

Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Neighbourhood Plan

Boulmer Settlement Boundary Background Paper

January 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to explain the process which has led to the proposed designation of a settlement boundary around Boulmer village in the Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 As part of the consultation on the pre-submission draft neighbourhood plan, the parish council are inviting comments on the proposed Boulmer settlement boundary. Comments can be submitted in the following ways:
 - Completing an online form at www.longhoughtonndp.co.uk;
 - Email to: adrian.hinchclife@btopenworld.com; or
 - Write to: Longhoughton PC, The Croft, Boulmer, Alnwick, NE66 3BW.
- 1.3 Comments must be received by 5pm on Monday 13 November 2023.

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, 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 several 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;
 - 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, including landscape;
 - 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. 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 deliver affordable housing for local needs (in locations adjoining and outside of the settlement boundary); and
 - Ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach.

2.3 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 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, such as valued open spaces within settlement boundaries. 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 private gardens; 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 a village.

The Development Plan

2.4 The development plan for Longhoughton Parish comprises the Northumberland Local Plan (NLP), which was adopted by Northumberland County Council (NCC) in March 2022. The NLP defines settlement boundaries for all main towns, service centres and service villages, unless these are being considered through the neighbourhood planning process.

2.5 NLP Policy STP1 identifies a settlement hierarchy. Longhoughton is classified as a service village and is expected to provide for a proportionate level of housing and be the focus for investment in rural areas, to support the provision and retention of local retail, services and facilities. A settlement boundary for Longhoughton is included within the NLP.

2.6 Boulmer and Howick are identified within the NLP as small villages, which will support a proportionate level of development. Settlement boundaries are not defined within the NLP for Boulmer or Howick.

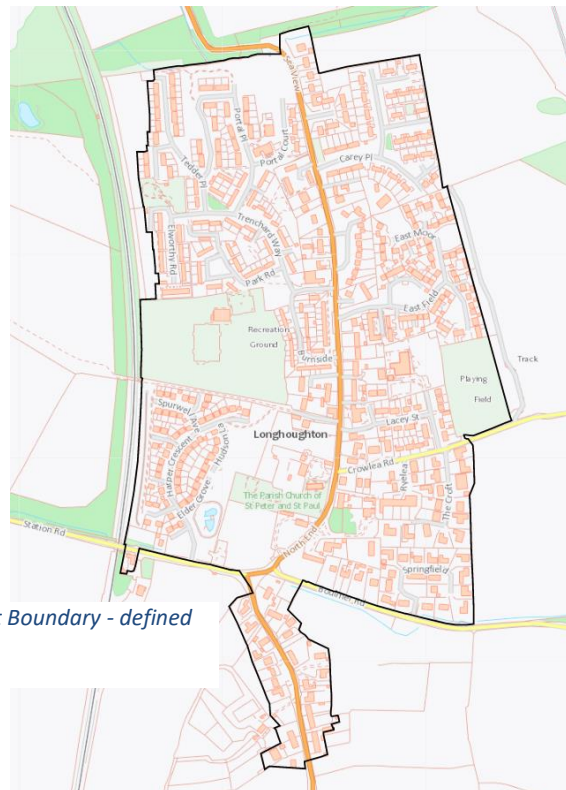


Figure 1: Longhoughton Settlement Boundary - defined within the NLP

The need for additional development

- 2.7 The ability for the current Longhoughton settlement boundary to support the sustainable growth of the village and wider parish was considered as part of the evidence work looking at housing needs and the identification of housing sites. The housing site assessment background paper illustrates that land is available within the existing Longhoughton settlement boundary to support an appropriate level of housing development and therefore the decision was made that it was not necessary to amend the Longhoughton settlement boundary through the neighbourhood plan.
- 2.8 Both the housing needs assessment and feedback from the local community has illustrated that the village of Boulmer has different challenges. The popularity of the village as a tourist destination continues to have a significant impact on the community. The second and holiday homes background paper illustrates that there is a large concentration of dwellings (35%) that are not occupied as a principal residence. The local community has expressed concern that young people are unable to buy homes in the village and that if more homes are lost from the housing market this will impact further on its sustainability. It was therefore concluded that there was a need for the plan to identify a small number of additional dwellings to be constructed within Boulmer to support its sustainability and that alongside this, it was important to define a settlement boundary for the village to manage the location of any future housing development.

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 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 Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Neighbourhood Plan, has been informed by a review of a number of different approaches and has been prepared in the context of the parish. It follows a five-stage process which is described below.

Stage 1 – Desktop review:

- 3.4 This first stage involves a review of existing evidence documents, including:
- Northumberland Local Plan Policies Map;
 - Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010);
 - Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2013);
 - Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2019-2036 (2022);
 - Review of current planning applications/ permissions (see housing site assessment background paper);

- Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Design Guidance and Design Codes (2021);
- Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Neighbourhood Plan Housing Site Assessment Background paper; and
- Aerial mapping (Google Earth).

Stage 2 – Identification of a draft boundary and on-site review:

3.5 Following the desktop review, an initial draft boundary is identified which can then be viewed on site. In order to establish robust settlement boundaries for villages within the plan area 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 settlement;
 - Agricultural buildings if they are well related in terms of scale and positioning to the rest of the settlement;
 - Community facilities where they are within the built-up area;
- Areas to be excluded are:
 - Curtilages 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:

3.6 Public feedback on the draft boundary as part of early engagement and then the consultation on the pre-submission draft plan.

Stage 4 – Review:

3.7 Review of comments received and amendment where necessary.

Stage 5 – Submission/ adoption:

3.8 Inclusion of proposed settlement boundary within submission draft plan, if endorsed through examination and referendum, 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.

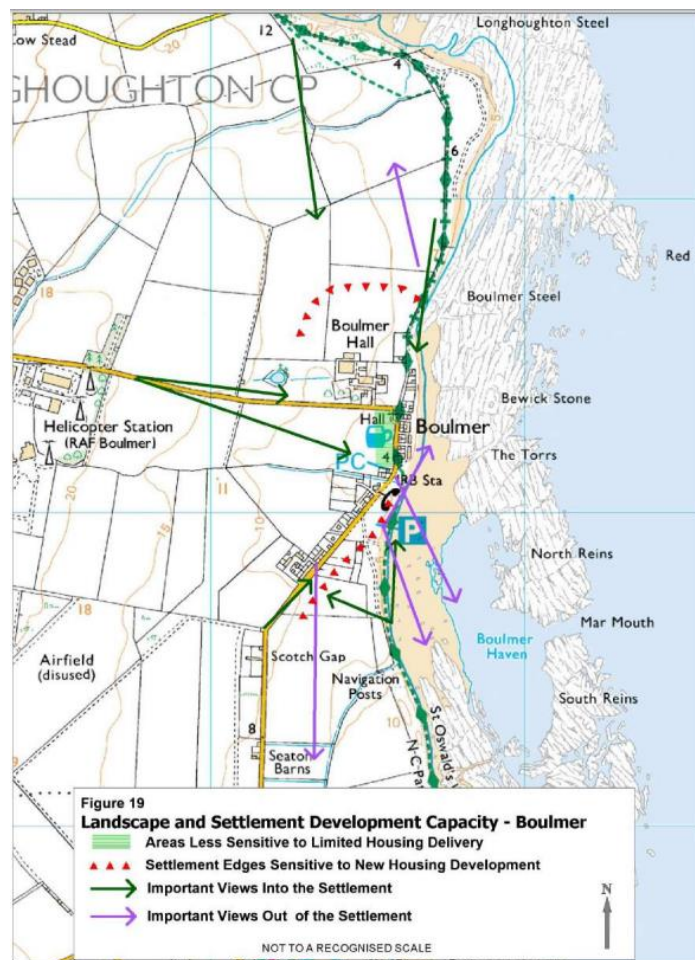
Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010)

- 4.2 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) describes the essential landscape characteristics of the county. The plan area lies within the North Northumberland Coastal Plain national character area and Boulmer falls within local landscape character areas 4c Rocky Coastline (Craster Coast). The LCA describes a number of the forces for change in the landscape and provides development guidelines. Development outside of villages within the Rocky Coastline are identified as a risk to landscape character and that the principal aim of landscape planning policies should be to arrest the erosion of character.

Northumberland Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study (2013)

- 4.3 The study assessed the sensitivity and capacity of the landscapes within the AONB in relation to tourism, housing and wind turbine (small and large scale) developments. It identifies: features that are of importance in landscape terms; constraints for development; opportunities for landscape enhancements; and key views which are the highest sensitivity to development.

- 4.4 With regard to Boulmer, the study highlights that the village is one of the few remaining unspoiled, traditional fishing/ farming villages on the AONB coast. That the traditional historic character of the village is a prominent aspect of the landscape, which would be affected by new housing which was out of scale and unsympathetic in design, layout and form.



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Figure 2: Extract from the AONB landscape sensitivity and capacity study

Northumberland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2021-2026 (2019)

4.5 The Northumberland SHLAA does not contain any sites within or on the edge of Boulmer village.

Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Design Guide and Design Codes (2021)

4.6 As part of the government's support programme for neighbourhood planning, the parish council commissioned AECOM to prepare a design guide to inform the work on the plan. The design guide describes the growth of the parish (figure 4), landscape character, importance of green spaces, as well as statutory and non-statutory designations and important views (figure 5). The document explains that the linear village of Boulmer has a consistent pattern of density, with higher densities found to the north and south of the village.

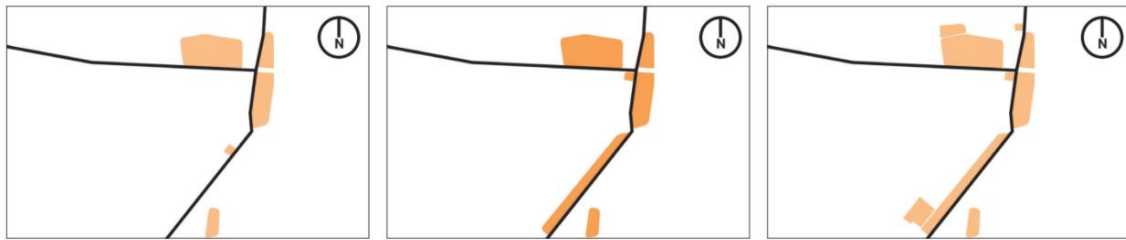


Figure 23: Illustrates Boulmer's historic settlement pattern c.1867. Figure 24: Illustrates Boulmer's historic settlement pattern c.1966. Figure 25: Illustrates Boulmer's historic settlement pattern c.2020.

Figure 3: Development of Boulmer 1800s to 2020

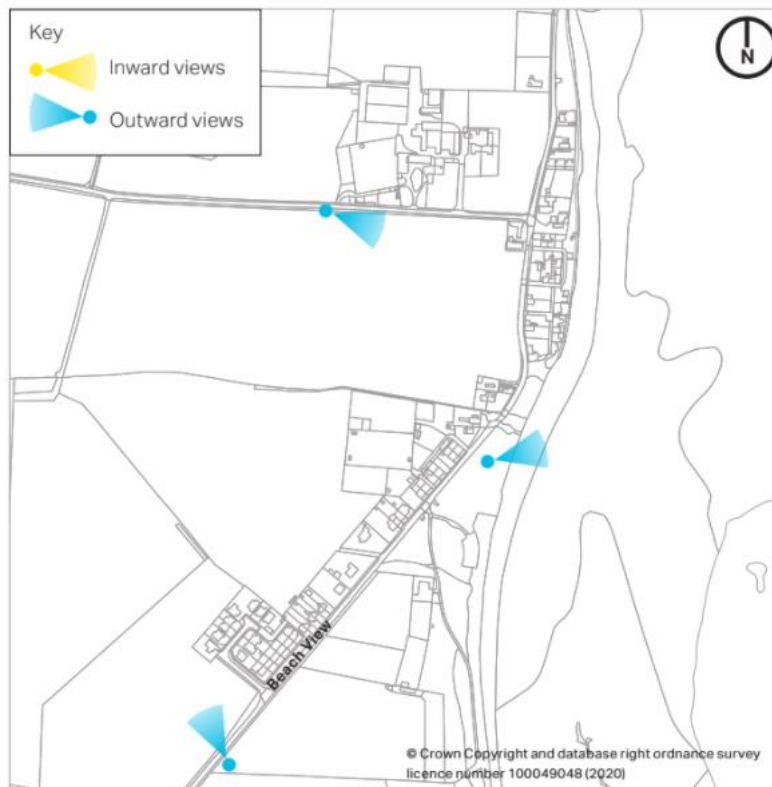


Figure 4: Some of the important views

Longhoughton, Boulmer and Howick Neighbourhood Plan Housing Site Assessment Background Paper (2023)

4.7 The housing work that has been prepared to inform the neighbourhood plan (summarised within the housing site assessment background paper) has identified that there is a need for new housing development in the parish. The second and holiday homes background paper illustrates that whilst the parish as a whole does not have high levels of second and holiday home use, there is a large concentration within Boulmer, which accounts for 35% of the properties within the village. The housing site assessment process considered a number of sites across the parish. This has resulted in the identification of one potential housing site on the southern edge of Boulmer. In addition, there is a site to the north of the village with planning permission for two dwellings. This site assessment process has informed the identification of a settlement boundary for the village (site B4 in figure 7).

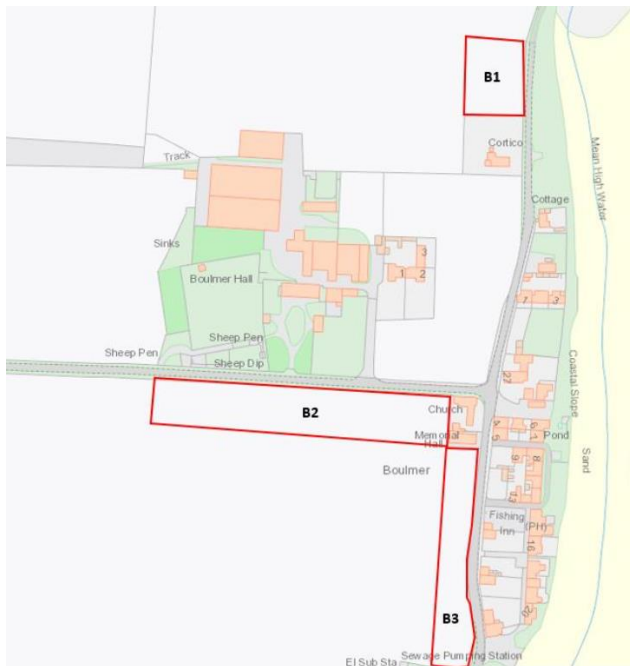


Figure 5: Sites assessed for housing (Boulmer north)



Figure 6: Sites assessed for housing (Boulmer south)

5. Identification of a settlement boundary

5.1 As identified above, the impact of future development on the landscape and setting of Boulmer has been critical in the definition of the settlement boundary as well as ensuring it supports the sustainable growth of the plan area. The proposed boundary:

- Take into account extant planning permissions;
- Will manage development to around to ensure that it does not have a negative impact on the landscape setting of the village, having regard to the sensitivity of the landscape and its capacity to accommodate new development;
- Will manage development to seek to ensure that it conserves and enhances the special qualities of the AONB;
- Establishes a logical shape to the edges of the villages, again seeking to conserve and enhance the character of the area;
- Avoids irregular incursions into the open countryside; and
- Have been drawn along features which are easily identified on the ground.

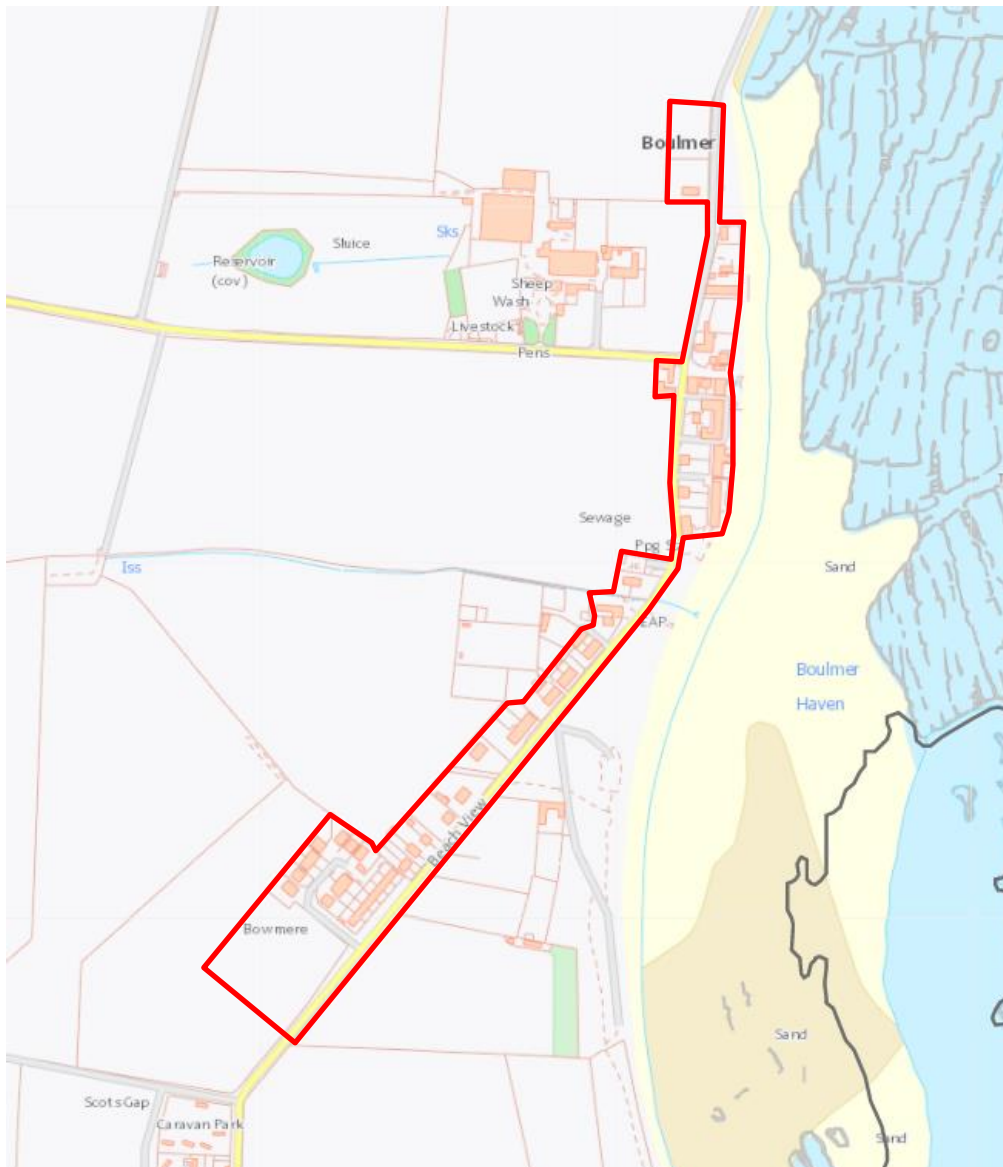


Figure 7: Proposed Boulmer settlement boundary