

# Wooler



## DESIGN STATEMENT



## **What is a Village Design Statement?**

This Wooler Design Statement is a snapshot of our community. It attempts to define the unique character of the town and its setting. It was prepared following consultation with and input from the people who live and work in Wooler.

A Design Statement is meant to be of help to those considering development, redevelopment, renovation, alteration or change of use within the town. It is intended to supplement and be read in conjunction with the Berwick upon Tweed Local Plan which contains the detailed development policies for the local area.

## **Who should take note**

- Developers, builders and architects
- Public authorities, highway engineers and utility companies.
- Residents, householders, landowners and businesses.
- Community groups of all ages

Of great importance while producing a Design Statement was acceptance of the principle that Wooler will grow, will develop and will change. It is possible to manage that change in a sympathetic and constructive way to prevent the mistakes of the past being repeated.

**This statement has been adopted by Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council as a Supplementary Planning Guide within the Local Plan. The Wooler Design Statement will assist the authority when determining planning matters ensuring that the views and wishes of Wooler are given due consideration.**



**“Wooler is essentially a working town .... Unpretentious ....  
but with an inherent sense of place”.**

Wooler resident



# Wooler

Wooler, in Northumberland's Cheviot Hills, is located 14 miles south of the Scottish border, halfway between the market towns of Alnwick and Berwick upon Tweed. The main approach road is the A697, a single carriageway linking the A1 at Morpeth with the A68 just north of Lauder. Many roads in the area retain the rustic characteristics of their country lane origins and afford some striking views over the town.

Wooler is situated on the edge of a post-glacial lake that is now the Milfield Plain, in an area known as Glendale. The prevailing landscape is a patchwork of arable and pastoral fields enclosed by hills supporting further pasture, forestry and open moorland. Glendale is designated as an "Area of High Landscape Value" within the Berwick upon Tweed Local Plan adopted in 1999. The town sits on the edge of Wooler Water, a tributary of the nearby river Till.

Wooler recorded a population of 1868 in the 1991 census.

## Historical Background

Documented reference to Wooler first appears around 1107 when a barony was created but there is abundant evidence of pre-historic settlements in the surrounding area.

Wooler became a market town with the granting of a market licence in 1199 and remains the social, political and economic focus of Glendale.



## Boundaries

The continuous built-up area of Wooler and its designated development areas as identified by the Local Plan form the boundary of the Design Statement. Wooler's sphere of influence extends beyond the immediate town as many of the surrounding settlements look to it to supply their needs.



## Views

Within Wooler, almost every aspect provides a view of trees and hills. The walks that start within the town give ever-widening vistas. Being on rising ground means that many of Wooler's houses have a panoramic view across the landscape. This is a very important amenity offered by the town. However, any protection afforded by the Local Plan has been insufficient to prevent the erection of major electricity pylons and telecommunications equipment which blight the valley and the further horizon. The expansion of industry in this valley and the redevelopment of disused industrial land has yet to be sympathetically absorbed into the landscape.



## Transport

*Pedestrians.* The town has many paths and alleyways, which give tantalising glimpses of a world beyond the main thoroughfares. Steps meander, linking different levels whilst those who know can travel from one end of Wooler to the other by a series of shortcuts without ever going along a main road.

*Public Transport.* Services from Wooler's bus station, off the Market Place, travel both around the town and to Berwick and Alnwick from where connections by train and bus are possible.

*Motor transport.* Essential for the movement of goods and people in the rural environment. Heavy traffic, except for deliveries, can avoid the High Street. Parking here is limited to one side of the street giving quick access to shops and services. Car parks at each end provide for longer stays thus contributing to street activity without inconveniencing pedestrians or cyclists.





## Public open spaces

There are many open spaces within Wooler, foremost are the recreational areas:-

Scotts Park      between Weetwood Avenue and the river.

Brysons Park    between Broomey Road and Oliver Road.

Others include public or local authority sports fields, children's play areas and open areas, as well as a number of privately owned open spaces, some of which are shown on page 9. Additionally there are many smaller green spaces with their associated hedges and trees which provide natural landscape buffers. Open spaces contribute much to the quality of community life and their protection should be considered of paramount importance.

## Trees and Hedges

Trees form a vital part of Wooler's landscape and heritage with many fine mature specimens, generally native deciduous species, throughout the town. As well as individual trees in private gardens, there are several on public ground worth mentioning: the trees on the Haugh; the willow by the entrance to the bus station; the silver birches alongside Padgepool Place; the young sycamores at the Martins and the majestic horse chestnut, beech and lime trees around the cemetery and in the church yards of St Ninian's and St Mary's. The few surviving wild hedgerows that are scattered throughout the town (such as those on Burnhouse Road



and Common Road) provide an attractive corridor and habitat for wildlife as well as being visually pleasing. It is essential for environmental as well as aesthetic reasons that the maximum possible protection is extended to trees both mature and developing, as well as to all the surviving old hedgerows.



## Economy and Industry

The commercial heart of Wooler is the High Street with a range of businesses, shops and services that fulfil most of the needs of everyday life.

The town has suffered some loss of vitality as its main industry, farming, has declined due to mechanisation and the changing economic position of agriculture. The Mart continues to be an important local centre for the sale of livestock.

South Road and Berwick Road industrial areas are a mixture of stores, retail or manufacturing businesses and residences. This is a traveller's first, and often only experience of the town. Much of it is well-designed within the context of industrial buildings but there are several older or disused buildings in need of substantial renovation or removal. The estate on Berwick Road is mainly small factories and workshops although the agricultural engineering workshops are extensive and rambling.



## Tourism

Wooler, "The Gateway to the Cheviots" has long been a base for tourism and offers the visitor magnificent scenery and a prime location between the coast and hills. It is popular with walkers and cyclists exploring Northumberland National Park or passing through on St. Cuthbert's Way, as well as with those who just wish to look at the beautiful scenery. Hotels and guest houses are for the most part older, well-established buildings, many having a notable history which is part of their charm and attraction.

The town's two caravan parks intrude on the landscape particularly when viewed from a higher level. They are otherwise partially screened by well-kept hedges and recent tree planting or by the land's natural contours. Additional screening to further reduce the visual impact should be encouraged.







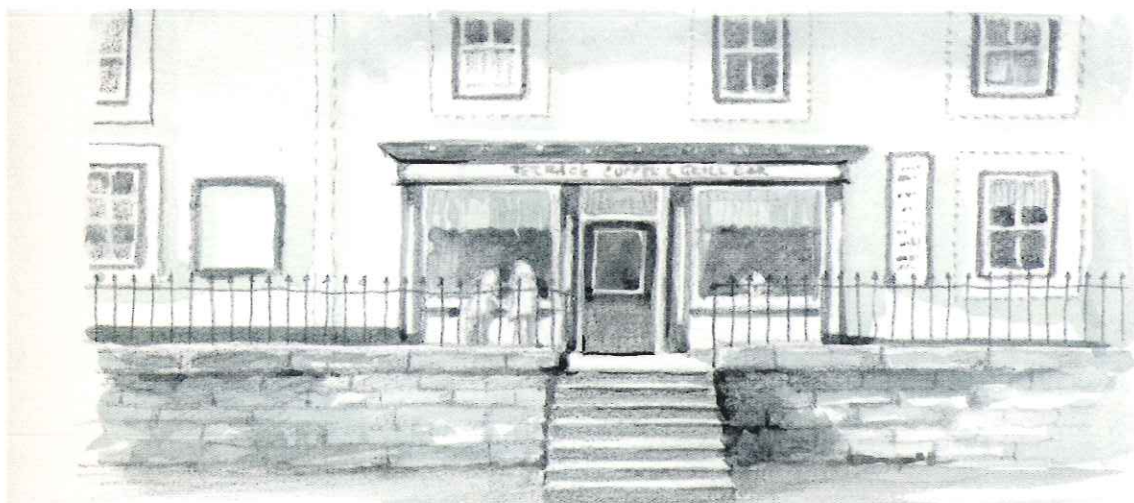
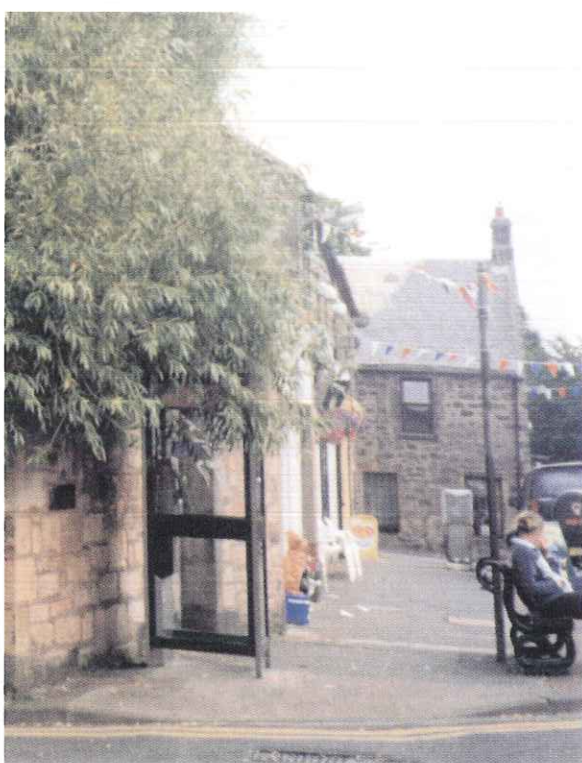
### Street Furniture

Wooler is well furnished with various styles of public seating which is well used and generally in a good state of repair. Litter bin design varies, the predominant type being the black metal bins of the High Street.

Street name plates are for identifying streets and should not be used as a fashion accessory or for corporate advertising.

There is a proliferation of advertising signs and signposts particularly in the High Street. The modern style telephone boxes do not blend in well.

Overhead telegraph and electricity cables in the town are an unattractive visual feature and their repositioning underground would be welcome. This should also make the electricity supply more robust.



## Buildings

The rebuilding after a series of devastating fires in the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly the one in 1863, has given Wooler the predominantly Victorian look it has today. There are at present 27 listed buildings in and around the town.

*17th and 18th Centuries:* The oldest residential parts of Wooler are The Terrace in the Market Place and the single-storey cottages on Tenter Hill. They are attractive, unassuming buildings, whitewashed with pantile roofs. The Red Lion and The Angel are old coaching inns. Several houses on Ramseys Lane are old, pleasingly tucked in and represent a larger style, while avoiding any air of grandness.

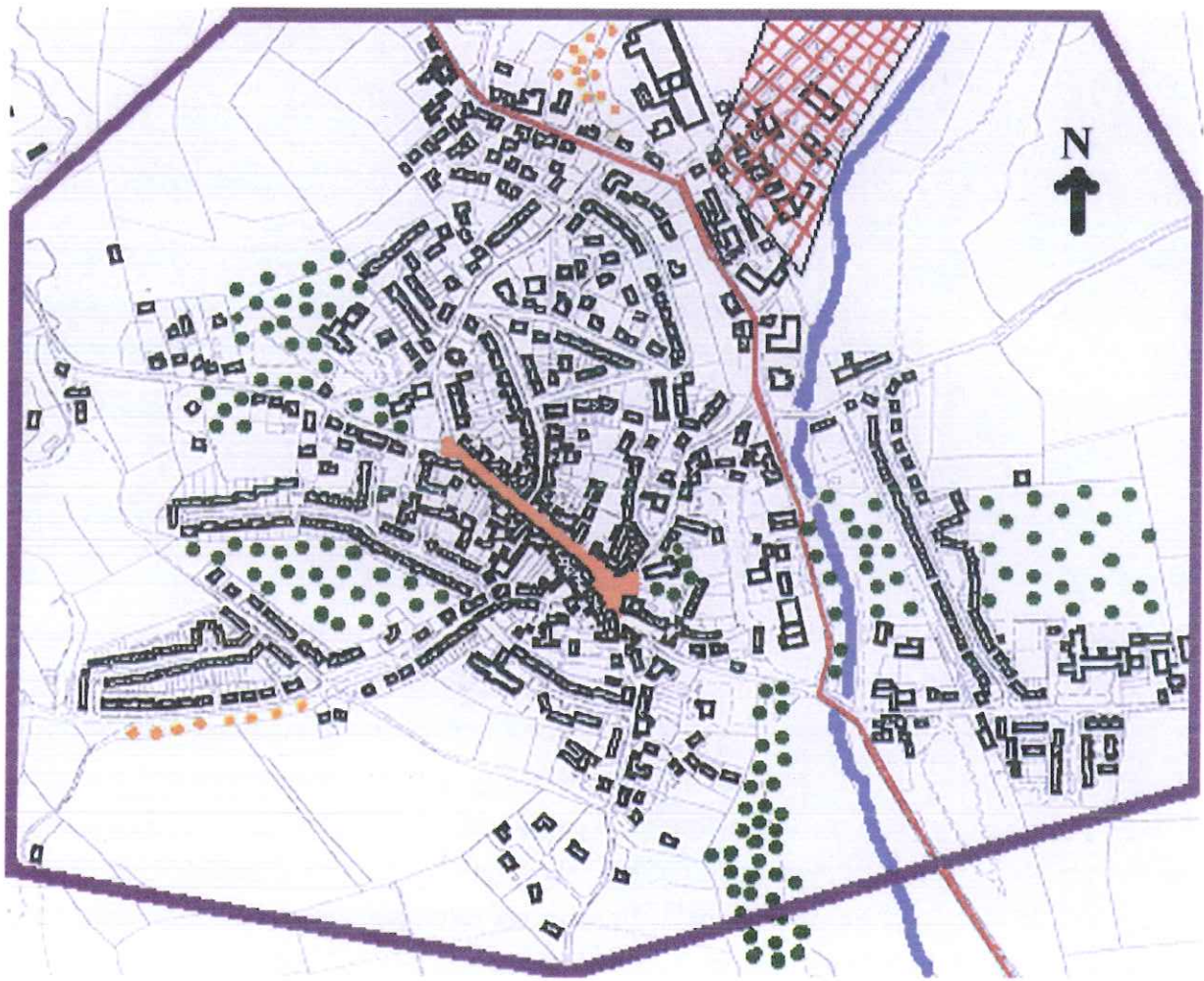
*19th Century:* Public buildings include the police station on Church Street, the old

Register Office on Burnhouse Road, the Bank of Scotland in the Market Place and the United Reformed Church on Cheviot Street. These are well-proportioned buildings of local stone and stand well in their setting. Some residential buildings are also built of stone, such as those on Tankerville Terrace, Cheviot Street and Glendale Road. The latter is one of the most pleasant streets in Wooler, curving round from the High Street to Ryecroft Way, the long gardens fronted by low stone walls. The disused former railway station has been renovated and made into very attractive dwellings.











# WOOLER



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-  Boundary of the area covered by this Design Statement
-  A697 leading to South Road & Cottage Road
-  High Street & Market Place
-  Area suited to light industry
-  Significant open areas
-  Areas suited to residential development



*Early 20th Century:* The bungalows along Burnhouse Road, all different but complementary, are also good examples of Wooler's lack of pretension. They are aesthetically pleasing constructions that face the road with gardens bordered by low walls. *Inter-war:* Construction includes houses on Ryecroft Way, Oliver Road, Ramseys Lane and Broomey Road. They are solid and well-built.



*Post-war:* An example of well-designed later building is the Archbold Cottages. Attention has been paid to detail and the importance of building materials has been recognised. Local traditions and patterns of building have been successfully combined with the latest technologies, building types and needs. The extension to an old cottage in Ramseys Lane also illustrates this, both the angle and materials of the roof having been planned to fit in with the cottage.

The small modern private estates make little or no reference to any characteristic local building style and consist of detached or semi-detached houses and bungalows, often in cul-de-sacs.

Local Authority housing is spread throughout Wooler and makes up approximately 40% of the housing stock. There are many small developments, some with only half a dozen dwellings, with larger ones in Weetwood Avenue, The Martins and other areas.

The harsher lines and strict right-angles of some the later local authority housing have been softened by thoughtful planting.

The criteria applied to the development of public housing should be the same as that for the private sector.

Smaller developments are much more able to fit in sympathetically than larger ones.







### Construction, layout and design

As much of Wooler can be seen from above, roofs are very important. The sloping roofs, set at angles to one another, provide an attractive display of mauve and blue slates with red ridge tiles and a random smattering of red pantiles warming the overall effect.

Windows are usually casement or sash.

Building materials commonly used are ashlar, rock-faced ashlar, random rubble and roughcast. The local pink sandstone mellows slowly over time to a pleasing tone.

*General design:* From the east the town appears to be climbing up the hills, therefore the visual impact of any new development must be carefully considered.

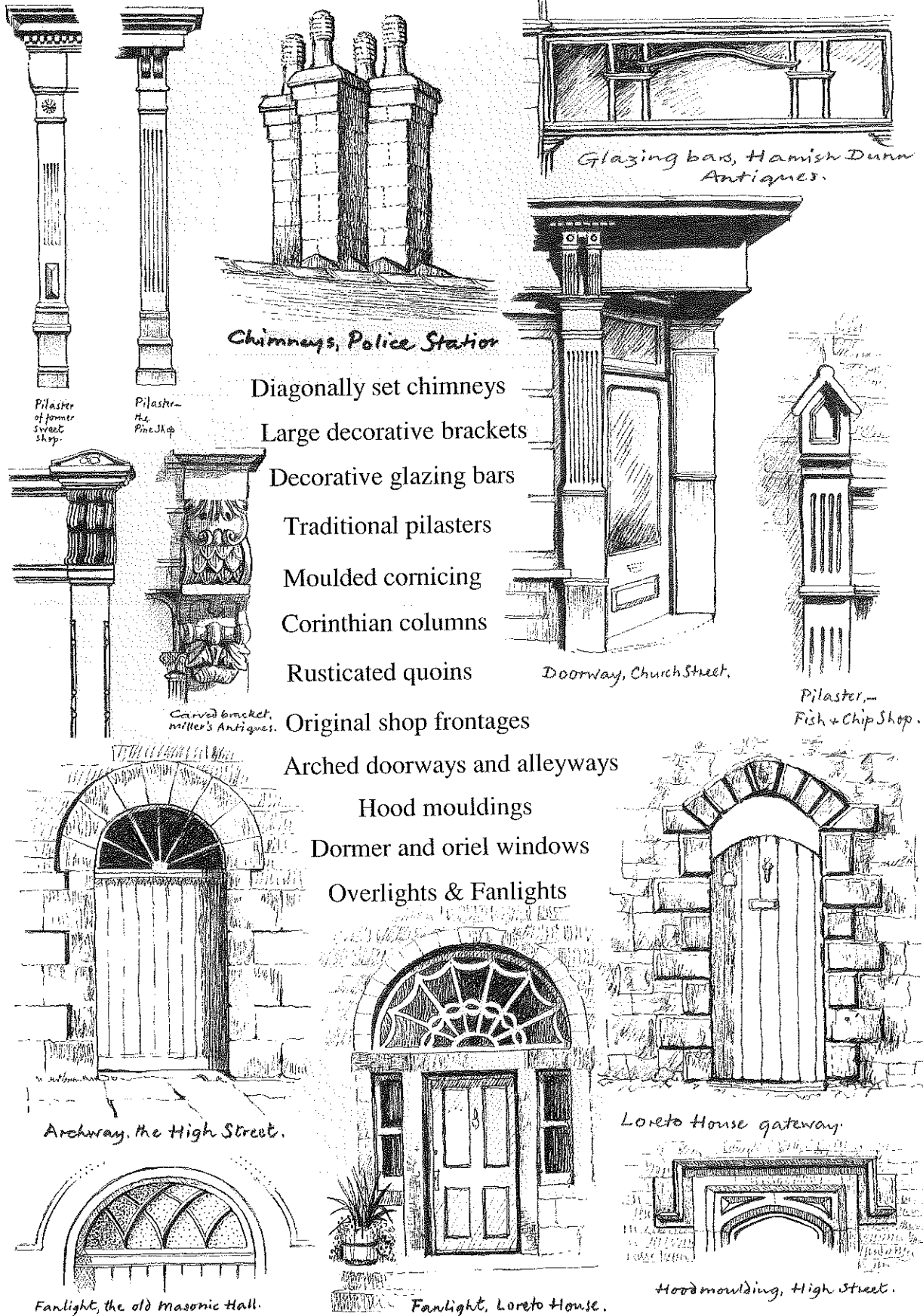


The heights of buildings must not interfere with views or occasion loss of privacy. They must be sited and designed to be visually acceptable in their own right but they also need to fit in with existing surroundings. While in most places they can differ in style they should be compatible in height, proportions, size, rooflines, building materials and window style.

The two small supermarkets in the High Street have unattractive modern facades which are out of character with their surroundings. A thoughtful toning down of the corporate image would enhance the overall effect, adding to rather than detracting from the area.



*Architectural features.* Many of Wooler's older buildings in the vicinity of the Market Place and High Street have been granted listed building status as they have interesting and distinctive architectural features including:





## Churches

St Mary's Parish church, near the Market Place was built in 1765 and has a distinctive four-storey tower. At the western end of the High Street, St Ninians Roman Catholic Church is a pleasing example of Victorian architecture. Situated as they are at opposite ends of the High Street these two churches with their attractive closed churchyards are considered as visually very important. Any proposal for change in the area must take this fully into account. The impressive stained glass windows of the United Reformed Church in Cheviot Street are in the style of Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



## Regeneration

Over the years many redundant buildings have proved their adaptability by responding to changing social, technological and market conditions. The current Health Clinic on Burnhouse Road was opened in 1964, but was originally built as the Wooler Register Office in 1859. Other examples include the abattoir, part of which is now a garden centre and the Methodist church which has become the Glendale Hall. The old Mechanics Institute, built in 1889, was in a state of disrepair after years of disuse, but has reopened as the Youth Drop-In Centre. This building now provides a much needed social centre for the young people of Wooler. The Poor Union Workhouse of 1839 has undergone several changes of use and is now The Cheviot Centre. This multi-use building houses a Tourist Information Centre and Community Centre along with other services and facilities. Several former shops mainly on the High Street have closed and are now used residentially. While upper floors lend themselves to use as residential accommodation



use it would be desirable for the ground floors to be occupied for uses which relate directly to pedestrians, creating activity and visual interest. The original shop fronts and doorways must be retained in good repair to preserve character, maintain vitality and facilitate a possible return to trading in the future.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

**These recommendations must not be taken in isolation but read in conjunction with the main text also taking into account the policies set out in the Local Plan.**

### **GENERAL**

- 1. The redevelopment of "Brownfield" sites is preferable to the continued allocation of Greenfield areas. Where Greenfield sites are used the development must be sustainable and take into account the features identified in this document.**
- 2. The landscape must be preserved and enhanced as an essential asset to residents and to the tourist trade that makes up a significant part of the town's economy.**
- 3. Landscaping proposals that are sustainable and enforceable must form part of any development.**
- 4. All new development or redevelopment must be required to protect trees and the remaining wild or mature hedgerows as far as is reasonable. Though this may require slight change in plan or design it should be seen as an overall environmental benefit. Full use of tree and hedge preservation orders should be encouraged.**
- 5. Where possible new developments should use existing allocation of land first and where planning permission has lapsed, it should not necessarily be renewed.**
- 6. All new development or redevelopment must be seen as part of the town as a whole and not in isolation. This will avoid sporadic, isolated enclaves that are remote from the building edge of the settlement.**
- 7. The style and vitality of the area around the Market Place and High Street is an important asset that must be retained and reinforced by thoughtful redevelopment.**

### **INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE**

- 1. Light industry expansion should be encouraged if it is sustainable and uses resources effectively e.g. reusing or regenerating currently disused sites and buildings.**
- 2. Industrial areas should start landscaping when development begins, with planting starting at first growing season. Forward planning by developers should be encouraged to advance the screening process.**
- 3. New industrial expansion should where possible be centred on the Berwick Road area.**
- 4. The redevelopment and improvement of the South Road area should be encouraged with a bias given towards housing and office development.**
- 5. Street furniture and shop fronts around the Market Place and High Street can add variety but should take into account the overall style of the area. Standard corporate imaging is not always appropriate and should be modified to be acceptable to the overall style of the area.**



## **CONSTRUCTION**

- 1. Materials used in construction must be sympathetic in colour and style to the general surroundings. Roof materials should be slate, red pantile or similar man-made replacements.**
- 2. Buildings should be restricted in height where appropriate to protect views and horizons.**
- 3. Buildings should in general front onto streets, presenting a live edge to maximise vitality and to promote natural surveillance.**
- 4. Affordable single units and flats should where possible form part of the housing mix of any development.**

## **AMENITY**

- 1. Newly created public open spaces should be capable of being used for sitting, walking and general recreation, not left empty.**
- 2. The provision of additional public seats and the upkeep of those already in place is considered important. It should also be included in any development accessible to the public.**
- 3. Planting should be used to form views, create shelter, enclose and define spaces, soften or screen buildings, provide seasonal variation and attract wildlife.**

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- 1. Paths and tracks should be suitably improved and maintained to allow all year round use.**
- 2. To promote walking and cycling, direct footpaths and cycle routes (where appropriate) must form part of any development plans.**
- 3. Encouragement should be given (keeping the bus station central) to the improvement and expansion of public transport links to local areas as well as to Newcastle, Edinburgh and beyond. This would benefit residents, tourists and businesses.**
- 4. A growing population means traffic calming and speed control measures are required in several areas, while the provision of footpaths on all roads that are busy or used by heavy vehicles is essential for safety.**
- 5. Road safety signs must be positioned to avoid visual clutter. The provision of additional information signs is useful particularly to visitors, but they must not compromise safety.**
- 6. The repositioning underground of overhead electricity lines and cables sited within the town should be considered as a matter of urgency, particularly if road works are being carried out.**



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