

Berwick Neighbourhood Plan — Responses Sample 2

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

Yes. We need to address the 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. The plan must go further than simply 'influencing' design. It needs enforceable standards that prevent this happening again.

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

The vision is broadly welcome but needs strengthening. The phrase 'New development will respect and respond to the town's exceptional historic fabric' is a good starting point, but the vision must call for a specific design code covering both public and domestic architecture. The historic fabric has already been significantly diluted by recent and ongoing developments that do not respect in any meaningful way, and given the dire state of current architectural education, a design code is essential to establish future protections for 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?

Any extension of shopping areas 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. This is the most important area in which 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. 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.

Yes. However 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 potential sites is a strong starting point. Local green space designation is an important tool, offering stronger protection than existing open space allocations. An addition to the list should be the old Wilson's Stonemason's yard at the foot of the old Bridge in Tweedmouth. This land belongs to the Port of Berwick (therefore to the town) and is in the conservation area. A small but significant patch of green space, it has recently suffered the loss of two mature rowan trees as well as the removal of a historic sculpture - and public anger has been considerable.

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

Yes. 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 list of around 40 assets is impressive and reflects real community knowledge. However, designation as a non-designated heritage asset does not in itself prevent demolition or unsympathetic alteration but simply requires the impact to be considered. 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 also add the Infirmary frontage to this list, not just the tower as currently mentioned.

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?

Yes. The list is comprehensive. I 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?

Cycle lanes and improvements to river path are to be welcomed. Any new development should be required to demonstrate genuine pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the town centre.

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

A significant omission is a standalone policy area specifically covering conservation area design standards. Currently heritage is split between 'non-designated heritage assets,' 'streetscape' and reliance on county-level policies. Berwick has three conservation areas containing some of the most important historic fabric in the North East. These deserve their own dedicated policy with an enforceable, comprehensive design code — like the one created for Chesham by Create Streets — 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?

Commission an enforceable and comprehensive design code for Berwick's conservation areas — like the one created for Chesham by Create Streets. This should apply to both domestic and public architecture. This is the single most effective action the Town Council could take to protect the character of the town.