

# WITTON GILBERT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN: BACKGROUND HOUSING TOPIC PAPER

revision 24 April 2017

## Introduction

This paper is intended to provide background information and evidence to support housing policies in our neighbourhood plan. In relation to housing, the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan seeks to:

- ensure that the settlement boundary of Witton Gilbert is generous enough to promote sustainable development, and the growth of our sustainable community over the Plan period
- ensure that the right type and tenure of the new homes come forward in the village
- ensure that new development contributes to the regeneration and sustainability of the village

In order to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan does indeed seek to promote sustainable development, it is important to ensure that enough land has been made available for new housing development within the settlement to achieve these aims.

## The County Durham Plan

A neighbourhood plan should support the strategic development needs set out in the local plan and plan positively to support local development (as outlined in paragraph 16 of the NPPF).<sup>1</sup>

Although a draft neighbourhood plan is not tested against the policies in an emerging local plan the reasoning and evidence informing the local plan process is likely to be relevant to the consideration of the basic conditions against which a neighbourhood plan is tested. For example, evidence of up to date housing needs is relevant to the question of whether a housing supply policy in a neighbourhood plan contributes to achieving sustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

There are, at present, no strategic housing numbers available to enable the Steering Group to ensure that Witton Gilbert meets the strategic housing allocation requirement in relation to the village.

Current evidence consists of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment for County Durham, which is supporting the emerging County Durham Plan. This housing land assessment is for the entire County, and is not divided into smaller market areas. This makes it very difficult for Witton Gilbert to extrapolate accurate data about what the expected housing figures for the settlement are likely to be.

Latest NPPG guidance (updated 11/02/16) states: 'The local planning authority should work with the qualifying body (Witton Gilbert Parish Council) to produce complementary neighbourhood and local plans. It is important to minimise any conflicts between policies in the neighbourhood plan and those in the emerging Local Plan, including housing supply policies. This is because section 38(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the conflict must be resolved by the decision maker favouring the policy which is contained in the last document to become part of the development plan.'<sup>3</sup>

Meetings have taken place with Durham County Council planners and housing officers, and it has been agreed that the extended settlement boundary and infill sites are likely to contribute to sustainable development in the village, and that there is enough land made available for new housing, thus ensuring the Plan meets the basic conditions and does not conflict with strategic aims in the emerging County Durham Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 004 Reference ID 41-004-20140306 (NPPG)

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 009 Reference ID 41-009-20160211 (NPPF)

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 009 Reference ID: 41-009-20160211 (NPPG)

In addition, it is likely that a large scale housing development will come forward within the Neighbourhood Plan area, which will provide a significant amount of new housing relative to other parts of the County. This potential allocation (and deletion of green belt) is outside the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan, which seeks to focus solely on the settlement of Witton Gilbert itself.

### **Sustainable Development in Witton Gilbert**

Witton Gilbert is a relatively small settlement and as stated above Durham County Council's strategic housing data does not provide sufficiently fine grained data to inform an assessment of specific housing numbers to plan specifically within the settlement.

The Neighbourhood Plan recognises that the developing County Plan will require the Neighbourhood Plan Area to accommodate part of the strategic housing requirement for County Durham. The Steering Group are aware that there are proposals in the emerging County Durham Plan, to promote large scale housing development within the Neighbourhood Plan area. These proposals are not referred to in the Neighbourhood Plan, as the land is currently in the green belt, and therefore outside the scope of neighbourhood planning.

The Neighbourhood Plan housing policies focus mainly on the Village of Witton Gilbert and the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan is to encourage development that contributes to the sustainability of the village of Witton Gilbert, by ensuring that our valued services and facilities are maintained, and that our community continues to thrive.

To ensure that this is the case, we have sought to understand the demographic changes within our community and how these may affect the long term wellbeing and viability of the settlement.

To these ends the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to re-define a settlement boundary for Witton Gilbert, by expanding the current settlement boundary to include more land for sustainable development.

This boundary has been carefully drawn, using a clear methodology, to achieve the Community's aims of providing development opportunities within the settlement area based on a clear set of criteria.

In order to have a robust settlement boundary, that ensures that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions, and in particular the condition that the Neighbourhood Plan contributes to sustainable development, it is important to have some concept of the number of homes required within the boundary to ensure the village continues to grow enough to support our vital services and facilities, without compromising our special landscapes, the green belt, and our sense of 'separation' from neighbouring settlements.

### **Witton Gilbert Development Context**

It is undeniable that we will need to build new homes and improve the existing ones to ensure they are suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to provide for the changing needs of our community and to ensure we retain a sustainable and vibrant community into the future. It is important to maintain as balanced a profile to our population as possible to sustain our important facilities such as the community centre, local shop, primary school, playing fields, pubs and churches. To lose any of these assets would irrevocably alter our community. To preserve and enhance Witton Gilbert it is vital that the appropriate housing stock is available.

We must also recognise the evolving National Planning Policy Framework which places responsibilities on local authorities to deliver the new housing contained in local and national plans and to remove unnecessary hindrances to development. There is now a presumption in favour of development which can make it more difficult for communities to resist inappropriate development. It is important that the Neighbourhood Plan be positive and forward looking, but it must also allow us to put in place measures which control and protect the important aspects of our parish.

## History

The Evolution of Witton Gilbert section in the Neighbourhood Plan (para 3.4) gives a detailed history of the village and to some extent explains where and how the various stages of development took place over the centuries. This shows the profile of the existing housing stock and the previous scale of development that took place. It also shows how the balance of the village was shifted away from its historic heart and moved up towards Sacriston, leaving behind the church, public houses and the shops with devastating consequences for the Front Street area.

The vast majority of homes in Witton Gilbert village were built before 1980 and a large proportion of those are pre 1940. There is an obvious need for improving the housing stock to allow all members of our community the opportunity to live in an energy efficient home, set in well-planned and maintained external spaces.

The history and its visual character are important to the residents, so any development must be sensitive to the context and visual character of the site and make a positive contribution to the overall form of the village and enhance the historic context.

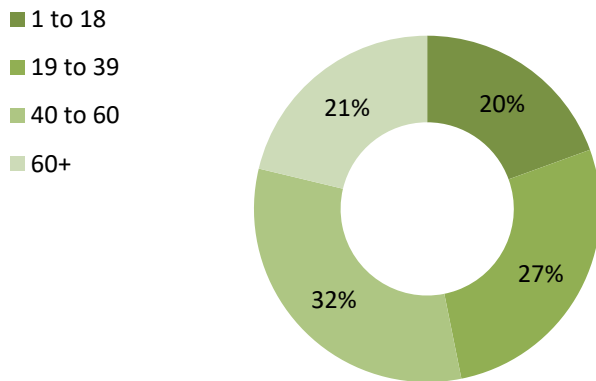
## Population

The 2011 census (*\*see footnote 1*) provides population statistics which will be used until 2021 by planners, policy makers and researchers in both the public and private sectors. The population in England and Wales is changing rapidly and the need to understand these changes will continue. As the population increases, so the need for more housing becomes crucial.

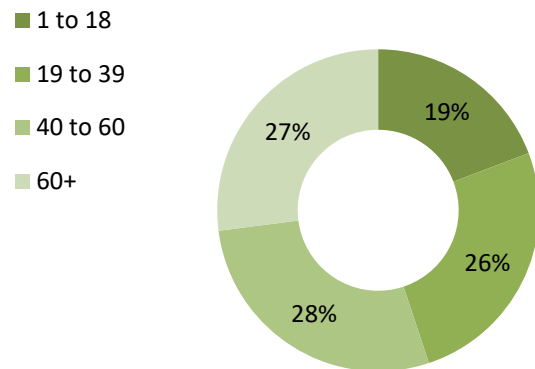
The 2011 census shows that Witton has a wide mix of socio-economic categories, low ethnic diversity and a comparison with the 2001 census shows us that our population is ageing like the rest of the UK. At the 2001 census the population of Witton Gilbert village was 2292 and by the 2011 census it had risen to 2419. The growth rate over the 10 year census period equates to 5.54% which compared to previous decades was a quite modest rate of change. To assess population growth over the neighbourhood plan period from the 10 years covered by the census we considered 3 scales of information 1. Extrapolating the parish census growth over 15 years, this gives a figure of approximately 7.75%. 2. Although the parish census output area is not available in a midyear estimate form, using the Middle Layer Super Output area of Durham 026, this larger area showed an increase in population from 2001 to 2015 of 7%. 3. This figure of 7% is compatible with the anticipated future housing market increase identified in the County Durham Issues and Options SHMA (Part 1) published in June 2016. This states, that “the population of County Durham is estimated to increase by 7% by 2037 (based on ONS 2012 based population projections”.

The Neighbourhood Plan period is for 15 years taking us to 2031, so if we use the same organic growth rate as seen in the last 15 years the village, population will increase to approximately 2620 that's an increase of 170 persons over the projected 2015 population figure of 2450. The previous household occupancy rate for Witton was 2.17 persons per household. The average household size in the UK is now 2.37 persons per house. Using the UK average household size to accommodate the expected increase of 170 persons we would need an additional 70 new homes, this equates to 5 new houses per year over the next 15 years.

### POPULATION DISTRIBUTION: 2001



### POPULATION DISTRIBUTION: 2011



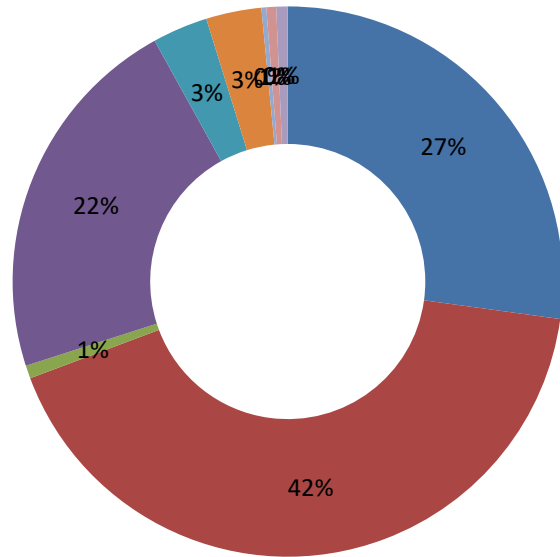
**School places** is a subject which generates some debate so to understand the effect of this population increase we would need to estimate the numbers of school age children the new homes would generate. The method used by the County Council is to use a multiplier which is generated by their past data and we have used the same formula.

For primary school children all new homes may deliver 0.3 primary school children per new house over the life of the Neighbourhood Plan. That is 21 primary school children over 15 years or 1.4 children per year. For secondary school children the multiplier is 0.12. This results in 8.4 secondary school children over 15 years or 0.6 per year. The actual rate that the new homes will be delivered will depend on a number of factors, site availability, market pressure, housing demand and viability. The number of potentially available sites within the Settlement Boundary is approximately 4 to 5 and these would probably be delivered in at least 6 phases. We therefore expect it will be 2 to 3 years before any significant number of homes can be completed with the remainder following on in years 4, 5, 6 and 7.

**The housing stock statistics** are shown in the charts below and indicate that the percentage of owner/occupiers has change very little between 2001 and 2011 (2001= 70% and 2011= 69%) whereas the changes in the rented sector have been much more marked. The combined social rented homes in 2001 were 25%(of which 22% were council houses) of housing stock, but in 2011 this had fallen to 21%(of which 16% were council houses) with the private rented sector picking up the difference, accounting for 4% in 2001 and in 2011 9%. The total number of households in Witton Gilbert relating to the above figures was for 2001 **1045** and in 2011 it had risen to **1110** which is an increase of **65** households. Between 2001 and 2011 there were **46** new owner occupied households created. There were **36** less Social rented households and **61** more private rented households. Therefore a total of **143** households were created or changed their status in the inter census period. We did not physically lose council built homes, they changed ownership to either private owners or Housing Associations.

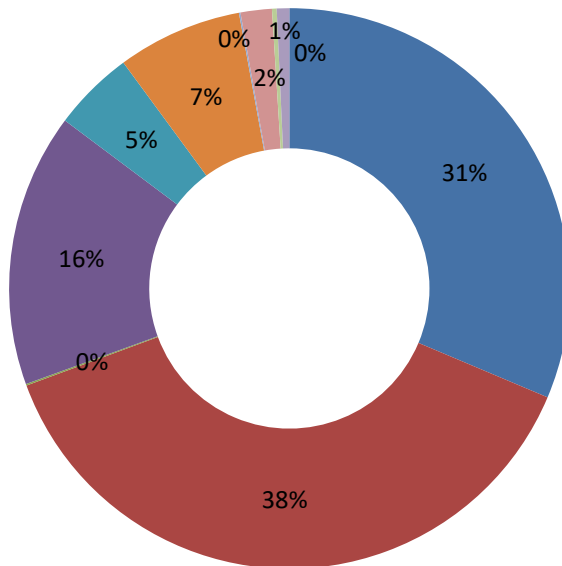
## Household Tenure:2001

- Owned outright
- Owned: mortgage or loan
- Shared ownership
- Social rented Council
- Other social rented
- Private rented: Private landlord
- Private rented: Employer
- Private rented: Relative
- Private rented: Other
- Living rent free



## Houshold Tenure: 2011

- Owned Outright
- Owned with a Mortgage or Loan
- Shared Ownership
- Social Rented Council
- Social Rented; Other
- Private Rented; Private Landlord
- Private Rented; Employer
- Private Rented; Relative
- Private Rented; Other
- Living Rent Free



**To summarise:** the net effect of the inter census period changes in the village has been to reduce the availability of social rented accommodation. Home ownership as a percentage of total households has remained static but the private rented sector has increased disproportionately. If this trend were to continue it would have a significant effect on community cohesion and run counter to the Neighbourhood Plans aim of promoting a stronger sense of community.

### ***The aims of the Plan are:***

*To plan to build a maximum of 76 new homes within the settlement of Witton Gilbert over the Neighbourhood Plan period.*

*To develop policies which will encourage both home ownership and social rented properties within new developments*

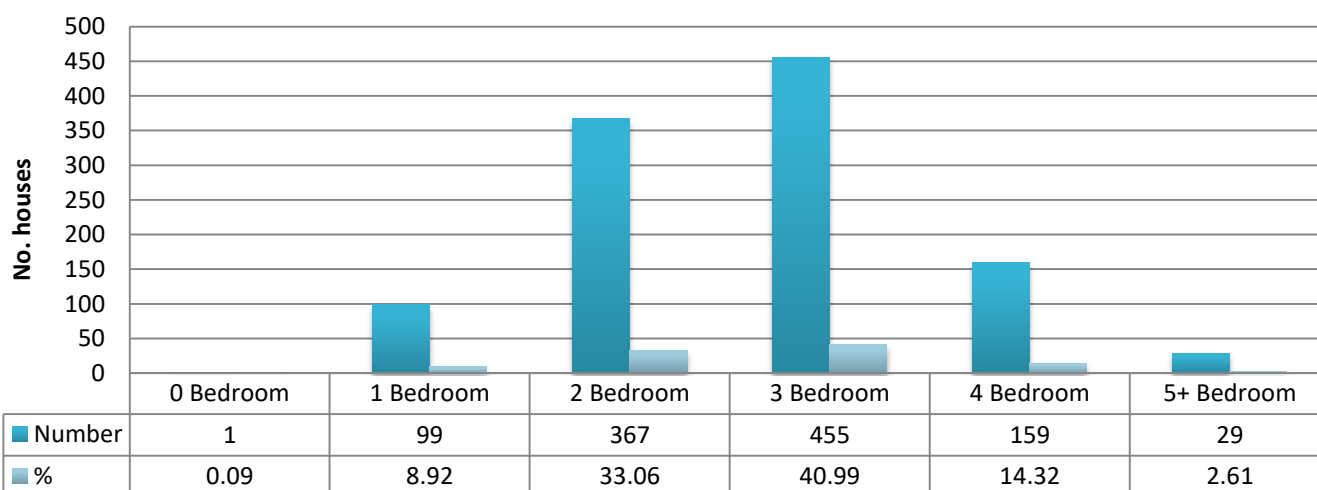
*To ensure that 10% of new homes are provided by the social rented sector. To maintain the private rented sector at the current ratio*

*To improve the choice available for older people, by encouraging the development of accessible and adaptable homes (Building Regulations M4 (2)) which provide sustainable development and maintain a strong, healthy and vibrant community.*

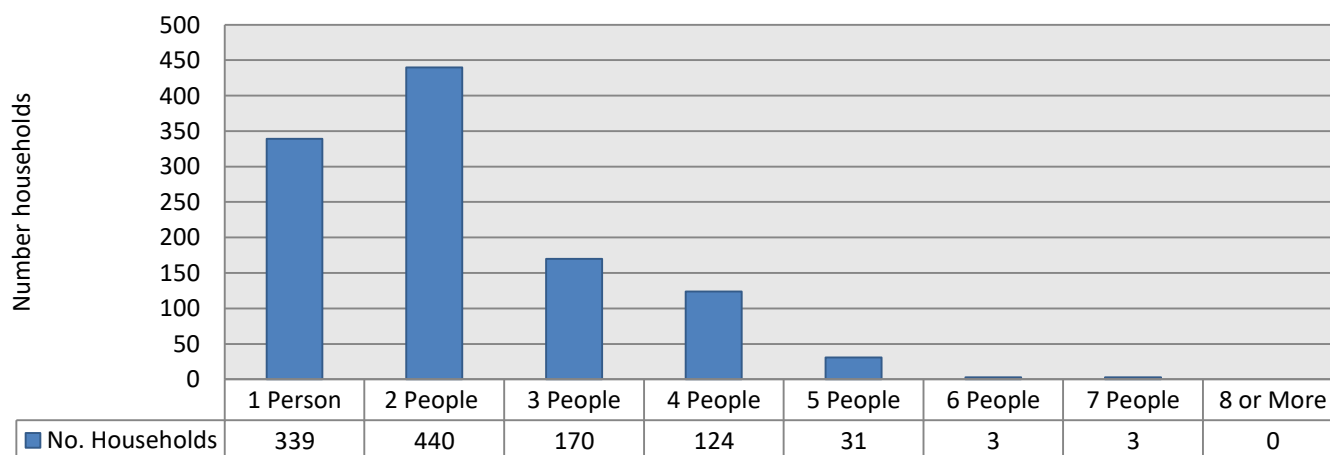
### Housing stock by bedroom number.

The chart below shows the distribution of the number of bedrooms per home in 2011. In overall terms there is not an overcrowding issue. Our population at 2011 was 2419 and we had a total of 2979 bedrooms which is an 18.7% additional capacity. However this does not suggest that there are no individual cases of overcrowding nor would the majority of residents consider them as “spare” bedrooms, as the 560 extra bedrooms equates to 0.5 extra rooms per household. There are 779 households with 2 or less occupants, that’s 70% of all households where the number of homes with 2 or less bedrooms is 467, which is 42% of all households. It is obvious that there is some over supply and that housing provision in the village could achieve a better balance. For example by building homes specifically designed for the more elderly residents, this may release family sized homes for younger established families. Given the percentage of the population above 75 years of age is approximately 8%, the proportion of the new homes built for the elderly should be limited to 10%.

### Housing Stock 2011: No. Bedrooms

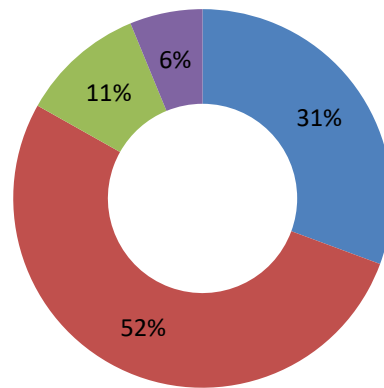


### Household size 2011



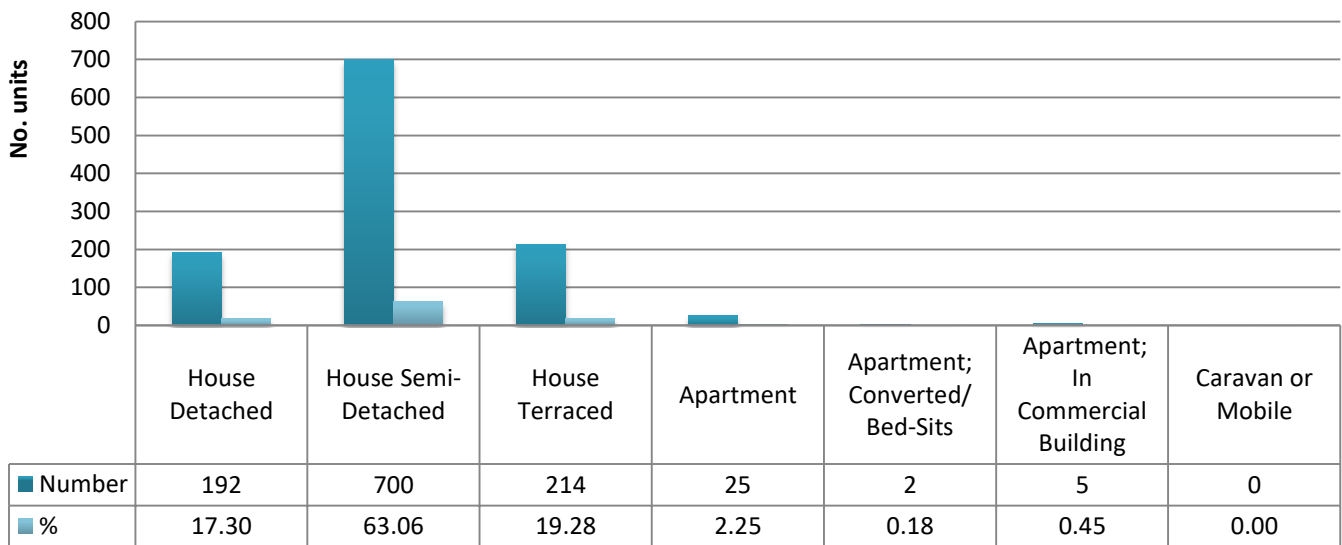
## Persons per Bedroom: 2011

- Up To 0.5 Persons Per Bedroom (Households)1 Count
- Over 0.5 and Up To 1.0 Persons Per Bedroom (Households)1 Count
- Over 1.0 and Up To 1.5 Persons Per Bedroom (Households)1 Count
- Over 1.5 Persons Per Bedroom (Households)1 Count



## Housing stock by House type.

### Housing Type: 2011



Semi-detached houses predominate, forming 63% of the housing stock with terraced houses next at 19% and detached 17%. The total for all types of apartment is approximately 3%. This would seem to suggest that the Neighbourhood Plan should discourage developments with a significant proportion of semi-detached houses in order to rebalance the housing stock and provided a more varied choice of property for both the current residents and families moving into the area.

### Older People's Housing

The provision of specialised housing for older people is not a new concept. It dates back to the middle ages with the development of almshouses. Since then, provision has moved from trade based care communities through to the significant development of sheltered housing following the Second World War. Sheltered housing was seen as a mid-point between general needs housing and the higher care afforded within residential homes.

Most recently there has been a shift towards services that enable people to remain in their own homes, ideally homes which have been designed to promote independence. This shift has been driven to a great extent by the increasing proportion of the population over 65, the changing attitudes and expectations of older people and the demand that in the future, developments should be of housing suitable for older people rather than the more stigmatising 'older people's housing'. It should be housing which people look at and welcome rather than housing where the underlying message is, "has it come to this?" The Government and care professionals are coming to realise that the current mode of elderly care is unsustainable.

It is reasonable to expect that people in their 50's will want to downsize at some point and for a generation of older people used to choice and quality of design, aspirations now are increasingly towards homes which will be able to satisfy future possible health/mobility needs. The old path of moving into purpose built elderly accommodation or residential care is no longer acceptable to the middle-aged population of today. Buying into specialist retirement housing is a big psychological step, especially as there is little awareness of what is on offer.

The planning system has a role to play in helping people achieve their aspirations by making sure, as far as we can, that there is suitable housing for an increasingly ageing population and making sure that such housing not only diminishes people's need for care and support but is also an attractive, desirable and financially viable option.

Planners thinking of the way older people's housing need should be designed and funded is changing. With an emphasis on choice and individuals having funding, either through their own resources or from a personal health and social care budget, there is a need to seek housing and care solutions that are much more positive and attractive than those that have been seen as appropriate in the past. The offers that have been available to date, from retirement villages to the apartment model aren't the right solutions for everybody.

The 2008 DCLG policy paper 'Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbours' points out that in 1950 the average male retirement age was 67 and he could expect to have 10.8 years in retirement. Now the average retirement age is 65 with men expecting to have 17.6 years and women 20.2 years in retirement.

There have been huge increases in home ownership. Of the 5.5m 65+ households in England, 75% are home owners. Of particular significance for future market developments, nearly 50% of all household equity is held by the 65+ age group.

### **Witton Gilbert**

Results from the 2011 census has shown that the majority of the housing stock is comprised of 1110 household spaces, 1079 of which were houses/bungalows and 31 flats.

In 2011, over a third of these households (334) had at least one 65+ resident, 228 of which were owner/occupiers or 68.2%, which is slightly higher than the north-east average of 66%.

A recent count of bungalows in the village shows there are 162 in total, accounting for 14.4% of the housing stock. 154 of these are within the settlement boundary with the majority consisting of social housing, 92 to 62 private. With the majority of older people in the village being owner/occupiers the mismatch in the existing stock between private and social bungalows is clear. Older owner occupiers who may want to downsize have particularly few market options. Given the percentage of the population in the 60+ age range (27%) there is evidence that there is and will be a shortage of housing choice for older people, which justifies the inclusion of an older people's housing provision policy.

The national trend is for the percentage of over 60s to continue to increase and thus we have made an assumption that our local population will follow the national trend.

If the increase in Witton Gilbert were to continue as a straight line graph using the figures in the 2001-2011 census, the percentage would increase to approximately 39% by 2030 and as the over 60s have a much lower occupancy



rate than younger families they could occupy over 45% of all homes in the village. Though this is not a bad thing in itself, if this section of the population reduces the housing choice for the younger households it could impact on the viability of the settlement.

The major social housing provider in the village (Durham County Homes) responded to our enquires regarding their plans for expanding supply or improving existing stock, stating they had no plans for either option in the foreseeable future.

There is also substantial evidence in County Durham's Strategic Housing Market Assessment to suggest that the housing stock in the County is not suited to an ageing population. (OP Appendix 1)

We should stress that many of this generation have the resources to purchase property which meets their requirements, should developers choose to supply them. The Neighbourhood Plan will support such developments as the current housing market is failing to meet the demand for this growing sector.

The size of the population of Witton Gilbert suggests that there are limited opportunities for a wide range of housing provision and we have to be realistic about what can be achieved. In formulating the policy a number of assumptions have had to be made. Firstly, there is not the scope to justify any specialist provision such as extra care properties or residential homes, although any proposals for such provision will be supported. The policy is aimed at providing private and intermediate general needs housing for a growing elderly population, mainly in home ownership, with a view to including such provision within any new development. On sites over 0.5ha, 10% of the total new build should be appropriate for older people's housing able to satisfy the possible needs of people as they grow older, without having to move home. Examples of types of housing known to be appropriate are:

- Level access bungalow or flat
- Category M accessible homes (former lifetime homes)
- Minimum 2 bedrooms for general needs and possible future needs

The population of older people in England is living longer and has greater affluence than its predecessors, but for some reveals problems of poverty and poor health for many more. It is this complex interaction of factors that makes it hard to translate demographic change into anticipated housing demand.

It is unclear the degree to which housing choice influences decisions about moving house but evidence suggests that more people will consider a move if there are attractive housing options available.

Local authorities are beginning to consider housing provision for older people within their local plan policies so it seems appropriate that the Neighbourhood Plan has the foresight to include a policy for future housing development.

\*Foot Note 1: The specific focus of the paper is the main settlement of Witton Gilbert and the best fit census output area is the **Parish** output area which contrary to its name only covers the area of the village and the western part of the parish. There is no output area which exactly matches the Parish boundary. This suits the purpose of this discussion paper as the agreed method is to concentrate on the village of Witton Gilbert as this will be the focus of future development and following an examination of the national planning guidance on development within the country side it was felt we could not make any meaningful improvements to the planning guidance for housing within the country side. It is obviously important for comparative purposes that the areas for 2001 and 2011 match.

In order to make a projection for future housing land within the Settlement Boundary we would need to look at the past population growth within Witton Gilbert and the growth trends in our neighbouring area , Durham County and nationally. As the Parish census data is not updated with midyear estimates, we selected a Middle Layer Super Output Area for Durham 026, which contains Witton Gilbert and parts of some immediate neighbouring settlements; this gives a broader picture of a similar but larger population and allows us to update the percentage growth projections for the plan period.