**Local Green Space Topic Paper**

The character and structure of urban areas, whether large or small, are dependent upon the relationship between the built environment and open spaces.

Guidance in the *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Communities and Local* *Government 2012)* includes provision for neighbourhood plans to designate local green space (LGS). It is discretionary and there is no policy obligation for local authorities to include any designation in their local development plan.

Designation of LGS though neighbourhood plans allows the community to identify spaces important to them. Such spaces would be afforded a high level of protection from development, but they must be justified and supported by evidence. If not, then the designation may fail at the examination stage and be removed from the plan.

The purpose of this note is to expand on the written Policy 9 in the Plan which puts forward 14 green spaces within the settlement boundary that have been identified through public consultation events as areas the community wish to protect from development due to the recreational value and importance by which they are regarded. The intention is to provide evidence and justification for the spaces identified within the policy.

***The Protected Green Spaces Map DWG WG-NP 03 rev can be found on page 38 of the Plan.***

Each designation must conform to the requirements of the NPPF which states that:

*The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:*

*●**where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*

*●**where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*

*●**where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

*National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Communities and Local Government 2012)*

Witton Gilbert has extensive green belt land to the south and west of the village and as such is already protected from development by Durham County Council’s Green Belt Policy. It was decided to include green belt designations as LGS for added protection for these areas within the Neighbourhood Plan.

In defining and mapping the Local Green Spaces the intention was to exclude domestic curtilages.

**The importance of green spaces**

Green spaces close to communities can provide a range of social, environmental and economic benefits, including:

improved health, both mental and physical;

improved community cohesion and sense of local identity;

 more resilient wildlife and habitats;

climate change adaptation;

reduced crime rates;

increased opportunities for children to learn;

potential for growing food locally;

more attractive places to live, work, play, visit and invest.

**The designated LGS**

Community benefits of designation include:

* forming part of a network of paths and spaces enabling free movement
* Forming part of the public realm where informal social interaction takes place
* Adding to local amenity by providing an attractive setting and outlook for surrounding properties
* Providing areas for growing local food
* Forming part of the character and landscape of the community

In selecting green spaces for inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan great emphasis has been placed on the opinions of local people expressed in response to the Parish Plan questionnaire and written comments submitted at the public consultation events. Each of the

One of the criteria for a Local Green Space in the National Planning Policy Framework is that…..”the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land”   What constitutes “local in character” or “an extensive tract of land” is not defined and is open to interpretation The Draft National Planning Practice Guidance states “There are no hard and fast rules about how big a Local Green Space can be because places are different and a degree of judgement will inevitably be needed”.  In arriving at our interpretation of the criteria and our proposals for Local Green Spaces listed in the Neighbourhood Plan, the conclusion is that none of the designated LGS are of a size as to be described as part of an extensive tract of land.

Local Green Spaces listed was proposed by local people and have been judged to satisfy the requirements in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

***All the proposed green spaces have been assessed according to NPPF guidelines and details can be found at The Green Spaces Assessment Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan rev D document***

Neighbourhood Plans are intended to place greater emphasis on the views of local people, therefore we consider even more weight should be given to their comments than is usual in traditional planning decisions.

New development or change of use within the areas defined as being local green space may be permitted only where the following very exceptional circumstances apply:

* The applicant can demonstrate that such a loss is related to essential infrastructure works required by a service utility which cannot be accommodated elsewhere; or
* The proposal will have a direct community benefit and this outweighs the harm that would otherwise result in the loss of the green space in question.
* Any other special circumstances will have to be argued on their individual merits having regard to the general desirability of retaining public access and the openness of such areas.

Some suggested areas for protection have not been carried forward to the Plan due to the existing protection of Green Belt status (Clink Field, Witton Dene), the large size of open countryside (north of Norburn Park) and the location outside the Settlement Boundary (west of Norburn Park). Green belts do not recognize landscape quality or community value but it must be emphasized that the Neighbourhood Plan does not intend to impose green belt type protection on the designated sites as this would be a misuse of the designation and would not meet the basic conditions at examination.

As a consequence of investigation and consultation, the Plan identifies 14 areas of green space within the Settlement Boundary which are deemed to be worthy of protected status and which fit the criteria of para 77 of the NPPF.

A short supporting case is presented separately for each of the proposed Local Green Spaces (see Policy 9 in evidence library). Each case for support includes a photograph, a proposals assessment form and any other available evidence.

All LGS sites are indicated on the proposed Protected Green Spaces Map.