**Landscape character**

The parish is situated to the west of Durham city and extends to within 190 metres of the city boundary. The parish has a total area of 1108 hectares and is bordered by 6 other parishes or wards, Bear Park, Esh, Framwellgate, Sacriston, Burnhope and Kimblesworth and Plawsworth. (See drawing DWG WG-NP 05) The village of Witton Gilbert occupies 55.5 hectares with the remainder being scattered settlements and farm buildings. The parish is essentially rural in nature with arable and livestock farming. There are small areas of mixed woodland. A large area (680 hectares) to the east of the village is part of the designated Green Belt which surrounds Durham City. This green Belt abuts and encloses the Witton Gilbert settlement on most of the eastern side of the village (see drawing DWG WG-NP 06). The majority of the parish is situated on the northern slopes of the Browney Valley. Our neighbouring settlements are Sacriston and Langley Park a distance of 1mile and 1.5 miles from village centre to centre. The parish is bisected east-west by the B691, the main trunk road to and from Durham city to the west of the county. The parish has an extensive network of Public Footpaths and bridleways through the surrounding countryside and connecting the various settlements.

**Built Environment**

Witton Gilbert no longer has a consistent architectural style or use of building materials, as each of the developments in the village over its history have followed the trend of their period. The historic centre of the village was clustered around Front Street where the majority of the houses were stone built cottages, preindustrial shops and farmsteads. Witton came close to losing Front Street in the 1980-90s as it was the main route to the west from Durham. The build-up of commuter and industrial traffic made the living conditions very difficult and the restricted width of Front Street caused significant congestion. To resolve these problems the Council proposed demolishing the south side of Front Street and as a result the properties became very run down. The construction of the A691 by-pass in 1996 saved the historic centre of the village but took away the northern part of Witton Dene and created a discontinuity between the main population and their access to the Dene and the parish church of St Michael & All Angels. Over the years since the bypass was constructed the properties on Front Street have begun to come back to life and although we have managed to retain the two public houses, all of the other businesses have been lost in this area.

It is often the small details in our streetscapes which help to create an individual identity. The design of railings, street lighting and furniture, paving materials, signage, landscaping to public spaces and trees all make a significant contribution to the sense of place and uniqueness. It is important our plan allows us to protect and enhance Witton gilberts unique character.

**Scale and layout**

With a few notable exceptions the buildings are small scale of one or two story and of a domestic nature. The earlier village developments were predominantly terrace streets with small back yards and moderately high density. With the later post 1900 developments having gardens and communal open space with a mixture of house types with relative low density.

Most of the post 1900 building seemed to ignore the historic centre of the village and this resulted in an unbalanced settlement which contributed to the demise of the commercial elements on Front Street and left the village without a natural centre.

The older street pattern, ally-ways and footpath network reflect the routes and ownership boundaries of the 18th and 19th centuries with the main roads and junctions better able to cope with horse and cart than modern forms and frequency of transport.

**External materials**

Each development period has utilised the popular materials of the day and this has resulted in a mixed palate of materials shown in the different areas within the village. In the older parts of the village, successive generations have added to and altered the external appearance of their homes, so even in areas where dwellings are of contemporary construction the exterior materials have a numbers of variations. Examples of the materials palate are shown below.

**Insert Pictures;**

**Policy aims**

The Neighbourhood Plan aims to both protect and improve the unique setting and character of the parish. The use of a Settlement Boundary within the plan is to protect the wider landscape from encroaching development, to ensure a distinct separation from our neighbouring community of Sacriston, to focus all new development within the existing settlement and in locations which will rebalance the settlement.

The Housing Policies are concerned with Housing development within the Village of Witton Gilbert and the other small settlements within the Parish (Sniperly?) and they aim to provide developments which protect the visual character of the settlements, ensure they create a unique sense of place which reflects its immediate and wider setting. The scale, layout and materials used need to respond to those used on the neighbouring buildings.

*(Comment: we don’t want to be overly restrictive, as we should encourage home suitable for the 21 century. Need to add this to the planning aims and policy)*