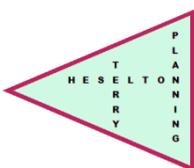


Draft Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan (Submission Version)

Report of the Independent Examination

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Independent Examiner



Terry Heselton Planning

23 June 2020

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Summary

I have examined the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan as submitted to Northumberland County Council by Lesbury Parish Council. The examination has been undertaken by written representations.

I conclude that the Neighbourhood Plan meets all of the statutory requirements, including those set out in paragraph 8(1) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). However, a number of modifications are required to ensure that the Plan meets the 'Basic Conditions', as defined in Paragraph 8(2) of the Schedule (as amended).

Subject to making the modifications set out in my report I recommend that the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan proceeds to referendum, and that the voting area corresponds with the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area as designated by Northumberland County Council on 24 July 2017.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 I have been appointed by Northumberland County Council (Northumberland CC), with the consent of Lesbury Parish Council, to examine the Lesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan and report my findings as an Independent Examiner.
- 1.2 The Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan (referred to as ‘the Neighbourhood Plan’ or ‘the Plan’) has been produced by Lesbury Parish Council under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, which introduced the means for local communities to produce planning policies for their local areas. The Parish Council is a qualifying body for leading the preparation of a neighbourhood plan¹.
- 1.3 The Plan covers the entire parished area of Lesbury including an area of coastline to the north of Alnmouth, and is situated between the popular tourist centres of Alnwick to the north west and Alnmouth to the south east.
- 1.4 The Parish contains three distinct settlements, Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton surrounded by a number of outlying farmsteads which are set in attractive countryside, part of which falls within the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The three settlements share the same primary school, church, village hall, Post Office and community facilities.
- 1.5 Alnmouth Railway Station on the East Coast Main Line is situated between Bilton and Hipsburn, and RAF Boulmer which is home to the UK Air Surveillance and Control System is situated to the north of Lesbury.
- 1.6 The Plan focuses on managing proposals for new development, promoting high quality designs, protecting and enhancing the local environment, and encouraging the provision of new or enhanced community facilities, including additional parking at the railway station and new footpath and cycling routes.
- 1.7 My report provides a recommendation as to whether or not the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. Were it to go to referendum and achieve more than 50% of votes in favour, then the Neighbourhood Plan would be *made* by Northumberland CC. The Plan would then be used to determine planning applications and guide planning decisions in the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area.

¹ Section 38C of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 61F of the Town and County Planning Act 1990.

2.0 Scope and Purpose of the Independent Examination

- 2.1 The independent examination of neighbourhood plans is intended to ensure that neighbourhood plans meet five 'Basic Conditions'², together with a number of legal requirements. Neighbourhood plan examinations are narrower in scope than Local Plan examinations and do not consider whether the plan is 'sound'.
- 2.2 A neighbourhood plan meets the Basic Conditions if:
- having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to 'make' the plan,
 - the making of the plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development,
 - it 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), and
 - the making of the plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations (which remain in force until replaced by UK legislation after the end of the Brexit transition period), and
 - it does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- 2.3 In addition to reviewing the Draft Neighbourhood Plan and the supporting documents submitted at Regulation 16 stage I have as part of the examination considered a number of evidence and background documents which are listed in Appendix 1. I have also taken into account representations submitted in response to the Regulation 16 Publicity, including comments submitted by Northumberland CC, and following my invitation to Lesbury Parish Council to comment on the Regulation 16 representations some additional comments from the Parish Council. (All submitted representations, including the Parish Council's additional comments, are available to view on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages)
- 2.4 During the course of the examination I have sought written clarification on a number of factual matters from Northumberland CC and the Parish Council, including evidence to establish whether a number of regulatory and other requirements have been satisfied. (My clarification questions and the combined Northumberland CC/Parish Council responses are available to view on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages).
- 2.5 The general rule is that examination of the issues is undertaken through consideration of written representations, unless the examiner considers that a public hearing is necessary to ensure adequate examination of an issue (or issues) or to ensure that a person has a fair chance to put a case.
- 2.6 In reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan and the accompanying background documents and submitted representations, I have not identified any issues

² Set out in Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

which require a public hearing to be held. I am also of the opinion that all parties have had the opportunity to register their views and put their case forward. I have therefore undertaken the examination through consideration of written representations.

- 2.7 In undertaking the examination I am also required to check whether:
- the Neighbourhood Plan policies relate to the development and use of land for the designated neighbourhood area³;
 - the Neighbourhood Plan meets the requirement to specify the period for which it is to have effect, not to include provision relating to 'excluded development', and not to relate to more than one neighbourhood area⁴;
 - the Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared for an area that has been properly designated⁵ and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body⁶; and
 - adequate arrangements for notice and publicity have been made in connection with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan⁷.
- 2.8 As Independent Examiner, I must make one of the following recommendations:
- that the Neighbourhood Plan is submitted to referendum, on the basis that it meets the 'Basic Conditions' and other legal requirements; or
 - that modifications (as recommended in the report) are made to the draft Neighbourhood Plan and that the draft Neighbourhood Plan as modified is submitted to referendum; or
 - that the Neighbourhood Plan does not proceed to referendum, on the basis that it does not meet the 'Basic Conditions' and other relevant legal requirements⁸.
- 2.9 Modifications may only be recommended to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the 'Basic Conditions', that it is compatible with Convention Rights, or for the purpose of correcting errors.⁹
- 2.10 If recommending that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum, I am required to then consider whether or not the Referendum Area should extend beyond the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area, and if so what the extended area should be¹⁰.
- 2.11 I make my recommendations in this respect in the final section of this report.

³ Section 38A (2) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended

⁴ Section 38B (1) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended

⁵ Section 61G Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended

⁶ Section 38C Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 61F of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

⁷ Section 38A (8) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as applied by the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012

⁸ Paragraph 10(2) Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended

⁹ Paragraph 10(3) Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended

¹⁰ Paragraph 10(5) Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended

3.0 Representations

- 3.1 Responses were received to the Regulation 16 Publicity from or on behalf of eight local residents and seven organisations, namely; the Coal Authority, Highways England, Historic England, National Grid UK, Natural England, Northumberland County Council, and Northumberland Estates.
- 3.2 Comments range from expressions of general support, particularly from local residents, to those challenging the ability of the Plan to satisfy the Basic Conditions.
- 3.3 **Northumberland CC** have provided detailed comments on a range of topics and issues to assist the examination, including suggestions to ensure compliance with national planning policy, and to improve the clarity, consistency, and legibility of the Plan. They also raise concerns about the amount of duplication between policies and suggest an alternative policy framework to manage specific development proposals and to meet a number of the Plan's objectives.
- 3.4 **Northumberland Estates** object to the Plan's perceived negative approach to future housing provision, including the delineation of settlement boundaries and 'settlement edges sensitive to new housing development'. They also challenge the adequacy of the supporting evidence used to justify housing policies and identify Local Green Spaces.
- 3.5 Although **Natural England** broadly support the Plan's Vision they would like to see additional emphasis given to ensuring that new development protects and enhances biodiversity. A number of nationally and internationally important nature conservation resources are also identified for specific referencing in the Plan.
- 3.6 **Local Residents** are generally supportive of the Plans proposals, although two households object to the exclusion of parts of their gardens from the proposed settlement boundaries.
- 3.7 Another **resident** puts forward additional suggestions for 'important views into the settlement' which are identified on the Policies Map.
- 3.8 **The Coal Authority, Highways England, Historic England, and National Grid** have no substantive comments to make.
- 3.9 Detailed points made on specific issues and policies in the Plan by those submitting representations are considered in Section 6.0.
- 3.10 As referred to previously I have also taken into account the general comments provided by Lesbury Parish Council on the Regulation 16 representations following my invitation to the Parish Council to comment on the representations.

4.0 Compliance with Legal Requirements

(a) The Qualifying Body

- 4.1 Lesbury Parish Council is recognised as a relevant body for the purposes of preparing Neighbourhood Plans under sections 61F and 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

(b) The Plan Area

- 4.2 The Neighbourhood Plan relates to the Neighbourhood Area that was designated by Northumberland CC on 24 July 2017, in response to an application by Lesbury Parish Council submitted on 27 June 2017. The Lesbury Neighbourhood Area is coterminous with Lesbury Parish.
- 4.3 Designation of the Neighbourhood Area was publicised on the Council's web site accompanied by a map of the Neighbourhood Area.
- 4.4 I therefore confirm that the requirements for preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan under section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and Regulations 5, 5A and 7 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) have been complied with.
- 4.5 I am also satisfied that the Plan does not relate to more than one neighbourhood area and there are no other neighbourhood development plans for the designated Neighbourhood Area in accordance with statutory requirements.

(c) Policies for the Development and Use of Land

- 4.6 The Neighbourhood Plan sets out policies in relation to the development and use of land for the defined Neighbourhood Area, which accords with the definition of neighbourhood plans in Section 38A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).

(d) Time Period

- 4.7 A neighbourhood plan must specify the period during which it is to have effect. The Neighbourhood Plan clearly states on its title page that it covers the period 2019 to 2036 and therefore satisfies this requirement.
- 4.8 However, this conflicts with the reference made to a twenty year plan period between 2016 and 2036 in paragraph 2.4 of the Plan.

- 4.9 Because the Plan relies on the emerging Northumberland Local Plan to establish the housing requirement for the designated Neighbourhood Area in order to provide a consistent basis for monitoring the delivery of new housing it makes sense to align the base date of the Plan with the base date of the Local Plan housing requirement calculation.
- 4.10 I therefore recommend changing the date on the title page to ensure consistency.

Recommendation 01

Change the time period of the Plan to 2016 – 2036.

(e) Excluded Development

- 4.11 The Neighbourhood Plan does not include policies on excluded development such as national infrastructure, mineral or waste related development.

(f) Publicity and Consultation

- 4.12 Public consultation on the production of land use plans, including neighbourhood plans, is a legislative requirement. Building effective community engagement into the plan-making process encourages public participation and raises awareness and understanding of the plan's scope and limitations.
- 4.13 I have considered the steps taken to engage with the local community and other stakeholders during preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan with particular regard to content, openness and transparency, as well as the extent to which the regulatory requirements have been satisfied.
- 4.14 The stages of consultation and engagement can be summarised as :-
- Initial Public Engagement/Awareness Raising (July 2017 - November 2017)
 - Evidence Gathering (December 2017 –June 2018)
 - Draft Plan (December 2018 - February 2019)

Initial Public Engagement/Awareness Raising

- 4.15 Following the designation of the Neighbourhood Area a steering group was established to undertake the preparation of the Plan. This comprised a mixture of Parish Councillors, local residents and representatives from the local church, school and village hall. A dedicated webpage was also established on the Parish Council's website in order to keep the community informed as work on the Plan progressed.
- 4.16 In order to obtain views on emerging aims and objectives and identify key

issues an open community meeting was held in the village hall on 7 November 2017. This was advertised in the Parish newsletter and by notices displayed around the Parish and was attended by 70 people. At the meeting local residents were encouraged to become 'neighbourhood plan champions' responsible for liaising with the local community and helping to take the plan forward.

Evidence Gathering

- 4.17 As well as engaging with local stakeholders and landowners, and examining available evidence, the steering group commissioned surveys on housing need and young persons' leisure aspirations to support policies in the Plan.
- 4.18 As work progressed a number of focus meetings with the public were also held during March – June 2018, to consider specific aspects of the Plan namely; transport and parking, housing and development sites, and leisure, education and environment. Over 110 people attended the events.
- 4.19 These were held at different locations and different times during the week and weekend so that as many sectors of the local community as possible had the opportunity to attend.

Pre-submission (Regulation 14) Consultation

- 4.20 The draft Plan was published for consultation between 18 December 2018 and 11 February 2019, and a communication about the consultation was sent (by letter or email) to all consultation bodies and other stakeholders, including local businesses, landowners, and sports and community facility providers.
- 4.21 I note that the minimum 6 week deadline for submitting comments was extended by two weeks to allow for the Christmas holiday during the consultation period.
- 4.22 During the consultation a number of drop-in community events were held to raise awareness and encourage residents to submit comments. These were again held at different locations and different times during the week and weekend to maximise participation. The consultation was publicised in the usual way through posters and notices around the villages, the Parish Council's website, and the Parish newsletter.
- 4.23 In addition to viewing the draft Plan on the Parish Council's dedicated neighbourhood plan website, paper copies of the Plan were available in the village hall and the local post office. Comments could be made either by email or by post to the Parish Council, or by using the 'drop box' placed in the post office.
- 4.24 Evidence is provided in the Consultation Statement accompanying the submitted Plan to demonstrate how the Plan and the opportunity to comment on it has been publicised during the preparation of the Plan.
- 4.25 Details of the various organisations and individuals, including statutory consultation bodies and other stakeholders who were specifically consulted on the draft Plan are also provided in the Consultation Statement, together

with a summary of submitted comments and responses, and details of changes made to the Plan as a result.

- 4.26 In response to the Regulation 14 consultation a total of 150 responses were received from members of the public, local organisations and other stakeholders.

Conclusions

- 4.27 During the preparation of the Plan it is apparent that the Parish Council has placed considerable emphasis on community consultation and liaison with interested parties, and has taken positive steps to keep the local community informed of progress. This is demonstrated by the decision to advertise meetings and events by displaying posters at prominent locations and distributing flyers to every household within the Neighbourhood Area, and also by establishing a dedicated website, and through the use of social media. The Parish Newsletter, which is delivered free of charge to every household in the Parish, was also a regular source of information about the progress of the Plan.
- 4.28 Delegating the preparation of the Plan to a steering group comprising Parish Councillors, local residents and local community leaders has also ensured that the views of a wide cross section of the community have been taken into account.
- 4.29 I also note that the Regulation 14 Consultation Draft Plan was available on request in paper format (as well as online) so that those without access to digital media have not been unduly disadvantaged.
- 4.30 Taking all the above factors into account there is enough evidence to show that the consultation process as a whole was appropriate to the size and nature of the Neighbourhood Area and that reasonable steps were taken to publicise and invite comments on the Plan. The Regulation 14 requirements for consultation and publicity, including pro-actively seeking views of relevant consultation bodies, have therefore been met and in some cases exceeded, for example by extending the time allowed for submitting comments beyond the statutory minimum six week period.
- 4.31 The Consultation Statement also addresses the requirement to summarise and explain how the various issues raised by interested parties at various stages of Plan preparation have been taken into account or rejected.

Regulation 16 Publicity

- 4.32 The Draft Neighbourhood Plan, as amended in response to the consultation, was subsequently submitted to Northumberland CC on 29 November 2019 together with a number of supporting documents including a Consultation Statement, and a Basic Conditions Statement explaining how the proposed Neighbourhood Plan meets the requirements of paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The submitted Plan incorporates a map identifying the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan.

- 4.33 Northumberland CC published details of the Plan on their website, notified interested parties and 'consultation bodies' of its receipt, and provided details as to how and by when, representations could be submitted on both their website and via site notices in Lesbury Parish. As well as the online versions, hard copies of the submitted documents were also made available for inspection at Northumberland CC's main office at County Hall, Morpeth and at Alnwick Library situated in the Alnwick Playhouse.
- 4.34 The formal publicity stage for submitting representations originally covered a seven week period between Thursday 12 December 2019 and Friday 31 January 2020, allowing additional time beyond the minimum six week period because consultation ran through the Christmas holiday period.
- 4.35 The publicity period was subsequently extended to Monday 10 February 2020 to ensure that a six week period was allowed for making representations on the Plan and its supporting information, including a revised version of the Habitats Regulations Assessment which was published after commencement of the consultation.

Conclusions

- 4.36 In the light of the foregoing I am satisfied that the Regulation 16 requirements to bring the proposal to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area, and to provide an opportunity for representations to be submitted, have been met.

5.0 Basic Conditions

- 5.1 This section of my report considers whether the Neighbourhood Plan taken as a whole has regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, whether the plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development, and whether it is in general conformity with local strategic policy. It also addresses current EU obligations. Each of the plan policies is considered in turn in the section of my report that follows this.

(a) National Planning Guidance

- 5.2 National Planning Guidance is set out principally in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was revised in July 2018, and updated in February 2019. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (NPPF paragraph 11) which when applied to neighbourhood planning means that communities should develop policies which shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development (NPPF paragraphs 28 and 29).
- 5.3 The NPPF also requires neighbourhood plans to be in general conformity

with the strategic policies contained in any development plan that covers the neighbourhood area and not to promote less development than that set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies (NPPF paragraph 29).

- 5.4 Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently (NPPF paragraph 30).
- 5.5 More detailed guidance and advice, expanding on the general policies in the NPPF has been available since March 2014 as national Planning Practice Guidance. This includes specific guidance as to ‘What evidence is needed to support a neighbourhood plan?’¹¹, and ‘How policies should be drafted’ that is *“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”*¹².
- 5.6 I have had regard to these principles in carrying out the examination, since the manner in which policies are drafted and whether or not they are supported by appropriate evidence is clearly fundamental to determining whether or not individual policies and a plan as a whole satisfies the Basic Conditions.
- 5.7 Less straightforward to determine is whether a policy is distinct, and whether it reflects local circumstances. For example while it is clear that policies in the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan are driven by local circumstances and community preferences, to a certain extent some could apply to other, if not all, locations. I have taken the view that the fact that a local community has chosen to include a particular policy, reflects its awareness that the particular issue is of special importance to the locality, and this does not therefore prevent that policy from satisfying the Basic Conditions.
- 5.8 Taken as a whole I conclude that the Neighbourhood Plan has regard to the policies and principles embedded in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance. In those instances where individual policies and/or supporting text have been found to be inconsistent with national planning policy I have made specific recommendations to correct this later in the report.

(b) Sustainable Development

- 5.9 In carrying out the examination I am also required to consider whether the

¹¹ Planning Practice Guidance para 040 Ref ID: 41-040-20160211

¹² Planning Practice Guidance para 041 Ref ID: 41-041-20140306

Plan would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

5.10 In so doing I have had particular regard to the 3 overarching and interdependent objectives established in paragraph 8 of the NPPF, namely:

- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and co-ordinating the provision of infrastructure
- **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

5.11 Although the Neighbourhood Plan does not make specific provision for new development, for example through site allocations, it includes policies to manage development subject to environmental safeguards. Other policies aim to protect green space and local heritage, and to encourage the provision and/or improvement of retail, health, education, leisure and tourism facilities. These are key aspects of sustainable development, as set out in the NPPF.

5.12 Subject to the modifications recommended later in my report I am satisfied that the Neighbourhood Plan is capable of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

(c) Local Strategic Policy

5.13 Statutory weight is given to neighbourhood development plans that are in general conformity with, and do not promote less development than, the strategic policies of the adopted development plan for the area (NPPF paragraph 29). This ensures neighbourhood plans cannot undermine the overall planning and development strategy for the local area set out in the development plan.

5.14 The current development plan for the Northumberland CC area comprises

- Remaining 'saved' policies in the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (adopted April 1997)
- Remaining 'saved' policies in the Northumberland Minerals Local

- Plan (adopted March 2000)
 - Remaining 'saved' policies in the Northumberland Waste Local Plan (adopted December 2001)
 - Alnwick Core Strategy 2004-2021 (adopted October 2007)
- 5.15 The remaining 'saved' policies in the Minerals and Waste Local Plans would appear to have no direct relevance to the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.16 The adopted Alnwick Core Strategy (ACS) provides a spatial strategy and a range of policies to guide future development across the whole of the former Alnwick District Council area, including Lesbury Parish.
- 5.17 Of less relevance is the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (ALP) which was adopted as long ago as April 1997. Policies in the Plan were initially saved for a three year period until 27 September 2007 under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Policies that remained relevant and compliant with (at the time) national and Structure Plan policies were then extended beyond that date by Direction of the Secretary of State on 31 August 2007.
- 5.18 As the 'saved' policies in the ALP, and adopted policies in the ACS predate the NPPF (2019 version), the NPPF takes precedence where there is a conflict.
- 5.19 I am also mindful of the fact that Northumberland CC is preparing a new Local Plan which has reached examination stage. When adopted this will form part of the development plan and will replace all of the previous District and County Council Local Plan and Core Strategy documents.
- 5.20 As there are a number of remaining unresolved objections to policies in the new Local Plan, until the Inspectors report following public examination of the Plan is received, only limited weight may be given to the policies in the emerging Plan. In any case even if the document is found to be sound it may have some way to go to reach adoption. There is therefore no certainty as to when this document may be adopted and the extent to which it may be changed.
- 5.21 In assessing whether the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with strategic policies contained in the Development Plan for the area I have therefore referred to policies in the adopted ACS, and saved policies in the ALP, which have been specifically identified as strategic policies within the meaning of national Planning Practice Guidance¹³ by Northumberland CC. These are set out in a document entitled 'Strategic Policies Relating to the Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan' which was supplied to Lesbury Parish Council to support the preparation of the Plan, and which is included in Northumberland CC's and Lesbury Parish Council's combined response to my clarification questions (dated 8 April 2020) which are available to view on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages.
- 5.22 In so doing I have taken into account that in accordance with national planning policy less weight may now be attributed to these policies than

¹³ Planning Practice Guidance paras 075 – 077 inc Ref ID: 41-075/076/077 - 20190509

formerly owing to the period of time which has elapsed since they were first adopted, and that in any case some policies are now out of date and/or superseded by national planning policy.

- 5.23 A number of modifications are necessary for the Neighbourhood Plan to be in general conformity with the above strategic policies. These are set out in the *Comments on the Neighbourhood Plan* section of my report.

(d) European Union Obligations

- 5.24 Local Planning Authorities are legally responsible for deciding whether neighbourhood plan proposals are compatible with EU obligations, (as transposed into UK law) until EU Directives are replaced by UK legislation after the end of the Brexit transition period. This includes obligations under the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive¹⁴, the Wild Birds Directive¹⁵, and the Conservation of Natural Habitats Directive¹⁶.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 5.25 In circumstances where a neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant effects on any sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive or Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive, an assessment (referred to as an Appropriate Assessment) is required in accordance with the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017, to determine if the Plan would have an adverse effect on the integrity of those European Sites.
- 5.26 As there are a number of European Sites located within or within 10km of the Plan boundary a screening assessment of policies contained in the (Pre-submission) Draft Plan was carried out by Northumberland CC on behalf of Lesbury Parish Council. This concluded that the housing and settlement boundary policies in the Plan would be likely to have a significant effect on designated European Sites, principally by creating additional recreational pressure through new residential or tourism related development. It was further concluded that this could only be avoided with mitigation, and that a full Appropriate Assessment would therefore be required.
- 5.27 As a result of the screening opinion the Plan was amended to include an additional policy to mitigate the potential impacts of new development by securing developer contributions towards the cost of Northumberland CC's Coastal Mitigation Service. This is a wardening service which is intended to reduce the impact of recreational disturbance by providing advice and education for recreational users within European Designated Sites.
- 5.28 The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) subsequently prepared on

¹⁴ Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 2001/42/EC

¹⁵ Conservation of Wild Birds Directive 2009/147/EC

¹⁶ Conservation of Natural Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC

behalf of the Parish Council concluded that with strategic mitigation in place via the Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service the amended Plan would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of European Sites.

- 5.29 The statutory consultation body (Natural England) who were consulted at different stages during the preparation of the Appropriate Assessment agree with the conclusions in the Report and no concerns in relation to the assessment or the process have been raised.
- 5.30 The most recent (December 2019) version of the HRA Report was also published as part of the Regulation 16 Publicity during which Natural England reiterated their previous comments on the Report. No comments have been received from any other party.
- 5.31 I therefore conclude that the making of the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and that the Plan meets the additional Basic Condition introduced by the 2018 Regulations¹⁷.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 5.32 Although the Plan does not include proposals to allocate land for development, the need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment automatically triggered the need to undertake a full SEA due to the likely significant effects of policies that support residential and tourism related development.
- 5.33 An SEA Environmental Report has therefore been prepared by the County Council on behalf of the Parish Council, in accordance with the SEA Directive and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (EAPP Regulations)¹⁸. As the SEA is an iterative process the SEA also considered the effects of the new mitigation policy included in the Plan in order to address issues raised in the HRA report.
- 5.34 The assessment concludes that overall the Plan is likely to lead to positive or neutral environmental effects, that individually and collectively the policies and objectives of the plan will mitigate any potential negative environmental effects and that there are no significant adverse impacts as a result of the Plan.
- 5.35 In response to the EAPP Regulation 13 Consultation on the Environmental Report all three statutory consultation bodies (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England), who were also consulted during the scoping stage of the assessment, agree with the conclusions in the Report and no concerns in relation to the preparation process have been raised.
- 5.36 The SEA Environmental Report was subsequently published as part of the

¹⁷ This Basic Condition arises from the coming into force, on 28 December 2018, of the Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018 whereby the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 are amended. This basic condition replaced a basic condition “the making of the neighbourhood plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects”.

¹⁸ Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

Regulation 16 Publicity and as part of their response Northumberland Estates object on the grounds that the preparation of the Report is procedurally incorrect and that insufficient time has been allowed for the EAPP Regulation 13 Consultation. They also consider that the geographical area covered by the baseline information in the Report is inappropriate and that the consideration of reasonable alternatives is flawed. It is further suggested that as a result the Plan may be open to legal challenge.

- 5.37 I am also in receipt of a copy of Northumberland Estates previously submitted EAPP Regulation 13 comments on the Environmental Report (which were attached as an appendix to their submitted Regulation 16 representations) together with a copy of a legal opinion prepared by solicitors on their behalf requesting that the Plan be withdrawn from examination and the Parish Council formally re-consult on the latest (Pre Submission) draft version of the Plan and its accompanying Environmental Report.

Comments

- 5.38 While it is outside my remit to consider the merits of a potential legal challenge and a formal request for the Plan to be withdrawn it is part of my role to independently consider whether relevant statutory, regulatory and national planning policy requirements have been satisfied, including the requirements of EAPP Regulations.
- 5.39 I therefore address each of the four main issues raised by Northumberland Estates in turn.
1. Have the EAPP regulatory requirements for screening and consultation been correctly followed ?
- 5.40 Northumberland Estates consider that the Plan should have been screened for significant environmental effects at an earlier stage in the process so that evidence gathering could be integrated with the preparation of the Plan and to better inform the choices being made. This view is based on the 'strategic environmental assessment requirements for neighbourhood plans' set out in national Planning Practice Guidance (specifically paragraphs 028, 029 and the flowchart in paragraph 033), which suggests that consultation on the Environmental Report could coincide with the Regulation 14 consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Plan.
- 5.41 However, in this case the need to prepare a full SEA Report was only triggered by the results of the HRA screening process which was undertaken at Regulation 14 stage. Otherwise there would have been no need to undertake a full SEA particularly since the Plan does not contain any allocations.
- 5.42 While I appreciate that national guidance is intended to establish a uniform approach to SEA, local circumstances will inevitably influence the approach taken in any particular area. For example as it is not possible to undertake SEA/HRA screening until plans have a sufficiently developed vision and policy intent screening often corresponds with the publication of a draft plan at Regulation 14 stage, as was the case in Lesbury.

- 5.43 As neighbourhood plans and SEA reports are governed by different regulatory requirements neither do I see any merit in Northumberland Estates alternative suggestion that prior to the submission of the Plan an additional Regulation 14 consultation (or re-consultation) should have been undertaken on the amended Pre-Submission version of the Plan alongside the EAPP Regulation 13 consultation on the Environmental Report.
- 5.44 In response to my request for details of the Regulation 13 consultation in my clarification questions to Northumberland CC and Lesbury Parish Council (dated 8 April 2020) I have been provided with evidence that the Parish Council notified consultation bodies and other stakeholders (public consultees) on 21 October 2019, made copies of both the amended Pre-Submission Draft Plan and the Environmental Report available on their website for viewing and downloading, and informed consultees how they might express their opinions and the period within which comments must be submitted. Copies of my questions and the Councils' joint response are available to view on the Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages.
- 5.45 Northumberland Estates acknowledge in their representations that they were notified by email on 21 October 2019 about the consultation on the Environmental Report and amended Plan and that they were informed of the deadline for submitting comments.
- 5.46 I am further advised of additional steps undertaken to publicise the consultation by distributing flyers around the village and inviting residents to a surgery in the Village Hall.
- 5.47 I am therefore satisfied that the EAPP Regulation 13 requirement to 'make the draft Plan and the accompanying Environmental Report available for the purposes of consultation' has been satisfied, and in some respects exceeded.

2. Was a reasonable amount of time allowed for the EAPP Regulation 13 Consultation ?

- 5.48 Northumberland Estates point out that they were notified about the Regulation 13 consultation by email on 21 October 2019 and given a deadline of 21 November 2019 to submit comments. In their view 31 days is insufficient time to digest the contents of both the Environmental Report and the amended Plan and to respond, in comparison with the minimum 42 days (six weeks) allowed for the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulation 14 Consultation and Regulation 16 Publicity.
- 5.49 While I agree greater consistency could have been achieved by adopting a standard time period for all consultation undertaken during the preparation of the Plan, I must also take into account the fact that the EAPP Regulations only require the time period for the Regulation 13 Consultation 'to be of such length as will ensure that the consultation bodies and public consultees are given an effective opportunity to express their opinion on the relevant documents'¹⁹.

¹⁹ Regulation 13(3) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004

- 5.50 As there is no prescription in the Regulations it is therefore a matter of judgement as to what constitutes an ‘effective opportunity to express an opinion’.
- 5.51 In this respect I do not agree that the need to consider the contents of an amended Plan, as well as the Environmental Report, would justify increasing the time allowed for the consultation, as the only significant change made to the Pre-submission draft version of the Plan has been the inclusion of an additional policy to mitigate the impact of future development.
- 5.52 I am also mindful of the fact that while the time allowed for submitting comments is less than the time allowed for submitting representations at the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulation 16 stage (approximately 26% less), this still represents 48% more than the time allowed (21 days) for submitting comments on planning applications, including major applications. Neither do I agree that allowance should be made for the fact that the consultation was held during the two weeks schools half term period since this period did not contain any statutory holidays.
- 5.53 The fact that Northumberland Estates have been able to submit a nine page document supporting their objections at (EAPP) Regulation 13 stage suggests to me that their interests have not been prejudiced by the way in which the consultation has been carried out, particularly since a second opportunity to comment on the Environmental Report has been provided through the (NPGR) Regulation 16 Publicity.
- 5.54 In the circumstances I do not consider that 31 days was an unreasonable amount of time to allow for comments to be made on the Environmental Report.

3. Is the baseline information established in the Report appropriate?

- 5.55 Northumberland Estates consider that the Environmental Report “has not adequately captured the extent of the baseline condition in terms of understanding that the area of the baseline condition is wider than the geographical extent of Lesbury Parish”.
- 5.56 This view is based on the premise that as Alnmouth Railway Station is a regionally significant transport hub, the inclusion of policies in the Plan restricting development around the station may prejudice its future operational requirements, and that this will impact on a much wider catchment than the local area.
- 5.57 However, neighbourhood plans are not obliged to include proposals for new housing and other forms of development²⁰, and it is apparent that the Plan is relying on the emerging NLP to identify and address future housing/development needs in this respect. Neither is there any prescription in current guidance or legislation about the range of topics or aspirations that should be covered.
- 5.58 It seems to me that it would therefore be illogical for the Report to establish

²⁰ Planning Practice Guidance paras 040 Ref ID: 41-040-20160211 and 104 Reference ID: 41-104-20190509

baseline information covering the environmental characteristics of a wider (than local) geographical area in order to assess the potential impact on that area caused by the absence of a policy promoting development in the vicinity of the Railway Station.

4. Does the identification and evaluation of 'reasonable alternatives' satisfy EAPP requirements?

- 5.59 As well as considering the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Plan, the EAPP Regulations also require assessments to identify and evaluate the likely significant effects of any reasonable alternatives to the approach adopted in the Plan.
- 5.60 Northumberland Estates consider that this process has been unduly constrained because the Environmental Report relies on the emerging Local Plan to provide the strategic planning context for identifying 'reasonable alternatives' rather than extant development plan policies. For example the NLP includes proposals to establish settlement limits (responsibility for which rests with Parish Councils where neighbourhood plans are being prepared), which is considered to limit the scope for selecting more growth orientated development options in comparison with the less restrictive approach in the extant ACS which does not make provision for settlement limits.
- 5.61 In Northumberland Estates view only limited weight should be attached to the emerging NLP which is currently at examination, and subject to unresolved objections, a number of which affect the Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.62 While I agree that only limited weight may be attached to policies and proposals in the emerging NLP for the purposes of testing whether or not the Neighbourhood Plan satisfies the basic condition, I am also mindful of the fact that the establishment of settlement limits is linked to the scale of future housing growth, which is a relevant consideration.
- 5.63 In circumstances where the extant development plan is out of date and/or the housing requirement has been satisfied it is important that neighbourhood plans take account of the housing requirement established in emerging local plans in order to ensure consistency of approach. National Planning Practice Guidance specifically recognises that while neighbourhood plans should not be tested against the policies in emerging local plans, the reasoning and evidence informing the local plan process is likely to be relevant to the consideration of the basic conditions against which a neighbourhood plan is tested ²¹.
- 5.64 Rather than develop its own housing requirement the Plan relies on the emerging Local Plan to establish the scale of future housing growth and meeting the emerging NLP 45 dwelling (minimum) requirement in the period 2016 - 2036 is specifically reflected in one of the Plan's main objectives.
- 5.65 Although the housing requirement figure will not be finally settled until after the NLP examination report is available, as the figure set out in the

²¹ Planning Practice Guidance para 009 Ref ID: 41-009-20190509

Publication Draft NLP represents the most up to date figure available at the time of preparing the Environmental Report, it is therefore appropriate to base the consideration of 'reasonable alternatives' on that figure.

- 5.66 Basing the identification of 'reasonable alternatives' on a higher housing figure implied by Northumberland Estates comments, would not only conflict with extant and emerging planning strategies concerning the scale and distribution of development but would potentially increase the 'likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the Plan'. This was one of the key factors which triggered the need for the SEA to be undertaken, and I find it difficult to reconcile how considering additional housing growth in the Environmental Report would contribute toward avoiding or mitigating the potential adverse effects of development.
- 5.67 Bearing in mind that 39 out of the 45 dwellings are already accounted for through existing permissions and completions neither would I expect potential housing sites or enlarged settlement limit boundaries to be considered as realistic options in the Environmental Report. As referred to previously neighbourhood plans are not obliged to make specific provision for housing, or seek to allocate sites to accommodate the housing requirement identified in higher level plans, and it would be illogical to consider housing growth alternatives that are beyond the scope of the objectives in the Plan.
- 5.68 I am therefore satisfied that the identification and evaluation of 'reasonable alternatives' taking into account one of the main objectives of the Plan to meet the emerging NLP housing requirement in a sustainable manner, accords with EAPP requirements²².

European Convention on Human Rights/Other EU obligations

- 5.69 The Basic Conditions also require neighbourhood plans to be fully compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. Although an equalities impact assessment has not been undertaken the Neighbourhood Plan would appear to have neutral or positive impacts on property rights (Article 1), the right to respect private and family life (Article 8) and groups with protected characteristics (Article 14). And no evidence has been put forward to suggest otherwise.
- 5.70 Other EU obligations that can be relevant to land use planning such as the Water Framework Directive, the Waste framework Directive, and the Air Quality Directive do not appear to be relevant to the designated Neighbourhood Area.
- 5.71 I therefore conclude that the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements and therefore satisfies that 'Basic Condition'.

²² Regulation 12(2)(b) Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (as amended)

6.0 Comments on the Plan and its Policies

6.1 The Neighbourhood Plan is considered against the Basic Conditions in this section of my report, particularly whether individual policies and supporting text have regard to national policy, and whether they are in general conformity with local strategic policies. Where modifications are recommended, they are highlighted in **bold print**, with any proposed new wording in *italics*.

(a) General Comments

- 6.2 In commenting on the Submission Draft Plan Northumberland CC have raised a number of general issues such as the relationship between the objectives and policies in the Plan, and the amount of repetition between some of the policies, which in the County Council's view could lead to interpretation difficulties.
- 6.3 Concerns are also raised about the extent to which some policy requirements and considerations may conflict with national planning policy and whether Policies 1, 3 and 5 provide an adequate framework for managing development proposals.
- 6.4 While the County Council's comments have been of considerable assistance to the examination, particularly where suggested changes would improve the clarity and effectiveness of the Plan, it is concerning that the County Council feel it necessary to put forward so many suggested changes at this late stage in the process. I note that in responding to my invitation to comment on the Regulation 16 representations Lesbury Parish Council have expressed surprise at the nature of the County Council's comments but do not indicate whether or not they agree with the suggested changes²³. I also note that a number of the suggested changes repeat comments that were previously put forward at Regulation 14 stage but which were rejected by the Parish Council at the time.
- 6.5 It is disappointing, however, that these issues could not be resolved prior to the submission of the Plan particularly in the light of the advice in national Planning Practice Guidance that local planning authorities and qualifying bodies should work collaboratively, sharing evidence and seeking to resolve any issues, to ensure the draft neighbourhood plan has the greatest chance of success at independent examination²⁴.
- 6.6 In considering the merits of the Plan (and points raised in response to the Regulation 16 Publicity) I should emphasise that my role as examiner is to decide whether changes are required in order to satisfy the Basic

²³ My invitation to the Parish Council to comment on the responses to the Regulation 16 Publicity is included in my Examination Procedure note (dated 16 March 2020). Both the Procedure Note and the Parish Council's comments may be viewed on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages.

²⁴ Planning Practice Guidance para 009 Ref ID: 41-009-20190509

Conditions and not to arbitrate between different parties.

- 6.7 Therefore while I agree with many of the suggestions put forward by Northumberland CC I have confined my recommended modifications to those instances where it is necessary to remove ambiguity, or where statements or policies in the Plan would undermine local strategic policy or do not have appropriate regard to national planning policy, or would compromise the Plan's ability to satisfy the Basic Conditions in some other way.
- 6.8 For example while the addition of a list of planning policies at the start of the plan would help in navigating the Plan, as suggested by Northumberland CC, this is not essential for satisfying the Basic Conditions and does not inhibit the interpretation of the Plan, and I therefore make no recommendation in this respect.

(b) The Plans Overall Approach

- 6.9 The Plan recognises that the housing requirement for the Neighbourhood Area is being determined through the emerging NLP and does not attempt to establish an alternative level of future housing growth. As more than 85% of the housing requirement will be met through recent development and existing planning permissions it does not allocate specific sites for development, relying instead on future windfall proposals to cater for the balance of the housing requirement.
- 6.10 The main focus is therefore on managing proposals for new housing and other development including policies to promote good quality design and to mitigate the impact of development on designated European sites, where appropriate. Other policies support the provision of affordable housing on exception sites and aim to protect and enhance local facilities, to safeguard local heritage and environmental assets such as local green spaces, and to promote improvements to community facilities, including walking and cycling facilities, and car parking at Alnmouth Station.
- 6.11 In considering whether the Plan's overall approach to accommodating future development needs satisfies the Basic Conditions I have also taken into account representations submitted on behalf of Northumberland Estates.
- 6.12 The main issues raised are that the Plan is overly restrictive in its approach to future housing growth particularly through the delineation of very tight settlement limits and that only limited weight should be attached to the housing requirement identified in the emerging NLP as this is not part of the extant development plan and still subject to unresolved objections. It is also suggested that the Plan incorrectly interprets the 45 dwelling housing requirement as a maximum figure, and it should allocate sites for development to provide certainty rather than rely on windfalls and exceptions sites, particularly as it is considered there are insufficient windfall sites available.

Comments

- 6.13 Neighbourhood Plans are required to be prepared in conformity with the extant development plan for the area, in this case policies in the ACS and 'saved' policies in the ALP, and not to be tested against policies in an emerging Local Plan²⁵. In this respect the overall approach to supporting and managing development in the Plan is generally consistent with the development strategy set out in the ACS which identifies Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton, (in combination with Alnmouth), as a group of settlements with a strong service base, forming one of ten 'sustainable village centres' in the settlement hierarchy. While development is intended to be concentrated in three higher tier service centres (Alnmouth, Amble and Rothbury) the ACS (Policy S1 Location and Scale of New Development) also recognises that new rural development would best be located in 'sustainable village centres' provided it is well related to the scale and function of the settlement
- 6.14 However while a number of extant local strategic policies continue to provide relevant guidance those policies concerned with future housing needs are almost out of time (as the time period of the ACS is 2007 – 2021) and have been overtaken by changing circumstances, including the amalgamation of all the former Local Authorities in Northumberland into a single combined unitary authority in 2009.
- 6.15 I am also mindful of the fact that owing to a healthy housing land supply at the time the ACS was adopted only a relatively modest number of dwellings were required through new allocations in settlements other than the three service centres, and that 34 dwellings out of the total 165 dwellings requirement for the ten 'sustainable village centres' for the period 2011 – 2021 have been provided in Lesbury/Hipsburn/Bilton. That is approximately double the number that would have been required if housing growth had been apportioned equally between the ten 'sustainable village centres', and would conceivably preclude any further housing growth based on extant development plan policy rather than emerging policy.
- 6.16 In circumstances where neighbourhood plans are being prepared in advance of or in parallel with Local Plans, and extant development plan policies are out of date, Planning Practice Guidance advocates a collaborative approach to ensure the production of complementary neighbourhood plans and Local Plans.²⁶
- 6.17 The regard given in the Neighbourhood Plan to the emerging NLP, including the proposed 45 dwelling housing requirement over the period 2016 – 2036, is consistent with this guidance. While I acknowledge that as there are a number of unresolved objections only a certain amount of weight may be attached to this figure until the Inspectors Report is published following examination, this nevertheless represents the most up to date guidance on housing need available to the Parish Council²⁷.

²⁵ Planning Practice Guidance para 009 Ref ID: 41-009-20190509

²⁶ Planning Practice Guidance para 009 Ref ID: 41-009-20190509

²⁷ Appendix G 'Rationale and Methodology for Calculating Housing Numbers in Lesbury' in Northumberland

- 6.18 In any case should the housing requirement be increased following examination of the NLP and/or sites be recommended for allocation in Lesbury Parish then responsibility for taking this forward will rest with Northumberland CC. The County Council's response to my clarification request also confirms that the County Council will be responsible for ensuring the delivery of sufficient housing land to meet identified minimum needs, for example through a 'call for sites', changes to settlement boundaries and or/a Local Plan review. In other words there is no expectation that the Neighbourhood Plan would need to be amended in order to satisfy a revised housing requirement.
- 6.19 This view is underpinned by national Planning Practice Guidance which states that 'Where strategic policies set out a housing requirement figure for a designated neighbourhood area, the neighbourhood planning body does not have to make specific provision for housing, or seek to allocate sites to accommodate the requirement'²⁸.
- 6.20 While I agree with Northumberland Estates that no site specific evidence has been produced to justify the assertion in paragraph 5.20 that the Plan has 'identified scope for further development through windfall and infill sites or the allocation of Rural Exception Sites', I am nevertheless satisfied that the future contribution from 'unidentified' conversions, changes of use and redevelopment proposals is likely to exceed the balance of the housing requirement in the remaining 16 years of the Plan period.
- 6.21 I have based this assessment on the information on historic housing completions and existing consents provided by Northumberland CC for 2009-2020²⁹ which indicates that since 2016 there have been a total of 31 net additions to the housing stock and that a further 7 dwellings have the benefit of planning consent, leaving a modest shortfall of 7 dwellings, which I note differs from the 6 dwelling shortfall quoted in the Plan.
- 6.22 The data also demonstrates that 9 out of 39 net dwellings completions (or 23%) during the 11 year period 2009 – 2020 were from conversions, changes of use and/or redevelopment proposals. If new housing from this source were to continue coming forward at the same rate the minimum 45 dwelling housing requirement would easily be exceeded (and the remaining 7 dwelling requirement would be almost doubled) before the end of the Plan period.
- 6.23 In this assessment I have also discounted any contribution from new build sites as although I was able to identify a number of potential rounding off and infilling opportunities within the proposed settlement limits during my visit to the area, I have no information regarding their availability or

CC and Lesbury Parish Council's joint response (dated 28 April 2020) to my clarification request which explains that the housing requirement for Neighbourhood Areas has been calculated by allocating a proportionate share of countywide housing need to designated service villages including Lesbury/Hipsburn/Bilton and Alnmouth as a combined service village) based on population. The joint response is available to view on the County Council's Neighbourhood Plan web pages,

²⁸ Planning Practice Guidance para 104 Ref ID: 41-104-21090509

²⁹ Appendix H in Northumberland CC and Lesbury Parish Council's joint response (dated 28 April 2020) to my clarification request which is available to view on the County Council's Neighbourhood Plan web pages.

deliverability. That is not to say that such sites may not come forward before the end of the Plan period.

- 6.24 I am therefore satisfied that the Plan will not undermine either the extant or emerging spatial development strategy in terms of meeting the identified housing requirement.
- 6.25 Changes are, however, required to paragraph 5.20 to more accurately reflect the expected contribution to housing supply from recent completions, existing permissions and future windfall sites and to acknowledge that the identified housing requirement is a minimum figure.
- 6.26 The reference to ‘allocating rural exception sites’ should also be removed as by definition these sites are permitted as exceptions to policy and are not allocated. Neither is it appropriate in calculating future housing land supply to make an allowance for new housing from this source.
- 6.27 It would also be more accurate in both paragraph 5.20 and paragraph 5.21 to refer to windfall sites rather than ‘infill’ sites, (which are a type of windfall), and to describe the types of development that fall within the definition of ‘windfall’. Otherwise the Plan could preclude future housing provision from a number of significant sources such as conversions, changes of use and redevelopment proposals.

Recommendation 02

- a) In paragraph 5.20 replace ‘an additional’ with ‘*a minimum of*’ in line 1
- b) Replace ‘planning permissions for 39 properties have been granted’ with ‘*there has been a net addition to the housing stock of 31 dwellings, and 7 more have the benefit of planning consent, leaving a shortfall of 7 dwellings*’.
- c) Replace the last sentence with ‘*It is anticipated that this figure will be exceeded through additional windfalls coming forward in the form of conversions, changes of use, redevelopment proposals, and infilling, including infilling on garden land*’.
- d) In paragraph 5.21 replace ‘infill’ with ‘*windfall*’ in line 2

(c) Scope of the Plan/Omissions

Protected Views

- 6.28 In responding to the Regulation 16 Publicity a local resident has identified a number of ‘significant views’ which are considered to be important to the landscape character and visual character of the Parish, and suggests that these are added to the existing ‘protected views’ on the Policies Map

Comments

- 6.29 I am not in a position to judge the relative merits of the suggested

additional 'protected views', and the Parish Council have not offered any opinion on them when commenting on the Regulation 16 responses following my invitation for them to do so. In any case I would have reservations about their inclusion at this late stage in the process since interested parties have not previously been consulted or had the opportunity to comment.

- 6.30 As the purpose of the examination is to assess whether the Plan as submitted satisfies the Basic Conditions, whether or not the Plan is amended to incorporate additional suggestions put forward at Regulation 16 stage does not affect its ability to satisfy the Basic Conditions and I cannot therefore support this suggestion.

Strategic Considerations

- 6.31 As part of their response to the Regulation 16 Publicity Northumberland Estates have suggested that the scope of the Plan should be extended to address wider spatial policy considerations, including the linkages and cross boundary issues between Lesbury Parish and the adjacent settlement of Alnmouth. As Alnmouth is physically constrained and Lesbury, Hipsburn, Bilton and Alnmouth are identified as a single 'sustainable village centre' in the ACS it is suggested that the Plan (and the Housing Needs Survey which has informed the Plan) should address housing needs arising over a wider area.
- 6.32 Northumberland Estates also consider that the Plan has not been positively prepared in line with national planning policy because it does not adequately recognise the strategic importance of Alnmouth Station, including its potential as a sustainable location for growth. It is suggested that a specific allocation for additional car parking at the Station should be included in the Plan in order to help maintain the viability of the station and to support one of the Plan's identified 'Community Projects to create a community hub with cafe, tourist information and car and cycle hire facilities at the station.

Comments

- 6.33 While I recognise the desirability of reflecting wider strategic considerations during the preparation of the Plan, there is no requirement in national planning policy or Planning Practice Guidance on Qualifying Bodies to formally co-operate with neighbouring parishes or indeed to prepare joint neighbourhood plans. This contrasts with the preparation of Local Plans where there is a specific duty to co-operate. I am also mindful that the Parish Council consulted adjoining parishes during the preparation of the Plan and that the response from Alnmouth Parish Council was positive and supportive. At the time the Plan was being prepared Alnmouth Parish Council were not intending to prepare a neighbourhood plan and declined the invitation to prepare a joint Plan.
- 6.34 Neither is there any prescription in current guidance or legislation about the range of topics or aspirations that should be covered in neighbourhood plans, or the level of detail and neighbourhood plans are not obliged to

contain policies addressing specific types of development³⁰. It is also outside my remit to recommend the incorporation of additional policies and proposals, or more ambitious objectives, which have not previously been subject to consultation during the preparation of the Plan.

- 6.35 The perceived omissions do not therefore affect the Plan's ability to satisfy the Basic Conditions and the Plan instead concentrates on addressing issues which have been identified as local priorities through consultation with the wider community.
- 6.36 No changes to the Plan are therefore recommended in response to the above representations.

(d) Settlement Limits

- 6.37 In order to control the location of development within existing settlements and in the surrounding countryside, the Plan incorporates a number of criteria based policies linked to defined settlement limits. The settlement limits for Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton, which are identified on the Policies Map, are based on the settlement limits previously delineated in the 1997 ALP. Although these were not carried forward in the 2007 ACS the emerging NLP defines settlement boundaries for all towns, service centres and service villages in the County unless, as is the case in Lesbury Parish, local communities wish to define settlement boundaries through the neighbourhood plan process.
- 6.38 The intention in the NLP is to define settlement boundaries in a way which supports a level of housing and economic growth appropriate to the size, role and function of the settlement. Where there are sufficient housing commitments to meet identified needs boundaries are to be defined to accommodate these commitments, and to protect the countryside from future ad hoc incursion³¹.

Comments

- 6.39 The delineation of settlement limits in the Plan provides an appropriate mechanism for managing future development proposals by creating a clear dividing line between existing settlements and the surrounding countryside to help determine where different types of development will be acceptable in planning terms. This in turn contributes toward the achievement of some of the Plan's key objectives including protecting important landscapes, maintaining the sense of separation between Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton, and encouraging housing and other development within existing settlements.
- 6.40 While the former ALP boundaries have been adjusted to reflect extant permissions, recent development and other changes, it is apparent from my inspection of the area and aerial photographic evidence that the

³⁰ Planning Practice Guidance para 040 Ref ID: 41-040-20160211

³¹ Paragraph 4.39 Publication Draft Northumberland Local Plan (January 2019)

settlement boundaries otherwise follow the same well defined physical features such as walls, hedgerows, watercourses and garden curtilages used to define the 1997 ALP boundaries.

- 6.41 In considering the merits of the proposed settlement limits I have also taken into account an objection from Northumberland Estates who question the justification for re-instating boundaries first in use 20 years ago prior to the current development plan. However, as I have previously concluded that there is no necessity to make additional provision for housing growth in the Plan beyond the level likely to be achieved through recent completions (since 2016), existing permissions, and the continued contribution from windfalls there is consequently no need to expand development limits beyond the established built up edge of settlements. I am also satisfied that the evidence and methodology described in the background paper³² accompanying the Plan provides an appropriate basis on which to define the settlement limits.
- 6.42 I am also required as part of the examination to consider specific objections to the proposed settlement limit boundary in relation to two residential properties in Longhoughton Road, Lesbury. In both cases the property owners would like the settlement limit boundary amended to incorporate the whole of their residential curtilages, as they feel two parcels of land comprising a triangular shaped woodland to the rear of Fir Tree Cottage and a tennis court to the rear of Brookside have been mistakenly excluded.
- 6.43 The disputed areas of land are both located to the west of a small watercourse which was utilised to delineate the original 1997 ALP settlement limits. In the case of Brookside evidence has been produced to demonstrate that the ownership of the land and its use as a tennis court pre-dates the 1997 settlement limits.

Comments

- 6.44 During my visit to the Neighbourhood Area as part of the examination I have been able to inspect both properties accompanied by the owners and representatives from the County Council and the Steering Group.
- 6.45 On the evidence of my accompanied site visits I am satisfied that both the tennis court and the woodland are used in connection with the associated residential properties and that they are situated immediately adjacent to and physically accessible from the garden areas. I have also been able to observe the extensive boundary planting undertaken by both property owners which as it matures will reinforce the existing boundaries with a mixture of hedgerow species.
- 6.46 However, while the boundaries to domestic curtilages are often used to define settlement limits, particularly where they have well defined physical features such as fences and hedgerows, this must be compatible with the main purpose of settlement limits which, as referred to previously, is to

³² Settlement Boundaries for Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton (May 2019) including Appendix 1 Settlement Boundary Methodology

- establish the demarcation between the built up part of a settlement where development will generally be supported in principle, and the countryside beyond where a more restrictive approach is taken.
- 6.47 Where properties have extensive rear gardens it may sometimes therefore be inappropriate to include the whole curtilage within settlement limits, for example where future development would be intrusive or would have an unacceptable impact on the character of the area.
- 6.48 As the Brookside tennis court is surrounded on three sides by meadow and is effectively encroaching into the surrounding countryside I cannot therefore support its inclusion within settlement limits. Similarly, although the Fir Tree Cottage woodland arguably represents the transition between the village and the surrounding countryside, any future development at this location would also encroach into the surrounding countryside bearing in mind it adjoins meadow land to the north and west.
- 6.49 Another consideration is that while settlement boundaries defined by fences, hedgerows and trees are generally accepted as ‘defensible’ physical boundaries, since they are capable of falling into disrepair, or being grubbed up or felled, they may also be considered to be less permanent features than roads and watercourses, which highway authorities and riparian owners are obliged to maintain. It would therefore have been logical to follow the watercourse rather than other options in determining the 1997 ALP settlement limit boundaries.
- 6.50 I am also mindful that while the proposed neighbourhood plan settlement limit boundary replicates the 1997 ALP boundary to the rear of Fir Tree Cottage, the settlement limit boundary to the rear of Brookside has been amended to incorporate an additional area of garden land in the south west corner of the property. Where previously the boundary followed the course of the stream for the full width of the garden, at the point where the stream turns south eastwards through the garden the boundary now continues in a straight line following the original north-south fence line to the rear of Brookside and continuing along the rear boundaries of several other residential properties in Longhoughton Road.
- 6.51 However, this seems to me to be a logical rationalisation of the boundary and does not create a precedent for incorporating either the tennis court or the Fir Tree Cottage woodland within settlement limits, which would result in a more irregular and intrusive boundary.
- 6.52 I do not therefore recommend any changes to the proposed Neighbourhood Plan settlement limit boundaries.

(e) Introductory Chapters

- 6.53 The Introduction to the Plan explains the background to its preparation and the role of neighbourhood planning, why the Plan has been prepared, the process for its development and securing community consultation, and the next steps in its preparation.

- 6.54 The section on Planning Policy Background describes the national and local strategic planning context within which the Plan has been prepared, and highlights the importance of meeting sustainable development objectives and satisfying EU obligations, including taking potential environmental impacts into account.
- 6.55 This is followed by Issues and Themes summarising the evidence and issues emerging during the preparation of the Plan concerning population and housing, the local economy, heritage, environment, landscape and settlement boundaries, design and landscaping, community facilities and transport.
- 6.56 The text (and the Plan as a whole) is supported by a number of photographs which contribute toward the readability of the Plan. There is also a map identifying the Parish boundary.

Comments

- 6.57 These introductory sections are clearly written and informative. They provide the background to the Plan and help to develop a sense of place. By highlighting specific local issues they provide a spatial portrait of Lesbury Parish which helps to demonstrate how the overall Plan vision and objectives have been arrived at.
- 6.58 A number of minor changes are required, however, to update Section 1 (Planning Policy Background) and Section 2 (Issues and Themes) to ensure the Plan better reflects current circumstances and to improve the clarity and accuracy of the text in a number of places, as follows.

Section 1.0 Planning Policy Background

- 6.59 First references to national and strategic planning policy should be updated to reflect current circumstances, by referring to the additional Basic Condition in paragraph 1.1, and omitting reference to the anticipated adoption date of the emerging NLP in paragraph 1.5 owing to the uncertainty over the remaining timetable created by the current Coronavirus pandemic.
- 6.60 Second the reference to extant development plan policies in paragraph 1.3 should be qualified by referring to 'relevant strategic policies', as saved policies in the Northumberland Minerals and Waste Local Plans also form part of the development plan although none of these are relevant to the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area.
- 6.61 Third, in order to ensure more accurate use of terminology reference should be made to 'national planning policy' in paragraph 1.1 (first bullet point) rather than just 'national policy' and 'allocates' should be changed to 'designates' in paragraph 1.5 when referring to the process of delineating settlement boundaries.
- 6.62 A number of statements in Section 1 also require updating to acknowledge that the Plan has moved on to the next stage of preparation since the time it was drafted.

Recommendation 03

- a) In paragraph 1.1 insert '*planning*' after 'regard to national' in the first bullet point
- b) Insert a fifth bullet point '*do not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Point 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017*
- c) In paragraph 1.2 delete 'which will be submitted with the Plan to Northumberland County Council'
- d) In paragraph 1.3 replace 'The development plan consists of' with '*Relevant strategic policies comprise*'
- e) In paragraph 1.5 delete the second sentence ('It is expected that this Plan will come into force in Spring 2020'), replace 'allocates' with '*designates*' in line 6, and replace 'will be' with '*are*' in line 9
- f) In paragraph 1.7 delete the final sentence ('This will be explained further in the Basic Conditions Statement')

Section 2.0 Issues and Themes

- 6.63 As pointed out by Northumberland CC paragraph 2.3 should be updated to reflect the fact that a neighbourhood plan for Alnmouth is now in preparation, and paragraph 2.4 should reflect changes made to the emerging NLP which now incorporates the housing requirement for individual neighbourhood areas (including Lesbury) in Policy HOU 3 rather than in a separate Annex as previously.
- 6.64 Making reference to neighbourhood plan 'housing requirements' rather than 'indicative housing requirements', would also better reflect national Planning Practice Guidance which states that 'The National Planning Policy Framework expects most strategic policy-making authorities to set housing requirement figures for designated neighbourhood areas as part of their strategic policies'³³.
- 6.65 As this section of the Plan is intended to present a factual assessment of local circumstances the statement in paragraph 2.12 that 'significant housing development would damage the environment' is inappropriate and should be deleted as this is a non-evidenced value judgement.
- 6.66 In addition, the explanation given in paragraph 2.9 concerning the reason for re-defining settlement limits should clarify that this is because the settlement limits originally defined in 1997 were not carried forward in the 2007 ACS.
- 6.67 Further changes are required to ensure more accurate use of terminology by referring to 'neighbourhood areas' rather than 'neighbourhood plan areas' in paragraph 2.4, and 'Natura 2000' rather than 'Natural 2000' in paragraph 2.20, and to correct the inaccurate reference to 'recently approved housing development' in paragraph 2.9 which should be 'recent

³³ Planning Practice Guidance para 101 Ref ID: 41-101-20190509

housing completions’.

- 6.68 As suggested by Natural England the accuracy of paragraph 2.18 could be improved by incorporating reference to the full list of protected areas that affect the Neighbourhood Area.
- 6.69 I also share Northumberland CCs reservations about the lack of clarity and disjointed nature of the ‘landscape and settlement boundaries’ sub section, which presents information in an illogical and confusing manner.
- 6.70 In particular paragraph 2.21 serves no useful purpose as no explanation or context is provided regarding the significance of the Lower AIn landscape character area or its relevance to the AONB boundary, which is described in detail in the second part of the paragraph, and which can in any case be viewed on the Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map.
- 6.71 I therefore recommend deleting paragraph 2.21 and re-organising the remainder of the subsection in order to provide a clearer and more coherent explanation about the role and interconnection between the various landscape studies which have informed policies in the Plan.
- 6.72 The reference to ‘the map extract below’ in paragraph 2.22 should also be changed to ‘Figure 2 below’ to be consistent with the title of the map on page 11.

Recommendation 04

- a) **In paragraph 2.3 replace the second sentence with ‘*Alnmouth Parish Council has recently begun the preparation of its own neighbourhood plan*’**
- b) **In paragraph 2.4 delete ‘indicative’ in line 2, delete ‘Plan’ in line 3, replace ‘indicative’ with ‘*housing*’ in line 3, and replace ‘contained in Annex A of’ with ‘*set out in Policy HOU 3 (Housing requirements for neighbourhood plan areas) in*’**
- c) **In paragraph 2.9 insert ‘*although these were not carried forward in the Alnwick Core Strategy (2007).*’ at the end of the first sentence, and replace ‘recently approved housing development’ with ‘*recent housing completions*’ in the second sentence**
- d) **In paragraph 2.12 delete the last sentence (‘Significant housing development would damage the environment these people have travelled to visit’)**
- e) **In paragraph 2.18 insert ‘*the Northumberland Marine SPA, the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC (Special Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive), the North Northumberland Dunes SAC,*’ after ‘the Birds Directive)’ in line 4**
- f) **In paragraph 2.20 replace ‘Natural 2000’ with ‘*Natura 2000*’**

Recommendation 05

- a) **Delete paragraph 2.21**
- b) **Replace paragraphs 2.22, 2.23 and 2.24 with the following paragraphs, and renumber paragraphs as appropriate**

The landscape around Lesbury is highly valued. To the east of Lesbury village is the Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (the boundary of which can be seen on the Policies Map, for information). In addition, and contiguous with the same boundary, is the Northumberland Heritage Coast.

Most of Hipsburn and all of Bilton lie outside the AONB apart from twenty properties on the eastern side of Steppey Lane. Similarly, the main built up part of Lesbury lies outside the AONB apart from properties to the east of the B1339 along Bridge End and small housing developments at Croftlands and Meadowlands comprising some sixteen properties.

Information about landscape types and settlement development capacity in the AONB is provided in the Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2013). This takes into account the landscape character assessments (based on National Character Areas) in the Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010).

The settlement sensitivity and capacity assessment (see Figure 2 below) was based on the assumption that new housing development would be limited to small scale schemes for local needs on the edge of settlements within the AONB, (including those parts of Lesbury and Hipsburn within the AONB) and that the majority of any new housing development would be prioritised in areas outside the AONB. One area of 'less sensitivity' was identified on land to the east of Lesbury, and this site has now been developed for housing.

Further evidence from the AONB Landscape Sensitivity & Capacity Study in relation to the built form of Lesbury and Hipsburn has been used to assist in defining settlement boundaries and 'settlement edges that are sensitive to new housing development' which are delineated on the Policies Map.

(f) Vision and Objectives

- 6.73 The overarching vision of the Plan is to retain and improve community facilities, protect valued green spaces and special landscapes, preserve

the distinctiveness of separate settlements, sustain community housing needs, and ensure new development is well designed and that it contributes to making the neighbourhood area an attractive, well connected, healthy and safe place to live visit and work.

- 6.74 To deliver the vision five key objectives have been identified which inform the land use and development related policies, and non-land use aspirations in the Plan.
- 6.75 Each objective is supported by a commentary explaining how each objective will be achieved and identifying the specific policies which will contribute to delivering the objective.

Comments

- 6.76 The vision and objectives capture the concerns and priorities identified by the local community during the preparation of the Plan. They are relevant to the local area and demonstrate how particular local issues have influenced the overall approach in the Plan and justify the inclusion of specific policies.
- 6.77 However, I agree with Northumberland CC that the approach adopted in Section 3 (and repeated in Section 5) of linking policies to specific objectives is somewhat contrived and misleading as it implies that in some cases particular policies only deliver one objective while ignoring the fact that Objective 1 (Sustainable Development) relates to all the policies in the Plan, creating potential interpretation problems for decision makers.
- 6.78 Similarly, while the commentary on proposed actions which accompanies each objective is a well intentioned attempt to explain how each objective will be delivered, this tends to oversimplify the scope of the associated policies and overlooks the more complex inter-relationship between policies and objectives. The commentaries also duplicate elements of the text supporting individual policies.
- 6.79 I would also question whether Objective 1 can be described as a sustainable development objective (which encompasses economic, social and environmental considerations) or whether by aiming to protect special landscapes, secure sympathetic designs and safeguard the individual character of settlements it has a more limited role as an environmental objective.
- 6.80 My recommended modifications are therefore intended to address these issues, by re-organising and simplifying the presentation of objectives in the Plan and making a number of consequential changes to the text
- 6.81 A number of changes are also required to ensure consistency with national and local strategic policy, and to improve the clarity and accuracy of the text.
- 6.82 First, in order to fully reflect national planning policy and Lesbury's status as one of ten 'sustainable village centres' in the ACS, the Plan's vision and Objective 2 (Housing) should not be restricted to meeting local needs only. For instance while the ACS directs the majority of new development to three rural service centres the ACS also distinguishes between 'sustainable

village centres' which have a good level of services where new rural development would usually be best located, and 'local needs centres' with a more limited range of services that will accommodate smaller scale development to satisfy local needs only.

- 6.83 While my role does not extend to re-imagining the Plan's Vision I have recommended the above change as the approach to new housing provision in the Vision, as drafted, is clearly at odds with national planning policy and higher tier development plan policy. I also agree with Natural England that overlooking the renewed emphasis placed in national planning policy on ensuring that new development pays special attention to the natural environment, as well as the historic environment, is a significant omission particularly given the emphasis in the Plan on protecting important habitats and biodiversity, and mitigating the effects where appropriate.
- 6.84 Second, to more accurately reflect national planning policy and local strategic policy the wording of Objective 2 should acknowledge that future housing development should provide a mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures and avoid giving the impression that only housing for younger families and older people will be acceptable.
- 6.85 Third, the 'emerging Local Plan for Northumberland' in Objective 2 should more accurately be referred to as the Northumberland Local Plan, and I also recommend omitting reference to the 'emerging Plan' in order to future proof the document.
- 6.86 Fourth, the phrase 'Our objective is' at the beginning of Objectives 1 – 4 (and which is omitted in Objective 5) is superfluous, particularly following my recommended modification, and should be deleted.
- 6.87 Fifth, as pointed out by Northumberland CC the wording of Objective 4 should clarify that not all development will necessarily impact on the Conservation Area or non-designated heritage assets. However, I do not agree with the County Council that the scope of this objective should be enlarged to also recognise the importance of designated heritage assets, as decisions regarding the scope of the Plan are a matter for the Parish Council. Designated heritage assets are in any case afforded full protection through national and local strategic planning policy.

Recommendation 06

- a) **Delete 'locally' in line 6 of the Vision and insert '*and natural*' after 'historic in line 10**
- b) **List the individual objectives immediately after paragraph 3.1 and delete the respective objective headings**
- c) **Delete 'Our objective is' at beginning of Objectives 1 – 4**
- d) **Replace paragraphs 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 with '*3.2 The Plan policies seek to ensure development will contribute to the achievement of these objectives. A number of the policies are relevant to more than one objective.*'**
- e) **In Objective 2 replace 'housing requirement defined in the**

emerging Local Plan for Northumberland and focuses on providing' with '*housing requirement identified in the Northumberland Local Plan, and provides a mix of dwelling types, sizes and tenures, including*'

- f) In Objective 4 replace 'to ensure that all new development preserves or enhances' with '*to preserve or enhance*', and replace 'pays special attention to the conservation of' with '*safeguard*'**
- g) In Section 5 (Planning Policies) delete the objective headings and the objectives, which precede the topic headings before paragraphs 5.1, 5.20, 5.30, 5.45 and 5.50**
- h) Group policies in Section 5 under the following sub-headings**
 - Sustainable Development**
 - Housing**
 - Community and Visitor Facilities**
 - Local Green Space, Recreational Spaces and Allotments in the Neighbourhood Area**
 - Historic Environment**
 - Well Connected, Healthy and Safe Places**
- i) Delete paragraphs 5.30, 5.31 and 5.50**
- j) Identify the objectives which each policy will contribute towards in the text preceding each policy.**

(g) Reading the Neighbourhood Plan

- 6.88 This section provides a very helpful explanation about the relationship between the different tiers of planning policy that make up the development plan for the area. It also emphasises the importance of reading the Plan as a whole document and explains the role of the text accompanying each policy, in clarifying the purpose and intentions behind the policy.
- 6.89 Corrections to the text are required to ensure the correct use of terminology in relation to the adoption of the emerging NLP, which is incorrectly referred to as being 'made', which is a term normally applied to neighbourhood plans.
- 6.90 While it would also be advisable to update and/or future proof references in paragraph 4.2 to the status of the various development plan documents, owing to the uncertainties created by the Coronavirus pandemic it is difficult to predict the order in which the Plan will be 'made' and the NLP will be adopted. I therefore recommend that the circumstances concerning the emerging NLP be kept under review and paragraph 4.2 be updated closer to the time the Plan is 'made'.

Recommendation 07

- a) In paragraph 4.2 replace 'made' in line 2 and in line 4 with '*adopted*'**

b) Update paragraph 4.2 to reflect the circumstances at the time the Plan is 'made'

(h) Planning Policies and Supporting Text

6.91 The Planning Policies part of the Plan is presented in groups of policies that are intended to deliver the specific objectives identified in section 3 of the Plan. Each objective is accompanied by a commentary on how each objective will be delivered, followed by relevant land use policies.

6.92 The individual land use policies are preceded in each case by a summary of relevant issues and evidence which provides the justification for the policy. For ease of reference policies are presented in a highlighted box to distinguish them from the supporting text and justification.

Comments

6.93 I have previously recommended that the format of this section be changed as presenting policies in groups that are intended to deliver specific objectives is somewhat contrived and misleading, and ignores the fact that Objective 1 (Sustainable Development) relates to all the policies in the Plan, creating potential interpretation problems for decision makers.

6.94 Otherwise the rationale and justification behind each policy is relatively easy to follow although as referred to previously it would be helpful to identify the objectives which each policy will contribute towards as part of the preamble to each policy. This will help to clarify the linkages between individual policies and the issues and objectives which inform them.

6.95 **Policy 1: Sustainable Development** is an overarching policy which is intended to support sustainable forms of residential, business, social, community, leisure, recreational and educational development in the Neighbourhood Area as a whole. The policy supports small scale housing development within settlement limits and the provision of affordable housing on 'rural exception' sites on the edge of settlements. Another policy strand is intended to preclude 'major' development in the Northumberland Coast AONB.

6.96 **Policy 3: Settlement Boundaries** identifies specific development types which will be supported outside defined settlement boundaries, subject to complying with other policies. These include affordable housing on rural exception sites, the re-use of redundant buildings, housing for essential rural workers and small scale rural business development.

6.97 **Policy 5: Rural Exception Sites and Community Led Housing** supports housing on Rural Exception Sites and/or Community Led Housing Schemes which meet an identified local need, provided they are located on the edge of settlements and satisfy a number of design and development considerations including having suitable and safe highways access and do not impact unacceptably on the local landscape.

Comments

- 6.98 Policies 1, 3 and 5 work together to manage the different types of development that will be supported within the Neighbourhood Area as a whole, and the types of development that will be supported within settlement limits and in the countryside beyond.
- 6.99 However, owing to the composition and overlapping nature of the policies, there are a number of inconsistencies and potential conflicts between different policy strands, which particularly affects the treatment of proposals for development in the countryside.
- 6.100 For instance, although in part c) of Policy 1 proposals for social, community, leisure, recreational and educational facilities are identified as acceptable uses within the Neighbourhood Area as a whole there is no reference to supporting the provision of these facilities in the countryside in Policy 3.
- 6.101 Similarly, while tourism is specifically recognised as an acceptable form of development in the countryside in Policy 3, it is omitted from the list of development types that will be supported in the Neighbourhood Area as a whole in Policy 1, implying that tourism related uses might not be acceptable within settlement limits.
- 6.102 There are also a number of significant differences between the policy wording and national planning policy.
- 6.103 For example, as pointed out by Northumberland CC, although there is no reference in national planning policy to limiting the size of rural housing schemes part a) of Policy 1 restricts the scale of future housing developments inside settlement limits to 9 dwellings or less. Moreover no evidence has been produced to justify this threshold, which may inhibit the scope for future regeneration/redevelopment within the built up areas in the Parish, contrary to national planning policies aimed at focusing development on existing settlements and maximising the use of previously developed land. References in the policies and supporting text to small scale housing should therefore be deleted.
- 6.104 Neither is any justification provided for seeking to restrict the scale of rural business and economic development in both part d) of Policy 1 and part a) Policy 3, nor is any definition provided as to what is meant by 'small scale' in an economic development sense. This contrasts with the approach in national planning policy (NPPF paragraph 84) which relies on planning judgement being exercised to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings and does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads, while encouraging the use of previously developed land and development to be physically well related to existing settlements.
- 6.105 Similar considerations apply to tourism development which is restricted to 'small scale tourism development that can be sensitively accommodated in the landscape' in part f) of Policy 3 although there is no equivalent restriction in national planning policy, other than the need to respect the character of the countryside (NPPF paragraph 83c).

- 6.106 I therefore agree with Northumberland CC that the inter-relationship between the policies and the amount of duplication between specific policy requirements, combined with inconsistent wording and disparity with national planning policy, does not provide an adequate framework for decision making.
- 6.107 In their Regulation 16 response the County Council propose an alternative approach to overcome these issues by combining Policies 1, 3 and 5 into a single policy to support and manage development within the Neighbourhood Area. This is set out in Appendix B in the County Council's comments.
- 6.108 The County Council's suggested policy makes a clear distinction between development that will be supported within settlement limits and the types of development that will be acceptable outside those limits in the countryside. It also amends and expands the list of development types that will be acceptable in the countryside, in line with national planning policy. The final part of the policy amplifies the policy considerations affecting development within the Northumberland Coast AONB.
- 6.109 Combining and amending the policies in the manner suggested by Northumberland CC is an appropriate way of overcoming the shortcomings of the policies described above and would provide more clear-cut guidance for both decision makers and those preparing development schemes. With one exception referred to below, I am also satisfied that this approach would not prejudice third party interests by introducing new issues or mechanisms that have not previously been the subject of public consultation, or which are not consistent with national planning policy.
- 6.110 However, as one of the key purposes of neighbourhood planning is to provide communities with the opportunity to express views about the neighbourhood in which they live and to create policies which reflect their concerns and priorities, the extent to which the amended policy(s) might dilute the local focus and priorities highlighted in the Plan, is also a relevant consideration.
- 6.111 Taking all these factors into account my recommended modifications are intended to
- reformat the policies to avoid the ambiguity created by having overlapping policies which manage proposals for development in the countryside
 - remove conflict with national planning policy
 - eliminate ambiguity, repetition, and inconsistency in the policy wording, and
 - ensure that amended policies and supporting text reflect local priorities and retain as many of the original community aspirations as possible.
- 6.112 I am also mindful of the need to ensure policies are concise and avoid duplicating national planning policy and extant development plan policies.
- 6.113 In the light of the above my recommended modifications differ from the

County Council's suggested changes in three principal ways.

- 6.114 First, as the local community clearly attaches a high priority to securing the provision of affordable housing there is a compelling case for retaining a specific policy in the Plan to highlight and to provide a local dimension to this issue. I appreciate this means that an element of repetition will remain in the Plan but on balance I consider this is preferable to allowing this important local issue to be absorbed into a more generalised policy.
- 6.115 Second, while the County Council's amended list of acceptable forms of development in the countryside more accurately reflects national planning policy (than the Policy 3 list), I would question whether it is necessary to replicate national planning policy and/or local strategic policy in full. My suggested modification therefore simplifies the references to acceptable forms of development since proposals will in any case be considered against national planning policy and extant development policy, as well as Neighbourhood Plan policies.
- 6.116 Third, while the County Council's expanded range of policy considerations to be taken into account in the Northumberland Coast AONB may improve the effectiveness of the policy it is outside my remit to expand the scope of the policy at this late stage, particularly as the suggested wording has not previously been subject to consultation. I do, however, agree that it is important to clarify the different considerations applying to proposals affecting identified heritage coast and the AONB.
- 6.117 In this respect the statement in paragraph 5.5 that small scale housing development in the AONB is likely to be treated as major development is inaccurate and should be deleted, as no such definition exists in national planning policy. Paragraph 172 and footnote 55 of the NPPF provide sufficient guidance on this matter and deciding whether a development constitutes major development in the AONB will be a matter of planning judgement.
- 6.118 An additional modification is required to ensure the combined policy reflects a positive approach to development since Policy 1 as drafted would preclude any other form of development being supported other than development types that are identified in parts a) – d) of the policy. This can be achieved by omitting reference in the amended policy to specific development types that will be supported inside development limits. In order to retain a local context reference to the type of development that is specifically required and/or supported in the Neighbourhood Area could be incorporated in the supporting text alongside proposals for affordable housing and community facilities which are already referred to in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3.
- 6.119 Since Policy 1 does not incorporate any safeguards to ensure a good standard of development is achieved, I also agree with Northumberland CC that where proposals are judged to be acceptable the amended policy should emphasise that this is subject to compliance with other relevant policies including policies in other development plan documents. Although I appreciate that design and development considerations are addressed in a separate policy (Policy 4 Design in New Development) it would also be

appropriate to ensure proposals avoid creating adverse amenity and highways impacts in the interest of good development management practice.

- 6.120 In order to ensure a consistent approach to protecting sensitive settlement edges and important views the locational restrictions applied to rural exceptions housing in Policy 5 should be also be reflected in Policy 1 as these considerations are equally applicable to other forms of development. A consequential change is required to the Policies Map legend.
- 6.121 As part of their objection to the Plan's overall approach to future housing growth Northumberland Estates question whether the delineation of 'sensitive settlement edges' is adequately justified, and whether the potential impact of development has been robustly assessed. However, I am mindful that the policy has been informed by a comprehensive landscape and settlement capacity study covering the whole of the Northumberland Coast AONB³⁴, a map extract from which is reproduced in Figure 2 of the Plan. I am therefore satisfied that this provides an appropriate and proportionate rationale for both the concept of 'sensitive settlement edges' and the identification of specific settlement edges within the AONB to be protected in the Plan.
- 6.122 I do however agree that no evidence has been provided to justify extending the 'sensitive settlement edge' notation on the Policies Map beyond the AONB, to the west of the B1339 at the northern edge of Lesbury. It is also apparent, (from my own observations during my visit to the area), that the B1339 marks the point where the rolling topography associated with the AONB to the east, gives way to a more gently sloping landscape typified by paddocks and meadows immediately to the north and north west of Lesbury. I therefore recommend removing the 'sensitive settlement edge' notation to the west of the B1339 at the northern edge of Lesbury from the Policies Map.
- 6.123 I also recommend changing the references to 'key views' in the policies to 'important views' to be consistent with the terminology used in the Policies Map and in the AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study which has informed the preparation of the Plan. In assessing the impact of proposals on 'important views' consideration should also be given to whether a proposal would have a 'significant adverse effect' on any particular view rather than whether it affects the view, since arguably any development will affect the view to some degree or other.
- 6.124 As a result of these recommended policy changes a number of consequential changes are required to the supporting text, including re-ordering and re-numbering paragraphs.
- 6.125 In addition the supporting text should clarify the circumstances in relation to settlement limits by providing a more accurate explanation that settlement boundaries were previously delineated in the 1997 ALP but not carried forward in the 2007 ACS. The reference to 'retaining settlement boundaries' in paragraph 5.9 should consequently be corrected to 're-

³⁴ Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study 2013

instating settlement boundaries’.

- 6.126 It would also be more accurate to refer to ‘supporting affordable housing’ in paragraph 5.1 rather than ‘securing affordable housing’.
- 6.127 Paragraph 5.4 is superfluous as it duplicates paragraph 5.6 in the next section and should therefore be deleted

Recommendation 08

- a) **Replace Policy 1 and Policy 3 with the following policy and renumber the remaining policies in the Plan as appropriate**

‘POLICY 1: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Development within the settlement boundaries defined on the Policies Map will be supported provided no significant adverse impact arises to residential amenity and highway safety, and subject to compliance with relevant policies elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan and other relevant development plan policies.

Land outside the defined settlement boundaries will be treated as countryside whose intrinsic character and beauty must be recognised in all decision making on development proposals in those areas.

Outside the settlement boundaries, other than on sensitive settlement edges defined on the Policies Map, or where significant adverse effects would arise to important views into and out of the settlements as identified on the Policies Map, development will be supported which is compatible with national and local strategic planning policy and subject to compliance with relevant policies elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan. This includes proposals for affordable housing delivered through rural exception sites (in accordance with Policy 5), rural business and economic development proposals, diversification of agriculture and other land based businesses, and proposals for community and leisure facilities and rural tourism.

Proposals for isolated homes in the countryside will not be supported unless one or more of the circumstances outlined in national planning policy are met.’

Major development within the Heritage Coast will not be supported unless it is compatible with its special character.

Proposals for major development in the Northumberland Coast AONB will not be supported other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated to be in the

public interest in accordance with national planning policies and relevant development plan policies.

- b) Make consequential changes to the policy numbers referred to in paragraph 4.3**
- c) Delete the 'sensitive settlement edge' notation to the west of the B1339, at the northern edge of Lesbury, on the Policies Map**
- d) Delete 'Housing' in 'Settlement Edges Sensitive to New Housing Development' in the Policies Map legend.**

Recommendation 09

- a) In the text supporting Policy 1 insert a new paragraph immediately after the sub heading 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT' as follows '*Policy 1 establishes a framework for supporting and managing development within the Neighbourhood Area through the delineation of settlement limits around Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton as shown on the Policies Map. The policy makes a clear distinction between development that will be supported within settlement limits and development that will be supported in the countryside beyond where a more restrictive approach is appropriate in line with national planning policy and other development plan policies.*'**
- b) Relocate paragraph 5.9 to follow the new paragraph, incorporate a new first sentence '*Settlement boundaries were originally drawn in the 1997 Alnwick Local Plan although these were not retained in the 2007 Alnwick Core Strategy.*', and replace 'retained' with '*re-instated*'**
- c) Relocate paragraph 5.11 to follow the above paragraph, and replace 'Settlement boundaries include all land with planning permission and' in the first line with '*Although the original settlement boundaries have been used as the basis for the defined settlement limits these have been updated to take account of recent development and outstanding planning permissions. The revised boundaries*'**
- d) Relocate paragraph 5.10 to follow the above paragraph, and delete the first sentence**
- e) Relocate paragraph 5.1 to follow the above paragraph, delete the first sentence, replace 'The policy seeks to secure' in line 2 with '*Particular support will be given to the provision of*', and delete 'to support' in line 4**
- f) Relocate paragraph 5.2 to follow the above paragraph, insert a new first sentence '*The policy is also intended to support business enterprises and economic development.*', replace 'community' in line 3 with '*social, community, leisure, recreational and educational*', and delete the last sentence**
- g) Relocate paragraph 5.3 to follow the above paragraph**
- h) Delete paragraphs 5.4, 5.5, 5.12, and 5.13**
- i) Renumber all paragraphs as appropriate.**

Recommendation 10

- a) In Policy 5 replace 'affect key views' in line 2 of paragraph 2 with '*would have a significant adverse effect on important views*'
- b) Delete paragraph 3.

6.128 Subject to the above modifications the Policies meet the Basic Conditions

6.129 **Policy 2 (Northumberland Coastal Mitigation Service)** requires all development which will create a net increase in residential or tourism units to contribute toward the cost of Northumberland CC's warden service which is intended to reduce the impact of recreational disturbance within European Designated Nature Conservation Sites by providing advice and education for recreational users. Developers may undertake alternative forms of mitigation provided this is of demonstrable effectiveness.

Comments

6.130 This policy was incorporated in the Plan as a direct result of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process (see section 5(d) above) which identified the need to mitigate the potential impact of housing and sustainable development policies in the Plan on a number of designated European Sites.

6.131 Minimising impacts on biodiversity, protecting valued landscapes, and maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast while improving public access to it, are key objectives in national planning policy (NPPF paragraph 170). The policy also reflects the broad intentions of ACS Policy S12 and Policy S13 to protect and enhance biodiversity and landscape character.

6.132 Although the policy was incorporated in the Plan after consultation on the draft Plan at Regulation 14 stage no objections have been received in response to the Regulation 16 Publicity and Natural England advise that with strategic mitigation in place the Plan will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of designated European Sites.

6.133 The policy provides a fair and consistent mechanism for ensuring that proposals contribute toward the achievement of sustainable development.

6.134 I am therefore satisfied it meets the Basic Conditions and no modification is required.

6.135 **Policy 4 (Design in New Development)** aims to ensure that new developments incorporate high quality designs by establishing a number of design and planning principles against which proposals will be considered. These include respecting local character and materials, incorporating appropriate landscaping and sustainable drainage systems, securing a net gain in biodiversity and taking into account the amenity of neighbouring

occupiers. The policy also requires proposals to incorporate measures to reduce the carbon footprint of buildings and maximise energy efficiency in the design of buildings. Another policy strand requires proposals in the Northumberland Coast AONB to reflect principles established in the Northumberland Coast AONB Design Guide.

Comments

- 6.136 The policy integrates two of the fundamental principles in national planning policy, namely, to ensure that new development creates well designed buildings which incorporate sustainable construction techniques and designs. By setting out clear design requirements, it accords with the expectation in paragraph 125 of the NPPF that neighbourhood plans can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development. The policy will therefore ensure that future development contributes to the social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.
- 6.137 Although there are no equivalent policies in the ACS or ‘saved’ policies in the ALP, the policy reflects one of the objectives of the ACS to promote quality and good design in new development and to enhance local character, environmental quality and distinctiveness. Criterion f) which is concerned with safeguarding local amenity also accords with ALP Policy CD32 (Controlling Development that is Detrimental to the Environment and Residential Amenity) and criteria g) and h) reflect elements of ACS Policy S22 (Energy Efficiency) by promoting sustainable construction techniques and energy efficiency measures.
- 6.138 However, I have a number of reservations about the clarity and practicability of some aspects of the policy wording as a suitable mechanism for managing development proposals.
- 6.139 First, I would question whether it is reasonable or even practical to require all developments, irrespective of type, location or scale, to satisfy every single criterion in the policy particularly where this may affect scheme viability. As pointed out by Northumberland CC it would not be appropriate to require domestic extensions to incorporate SuDS proposals. I therefore suggest the words ‘where appropriate’ should be incorporated in the first part of the policy. I appreciate that the policy will rely on the interpretation of this relatively imprecise term on a case by case basis, but without this qualification I am not confident that the policy could be applied in a meaningful way.
- 6.140 Second, I agree with Northumberland CC that it is not clear in criterion a) how access is related to local context and character although I do not feel access requirements need to be addressed through the incorporation of an additional criterion as suggested, as my recommended changes to Policy 1 will ensure that highway safety considerations, which encompass the provision of safe and suitable access, are taken into account in considering development proposals. Reference to access should therefore be removed from criterion a).
- 6.141 Third it is unrealistic in criterion f) to expect proposals to avoid any adverse

amenity impacts on neighbouring residents. Since all proposals potentially have an adverse effect on local amenity an alternative approach would be to incorporate a test as to whether a proposal has a 'significant effect' or an 'unacceptable adverse impact'. While I appreciate that decision makers would still be required to make a judgement as to whether an impact is considered significant or unacceptable I consider this to be a more realistic approach.

- 6.142 Further changes are required to ensure the use of correct terminology by referring to Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) rather than Sustainable Urban Drainage systems in criterion d), and to clarify that one of the considerations in criterion f) is whether the proposal would create an unacceptable loss of light or overshadowing to 'neighbouring properties'.
- 6.143 The reference to the Neighbourhood Area in the first line of the policy is also superfluous as the policy can only apply to proposals in the Neighbourhood Area.

Recommendation 11

- a) **Replace 'All new development in the Neighbourhood Area' with 'Where appropriate, new development' in the first line of Policy 4**
- b) **Replace 'means of enclosure and access' with 'and means of enclosure;' in criterion a)**
- c) **Replace 'a Sustainable Urban Drainage system' with 'a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS)' in criterion d)**
- d) **Insert 'neighbouring properties' after 'scale and proximity' and delete 'of' in line 1 of criterion f), and insert 'significant' after 'or other' in line 3**

6.144 Subject to the above modifications the Policy meets the Basic Conditions.

6.145 **Policy 6 (Community, Recreational and Visitor Facilities)** is intended to resist the loss of existing facilities unless it can be demonstrated that the facility is surplus to requirements or not viable, while supporting proposals that will enhance the viability and/or community value of existing facilities. Another policy strand identifies a number of specific projects for new and improved facilities that have been identified by the community as particular priorities.

Comments

6.146 The need to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued community facilities and services and to plan positively for the provision of additional facilities which enhance the sustainability of communities are fundamental principles embedded in national planning policy (NPPF paragraph 92). By identifying potential opportunities for securing additional facilities the policy provides a local dimension to ACS Policy S18 (Provision of Social and

Community facilities). The provision of accessible local services that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being are key attributes of the social objective of sustainable development.

- 6.147 While the policy is partly aspirational in nature and, as pointed out by Northumberland Estates while the achievement of some of the desired schemes and projects may be reliant on funding generated by future development proposals, the policy nevertheless provides a reasonable framework for decision making.
- 6.148 However, as drafted the policy gives unqualified support for proposals to enhance the viability or community value of existing facilities or to provide new facilities identified in the second part of the policy. As pointed out by Northumberland CC this does not provide an adequate basis for decision making and may result in an unsatisfactory standard of development. Failure to take into account the potential environmental or amenity impacts of development also overlooks some of the key principles set out in national planning policy and local strategic policy.
- 6.149 In order to satisfy the Basic Conditions I therefore recommend the policy be amended to ensure that where proposals are acceptable in principle this is subject to compliance with other relevant policies such as Policy 4 (Design in New Development), including policies in other development plan documents. Applying the same safeguards suggested in my recommended changes to Policy 1 would also ensure a consistent approach throughout the Plan.
- 6.150 As part of their response to the submitted Plan Northumberland CC object to the inclusion of Hipsburn Primary School in the list of protected community facilities in paragraph 5.33. In the County Council's view it is not appropriate to create planning policies which may prevent the loss of schools since school planning and organisation is a matter for the Local Education Authority. It is also argued that the omission of educational facilities from the list of community facilities which are referred to in paragraph 83d) of the NPPF as 'community facilities which should be retained in rural areas' means that educational facilities should not be treated the same as the other types of community facilities listed.
- 6.151 While the NPPF paragraph 83 list is not intended to be an exhaustive list I am also mindful that the County Council in its role as Local Education Authority is best placed to judge whether there is a continued need for the provision of a particular education service at any given location, and whether the existing building is viable for that purpose. Moreover such assessments are often taken against the background of service rationalisation, and an inability to dispose of land and premises may preclude reinvestment in improved/ modern facilities for the benefit of the wider community. On balance I therefore accept the County Council's case for deleting the Hipsburn Primary School from the paragraph 5.33 list.
- 6.152 I also agree that the inclusion of a Community Orchard in the list of new facilities that will be supported in the Policy is inappropriate as this use falls within the definition of agriculture and would not constitute development

which would require the submission of a planning application. The creation of a Community Orchard is in any case identified as a Community Project in Section 7 of the Plan which concerns community aspirations rather than land use planning considerations.

- 6.153 A number of additional changes are required to clarify the intention of the policy with regard to the protection of recreational facilities and to remove a number of anomalies and ambiguities in this respect.
- 6.154 First, both the policy and the supporting text should clarify that the intention is to protect specific buildings or clubhouses that are associated with sport and recreational activities rather than the sports clubs or user groups, by referring to clubhouses rather than sports clubs.
- 6.155 Second, Alnmouth Croquet Club should be removed from the list of protected recreational facilities as the croquet club share use of the Alnmouth and Lesbury Cricket Club facilities and do not have separate premises.
- 6.156 Third, Alnmouth Football Club Playing Fields should also be removed from the list to avoid duplication with Policy 7 (Local Green Spaces, Recreational Spaces and Allotments).
- 6.157 In line with Planning Practice Guidance it is not only important that the meaning of policies and proposals is clear and unambiguous but also that the locations, sites and/or premises to which they apply are identified in sufficient detail to be of use for development management purposes. I therefore recommend that the specific community facilities intended to be protected through the policy, as referred to in paragraphs 5.33 and 5.34 (as amended), are listed in the policy and cross referenced to the Policies Map.
- 6.158 Consequential changes are required to the Policies Map and Policies Map legend in the light of the above recommendations.

Recommendation 12

- a) **Insert '*provided no significant adverse impact arises to residential amenity and highway safety, and subject to compliance with relevant policies elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan and other relevant development plan policies*' after 'will be supported' in line 2, and after 'will be supported' in line 4**
- b) **Delete 'e) A Community Orchard' in the second part of the policy**
- c) **Replace 'existing community facilities identified in this Plan' with '*the following community facilities as identified on the Policies Map*' in line 13**
- d) **Insert the following list at the end of the policy**

'A St Mary's Church

B The Coach Inn

C Lesbury Village Shop and Post Office

***D Lesbury Village Hall
E Alnmouth Railway Station
F Alnmouth Golf Clubhouse
G Alnmouth and Lesbury Cricket Clubhouse
H Lesbury Bowls Clubhouse'***

and make consequential changes to the Policies Map and Policies Map legend including changing the letters prefixed to the individual community and recreational facilities which are identified

- e) Delete the second bullet point 'Hipsburn Primary School and Pre-School' in paragraph 5.33**
- f) Replace the first two lines in paragraph 5.34 with '*Sport and recreational facilities (some of which are associated with Local Green Spaces and sports pitches which are protected by separate policies) identified are:*'**
- g) Delete 'Alnmouth Croquet Club' and 'Alnmouth Football Club Playing Fields' in paragraph 5.34, and change the references to the remaining sports clubs to '*Clubhouse*' in each case**

6.159 Subject to the above modifications the Policy meets the Basic Conditions.

6.160 **Policy 7 (Local Green Spaces, Recreational Spaces and Allotments)** aims to protect a number of green spaces in the Parish which have particular local significance by ruling out development other than in very special circumstances, consistent with Green Belt policy. A second policy strand precludes development involving the loss of playing fields and allotments unless a replacement of equivalent quality and size is made.

6.161 Eight sites are designated as Local Green Spaces, comprising 3 amenity spaces, 2 play areas, a memorial garden, an area of woodland and a bowling green.

6.162 Allotment sites in Bilton and Hipsburn and playing fields in Hipsburn, namely Alnmouth Football Club Playing Fields and Alnmouth and Lesbury Cricket Club Grounds are also identified for protection in the policy.

6.163 Additional information and justification for each of the sites is provided in a supporting evidence document which identifies individual site characteristics and analyses the local significance and value of each of the sites to the local community.

Comments

6.164 The policy is consistent with national planning policy which recognises that access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities (NPPF paragraph 96), and which advocates the retention of existing open space and playing fields unless they are surplus to

requirements or replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location (NPPF paragraph 97).

- 6.165 The desirability of identifying and protecting locally important green space is also specifically recognised in national planning policy subject to meeting stringent conditions set out in paragraph 100 of the NPPF.
- 6.166 By supporting healthy communities with accessible services and open spaces and helping to protect the natural, built and historic environment the policy will contribute toward the social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.
- 6.167 The protection and retention of high quality, accessible open space, sport and recreation facilities also generally conforms with one of the main objectives of ACS Policy S20 (Providing for Open Space, Sport and Recreation).
- 6.168 As the policy has two distinctly separate strands with differing policy considerations, I consider each of these in turn below. In order to avoid confusion over the interpretation of the policy I also recommend treating these differing elements as separate policies, particularly since Local Green Space is a very high level form of protection with no flexibility in terms of relocating the green space or making alternative provision, in comparison with allotments and playing fields. Consequential changes are required to the supporting text.

Local Green Space

- 6.169 The three NPPF paragraph 100 conditions which must all be satisfied are that the green space is;
- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves
 - demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, and
 - local in character and not an extensive tract of land.
- 6.170 Based on the information presented in supporting evidence and my own observations having visited each of the sites, I am satisfied that all eight sites satisfy the three criteria, and other NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance requirements.
- 6.171 First all of the sites are situated either within or immediately adjacent to the built up area and therefore satisfy the first criteria.
- 6.172 Second, although I have reservations about the extent to which individual sites have particular local significance or are demonstrably special to the local community, for example in the case of play areas and the bowling green, I accept that it is a legitimate aspiration to protect land that is particularly valued by the local community and that the local community is best placed to determine which are the most important green spaces in this respect.
- 6.173 Third, while it is a moot point as to what constitutes a site that is local in character it is apparent that all of the sites primarily serve the local community, and self evident that none of the sites are extensive in nature

particularly in comparison with the scale of the built up area.

- 6.174 I am also satisfied that designation of the Local Green Spaces would be consistent with planning for sustainable development in the area, as referred to in Planning Practice Guidance³⁵, since the Local Green Space designations would not undermine the need to identify sufficient land to meet identified development needs.
- 6.175 In considering the merits of individual sites attention has been drawn by Northumberland Estates to the fact that Site LGS6 (Woodland on the corner of Lesbury Road and Curly Lane, Hipsburn), includes an area of highway verge within the boundary of the woodland identified on the Policies Map, and that the site is in generally in poor condition and in need of enhancement. Northumberland Estates also challenge the robustness of the evidence used to justify the designation on the grounds that it is not supported by a tree survey, ecological survey or landscape/visual assessment.
- 6.176 While I acknowledge that no evidence has been put forward to demonstrate the value of the woodland from an ecological or arboricultural point of view it nevertheless provides a significant focal point in the streetscape as well as a visual experience which may be enjoyed by the local community in its own right, in an area with generally limited tree cover. In any case as referred to above whether or not an area of green space is special and holds particular significance to the local community is partly a reflection of local opinion. Neither is it dependent on the quality or condition of the green space in question.
- 6.177 With regard to the accuracy of the woodland boundary I am mindful that the County Council has been consulted on the Plan and has not raised any objection to the boundary in its role as Local Highway Authority. However I am also aware that the emerging NLP includes this site as one of a number of sites identified as Protected Open Space and that the boundary excludes the highway verge referred to by Northumberland Estates. Since the boundary delineated in the emerging NLP has been drawn at a larger scale with a more detailed boundary than the Neighbourhood Plan in the interests of accuracy I recommend that the boundary of Site LGS6 be amended to correspond with the boundary in the emerging NLP.
- 6.178 I also recommend deleting the reference in paragraph 5.39 to a statement attributed to the NPPF that 'most green spaces will not be suitable for allocation as Local Green Space' as that provision was omitted from the current version of the NPPF when the NPPF was revised in 2019.

Recreational Spaces and Allotments

- 6.179 The more flexible approach to the protection of recreational spaces and allotments is consistent with national planning policy which recognises that there may be circumstances where the relocation of existing facilities is appropriate.
- 6.180 However as recreational spaces such as equipped play areas and a

³⁵ Planning Practice Guidance para 007 Ref ID: 37-007-20140306

bowling green are the subject of proposed Local Green Space designations, in order to avoid confusion with Local Green Space policy I recommend changing the reference to 'Recreational Spaces' in the policy heading and in line 4 of the policy to 'Playing Fields', and making a consequential change to the wording of the sub-heading on page 23.

- 6.181 Greater clarity and consistency with Local Green Space policy could also be achieved by referring to the list of playing fields and allotments in the policy wording and cross referencing these to the Policies Map.
- 6.182 Since there may be scope to replace displaced playing fields and allotments in adjacent parishes it would also be more accurate to refer to the possibility of replacement within the locality rather than the Neighbourhood Area.
- 6.183 I also recommend deleting the description of Bilton Allotments being located 'just after the railway' in line 18 as this is both superfluous as the allotments are identified on the Policies Map, and misleading as the site could equally be described as 'just before the railway' depending on the direction of travel.

Recommendation 13

- a) **Sub-divide Policy 7 to create two separate policies for Local Green Space and for Playing Fields and Allotments**
- b) **Amend the boundary of Site LGS6 on the Policies Map by removing the highway verge**
- c) **Replace 'Recreational spaces or Allotments identified in this policy' with '*Playing Fields or Allotments listed below and shown on the Proposals Map*' in line 4**
- d) **Replace 'Plan Area' with '*locality*' in line 6**
- e) **Delete 'just after the railway station' in line 18**
- f) **Change the sub-section heading on page 23 to '*LOCAL GREEN SPACES, PLAYING FIELDS AND ALLOTMENTS*'**
- g) **Delete the second sentence in paragraph 5.39**
- h) **Delete 'as well as the Alnmouth Football Club playing fields and the Alnmouth and Lesbury Cricket Club grounds' in paragraph 5.41, insert a new paragraph after paragraph 5.42 as follows '*The Alnmouth Football Club playing fields and the Alnmouth and Lesbury Cricket Club grounds in Hipsburn cater for local sports clubs and accommodate a range of outdoor activities.*' and renumber paragraphs**
- i) **Insert '*in Bilton and Hipsburn*' after 'The allotments' in paragraph 5.43**

6.184 Subject to the above modifications the Policies meet the Basic Conditions.

6.185 **Policy 8 (The Lesbury Conservation Area)** establishes the planning and design considerations which will be taken into account in considering

proposals for development within or affecting the setting of the Lesbury Conservation Area, such as the use of traditional materials, the retention of stone walls, trees and hedges, and the impact of development on the skylines to the north and south of the village.

Comment

- 6.186 The policy has regard to national planning policy by seeking to preserve or enhance a designated heritage asset and by promoting designs which will make a positive contribution toward local character and distinctiveness. The promotion of good design principles and safeguarding built heritage are key aspects of sustainable development.
- 6.187 The policy is broadly aligned with ACS Policy S15 (Protecting the Built and Historic Environment) although elements of that policy have been superseded by the approach to conservation in national planning policy.
- 6.188 As drafted however, the requirement in the policy for proposals to avoid harming the character of the conservation area is unrealistic and impractical since all proposals may have some degree of adverse impact. The policy also transposes one of the overriding objectives in national planning policy to ensure that development preserves or enhances the historic environment with the mandatory provision in NPPF paragraph 195 that where a proposed development will 'lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset', consent should be refused, unless there are particular extenuating circumstances.
- 6.189 My recommended changes are therefore intended to bring the policy wording more in line with national planning policy by ensuring that proposals are rejected where they would lead to substantial harm to the conservation area.
- 6.190 Similarly, while I am satisfied that the considerations set out in the policy generally achieve an appropriate level of prescription, in order to provide an element of flexibility the policy should clarify that the use of traditional materials and the provision of chimneys and clay pots will only be required in appropriate circumstances.
- 6.191 While Northumberland CC are responsible for designating and reviewing conservation area boundaries, the interpretation of the policy could be enhanced by identifying the precise boundary of the conservation area on the Policies Map.
- 6.192 Two minor changes are also required to paragraph 5.46 to correct the reference to relevant Listed Building and Conservation Area legislation and to avoid creating the impression that conservation areas are excluded from the definition of designated heritage assets.

Recommendation 14

- a) **Replace 'must not harm the character of the conservation area and should' with '*will be expected to preserve or enhance the character or appearance and quality of the conservation area***

and' in line 1 of Policy 8

- b) Insert '*where appropriate*' after 'clay pots' in criterion e)
- c) Replace 'fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance and quality' with '*lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance)*' in the final part of the policy
- d) Delineate the Lesbury Conservation Area boundary on the Policies Map and add the conservation area to the map legend
- e) Replace 'designated heritage assets (listed buildings)' with '*listed buildings*' in line 1 of paragraph 5.46, and replace 'Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1972' with '*Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990*' in line 3

6.193 Subject to the above modifications the Policy meets the Basic Conditions.

6.194 **Policy 9 (Non-Designated Heritage Assets)** requires proposals for development affecting a non-designated heritage asset to be sensitively designed in a manner appropriate to its archaeological, historic or architectural significance. 42 sites of local heritage interest are identified in the Plan.

Comments

6.195 Identifying and managing those parts of the historic environment valued by local communities, but which do not qualify for conservation area or listed building status (designated assets) is an important element of the heritage protection system. This can take the form of Local Lists of non designated assets prepared by Local Planning Authorities incorporating any such assets which have been identified by neighbourhood planning bodies³⁶.

6.196 Since Northumberland CC does not have a formal Local List of non-designated heritage assets at the present time there is no reason why locally valued features, buildings, structures and spaces should not be protected through the Neighbourhood Plan. This approach is recognised through recent changes in national Planning Practice Guidance³⁷.

6.197 Additional information and justification for each of the proposed designations is provided in a supporting evidence document which identifies individual site characteristics and analyses the local significance and value of each of the sites to the local community.

6.198 In reviewing the evidence supporting the proposed designations I am satisfied that a consistent methodology has been followed based on Historic England guidelines and good practice advice³⁸.

6.199 Although I am not in a position to judge the merits of individual designations I am mindful that the local heritage assets identified in the Plan have also been subject to consultation at both Regulation 14 and

³⁶ Planning Practice Guidance para 040 Ref ID: 18a-040-20190723

³⁷ Planning Practice Guidance para 040 Ref ID: 18a-040-20190723

³⁸ Local Heritage Listing (Historic England Advice Note 7 May 2016)

Regulation 16 stage, and no objection to any of the proposed designations have been raised. There is therefore no basis for me to recommend deletions or additions to the proposed list of non-designated heritage assets identified in the background paper supporting the Plan, and as listed in Appendix B.

- 6.200 Modification is however required to clarify the precise location of the non-designated heritage assets to be protected in the Plan rather than relying on the supporting background paper.
- 6.201 In line with Planning Practice Guidance it is not only important that the meaning of policies and proposals is clear and unambiguous but also that the areas to which they apply are identified in sufficient detail to be of use for development management purposes. As the scale at which the Policies Map is presented is inadequate for this purpose I recommend that the individual non-designated heritage assets should be identified on a series of individual or combined maps at a large enough scale to delineate either the building footprint or the site curtilage, as appropriate. These should be incorporated in Appendix B and the individual heritage assets should be numbered in both the Appendix B list and the accompanying maps, to correspond with the numbering used to identify the sites on the map accompanying the background paper.
- 6.202 The policy is otherwise consistent with national planning policy on the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment (NPPF paragraph 197).
- 6.203 Consequential changes are required to the policy wording and the supporting text which should clarify that a link to the background paper referred to is provided in Appendix A. The reference to the supporting background paper in the policy is also superfluous and should be deleted.
- 6.204 There is also a typographical error to correct in line 5 of paragraph 5.49 by deleting 'to be' which is superfluous.

Recommendation 15

- a) Delete the first sentence in Policy 9**
- b) Replace 'whether listed in this plan' in line 3 with '*identified in the maps in Appendix B*'**
- c) Identify the non-designated heritage assets listed in Appendix B on a series of maps, ensuring that individual building footprints or site curtilages (as appropriate) are legible, using the same numbering on both the maps and the list that was used to identify individual assets in the background paper 'Non-designated Heritage Assets'**
- d) In paragraph 5.49 replace 'in Appendix A' with '(see *link in Appendix A*)' in line 3, replace 'listed' in line 4 with '*identified*', and delete 'to be' in line 5**

- 6.205 Subject to the above modifications the Policy meets the Basic Conditions.
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6.206 **Policy 10 (Parking and Highways Improvements at Alnmouth Railway Station)** supports proposals to increase car parking provision at Alnmouth Railway Station subject to the incorporation of appropriate landscaping, improved pedestrian and cycle access, and the provision of electric charging points for cars. A second policy strand supports measures to improve highway safety and access in the vicinity of the station.

Comments

6.207 National planning policy recognises the importance of convenient, safe and secure car parking and encourages measures to facilitate access to high quality public transport (NPPF paragraph 110 (a)). These are key attributes of the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.

6.208 Although there are no equivalent saved policies in either the ALP or the ACS the policy would contribute toward key ACS objectives by assisting in the delivery of a sustainable integrated transport system and improving access to jobs, services, recreational and cultural opportunities.

6.209 While I acknowledge the point made by Northumberland Estates that there are likely to be only limited opportunities in the Neighbourhood Area to secure infrastructural improvements through developer contributions the policy nevertheless establishes a positive steer for future investment, and will support the continued use of the existing railway.

6.210 Although the requirement to provide car charging points is a laudable aspiration as it is concerned with an operational matter it potentially falls outside the scope of a land use policy. I therefore recommend substituting a requirement to ensure that designs facilitate the provision of car charging points as referred to on NPPF paragraph 110(e).

Recommendation 16

Replace ‘electric charging points for cars’ in line 5 of Policy 10 with ‘*be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.*’

6.211 Subject to the above modification the Policy meets the Basic Conditions.

6.212 **Policy 11 (Improvements to Walking and Cycling Routes)** identifies some specific improvement projects to create new pedestrian and cycling routes which will be supported, including improvements to Steppey Lane footbridge to enable disabled access from Steppey Lane into Lesbury village. The second part of the policy supports proposals to improve and extend the existing cycleway network and footpath network provided any negative impacts on designated European sites are adequately mitigated.

Comments

- 6.213 The policy reflects the intentions in national planning policy by promoting pedestrian and cycle movements as an alternative to the motor car, which contributes toward the creation of healthy communities, while minimising impacts on biodiversity. It also addresses the needs of people with disabilities in line with NPPF requirements (paragraph 110(b)). Maximising non car-based transport, promoting well-being, and safeguarding natural resources are key aspects of the social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.
- 6.214 Although there are no specific policies in relation to pedestrian and cycle routes in either the ALP or ACS, promoting healthy communities and ensuring access to recreational facilities and opportunities are key objectives in the ACS.
- 6.215 The policy includes a list of measures and improvements which the local community would like to see in place, some of which are also identified as community projects in Section 7 (Community Projects). As these are aspirational and do not appear to relate to firm proposals it is questionable whether it is appropriate to include them within the policy, and whether they might alternatively be referred to in the supporting text cross referenced to Section 7, as aspirational schemes which will be supported by the Parish Council.
- 6.216 However as the projects are linked to other identifiable projects such as improving access to the railway station (including improved access for people with disabilities), and the Aln Valley Railway Project, I am satisfied that the policy contributes toward the promotion and implementation of a wider strategy and provides a reasonable basis to inform decision making.
- 6.217 The policy therefore satisfies the Basic Conditions and no modifications are required other than correcting a minor typographical error by replacing 'assure' with 'ensure' in line 3 of paragraph 5.55.

Recommendation 17

Replace 'assure' with 'ensure' in line 3 of paragraph 5.55.

(i) Monitoring and Review

- 6.218 The land use policies are followed by a section summarising the Parish Council's approach to monitoring the effectiveness of the policies contained in the Plan and deciding whether changes are needed in the future.
- 6.219 While the Plan acknowledges that decision making on planning applications rests with Northumberland CC the Parish Council will undertake their own monitoring to evaluate progress toward delivering the vision of the Plan.

Comments

- 6.220 National Planning Practice Guidance recognises the importance of ensuring that neighbourhood plans are deliverable and while the Parish Council are to be commended for their commitment to undertake monitoring and review of the Plan, they have as yet not identified the indicators or ‘success measures that will be used to assess performance.
- 6.221 While this does not affect the Plan’s ability to satisfy the Basic Conditions it is a matter that should be addressed at the earliest opportunity perhaps in liaison with Northumberland CC who may be able to assist with data collection and availability.
- 6.222 Reference is also made to a potential future review of the plan to ensure it is aligned with the NLP, as it is anticipated that the Neighbourhood Plan will be ‘made’ before the NLP is adopted. However as this expectation has been overtaken by changing circumstances owing to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, the Plan should acknowledge that there is now more uncertainty over which of these two documents will be finalised first.

Recommendation 18

- a) **Replace the first two sentences in paragraph 6.4 with ‘*As it is not known whether the Neighbourhood Plan will be ‘made’ before the adoption of the NLP it may be necessary to review the Plan in the light of any significant policy shifts*’**
- b) **Replace ‘were’ with ‘are’ in line 4 of paragraph 6.5**

(j) Community Projects

- 6.223 This section of the Plan highlights the community projects and aspirations which were identified as important during the preparation of the Plan, and which do not necessarily fulfil the criteria to be included as land use and development policies.

Comments

- 6.224 I recognise that plan making at the local level will inevitably focus on wide ranging aspirations of the community, some of which may be non land use based. Where neighbourhood plans incorporate non land use policies and aspirations it is important that these are clearly distinguishable from the land use and development policies that will be used to inform the decision making process.
- 6.225 The inclusion of projects and aspirations in a separate section is a practical response to this issue. This has enabled non land use aspirations to be consulted on and incorporated within the document in a way in which the ‘aspirations’ will not be confused with land use policies. I acknowledge that some community projects, such as upgrading Steppey Lane footbridge, are also identified as schemes that are specifically supported in Policy 11

(Improvements to Walking and Cycling Routes). As these have a land use dimension which is linked to other wide ranging projects, as referred to previously, I am therefore not recommending their exclusion in this case.

(k) Appendices and Glossary of Terms

- 6.226 In addition to changes recommended previously in my report a number of changes are required to correct inaccuracies and definitions in the appendices and Glossary of Terms. It would also be helpful to date the background papers listed in Appendix A as I have referred to a number of these in my report. The reference to 'Insets' in the Glossary of Terms is also irrelevant as there are no towns or villages that are Inset in the Green Belt in the Neighbourhood Area.
- 6.227 I also agree with Northumberland CC that the definition of major development in the Glossary is unnecessarily complex and confusing because it is linked to a definition of small scale development. There is also an incorrect reference to a statutory instrument.

Recommendation 19

- a) **In Appendix A change the date of the Habitats Regulations Assessment Report to '*Revised November 2019*', change the title of the Local Green Spaces Background Paper to '*Local Green Spaces, Recreational Spaces and Allotments*, and add dates to those background papers that are undated**
- b) **In the Glossary of Terms insert '*(2019 NPPF definition)*' after 'Affordable Housing', change 'the Act' to '*the 2011 Act*' in 'Basic Conditions', delete the definition of 'Inset', and delete 'RES' after 'Rural Exception Sites'**
- c) **Delete the first sentence and the sixth sentence beginning 'A small development.....' in the definition of 'major development', and replace the '2010 Order' in line 14 with '*The Town and County Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015*'**

7.0 Conclusions and Formal Recommendations

Referendum

- 7.1 I consider the Neighbourhood Plan meets the relevant legal requirements and subject to the modifications recommended in my report it is capable of satisfying the 'Basic Conditions'.
- 7.2 Although there are a number of modifications the essence of the policies would remain, providing a framework for managing future development proposals and conserving and enhancing the local environment.

I therefore recommend that the Neighbourhood Plan should, subject to the recommended modifications, proceed to Referendum.

Voting Area

- 7.3 I am also required to consider whether the Referendum Area should be extended beyond the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area.
- 7.4 As the impact of the policies and proposals contained in the Plan, which does not include any land allocations, is likely to have minimal impact on land and communities outside the defined Neighbourhood Area I consider the Neighbourhood Area to be appropriate.

I therefore recommend that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to Referendum based on the Lesbury Neighbourhood Area as designated by Northumberland CC on 24 July 2017.

Declaration

In submitting this report I confirm that

- I am independent of the qualifying body and the Local Authority.
- I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan and
- I possess appropriate qualifications and planning and development experience, comprising over 45 years experience in development management, planning policy, conservation and implementation gained across the public, private, and community sectors.

Examiner Terry Raymond Heselton BA (Hons), DiP TP, MRTPI

Dated 23 June 2020

Appendix 1 :

List of Documents referred to in connection with the examination of the Lesbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

- Submission Draft Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan (November 2019)
- Submission Draft Lesbury Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map (November 2019)
- Basic Conditions Statement (November 2019)
- Consultation Statement (November 2019)
- Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report (October 2019)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment Report (Revised November 2019)
- Settlement Boundaries for Lesbury, Hipsburn and Bilton Background Paper (May 2019)
- Local Green Spaces, Recreational Spaces and Allotments Background Paper (June 2019)
- Non-designated Heritage Assets Background Paper and Supporting Information
- Housing Needs Survey Final Report (Community Action Northumberland) (February 2018)
- National Planning Policy Framework (2019 version)
- National Planning Practice Guidance
- Historic England Advice Note 7 – Local Heritage Listing
- Historic England Advice Note 11 – Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment (October 2018)
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)
- The Localism Act (2011)
- The Housing and Planning Act 2018
- The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (2012) (as amended)
- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004)
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species and Planning (Various Amendments) (England and Wales) Regulations 2018
- The Alnwick District Core Strategy (adopted October 2007)
- Saved policies in the Alnwick District Wide local plan (adopted April 1997)

- Draft Northumberland Local Plan (Publication Draft version January 2019)
- Representations received from eight local residents and from or on behalf of seven organisations during the Regulation 16 Publicity period
- Lesbury Parish Council's comments on the Regulation 16 representations (dated 31 March 2020) which can be viewed on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages
- Examiners Questions (dated 8 April 2020) and NCC and LPC combined response to the examiners questions (dated 28 April 2020) which can be viewed on Northumberland CC's Neighbourhood Plan web pages

I also accessed Northumberland CC's planning policy web pages and Lesbury Parish Council web pages during the course of the examination.