Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan

Settlement Boundary Background Paper

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Contents

1. Introduction 3

2. Background 5
   Settlement boundaries 5
   The Development Plan 6

3. Settlement Boundary Methodology 7
   Desktop Review 7
   Identification of a draft boundary and on-site review 7
   Engagement on the draft boundary 8
   Review 8
   Submission/ adoption 8

4. Desktop review – key findings 9
   Blyth Valley Local Plan 9
   Northumberland Landscape Character Appraisal 10
   Northumberland SHLAA 12

5. Identification of a settlement boundary 13
1. Introduction

1.1 This document is one in a series of background papers prepared by the Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. It sets out the relevant national and local policy and guidance that is informing the Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan. The background paper also identifies and explains the relevant evidence base, feedback from early engagement and explains how the preferred policy approach has been identified.

1.2 The vision, outcomes and objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan defines what the Plan aims to achieve. A number of areas are of relevance to the identification of settlement boundaries within the Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan.

1.1 The vision for the Neighbourhood Plan is:

### A Vision for Cramlington

*Cramlington will continue to grow, becoming a successful sustainable community. It will strive to become the main town in the county and one of its principal gateways. Cramlington will be transformed into Northumberland’s Garden Town thereby creating a distinct identity for its residential and business communities and visitors.*

1.2 The main outcomes of the Plan relevant to the identification of settlement boundaries are:

- Cramlington will be a place where young people choose to stay to live and work, because of: the excellent education and health facilities, the choice and quality of work, the retail offer, the range of leisure opportunities and access to high quality and suitable housing for all;
- Taking advantage of its rail and road links, Cramlington will be well connected to the social and economic opportunities provided in Tyneside. It will have strengthened its offer and role as a business location allowing people more opportunity to live and work locally.
- Growth in the South West Sector and the development of local businesses will have reduced the amount of commuting.
- Cramlington will be a caring and inclusive community where everyone has access to the services and facilities the town has to offer. Residents will have access to good quality, protected open spaces underpinned by a network of recreational and cultural facilities.

1.3 The main objectives of the Plan relevant to settlement boundaries are:

1. **Completing our Town and extending choice in the housing market:** To effect a step change in the delivery of new homes and extending choice in the housing market by:
   - Promoting the phased completion of the South West Sector and land north of Station Road; and
   - Supporting the construction of new homes at an appropriate scale elsewhere in the town. This will include the provision of:
     - affordable homes, suitable for use or adaptation at all stages in peoples’ lives;
     - homes for vulnerable people; and
     - the provision of social rented housing.
1.4 The main areas covered by this background paper are:
- Background to settlement boundaries;
- Established policy approach;
- Settlement boundary methodology;
- An overview of other relevant documents and evidence;
- Explanation of the preferred approach.

2. Reinforcing Cramlington’s sub regional employment role: To reinforce the town’s sub-regional employment role by: ensuring land is available for employment development; supporting investment in the provision of modern competitive employment space. Thereby, retaining jobs and diversifying the local economy into new sectors;

4. Investing in our infrastructure: To renew, reinforce and enhance, the town’s physical infrastructure and assets, including Information and Communications Technology, through investment and robust management. Thereby, improving its setting and attractiveness for sustainable living and modern, competitive business;

6. Enhancing the environment: To improve the visual and spatial relationships in and between the town’s residential, business and commercial sectors, by implementing a programme of environmental improvements designed to create areas with a defined character, as well as attractive and safe routes between them;

7. Protecting and enhancing our public open spaces: Achieving a balance between development and protecting important green spaces, whilst improving the range of good quality open spaces and streetscapes which residents appreciate and value. To enhance the town’s network of existing open spaces by seeking additional provision through the development process to meet identified deficiencies; and

8. Creating and supporting thriving and inclusive communities: To build on the diverse needs of existing and future residents to seek to ensure communities are: active, inclusive, safe, have access to a home they can afford, access to employment and are well served by social, recreational, educational and cultural facilities.
2. Background

Settlement boundaries

2.1 A settlement boundary is a line that is drawn on a plan around a village, which reflects its built form, this is also known historically as a ‘village envelope’. A settlement boundary is used as a policy tool reflecting the area where a set of plan policies are to be applied. The settlement boundary does not necessarily have to cover the full extent of a village or be limited to its built form. In general, there is a presumption in favour of development within the settlement boundary. Any land and buildings outside of the boundary line are usually considered to be open countryside, where development would be regulated with stricter planning policies. However, it should be noted that any land which has been included within the boundary line does not have a guarantee of approval of planning permission, as there will be other planning policies which will need to be adhered to also, for example; the protection of the character of a settlement.

2.2 Settlement boundaries have a number of advantages, they seek to:
- Ensure development is directed to more sustainable locations, both in terms of accessibility to and support of existing services and transport and in terms of landscape;
- Protect the countryside from encroachment of land uses more characteristic of built up areas, which can help conserve and enhance cultural heritage and natural beauty;
- Provide an easy to understand tool that gives certainty for landowners, developers and the community over where development is likely to be acceptable and where it is not;
- Direct development to specific parts of the area and this can help increase the viability of local services, as well as encourage new ones to establish;
- Ensure a plan-led and more managed approach to future development, providing a firm basis for protecting the countryside from unnecessary encroachment;
- Support the presumption in favour of sustainable development of sites that are too small to be identified as formal allocations;
- Make it easier for local residents to obtain planning permission for domestic outbuildings within a settlement boundary than outside;
- Provide a guide for appropriate locations for rural exception sites to provide affordable housing for local needs (in locations adjoining and outside of the settlement policy boundary); and
- Ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach.

2.3 However, there can also be some disadvantages of settlement boundaries:
- By restricting development, settlement boundaries can artificially increase land values within the settlement compared with land outside, as the likelihood of successfully gaining planning permission differs;
- Artificially increase land values on land adjoining the settlement boundary due to future ‘hope value’, with landowners seeking the possibility of the boundary being realigned at some point in the future to accommodate future growth of the settlement. This could mean fewer rural exception sites coming forward, as the landowner may wish to take a longer-term view;
- The general presumption that development within settlement boundaries is acceptable can result in pressure for the development of unsuitable land. This can result in pressure for the development of valued open spaces within settlement boundaries but where development may not be appropriate. Although, this can be overcome through ensuring that any open space valued by the community is protected through formal designation;
The use of settlement boundaries can lead to the perception that they result in denser development in already well-developed settlements e.g. within the gardens of houses; and

Settlement boundaries can be crude and inflexible. For small rural communities with a character of dispersed development, it can be difficult to draw a logical boundary around the village.

The Development Plan

2.4 The Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan proposes a general presumption in favour of sustainable development within settlement boundaries of the two settlements in the Plan area: Cramlington and East Hartford.

2.5 The current Development Plan for the Plan area comprises the: Blyth Valley Core Strategy (2007), the Blyth Valley Development Control Policies (2007) and the saved policies of the Blyth Valley District Local Plan (1999). Local Plan policy G9 defines settlement limits for both Cramlington and East Hartford. Outside settlement boundaries, policy G9 restricts development to: agricultural or forestry operations; development beneficial to the rural economy; outdoor sport and recreation; cemeteries; extensions or replacement of dwellings; the provision of essential infrastructure; and uses of land which preserve the openness of the countryside.

2.6 The emerging Northumberland Local Plan does not propose to define settlement boundaries in areas where they are proposed to be defined within an emerging Neighbourhood Plan.
3. **Settlement Boundary Methodology**

3.1 As explained in section 1, the concept of settlement boundaries is to identify a policy line which separates built-up areas (within which development is, in principle, acceptable), from the countryside (within which, with limited exceptions, development is not acceptable).

3.2 There is a presumption in favour of development if land is within a settlement boundary and therefore land should only be included within the boundary if that is where development is considered acceptable in principle, subject to compliance with other policies. There is a judgement to be made as to whether other development or areas adjacent to but outside the current settlement policy area relates more to the built environment than to the surrounding countryside.

3.3 There is no definitive methodology to establish settlement boundaries and different approaches have been taken by Local Planning Authorities and Neighbourhood Plan groups across the country. This settlement boundary methodology for the Cramlington Neighbourhood Plan, has been informed by a review of a number of different approaches and has been prepared in the context of the Parish and follows a five-stage process which is set out below.

**Stage 1 – Desktop review:**
This first stage involves a review of existing evidence documents, including:

- Blyth Valley Local Plan Proposals Map (1999);
- Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010);
- Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010);
- Review of current planning applications/permissions;
- Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2017); and
- Aerial mapping (Google Earth).

**Stage 2 – Identification of a draft boundary and on-site review:**
Following the desktop review, an initial draft boundary is identified which can then be viewed on site. In order to robust settlement boundaries for Cramlington and East Hartford there are a number of guiding principles:

- Where practical, the boundary should follow clearly defined physical features, such as walls, fences, hedgerows, roads and water courses;
- Areas to be included are:
  - Built development that visually forms part of the settlement;
  - Those with extant planning permissions for built development which is physically and functionally related to the village;
  - Agricultural buildings if they are well related in terms of scale and positioning to the rest of the village;
  - Community facilities where they are within the built-up area;
- Areas to be excluded are:
  - Curtaloges of properties which have the capacity to extend the built form of the settlement - including large residential gardens;
  - Recreational or amenity space at the edge of settlements which primarily relate to the countryside;
  - Allotments, unless within the built-up area;
  - Isolated buildings, not well related to the settlement;
  - Designated wildlife sites, unless within the built-up area;
  - Woodlands, orchards and other community green spaces, including cemeteries and churchyards, unless within the built-up area;
○ Car parks on the edge of settlements;
○ Community facilities clearly outside the settlement e.g. pubs/ hotels.

Stage 3 – Engagement:
• Public feedback on the draft boundary as part of the consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Plan.

Stage 4 – Review:
• Review of comments received and amendment where necessary.

Stage 5 – Submission/ adoption:
• Inclusion of proposed settlement boundaries within Submission Draft Plan, if endorsed through examination and referendum it will be adopted as part of the Neighbourhood Plan.
4. Desktop review – key findings

4.1 A number of key considerations were identified as part of the desktop review, these are set out below.

Blyth Valley Local Plan Proposals Map (1999)

4.2 Policy G9 of the Blyth Valley Local Plan defines development limits for settlements across the former District. The settlement boundaries for Cramlington and East Hartford are set out below.

Figure 1: Extract from Cramlington Local Plan Proposals Map – Cramlington Settlement Boundary (north)

Figure 2: Extract from Cramlington Local Plan Proposals Map – Cramlington Settlement Boundary (south)
Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

4.3 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) describes the essential landscape characteristics of various parts of the County. Part B of the LCA includes development guidelines for the landscape of the Plan area, identifies the need to encourage the establishment of strong settlement boundaries as part of any new development and to ensure that development which may affect the setting of key historic features, should be carefully considered.

4.4 The LCA identifies the following characteristics of the Plan area:

- The historic core of Cramlington consists of a small nucleated settlement of traditional sandstone buildings, which is a Conservation Area;
- The town developed with the coal mining industry in the 19th century;
- In the 1960s it became the nucleus of a new town, and several housing estates were developed around the historic core within a framework of A-roads;
- The townscape is characterised by extensive areas of suburban housing, connected by access roads, and lined with wide verges, trees or shelterbelts;
- The setting of Cramlington is largely defined by its surrounding landscape of agricultural fields on the coastal plain, and the nearby Newcastle conurbation;
- There are few views overlooking Cramlington, lending the settlement a self-contained character;
- Approaches are indistinct as roundabouts frequently punctuate the main access roads through the settlement, diminishing a sense of arrival. A small number of landmarks, including the hill at Nelson Village, several school buildings and playing fields, provide useful elements for orientation;
- Views from within the settlement are largely limited by shelterbelts which line the regular road network;
- The historic core of Cramlington Village is distinctly different in character from the surrounding settlement of Cramlington and thus forms an interesting feature within the settlement, albeit somewhat overshadowed by the adjacent shopping centre;
- The various housing estates of which Cramlington consists are relatively spacious and each enjoys considerable areas of open spaces, including recreation grounds and green spaces;
- A central area of open space near Nelson Village provides a viewpoint which allows views across the settlement.

Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010)

4.5 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study looks at the sensitivity of Northumberland’s landscape character areas to a number of key land uses and major changes that may threaten their character. With regard to the Plan area, it identifies that:
The urban edge is in most places defined by the framework of infrastructure and woodland belts. At Beaconhill the urban edge is formed by gardens and green spaces, allowing views across adjacent farmland that gradually slopes away in southerly direction towards Arcot Hall;

The existing road framework forms a rigid boundary around much of the settlement, beyond which large areas are designated Green Belt. These are considered to be of higher landscape sensitivity as they play an important role in preventing coalescence with surrounding settlements. East of the A189, areas north and south of East Cramlington are excluded from the Green Belt and provide some potential for development. Mitigation planting in newly developed areas would be beneficial in strengthening landscape structure;

The settlement edge is less rigid at the existing housing development on Beaconhill, and there is some scope here for development in areas of lower landscape sensitivity. However, appropriate consideration should be given to the setting of Arcot Hall and its estate landscape;

North of Beaconhill, extensive industrial estates mark areas of lower sensitivity and provide scope for infill development north of the railway on either side of Fisher Lane. The valley of the River Blyth is considered to be of higher landscape sensitivity and further northward expansion of the settlement, beyond the A192, is therefore undesirable.

4.6 The study also defines a number of guidelines on landscape sensitivity to new development which should be applied when considering proposals for new development. The areas referred to are shown with a corresponding number on the indicative settlement illustration (figure 4):

1. Lower sensitivity south of Beaconhill provides scope for development on an appropriate scale;

2. Limited scope for development at Windmill Industrial Estate and east of Fisher Lane (A1068);

3. Safeguard Green Belt, and seek to ensure robust links with areas of mitigation planting if development were to take place in nearby locations;

4. Seek to maintain the setting of the River Blyth valley, retaining as far as possible the northern settlement boundary.

4.7 A number of mitigation measures were recommended:

Figure 4: Extract from Key Land Use Impact Study
• Provide sufficient open space with trees to reflect other areas of Cramlington and reinforce green network;
• Strengthen settlement edge of new development with woodland belts and trees;
• Enhance landscape elements along road south of Arcot Hall.

Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2017)

4.8 All of the sites included within the Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) have been considered by the Steering Group – the results of the assessment are included within the Housing Background Paper.
5. **Identification of a settlement boundary**

5.1 As identified above, the impact of future development on the landscape and setting of the settlements as well as ensuring the boundaries support the sustainable growth of the Neighbourhood Plan area. The proposed boundaries:

- Take into account extant planning permissions;
- Establishes a logical shape to the edge of Cramlington, following its planned completion;
- Establishes a logical shape to the edges of East Hartford, seeking to conserve and enhance the character of the area;
- Avoids irregular incursions into the open countryside; and
- Has been drawn along features which are easily identified on the ground.

*Figure 7: Proposed Cramlington Settlement Boundary (north)*

*Figure 8: Proposed Cramlington Settlement Boundary (middle)*
Figure 9: Proposed Cramlington Settlement Boundary (south)

Figure 10: Proposed East Hartford Settlement Boundary