BERWICK HERITAGE

The Neighbourhood Plan Consultation — Annotated Guide

Deadline: 30 April 2026 · berwick-tc.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan

The Town Council has published a consultation on the future Neighbourhood Plan. It's quite a long document. Here's what it's actually asking — and why it matters. This annotated version has been prepared by Berwick Heritage independently of the official consultation and Town Council.

A Neighbourhood Plan is a legal document that guides planning decisions in Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal. Once adopted it carries real legal weight — developers and planning officers must follow it. The Town Council is currently asking residents what the plan should cover. This is your chance to have a say before the document is drafted. On the left below is what the consultation document says. On the right is what it actually means.

WHAT THE CONSULTATION SAYS	WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BERWICK

WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN?

"Neighbourhood plans contain planning policies which are used to assess planning applications… Once they have passed examination and have been agreed by the local community, they have the same status as the Northumberland Local Plan."	A Neighbourhood Plan is a legal document. Once passed by referendum it has the same force as the County Council's own planning policies. Planning applications in Berwick will have to comply with it. It's not a wish list — it's the law.
"A plan should include planning policies that are relevant to the local area, but importantly it should not repeat policies that are already defined within the Northumberland Local Plan."	The neighbourhood plan fills in the gaps that the County Council's plan doesn't cover locally. It's where Berwick can set its own specific standards — for example, what materials new buildings should use, or how tall they can be.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

"Feedback on the issues for the plan includes the need for policies and community actions to: influence the design of new development; protect our heritage, natural environment and important open spaces…"	Previously, residents told the Town Council they care about how new buildings look, and about protecting the historic character of the town. This consultation is asking whether you agree — and whether you want the plan to have real rules about it, not just good intentions.
Question 1 *"Are there any other key issues and opportunities for the neighbourhood plan to address?"*	**In other words** Is there anything important they've missed? Berwick Heritage thinks yes — the plan doesn't say enough about design standards in the conservation areas. Recent developments like Pets at Home show what can happen without proper rules.

VISION AND OBJECTIVES

"In 2040 Berwick-upon-Tweed will be an attractive and thriving place to live, work and visit… New development will respect and respond to the town's exceptional historic fabric."	This is the plan's ambition for Berwick in 2040. It sounds good — but "respect and respond" needs to mean something specific. Without measurable standards, a developer can claim any building "respects" the town's character.

Question 2 *"Should we use the draft vision and objectives for the neighbourhood plan?"*	**In other words** Do you agree with these aims? Broadly yes — but they need to be more specific. The vision should spell out exactly what "respecting historic character" means in practice, and there should be a specific objective for Berwick's three conservation areas.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TOURISM

"The Northumberland Local Plan includes several policies to support the growth of the economy… including an enterprise zone at Ramparts Business Park and planning policies to support employment development and tourism."	The County Council already has policies to support jobs and tourism. The question is whether Berwick needs anything extra — or whether economic development should be allowed to override heritage protection.
Question 3 *"Should we rely on the policies in the Northumberland Local Plan which support economic growth and tourism?"*	**In other words** Are the county's economic policies good enough for Berwick? Mostly yes — but the neighbourhood plan should make clear that economic arguments cannot override heritage protection.

TOWN CENTRE AND SHOPS

"The neighbourhood plan provides an opportunity to reinforce the role of the town centre as the primary retail and service focus… The plan could extend the key shopping frontage from Castlegate along Marygate, down Hide Hill along Bridge Street and up West Street."	The plan could extend the protected shopping area to cover more of the town centre streets — including Tweedmouth's Main Street. This would give more protection to keeping shops as shops. But any changes to shopfronts need to come with proper design rules, not just guidelines.
Question 4 *"Should the neighbourhood plan look to update retail allocations for the town, including extending the town centre boundary and extending key shopping frontages?"*	**In other words** Should the plan protect more of the town centre? Yes — including Tweedmouth's Main Street. But shopfront design rules must be enforceable, not just advisory.

HOUSING

"The Northumberland Local Plan identifies a housing requirement for Berwick-upon-Tweed for the delivery of 680 homes between 2016 and 2036. Of this requirement, 82 homes have been built since April 2016 and there is planning permission for an additional 792 dwellings."	There are already enough homes planned for or being built to meet Berwick's targets. The question is what those homes look like and where they go — particularly on sensitive sites like the old Middle School land.
Question 5 *"Should we rely on the policies within the Northumberland Local Plan to manage the location of new housing?"*	**In other words** Are the county's housing policies enough? Mostly — but the Middle School sites need a locally specific design code. These sites sit next to some of Berwick's finest early 20th century streets. What gets built there matters enormously.

DESIGN OF NEW BUILDINGS

"It is proposed that the plan would include… a Design policy advocating for public engagement, consultation and design review… a Middle School Sites design code promoting medium density, high quality and pedestrian-friendly design."	The plan proposes some design policies — but many of the words used ("advocating for," "seeking to ensure") have no legal force. A design code for the Middle School sites is proposed, which is good. But Berwick needs the same for its conservation areas too.
Question 6 — KEY *"Should the neighbourhood plan include a policy or policies that would be used to manage the design of new development?"*	**In other words — this is the most important question** **★ Key question** Should there be proper rules about how new buildings look? Yes — and they must be enforceable. We need a design code with specific standards for materials, building heights, windows, doors and rooflines. Vague language has failed Berwick before.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

"Both the River Tweed and the coastline to the east of Berwick support diverse marine habitats and ecosystems, meaning a significant amount of local, national and international natural environmental designations are located in the plan area."	Berwick's river, estuary and coast are internationally protected. The county plan already covers most of this — but the neighbourhood plan should specifically protect the visual relationship between the town and its landscape setting.
Question 7 *"Should we rely on the policies within the Northumberland Local Plan to protect and enhance the natural environment?"*	**In other words** Are the county's nature policies enough? Mostly — but add local policies specifically protecting the views of the river, estuary and coast that make Berwick so distinctive.

GREEN SPACES

"The identification of local green space is an important role for neighbourhood plans — an allocation which would prevent inappropriate new development on these sites other than in very special circumstances. Initial work has identified almost 40 potential local green space sites."	Nearly 40 green spaces in and around Berwick could be formally protected by the plan — from Magdalene Fields to the Spittal Promenade. Once designated, they can only be built on in very exceptional circumstances. This is one of the most powerful things the plan can do.
Question 8 *"Should the plan identify areas of local green space and protected open space sites that are important to the local community?"*	**In other words** Should we protect our green spaces? Yes — absolutely. Are there spaces you love that aren't on the list? Say so.

ALLOTMENTS

Question 9 *"Should the plan include a policy to protect allotments?"*	**In other words** Should the five allotment sites in Berwick be protected from being built on? Yes, without reservation. Once lost, allotments don't come back.

VIEWS AND STREETSCAPE

"It is proposed to include a policy within the plan to maintain and where possible enhance the important views including those of the River Tweed and the coastline, the Town Hall, Tweed bridges, Clock Tower and Spittal Point… development within Berwick should not exceed prevailing building heights."	The plan proposes to protect key views across the town. This is important — but the policy needs to name specific view corridors and set precise height limits that can actually be enforced. Good intentions aren't enough.
Question 10 — KEY *"Should the plan include a policy to protect and enhance important views?"*	**In other words** **★ Key question** Should the plan protect Berwick's famous views? Yes — with mapped view corridors and measurable height limits. Vague protection is too easy for developers to argue around.

HERITAGE BUILDINGS AND PLACES

"There is the opportunity through a neighbourhood plan to identify heritage assets that are important to the local community. A non-designated heritage asset is a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions… Initial work has identified almost 40 potential heritage assets."	Nearly 40 buildings and structures could be added to a local heritage list — from the Lifeboat House at Spittal to the ice houses on Ravensdowne. Being locally listed doesn't stop them being changed, but it means any planning application affecting them has to take their heritage value seriously.
Question 11 — KEY *"Should the plan identify heritage assets that are important to the local community?"*	**In other words** **★ Key question** Should we protect locally important historic buildings? Yes — and the plan should require a proper heritage assessment before anything affecting them can be approved. Are there buildings you'd like added to the list? For example, if you believe the whole Infirmary front should be retained (as per the 2020 plan) and not just the tower (as per the 2025 plan) please state this, since it's currently only mentioned as a tower 'remnant'.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

"National planning policy identifies community facilities as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship. Through early engagement the following community facilities have been identified as having great importance to the local community…"	The plan lists over 80 community facilities across Berwick, Tweedmouth and Spittal — including pubs, churches, sports clubs, health centres and schools. Listing them formally means planning permission would be needed to close or demolish them.
Question 12 *"Should the plan identify important community facilities and protect them from loss?"*	**In other words** Should the plan protect local community buildings? Yes. The list is comprehensive. Any changes to listed facilities should also have to respect their historic character.

GETTING AROUND

Question 13 *"Should the plan include a sustainable transport/accessibility policy within the neighbourhood plan?"*	**In other words** Should the plan have rules about cycling, walking and public transport? Yes — especially for new developments. Any new housing must have real walking and cycling links to the town centre, not just lines on a map.

WHAT SHOULD THE PLAN COVER?

"Based on the issues outlined above, we consider that the following may form the main policy areas of the neighbourhood plan: Retail and town centre; Design, including public realm and Middle school sites design code/policy; Local green space; Protected open space; Allotments; Streetscape (important views); Non-designated heritage assets; Community facilities; Sustainable transport/accessibility."	This is the proposed list of topics the plan will cover. It's a reasonable list — but it's missing something important. Berwick has three conservation areas. They need their own policy, with a proper design code that sets specific local standards. Conservation areas are mentioned in passing but never given their own policy. That's a significant gap.
Question 14 — KEY *"Should the plan include the suggested possible planning policy areas? Are there other elements that should be identified?"*	**In other words** **★ Key question** Is this the right list of topics? Yes — but add a standalone conservation area design code. The county's policies have not stopped damaging development in Berwick. We need our own enforceable local standards.

COMMUNITY ACTIONS

"The following themes for community actions have been identified: monitoring the impact of short-term holiday accommodation on the availability of housing; working with NCC to explore opportunities to introduce Article 4 Directions within the conservation areas… scoping opportunities to deliver hotel accommodation; opportunities to enhance public transport; considering opportunities to increase car parking."	Community actions are things the Town Council commits to doing but which aren't planning policies. The list is reasonable. But Berwick Heritage would press for an enforceable and comprehensive design code, like the one created for Chesham by Create Streets.
Question 15 *"Should the plan include the identified themes for community actions? Are there others that should be identified?"*	**In other words** Are these the right community commitments? Yes to all — and as a matter of urgency commission an enforceable and comprehensive design code.

HOW TO RESPOND

The deadline is 30 April 2026. You can respond online, by email or in person.

Online: berwick-tc.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan · Email: info@berwick-tc.gov.uk

Drop-in sessions at the Town Hall: Saturday 18 April and Saturday 25 April 2026.

This guide was prepared independently by Berwick Heritage and does not represent the views of the Town Council.