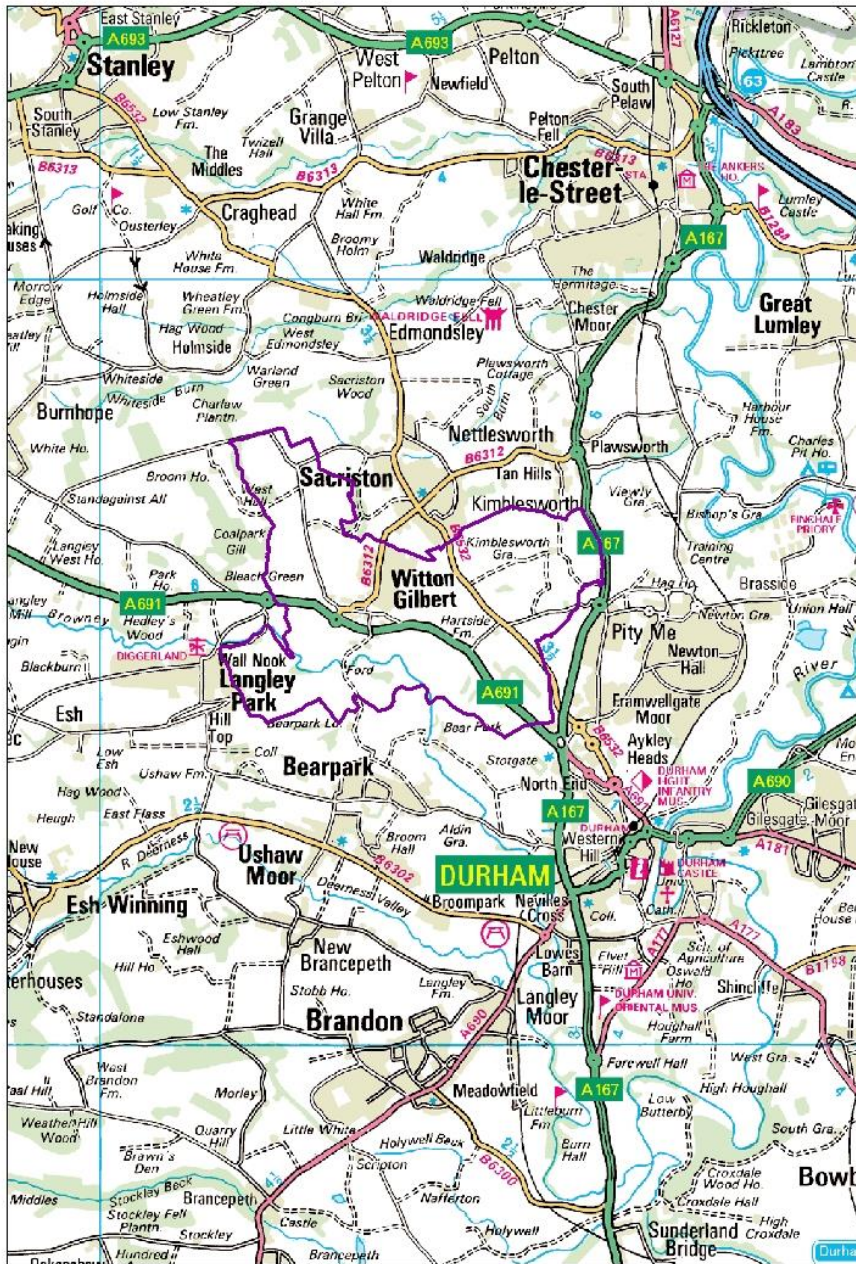


# Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan

## Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report





	SCREENING SUMMARY	
.	SCREENING SUMMARY	iii
	REGION	
1.	INTRODUCTION	7
2.	LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND	10
3.	SEA SCREENING	13
4.	HRA SCREENING	26
5.	RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	38



## Screening Summary

**Table 1 Summary of Neighbourhood Plan**

Details of Neighbourhood Plan	
Name of Neighbourhood Plan	Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan
Geographic Coverage of the Plan	Witton Gilbert Parish (1107.198 hectares)
Key topics / scope of Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation of a defined village centre comprising public realm, commercial spaces, community space, café, outdoor covered meeting space, imaginative landscaping, parking and a bus stop</li> <li>● Improve the appearance of Front Street</li> <li>● Protection of specific areas of green space within the village</li> <li>● Allocation of land within the village for housing development and encourage high quality design. A figure of between 50 and 70 new homes within the 15 year plan period has been established</li> <li>● Encourage use of and improve sustainable modes of travel for all</li> <li>● Improve broadband connection to the village</li> <li>● Extend protection to non-designated heritage assets</li> <li>● Explore potential for community energy generation</li> </ul>

**Table 2 Summary of SEA Screening Opinion**

Local Authority Details	
Name and job title of officer undertaking screening opinion	Nadia Wetherell, Sustainable Strategy Officer
Date of assessment	May 2015 and July 2015
Conclusion of assessment	SEA is not required
Reason for conclusion	<p>Housing site H2 is the only site considered likely to give rise to negative environmental effects. However, effects are unlikely to be significant and can be minimised through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● avoiding development within the eastern part of the site (forms part of the Local Geological Site)</li> </ul>

Local Authority Details	
	<p>designation and is the most sensitive in terms of landscape character); and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusion of a policy within the Plan that controls the density and scale of development throughout the remainder of the site to minimise impact upon landscape character, sense of place and the setting of heritage assets.</li> </ul> <p>SEA of the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan is therefore not required.</p> <p>Please note that there is limited potential for further housing sites to be identified during the plan preparation process due to existing greenbelt boundaries. Remaining areas of housing potential are considered unlikely to give rise to significant adverse environmental effects.</p>
Name and job title of officer approving screening opinion	Stephen McDonald, Senior Sustainability Strategy Officer
Date of approval	8th May 2015 and 14th July 2015
Date of final screening document	14th July 2015

**Table 3 Summary of HRA Screening Opinion**

Local Authority Details	
Name and job title of officer undertaking screening opinion	Nadia Wetherell, Sustainable Strategy Officer
Date of assessment	May 2015
Conclusion of assessment	The WGNP will not result in likely significant effects to European Protected Sites. Appropriate Assessment is not required
Reason for conclusion	Those that are likely to encourage new development will not result in a direct or indirect loss of land or functional land associated with European Protected Sites or result in changes to air, water quality or hydrology where these are required to support overall site integrity. The potential for recreational pressure linked to an increase in housing can be screened out predominantly due to distances involved from European Protected Sites and / or existing management measures.
Name and job title of officer approving screening opinion	Tammara Morris Hale, Senior Ecologist
Date of approval	8th May 2015
Date of final screening document	14th July 2015

Table 4 Summary of Consultations

Statutory Consultee	Summary of Comments
Historic England	On the information provided I am of the view that in this instance SEA will not be required for the Plan in relation to its potential for effects upon the historic environment. Such impacts are likely to be less than substantial in relation to townscape and heritage, and capable of being straightforwardly controlled through appropriate Development Management mechanisms.
Environment Agency	It will lead to significant environmental effects as the draft Neighbourhood Plan are allocating housing sites.
Natural England	<p>There are no issues within the remit of Natural England that would be likely to be affected as result of the draft neighbourhood plan and therefore require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). However, there may be other wider issues within the remit of the Local Planning Authority (LPA) that may be likely to be affected that would require an SEA.</p> <p>Natural England agree with the conclusions of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report that the draft neighbourhood plan is unlikely to require an Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of the Habitat Regulations.</p>





## 1 Introduction

### Background

**1.1** The Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Area is situated towards the north of Durham County, approximately 4 miles north west of Durham City and covering an area of 1107.198 hectares. The Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Area utilises the same boundaries as the Parish of Witton Gilbert but focuses predominantly upon the village of Witton Gilbert itself.

**1.2** The village of Witton Gilbert was originally spelt Witun (*Wit* meaning white horse and *Tun* meaning fortified place). Gilbert was added later and could be derived from the Norman lord Gilbert de la Ley or a later Lord Gilbert de la Latone. The village was the centre of a wooded estate some time before the Norman Conquest and by the end of the twelfth century it was owned together with Fulforth by the Bishop of Durham.

**1.3** Witton Gilbert is surrounded by rolling countryside. To the south, a number of steep, wooded denes run towards the River Browney of which Witton Dene, extending from the village is the largest.

**1.4** The Neighbourhood Plan Area contains one Local Wildlife Site, one ancient woodland, one Local Geological site, eight listed heritage assets (predominantly Grade II), and a green belt to the south and east. The spatial strategy of the County Durham Landscape Strategy has defined land to the west and south of Witton Gilbert Village as a Landscape Conservation Area. Land to the east of the village is defined as a Landscape Improvement Area.

**1.5** The aspirations of the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan (hereafter known as 'WGNP') are to:

- Create a defined village centre
- Improve the appearance of Front Street
- Protect green spaces within the village
- Allocate land for housing
- Encourage use of and improve sustainable modes of travel
- Improve broadband connection
- Extend protection to non-designated heritage assets
- Explore the potential for community energy generation

### Purpose of this Report

**1.6** This screening report is designed to determine whether or not the contents of the draft WGNP requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in accordance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and associated Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

**1.7** This report will also screen to determine whether or not the WGNP requires an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and with Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as

amended). An Appropriate Assessment is required when it is deemed that significant negative effects are likely to occur to protected European wildlife sites known as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Ramsar sites as a result of the implementation of a plan or project. The term Habitats Regulations Assessment, HRA for brevity, has come into use for describing the overall assessment process including screening and the specific Appropriate Assessment stage.

**1.8** The legislative background set out in the following section outlines the regulations that require the need for this screening exercise. Section 3, provides a screening assessment of both the likely significant environmental effects of the WGNP and the need for SEA. Section 4, provides the HRA screening assessment of the likely significant effects of the implementation of the WGNP and the need for Appropriate Assessment.



## 2 Legislative Background

### Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

**2.1** The basis for Strategic Environmental Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal legislation is European Directive 2001/42/EC which was transposed into English law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, or SEA Regulations. Detailed Guidance of these regulations can be found in the Government publication 'A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' (ODPM 2005).

**2.2** The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 required Local Authorities to produce Sustainability Appraisals (SA) for all local development documents to meet the requirement of the EU Directive on SEA. It is considered best practice to incorporate the requirements of the SEA Directive into an SA. This is also discussed within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) para 165.

**2.3** However, the 2008 Planning Act amended the requirement to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal for only development plan documents (DPD's), but did not remove the requirement to produce a Strategic Environmental Assessment. A Neighbourhood Plan is not a development plan document and therefore does not legally require a Sustainability Appraisal. Where appropriate, however, an SEA assessment still needs to be undertaken in line with the SEA regulations.

**2.4** The purpose of SEA is to:

"Provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes, with a view to promoting sustainable development, by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment."

(2001/42/EC)

### Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

**2.5** HRA is required by Article 6 (3) of the EU Habitats Directive and by regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). HRA requires that an Appropriate Assessment is undertaken of plans and projects where the potential for significant effects upon European Sites are deemed likely. If following Appropriate Assessment, adverse effects upon the integrity of a European site cannot be objectively ruled out or mitigated, the plan should not be consented unless further legal tests including Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest can be demonstrated. Regulation 61 states that:

A competent authority, before deciding to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for, a plan or project which:

A) Is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and

B) Is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of that site,

Must make an appropriate assessment of the implications for that site in view of that site's conservation objectives.



### 3 SEA Screening

**3.1** The WGNP working group has requested a SEA screening opinion of its Neighbourhood Plan. It is Durham County Council's responsibility to assess whether the policies and proposals in the WGNP are likely to have 'significant environmental effects'. The Plan does not have to be at a final stage to be assessed.

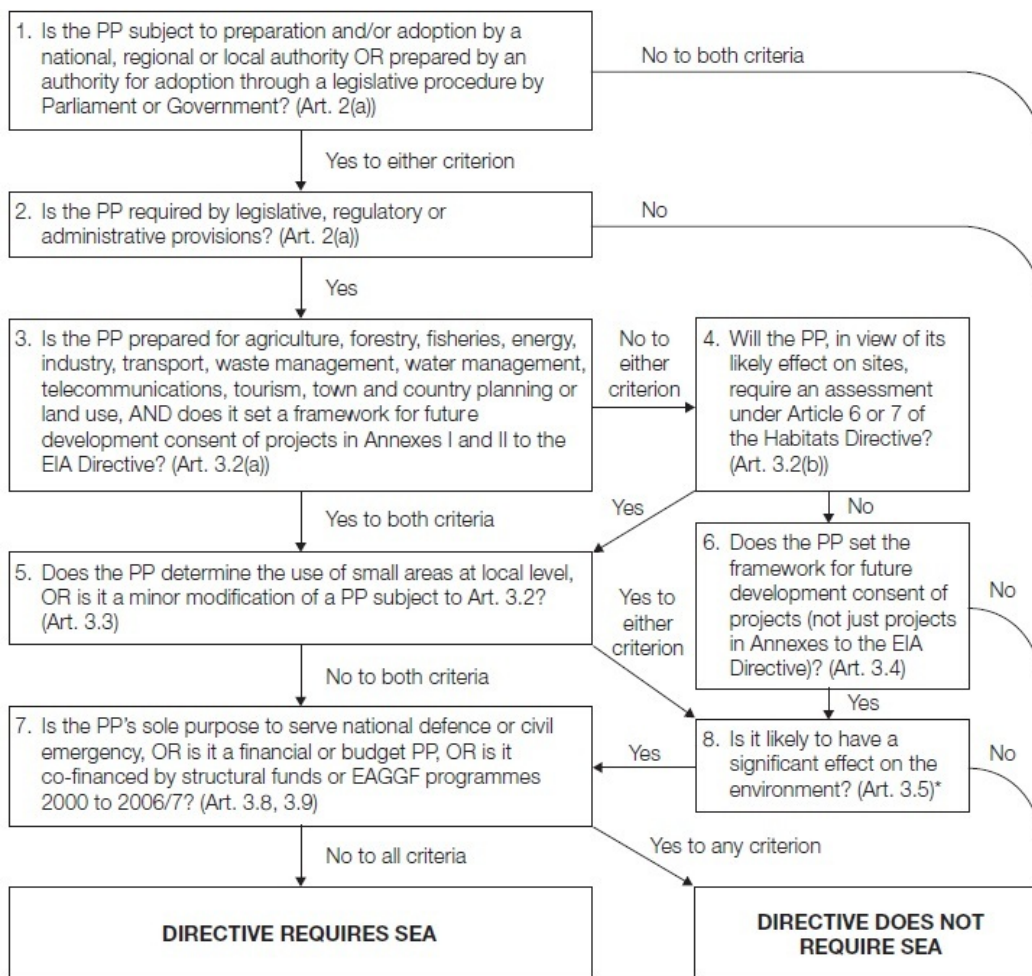
**3.2** The screening opinion assessment is undertaken in two parts: the first part will assess whether the plan requires SEA (as per the flow chart which follows); and the second part of the assessment will consider whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, using criteria drawn from Schedule 1 of the EU SEA Directive and the UK Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. [The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#)

**3.3** The three statutory consultation bodies (Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England) will be consulted to determine whether they agree with the conclusion of this screening opinion, in establishing whether the WGNP may have a 'significant environmental effect'. Should it be concluded that SEA is required the WGNP working group will need to undertake a SEA with a SEA Scoping Report exercise as the first stage.

**3.4** The government guidance 'A practical guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive' sets out the following approach to be taken in determining whether SEA is required:

**Figure 1 Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes**

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



\*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

**3.5** The process in figure 1 has been undertaken and the findings can be viewed in Table 5. Table 5 shows the assessment of whether the WGNP will require SEA. The questions in table 5 are drawn from the diagram above which sets out how the SEA Directive should be applied. Table 6 provides specific detail on question 8 in relation to the criteria for determining likely significant effects referred to in Article 3(5).

**Table 5 Assessment 1: Establishing the need for SEA**

Stage	Answer	Reason
1. Is the PP subject to preparation and / or adoption by a national, regional or local authority OR prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government? (Art. 2 (a))	Y	WGNP is not a Development Plan Document, however if the document receives 50% or more 'yes' votes through a referendum it will be adopted by Durham County Council.



Stage	Answer	Reason
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2 (a))	N	Communities have a right to be able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, however communities are not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. This plan however is subject to 'provisions' that require it to be prepared in a formal way and if adopted would form part of the statutory development plan. Therefore it is considered necessary to answer the following questions to determine further if an SEA is required.
3. Is the PP required for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art.3.2(a))	Y	<p>The WGNP is prepared for town and country planning or land use and it MAY set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive in relation to community energy generation projects.</p> <p>In relation to wind energy, development that involves the installation of more than 2 turbines or where the hub of any turbines or height of any other structure exceeds 15 metres would require EIA. Whilst large scale solar PV arrays and other types are not expressly listed in Schedule 2 to the EIA Regulations 1999; such developments may or may not have a significant effect on the environment, positive or negative depending on location. In general, an EIA is likely to be needed for Schedule 2 developments if the solar PV development is in a particularly environmentally sensitive or vulnerable location.</p> <p>Whilst the WGNP intends to allocate land for housing the sites under consideration do not meet EIA screening thresholds i.e. Not more than 150 dwellings and not more than 5ha.</p>
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art.3.2(b))	N/A	NOT APPLICABLE
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	Y	Sites are under consideration within Witton Gilbert for small scale housing developments, a village centre and potentially a community renewable energy project depending upon feasibility.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)	N/A	NOT APPLICABLE
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or	N/A	NOT APPLICABLE

Stage	Answer	Reason
EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7 (Art. 3.8, 3.9)		
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5)	N	Please see Table 6
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>The WGNP DOES NOT REQUIRE SEA</b>	

**Table 6 Assessment 2: Likely Significant Effects on the Environment**

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
<b>The characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan, having regard to:</b>	
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	The WGNP would, if made form part of the statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future consent of projects, albeit these will be localised in nature.
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The WGNP will need to be in general conformity with the relevant Development Plan. Therefore the WGNP should not significantly influence other plans and programmes
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	<p>It is a condition of Neighbourhood Planning that Neighbourhood Plans are to demonstrably contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development. The WGNP aims to promote sustainable development through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provision of a central, community hub which will contribute towards social cohesiveness, health and wellbeing and possible job creation / skills development through provision of work spaces</li> <li>● Protection of existing green spaces which currently contribute towards social cohesiveness, health and wellbeing and biodiversity</li> <li>● Meeting existing and projected housing needs which will contribute towards meeting the needs of families, an ageing population and sustaining the viability of existing services and facilities within Witton Gilbert.</li> <li>● Encouraging high quality design of new housing which will contribute towards reducing resource use, emissions, ensure good levels of thermal comfort and may contribute positively towards townscape character.</li> <li>● Encouraging use of and improving sustainable modes of travel which can reduce associated vehicle emissions and contribute towards active lifestyles</li> <li>● Improving broadband connection which can contribute towards business and skills development</li> <li>● Extending protection to non designated heritage assets which will contribute towards the protection of</li> </ul>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
	<p>heritage of local interest and existing character and distinctiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of community energy generation projects which have the potential to reduce reliance on fossil fuel consumption to meet local energy needs.</li> </ul>
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Traffic congestion issues on the A691 but no known air quality issues</li> <li>● Water quality (chemical and biological) for the Blackburn Beck Kays Burn and River Browney is good</li> <li>● Flood zones 2 and 3a associated with the River Browney</li> <li>● Lower Browney Local Wildlife Site is in a reasonable condition</li> <li>● No listed heritage assets on the Heritage at Risk register</li> <li>● No secondary school or post 18 education providers within Witton Gilbert and limited employment opportunities. However, generally good access to public transport and short travel distances to Durham City for wider access to services and facilities</li> </ul>
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	The WGNP is not directly connected to the implementation of European legislation
<b>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b>	
The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	<p>The allocation of land within the WGNP for housing and a village centre would generate permanent, irreversible effects. Effects associated with a possible community renewable energy generation project are likely to be temporary in nature lasting for an average duration of 20 - 25 years.</p> <p>The reversibility of effects of other WGNP aspirations in terms of the overall sustainability of planning in the area and any undesired or unintended effects would depend upon a review of the WGNP. This means that the Plan will require monitoring over time. There may be some merit in adding a paragraph within the draft WGNP document to make clear that the cumulative effects of policies will be monitored and the plan reviewed if necessary.</p>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
The cumulative nature of the effects	<p>The desired provision of between 50 and 70 houses over the WGNP period may contribute cumulatively to existing traffic congestion issues. However, the desire to encourage use of and improve sustainable modes of travel could contribute towards minimising cumulative effects.</p> <p>No other cumulative effects are anticipated, albeit the Plan will require monitoring over time.</p>
The trans boundary nature of the effects	There are not expected to be any significant trans boundary effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	The provisions within the Plan do not provide unacceptable risks to human health or the environment.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	<p>Land use changes will effect Witton Gilbert Parish which extends to 1107.198 ha.</p> <p>Land use changes within WGNP area are most likely to effect residents within Bearpark and Witton Gilbert Ward (4,460 persons) and potentially Sacriston Ward (6,621 persons).</p>
<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,</li> <li>- exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,</li> <li>- intensive land-use,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Value and vulnerability</b></p> <p>The WGNP area contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1 Local Wildlife Site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lower Browney Valley LWS</li> </ul> </li> <li>● 1 Ancient Woodland</li> <li>● 1 Local Geological Site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sacriston Subglacial Channels</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Eight Grade II Heritage Listings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Witton Hall is Grade II*</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Land to the west and south of Witton Gilbert is defined by the County Durham Landscape Strategy as a landscape Conservation Area. Land to the south was locally designated as an Area of High Landscape Value.</li> <li>● Agricultural land quality is Grade 3 (good to moderate)</li> </ul> <p>In relation to potential housing sites a community consultation event was held on the 21st February 2015 to discuss amongst other things where new housing would be</p>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
	<p>best placed within Witton Gilbert. Please see figure 2. Whilst some housing sites will not be considered further following the event (e.g. H5) and more sites may be taken into account during the plan preparation process, support was obtained for H2 in recognition of its potential to bring about improvements to Front Street.</p> <p>H2 forms an important rural context to the original settlement pattern of Witton Gilbert as a former medieval green village. The land would have previously provided agricultural and grazing land for farmsteads and villagers (please see figure 3.) The development of this site in its entirety therefore has the potential to negatively impact upon Witton Gilbert's character and sense of place. The site is also within the setting of a Grade II listed former Smithy to the north of the site and development could have a negative effect upon its setting depending upon the density and scale of development.</p> <p>The development of the eastern part of H2 would impact upon the Local Geological Site to some degree (please see figure 4) albeit effects to this part of the designation may be negligible given that it is already dissected by Front Street and the A691.</p> <p>In relation to the other housing sites identified and not discounted there are no known environmental constraints and effects are unlikely to be significant. There is limited potential for further housing sites to be identified during the plan preparation process due to existing greenbelt boundaries. Remaining areas of housing potential are considered unlikely to give rise to significant adverse environmental effects.</p> <p>In relation to the potential for a community energy generation project a potential site for consideration has been identified to show the potential scale of such a site and generate community discussion only. (Please see figure 5). In the event that a community energy generation project were to be allocated within the Plan it's allocation would need to be in conformity with existing renewable energy policies and associated environmental protection criteria.</p> <p><b>Exceeded standards</b></p> <p>There have been no known exceedances of national air quality objectives within the NP area and water quality is of good chemical and biological quality. The WGNP is not expected to exceed environmental limits</p> <p><b>Land use</b></p>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
	Proposals will be expected to make the most efficient use of land in conformity with the relevant Development Plan.
The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Landscape is of local conservation value only
<b>Assessment 2 Conclusion</b>	<p>Housing site H2 is the only site considered likely to give rise to negative environmental effects. However, effects are unlikely to be significant and can be minimised through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● avoiding development within the eastern part of the site (forms part of the Local Geological Site designation and is the most sensitive in terms of landscape character); and</li> <li>● Inclusion of a policy within the Plan that controls the density and scale of development throughout the remainder of the site to minimise impact upon landscape character, sense of place and the setting of heritage assets.</li> </ul> <p>SEA of the Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan is therefore not required.</p> <p>Please note that there is limited potential for further housing sites to be identified during the plan preparation process due to existing greenbelt boundaries. Remaining areas of housing potential are considered unlikely to give rise to significant adverse environmental effects.</p>

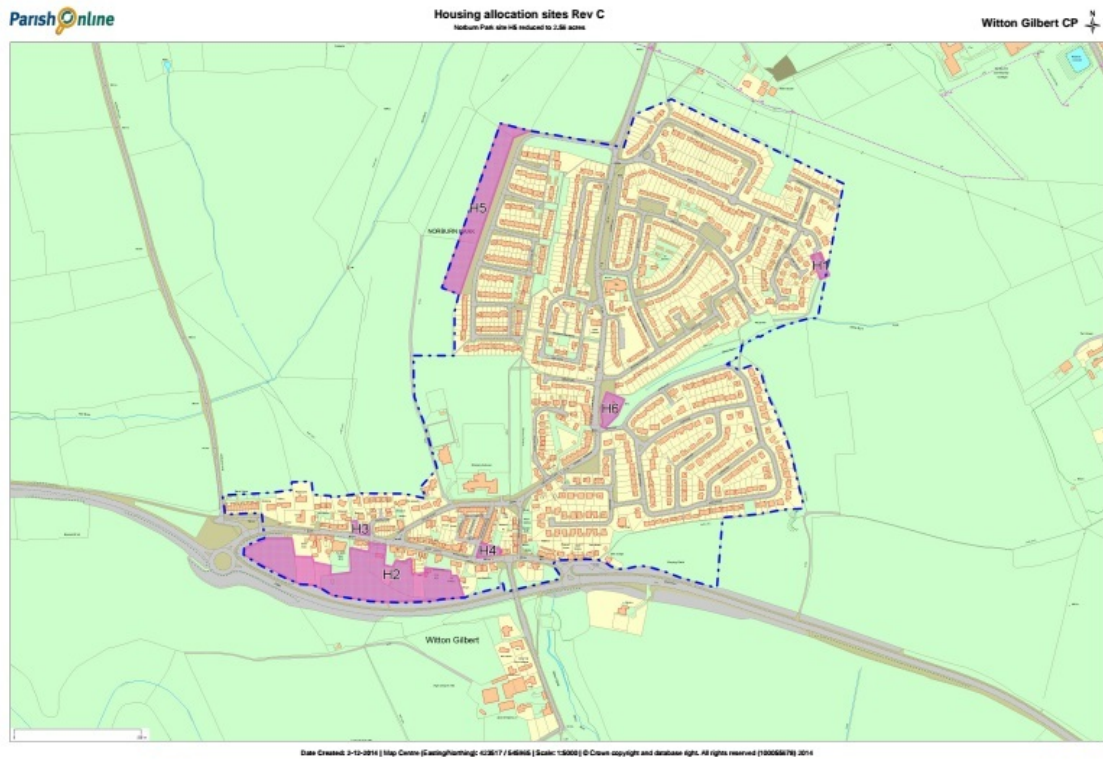
**Figure 2 Potential Housing Sites in Witton Gilbert**



Figure 3 Historic OS Map of Witton Gilbert (1860)





Figure 4 Sacriston Subglacial Channels LGS

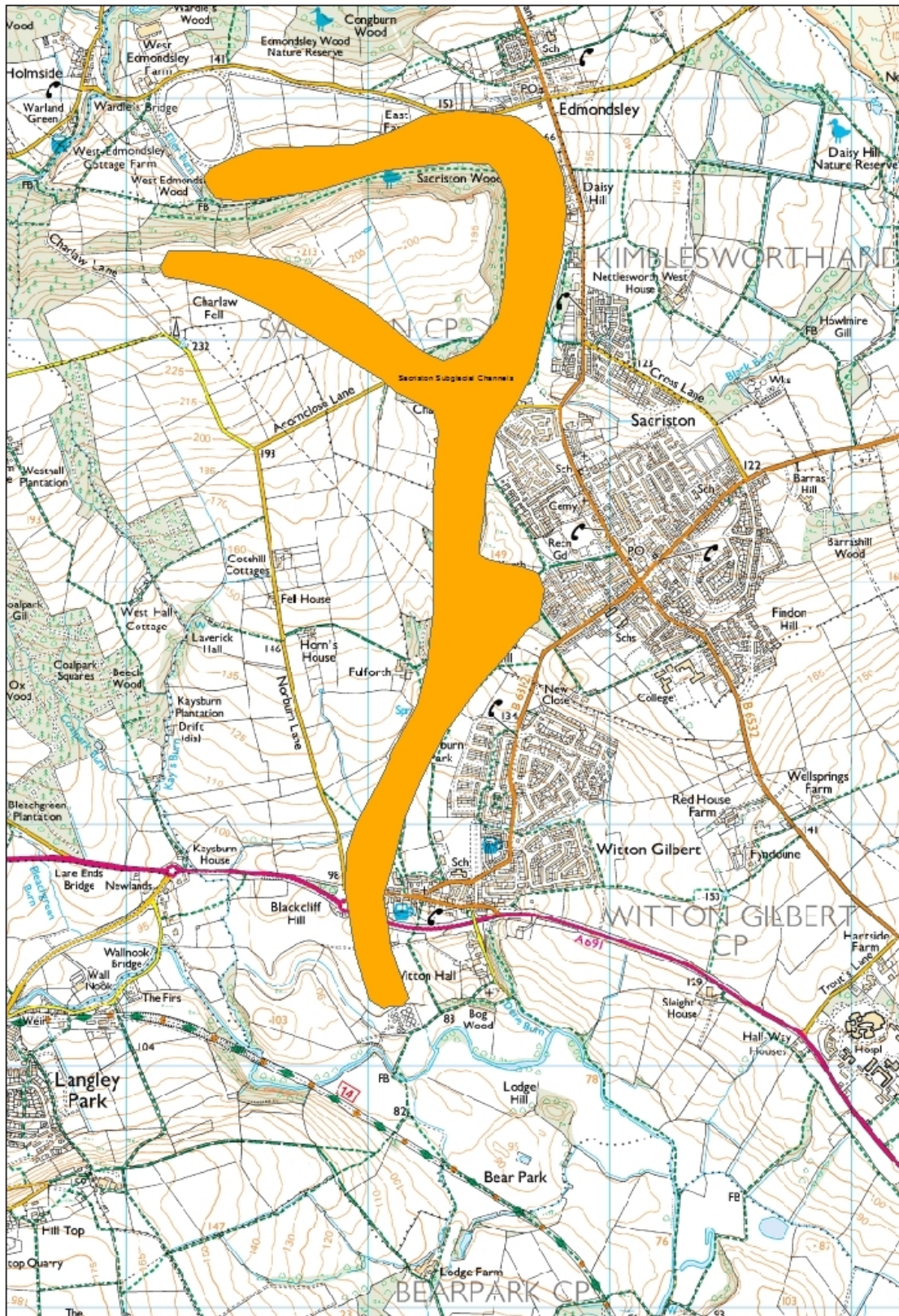
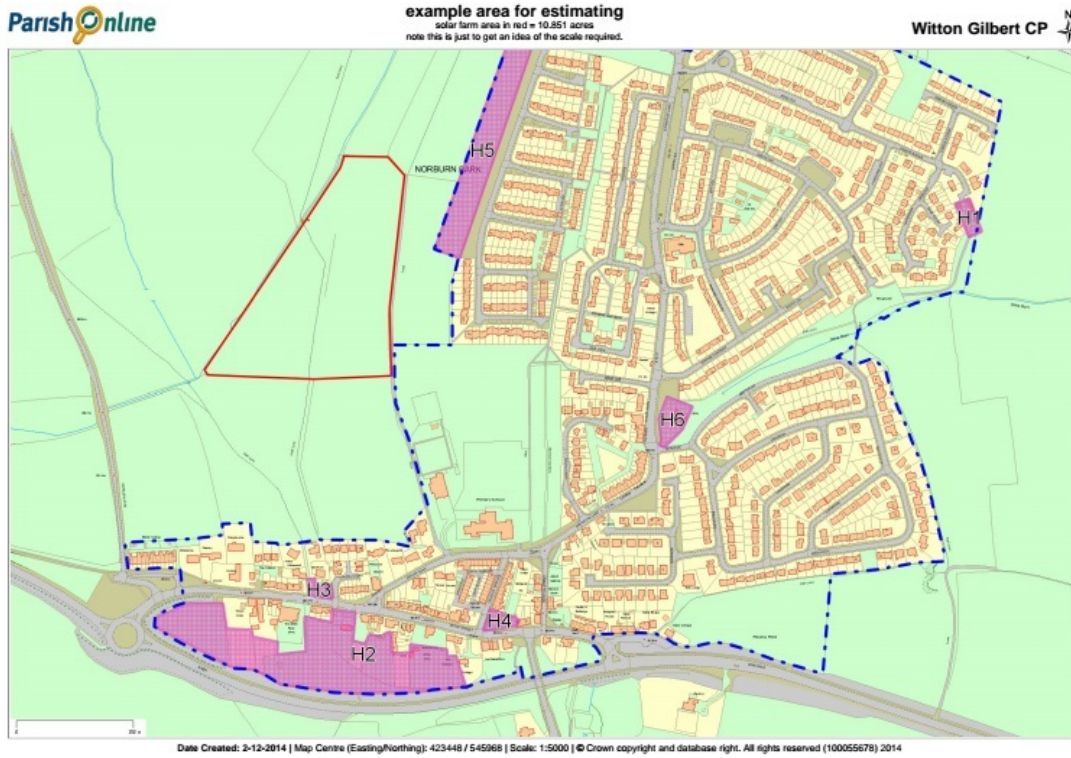


Figure 5 Potential Community Energy Generation Project







## 4 HRA Screening

### Relevant European Protected Wildlife Sites

**4.1** In line with the agreed methodology of the HRA of the County Durham Plan, all sites within 20km of the plan area (in this case the neighbourhood plan area) should be included within the HRA screening exercise, in addition to those outwith the 20km radius that are ecologically / hydrologically linked or are likely to be subject to increased recreational pressure as a result of the Plan. Maps 1 and 2 show that sites falling within the 20km radius include:

- Durham Coast SAC
- Castle Eden Dene SAC
- Thrislington SAC
- North Pennine Moors SAC and SPA
- Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar

**Map 1 SAC's within 20km of Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Area**



Map 2 SPA's and Ramsar sites within 20km of Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Area



**4.2** The sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the sites subject to screening were fully identified in the HRA of the County Durham Plan and are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 Description of Relevant European Sites

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
Durham Coast	Durham Coast SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 394 hectares. Durham Coast SAC is the only example of vegetated sea cliffs on magnesian limestone exposures in the UK. These cliffs extend along the North Sea coast for over 20 km from South Shields southwards to Blackhall rocks. Their vegetation is unique in the British Isles and consists of a complex mosaic of paramaritime, mesotrophic and calcicolous grasslands, tall-herb fen, seepage flushes and wind-pruned scrub. Within these habitats rare species of contrasting photogeographic distributions often grow together forming unusual and species-rich communities of high scientific interest. The communities present on the sea cliffs are largely maintained by natural processes including exposure to sea spray, erosion and slippage of the soft magnesian limestone bedrock and overlying glacial drifts, as well as localised flushing by calcareous water.	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts	No vulnerabilities have been recorded for this site as such. The Natura 2000 Standard data Form for the site states:  Vegetated sea cliffs range from vertical cliffs in the north with scattered vegetated ledges, to the Magnesian limestone grassland slopes of the south. Parts of the site are managed as National Nature Reserve, and plans provide for the non-interventionist management of the vegetated cliffs. The majority of the site is in public ownership and an agreed management plan is being developed to protect nature conservation interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall length and/or area of cliff habitat to be maintained taking into account natural variation</li> <li>There should be no increase in area constrained by introduced structures or landforms</li> <li>The range of physical conditions supporting the habitats, and the range of maritime grasslands and other communities should be maintained</li> <li>There should be no further increase in species untypical of the communities that define the feature</li> </ul>
Castle Eden Dene	Castle Eden Dene SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 194 hectares. Castle Eden Dene SAC represents the most extensively northerly native occurrence of <i>Taxus baccata</i> ; Yew woods in the UK. Extensive yew groves are found in association with <i>Fraxinus-Ulmus</i> ;	<i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the British Isles; Yew-dominated woodland	No vulnerabilities have been recorded for this site as such. The Natura 2000 Standard data Form for the site states:  Yew woodlands are distributed throughout the site in a matrix of other woodland types. The site is managed as a National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No loss of ancient semi-natural stands</li> <li>At least current area of recent semi-natural stands maintained, although their location may alter.</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
	<p>Ash-elm woodland and it is the only site selected for yew woodland on magnesium limestone in north-east England.</p>		<p>Nature Reserve and the Management Plan provides for regeneration of this special woodland type.</p> <p>However, the site is sensitive to changes in air quality and is currently exceeding critical thresholds of acid and nitrogen deposition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Woodland natural processes and structure / structural diversity maintained</li> <li>● Natural regeneration to maintain canopy density over a 20 year period</li> <li>● Limited loss of native woodland species to non-native or other external factors (e.g. Pollution, eutrophication form run-off, disease)</li> <li>● Limited air pollution</li> <li>● Maintain species, habitats and structures characteristic to the site</li> </ul>
Thrislington	<p>Thrislington SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 23 hectares south of the village of West Cornforth. Thrislington SAC is a small site but nonetheless contains the largest of the few surviving stands of CG8 <i>Sesleria albicans</i> - <i>Scabiosa columbaria</i> grassland. This form of calcareous grassland is confined to the Magnesian Limestone of County Durham and Tyne and Wear. It now covers less than 200 hectares and is found mainly as small scattered stands.</p>	<p>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone</p>	<p>The conditions of these grasslands are dependent upon continuous management by seasonally-adjusted grazing and no fertiliser input. The site is a National Nature Reserve and management on these traditional lines is undertaken at the site.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No reduction in extent</li> <li>● Continuous management by seasonally-adjusted grazing</li> <li>● No fertiliser input</li> <li>● Control of invasive species</li> <li>● Control of over grazing</li> <li>● Limited air pollution</li> </ul>



Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
North Pennine Moors SAC	<p>The North Pennine Moors (along with the North York Moors) hold much of the upland heathland of northern England. At higher altitudes and to the wetter west and north of the site complex, the heaths grade into extensive areas of blanket bogs. The site is considered as supporting the major area of blanket bog in England. A significant proportion remains active with accumulating peat, although these areas are often bounded by sizeable zones of currently non-active bog, albeit on deep peat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>: Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath</li> <li>● European dry heaths</li> <li>● <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands; Juniper on heaths or calcareous grasslands</li> <li>● Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Viola calaminariae</i>;</li> <li>● Grasslands on soils rich in heavy metals</li> <li>● Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands; Montane acid grasslands</li> <li>● Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone</li> <li>● Blanket bogs</li> <li>● Petrifying springs with tufa formation (<i>Cratoneurion</i>);</li> <li>● Hard-water springs depositing lime</li> <li>● Alkaline fens; Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens</li> <li>● Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galepsietalia ladani</i>); Acidic scree</li> <li>● Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Plants in crevices in base-rich rocks</li> </ul>	<p>All interest features have been affected by excessive livestock grazing levels across parts of the site. These have been, and are still, encouraged by headage payments, but agreements with graziers and moorland owners, including those in Wildlife Enhancement and Countryside Stewardship schemes, are starting to overcome the problems of overgrazing. In places, the difficulty of reaching agreements on commons, which cover much of the site, means that successes are limited at present, and continues to prevent restoration. Drainage of wet areas can also be a problem; drains have been cut across many areas of blanket bog, disrupting the hydrology and causing erosion, but in most parts these are being blocked and the habitat restored under agreements. Burning is a traditional management tool on these moorlands, which contributes to maintaining high populations of SPA breeding birds. However, over-intensive and inappropriate burning is damaging to heath and blanket bog and further agreements are needed with the landowners to achieve sympathetic burning regimes. Restoration, to some degree, of a mosaic of more natural habitats across parts of the site is desirable. Acid and nitrogen deposition continue to have damaging effects on the site. Recreational activity may also be problematic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Control of grazing</li> <li>● Appropriate moorland management including scrub/tree/bracken encroachment</li> <li>● Limited air pollution</li> <li>● No drainage of wet areas - maintenance of wet areas</li> <li>● Maintenance of water quality - organics/silt form physical disturbance</li> <li>● Limited erosion by human impacts (e.g. Recreation)</li> <li>● Very little peat extraction (no mechanised extraction)</li> </ul>



Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
North Pennine Moors SPA	The habitat of North Pennine Moors SAC supports breeding pairs of Hen harrier, Merlin, Peregrine falcon, European Golden plover, Dunlin and Eurasian curlew.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation;</li> <li>● Plants in crevices on acid rocks</li> <li>● Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles; Western acidic oak woodland</li> <li>● <i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>; Marsh saxifrage</li> <li>● <i>Circus cyaneus</i>; Hen harrier (Breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Falco columbarius</i>; Merlin (Breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Falco peregrinus</i>; Peregrine falcon (Breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>; European golden plover (Breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>; Dunlin (Breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Numenius arquata</i>; Eurasian curlew (Breeding)</li> </ul>	As for North Pennine Moors SAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No loss of area of habitat</li> <li>● Grazing to maintain suitable moorland</li> <li>● Control of erosion and peat extraction</li> <li>● Diversity, age and structure of vegetation</li> <li>● Food availability (birds, day flying moths, small mammals, soil and ground surface invertebrates)</li> <li>● Open landscape</li> <li>● Lack of disturbance and persecution (moor burning, vehicles, stock, dogs and walkers)</li> </ul>
Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar	Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar was designated in February 2000 and covers an area of approximately 1,108 hectares. The site comprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Calidris maritima</i> aka Purple sandpiper (Non-breeding)</li> </ul>	Little terns are vulnerable to disturbance by tourists in the summer causing reduced breeding success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Freedom from disturbance</li> <li>● Extent and availability of habitat (no decrease) -</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
	<p>several discrete stretches of the coastline in North East England between Spittal in the north of Northumberland to Crimdon Dene in County Durham. The site consists of rocky shore with associated bolder and cobble beaches. These support a rich algal flora and associated fauna and form an important feeding area for wading birds. The areas of sandy beach within the site support a flora which includes <i>Ammophila arenaria</i>; marram and <i>Honkenya peploides</i>; sea sandwort. A diverse range of recreational activities takes place along the coast including walking, camping, sea angling, bird watching, water sports (water-skiing, sailing, windsurfing and canoeing) and general use of amenity beaches. As well as attracting a large number of day trippers, a sizable population of summer visitors stay in caravan sites and other accommodation along the coast. The site also includes parts of three artificial pier structures and a small section of sandy beach.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Arenaria interpres</i> aka Ruddy turnstone (Non breeding)</li> <li>● <i>Sterna albifrons</i> aka Little tern (Breeding)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● breeding areas, feeding areas, roost sites</li> <li>● Food availability (marine fish, crustaceans, worms and molluscs; epibenthic invertebrates amongst rolling seaweed; surface and sub surface invertebrates)</li> <li>● Open landscape</li> </ul>

## Assessment of Effects

**4.3** Categorisation has been set up to identify the effect of policies upon the relevant European sites. Table 8 identifies the categories used in the assessment of effects of the WGNP.

**Table 8 Categorisation of Likely Effects**

Category	Sub Category	Description
1. No negative effect	A	Policy or measure will not lead to built development. For example it relates to green infrastructure, design or other qualitative criteria, or it is not a land-use planning policy
	B	Policy or measure may encourage new development but due to development type, distance from European Protected Sites and / or absence of connected impact pathways no negative effect is likely to occur.
	C	Policy or measure supports or may encourage new development that has the potential for adverse effects. However, additional wording can be added to the draft to safeguard against such and enable policy or measure to be screened out.
	D	Policy intended to conserve or enhance the natural, built or historic environment, where enhancement measures may have a positive effect on a European Site.
	E	Policy intended to conserve or enhance the natural, built or historic environment, where enhancement measures will not be likely to have any negative effect on a European Site.
	F	Policy would have no effect because no development could occur through the policy itself, the development being implemented through later policies in the same plan, which are more specific and therefore more appropriate to assess for their effects on European Sites and associated sensitive areas
	G	Policy is similar to existing Development Plan policy which has already been assessed as having no likely significant effects
2. No significant effect	-	No significant effect either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, because effects are trivial or minimal.
3. Likely significant effect alone	-	Policy could impact upon a European Site because it provides for, or steers, a quantity or type of development that may be very close to it, or ecologically, hydrologically or physically connected. Alternatively, it may increase disturbance as a result of increased recreational pressure
4. Likely significant effect in combination	-	The policy would have no significant effect alone but the cumulative effects when combined with those of other policies or projects are likely to be significant

**4.4** An assessment of likely significant effects has been undertaken for all measures of the WGNP resulting in the following categorisation.

**Table 9 Categorisation of WGNP Policies**

Policy / Measure	Durham Coast SAC	Castle Eden Dene SAC	Thrislington SAC	North Pennine Moors SAC	North Pennine Moors SPA	Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar
Village Centre Development	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B
Protection of Green Space	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A
Housing Provision	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B
Housing Design	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A
Heritage Protection	1E	1E	1E	1E	1E	1E
Solar Farm	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B	1B
Superfast Broadband	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A	1A

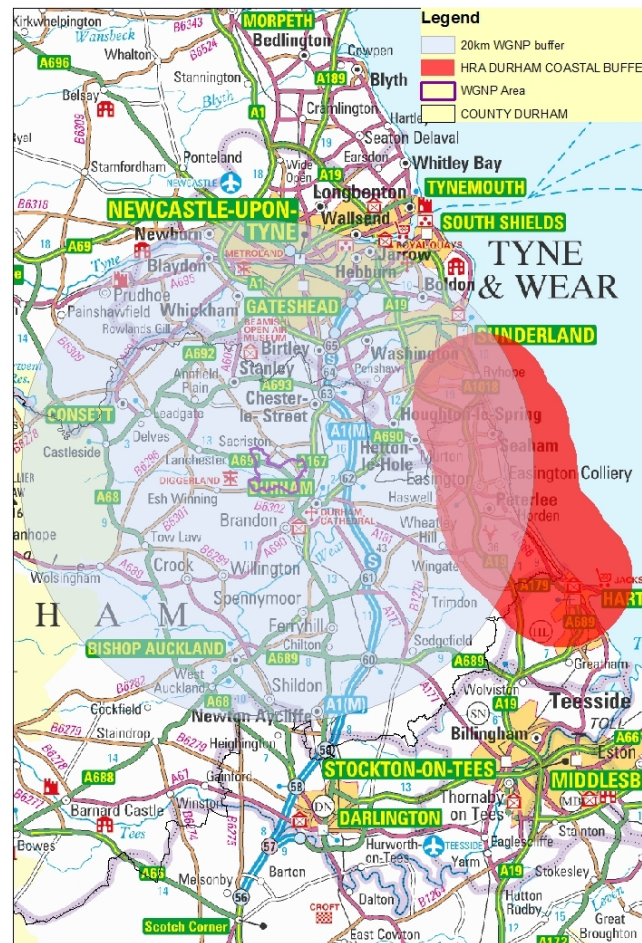
**4.5** The findings of the assessment show that the WGNP policies / measures will have no effect upon European Protected Sites. Those that are likely to encourage new development will not result in a direct or indirect loss of land or functional land associated with European Protected Sites or result in changes to air, water quality or hydrology where these are required to support overall site integrity.

**4.6** In relation to an increase in housing provision (between 50 and 70 new homes over the Plan period) a potential increase in recreational pressure and associated effects to the relevant European Protected sites can be screened out for the following reasons:

#### **Durham Coast SAC and Northumbria Coast SPA and Ramsar**

**4.7** The HRA of the County Durham Plan identified that a distance of 6km from the coastline is the catchment within which a significant proportion of visits to the coast arise as shown by Map 3. WGNP area is outwith the 6km catchment by a good margin and therefore an increase in the population is unlikely to significantly increase recreational pressure and associated effects to either Durham Coast SAC or Northumbria Coast SPA.

**Map 3 Map showing WGNP area and distance from coastal catchment**



### Castle Eden Dene SAC

**4.8** Given the distance of WGNP area from Castle Eden Dene SAC (approximately 18km) it is unlikely that an increase in population to Witton Gilbert arising from between 50 and 70 homes over the Plan period will significantly increase recreational pressure to the SAC. In any event, Castle Eden Dene SAC is unlikely to be unmanageable given existing management procedures of its National Nature Reserve status and the nature of the SAC itself in limiting off-track activities.

### Thrislington SAC

**4.9** Given the distance of WGNP area from Thrislington SAC (approximately 14km) it is unlikely that an increase in population to Witton Gilbert arising from between 50 and 70 homes over the Plan period will significantly increase recreational pressure to the SAC. The HRA of the County Durham Plan identified that recreational pressure to the site was likely to be from localised sources within 1km of the SAC. Limited car parking facilities exist at the SAC to enable a wider recreational catchment.

## North Pennine Moors SAC and SPA

**4.10** WGNP area is at a distance of approximately 18km (11 miles) from the North Pennine Moors SAC and SPA. Whilst surveys undertaken by Natural England suggest that people are willing to travel between 33 and 36 miles to visit these sites the HRA of the County Durham Plan screened out significant adverse effects as the majority of visitors stick to Public Right of Way routes and dogs are either kept under control or restricted from sensitive areas.

### Conclusion

**4.11** Following assessment it can be concluded that the implementation of the WGNP will **not result in likely significant effects** to any of the relevant European Protected Sites.



## 5 Recommendations and Conclusion

**5.1** Further to undertaking the screening assessment and taking the views of the statutory consultation bodies and those of Durham County Council's Principal Landscape Officer into account this SEA and HRA screening opinion can conclude that the draft WGNP does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations or the Habitats Regulations.

**5.2** In order to minimise the negative effects associated with potential housing allocation site H2 it is recommended that:

- development within the eastern part of the site is avoided (forms part of the Local Geological Site designation and is the most sensitive in terms of landscape character); and
- The Neighbourhood Plan includes a policy that controls the density and scale of development throughout the remainder of the site to minimise impact upon landscape character, sense of place and the setting of heritage assets.

**5.3** In relation to the potential allocation of a site to support a community energy generation project due regard should be given to City of Durham Saved Policy U15 (Energy Conservation - Renewable Resources) and Policy 21 of the emerging County Durham Plan.

**5.4** In relation to the current draft sections of the WGNP there may be some merit in adding a paragraph to make clear that the cumulative effects of policies will be monitored and the plan reviewed if necessary.





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