**Comment:** Thank you for giving us an opportunity to comment on your neighbourhood plan. I am very glad I looked in detail at the leaflet and didn't file it in the bin as I found many of my neighbours had.   
  
Setting up your consultation meetings during the school holidays when some families are away is not inclusive of the full community as we, along with some others could not attend and talk to you about your proposal in person.   
  
Your plan has come as quite a shock to us and many of our neighbours on Front Street and although updates of the creation of the neighbourhood plan have been in the newsletter, as ever the devil is in the detail. I was not aware that the plan would be covering such a strong focus on housing development. It may have been prudent to consult with the area of the village most affected in a more direct way than some leaflet drops and the odd update in the parish newsletter, which I do always read with interest. In my line of work, we door knock and talk to people face to face when we are directly impacting them even temporarily with construction activity, let alone a life changing event such as redefining their living environment.   
  
We are in complete disagreement with your identified strategy and are not convinced it represents the true needs of our local community. We would like to know the proportion of respondents in relation to total village residents who have contributed and also the proportions to total that identified the issues you are looking to address. I would also be interested in the demographics of those most closely involved in developing the detail to see how representative they are of the community this plan will most heavily affect. You mention in the plan that there is a community consultation statement, please can you post this, the members of the steering group and the full details of all consultation and how much engagement you have had from the community on the development of this plan on your website. I would also be interested in the list and access to the supporting documents you mention not currently available on the website. I am intrigued at how you have interpreted results of the survey to reach your conclusions and would like more detail on the logic followed.   
  
I fully agree with protecting our natural environment and preserving the historic core of the village but fail completely to see how building 60 houses achieves this. You will only remove greenfield land destroying the natural environment, hedgerows, and wildlife habitats. You will not protect our historic core with new houses, you will damage our quiet close knit community.   
  
We live in one of the oldest houses in Front Street (48, not designated as being part of your historic core?) and bought in this area because of the rural feel, open space and green outlook of Front Street. We did not want to live in a housing estate or a busy urban area. We love the access to the natural environment that comes with living in this village, the great neighbours and community we have in Front Street and the history that comes with living in an old village. We have the old animal trough in our back garden, a traditional milestone in front of our house and this is the character we love and chose.   
  
We have a number of questions and issues to raise in relation to your neighbourhood plan and detail them below.   
  
You cannot look at the housing needs of County Durham and apply them at Parish level, the county has a plan that outlines its strategy to addressing the County's housing shortfall, the 2013 plan has no identified needs in Witton Gilbert. It identifies requirements in surrounding areas and addresses the overarching needs through developments such as Sniperley. It is also looking at regeneration in local areas such as Bowburn, Sacriston and Esh   
Winning. Across the County there are SHLAAs and new housing sites identified that satisfy Central Durham's population needs. There are no identified suitable SHLAAs in this village. Growth should not be considered in such an isolated and silo way.   
  
Once you have filled in this space there is nowhere else to build so how do you plan to continue to build a 'living, working, sustainable community' if building houses is your only means of achieving this.   
  
Who benefits long term from this development, I can see a short term financial gain of which a proportion will be reinvested into the village but where does the rest of it go? Who will benefit from our reduced quality of life?   
  
For growth to be sustainable there needs to be facilities for the new residents and no detriment to the environment. As you state there are minimal facilities in Witton and I am surprised that enhancing facilities for existing residents does not come as first priority for a community plan. Improved play parks, protected green space, encouraging some local shops, and more organised activities to bring community spirit should be prime principles.   
  
The school does not have capacity, my child has some of his lessons in a shed and they are building a new canopy area this half term to create some much needed additional teaching space. They would love to have a library but have nowhere to put it as every spare space is used for breaking classes into smaller groups to provide quality, matched teaching. The school has been over subscribed for the last four years so where will the new children go?   
  
Addressing traffic issues (rat run and congestion on Front Street) and parking problems also on Front Street should rightly be a priority and although traffic calming measures will slow traffic down, it will not stop the rat run and your plan creates additional traffic from the new houses.   
  
Constructing 60 more houses creates a need for approximately 100 cars with parking requirements, plus the displacement of parking areas currently used by existing residents in the pub car park and the old garage is an interesting approach to protecting our village spirit and heritage core. I do not feel that your proposals adequately resolve the new parking and existing parking needs of our village. This area is often log jammed with cars and current parking frequently disrupts free traffic flow at all times of the day. We have young children and having cars parked along both sides of a busy and getting busier Front Street can only make road crossing more dangerous. Volume and speed both contribute to traffic risk.   
  
The choice of this land is unsuitable as the land floods from surface water at both ends of the village, not just at the field at the west end, the field behind the Glendenning Arms also floods. The water table is very high in this area as we have surface water issues in our garden. Housing policies place high priority to flood risk, creating further impermeable areas in a locality with flood risk is positively discouraged.   
  
This land has been pushed for development on at least two occasions over the last 20 years and always been knocked back. The local residents were against this development the last time you tried to push it in 2005 and formed the Witton Gilbert Village - Save our Spaces group to fight your proposal. Compromise the last time was to reduce the amount of land you sold off and to build sympathetic family homes. The buildings constructed where not stone faced as promised and are small rented flats, not family homes. This has not enhanced or built a sustainable communities as these residents are short lived and move on regularly. I would not consider any of the pictures of housing included in your plan as being sympathetic to the old housing stock in this part of the village, modern buildings rarely are.   
  
We will oppose this proposal vehement as we wish to protect our village spirit, safety, environment and heritage and not just fill up the last little space with inappropriate housing for short term financial gain. That is not what the local residents of Front Street want nor can see any clear justification for it from your evidence base and the concerns we have detailed in this letter.   
  
Your plans will directly impact us in the following way:   
- a new road access directly opposite our house front   
- obliterate our rural outlook and views   
- potential damage to our property from construction (the old houses in this part of the village don't have foundations and are easily damaged from piling which will be needed and heavy vehicle movement)   
- the safety of our children on our front street from additional traffic and car parking.   
  
A neighbourhood plan is supposed to allow communities to shape the area they live not to enable parish councils to get inappropriate house building for short term financial gain. This is not the legacy we want to leave our children and the next generation of Witton Gilbert. There has been no sympathetic development of Front Street in recent years and we do not want the character of our homes and streets to be destroyed further. We want our children to grow up in the rural environment we moved here for.   
  
When I explained to my 8 year old daughter what I was writing She said "There is wildlife and animals you can't take away their home. Where will the horses and chickens go as lots of people enjoy the animals?"   
  
Looking forward to your response to our concerns and how they will be reflected in your plans.   
  
Yours faithfully   
  
Mrs N Walsh CEng CEnv MCIWEM MBA BEng (Hons)