**Notes of meeting of Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Group/ Front Street Residents:**

**Tuesday 9th August 2016 6.00pm Glendenning Arms**

**Present: Eileen Hall; Terry Crozier; George Thompson; Mike Rowell; Neil Liddle; Fraser Reynolds; Tony Harries; Robin Minney (NP Group)**

**Kirsten & Steven Cox; David & Nikki Walsh; Pat Bainbridge; Ian Armstrong & Keryn Emery; Brian & Judith Brown; Doug Swales; Bill Murphy.**

This special meeting was held following written correspondence from some residents of Front Street expressing concern over the allocation of land as suitable for development, as part of the Neighbourhood Plan Housing Policy.

Neil Liddle opened the meeting and introductions were made by all present. A summary of the nature and scope of a neighbourhood plan was explained and stressed that the NP was not finalised, only in the draft stage. The NP Group were keen to have a single document to present to the community at the last consultation event but there was still a great amount of work to be done.

Mrs Walsh expressed concern that a series of consultation events had been arranged during school holidays when many families were on holiday and unable to attend. This has been noted and all efforts to hold any future consultations within term time will be made.

Terry Crozier gave a presentation on the position of the NP so far, the processes and guidance which have to be followed and the reasoning behind decisions taken so far. The basis of the NP emerged from the 2012 Parish Plan and is attempting to address the concerns and desires expressed therein.

The residents in attendance were supportive of other policies within the NP, but fundamentally disagreed with the allocation for housing of the area within their vicinity. It was explained that a neighbourhood plan must not be anti-development, the Government’s National Planning Policy Framework insists on this. We cannot therefore have a policy stating no development will be allowed within the Settlement Boundary. Given that some development will take place, the aim of the NP is to have an influence over what type of development in certain locations would best complement the existing buildings, particularly within the heritage area of Front Street. This could be achieved through a design guide to which developers would have to conform. Such a guide included in the NP would restrict the type and density of development.

It was expressly indicated that whether the Front Street site was or wasn’t allocated for development any detailed plans must go through the formal planning process with the ultimate decision taken by the Development Management Team at Durham County Council and possibly by councillors at Planning Committee.

Questions were raised about which other sites were considered and why some were not deemed suitable. All sites were assessed against the same criteria taking note of a variety of indicators, national and local, with decisions and justifications made for each site.

A question was raised about the possibility of the Front Street site being designated a protected green space. The site is not suitable for local green space protection due to the strict criteria within the NPPF which must be applied in site assessment..

When the NP is at a satisfactory stage it will be deposited as a Draft Neighbourhood Plan with the Local Planning Authority. If approved, they will then follow the statutory consultation process before sending it to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination. If the examiner is satisfied he/she will report back to the Local Planning Authority who will decide whether to take the Plan to referendum. The ultimate decision is taken by the community on a simple majority vote. If successful, the NP will then become part of the Durham County Plan.

It was agreed to post the NP housing paper an accompanying raw census data on the website, along with notes of NP Group meetings.

It was again emphasized that any resident is welcome to join the NP Group to help take it through to a successful conclusion.