

Berwick Neighbourhood Plan — Responses Sample 1

Q1: Are there any other key issues and opportunities for the neighbourhood plan to address?

Yes. We need to address quality of design. Berwick has suffered significant harm from recent developments. Pets at Home is an example of where the character of the town has been damaged by poor design decisions; likewise the new hospital. Residents are very unhappy with both of these designs, and if the aim of the exercise is happy residents, then we cannot ignore this. Just because the developers are powerful organisations or there is social good does not mean that aesthetics do not matter. We know that developers won't police themselves in this regard. So the neighbourhood plan must go further than simply 'influencing' design. It needs enforceable standards that prevent designs that conflict with the beauty of the town, which divides us and chips away at the desirability of living and working here and attracting visitors. This applies especially but not only in the conservation areas.

Q2: Should we use the draft vision and objectives for the neighbourhood plan? We would welcome any comments or suggested amendments.

The draft vision and objectives are good but don't go far enough on their own: each developer will make their own interpretation. Objectives need to be better defined and if possible measurable. For example: natural materials, pitched roofs, good proportions (according to well-established principles), a specified building height restriction (as mentioned in the document) and window styles in keeping with those of existing buildings. One criterion should be whether the new building - especially a public building - can be considered a positive addition to the architecture of the town.

Q3: Should we rely on the policies in the Northumberland Local Plan which support economic growth and tourism? If not, please explain why and what additional local policy approach you think is needed.

The neighbourhood plan should add local detail ensuring that tourism and economic development does not come at the expense of the town's historic character. Development that damages the setting of heritage assets should not be permitted on economic grounds alone.

Q4: Should the neighbourhood plan look to update retail allocations for the town, including extending the town centre boundary and extending key shopping frontages?

Yes to extending the town centre boundary to include Tweedmouth's Main Street. Yes to extending key shopping frontages. I agree the primary shopping area designation has little practical value and can be removed. However, any extension of frontages must be accompanied by strong shopfront design guidance with enforceable standards.

Q5: Should we rely on the policies within the Northumberland Local Plan to manage the location of new housing? If not, please explain why and what additional local policy approach you think is needed.

The neighbourhood plan must ensure that housing on sensitive sites, particularly the Middle School sites adjacent to early 20th century planned housing, is subject to locally specific design codes that reflect the character of surrounding streets. General county-level policies are insufficient for sites of this sensitivity.

Q6: Should the neighbourhood plan include a policy or policies that would be used to manage the design of new development?

Yes, absolutely — this is the most important area where the neighbourhood plan can make a real difference. However, the proposed approach is too weak. Policies that 'advocate for' public engagement or 'seek to ensure' good design have repeatedly proven ineffective in Berwick. We need a clear design code with measurable, enforceable standards covering: materials; building heights relative to neighbours; window and door proportions and roofline treatment. This should apply to both housing developments and public buildings. Shopfront guidance must also be enforceable, covering signage, materials, colour and illumination.

Q7: Should we rely on the policies within the Northumberland Local Plan to protect and enhance the natural environment? If not, please explain why and what additional local policy approach you think is needed.

The neighbourhood plan should add local policies protecting the visual relationship between the built environment and the natural landscape — particularly the river, estuary and coastal views that define Berwick's character.

Q8: Should the plan identify areas of local green space and protected open space sites that are important to the local community? If so, are there any additional sites which you would like to propose for inclusion and explain why?

Yes. The list of 39 potential sites is a strong starting point and we support the principle of local green space designation, which offers stronger protection than existing open space allocations. We would encourage the steering group to ensure evidence is gathered to formally justify each designation, as these will be tested at examination.

Please add the stonemason's yard at the Tweedmouth end of the Old Bridge, which is a historic site occupied by funerary sculptors from the mid-19th century until recently. Many residents have expressed their anger and sadness at the way this site has been treated (two rowan trees and monuments removed). It is clear that protection is needed here for a site in a sensitive location that means a lot to many people.

Q9: Should the plan include a policy to protect allotments?

Yes, without reservation. Allotments are irreplaceable community assets and their loss to development should be resisted in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

Q10: Should the plan include a policy to protect and enhance important views which could be from within the town, into the town or outwards from the town?

Yes. The list of views is a good start. The policy must go further than general protection and should map specific view corridors with defined assessment points, so that any planning application affecting those views can be properly evaluated. The building height principle that development should not exceed prevailing heights unless it can demonstrate no adverse impact is welcome but needs to be more precisely worded to be enforceable. This would be included in the design code.

Q11: Should the plan identify heritage assets that are important to the local community? If so, are there any other buildings or structures that you would like to be included and explain why?

The neighbourhood plan should therefore pair the asset list with a strong policy requiring heritage impact assessments for any development affecting listed assets, and setting a high bar for demonstrating that harm is justified. *** Please change the reference to Infirmary Tower alone as a 'remnant', to the Infirmary Front, including the tower. Planning permission does not yet exist to demolish the front and many people do not accept this plan. ***

Q12: Should the plan identify important community facilities and protect them from loss? If so, are there any additional facilities that you would like to be included and explain why?

The list is comprehensive. We would particularly emphasise the importance of maintaining the heritage character of any community facilities.

Q13: Should the plan include a sustainable transport/accessibility policy within the neighbourhood plan? If so, are there other elements which you consider should be included?

Yes. We particularly support enhanced cycling provision and improvements to river path connectivity. Any new development should be required to demonstrate genuine pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the town centre, not merely pay lip service to it.

Q14: Should the plan include the suggested possible planning policy areas? Are there other elements that should be identified?

Berwick's conservation areas deserve their own dedicated policy with an enforceable, comprehensive design code, not simply a cross-reference to Northumberland Local Plan policies that have demonstrably failed to prevent harmful development in recent years.

Q15: Should the plan include the identified themes for community actions? Are there others that should be identified?

This is an answer to Q15 as there is no space to answer, but overlaps with Q16. Yes to all themes in Q15. I recommend commissioning a comprehensive design code for Berwick's conservation areas, to protect our unique heritage from jarring elements and poor design.

I also suggest setting up monitoring of our air quality. This is not being undertaken by a government agency but it's clear that there are shortcomings in air quality, in Berwick and particular around the Tweedside Trading Estate. To enjoy our town, it's a prerequisite that residents, workers and visitors can breathe safely. Thank you.