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Bedlington Investment Study

Last year consultants Shared Intelligence in association with Willie Miller Urban Design & Planning and Donaldsons was commissioned by Wansbeck Council, Northumberland County Council and regional development agency OneNorthEast to prepare an Investment Study for Bedlington. The study area was subsequently expanded to include Stakeford, Choppington and Guide Post to allow specific consideration of any development of Barrington Industrial Estate as well as the future provision of community facilities in and around Bedlington. This public consultation exercise is based on the findings of their joint study.

Over the last 10 years the population of Bedlington has grown by almost 9% - three times the rate for both Northumberland and the rest of Wansbeck - with much of the growth concentrated on the three Bedlington wards. There is still a strong demand from housebuilders to carry on building around the town.

By contrast there are communities within the study area suffering from significant levels of deprivation, high unemployment, lack of health facilities and low educational achievement.

Bedlington has a number of community facilities but the study also concludes there are gaps in provision across the study area.

The consultants say the town is well served by small to medium-size supermarkets and other convenience outlets and that vacancy rates are low. Yet they also acknowledge that Bedlington faces strong shopping competition from major convenience and stores in Blyth as well as the attractions of both Newcastle and

the MetroCentre.

The study report concludes that retaining and expanding the area's residential population is critical to achieving a sustainable future for the town.

It further concludes that sustaining Bedlington's role as a convenience shopping centre must remain a priority not only to ensure shops are accessible to people without their own car, but also to maintain the overall viability and vitality of the town centre.

In their report the consultants outline the case for the provision of new community facilities focused around the development of a combined primary care, health and leisure building in Bedlington as well as what they describe as a new 'civic square' that would also act as a link between Front Street and car parking to the rear of the Market Place.

Summary of Investment Study Proposals

Community use and the expansion of existing retail facilities are at the core of the proposed changes around the central focus of Bedlington's Market Place.

Residential development in the shape of two and three-bedroom properties is also outlined among the changes which would also introduce more activity to the area.

The key proposals include:-

- A Primary Care Health Centre combined with wet and dry leisure facilities including a community pool and multi-purpose sports hall. The health centre would replace existing GP surgeries at Bedlington, Bedlington Station and Guide Post. Details of outreach facilities perhaps provided by nurse practitioners rather than

doctors at Guide Post and Bedlington Station, have yet to be considered along with transport access to the Bedlington centre. The study suggests that the proposed new centre would best be located on what is known as the 'gap site' adjoining the Market Place.. A building of some 5,000m² over two floors, is proposed.

- Expanded superstore. Safeway is understood to be considering either redeveloping its present premises or building a new store in the existing car park although details of which option is preferred have yet to be revealed.

- More Town Centre Housing. There is still a healthy demand from builders for new development sites in Bedlington, some of which could be met within the town centre on 'brownfield' sites. Part of the car park to the north of Front Street West is suggested for special housing needs, while land to the east of the Law Courts and south of Schalksmuhle Road could also be used. A total of 74 new properties is proposed in the study report.

- New Civic Square. One of the most important elements of the proposals for the town centre, it would connect the Market Place with the rear of Front Street. A mix of new and existing buildings including the proposed community building, the Law Courts and superstore would provide the frontage and enclosure to the square.

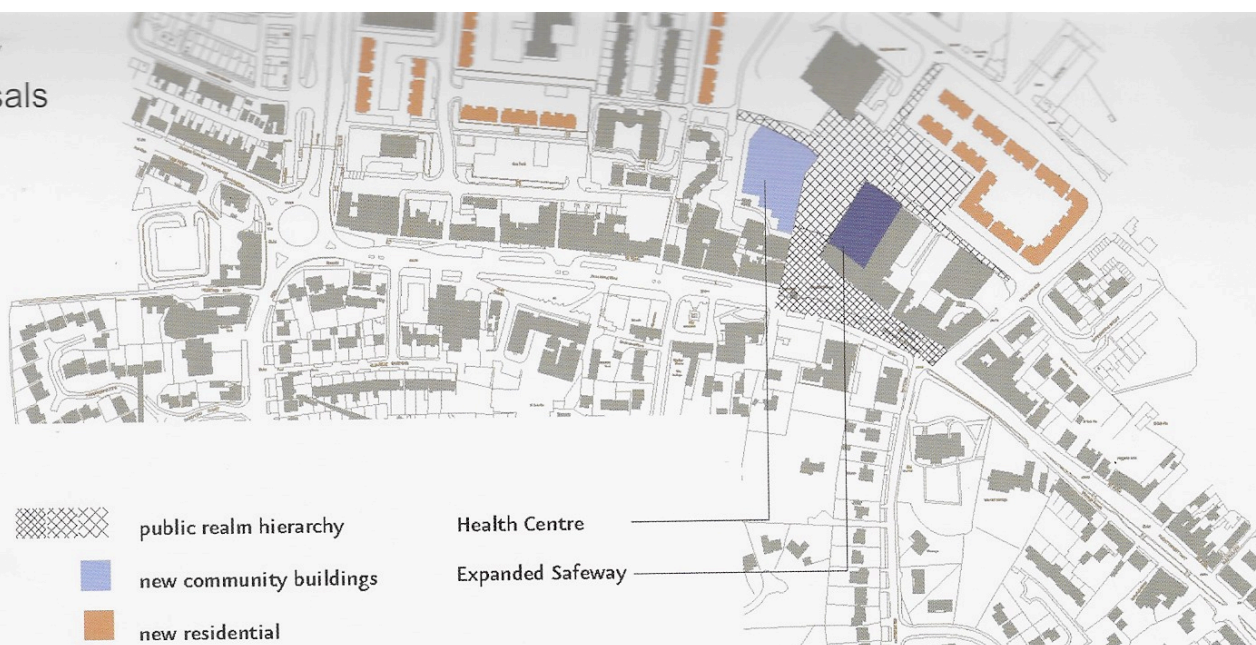
- An overall reduction in town centre car parking is proposed to facilitate the new developments. A Northumberland County Council survey suggests that parking spaces could be halved without a significant impact on demand. A reduction of 100 spaces would still leave room for 550 vehicles.

- There is also a suggestion to move Bedlington's weekly market to the Front Street around the Market Place which would not only activate the street but

improve trading potential for existing businesses. The study suggests considering 'theming' the market with, for example, a trial of a farmers' market.



Centre Proposals



Barrington Industrial Estate

The sole location for industry within the study area. Although it currently suffers from a poor image it has the potential to become a greater asset for the area.

The views of businesses located on the estate were sought by the consultants who would like to see more investment in environmental and landscaping improvements; resurfacing of estate roads; parking restrictions on its main road and generally better parking facilities.

The study recommends that an estate Management Plan should be prepared to address these issues.

Community and Leisure

The wider study area benefits from a range of community and leisure facilities and more are being proposed. For instance Choppington now has a new welfare providing not just social and recreational but learning facilities. Stakeford and Bomarsund Welfare is also planning to renew and expand its own facilities and Guide Post Middle School is developing all-weather sports pitches.

Other facilities include Bedlington Community Centre, the Salvation Army Hall, Trinity Youth, the People's House, a public service network centre and Bedlington Station's Open Learning Centre. The study recommends improving co-ordination to avoid duplication.

The Next Steps

Clearly proposals such as the ones outlined in this summary to revitalise the town centre of Bedlington and provide new facilities elsewhere, are not going to happen overnight, but an important step is to consult local people, traders, community groups and organisations to find out whether there is broad agreement with what is being outlined as a result of the investment study. It is critically important, therefore, that local people respond and submit their views.

The proposals are complex and inter-linked and would clearly need resources to be allocated from both the public and private sectors, if they are to be developed and implemented. The consultants have outlined what they think is a realistic assessment of the situation in Bedlington and have put forward what they consider are realistic proposals. But they have also indicated that a number of development issues are still unresolved. For instance, neither the health/leisure centre nor the Safeway store development is a committed project.

So at this stage local people are being given the chance to comment on the proposals that have been outlined as well as putting forward their views on what they feel needs to be done to secure Bedlington's future as a thriving and town centre.

A survey questionnaire is available and the partners would ask you to complete one and return it to Wansbeck Council either by using one of the special return boxes or by using FREEPOST NEA8578 marked 'Bedlington Town Centre'. All returns are requested by Monday 18th November.

YOUR views are important and will be taken into consideration.





WANSBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, TOWN HALL, ASHINGTON, NE63 8RX.