues for development in this direction. See also Policy 27 (railway line).
31a Land north of Ryecroft	22-35	Road access issues.
32 Land along Burnhouse Road towards Low Humbleton	??	A possibility for housing or overnight tourist accommodation in the longterm.
33 Land adjacent to The Crossing, Haugh Head	1-2	Rejected by AECOM as outside main settlement and various site and access constraints. Covered in WNP by Policy 9
33a Land north of Heather View (Haugh Head)	1-2	Rejected by AECOM as outside main settlement and various site and access constraints. Covered in WNP by Policy 9

