

1.0 Introduction

This background paper sets out a proposed methodology for the definition of settlement boundaries in the emerging Lowick Neighbourhood Plan.

The delineation of settlement boundaries is considered to be the best mechanism to achieve some of the main elements of the vision and objectives of the neighbourhood plan, particularly those related to landscape protection and encouraging the provision of housing in the best locations in the village.

The neighbourhood plan is planning positively for housing in the plan area. The objectively assessed need for housing for the plan area over the plan period stands at approximately 36 dwellings over the plan period (2018 – 2036)¹.

2.0 What is a settlement boundary?

In simple terms, a 'settlement boundary' is a dividing line, or boundary between areas of built/urban development (the settlement) and non-urban or rural development (the open countryside). Although a settlement boundary does not preclude all development beyond the boundary², it does give clarity as to where new development (particularly housing) is likely to be acceptable in planning terms. The Lowick Neighbourhood Plan may propose to allocate land for housing. Any proposed housing sites will be included within the settlement boundary. The Plan is proposing to take a positive stance with regard to the provision of affordable housing, and so proposes to support 'exceptions' sites beyond (but adjoining) the settlement boundary.

Inclusion of land within a settlement boundary does not mean that all land within the boundary is automatically suitable for new development. There may be areas of land within the settlement boundary that are not suitable for development due to other constraints, for example, where there is land protected as Local Green Space (to be allocated through the neighbourhood planning process) or areas of special character (for example areas that would have an impact on the setting of listed buildings). Policies in the neighbourhood plan will clearly define what proposals are likely to be acceptable within the settlement boundary.

The benefits of establishing settlement boundaries are as follows:

- Ensure development is directed to the most suitable locations in the village, both in terms of accessibility to and support of existing services and transport, and in terms of landscape and the historic environment.
- Protect the special character of the village and the landscape around it and maintain the character and distinctiveness Lowick.
- Provide greater certainty to communities, landowners and developers over where certain types of development could be acceptable in principle, and where.

¹ Based on a crude pro-rata calculation – more detailed assessment is underway

² A number of exceptions exist, including 'exceptions' housing sites as defined in the NPPF, some business and employment related activities and development in the countryside in accordance with relevant paragraphs in the NPPF.

- Support the plan led approach to development, giving a local context to the strategic intention of providing sufficient housing to meet the OAN of the parish.

3.0 Current Planning Context

The Lowick Neighbourhood Plan will propose a general presumption in favour of sustainable development within the settlement boundary of the village. The current strategic plan for the neighbourhood plan area is the Berwick-upon-Tweed Local Plan (April 1999). Northumberland County Council is in the process of preparing a County-wide Local Plan (currently proposing to consult on issues and options in Spring 2018). This Northumberland Local Plan is at the very early stages of production.

In line with national planning policy, the current strategic policy for Northumberland is to direct development to the most sustainable locations in the county. Lowick is a sustainable settlement, capable of accommodating some development. It has a number of services and facilities, including a First School, two public houses, a church, a village hall, a shop and a garage, along with a number of local businesses. There is also a community orchard, and a playing field (which is located some way out of the village).

It is considered that the definition of a settlement boundary for Lowick will be a spatial planning tool that should be used to direct development to the most sustainable and appropriate locations in the village, whilst protecting the special character of the surrounding landscape which is defined in Policy F4 of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Local Plan as an 'Intermediate Area of Landscape Value'.

There is no currently defined settlement boundary for Lowick and none was defined in the Berwick Local Plan. The allocated housing sites that were defined in the Berwick-upon-Tweed Local Plan have now either got consent or been developed (although not yet completed).

The principle of development within the settlement boundary of Lowick will be supported provided that it complies with other relevant policies in the Development Plan and is of a scale and nature appropriate to the character and function of the settlement and is in accordance with the spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area. Development will not be permitted outside of settlement boundaries, subject to a number of exceptions which will be set out in neighbourhood plan policy, within the context of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Hamlets located outside settlement boundaries (such as Holburn, West Kylee and Barmoor) are considered to be part of the 'open countryside' in planning terms. These hamlets are therefore treated as part of the countryside and will not have settlement boundaries. The Lowick Neighbourhood Plan is, however, proposing to include a policy to support the provision of single dwellings in these hamlets where they are for 'local needs' (which will be defined in the Plan).

4.0 Methodology for defining settlement boundaries

4.1 Background

There is no single established methodology for defining settlement boundaries, and different local planning authorities across the country have taken different approaches to drawing settlement

boundaries. However, where a methodology has been used the criteria are generally similar from one local authority to another. These include questions such as whether to draw a boundary around clusters of buildings close to but separate from the main settlement; and whether particular uses should be included or excluded from the boundary, where they occur at the edge of a settlement. This report has drawn on existing methodologies and sought to establish a methodology considered to be most appropriate within the context of the sensitive landscape around Lowick, and the local context.

The methodology does not determine whether a settlement will have a boundary or not. The decision to define settlement boundaries has been taken by the qualifying body, in consultation with the local community, in the production of the Lowick Neighbourhood Plan, to give clarity and context to policies proposed.

Any methodology must be clear, easy to understand, and replicable. The methodology is similar to that used in the production of the North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan, which has recently passed examination.³

5.0 Existing evidence

There is a significant amount of evidence available to the neighbourhood plan Steering Group, and the desk-top element of defining settlement boundaries has drawn on a range of published studies and evidence base relating to landscape, townscape, land ownership and the historic and natural environments.

The following evidence has been used as background information to inform settlement boundaries, as well as the criteria put forward later in this paper.

5.1 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Data (Interactive Map)

The map below contains the most SHLAA sites that have been submitted in Lowick. There has been a recent call for sites (ended mid-March 2018), so there may be further sites coming forward.

³ Post examination North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan (2018)



5.2 Planning applications/approvals in Lowick

The number of planning approvals that have been given so far is detailed in the Housing Topic Paper. It is clear that there have been a significant number of planning approvals, and sufficient to meet the OAN for the Neighbourhood Area.

5.3 Consultation with local landowners (ongoing)

Consultation has taken place with local landowners also defining where they consider settlement boundaries should be to reflect their longer-term interests.

5.4 Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (August 2010) (Land Use Consultants)

This document forms part of the evidence base for Northumberland County Council. It refers to Lowick as an important medieval settlement and defines Lowick as falling within Landscape Character Type 16b (Lowick and Duddo). It is the far-reaching views from Lowick to other areas, that give the settlement its character.

5.5 Local Features

Where possible, the settlement boundary should be drawn along defined features such as walls, hedgerows, watercourses, garden curtilages and existing development and roads/footpaths.

Site visits, aerial photographs and use of evidence base documents referred to above as well as criteria listed below will be essential to ensure a consistent approach.

Where no specific recommendations arise from the above evidence base studies, the following principles have been applied to the inclusion or exclusion of specific uses from within the settlement boundary where they occur adjacent to an existing or proposed new settlement boundary. The reasoning for these principles is provided in the paragraphs that follow.

The table below describes what types of development will be included or excluded from settlement boundaries. It is important that a consistent and clearly replicable approach is used to define the settlement boundary.

5.6 Historic Environment

The historic environment record (HER), and detailed information about listed (and non-listed) buildings provides an idea of the local historic context in Lowick.

Site by site basis	Include	Exclude
Agricultural fields or paddocks that are surrounded by development on all sides	Built development forming the main settlement	Isolated housing not well related visually to the settlement. Housing in large plots on the edge of settlements, but not well related to the built form, will be excluded.
Former farm buildings, converted to other uses adjacent to the settlement (account will be taken of defensible boundaries and the age of building - i.e. how established it is within the settlement)	Hard surfaced school playgrounds and playing fields where within, or on the edge of a settlement	Community orchard/allotments/community recreational areas if not well related to the existing settlement
Caravan sites, except where clearly within a settlement	Community facilities e.g. schools, public houses where they are within the existing built environment	Designated wildlife sites (unless within the built-up area)
Edge of settlement sites included in the SHLAA or put forward by local landowners	Local Green Spaces (designated through the neighbourhood plan) within settlements	Woodlands, orchards and other community green spaces, including cemeteries and churchyards (unless within the built-up area)
	Land with planning permission for new development within or well-related to the settlement	Agricultural units (farmyards and farm buildings) including agricultural workers' dwellings, horticultural nurseries, equestrian facilities where not well related to the settlement
		Community facilities clearly outside the settlement (i.e. pubs/hotels)
		Roads, tracks and public rights of way running along the boundary

6.0 Explanation of exclusion/inclusion criteria:

6.1 Agricultural fields and paddocks

Where agricultural fields and paddocks, including those no longer in agricultural use, are entirely surrounded by a built-up area, they will be assessed on a case by case basis. If they contribute positively to the landscape and/or have biodiversity, historic and recreational value then it is likely that they will be designated as Local Green Space through the neighbourhood plan where they can be demonstrated as having particular importance to the local community they serve.

Where these sites have been submitted through the SHLAA process, they will be assessed on a case by case basis, depending on need for housing land, and location of the site in terms of sustainability and local context as well as suitability for housing.

6.2 Agricultural buildings

Agricultural farmsteads are characteristically part of the countryside and provide the historical connection between settlements and their agricultural origins. These buildings can provide visual links to the rural context beyond. Therefore, where farmsteads are situated on the edge of the built form of settlements, they will be excluded if they are not well related to the settlement. Where farmsteads are clearly integral to the built up part of the settlement, they will be included within the settlement boundary.

6.3 Other countryside development

Other developments that would be allowed in the countryside or have been allowed under countryside policies in the past are considered to relate more to the countryside than to the settlement and will therefore be excluded where they lie adjacent to the boundary. This category includes equestrian developments; housing for agricultural or forestry workers and tourism/employment sites as well as other development that is appropriate in the countryside.

6.4 Community facilities

Extensive community facilities such as hard surfaced sports grounds (including pavilions) and car parks, where they have been built outside existing settlement boundaries will be excluded. More intensively built up community uses such as schools (and their playing fields) or public houses have been included in the boundary if they are already within the built up area or if they have been built adjacent to the built up area, and relate well to the settlement.

6.5 Caravan Sites

Caravan sites not within a settlement are excluded.

6.6 Employment sites or other designated sites

Business/employment sites are included within the settlement boundary. Sites designated for housing or other development in existing Local Plans are included in the settlement boundary. Sites where planning permission has been given for housing are included in the settlement boundary.

6.7 Tracks and roads

Where settlement boundaries run along roads, tracks or public rights of way, they have been drawn along the edge closest to the settlement.

6.8 Hamlets and farmsteads

There are a number of hamlets and farmsteads in the parish. These are some distance from Lowick and so will not be contained within the settlement boundary. None of these hamlets are of sufficient size to merit their own settlement boundary.

7.0 Conclusion

It is considered that this methodology presents as objective a method as feasible, for establishing a settlement boundary around Lowick.

8.0 Next steps

- Methodology is approved/amended by Lowick Parish Council
- Desk-top study and site visits (with members of Steering Group where necessary) are undertaken by planning consultant/Steering Group (Spring 2018)
- Proposed settlement boundaries are drawn, based on methodology contained in this paper and a written record produced. The settlement boundary is consulted on, along with the housing site allocations (early Summer 2018)
- Following consultation, proposed settlement boundaries are agreed/amended by Lowick Parish Council