NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

2020 to 2035

'Made' (adopted) by
Durham County Council on 23 June 2021

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Explanatory note post examination, in March 2021. Following the examination of the Submission Draft of the Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan a number of modifications were required to make the plan accord with the basic conditions. All of these modifications have been implemented here in this document now being put forward for referendum in May 2021. At the time of submission, the County Durham Plan was also in preparation. It was formally Adopted in October 2020 and, accordingly, all references in the following text to the stage of preparation of the County Durham Plan are superseded; it is now the principal statutory development plan for all parts of County Durham. Similarly, all references to the Wear Valley Local Plan are now redundant as it has ceased to have any status.

1.0   Introduction

1.1 Forward by Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

The Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan (ONP) sets out the future development strategy for Oakenshaw for the period 2020 to 2035. Under the auspices of Greater Willington Town Council as the qualifying body, the plan has been developed by the community of the village, so that their voice is heard in the determination of planning applications, which directly impact on their lives.

Oakenshaw has a rich heritage and a strong community. While this has in many ways shaped the development of the village, Oakenshaw is transformed from the days of coal mining. The setting of the village in open countryside and its proximity to Durham City provide opportunities and challenges for the development of the village that this Neighbourhood Plan seeks to address.

Community engagement has been central to the development of this Neighbourhood Plan. The views of the entire community have been sought and incorporated into its preparation. The plan has been over 5 years in preparation.

We pay tribute to the late Kate McNulty, member of the Steering Group and without whom the Neighbourhood Plan may never have got off the ground. Her drive and enthusiasm were infectious and are sadly missed.

On behalf of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed into the plan making process.

Sally Corbett   **Cllr Fraser Tinsley**

Chair, Oakenshaw NP Steering Group   Town Mayor, Greater Willington

1.2 How the Neighbourhood Plan Was Prepared

1.2.1   Steering Group

Oakenshaw has a very active and well organised community association (OCA) that is keen to support the development of the ONP. Two OCA committee members and a representative of Greater Willington Town Council (GWTC) formed a steering group under the auspices of GWTC. The group met regularly to project manage the development of a plan. It was agreed that the OCA members of the steering group should act independently of the OCA as not all village residents belonged to the association at that time. The OCA provided practical support such as delivering flyers, offering information and advice, providing an established infrastructure to disseminate information and to report progress in various ways, at meetings and social events, in the newsletter, on the village noticeboards, via Facebook and a website. Other residents were co-opted into the steering group to help with tasks

such as defining the perimeter of the neighbourhood area, hosting focus groups and providing IT support.

Two successful grants enabled us to commission expert advice and guidance from a planning consultant who ran workshops, developed one topic area to provide a template for preparing the evidence for other topics, reviewed topic papers written by the steering group, advised and carried out a health check to ensure consistency during the development of the final policies.

The steering group produced and continually revised a Project plan and GANTT chart to time-manage the project and tasks, according to each stage of the process.

1.2.2 Consultation

The steering group decided not to survey residents to elicit ideas for the ONP, as a survey with an 86% return rate had recently been carried out by the OCA to determine spending priorities. Instead the consultation strategy used an iterative process of gathering opinions and ideas at any event where residents met, such as the OCA AGM, and social events. Residents were asked to write ideas on post-it notes, and these were transcribed and copied into a master document for analysis. Following the initial round of consultations, the cumulative ideas were fedback to residents using presentations at meetings and at an ONP open day held on December 3rd, 2016.

In addition to informal information gathering, a systematic consultation was conducted using nine focus groups hosted by residents in their homes in different parts of the village. For each focus group invitations were issued to all residents living in the same area, thus all villagers were invited to a focus group at some stage. Those attending were asked what they would like to preserve, improve, or develop in the village. They generated and discussed ideas often reaching consensus within each group. Ideas were noted down on post-it notes which were transcribed and a summary of these ideas was delivered to all those originally invited, whether they had attended the focus group or not. Contact details of the steering group were provided so that other comments could be emailed or left on an answer machine. These ideas were added to a master document for analysis. Every resident in the village had been invited to attend a focus group and informed of the outcomes of the group they had been invited to attend, excepting two landowners, and three local small business owners who were all seen separately. One caveat is that summating the comments provides only an approximate indication of the level of endorsement as not everyone wrote down their ideas, especially where another group member had already recorded the same idea. If anything, summation underestimates those endorsing an idea, but the data is better used qualitatively to capture the range and content of the ideas.

All ideas that had been transcribed and recorded on the master document were analysed and grouped by subject matter. Transcribed comments were organised to show the level of support or opposition to the ideas expressed and categorised according to its suitability for planning policy, or a non-planning issue, or a

community action project. Key issues were identified for each subject area and objectives were formulated. Topic papers were prepared for each subject and are available in evidence files. The organised issue tables are shown in the appendices for each topic paper. In addition to specific topics broad aims and outcomes were discussed and distilled into an overall vision for the future.

Progress on the ONP was reported in newsletters and at all public meetings. A draft plan was put onto the GWTC website:

http://www.gwtc.co.uk/assets/180725-onp-consultation-draft.pdf

and residents provided with the link. Flyers were delivered to every household to invite residents to a neighbourhood plan open day held on 28th July 2018 which, in addition to a poster board display about the plan, included musical entertainment and refreshments.

The plan was amended following feedback received from this first consultation. The amended version was accepted on the 8th October 2019 by Greater Willington Town Council to be displayed and circulated for public consultation from 0ctober 9th until November 22nd 2019.All residents within the ONP area were notified of the public consultation using the Newsletter delivered to every household and by Facebook. Over 75 organisations and residents bordering the Neighbourhood Plan Area were notified of the public consultation by email or letter posted or delivered by hand. The consultation strategy, feedback and further amendments have been detailed in the Public Consultation electronic folder submitted with this plan.

1.3   Designation of the Neighbourhood Plan area

Oakenshaw is a small village in County Durham, situated a mile and a half from Willington to the south, and Brancepeth to the east. Its unique industrial archaeology has shaped the main settlement area, the surrounding landscape and economic activity to the present day. The main settlement is separated from Park View to the south by agricultural land. Residents of Park Street, further down the hill towards Willington are required to vote in Oakenshaw. Local farmers outside the main settlement had been very active in previous iterations of the Oakenshaw Community Association (OCA) and residents in outlying cottages are now members of the OCA.

To determine the outer perimeter of Oakenshaw for the Neighbourhood Plan, five residents including two from the steering group walked around the areas that might prove to be contentious. Residents of the surrounding farms and cottages were asked if they perceived themselves to be part of the village and if not, whether they would have any objection to their property being included in the neighbourhood plan. Following this consultation, a red line was drawn on a map to designate the area included in the neighbourhood plan (Figure 1). The area within the red line drawn on the map can be fully justified (See Appendix 1.4 of the Introduction topic file) using notes taken from consultations with residents about the perimeter of the ONP. The Neighbourhood Plan area was approved by Greater Willington Town

Council subject to consultation with Brancepeth Parish Council and approval from Durham County Council.

Brancepeth Parish Council was consulted to ensure there was no similar neighbourhood plan or potential overlap of particular areas. The map on the website (http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10144309/boundary#) shows the parish boundary. There is some overlap between the boundaries of Brancepeth church parish boundary and that of the ONP towards Stockley Beck. Advice was sought from Durham County Council Planning Department about the feasibility of the ONP area for planning purposes. Their view was that Stockley is included in the same parish as Oakenshaw (i.e. both within Willington). Stockley is only in Brancepeth in respect of the church parish, which is not coterminous with the local government area and this would not be regarded as a problem.

Durham County Council granted approval for the application to designate a Neighbourhood Area in accordance with the boundaries specified on the submitted plan on 26th November 2015.

The Neighbourhood Plan Area is identified in Figure 1.
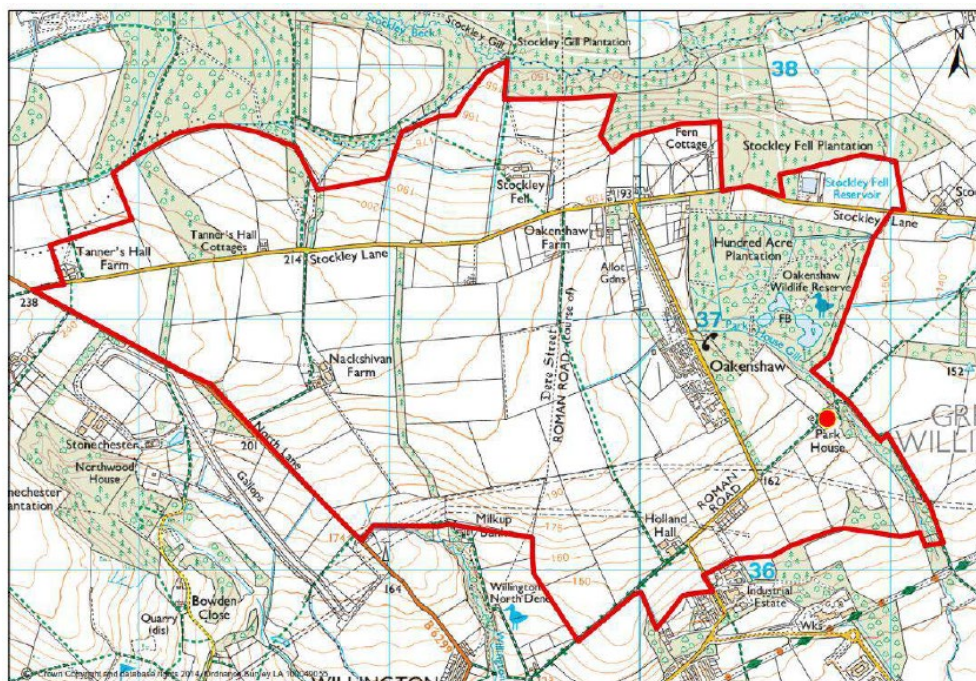

Figure 1: Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan Area

1.4 Background information about the village

1.4.1 Brief Village history

The Oakenshaw area was famous before the introduction of coal mining as an area of forest. Oaks have been grown and felled in this area for centuries and more recently trees were planted to supply pit props. Oaks still exist in the woods today.

The village retains features from its industrial past such as the pit entrance situated at the junction of Reed Avenue with Stockley Lane now converted into a private home. It also retains, to this day, what may be the longest continuous row of pit cottages remaining in County Durham. The long gardens of New Row were originally bounded by a solid wall, the other side of which the waggonway ran, taking coal and slag to Willington. This was later replaced by a road and an aerial flight for the wagons which ran parallel to the east of the road. Today gates in the wall allow access to the main road to Willington (Marked as Reed Avenue on ONS explorer map 305).

Whilst the colliery was operating the village enjoyed many amenities including the miner's institute, chapels, a shop, a school, a garage, the working men's club, a cricket pitch, and small home enterprises operating out of back doors including two sweet shops. Designated for no further development after the pit closed approximately fifty years ago (Category D), several rows of houses were demolished, the remainder sold off to private ownership. The village lost all local amenities when finally, the working men's club fell into disrepair and was burnt down in an arson attack in 2002. Oakenshaw Community Association (OCA) meetings are now held in Willington as there is no community meeting place in the village.

During the post Second World War years the Coal Board and private companies carried out extensive open cast mining between Tow Law and Brancepeth. Open cast coal extraction occurred on three sides of the main Oakenshaw settlement, some areas being reopened twice. In the 1980's the 'bleak wasteland' (Report prepared to object to further opencast development) created by the cumulative impact of continuous mining, slowly recovered. Restoration of the Nackshivan open cast to agricultural land, the closure of the pit and conversion of pit head buildings, reclamation of the waste heap, the removal of the aerial flight and landscaping of the land following its course down the hill to Willington, created an open rural environment. The field opposite New Row (grid ref NZ 20119 37352) was restored and protected by covenant for agricultural use only as recompense for the long-term impact of open casting on the quality of life of residents. It has now been divided into small grazing plots and remains a valued green space despite recent plans to build a residence on one of the plots.

In 1991 open cast mining recommenced to the north of Park House Farm despite considerable opposition by residents concerned about the resumption of extraction causing noise, dust, and the repeated decimation of the countryside. After this was discontinued in 1993, a nature reserve (grid reference 20594 37023) was created by Banks Group, with three small lakes surrounded by commercial woodland. The nature reserve was officially opened by Tony Blair MP in 1996 and has since increased in biodiversity of flora, fauna and fungi. This is a highly valued local green space giving Oakenshaw a unique amenity. It is used by residents and visitors interested in its diverse wildlife, for walking and is popular with dog owners.

A report completed in the early nineties for H.J.Banks & Co Ltd by the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service – Ecological assessment identified the likelihood

of an area of Ancient Woodland along the Eastern boundary of the reserve because of ditch and bank features found there. The Southern section of broadleaved woodland adjoining the South Eastern corner is also identified as ancient woodland where bluebells and wood sorrel grow and these sites could have had a continuous history of tree cover since at least 1600. Ancient woodland is known to be of high value to wildlife and can contain species not normally found elsewhere. Policies to protect ancient woodland of this type are found in the Wear Valley District Local Plan 1997 (ENV15), and the emergent County Durham Plan (Policy 41).

Included in the wider Neighbourhood Plan area is Nackshivan Farm, built in the late 18th Century and used as a base by the artist J.M.W. Turner during his visit to the North East in 1817. This non-designated heritage asset is a working farm and development on this site would be subject to Policy BE1 of the Wear Valley District Local Plan and Policy 25 of the County Durham Plan.

1.4.2   Population Growth and Change in Age Demographic

Despite its category D status following the closure of the pit, the population of Oakenshaw has grown. The Wear Valley District Local Plan (1997) cites the population of Oakenshaw as 264, based on the 1991 census. Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakenshaw, County Durham) cites the 2001 census data, showing the population had grown to 470. As the area became more desirable, incomers to the village, mainly moving to new housing areas built at the southern end of the main settlement, led to a further population increase. Using the census output area which includes a few dwellings not within the ONP boundary, the 2011census shows a further rise in the population to 565. Whilst these figures are based in slightly different output areas, census data indicates a steady rise in population. Not only has the population grown, but the composition of it has altered. The age profile of the village population has changed as follows:

- A decrease in the proportion of children aged 0 to 15 years from 21% to 15%
- An increase in the proportion of older people over 65 from 11% to 19%
- A slight decrease in the proportion of people of working age (16 to 64 years) from 68% to 66%

1.4.3   Indices of Multiple Deprivation

Current indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) indicate that Oakenshaw post codes DL15 0TE and DL15 OTB are on the 4th decile overall, scoring lower for health and wellbeing (3rd decile) and barriers to housing (2nd decile). These lower scores may be explained in terms of the age of the population, and the age of some of the housing stock in these post code areas. Levels of education tend to be higher (6th decile), reflecting the number of professionals and retired academics resident in the village who may have skewed the results.

1.4.4   Amenities

Despite the steady rise in population, indoor public amenities, previously lost, have not been restored or developed in response to demographic change.

New outdoor amenities have been developed. In 1993, following the cessation of open cast mining to the east of the village, a Wildlife Nature Reserve was created on restored land consisting of woodland and pond areas. The reserve is surrounded by woodland which also supports wildlife habitat. The village also has a large, public, open field (referred to as 'the green' although it has not been designated as a village green) which runs parallel to the west of New Row with a small football pitch, multiple use games area and children's play area. West of this field are allotments, one of which has been designated a community orchard garden with sheltered seating areas, providing residents with the opportunity to engage in communal gardening. The IMD index for the living environment is rated above average at the 7th decile.

Public transport is limited necessitating high levels of car ownership and provision of parking. The village is served by an hourly bus to Bishop Auckland which does not run after 5.15 in the evening or on Sundays. To get to Durham or Crook, it is necessary to change buses in Willington; buses running every 20 minutes through Willington.

1.4.5   *Flood Risk and Flood Protection*

The Green has a clay base with topsoil. Following prolonged dry weather, the ground is hard and the trees become distressed. After heavy rain the ground becomes extremely soft and difficult even to walk across, limiting its use as a public amenity. There is considerable rain-water run-off (see Figure 2) especially after a dry spell when rain falls on hard ground. In recent years run-off across the green and down Reed Avenue has overwhelmed the drainage into the culvert at the bottom of Institute Street resulting in flooding up to a depth of three feet in the bottom five houses.
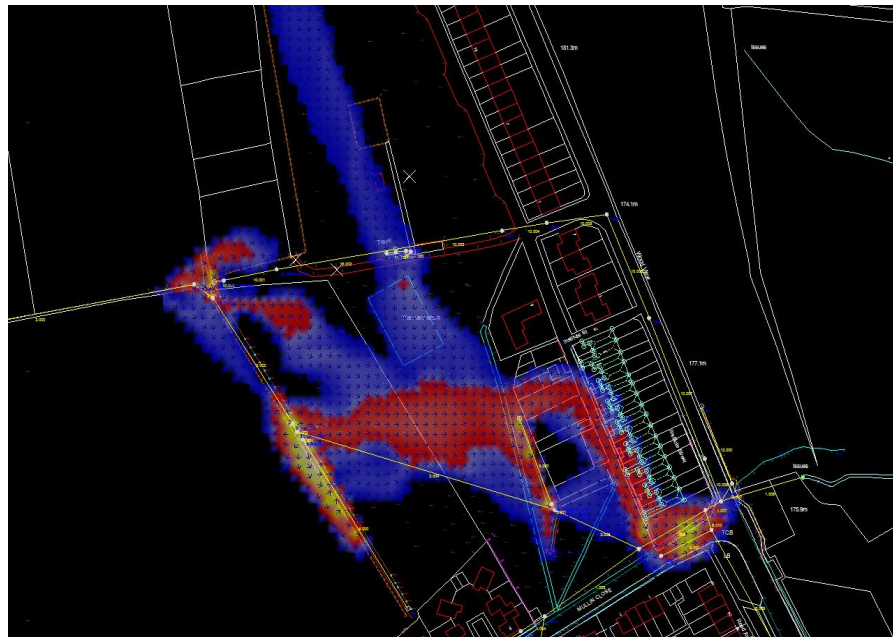
Figure 2: Map of Flood Risk

In 2014, to reduce flood risk, drainage pipes and ditches were installed (Figure 3) parallel to the access road to the allotments (shown in green and yellow) and across the lower part of the green into a drainage ditch to reduce the speed of water run-off. Any strategy for the development of the green to improve its use as a public amenity will need to take account of the ground conditions, rain-water run-off and the location of drainage pipes and ditches designed to reduce flood risk.
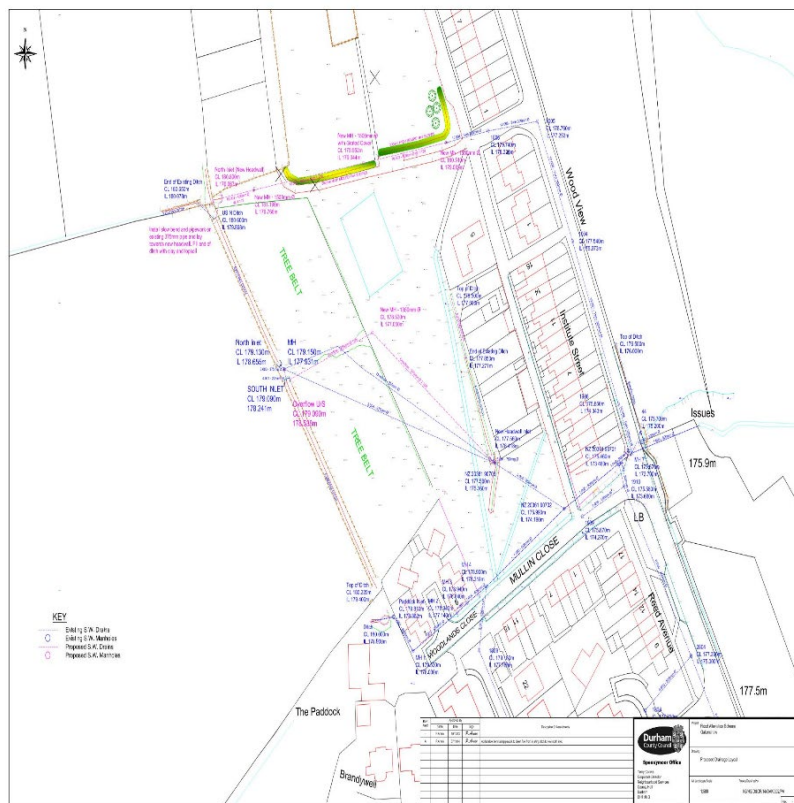
Figure 3: Plan of Food Risk Mitigation Strategy

1.4.6   Oakenshaw Community

There is a strong community, underpinned by the work of the Oakenshaw Community Association (OCA). In recent years residents have organised bulb planting, planters throughout the village, litter picks and open-air events to bring the community together. They have taken pride in the appearance of the village. The OCA has raised over £200,000 both within the village from the residents and through external grants. With this money new local amenities have been created such as a Play area, Multiple Use Games Area (MUGA), tree planting and a community orchard. The Association has recently negotiated income for the next twenty years, to use for community benefit, from a new wind turbine development. Residents have been asked how they would like to spend this money using a survey and at regular meetings. The key areas identified for expenditure through the community consultation were considered when developing the ONP. Some of these projects

have already been completed. The remaining projects will be incorporated into a broader plan for the village.

The residents feel proud of their achievements and can see direct benefits. These efforts have made Oakenshaw a desirable village to live in, have attracted new residents and the development of new built homes.

1.5   Policy Context and its relationship to the ONP

Statutory requirements, the National Planning Policy Framework, and Local Planning Policies have been used to identify the conditions, sustainable elements and structure of the ONP. This neighbourhood plan meets statutory requirements and forms part of the development plan used for determining planning applications.

1.5.1   Statutory requirements for the ONP outlined in the Localism Act 2011

The right for communities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans was established by the Localism Act 2011, which was accompanied by the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012. As a result, Neighbourhood Plans are required to meet a number of basic conditions which are detailed within paragraph 8, schedule 4B of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, as inserted by the provision of Schedule 10 of The Localism Act. The basic conditions require that the Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan (ONP):

- is prepared having regard to national policies and advice issued by the Secretary of State.
- contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.
- is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area.
- does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations

1.5.2   The roles of the ONP outlined in The National Planning Policy Framework 2019

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2019 part 2) notes that there are three elements to sustainable development; economic, social and environmental and as such the planning system (of which the ONP will form part) needs to perform three roles:

a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe

built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvement in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment, as well as in people's quality of life, including but not limited to:

- Making it easier for jobs to be created;
- Moving from a net loss of bio-diversity to achieving net gains for the future;
- Replacing poor design with better design;
- Improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure;
- Widening the choice of high-quality homes.

1.5.3   The relationship between the ONP and local planning policy context

This Neighbourhood Plan has been conceived to directly address the policy context provided by The localism Act (2011), the NPPF19, the extant Wear Valley District Local Plan (1997) and the emergent County Durham Plan 2019 which has yet to be finalised and ratified. This includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In addition to these, the ONP aims to address the specific local issues raised by the residents of Oakenshaw. The ONP should be considered as a whole and read in conjunction with national and local planning policies.

1.6   What the Neighbourhood Plan Hopes to Achieve

Amongst other things, the Neighbourhood Plan, which has emerged through local activity, aims to protect and improve green space and identify new areas for development. We seek to build on the current strengths and interests of the village, and the work of the community association to maintain and enhance the appearance of the village, restore amenities and create a vibrant future within a pleasant rural environment.

1.6.1   Vision

Following extensive consultation with residents, their aims and desired outcomes for the village were used to formulate the following overall vision for the Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan:

> *'That Oakenshaw retains and reinforces its character as an environmentally friendly village in a distinctly open rural setting. The green spaces and environmental assets of the Neighbourhood Area will be protected and*

enhanced, and support given to providing housing, facilities, amenities and opportunities that help promote a flourishing community and economy.'

This overall vision seeks to build on the village's key attributes (rural character and setting, open spaces, historic sense of community and embracing of sustainable energy) with an understanding that these are positive characteristics to be sustained and developed.

1.7 The Structure of the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to the policy context

The structure of the Neighbourhood Plan directly addresses the three elements of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) identified in part 2, paragraph 8 of the NPPF19. The Neighbourhood Plan also addresses the issue of housing which is a focus for national planning policy and a key issue in the future development of Oakenshaw. The village environment is described first and the related policies in order to provide information about the topography, settlement areas and sensitive areas that provide a setting for all other policies.

The Neighbourhood Plan is structured as follows:

Chapter 2.0   Village Environment

Chapter 3.0   Housing

Chapter 4.0   Village Community

Chapter 5.0   Village Economy

Each chapter defines the vision for a specific topic that emerged during consultation with the community, evidence from a variety of sources, key issues identified by residents, objectives based on evidence and key issues, and the consequential policies for that topic.

2.0   Village Environment

Policy in this chapter relates to the village environment, valued landscapes, local green spaces and largely reclaimed agricultural land. These are shown on the ONP Proposals Map (Figure 4) and are described below.

2.1   Policy approach to safeguarding the village environment

2.1.1   The Settlement Boundary

Within the neighbourhood plan area the Oakenshaw settlement was built from the 1850's as a colliery village for workers at the pit owned by Messrs. Straker & Love. The settlement is divided by agricultural land which separates Park View to the south from the main settlement. On the ONP Proposals Map (Figure 4) a black line has been drawn that joins the two main settlement areas in the village and includes a small area of agricultural land. This provides a clearly defined and coherent settlement boundary that incorporates Park View to the South and maintains the linear form of the village which contributes to the village's distinctly open rural setting and shows separation from surrounding settlements.

2.1.2   Environmentally Sensitive Green Area

The agricultural land on three sides of the settlement boundary shaded light green on the ONP proposals map (Figure 4) is a sensitive green area which has an important role in defining the linear form of Oakenshaw, maintaining the village's distinctly open rural setting and creates an area of separation from nearby settlements.
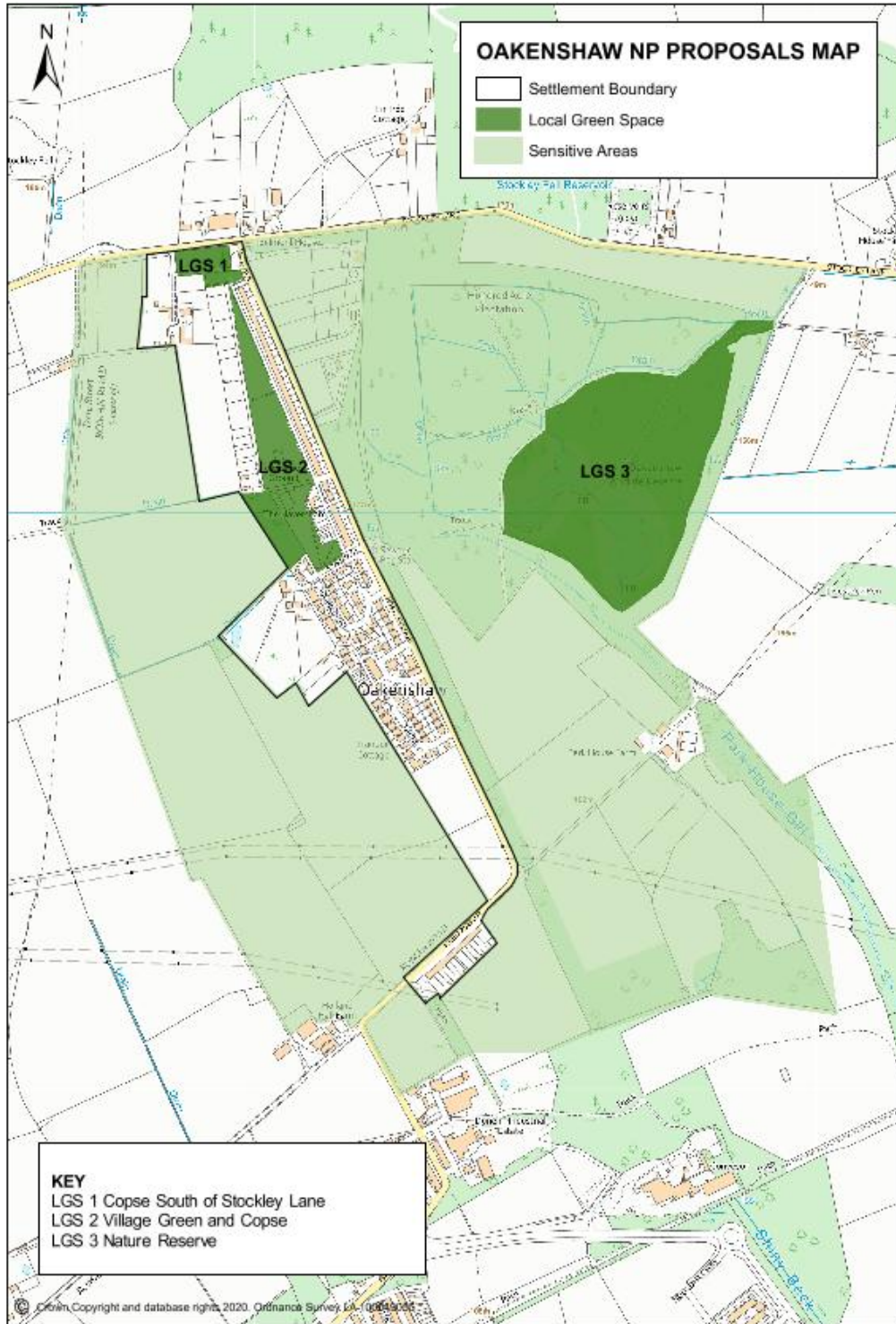
Figure4: Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Plan Proposals Map

2.1.3 *Local Green Spaces*

Within the settlement boundary and to the east of the settlement are three locations shaded dark green on the ONP Proposals Map (Figure 4). These areas, recognised during consultations as most important to residents of Oakenshaw, are now designated as Local Green Spaces (LGS) in accordance with NPPF 19 (Section 8: paragraphs 99, 100, 101).

The numbers of these local Green Spaces (LGS) correspond to the areas numbered LGS1 to LGS3 on the Oakenshaw Proposals Map (Figure 4) and shown are in more detail in Figures 5, 6 and 7.

LGS 1 The small wooded area adjacent to Stockley Lane (Figure 5: Grid Ref. NZ 19908 37441)

LGS 2 The village green (Grid Ref. NZ 19959 37379 to 20058 37050) and a small copse on the south western edge of the green by the MUGA (Figure 6: Grid Ref. NZ 20043 36971).

LGS 3 The nature reserve (including three small lakes) (Figure 7: Grid Ref. NZ 20596 37033).

LGS1 shields the village from noise and particulate pollution from Stockley Lane and provides habitat for hedgehogs, birds and bats. The village green (LGS2) is a valued recreational amenity, preserving open green space and the rural character of the village. The nature reserve (LGS3) supports diverse wildlife with its woodland habitat and ancient woodland. These sites are of significant value to residents and visitors as an environmental resource and well used amenities.

Figure 5: Local Green Space 1(LGS 1)

Figure 6: Local Green Space 2 (LGS 2)

Figure 7: Local Green Space 3 (LGS 3)

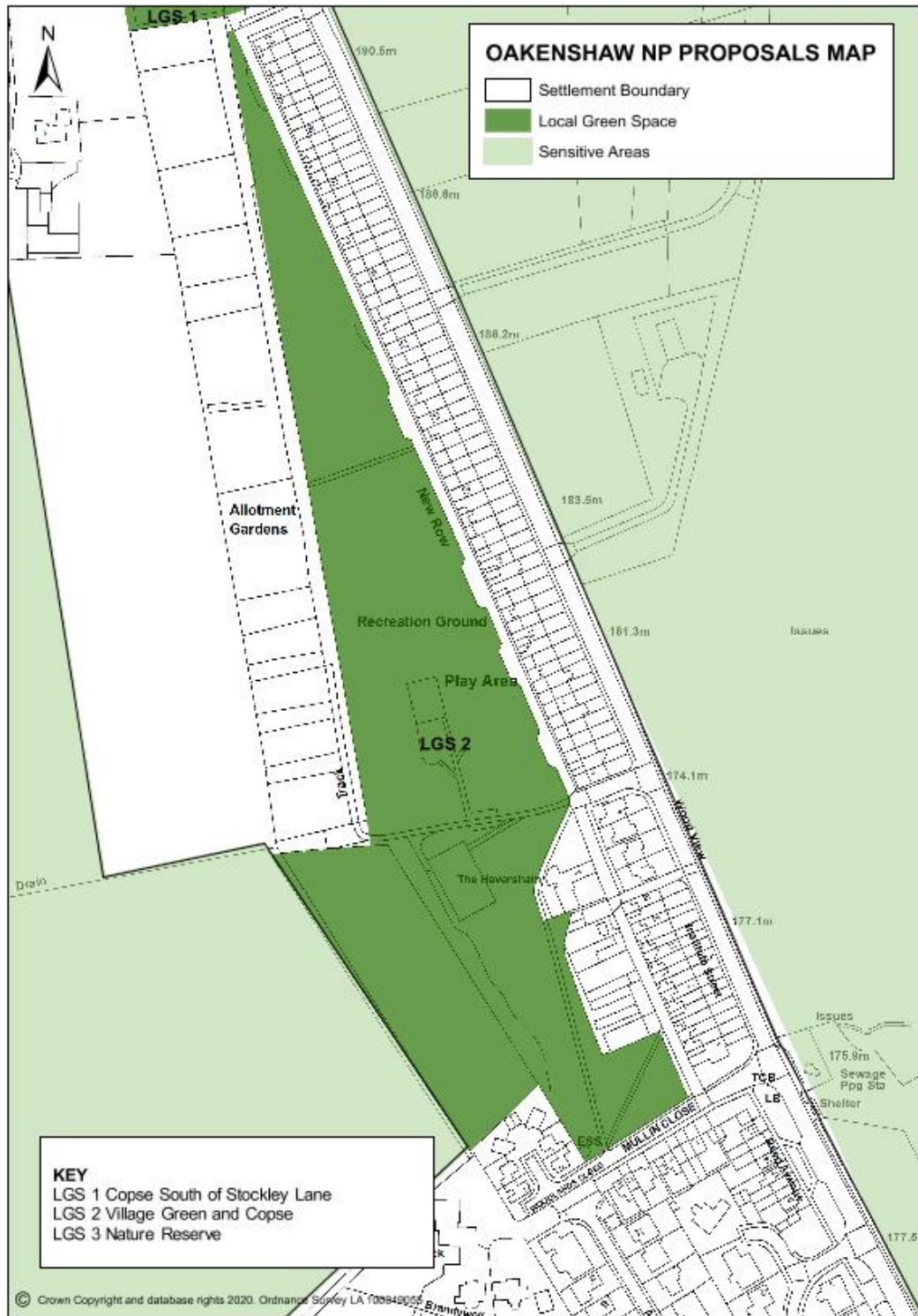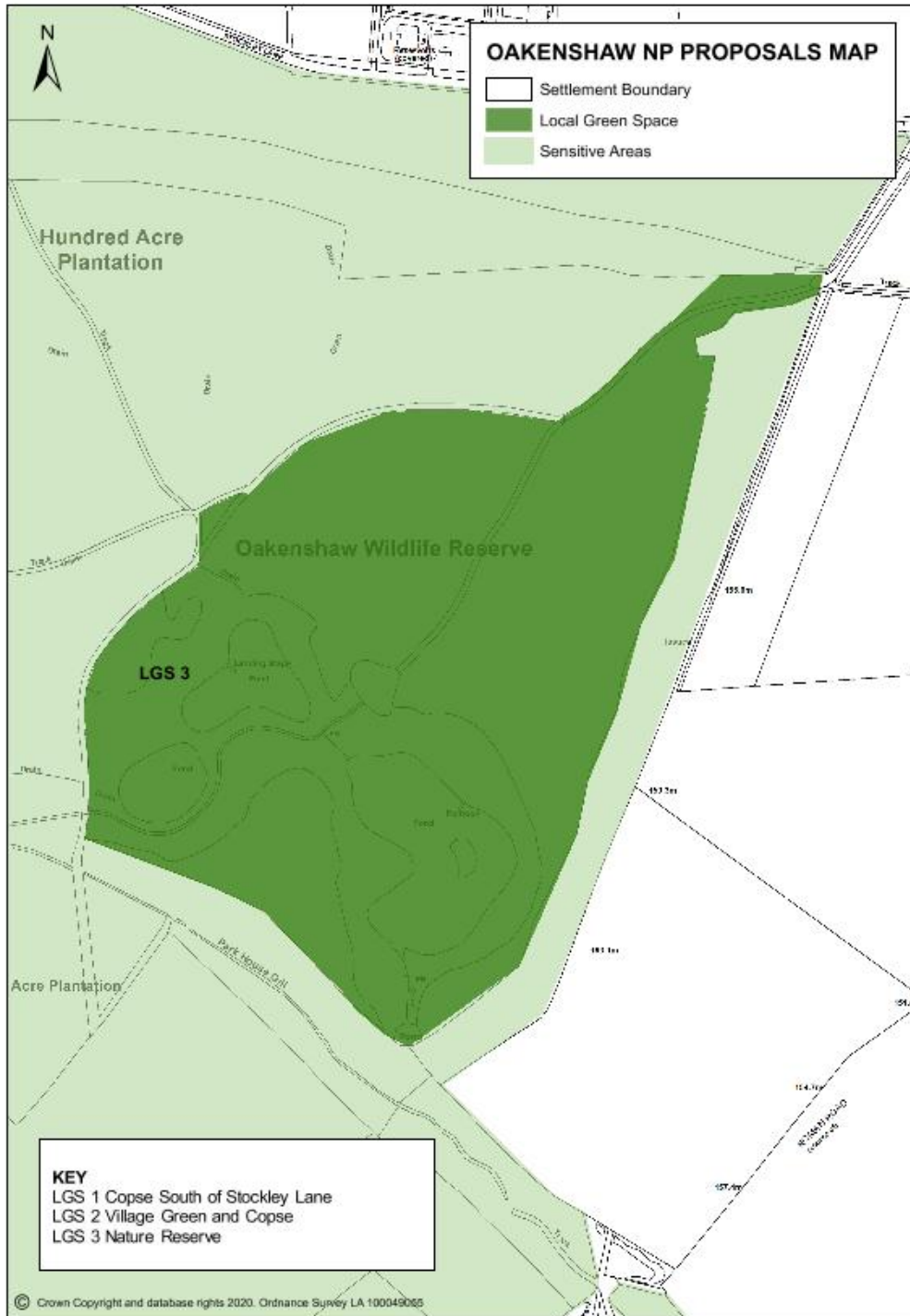### *2.1.4 Agricultural land*

The remaining agricultural land in the neighbourhood plan area, beyond the sensitive areas, is partly shown on the proposals map and left white. This is largely reclaimed land after open cast mining.

2.2   Key Issues

The settlement boundary and surrounding sensitive area affording valued views have an important role in defining the character of Oakenshaw as a distinct linear village in open countryside and providing wildlife corridors. The Local Green Spaces (LGS) are amenity areas, providing screening and wildlife habitat. These areas are of critical importance to the quality of life in Oakenshaw and the rural character of the village. This view was heavily endorsed during focus group consultations and many people said it was a reason for choosing to live in the area. Issues raised in the consultation were grouped by subject in the 'organised issues table – village environment' and can be found in the evidence folder.

The following key issues emerged during consultations and were used to inform the aims, objectives and policies.

1. Preserve the peace and quiet of the village (15 comments)

2. Preserve the open rural views around the village (31 comments)

3. Protect and improve the field known locally as the 'green' west of New Row to become more of a local amenity by improving drainage, lighting and play areas (32 comments)

4. Protect the wooded area adjacent to Stockley Lane to the north of the village (4 comments)

5. Preserve and protect local wildlife habitats (the woodland and nature reserve) and improve access (21 comments)

6. Preserve and protect the field east of New Row adjacent to the woodland and nature reserve for small scale agricultural use only (7 comments in favour with one against)

7. Preserve and protect the agricultural land south of Park View to separate it from Willington (3 comments) and west of Country View (1 comment)

8. Retain and protect existing wildlife corridors and encourage biodiversity by planting trees and enhancing the green infrastructure (12 comments).

2.3   Overall Vision – Village Environment

The overall vision for the environment in Oakenshaw is defined as follows:

> *Protection and enhancement of the valued green spaces, environmental assets of the village and the wider neighbourhood area for the important roles they fulfil. They provide an amenity for residents, maintain separation between Oakenshaw and Willington, and define the unique character of Oakenshaw as a linear village set in open countryside with strong demarcation between built fabric and the open countryside.*

2.4   Village Environment Objectives

Key issues informed the following objectives which have been identified to realise and specifically address the overall vision for village environment in Oakenshaw. They also seek to manage the environment of the village to retain its character as a distinct linear settlement where the open rural context and strong settlement boundaries are integral to its form.

1. To retain the distinct identity of Oakenshaw by designating green areas surrounding the village that are integral to maintaining its rural character and linear form set in open countryside with strong demarcation between built fabric and open countryside. (Key issue 1,2, 5,6,7)

2. To retain, maintain and improve the valued green spaces identified by residents within the settlement area, and the nature reserve (key issues 3, 4, 5).

3. Protect the nature reserve and surrounding woodland to enable wildlife to flourish and enhance this valued amenity for all who use it (key issue 5).

4. To increase tree planting to reduce noise and pollution from the main roads, to create a wildlife corridor and habitat, and to sustain the green and leafy character of the ONP area (key issue 8).

2.5   Environment Development Policies

The following policies are created to achieve the objectives above which were developed from the key issues identified in the consultation exercise. They are intended to inform and guide proposals for any new development in the village and surrounding area and their subsequent determination in the development management process.

High regard is given to the value of local green spaces as an amenity for residents in terms of recreation and views from the village to the surrounding open countryside, this being a key characteristic of the village.

> **ONP ENV 1- Maintaining the Open Rural Character and Areas of Separation**
> New development will be focused within the Oakenshaw Settlement Boundary as defined on the ONP Proposals Map (Figure4). Sustainable development proposals within the settlement boundary will be supported. Development must respect the character and appearance of the Sensitive Areas shaded in light green on the Proposals Map and retain Oakenshaw's qualities as a distinct linear settlement surrounded by open countryside. The enhancement of the Neighbourhood Area's biodiversity, green corridors and environmental quality will be supported.

Justification for ONP ENV 1
This policy seeks to direct development to suitable locations within the neighbourhood plan area by focusing new development within the main Oakenshaw settlement. This approach

provides for sustainable growth in Oakenshaw, for which there is no current housing allocation.

Landscape setting, trees and green open spaces were cited as one of the many positive aspects of the unique character of the village and surrounding area and are therefore of vital importance to residents. Protecting and enhancing our environment and improving its biodiversity and green infrastructure was mentioned frequently during the consultation process. This includes retaining areas of woodland which act to screen noise and particulate pollution from the surrounding road network.

The land east of the village is considered to be particularly important as a sensitive edge, maintaining the open rural character of the village, defining the village boundary and preserving the amenity of open space and tranquillity.

The Sensitive Areas around the settlement include areas rich in biodiversity. Sensitive Areas are locally valued for, amongst other things, supporting wildlife, providing green corridors, reducing noise and pollution, encouraging recreation and contributing to the settlements distinctive and separate identity. Strong settlement edges and green boundaries provide clarity and certainty as to where the village ends and the open countryside begins.

Meets Objectives 1 and 4

> **ONP ENV 2 - Local Green Spaces**
> The areas shown on Figure 4 (Proposals Map) and Figures 5, 6, and 7 (Local Green Space) are designated for protection as Local Green Space. Within the Local Green Spaces, the management of development will be consistent with that for development within Green Belts.

Justification for ONP ENV 2
This policy accords with the NPPF 19 (Section 8: paragraph 99) which states that 'The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them.' This affords protection from development other than in very special circumstances.

The NPPF19 (section 8 paragraph 100), also states:

The Local Green Space designation should only be used where the green space is:

a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;

b) 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

c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

These three conditions are met. Residents have identified three clearly defined areas they wish to designate as Local Green Spaces because of their beauty, tranquillity and recreational value to all. The copse (LGS 1: Figure 5) and village green (LGS 2: Figure 6) both lie within the settlement boundary (ONP proposals map Figure 4) and the nature reserve to the east of the

village (LGS 3: Figure 7) is in close proximity to the village. All are important and valued by residents of all ages who wish to conserve the unique and special character of the village and surrounding area.

Since its inception in 2007 Oakenshaw Community Association has been tasked by the residents of the village to conserve and enhance the green infrastructure by planting more trees, flowers and shrubs and caring for the local green spaces. Improvements include bird boxes and wildlife habitats in the copse, seating and pathways in the nature reserve, and provision of recreational facilities on the green. Improvement and enhancement are locally supported and ongoing.

Meets Objectives 2 & 3

> **ONP ENV 3 – Green Infrastructure and Natural Landscape**
> Development must respect the Neighbourhood Area's distinctive landscape character (as described in the County Durham Landscape Character Assessment, 2008) and should not result in loss of, or damage to, hedgerows, trees, or other forms of biodiversity value. Should the removal of a tree or group of trees be demonstrated to be necessary, such trees should be replaced with a similar number of trees in an appropriate nearby location, using native disease resistant species. The planting and/or enhancement of trees and hedgerows and net gains in biodiversity will be supported.

Justification for ONP ENV 3

This policy recognises that new development may on occasion impact upon vegetation and sets out appropriate mitigation in such circumstances and is in accord with WVDLP 1997 (Policies for protection of trees and conservation of nature; ENV11, ENV12, ENV15, ENV16), and NPPF 19 (Section 5). ONP ENV 3 specifically aims to protect the green infrastructure in the wider ONP area (Figure 1). The policy aims to protect existing trees and hedgerows and encourage the planting of more trees and hedgerows to create and enhance wildlife corridors. However, should it be necessary to remove trees then the impact could be mitigated by replanting appropriate species in a nearby location, although this is not ideal as habitat that is destroyed can take a long time to re-establish.

Oakenshaw residents value the existing high ridge and valley farmland, copses, lowland woods, and open pastures surrounding the village and in the wider Neighbourhood Plan area. See Durham Landscape Character Assessment, 2008; West Durham Coalfield Local Landscape Types map.

Residents wished to protect the valued views and open rural setting surrounding the village. A number of their comments related more specifically to preventing building on open agricultural fields close to the village.

Meets Objectives 1, 4.

3.0 Housing

3.1   Introduction

The population of Oakenshaw was estimated to be 565 in 2015[1]. This is more than double the 1991 population of 264. Much of this population increase has resulted from inward migration to the village that has been accommodated to a large extent in new residential development. This has typically been in the form of individual dwellings or small clusters of new houses. Noticeable trends in population change in the Oakenshaw Neighbourhood Area since 2001 have been –

- a steady decrease in the proportion of children (0-15 years) from 21% to 15%
- a steady increase in the proportion of older people (65+) from 11% to 19%
- a marginal decrease in the proportion of working age (16-64) people from 68% to 66%

In simple terms, the trends in the age profile of residents show that the proportion of families with young children has declined, whilst the proportion of older people has increased. This has implications for the type of housing required in the village which should be more suited to older people. However, the availability of low cost housing may reverse the decline in families with young children.

A count of the type of housing was carried out by the steering group (see the topic paper for housing). The resident population of Oakenshaw is accommodated in 223 dwellings. This equates to 2.5 persons per dwelling, which is slightly higher than the national average of 2.3 persons per dwelling. There are 127 'older' houses and 96 'new build' houses in Oakenshaw. Older houses are generally terraced houses with slate roofs, while new build houses are detached, semi-detached or bungalows, with an eclectic mix of exterior designs; brick built, stone clad or rendered with slate or pantiles on roofs.

Information from Durham County Council's planning records show that, over the period 2005-2012, planning permission was granted for a total of 12 new dwellings (of which 3 were from a conversion scheme). All 12 of the approved dwellings have since been built.

The SHLAA is a study to identify sites within County Durham which have the potential for housing development (NB – this does not automatically mean that they will come forward for development). Reference to the mapping part of the SHLAA 2019 and the CDP 2019 (p 50) shows that there are no identified sites within the Neighbourhood Plan Area of Oakenshaw.

Policies in the ONP will, as part of the development plan, help to provide the basis for considering windfall proposals in the Neighbourhood Area. The Neighbourhood

Plan seeks to encourage opportunities to respond positively to the demographic changes and rate of build described above as well as issues arising from the public consultation (see key issues below).

3.2 Key issues

Residents invited to attend one of nine focus group discussions identified issues they felt were important which they recorded on post-it notes. These were amalgamated with data gathered during public meetings and social events. These issues were grouped by subject matter and organised in a table into planning or non-planning issues, and community action projects. The organised issues table for housing is available in the evidence folder. Ten planning issues were identified as follows:

1. New housing should take account of the rate of build over the last 10 years (approximately 15 to 20 houses) and be proportionate to the scale of the settlement.
2. Confine new housing development to small scale/infill sites well integrated into the village (not large satellite estates) (6 comments) and maintain the rural feel and open spaces surrounding the village (13 comments and see policy ONP ENV1)
3. Keep Oakenshaw a separate entity, not an extension of Willington (3 comments)
4. Newly built houses should blend with the rural character of the village and be of appropriate type, style and size.
5. New houses should incorporate sustainable green energy solutions and high levels of insulation (3 comments, but 15 more comments recorded in the green energy organised issues table in the evidence folder)
6. There is a need for sheltered level access social housing for older or disabled residents (21 comments)
7. There is a need to attract younger families to the village with affordable and starter homes to reverse the demographic trend (4 comments in favour, 1 against)
8. More executive and high-end housing to attract commuters or people working from home to the village (3 comments in favour and 1 against)
9. Concerns were expressed about flooding, utilities (old water pipes) and pressure on amenities and services, such as schools (6 comments).
10. Overall, there was a desire to ensure easy access to all parts of the village requiring well maintained footpaths with ramps, roads (9 comments in organised issues table concerning getting around) and parking space (8 comments in organised issues table concerning getting around).

3.3 Overall Vision – Housing

The overall vision for the development of housing in Oakenshaw identified by demographic evidence, rate of build and the key issues that emerged from public consultation listed above is:

'Energy efficient housing development reflecting the historic rate of build, of an appropriate scale, type and location which aims to meet the identified needs of the community, whilst respecting the essential character and distinctly open rural setting of the village.'

3.4   Housing Development Objectives

While it is not anticipated that the community will double in size as it has since the 1990s, there is potential for a substantial increase. The historic build rate since the 1980's has been approximately 15-20 new houses every 10 years. This past development has been driven significantly by newcomers to the village and this is likely in the future. This rate of growth is considered reasonable by residents and in accordance with maintaining the character of the village through 'organic' growth. We also need to identify the housing needs of existing residents including older people (key issue 6) and those requiring low cost housing (key issue 7) in accordance with demographic census information described in the introduction to this chapter. The plan does not promote specific sites for development.

New housing proposals should consider development constraints associated with the existing wind turbine, previously experienced flooding issues and inadequate infrastructure. It should also take into account the location of historic coal mines some of which remain unmapped.

The key issues identified for housing development have been grouped into five objectives for Oakenshaw and are defined as follows:

1. To prevent urban sprawl and provide clear definition to the village and separation from Willington (meets key issues 1, 2 and 3)
2. To build new homes that blend with the rural character of the village, and be of appropriate type, style and size and provide adequate parking space, sympathetic planting and green spaces (meets key issues2, 4 and 10).
3. To build new homes that incorporate green energy solutions and high grade insulation (meets key issue 5).
4. To provide housing that meets both the identified needs of the community and offers homes to redress the demographic trend towards older residents. This includes provision of sheltered level access housing for older or disabled residents, high end development for home working and commuters, and affordable homes to attract younger families (Meets key issues 6, 7, and 8)
5. As the village has no indoor amenities, limited outdoor amenities, old water supply pipes, overhead electricity cables susceptible to adverse weather conditions and a need to improve roads and pathways to improve accessibility, consideration should be given to obtaining section 106 funding to improve infrastructure to support the increased village population. (Key issues 9 and 10)

3.5 Housing Development Policies

ONP H1 –Small Scale Housing Development

Infilling and small-scale (less than 30 dwellings) residential development within the settlement boundary will be supported where it:

1. is of high quality design;
2. respects local character, including the linear form of the settlement and its rural character and setting;
3. respects residential amenity
4. is not in an area of flood risk

New homes should be energy efficient and the incorporation of renewable energy measures, including solar panels will be supported, as will the development of homes with zero carbon emissions.

Justification for Policy ONP H1

There is no housing allocation for Oakenshaw in the County Durham Plan (Policy 4) and so this policy does not undermine the strategic policies in the wider plan. In addition to strategic housing policies in the WVLDP (GD1 General Development Criteria BE14 Open Spaces within Built-up Areas H3 Distribution of Development) and the NPPF 19 (Section 5: Identifying land for homes: para 38 subsections a and c Rural Homes, paragraphs 77,78,79), specific local issues raised by residents concerning location and containment of housing development, type of housing, energy efficiency and a proportionate improvement in community infrastructure needed to support increased housing provision, are addressed in this policy.

The approach adopted to housing development is defined by the built-up area of Oakenshaw within the 'Settlement Boundary'. This boundary links the two historic settlements at each end of the village currently separated by a tract of farmland, giving the village a linear form. The boundary is identified as a black line on the ONP Proposals Map (Figure 4). The settlement boundary includes areas of undeveloped land. Whilst the plan does not allocate sites for development, it seeks to facilitate infill in suitable locations for greater sustainability within the settlement boundary should they become available. Development within the boundary will prevent urban sprawl and provide an area of separation between Oakenshaw and Willington, thus preserving the distinct identity of the village. This accords with NPPF paragraphs 13, 28 and 29.

Since the design of houses varies throughout the village from the brick built terraces and slate roofs of old pit cottages (In New Row, Institute Street, School Row and Park View) to newly built rendered or stone clad houses with either slate or pan tiled roofs to the north and south of the main settlement, it is not possible to identify a typical local style. However, new proposals for housing development need to be

compatible with the design of existing houses in the immediate surroundings in order to blend in with the built environment.

The village has supported green energy with the erection of a wind turbine. Having energy efficient homes was important to the residents; as well as lowering energy bills. This accords with NPPF19 (section 14 paragraph 150) which specifies that new development 'can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design'. In paragraph 151 it recommends that plans should help to 'increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy and heat' and that 'even small-scale projects provide a valuable contribution to cutting greenhouse gas emissions' (NPPF19: Paragraph 154) .

Meets Objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

ONP H2 - Large Scale Housing Development Requirements

Large scale proposals for 30 dwellings within the settlement boundary will be supported where:
1. Proposals are in keeping with the rural character and linear form of the settlement area.
2. Housing development including external structures and walls should respond positively to local character and materials.
3. Houses are grouped around small landscaped green areas to create a low density feel and provide community space.
4. Landscaping using sympathetic planting of native trees, fruit trees, and shrubs is used to ensure that housing development is in keeping with surrounding rural areas marked in light green on the ONP proposals map (Figure 4) and maintains wildlife corridors.
5. Any development proposals which are implemented in phases must make adequate provision to provide small landscaped green open spaces and sympathetic planting of shrubs and trees throughout all phases.
6. All housing development will be required to provide affordable housing in accordance with development plan policy.

Justification for ONP H2

Policy ONP H1 deals with sites for less than 30 dwellings. Large scale development of 30 houses or more was contraindicated during the consultation with residents, especially if such development was not integrated into the linear form of the village. Building on sites within the settlement boundary will more than satisfy the expectation of 15 to 20 new houses being built over the next 10 to 20 years and there is no housing allocation for Oakenshaw in the CDP (Policy 4). However, there is the potential for larger scale development contained within the settlement boundary whilst maintaining the linear form of the village. This policy is needed to define acceptable development for 30 or more dwellings (of the total number of dwellings to be provided even if the development is to be built in phases).

The ONP aims to ensure that any new development in Oakenshaw is of high quality design and contained within the existing settlement boundary. Dwellings built around landscaped areas with attractive planting of native species of trees and shrubs would be in keeping with the rural character of the village in accordance with NPPF 19 (Paragraph 72c), help to maintain wildlife corridors and create a low density feel to the housing area. The rural character of the village was an important consideration for residents choosing to move to and live in the village.

In four focus group consultation events, affordable homes (and a definition of what is affordable), were identified as a need with only one objection. The specific concern expressed by residents of Oakenshaw is that the proportion of young families living in the village is declining. One reason given in the consultation exercise is the lack of affordable or rented housing in the village. Policy H2 aims to reverse this trend by attracting young families in order to maintain a mix of age groups to enhance the long-term sustainability of the village.

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2016 evidences there is an overall net shortfall of 968 affordable dwellings across County Durham each year. There is a vital need for housing to support the provision of a mix of affordable housing which meets a proven local need, one that is of a scale that accords with the existing communities. A local need would be ascertained using evidence, informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance in accordance with NPPF 19 (paragraph 60 and 61).

Residents stated that they did not want ad hoc large satellite estates being built around the sensitive green edges of the settlement. Instead they would support contained development that conformed to the current form of the village and, indeed, there may be some advantage to supporting development which would provide opportunities and resources to enhance sustainable development of the village. There has been a significant reduction in amenities and lack of investment in infrastructure needed to sustain the community since its former designated category D status, despite the growth of the local population. Oakenshaw residents have commented on the need to attract investment to improve roads and pathways for safe and suitable access for all people, improve water supply to houses in New Row and drainage to prevent surface flooding and risk of flooding from culverts, accessibility to services and develop and improve community infrastructure such as a community centre, parks, and play areas. They expressed concern about the pressures new development would place on the existing inadequate infrastructure.

Meets objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

ONP H3- Community led housing provision for older or disabled people

The development of level access community-led housing designed to meet the social housing needs of older and/or disabled people will be supported.

Justification for policy ONP H3

This ONP Policy refers toa specific need in Oakenshaw. The census data indicates there is an increasing proportion of ageing residents, some living in older pit cottages bought at low cost when the pit closed that are now unsuitable for their needs. These houses have steep staircases, some with no upstairs toilet or bathroom, and require expensive adaptation. As there is no alternative affordable or rented level access accommodation in the village, many older people have had no choice but to relocate to level access accommodation in Willington where they lose their social support networks and lifelong connection with the village. This is a pressing issue for residents and has been raised 21 times in focus group discussions and public consultations. In addition to policy ONP H3, the OCA has an aspiration to build centrally located homes that would enable older and less able residents to participate in village life and maintain their friendships and social support networks. The OCA's aims in this regard are set out below.

Community Action – New Community Homes

This Community Action is not a Neighbourhood Plan Policy but sets out an important local aspiration to deliver new community homes, to be led by the OCA.

A community led development of four or more level access homes for rent will share a small landscaped garden and be oriented to enjoy an attractive view of the village. This type of development will provide suitable and adaptable affordable homes within easy access of public transport to enhance independent living for older or disabled residents, enabling them to get around and participate in community activities. There is flexibility about the location of this housing and this will be subject to a feasibility study rather than a specific allocation in this plan.

The housing units will be designed with a multi-use room that enables visitors and carers to talk to residents while preparing food and drinks, and a bedroom with an en suite wet room to facilitate residents washing, dressing or preparing for bed with or without the help of carers. This design has few internal doorways to negotiate and these would be wide enough to provide 'Effective Clear Opening Widths' (≥800mm) for access using a wheelchair as specified by the most recent British Standard 8300, and Doc M. BS8300 also provides guidelines for other features to improve housing for disabled people including: entrances, door fittings, steps, stairs and ramps, corridors and passageways, surface finishes, visual signs, lighting, storage facilities, and provision of seating. We will seek funding through future initiatives and commuted sums.

Meets objective 4.

ONP H4 – Car Parking and Provision for Electric Vehicles and Cycles

New residential development must provide off-road parking, taking into account the type and mix of the development and the need to prevent increases in on - road parking to the detriment of highway safety. All new dwellings must provide electric vehicle plug-in points and provision for cycle parking or storage.

Justification for Policy ONP H4

As a result of inadequate public transport into Durham or Crook, car ownership in the village is high. Parking problems were frequently mentioned in the focus group discussions with residents (it was raised as a problem eight times) as there is limited off road parking provision for older properties in New Row, Institute Street and Park View. Fifty-seven cars were parked in bays on the green and on the road in New Row over two weekends and on road parking has been raised by residents of Park View as a safety issue. On-road parking impairs sight lines and constitutes a safety hazard. To ensure that these parking problems do not occur in future, new developments should provide for off-road parking commensurate with the scale and type of housing provided. Cycling and electric vehicles provide for sustainable forms of transport and the Policy seeks to encourage more sustainable patterns of movement by ensuring that new housing provides for these.

New developments should contribute toward a pleasant, uncluttered environment; it is essential to maintain the free flow of traffic especially for public service and emergency vehicles.

Meets objective 2.

4.0   Village Community

4.1   Introduction

Oakenshaw is a former colliery village which has experienced significant change over the past 40 years. The population of Oakenshaw was estimated to be 565 in 2015. This is more than double the 1991 population of 264.   Much of this population increase has resulted from inward migration to the village rather than growth from within the existing population. Today the community is characterised by families who have historic ties to the village that go back many decades and newcomers to the village, largely older people, attracted by the rural setting and location of Oakenshaw, close to Durham City. Despite these demographic changes the community retains a strong community spirit, building on its industrial heritage. The Oakenshaw Community Association has sought to integrate newcomers with long standing residents through community social and environmental improvement activities.

The residents of Oakenshaw strongly articulated (24 written comments) an ethos where the community would provide residents with mutual support for activities of daily living and improved local amenities that provide opportunities for social engagement. These aspirations are supported in the NPPF 19 (Section 8: 'Promoting healthy and safe communities').

Not all activities need a building and outdoor facilities can also be improved to meet needs, however, they would be assisted by a community hub, good access, and integration between developments. These initiatives would address the poor Indices of Multiple Deprivation rating Oakenshaw has for health and well-being (in the lowest 30% for some post code areas) by reducing social isolation and improving integration of newcomers into the village. The ONP supports community cohesion, a strong helping community spirit, interaction to reduce social isolation, and facilitates organisation of community cultural and learning activities.

4.2   Key issues

Comments written on post it notes during focus group consultation were amalgamated with data gathered during public meetings and social events and put into the 'Organised Issues Table for Village Community and environment' which can be seen in the evidence folder and seven key issues were identified.

1. Provide village hall/hub/community centre for multiple uses (23 comments) for meetings, large and small social gatherings, including fitness activities, sport and cultural activities (over 60 functions listed).
2. Provide a village shop (14 comments)
3. Provide a village pub (5 in favour and one objector who would agree to restricted drinking for events)
4. Improve and upgrade existing outdoor facilities on the field locally known as the village green (28 comments in environment table)

5. Increase opportunities for community activities and interaction to integrate all newcomers and across age groups including centrally located housing for older people (12 comments)
6. Improve communications within the village community
7. Provide specific services based in the community (8 comments) such as linking with local government for health care/nursing services

4.3   Overall Vision – Village Community

The overall vision for the development of community in Oakenshaw is defined as follows:

> *'That Oakenshaw retains its village character and support is given to providing the facilities, amenities and opportunities that help promote a flourishing community.'*

4.4   Village Community Objectives

From the key issues that emerged in the consultation and the Overall Vision for the community, objectives have been defined that specifically focus on supporting facilities and amenities that promote a strong community in Oakenshaw. While these refer to the development of facilities and amenities as a specific means of enhancing a sense of community, it is also recognised that sustaining and developing the other key elements of the plan expressed in the Overall Vision (rural setting, open spaces and environmental sustainability) are important in sustaining the community of the village. A key challenge for the development of Village Community is integrating newcomers with existing residents and across age groups into the social fabric of the village.

The Village Community Objectives are defined as follows:
1. Provide a Village Hub that can act as a focus for community events that enhance health and wellbeing and interaction within the village. (key issues 1, 2,3, 5, 6 and 7)
2. Develop amenities in the village including small scale retail facilities and other services (such as a community café / bar) that will foster community engagement and interaction. (key issues 2, 3, 5and 6)
3. Improve and upgrade the space on the field known locally as the village green including drainage, the play areas and small woodland area to the south of the green (Key issue 4, and 5)
4. Develop accessible housing, facilities and amenities that encourage less able residents to be involved with community activities (Key issues 5 and 6).
5. To provide amenities and facilities that enable services to be delivered locally, that promote community cohesion and integrate all areas of the village into a single settlement (Key issues 1,2,3,4,5,6, and 7)

4.5   Community Development Policies

The Policies for the development of Village Community in Oakenshaw are intended to enhance community cohesion and health and wellbeing by addressing the five main objectives listed above.

> **ONP VC.1 - Community Hub**
> The development of a Community Hub in Oakenshaw will be supported. The Community Hub should be located in an easily accessible location within the settlement boundary, with safe and convenient access for all users and it should be designed to respect local character, residential amenity and highway safety.

Justification for ONP VC.1

As the population of Oakenshaw has increased there has been a concomitant loss of amenities. Since the 1980s the village has lost a number of key indoor facilities which acted to support community cohesion. This included the chapel, village primary school, the Working Men's Club, public house, village shop / post office and cricket club. There is currently no retail outlet in the village, or place to gather for worship, or socially in the evenings. There is no space to provide outreach health services.

The Oakenshaw Community Association has a programme of meetings and social activities throughout the year which must currently be delivered in the open air and are dependent on the weather, or indoors in premises outside the village in Willington. These events are vital to enable communication with and amongst residents to promote community cohesion. There is a need for a multi-purpose indoor facility which acts as a focus for the village and neighbourhood plan area.

The building of a community hub was strongly endorsed by residents with 23 comments in support and over 60 potential uses were identified and are described in the topic guide for community in the evidence folder. This policy accords with NPPF19 (Section 8:Promoting healthy and safe communities, paragraphs 91 and 92)which states that 'planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which: promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, and provides the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs. The NPPF19 (Paragraph 91b) also specifies that such facilities should be safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas.

The Town Council and Community Association will seek to identify an appropriate location for a Community Hub further to detailed feasibility work.

Meets Objectives 1, 2 and 5.

> **ONP VC.2 - Community use of LGS2, 'The Green'.**
>
> The development of community facilities and services at LGS2 (known as 'the green') will be supported, including, where very special circumstances can be demonstrated, the development of a new Community Hub.

Justification for ONP VC.2

Currently the field west of New Row (LGS 2: Figure 6) is mown grass, with limited facilities to encourage children to play outside safely or for parents and carers to sit and socialise together whilst watching over their children. Use of the field is limited as it is often waterlogged, and the appearance is often spoiled by vehicles driving over the wet ground and on occasion getting stuck in the mud (see section 1.4.5).

This Policy recognises that the appearance and use of 'the green' would be improved by landscaping, improving drainage, enhancing the wildlife habitat and fencing the field to prevent vehicles driving over it and to protect the space which is used for community events, extending and upgrading the existing play area and providing an attractive seating area for informal social interactions and picnics. In addition, the Policy also recognises that the Oakenshaw community would benefit significantly from the provision of a multi-use hub building, providing indoor space linked to outdoor play and seating areas.

The Policy is therefore supportive of the development of a Community Hub at LGS2 subject to meeting the national planning policy requirement in respect of demonstrating very special circumstances for new development in a Local Green Space.

In addition to NPPF19 (Paragraph 91 and 92), which endorses the development of centres and spaces to provide opportunities for people to meet, paragraph 96 also supports improving access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity which is important for the health and well-being of communities.

Meets key objectives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

5.0   Village Economy

5.1   Introduction

Oakenshaw was a pit village with residents employed in the local colliery. The pit closed approximately 50 years ago and residents now generally seek employment outside the village, occasionally working from home.

There are a small number of self-employed people running their businesses from home including two landscape gardeners, builders, beauty therapy, distribution of chemicals for quality control testing, antique restoration, and a cattery. In addition, the Oakenshaw Community Association has taken advantage of government subsidies to erect a wind turbine, in collaboration with a local landowner, gaining an annual income stream for the benefit of the community for the next twenty years.

5.2   Key issues

Seven key issues emerged from the focus groups and public consultation:

1. Residents did not want Oakenshaw to be a dormitory village for commuters alone, but instead wanted to encourage small scale business and improved digital connectivity (11 comments).
2. They wanted to promote visitor and local leisure activities by enhancing walking and cycling routes; improving links between the old railway to the east, public rights of way and the Nature Reserve, and paving part of Stockley Lane which would create a system of trails for walkers and cyclists that also could be used for educational purposes. (5 comments)
   Because of our central location between Durham City, Bishop Auckland and the Dales and Pennines AONB there is an opportunity to promote tourism. There are already existing barn conversions used for holiday lets in our area.
3. There is a need to establish and promote small business employment and training opportunities for young people in the ONP area (3 comments).
   Six Community Action Projects were suggested to offer employment and training opportunities. Employment opportunities could be supported by developing a local trade and skills directory to promote sharing/bartering skills within the village (5 comments).
4. With the income from the turbine being time limited there is a need to generate income for the future through small community enterprises (6 comments).
5. A village shop and café were suggested which would also encourage walkers and cyclists to the village (14 comments).
6. Residents wanted to avoid larger industrial units and business set-ups as the scale would not be commensurate with maintaining the rural character of the village and space for industrial units is available less than a mile from the village in Willington (2 comments).

5.3 Overall Vision – Village Economy

The overall vision for the Village Economy in Oakenshaw is defined as follows:

> *'To support the village economy by facilitating home working, self-employment and small-scale business opportunities including tourism, that are appropriate to their setting and the nature of neighbouring uses. To improve electronic and wireless connectivity beyond the village and to maintain an income stream for the use and benefit of the community.'*

5.4 Village Economy Objectives

A number of Objectives have been identified from the key issues to realise the overall vision for the Village Economy. These are:

1. To support home working, micro business and the development of community enterprises with the potential to offer skills training. (key issue 1 and 3)
2. To improve digital connectivity (Meets Key Issue 1).
3. To enhance opportunities to engage in the leisure and tourist economy (Key Issue 2).
4. To enhance local employment opportunities (Key issue 3)
5. To seek and implement opportunities for income generation for the benefit of the community (key issue 4)
6. To discourage the development of large scale industrial buildings. (key issue 5)

5.5 Economic Development Policies

To ensure a thriving future economy for residents within the ONP area, the following policies support small local businesses and job creation opportunities, improved telecommunications and transport connections and seek ways of generating income for the benefit of the area beyond the income stream from the turbine without changing the tranquil rural character of the village.

> **ONP Econ 1 -Home-based working and rural diversification**
> The diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses and small-scale development to accommodate home working and businesses run from the home will be supported, subject to it being demonstrated that development would respect local character, residential amenity and highway safety.

Justification for ONP Econ 1

Some types of extensions, garden offices and workshops within the settlement boundary are already permitted subject to technical guidance. [1,2] [1]Building materials throughout the village vary from brick with slate roofs, to newly built houses using rendered or stone cladding with either slate or pan tiled roofs to the north and south of the main settlement. The Policy seeks to ensure that new development is compatible with the design of existing houses in the immediate surroundings in order to blend in with the built environment. Other factors to be taken into account will include highway safety matters, such as safe access and car parking and respecting the residential amenity of neighbours. This could include paying attention to the positive benefits of tranquillity and preventing undue noise and disturbance.

Meets Objectives 1, 3, 4 and 6.

ONP Econ 2 - Improving Digital Connectivity

The digital economy is important to Oakenshaw and the provision of sympathetically designed telecommunications infrastructure that respects local character and residential amenity will be supported.

New telecommunications masts or antennae should be located outside the settlement boundary.

Justification for ONP Econ 2

Residents found that a considerable limitation to home working is the lack of mobile signal as a result of the topography of Oakenshaw and poor provision of fibre broadband connections. Subject to the requirements of Policy ONP Econ 2, there is general support for the erection of a new mast or base station, or erection of antennae on an existing building or other structure and a statement that self-certifies that, when operational, International Commission guidelines will be met. This includes next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections compliant with criteria specified in NPPF 19 (Section 10).

Meets objective 2.

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[1]Permitted development rights for householders: Technical Guidance, April 2017 Department for Communities and Local Government

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/606669/170405_Householder_Technical_Guidance__-April_2017_FINAL.pdf

[2]https://ecab.planningportal.co.uk/uploads/miniguides/outbuildings/Outbuildings.pdf

Justification for ONP Econ 3 Tourism Development

An emergent theme in focus groups was that the area offered opportunities to engage in the tourist economy. Oakenshaw is located between Durham City and Bishop Auckland, both rich in places of historical interest. In addition, the village is close to the Durham Dales which are designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty (ANOB), and a UNESCO Global Geopark due to its outstanding geology. Oakenshaw is well placed to provide tourist accommodation and there are already existing barn conversions at Stockley Farm that provide holiday cottages and more of a similar type would provide local employment opportunities.

The area is also rich in industrial archaeology, Roman roads, and provides scenic opportunities for walking and cycling. Residents had noted the number of cyclists passing through the village and the potential to improve links between the old railway to the east, with historic public rights of way continuous with Park View and the Nature Reserve. Safer access is needed along Stockley Lane to connect the nature reserve to the old railway line to the east. Improving paths and cycle access from Oakenshaw to Willington would also provide pedestrians and children with a safe alternative to public transport (9 comments) especially for children getting to school. Currently, there is no amenity such as a café, to encourage cyclists or walkers to stop for refreshment or arrange to meet to realise an economic benefit for the village.

The number of visitors and time spent in the region and visitor expenditure is increasing year on year by 2%. This is providing up to 2%additional direct and indirect employment from which the village has the potential to benefit.

 Meets objective 1, 3, 4 & 5.

ONP Econ 4- Community Renewable Energy and Enterprise Projects

Development of renewable community energy development; district heating systems, solar farm, new or replacement wind turbines and new green energy technologies will be supported where they:

1. Demonstrate community support; and
2. Generate income for the benefit of the community; and
3. Respect local character and residential amenity, also taking into account, where appropriate, cumulative landscape and visual impacts.

The development of new community facilities will be supported.

Justification for ONP Econ 4Community Income Generation
The village has a record for championing green energy generation, planning and gaining agreement for the erection of a wind turbine that provides a regular income for community benefit. This income is being used for the maintenance, improvement and future development of village amenities.
Opinion on the erection of more turbines is split equally for and against with opinions strongly held. However, the income from the existing turbine has demonstrated the advantages of green energy to income generation for the benefit of the village. Other sources of income generation (such as biomass heating – 2 comments, and solar panels - 8 comments) to enable the village to continue to benefit from a steady income stream are supported (3 comments). The aim of this policy is to extend green energy generation beyond the lifetime of the existing wind turbine. It also aims to broaden the scope for green energy generation.

The village has benefitted from income generation from the turbine and will support other community enterprises that generate income and offer employment. The consultation identified five comments on community projects which might be enthusiastically supported, such as community led housing, small enterprises to upcycle waste, a market gardening co-operative, rural skills in the nature reserve, and social enterprise projects to benefit local people. These projects might generate income for the village, low cost homes for disabled or older residents and offer young people employment and training opportunities.

Meets objectives 4 and 5.

Appendix 1 Community Action Projects

During the consultation with residents a number of community action projects were identified which could be facilitated by policies in the ONP. Whilst they do not constitute planning issues, they provide context for the policies and, as views were strongly held, it is important to show that they have informed the ONP. Some of these projects have already been actioned.

App 1.1 Environment

Residents discussed ways of managing and improving the appearance of community spaces within the village settlement and the nature reserve.

1.1.1 The entrance of the village should be enhanced with signage. This has now been done but more work is needed to landscape this area.

1.1.2 Within the village planters needed to be improved and cared for, hedges and grassed areas need better maintenance and more trees and bulbs should be planted. The existing copses should be managed to enhance wildlife habitat

1.1.3 Reduce littering and fly tipping. Litter picks should be held regularly.

1.1.4 Public use of the nature reserve as a recreational and learning resource should be enhanced through improvement and maintenance of paths and seating in collaboration between Banks Group, GWTC and Oakenshaw Community Association. A hide could be introduced for wildlife enthusiasts and for educational purposes. There is a need for expert input to ensure the preservation of wild plants, fungi and habitat for animals.

1.1.5 The letting and maintenance of allotments should be improved. An allotment association should be set up.

App 1.2 Community

Whilst a community hub was included in the plan, its use will depend on community action. Over 60 potential activities were suggested in focus groups. Similar activities have been grouped together and condensed into the table below.

Table Appendix 1.2 Potential Activities in the Community Hub

Meeting place to bring village together & for OCA meetings. Provide opportunities to socialize (especially for older residents)
Parties/dances/private functions
Classes and groups (meditation, yoga, pilates exercises, Weight Watchers, creative writing, local history, Ecology,
Coffee mornings/Teas
Nursery/Creche/ mothers and toddlers group
Lunch club for the elderly/supper parties
Travelling cinema
Scouts, cubs, girl guides
Internet café with Wi-Fi access. Using community computer to order shopping on line (especially for vulnerable elderly)
Youth club
Harvest festival, religious gatherings, Sunday school

Sports
School education trips
Young farmers
Children's events
Leek or Flower shows
Village library
Co-working offices
Homework club
Part-time hot desking for local government services eg community care staff for downloading info back to councils
Renting rooms for activities
Health and wellbeing health checks (eg Blood pressure checks, weight advice)
Bar, darts team, pool team
Somewhere to have a night out/ a meal
Open for special nights for events or week ends
Provide garage services
Licensed to sell alcohol for certain events
Community garage sales
Mobile hairdresser
Oakenshaw Carnival
A local shop
Sale of produce from allotments

Improved communications were also discussed. It was suggested that we have a communications group who would manage Facebook, the OCA Newsletter, Noticeboards and flyers for important information

App 1.3 Economy

A key issue for the local economy was the need to find ways of generating income for the benefit of the village once the income from the turbine ended. There were also community action suggestions for non-profit activities to offer local training and employment.

1.3.1 Promote sharing and bartering of skills within the village and establish a trade directory

1.3.2 Establish a recycling or 'upcycling' centre

1.3.3 Teach rural skills (re forestry in the nature reserve)

1.3.4 Establish a market gardening cooperative

App 1.4 Green energy and conservation

Green energy was a recurring theme in the focus groups and has been incorporated into housing and village economy policies. Other Green energy and conservation issues that could be addressed through community actions were:

1.4.1 Recycling of rainwater

1.4.2 Installation of solar powered street lamps

1.4.3 Biomass heat pumps to heat homes

1.4.4 Energy conservation through insulation and use of cladding

1.4.5 Provision of fast charge electric car points

App 1.5 Transport and getting around

Focus groups were very exercised about inadequate public transport to Durham and Crook (18 written comments), necessitating high levels of car ownership to access jobs, services, education and training. Lack of public transport into Durham and Crook is a major limitation to accessing services, work and training outside the village.

The village is served by an hourly bus to Bishop Auckland which does not run after 5.15 in the evening or on Sundays. To get to Durham or Crook, it is necessary to change buses in Willington; buses running every 20 minutes from Willington. Children going to school need to catch the 8.15 bus which gets them to Willington by 8.25, 45 minutes before school starts and when leaving school at 3.10pm they need to wait 50 minutes before the next available bus from Willington to Oakenshaw. Transport to hospital appointments, especially to James Cook in Middlesbrough, is extremely difficult using public transport, taking as long as three hours. The poor bus service is a deterrent to young families moving into the village who cannot afford a car. There is a clear local need which gives people options to choose more sustainable forms of transport

1.5.1 With more than double the population since 1990, local public transport providers need to improve services and transport infrastructure in accordance with NPPF 19 (Section 10) and CDP 2019 (Policies 22 and 25). Local representation is needed to transport providers to improve direct links to Durham and Crook.

1.5.2 Innovative schemes were suggested to alleviate the transport problem. Unwell, elderly or disabled & people who can't drive could use a community transport service (village cab or minibus or car share) with designated drivers to attend hospital and access service. This may require a charging point and space to park (12 comments).

1.5.3 Provide electric car charging points for community transport

Focus groups also highlighted the need to improve road safety and access around the village.
Projects would include measures:
1.5.4 to restrict heavy vehicles passing through the village
1.5.5 to control speed
1.5.6 to improve existing roads and footpaths within the village and down to Willington
1.5.7 to improve parking provision especially along the green and at Park View