

1.0 Introduction

This background paper sets out the methodology used for the definition of settlement boundaries in the emerging Embleton 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 villages of Embleton and Christon Bank.

The neighbourhood plan is planning positively for housing in the Neighbourhood Area. The objectively assessed need for housing for the Neighbourhood Area stands at approximately 1.5 dwellings per year over the plan period (2018 – 2036)¹. This means a total OAN for the Neighbourhood Area of 27 new dwellings over the neighbourhood plan period. Some of these dwellings will come forward through existing permissions during the Plan period.

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 Embleton Neighbourhood Plan is also proposing to allocate land for housing. The proposed housing sites will be included within 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 is 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 or conservation areas). 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 villages, both in terms of accessibility to and support of existing services and transport, and in terms of landscape and protected landscapes, such as the Northumberland AONB, Heritage Coast and the Embleton Conservation Area.

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.

- Protect the special character of the villages and the landscapes around them to maintain local character and distinctiveness.
- Provide greater certainty to communities, landowners and developers over where certain types of development could be acceptable in principle, and where.
- 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 Embleton Neighbourhood Plan will propose a general presumption in favour of sustainable development within the settlement boundaries identified for each village. The current strategic plan for the neighbourhood plan area is the Alnwick Local Development Framework Core Strategy (October 2007) and the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (April 1997).

A number of policies in the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan were ‘saved’ under the Secretary of State’s Direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A settlement boundary for Embleton and Christon Bank exists on the proposals maps for the Alnwick District Wide Local Plan, (and is shown in background reports for the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan) but the policies relating to settlement boundaries were not saved.

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 as set out in the LDF Core Strategy is to direct development to the most sustainable locations. Embleton is a sustainable settlement, capable of accommodating some development. It has a number of services and facilities, including a First School, public houses, a church, a village hall, a golf club with bar/restaurant, and a shop, along with a number of local businesses.

Christon Bank does not have the level of services and facilities that Embleton does and is therefore a less ‘sustainable’ place. It does however have a small shop/garage.

An hourly bus service serves the village of Embleton. Christon Bank has a more limited service.

It is considered that the definition of a settlement boundary for Embleton and Christon Bank will be a spatial planning tool that will be used to direct development to the most sustainable and appropriate locations in the villages, whilst protecting the special character of the surrounding landscapes which are highly valued, particularly in Embleton, which has a Conservation Area, and is directly adjacent to the Northumberland Coast AONB designation, and the Heritage Coast designation.

Although there is a defined settlement boundary for both Christon Bank and Embleton in the Alnwick Local Plan, as stated previously, the policy relating to the settlement boundaries was not

‘saved’. There are therefore, in planning policy terms, no settlement boundaries for either settlement exist.

The principle of development within the settlement boundaries of Embleton and Christon Bank 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 Embleton Neighbourhood Plan.

Hamlets located outside settlement boundaries such as Dunston Steads 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.

4.0 Methodology for defining settlement boundaries

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 landscapes, particularly around Embleton, and the local context.

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, heritage, and the natural environment.

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

³ Post examination North Northumberland Coast Neighbourhood Plan (2018)

Settlement Boundary Methodology – Embleton Neighbourhood Plan (March 2018)

5.1 Northumberland County Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Data (Interactive Map)

A number of sites have been put forward for development for both Embleton and Christon Bank and there has been a recent call for sites (ended mid-March 2018), so there may be further sites coming forward. This gives an indication of which sites are available for housing.

5.2 Planning applications/approvals in Embleton and Christon Bank (NCC planning register)

This is derived from the County Council's planning application register. Land that has planning approval will generally be included within the settlement boundaries.

5.3 Alnwick District Wide Local Plan (1997) – Previous settlement boundaries

Although planning policies in the Alnwick Wide Local Plan related to settlement boundaries have not been saved, the previously adopted boundaries provide a relevant and useful context within which to re-define settlement boundaries for both the villages.

5.4 Northumberland Coast AONB Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (August 2013)

This document forms an important part of the evidence base for defining the settlement boundary for Embleton. It does not include reference to Christon Bank, as Christon Bank is not adjacent to the AONB. The document contains specific recommendations for the LCT (Landscape Character Type) areas and maps which indicate areas which are more and less 'sensitive' to housing development for Embleton.

5.5 Other landscape studies – Northumberland Landscape Assessment (2010) Land Use Consultants

This document contains detail on important landscape character features in the Neighbourhood Area.

5.6 Historic Environment Record

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

5.7 Embleton Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Embleton village has a detailed Conservation Area Appraisal that identifies key features, listed buildings, and important views into and out of the conservation area.

5.8 Local Features

Where possible, the settlement boundary should be drawn along defined features such as walls, hedgerows, watercourses, garden curtilages, 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.

6.0 General Principles

The table below lists, as a general principle, which types of area are likely to be included, excluded, or dealt with on a site by site basis, in determining the detailed boundaries for Embleton and Christon Bank.

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)	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/golf clubs)
		Roads, tracks and public rights of way running along the boundary

7.0 Explanation (where relevant) of exclusion/inclusion criteria:

7.1 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.

7.2 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.

7.3 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.

7.4 Community and tourism facilities

Extensive community facilities such as sports grounds (including pavilions), golf clubs and associated 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.

7.5 Existing allocated sites

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.

7.6 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.

7.7 Hamlets and farmsteads

There are a number of farmsteads in the Neighbourhood Area. The hamlets of Dunstan Steads and Embleton Mill are also (in some cases partially) in the Neighbourhood Area. These are some distance from Embleton and Christon Bank and so will not be contained within the settlement boundary. Neither of these hamlets are of sufficient size to merit their own settlement boundary.

8.0 Conclusion

It is considered that this methodology presents as objective a method as feasible, for establishing a settlement boundary around the villages of Embleton and Christon Bank to inform policy to be contained in the Embleton Neighbourhood Plan.

9.0 Next steps

- The settlement boundaries are consulted on (Spring 2018).
- Following public consultation, proposed settlement boundaries are agreed/amended by Embleton Parish Council.