

West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

Pre-Submission Draft

February 2022 – DRAFT
2022-2036



Foreword

The West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan sets out the opportunities and challenges for our plan to address. It includes a positive vision, strategy and range of policies that will guide development in West Bedlington for the period to 2036. These include, but not limited to, the quality of life for our residents, community well-being, local economy and accessibility.

This draft West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan has been drawn up by a working group of town councillors with input from residents and community groups. The preparation of the plan has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We undertook consultation on a draft plan during spring 2021. However, following the progress that had been made on the Northumberland Local Plan as well as feedback, we decided to undertake further work and to consult on an updated draft plan prior to submitting it to the county council for examination.

Our draft plan looks forward to 2036 and suggests policies and proposals that we believe will sustainably and effectively manage the future growth and development of West Bedlington and ensure our heritage and environment is protected and enhanced.

Once adopted, the policies within the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan will be used by planning officers at Northumberland County Council to determine planning applications. The plan will also be used by planning inspectors when deciding planning appeals. It will be part of the statutory development plan for the area and policies within it will supersede some policies in the old Wansbeck District Local Plan and provide further details to the strategic policies set out within the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

The working group have put in a huge amount of work to get to this point and on behalf of West Bedlington Town Council I would like to thank all those who have inputted to it.

The town council look forward to receiving comments on the draft plan.

Councillor Adam Hogg
Chair of Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

Contents

Foreword	x
1. Introduction	x
Background to neighbourhood planning	x
Planning context	x
Background to the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan	x
How to get involved	x
Next steps	x
2. The key issues for the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan	x
3. Vision and objectives	x
4. Quality of life	x
Background	x
Design	x
Location of new development	x
Green infrastructure and the natural environment	x
Local green space	x
Protected open space	x
Bedlington Conservation Area	x
5. Community well-being	x
Background	x
Housing	x
Community services and facilities	x
Allotments	x
Infrastructure	x
6. Local economy	x
Background	x
Employment	x
Bedlington town centre	x
7. Accessibility	
Background	x
Transport and new development	x
Annex 1: Community actions	x
Annex 2: Design Codes	x

1. Introduction

Background to neighbourhood planning

- 1.1 Neighbourhood planning is a right for communities introduced through the Localism Act 2011. Neighbourhood plans are community-led, prepared by town and parish councils. They set out guidance on how new development will be managed. They do this by creating land use 'planning policies'. Plans can deal with a wide range of issues like housing, employment, heritage and transport. In some cases, they may only focus on one or two issues that are of particular importance in a local area. Policies within neighbourhood plans cannot block development or support less than already committed in the statutory development plan. What they can do is shape where that development will go and what it will look like.
- 1.2 Neighbourhood plans can also cover issues which are not related to the use and development of land. They can provide a useful document in which a town or parish council can establish priorities for action to improve their area. These are often referred to as 'community actions'. However, the main purpose of a neighbourhood plan is to set policies for the use and development of land.
- 1.3 Once a neighbourhood plan has been: examined by an independent examiner; agreed at the referendum stage by the local community; and 'made' (brought into legal force) by the local planning authority it becomes part of the statutory development plan. Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning context

- 1.4 As they are part of the development plan, neighbourhood plans must be prepared in line with legal requirements. The way in which neighbourhood plans are prepared and the policies they contain are tested by an independent examiner who assesses whether the plan meets the 'basic conditions' to ensure they are legally compliant. Neighbourhood plans must:
 - Have regard to national planning policy and guidance;
 - Be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan;
 - Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
 - Be compatible with legal obligations.

National planning policy and guidance

- 1.5 National planning policy and guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

Development plan

- 1.6 Currently, the development plan for Northumberland consists of the saved policies of the former local planning authorities that made-up Northumberland before Local Government Reorganisation in 2009. For the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Area, these are the policies set out within the Wansbeck District Local Plan (2007).
- 1.7 Northumberland County Council (NCC) has prepared a new Local Plan which will replace the existing saved planning policies. This was submitted for examination in May 2019 and is now undergoing examination.

- 1.8 The West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan ('the plan') has been informed by the adopted Wansbeck Local Plan policies and the emerging Northumberland Local Plan.

Sustainable development

- 1.9 The purpose of the planning system is to help achieve sustainable development as defined by the NPPF. This specifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be the basis for every plan and every planning decision. In brief, 'sustainable development' is about growth which delivers economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations. The basic conditions statement, that will accompany the submission plan, will explain how the implementation of the plan is expected to contribute to sustainable development.

Legal obligations

- 1.10 Neighbourhood plans must be compatible with legal obligations, specifically strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and habitats regulations, through an appropriate assessment (AA). The SEA is a way of ensuring that the environmental implications of policies are taken into account before plans are brought into force. The AA process aims to ensure that the plan will not result in significant damage to internationally important nature conservation sites. The SEA and AA process is on-going and informing the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. A draft SEA and AA are available for comment alongside this pre-submission draft plan.

Background to the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

- 1.11 On 3 May 2016 the parish of West Bedlington was designated as a neighbourhood area for the purposes of neighbourhood planning, see figure 1. The process of preparing the plan began in the spring of 2016, when residents were asked to respond to a survey about the local area. During 2016 and 2017, the work on the plan was led by the Bedlington Partnership, overseen by the town council. In Autumn 2018 the town council made the decision to take the lead on the preparation of the plan.
- 1.12 There have been four rounds of early engagement to obtain views of the local community and other stakeholders on the scope of the plan.
- Spring 2016 – online survey to capture issues for the plan to address;
 - Autumn 2018 – sought further feedback on issues for the neighbourhood plan to address;
 - Spring 2019 – engagement on a draft vision, objectives and policy themes for the plan; and
 - Autumn 2019 – engagement on areas to be identified as local green space and protected open space.
- 1.13 In spring 2021 the town council consulted on a pre-submission draft plan. This consultation was due to take place in spring 2020, however because of the COVID-19 pandemic it was delayed for a year. Since the preparation of the draft neighbourhood plan, the Northumberland Local Plan is at a much more advanced stage and is scheduled for adoption in March 2022. The local plan contains a wide range of policies that do not need to be repeated within the neighbourhood plan. Therefore, following feedback from NCC and other stakeholders, the town council decided to undertake further work on the neighbourhood plan and seek further feedback prior to its submission for examination.
- 1.14 Early engagement has informed the preparation of this document, which is the pre-submission draft plan. This draft plan identifies:

- The context in which the plan has been prepared – an overview of West Bedlington, the **opportunities and challenges** for the plan to address;
- A **positive vision** for the future of the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Area;
- How the vision of the plan will be **delivered through planning policies** i.e. the policies that **will be used to determine planning applications** within the plan area – providing a framework for sustainable development; and
- How the vision of the plan will be **delivered through community actions** i.e. measures which are **intended to encourage action and influence decisions** taken by relevant bodies.

1.15 Full details of the engagement undertaken that has informed the preparation of the plan will be included within a statement of consultation which will accompany the submission draft plan.

1.16 The period covered by the plan is to 2036, this aligns with the emerging Northumberland Local Plan. During this period, the neighbourhood plan will be reviewed and updated where required.

1.17 The background documents that have informed the preparation of this pre-submission plan are available online at: westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/.

How to get involved

1.18 The draft plan has been informed by community engagement and evidence work. We need your input to ensure the plan and policies we have drafted fully reflect the views of local people.

1.19 You can let us know your views on this draft plan in the following ways:

- By email to: nplanwbtc@gmail.com ; or
- By letter to: West Bedlington Town Council, Bedlington Community Centre, Front Street West, Bedlington, NE22 5TT.

1.20 Comments must be received **by noon on xxxxx**.

Next steps

1.21 Following the end of the consultation period the town council will review the responses received and identify if any changes need to be made to the plan and its evidence base.

1.22 The current timetable for the next stages of the plan making process is:

- Submission of the plan to NCC for examination: summer 2022;
- Consultation on the submission plan: summer 2022;
- Examination of the plan by an independent examiner: summer/ autumn 2022;
- Referendum: winter 2022; and
- Neighbourhood plan 'made' by NCC: winter 2022.

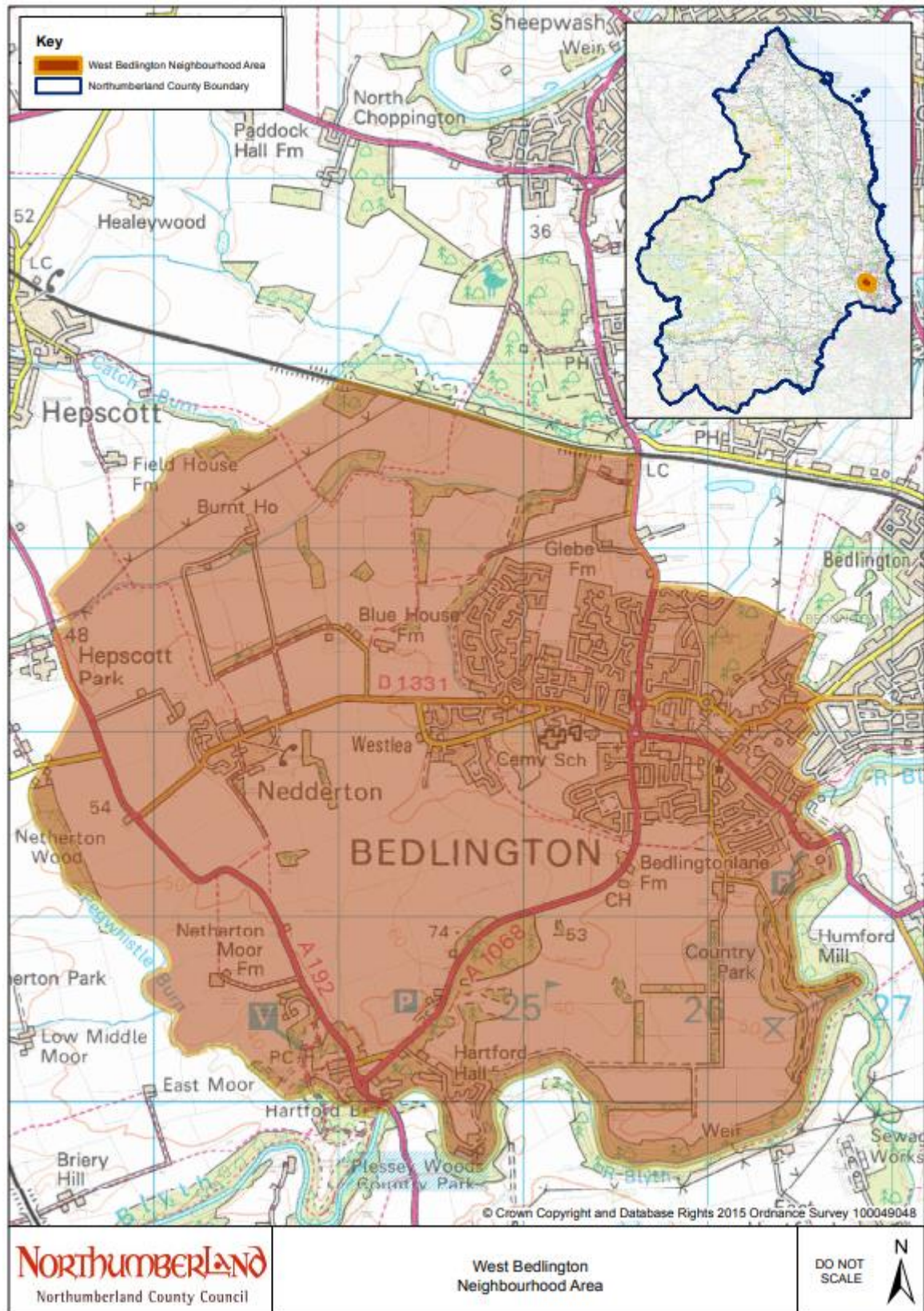


Figure 1: West Bedlington Neighbourhood Area

2. The key issues for the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan

Background to West Bedlington

The growth of the town

- 2.1 West Bedlington has a long history with Saxon origins. There is a suggestion that the remains of St Cuthbert rested at the site of St Cuthbert's church in 1069. Bedlington was previously part of County Durham, until 1844 when it was made part of Northumberland.
- 2.2 In the 1730s the market town began to change its focus to that of the industries of ironstone and coal. Bedlington became pivotal to infrastructure production for the new railway industry led by the Stephenson's of Newcastle. Commerce, industry and housing flourished, plus churches, schools, institutions and many pubs were developed. By the late 1900s, collieries and miners' terraces were added to the town, as well as upmarket housing.
- 2.3 During the late twentieth century, modern housing and low-density development was built to the north. Over the last 5 years there has been a number of large sites granted planning permission for residential development to the north (Glebe Farm – 500 units) and west (Blue House Farm – 180 units) of the plan area.

Population and housing

- 2.4 The Census identifies that in 2011 the plan area comprised 9,951 residents, living in 4,375 households. With regard to the age profile: 53.6% of residents were aged between 25 and 64; 18.6% aged 65 and over; with 17.9% of the population aged 15 and under.
- 2.5 In 2011, 89.6% of housing was described as a whole house or bungalow, the majority of which (37.8%) were semi-detached, then detached (32.3%), with terraced properties comprising 19.5%. 10.1% of the accommodation stock was described as flats, maisonettes or apartments. 39.8% of households owned their home with a mortgage or loan and 31.4% were owned outright. 16.6% of households were in the social rented sector and 11.6% private rented.
- 2.6 Of those aged 16-74 (5,124), 70.6% were economically active, with 42.7% employed full time. The main industries that residents were employed in 2011 were: human health and social work (16.3%); wholesale, retail trade (13.2%), public administration (12.3%) and manufacturing (10.8%).
- 2.7 Parish level health information illustrates that 46.1% of the community consider they are in very good health, 32.6% consider themselves to be in good health, 14.9% in fair health, 4.8% in bad health and 1.6% in very bad health.

Services, facilities and connectivity

- 2.8 The plan area provides a number of services and facilities to meet the day to day needs of local residents, including: schools, convenience stores, public houses and social clubs, cricket and golf clubs, a community centre and churches. However, residents rely on neighbouring towns such as Cramlington and Morpeth to gain access to a wider range of services and facilities. The town centre includes a large vacant brownfield site with proposals for its redevelopment to improve the retail offer of the town now being taken forward.
- 2.9 West Bedlington is well connected to the strategic road network, with the A189 located to the east, this connects Bedlington to Ashington and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea in the north and

Cramlington and the Tyneside conurbation to the south. The A1068 also connects Bedlington to Ashington, while the A193 provides a link to Blyth to the east. The B1331 links Bedlington to the A192, connecting the town to Morpeth.

Environment

- 2.10 Residents of the plan area benefit from easy access to a wealth of green spaces, including Humford Woods, Attlee Park, Plessey Woods, Gallagher Park and Doctor Pit Park. There are also important environmental designations within the plan area, including ancient woodland, local nature reserves and local wildlife sites. The centre of Bedlington is designated as a conservation area and the plan area contains 33 listed buildings, three of which are grade II*.

Key issues

- 2.11 Early engagement on the plan identified that there were a number of important issues for the neighbourhood plan to look to address through planning policies, including the:
- Importance of conserving and enhancing the valued natural and built environment, particularly green spaces/ networks and the heritage of the area;
 - Need to support the creation of new employment opportunities;
 - Lack of services and community facilities, as well as protecting existing facilities;
 - Concerns over whether the provision of infrastructure will keep pace with the level of development across the plan area, particularly roads, school and health care capacity;
 - Lack of affordable housing;
 - Need to support improvements in the town centre – more attractive shops and restaurants; and
 - Importance of allotments.
- 2.12 In addition, feedback suggested that the following matters should be considered through the development of appropriate community actions:
- Need to continue to celebrate the important heritage of the area;
 - Desire for improvements to the local environment e.g., townscape enhancements;
 - Concern over increased levels of dog fouling;
 - Management of antisocial behaviour;
 - Protecting community facilities as assets of community value;
 - Parking; and
 - Access to toilets.
- 2.13 The feedback from early engagement informed the preparation of the vision and objectives for the neighbourhood plan as well as the planning policies and community actions, which present opportunities to tackle the issues identified.

3. Vision and objectives

Vision

- 3.1 The vision sets out what the West Bedlington Neighbourhood Plan intends to achieve over the plan period to 2036, it informs all the draft policies and community actions contained within this pre-submission plan.

A Vision for West Bedlington
<p><i>By 2036 West Bedlington will comprise a sustainable and cohesive community. There will be an appreciation of the importance of the heritage of the area, which is vital to the areas sense of place, as well as giving local communities a sense of belonging.</i></p> <p><i>Improvements will have been made to the local environment, employment opportunities, services and facilities which will enhance the quality of life of residents. Communities will be well-connected, via sustainable transport routes to major employment opportunities as well as greater services and facilities beyond the plan area.</i></p> <p><i>The important environmental and historic character of the area will have been maintained and enhanced by ensuring new development is of an appropriate scale and design, as well as reflecting the rural setting of the plan area. Important green spaces will be protected for the benefit of current as well as future generations.</i></p>

Objectives

- 3.2 To deliver the vision, four objectives have been developed. The objectives clearly relate to the issues identified through early engagement. The planning policies and community actions contained within this pre-submission plan will deliver the objectives.

Objectives
<p>Objective 1 – Quality of life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Ensuring new development is sustainable, contributing positively to the built, historic and natural environment of the plan area. New development will be managed to ensure that important green spaces are protected.
<p>Objective 2 – Community well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Building on the strong sense of community across the plan area and recognising the diverse needs of existing and future residents, by: supporting the provision of different types of housing that people can afford and meet identified needs, including those of an ageing population; and ensuring the local community has access to the services and facilities they need.
<p>Objective 3 – Local economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Supporting both existing and the creation of new employment opportunities across the plan area. Protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre as an important source of local employment and service centre.
<p>Objective 4 – Accessibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Promoting access to sustainable modes of transport which connect local communities to employment as well as the services and facilities which they require.

Ensuring that the environmental quality of the plan area is protected by effectively managing traffic.

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4. Quality of life

Background

- 4.1 The quality of life within the plan area is highly valued by local residents, this has been confirmed during early engagement on the plan. Local residents want to ensure that new development contributes positively to the built, historic and natural environment of the plan area. As well as achieving a balance between development and protecting important green spaces. This is recognised within objective 1 of the neighbourhood plan.

Design

- 4.2 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, it creates better places in which people live and work. It is fundamental to what the planning and development process should deliver and will ensure that new development contributes positively to the local environment and therefore enhances the quality of life of local residents. The NPPF highlights the importance the government attaches to good design, recognising the significant role that neighbourhood plans can play in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in new development.
- 4.3 In addition, that national design guide sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. The national model design code provides further detailed guidance to promote successful design. There are also several good practice guidance documents that can help inform the design of development, such as Building for a Healthy Life, which is a government endorsed industry standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods.
- 4.4 The West Bedlington Design Code (2022), prepared by AECOM as part of the governments technical support package for neighbourhood planning, provides an analysis of the special characteristics of the parish and identifies design approaches to illustrate how future development can preserve and enhance local distinctiveness. The design code forms part of this plan and has been used to inform policy WB1. **Add further info from the design code once available.**
- 4.5 Policy WB2 encourages high quality and sustainable design and sets out the key principles that should be addressed as part of proposals for new development whilst seeking to ensure the plan area does not place unnecessary restrictions on new development. The policy is cross cutting and will help to deliver all the plan objectives.

Policy WB1: Design – **update once design code available**

Development should conserve and enhance local distinctiveness by demonstrating high quality design which both respects existing character and responds to the distinctive character of the area, having regard to the West Bedlington Design Code (Annex 2). Development will be supported where it has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the local planning authority that, where appropriate, it:

- a. Maintains and where possible enhances the character of the locality, paying particular attention to the appearance, size, scale and density of the proposed development;
- b. Uses materials which complement those of adjoining and surrounding buildings;
- c. Conserves or enhances the significance of heritage assets, including the contribution made by their setting;

- d. Takes account of the topography and natural features of the site and considers the impact of the development when viewed from surrounding areas of countryside;
- e. Respects established building lines and introduces boundary treatments and roof lines that are in keeping with the street scene;
- f. Demonstrates a commitment to sustainable design and construction to minimise energy use;
- g. Provides adequate refuse and recycling storage, which is incorporated into the scheme to minimise visual impact;
- h. Adopts the principles of sustainable drainage;
- i. Ensures the development will not prejudice the amenity of its future occupiers or that of adjacent properties in terms of overshadowing, loss of light, dominance, loss of privacy, noise or general disturbance;
- j. Provides sufficient car parking and cycle storage, which is appropriately sites within the development;
- k. Incorporates measures to support species and habitats;
- l. Will not result in unacceptable levels of noise, air or water pollution; and
- m. Creates a safe, accessible and well-connected environment that meets the needs of its users.

Where a design and access statement is required as part of a planning application, there should be a clear demonstration of how the proposal has responded to the above principles as an integral part of the design process.

Location of new development

- 4.6 The Northumberland Local Plan defines a settlement boundary for Bedlington in order to manage the location of new development and protect the countryside from unsuitable development, prevent the merger of settlements and maintain their character. The boundary seeks to maintain the separation between the settlements of Bedlington, Nedderton and Hartford Bridge. The NPPF identifies that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless specific criteria are met.
- 4.7 Land to the west of the plan area lies within the Green Belt. The Green Belt boundary excludes Nedderton and properties at Hartford Bridge, however properties at Hartford Hall are included within the Green Belt. Development proposals in the Green Belt will be considered against the requirements of the NPPF. The town council do not consider it is necessary to repeat the longstanding provisions of Green Belt policy within the neighbourhood plan, neither is it necessary to repeat policies contained within the local plan. The settlement hierarchy defined within the local plan (policy STP1) and the associated settlement boundary will protect the countryside from inappropriate development.

Green infrastructure and the natural environment

- 4.8 West Bedlington benefits from a rich natural environment, with a wide range of species and habitats including: Bedlington Country Park Nature Reserve, ancient woodland, deciduous woodland, woodland included on the national forest inventory and a traditional orchard (which is a priority habitat). Whilst there are no sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) within the plan area, the Willow Burn Pasture SSSI lies just outside the boundary, within Choppington Parish. The plan area lies within a priority area for targeting curlew and lapwing and is important for both farmland and sea birds. In addition, part of the south-east Northumberland Wildlife Network lies within the parish (figure 2).



Figure 2: Natural Environment Designations

- 4.9 Green infrastructure encompasses wildlife networks and corridors, open spaces and landscape corridors and linkages to the wider countryside. The NPPF defines green infrastructure as: ‘A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity’. As a network, green infrastructure can include: parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include: streams, canals and other water bodies and features such as green roofs and walls.
- 4.10 As green infrastructure is close to where people live, it can play a key role in supporting the health of the local community. It also supports wildlife, climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as helping to improve air quality.
- 4.11 The local plan includes policies to ensure the protection and enhancement of the natural environment as well as green infrastructure networks and assets, particularly policies ENV1 and ENV2. The neighbourhood plan has an important role in identifying and protecting spaces which are of importance to the local community and providing other important local detail.

Local green space

- 4.12 Green spaces are a vital part of a vibrant and healthy community and are of great importance to the character and identity of a place. They are valued for a wide range of reasons including: visual amenity; historic significance; recreational value; tranquillity; and richness of wildlife. Uncontrolled changes to green spaces can irrevocably alter their special character or intrinsic value.
- 4.13 The NPPF enables neighbourhood plans to designate areas of local green space for special protection, thereby preventing development on these sites other than in very special

circumstances. These spaces do not need to be publicly accessible but must be in reasonably close proximity to the community they serve. The land must also be demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance. The designation cannot be applied to an extensive track of land, so should be local in character.

- 4.14 The sites listed in policy WB2 and shown on the policies map are proposed to be designated as local green space as they meet the criteria set out within national policy and guidance. A background paper has been prepared to outline the reasons why the sites are of particular importance to the local community and to explain the process that led to their proposed designation¹. The designation of the sites will assist with the delivery of plan objectives 1 and 2.

Policy WB2: Local green space

The following areas, as defined on the policies map, are designated as local green space and will be protected in a manner consistent with the protection of land within the Green Belt:

- LGS1 Front Street West;
- LGS2 Front Street East;
- LGS3 South Park/ 20 Acre Playing Field;
- LGS4 St Cuthbert's Churchyard and grounds;
- LGS5 Bedlington Cemetery;
- LSG6 Market Place;
- LGS7 Bedlington Country Park/ Humford Wood;
- LGS8 Attlee Park;
- LGS9 Doctor Pit Park;
- LGS10 Gallagher Park;
- LSG11 Acorn Bank; and
- LGS12 Green letch adjacent to Hazelmere Estate.

Management of any development within these local green spaces must be consistent with national policy on Green Belts. Development of the land will not be permitted other than where very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the local green space by reason of inappropriateness and other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Protected open space

- 4.15 There are many areas of open space which are valued for their local amenity value and for formal and informal recreational purposes, but which do not meet the detailed allocation criteria for designation as local green space.
- 4.16 The sites listed in policy WB4 and shown on the policies map are proposed to be designated as protected as they are important to the local community. A background paper has been prepared to outline the reasons why the sites are important and to explain the process that led to their proposed designation². The assessment takes account of the areas that are identified for inclusion within the local plan as protected open space (see figure 3) and does not repeat this designation.

¹ westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/

² westbedlington.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/

- 4.17 Policy WB3 requires that any loss of protected open space resulting from new development should be replaced by at least equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, including amenity value. Importantly, the new provision should be in a suitable location. It is expected that when considering whether a location for the replacement open space is 'suitable', that a key consideration is whether the new space is easily accessible by the local community. It should therefore be in the near vicinity of the protected open space that it will be replacing. The designation of the sites will assist with the delivery of plan objectives 1 and 2.

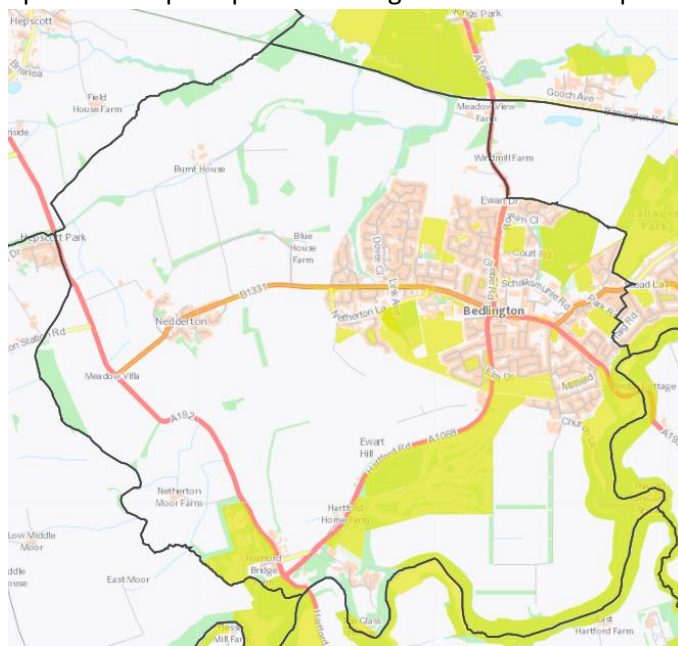


Figure 3: Protected open space identified in the local plan

Policy WB3: Protected open space

The following areas of open space, as defined on the policies map, shall be protected from development:

- POS01 Gallagher Park extension;
- POS02 Edinburgh Drive;
- POS03 West of Warwick Grove;
- POS04 Skipton Court;
- POS05 Alnwick Drive;
- POS06 Alnwick Drive/ B1331;
- POS07 Dunstanburgh;
- POS08 Hessop Way (north);
- POS09 Hessop Way (south);
- POS10 Coverdale;
- POS11 Milfield;
- POS12 Schalksmuhle Road;
- POS13 Adjacent to cricket club;
- POS14 Hirst Head;
- POS15 West Lea/ Netherton Lane;

Development that will result in the loss of protected open space will only be supported where the applicant has robustly demonstrated to the satisfaction of the local planning authority, that the:

- a. Open space is surplus to requirements; or
- b. Loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by open space of equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality, including amenity value, in a suitable location; or
- c. Development is for alternative recreation provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss of the open space.

Bedlington Conservation Area

- 4.18 As explained in section 2, West Bedlington has a rich history. Planning policies have an important role in protecting heritage assets, which can be designated or non-designated. Designated assets have statutory status and include listed buildings and conservation areas. A non-designated asset is a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which does not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets.
- 4.19 The glossary of the NPPF defines a heritage asset as:
'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).'
- 4.20 The NPPF states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and requires them to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Also, that planning decision affecting a heritage asset are required to be based on a sound understanding of the significance of the asset and the impact of the proposal on that significance.
- 4.21 West Bedlington has a diverse heritage, with Saxon origins and links to St Cuthbert. Originally a market town, the focus of the town shifted to the industries of ironstone and coal in the 1730s. Bedlington played a pivotal role to infrastructure production for the new railway industry led by the Stephenson's of Newcastle. Local heritage is important to the local community, not only its designated heritage assets.
- 4.22 The centre of Bedlington is designated as a conservation area and the plan area contains 33 listed buildings, three of which are grade II*. There are also many non-designated heritage assets, these include 193 entries on the Northumberland Historic Environment Record. Local plan policy ENV7 provides protection to the designated and non-designated assets across Northumberland, the significance of which could be affected by new development. It is not necessary to repeat this protection withing the neighbourhood plan. However, it is appropriate for a neighbourhood plan to provide additional detail to that contained within the local plan. There is the opportunity to provide this detail to guide future development within the Bedlington Conservation Area, informed by the character appraisal³ and management strategy⁴.
- 4.23 The Bedlington Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2011) provides an overview of the historical development of the area, spatial and character analysis as well as information of loss, intrusion and damage to the conservation area. The appraisal identifies three distinct parts to the conservation area (West, Market and East) however it explains that these do not vary sufficiently in detailed character to be defined as distinct sub-areas. The conservation area is described as having one long core street with an elbow at the central Market Place, creating three distinct parts. The special interest of the area is described as the modest residential scale and a uniformity of style and materials, providing a coherent and significant layout and form. Reference is also made to the importance of architectural features, particularly windows, doors and shop front openings

³ <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/Conservation/Bedlington-CACA.pdf>

⁴ [https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Consolidated%20Planning%20Policy%20Framework/Section%20B/Part%201%20-%20Adopted%20LDDs%20\(Not%20Statutory\)/Bedlington%20SPD/Bedlington-Conservation-Area-SPD.pdf](https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Consolidated%20Planning%20Policy%20Framework/Section%20B/Part%201%20-%20Adopted%20LDDs%20(Not%20Statutory)/Bedlington%20SPD/Bedlington-Conservation-Area-SPD.pdf)

4.24 Several individual buildings are identified within the character appraisal as being of importance to its significance:

- Public houses: Northumberland Arms, Sun, Market Tavern, Blue Bell, Dun Cow and Black Bull, Red Lion;
- Churches: St Cuthbert's Church and vicarage, St Bede's Catholic Church and Priests House, Former Primitive Methodist Chapel and attached Manse, United Reformed Church and Manse to rear,
- Front Street: 14, 22-26, 28, 36, 92-98;
- Front Street West: Bedlington Community Centre, Windsor House, The Cottage and Demesne Farm, numbers 40, 40a and 40b, 50-60 and 78-82;
- Hartford Road: Masonic Lodge, Former police station and courthouse;
- No 10 Vulcan Place;
- Laird's House;
- Former school.

4.25 The character appraisal also describes important views. It explains that there are few hilltop vistas or panoramas due to the mostly tight enclosure of buildings along each side of the street. It is possible to get occasional glimpses of distant views through narrow gaps. The only key views are those to and from Market Place, along Front Street in both directions. The character appraisal explains that as part of this view, visual containment is almost unbroken, creating strong enclosure. The composition and protection of these views is described as being critical to the character of the conservation area as they define its experience.

4.26 The management strategy seeks to guide the preservation and enhancement of the conservation area. It provides information and guidance on a number of matters including: locally important buildings; demolition; permitted development rights; enforcement; areas of archaeological sensitivity; design; building maintenance and repair; regeneration and enhancement opportunities; and public realm, green spaces and trees.

4.27 Policy WB4 seeks to ensure that new development in or affecting the Bedlington Conservation Area will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area and its setting.

Policy WB4: Bedlington Conservation Area

Development in or affecting the setting of the Bedlington Conservation Area will be supported where it preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting.

The following are key considerations when assessing the impact of development on the character or appearance of the conservation area and its setting. It must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the local planning authority that, where appropriate, the development:

- a. Maintains the distinct scale and a uniformity of style and materials, providing a coherent and significant layout and form;
- b. Reflects locally distinctive architectural characteristics, vernacular building forms and materials; and
- c. Preserves or enhances the key views to and from Market Place, along Front Street in both directions.

In assessing the impact of a development on the significance of the conservation area, consideration must be given to the impact of it on the following key buildings:

- CA1 The Northumberland Arms Public House
- CA2 The Sun Public House
- CA3 The Market Tavern Public House
- CA4 The Blue Bell Public House
- CA5 The Dun Cow Public House
- CA6 The Black Bull Public House
- CA7 The Red Lion Public House
- CA8 St Cuthbert's Church and vicarage;
- CA9 St Bede's Catholic Church and Priests House;
- CA10 Former Primitive Methodist Chapel and attached manse;
- CA11 United Reformed Church and manse to rear;
- CA12 Number 14 Front Street;
- CA13 Numbers 22-26 Front Street;
- CA14 Number 28 Front Street;
- CA15 Number 36 Front Street;
- CA16 Numbers 92-98 Front Street;
- CA17 Bedlington Community Centre;
- CA18 Windsor House;
- CA19 The Cottage and Demesne Farm;
- CA20 Number 40 Front Street West
- CA21 Numbers 50-60 Front Street West;
- CA22 Numbers 78-82 Front Street West;
- CA23 Masonic Lodge, Hartford Road;
- CA24 Former police station and courthouse;
- CA25 No 10 Vulcan Place;
- CA26 Laird's House;
- CA27 Former school.

Development that would lead to substantial harm to, or total loss of, significance of any aspect of the conservation area that contributes to its significance will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the conservation area this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area

- 4.28 There are a number of shops within the Bedlington Conservation Area. They are very prominent and comprise a large part of the floor space. The conservation area character appraisal highlights the impact of poorly designed shop fronts to the significance of the area. Good design of any replacement shop fronts is important not only to the character of the area but also to ensure the town centre remains an attractive place for businesses to locate.
- 4.29 As a result of the potential impact, the former district council prepared a shop front design guide for Bedlington and Newbiggin by the Sea Conservation Areas, which was adopted as supplementary planning guidance. This guidance, along with the conservation area character appraisal and management plan have informed policy WB5, which identifies criteria to guide

the assessment of proposals for new or replacement shop fronts within the conservation area, supporting the delivery of plan objective 1.

Policy WB5: Shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area

New or replacements shop fronts in Bedlington Conservation Area will be supported where the proposed development reflects the architectural style, scale, proportions, materials and colour of both the host building and the surrounding conservation area.

Proposals must be supported by sufficient information to demonstrate how, where appropriate:

- a. It retains shop fronts and other features which are of architectural or historic interest. Where it is not possible to retain the whole shop front, development proposals should aim to retain features which contribute positively to the character of the building and surrounding conservation area. Surviving historic features and archive research should inform the design of new shop fronts;
- b. The design and decoration of the shop front complements the proportions, scale and characteristics of the host building and has been informed by the characteristics of the surrounding conservation area;
- c. The design of the shop front takes into account the rhythm, lines and key characteristics of the street;
- d. Where a shop occupies the ground floor of more than one building, the design and proportions of each shop front relates to each individual building;
- e. The shop front does not obscure any existing architectural features or decoration of the upper floors;
- f. The proportions of the fascia, signage area and glazing are appropriately balanced with the shop front frame and upper-floor windows;
- g. Where security measures are needed, they have been designed as an integral part of the shop front, avoiding the use of external roller shutters. If there is no alternative to an external roller shutter, ensure that it is open weave and the shutter box is contained behind the fascia.

5. Community well-being

Background

- 5.1 The NPPF identifies that the planning system has an important role to play in creating healthy, inclusive communities. NPPG defines a healthy community as a good place to grow up and grow old in, a community which supports healthy behaviours and supports reductions in health inequalities.
- 5.2 Plan objective 2 seeks to build on the strong sense of community across the plan area, whilst recognising the diverse needs of existing and future residents. It acknowledges that supporting the provision of different types of housing that people can afford, as well as that which meets identified needs, can support community well-being. In addition, objective 2 seeks to ensure that the local community has access to the services and facilities it needs.

Housing

- 5.3 The NPPF states that neighbourhood plans should positively support the strategic policies for the area and should not promote less development than is required by the local plan. The emerging Northumberland Local Plan proposes to allocate land to meet the identified needs of the plan area.
- 5.4 Feedback from early engagement highlighted concerns regarding the impact of an ageing population across the plan area and considers it is vitally important to look for ways which allow people to remain living independently within the community for as long as possible. In addition, the town council considers that it is important that the plan supports the provision of housing for young families and for affordable housing.
- 5.5 The local plan includes several policies to ensure that a mix of house sizes, types and tenures are provided to meet needs:
- Policy HOU5 refers to housing types and mix, including specialist housing for older and vulnerable people, affordable housing, community led and self-build housing;
 - Policy HOU6 requires all new housing developments of 10 or more homes to provide affordable housing. In the majority of the parish the requirement would be to provide 15% affordable housing;
 - Policy HOU7 supports the development of affordable homes on sites not allocated for housing adjacent to an existing settlement where there is evidence of need for such homes. It also includes a number of other criteria that must be met; and
 - Policy HOU11 supports the provision of homes for older and vulnerable people.

Community services and facilities

- 5.6 Community facilities are identified in the NPPF as: local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. These facilities enhance the sustainability of local communities and residential environments.
- 5.7 There are a wide variety of community facilities across the plan area, including: schools, convenience stores, public houses, social clubs, cricket and golf clubs, a community centres and churches. These facilities are essential to support the strong sense of community that exists across the plan area. **Do you want to capture any key gaps in local services and facilities?**

- 5.8 The NPPF is clear that the planning system should support the development of new community facilities and that valued community facilities should be retained where appropriate. The local plan provides protection against the loss of local village convenience stores and public houses. It is however acknowledged that planning permission is not always required to change the use of a building or land and this therefore removes the ability to retain a valued facility.
- 5.9 Policy WB6 therefore supports the provision of new and enhancement of existing community facilities, as well seeking to resist the loss of existing facilities, this will assist with the delivery of plan objective 2. **If you want to include this policy, you will need to identify those services and facilities which are of importance to the local community – if not there is a local plan policy that I can refer to here and delete policy WB7.**

Policy WB6: Community services and facilities

Development proposals to enhance the provision of community services and facilities will be supported where the following criteria are met:

- a. The proposal will not generate unacceptable noise, fumes, smell or other disturbance to adjoining properties;
- b. The proposal will not have an adverse impact on highway operation or safety; and
- c. Access arrangements and sufficient off-street parking can be provided to the satisfaction of the local planning authority without negatively impacting on adjoining uses.

The following facilities are identified as having great importance to the local community and are identified on the policies map:

- CF1 xxxx;
- CF2 xxxx;
- CF3 xxxx;
- CF4 xxxx;

The following types of commercial services are identified as being essential to the future sustainability of the plan area: xxxx

A development that would result in the loss of a building or land which provides a community service or facility will only be supported where the applicant can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the local planning authority that:

- d. It is no longer needed in its current form;
- e. A replacement service or facility of sufficient size, layout and quality is to be provided on an alternative suitable location; or
- f. It would not be economically viable or feasible to retain the service or facility and there is no reasonable prospect of securing an alternative community use of the land or building.

Allotments

- 5.10 There are two allotments in the plan area at Ridge Terrace and Doctor Pit. The allotments are valued by allotment holders and their families. They provide significant physical and mental health benefits as well as the provision of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Allotments are also part of the green infrastructure of the area. Policy WB7 seeks to ensure that existing allotments are protected, which will assist with the delivery of plan objective 1 and 2.

Policy WB7: Allotments

The following allotment sites, as defined on the Policies Map, will be protected from development:

- A1 Ridge Terrace; and
- A2 Doctor Pit

Development resulting in the loss of any of the allotment sites identified would only be supported where

a replacement allotment of at least equivalent quality and quantity, in a convenient location for the users, is provided fit for use, prior to the loss of the allotment land or any part of it.

The provision of new allotments will be supported to meet locally identified demand.

Infrastructure

- 5.11 The infrastructure requirements of new development will vary depending on the type, scale and nature of the proposals. It could include the provision of: open space, public transport, education, leisure and medical facilities. The town council has particular concern over: the current provision of medical facilities; the lack of suitable indoor leisure provision; lack of provision for cycling across the plan area; and poor public transport connections in some parts of the plan area, particularly access to rail connections.
- 5.12 Local plan policy INF1 requires that to ensure development is acceptable, proposals must demonstrate that there is sufficient physical, community, social and green infrastructure capacity both on and off site, to support the needs arising from the development. It is therefore not necessary to repeat these requirements within the neighbourhood plan.

6. Local economy

Background

- 6.1 National policy requires significant weight to be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity. Plan objective 3 seeks to ensure that the plan supports both existing and the creation of new employment opportunities across the plan area, as well as protecting and enhancing the vitality and viability of the town centre.

Employment

- 6.2 The economy of the plan area is diverse, ranging from retail, farming and some industry. There is also employment in the local schools, police station and magistrates' court. The businesses on Front Street provide a large amount of local employment to people who live in the area. However, most residents travel elsewhere to access employment.
- 6.3 The local plan includes policies which will ensure, where planning permission is required, the retention and growth of local businesses as well as protecting employment land from non-employment generating uses. Policy ECN1 seeks to deliver economic growth, whilst safeguarding the environment and community well-being. The policy supports: the delivery of employment development to meet identified requirements; existing and new businesses; town centres as locations for employment and businesses; regeneration of existing employment areas; alongside the training and upskilling of the workforce. Policy ECN11 supports businesses located in built up areas as well as homeworking, where specific criteria can be met.
- 6.4 As a result of the detail contained within the local plan, it is considered that the neighbourhood plan could not add anything further to that contained within the local plan. The local plan also includes several policies which will maintain and reinforce the role of Bedlington as a main town.

Bedlington town centre

- 6.5 The local plan identifies Bedlington Town Centre as a 'main town - smaller centre' and highlights that a positive approach is needed to facilitate modern retail floorspace on a modest scale. Specific reference is made to the need to consider new town centre development to the north of Front Street within the constraints of the conservation area designation. Policy TCS2 defines the town centre boundary (figure 4).

- 6.6 Policy TCS3 seeks to maintain and enhance the role of centres across the county. It recognises their role as community and service hubs as well as being vital and viable centres for shopping, business, culture and leisure as well as places to live, work and visit. Policy TCS4 seeks to resist proposals for town centre uses outside the defined town centre boundary (figure 4) to



Figure 4: Bedlington Town Centre Boundary

protect the vitality and viability of the centre. Policy TCS5 supports development within town centres which would encourage people to visit and improve their environment. As a result of the detail contained within the local plan, it is considered that the neighbourhood plan could not add anything further to that contained within the local plan.

DRAFT

7. Accessibility

Background

- 7.1 The private car provides the principal mode of transport for residents of the plan area, with 79.4%⁵ of the working population traveling to work by this method. However, 21.5% of households within the plan area have no access to a car or van.
- 7.2 The NPPF encourages a reduction in congestion and greenhouse gas emissions through the introduction of measures which promote a decrease in the number of journeys made by car. Whilst the preparation of transport policy at a local level is primarily a matter for the local planning authority, there are a wide range of areas where the plan can have an influence on accessibility including supporting the protection and enhancement of active travel routes and accessibility in new development.
- 7.3 Plan objective 4 therefore seeks to promote sustainable modes of transport, to connect local communities to the services and facilities they require, whilst ensuring the environmental quality of the plan area is protected by effectively managing traffic.

Sustainable transport and new development

- 7.4 The NPPF identifies that planning policies should support a range of transport modes, with priority given to walking, cycling and public transport as well as consideration of disabled access. Policy WB8 therefore identifies the key considerations for development proposals across the plan area which will assist in the delivery of plan objective 4.

Policy WB8: Sustainable transport and new development

Development will be supported where it maximises the use of sustainable modes of transport. Applicants must demonstrate, where relevant to the proposal, how it has been designed and located to support sustainable transport choices, reducing the need to travel, giving priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Support will be given the development that will improve or extend the walking and cycling network, particularly that which provides greater access for all between existing housing areas, the town centre, green spaces, the countryside and neighbouring towns.

⁵ 2011 census <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20place/Parishes%20and%20towns/Parish%20fact%20sheets/FactSheetParishWestBedlington.pdf>

Annex 1: Community actions

As part of the process of developing the neighbourhood plan, some areas of community concerns were identified that cannot be addressed through the planning system. However, as part of the neighbourhood planning process they can become 'community actions', which are supported by West Bedlington Town Council. These proposals can be delivered in conjunction with other local organisations.

Community action 1: Celebrating our heritage

To develop a programme of community activities and initiatives to raise awareness of and continue to celebrate the important heritage of the plan area.

Community action 2: Townscape enhancements

Informed by the Bedlington Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy prepare a town enhancement programme. This will also consider issues outside the conservation area, including matters such as path/ cycle route maintenance.

Community action 3: Dog fouling

Work with Northumberland County Council to better control dog fouling across the plan area, including awareness raising, increasing the provision of bins and increasing patrols.

Community action 4: Antisocial behaviour

Work with Northumbria Police and Northumberland County Council to more effectively tackle incidents of anti-social behaviour.

Community action 5: Assets of community value

Work with the local community to compile a list of potential assets of community value for submission to Northumberland County Council.

Community action 6: Parking management

Work with Northumberland County Council to assess options for the introduction of parking restrictions, including residents only parking schemes, to improve parking management across the plan area.

Community action 7: Public toilets

Work in collaboration with local shops and community facilities to develop a 'community toilet scheme' where toilets are made available for public use during opening hours.