5.2(b) A BEAUTIFUL AND HISTORIC CITY - GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

5.2(b).1. VISION
To preserve and enhance natural green spaces and networks of greenery for the leisure, health, economic and environmental benefits they provide for residents, visitors and people working in the City

The objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan’s green infrastructure policies are:
1. to preserve and enhance the green infrastructure in Our Neighbourhood
2. to maintain and enhance the green settings of the World Heritage Site and the inner bowl, and the character areas of the Durham City Conservation Area
3. to address deficiencies of Green Infrastructure within Our Neighbourhood
4. to support the housing and economic aspirations of the City
5. to implement the NPPF which seeks to promote sustainable development and emphasises the importance of promoting healthy communities, protecting Green Belt land, meeting the challenges of climate change and flooding, and conserving and enhancing the natural environment

5.2(b).2 CONTEXT

Green infrastructure is the network of green assets (multi-functional green spaces and natural resources) within the City. Green assets cover a range of spatial scales and types of use. They include:

- the River and riverbanks
- wildlife sites and wildlife habitats
- woodland
- parks and botanic gardens
- public, community and private gardens
- green landscaped areas
- the grounds of the University, colleges, schools, hospitals, businesses and business parks
- highway verges and railway embankments
- footpaths and green corridors
- cemeteries and churchyards
- allotments and community gardens
- sports and playing fields
- amenity green spaces
- designated Local Green Spaces
- the Green Belt
- trees, hedgerows, grass, vegetation
- built structures such as green roofs, green walls, natural water features, bird and bat boxes and roosting sites

The city’s attractiveness and character is enhanced by the natural open spaces and networks of greenery which are valued throughout the year by residents, visitors and those working in the city. This green infrastructure serves a variety of purposes: the character setting of the World Heritage site and conservation areas, attractive open spaces and footpaths for recreation and connections between communities, beneficial effects on people’s health, an attractive setting which encourages new businesses and new residents to move to the City, visitor and tourist attractions, beneficial habitats for biodiversity and mitigating the effects of climate change.
5.2(b).3. JUSTIFICATION

The Forum’s priority survey identified that local people valued highly the green infrastructure of the City. The aspects that they rated most highly were the World Heritage Site, the Cathedral, Castle and Palace Green, and the riverbank setting and riverside walks. In addition they rated the woodland ‘wedges’ which bring greenspace into city, pedestrianised areas, Council flower displays and tree plantings, parks and nature areas.

The NPPF covers green infrastructure in a number of sections: 11. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 8. Promoting healthy communities; 9. Protecting Green Belt land; 10. Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change. It calls for “planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure”. (NPPF para 114)

A number of Durham County Council strategies and documents are relevant to green infrastructure. The Green Infrastructure Strategy (2012, p.5) identified a number of policy recommendations relevant to the Neighbourhood Plan:

- “Access and recreation – existing public open spaces and rights of way should be protected; new development should contain sufficient open space for new and existing residents’ needs; open spaces and rights of way should be good-quality, attractive and functional ...
- Biodiversity and geodiversity – designated sites and other ecologically valuable assets will be protected from the direct or indirect impacts of development; new green spaces will retain, reinforce or create links to the existing GI network; green spaces, roofs and walls will be encouraged
- Economic development – inequalities in the quality of living environments will be addressed; industries which depend upon green infrastructure will be supported; GI will be used as an asset – to improve the image of areas and attract inward investment, and to provide ecosystem services
- Energy – the development of new wind turbines, biomass facilities and small-scale hydro-electricity facilities will be permitted where they are feasible and the environmental impacts are acceptable
- Health and wellbeing – healthy lifestyles will be supported by the protection and enhancement of open spaces and the public rights of way network Landscape – designated landscapes and landscape conservation areas will be protected and managed; proposals to improve the countryside around towns and villages will be supported
- Townscape – sites of historic interest, and their settings, will be protected and enhanced; the use of green infrastructure as a design feature will be required where appropriate; green infrastructure features which contribute to townscape will be protected
- Trees, woodland and forestry – the creation of new woodlands will be supported; forestry and other woodland industries will be permitted where appropriate; urban trees will be protected.
- Water supply, drainage and flood control – the quality of water resources in rivers, streams and other water bodies will be protected and enhanced; Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, which use green infrastructure to manage flooding, will be required in new development where appropriate, particularly in flood risk areas.”

A key document is the County Durham Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment (currently being updated). The previous 2010 assessment identified deficiencies of Green Infrastructure within the Durham City AAP area: “This AAP has a significant under provision of parks and gardens, semi-natural greenspace and allotments, but only small over provision of other typologies. So whilst some of the shortfalls could be
met through utilising existing open space, opportunities should be sought for new provision within the AAP.” (p.83).

Durham City falls within The Wear Lowlands character area of the County Character Area Strategy (p.20). The strategy is “To conserve the character of the valley landscapes of the Wear while enhancing those areas which have been most affected by development, accommodating the needs of nearby urban populations while maintaining a strong rural identity to the countryside between towns and villages. A key component of the strategy for this settled landscape is the improvement of the countryside around towns and villages.”

The saved policies from the Durham City Local Plan include references to the Green Belt, open spaces within Durham City and conservation areas, areas of landscape value, historic parks and gardens and battlefield sites, trees and hedgerows, nature conservation including SSSIs, SNCIs, wildlife corridors and local nature reserves, and cycling and walking networks. A number of these policies have been incorporated into the policies below.

Local strategies and initiatives emphasise the importance of the green infrastructure within the City, in particular the Durham City Conservation Area Appraisal and the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan. The Durham City Conservation Area comprises “the pre-1900 expansion of the City and the majority of the natural ‘bowl’ (the upper slopes of which present a largely rural backdrop to views of the Cathedral), the important green wedges of open countryside and other significant green areas which contribute to and enhance the setting of the historic buildings and the city as a whole” (Executive Summary, p.2). Most of Our Neighbourhood falls within the area covered by the WHS and by the inner bowl setting of the WHS.

5.2(b).4. POLICIES

Policy G1: Preserving and enhancing green infrastructure

G1.1: A development proposal of 0.4ha or 12 housing units (or equivalent), or greater, will be supported if:
1. it provides additional good quality green assets on site for new and existing residents' needs, or
2. the provision of green assets are appropriate to the context, having regard to the landscape, townscape and ecology of the locality and where appropriate the setting of heritage assets, or
3. it incorporates native species and habitats, or seeks to create new appropriate habitats supporting local protected and priority species, or
4. it contributes to the network of interlinked green routes that connect residential areas with nearby destinations and the open countryside and reduces the fragmentation of green corridors or habitat, or
5. it addresses deficiencies of green assets within Our Neighbourhood, or
6. it contributes to the Emerald Network, where applicable.

G1.2: A development proposal of under 0.4ha or 12 housing units (or equivalent) will be supported if it provides additional green assets as appropriate. Such green assets would include trees, private gardens, communal gardens, and where space is at a premium, green roofs, green walls, natural water features, bat or bird boxes and roosting sites.

G1.3: A development proposal that would result in the loss of existing green assets will be refused unless:
1. the affected site or feature or asset does not have a significant recreational, cultural, ecological, landscape or townscape value, or
2. the affected site or asset can be demonstrated to be surplus to local requirements (with e.g. reference to OSNA, 2016), or
3. a compensatory amount of green assets of an equivalent or better quality is provided in Our Neighbourhood.

G1.4: A development proposal that would result in the loss of, or deterioration in the quality of, existing Public Rights of Way will not be permitted:
1. unless an equivalent alternative provision is made. Where diversions are required, new routes should be direct, convenient and attractive, and should not have a detrimental impact on environmental or heritage assets, and
2. the quality of existing Public Rights of Way is protected during and after construction.

G1.5: In considering proposals affecting green corridors:
1. a development proposal that would result in the loss of, or deterioration in the quality of, green corridors will not be permitted, unless the remaining elements of the green corridors are enhanced to maintain their continued functioning and alternative routes are provided or enabled, and
2. a development proposal that is adjacent to, or encroaching upon, identified green corridors must maintain or enhance their functionality and connectivity.

G1.6: All developments that abut onto the River Wear must provide pedestrian access along the river bank, and where space allows provide a green corridor as well.

G1.7: Planning conditions will be used where a development would impact on biodiversity to minimise disturbance, provide an alternative habitat capable of sustaining current populations and facilitate the survival of individual groups or species.

G1.8: In considering proposals affecting trees and hedgerows:
1. development which would result in the loss of ancient woodland or ancient trees will not be permitted, and
2. tree preservation orders will be designated as necessary, and
3. development proposals will be required to retain areas of woodland, important groups of trees, copses and individual trees and hedgerows wherever possible. If not possible, trees and hedgerows of equivalent or better value will need to be replaced on the same location site if possible, if not on another site within the development, and
4. proposals of 0.4ha or 12 housing units (or equivalent), or greater, will require a full tree survey to accompany planning applications when development may affect trees inside or outside the application site.

Policy G2: Designation of Local Green Spaces

G2.1: Green spaces within Our Neighbourhood that are of significant environmental, landscape or historical value are designated as Local Green spaces. These areas comprise:
1. The River Wear corridor that lies within Our Neighbourhood
2. Observatory Hill
3. Flass Vale wildlife site and nature reserve and Flass Vale allotments
4. St Margaret’s Cemetery plus St Margaret’s allotments
5. DLI grounds

G2.2 No development will be allowed in these Local Green Spaces, except for reasons or purposes as defined for Green Belt land in the NPPF and associated guidance.

Justification

The NPPF states that Neighbourhood plans can “identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. … The designation should only be used: where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. Local policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts.” (NPPF paras 76, 77, 78).

The areas above have been designated as local green spaces for the following reasons:

- The river and river corridor of the River Wear as it meanders through the City’s floodplain and cuts through the rocky gorge of the peninsular is the most significant landscape feature of the City. Its important contribution to the setting of the WHS and the City cannot be overestimated. The river and riverbanks are an important component of the Durham City Conservation area in all five character areas. The river paths are well used for walking and leisure activities, and provide an important wildlife corridor linking the character areas of the City conservation area to each other and to the wider countryside. The Durham Regatta is an important annual event. Protection of the river corridor was included in the City of Durham Local Plan saved policy E5 on protecting open spaces within Durham City. And a River Wear Walkway was proposed in policy R13.
- Observatory Hill, adjoining Potters Bank and near to Durham School, is within both the inner bowl of the WHS and the City conservation area. Its elevated site makes it very visible from the centre, and it contributes to the green and rural landscape setting for the WHS and the city centre. It is well used for walking and leisure activities. It was included in the City of Durham Local Plan saved policy E5 on protecting open spaces within Durham City.
- Flass Vale wildlife site and nature reserve and Flass Vale allotments. Such a central site is always under threat of development, and new permitted developments have ‘nibbled away’ at the edges of this site.
- St Margaret’s Cemetery plus St Margaret’s allotments, between Crossgate and South St, provides an important green space in the centre of the City. The Cemetery provides a wildlife refuge, a place for walking and quiet contemplation as well as being of historic value (St Margaret’s Church is one of the earliest churches in the City, dating from the 12 century). The Cemetery abuts onto the allotments. The allotments provide for gardening and leisure, as well as a wildlife resource, and are of historic value (the site has been cultivated since the middle ages, and was once the Cathedral’s vegetable garden and fish ponds; it is thought that the old quarry in the allotments was the source of the stone used to build the Cathedral). It was included in the City of Durham Local Plan saved policy E5 on protecting open spaces within Durham City.
• DLI grounds. Significance of these grounds as a resting place for the ashes of members of the DLI Regiment are of huge importance and significance to local people. Part of these grounds could be made into a Memorial Garden. The DLI grounds could function in association with the refurbished Wharton Park by providing a safe and secure picnic area, particularly for parents and children. The grounds could provide the setting for the proposed Art Centre within the DLI building, with the current DLI car park providing necessary car parking for people using the Art Centre.

• Woodland. Maiden Castle Wood, Great High Wood, Little High Wood, Hollingside Wood and Blaid’s Wood have been in existence since at least the 19th Century, though replanting has occurred in the 20th Century. Parts of these woods show the remnants of old railway embankments, and interpretation boards in Great High Wood give visitors information about the railway and mining historical background. Maiden Castle is an Iron Age promontory fort and is listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Hollingside Wood, Great High Wood and Blaid’s Wood are designated as Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV), Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW), Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and Sites of Ecological Value. The Woodland Trust has established a new wood in Low Burnhall, opened in ??date. This comprises newly planted woodland and wildflower meadows. These woods provide a near continuous block of woodland from Maiden Castle to the A167. They are used by the public for walking, cycling and leisure activities. The older woods are renowned for their display of English bluebells in the Spring. As Durham University says: “The number of designations covering the woodlands reflect their importance in terms of landscape, amenity, and conservation.”

Policy G3: Creation of the Emerald Network

G3.1: An Emerald Network is designated which comprises sites of wildlife interest within, or adjacent to, Our Neighbourhood linked by public footpaths. These sites comprise designated wildlife sites, such as Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodland Sites, key green sites, such as parks and gardens, and the River Wear and the riverbanks. The sites included in the Emerald Network are:-

1. Flas Vale (LWS, part LNR)
2. Baxter Wood (LWS)
3. Lowesbarn (LWS)
4. Moorhouse Wood (LWS) and Borehole Wood – Ancient Woodland Sites leading to Farewell Hall
5. Low Burnhall - Woodland Trust
6. Durham University Botanic Gardens
7. Hollingside Wood (ASNW), Great High Wood (ASNW), Little High Wood (LWS), Blaid’s Wood (ASNW)
8. Houghall/Maiden Castle (LWS)
9. Old Durham Gardens
10. Pelaw Wood (LWS, LNR)
11. Peninsular Woodlands
12. Kepier Woods (LWS) / The Sands
13. Sidegate / Franklands (part LWS)
14. Hoppers Wood (LWS)
15. Aykley Heads
16. Wharton Park

If new wildlife sites are designated, or key green sites established, in the future in Our Neighbourhood then they will be added into the Emerald Network.
G3.2: The sites and footpaths of the Emerald Network will be safeguarded from development.

G3.3. Proposals to improve existing sites or footpaths in, or to add new sites or footpaths to, the Emerald Network will be supported.

Justification

The Emerald Network will create a natural network of sites having wildlife interest lying within or adjacent to Our Neighbourhood. Existing rights of way will be used to develop corridors between the sites so as to enhance biodiversity and connectivity between them. The benefits of the Emerald Network include:

- improving the image of the City by proving an extra tourist attraction
- providing a leisure asset for local people, and thus improving their wellbeing
- counteracting the fragmentation of wildlife habitat within the City: fragmentation has been shown to reduce plant and animals populations to levels where they risk becoming extinct
- promoting and improving access rights and the Public Rights of Way network through the City
- maintaining links with the wider countryside and seeking to improve wildlife corridors to designated sites such as the Deerness Valley, Bearpark and Croxdale Woods and Brasside/Low Newton wetlands.

The Emerald Network could be set up via community action in partnership with bodies such as the Durham City Council (if it is set up) or a new Durham City Regeneration Body. The implementation strategy, comprises:

- setting up a management group
- writing an implementation plan
- engaging the local community (local residents and friends groups, schools, university and colleges)
- liaising with key stakeholders, such as DCC, Durham City AAP, Woodland Trust, Durham Wildlife Trust
- negotiating with landowners, e.g. Cathedral, University, owners of individual Local Wildlife sites etc., owners of land incorporating footpaths
- seeking funding to carry out assessments of existing sites and paths and need for new sites and paths, and then for site and path management and maintenance, signposting and interpretation boards

Policy G4: Enhancing the beneficial use of the Green Belt

- The Green Belt land in Our Neighbourhood will be enhanced to improve access and connectivity, provide opportunities for tourism, leisure, recreation and outdoor sport, improve the landscape and biodiversity, and improve damaged and derelict land.

Justification

The NPPF states that: “Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.” (para 81).
5.2(b).5. ACTIONS BY STATUTORY AND COMMUNITY BODIES

Cemeteries:
To consider the cemeteries in Our Neighbourhood for statutory protection, if this protection does not currently exist for specified cemeteries. Such protection could include:

- listing of Individual buildings and
- registering the designed landscape
- designation as Conservation Area
- declaration as a local nature reserve or a local wildlife site
- obtaining have Tree Preservation Orders for Individual trees

Cemeteries to be so considered are:
- St Margaret's Cemetery
- Bow Cemetery
- St Nicholas' Cemetery
- St Oswald's Cemetery
- Redhills Roman Catholic Cemetery
- etc.

Assets of Community Value

The Localism Act 2011 provisions "give local groups a right to nominate a building or other land for listing by the local authority as an asset of community value. It can be listed if a principal ("non-ancillary") use of the asset furthers (or has recently furthered) their community’s social well-being or social interests (which include cultural, sporting or recreational interests) and is likely to do so in the future. When a listed asset is to be sold, local community groups will in many cases have a fairer chance to make a bid to buy it on the open market." (Community right to bid, para 2.1) Parishes, community organisations and neighbourhood forums can nominate local assets; such assets may be owned by anybody. (para 2.4) The local authority reviews the nominations and judges whether they meet the definitions given in the legislation. Owner can object to their property being placed on the List by requesting an internal review of the council’s decision, and failing that an appeal to an independent tribunal.

Green sites which could be nominated for listing as assets of community value (if this has not already been done) include allotments, sports fields, etc.

Sports fields:
- Sheraton Park sports field
- Chorister School Playing Fields

Allotments:
- Neville’s Cross allotments
- Flass Vale allotments
- etc.

Public Rights of Way:
To register as Public Rights of Way footpaths that are not currently registered. In particular, unrecorded footpaths and bridleways created before 1949 need to be recorded by 1 January 2026.

Such footpaths are:
- Footpaths across Observatory Hill
- etc.
Enhancing Green Belt land via community action and the Durham City Regeneration Body
Such enhancement will include:

- improving and maintaining footpaths
- signage