

4.2(b): THEME 2b: A BEAUTIFUL AND HISTORIC CITY – GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



4.2(b).1 Vision and Objectives

4.60

Vision

Preserving and enhancing 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.

4.61

Objectives

1. To preserve and enhance the green infrastructure in Our Neighbourhood;
2. To maintain and enhance the green assets of the World Heritage Site, and its inner setting, and of the character areas of the Durham City Conservation Area;
3. To address deficiencies of green infrastructure within Our Neighbourhood;
4. 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.

4.2(b).2 Context

Definition of green assets

4.62 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.

4.63 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.

4.64 Table E1 in Appendix E lists landscape and natural environment sites in Our Neighbourhood.

4.2(b).3. Justification

4.65 This justification refers to the Green Infrastructure theme as a whole. Additional, specific justification for an individual policy is given with the policy itself.

4.66 The Forum's priority survey (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2015) identified that local people valued highly the green infrastructure of the City. One of the highest rated aspects was 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. One of their priorities is to protect green spaces/green belt and the environment. In the Forum's survey of the views of young people (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2016a), one of their priorities included the River. The young people all enjoyed the river and the river walks, and felt that even more could be made of the riverbanks to improve access and leisure opportunities.

4.67 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)

4.68 'The Natural Choice' (the natural environment white paper: UK Government, 2011) emphasises that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing. Its aims include: facilitating greater local action to protect and improve nature; creating a green economy, in which economic growth and the health of our natural resources sustain each other, and markets, business and Government better reflect the value of nature; strengthening the connections between people and nature to the benefit of both. The biodiversity strategy (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2011) builds on the natural environment white paper. Its mission is to halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people. Relevant aspects include: Putting people at the heart of policy (e.g. Establishing a new green areas designation, empowering communities to protect local environments that are important to them.); Planning and Development (e.g. retain the protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives of the planning system).

4.69 The 'Green Infrastructure Guidance' (Natural England, 2009) provides a comprehensive overview of the concept of green infrastructure, signposts to other relevant information, and maps out wider policy priorities and drivers for green infrastructure. Its aim is to drive forward green infrastructure planning and delivery.

4.70 More than 70 organisations from across multiple sectors have joined forces to create a 'Charter for Trees, Woods and People' with the aim of guiding UK policy and practice. This Charter will be launched in November 2017 and will recognise, celebrate and protect

this right. The Tree Charter principles outline the importance of green infrastructure, such as trees, woods and hedges, i.e. habitats for diverse species (providing homes, food and safe routes); cultural value; providing drainage and cooling, improving air quality and purifying water; carbon capture; physical and mental health benefits. Planning has a role to play by protecting existing green assets, particularly ancient trees and woods, and requiring new developments "to be balanced with green infrastructure, making space for trees."



4.71 A number of Durham County Council strategies and documents are relevant to green infrastructure. The Green Infrastructure Strategy (Durham County Council, 2012b, p.5) identified a number of policy recommendations relevant to our 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.”

4.72 The Sustainable Communities Strategy for County Durham 2014-2030 (County Durham Partnership, 2014) has a section 'Altogether greener' with the aim of maximising the value and benefits of Durham's natural environment. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 placed an obligation on local authorities to produce and maintain a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The Rights of Way Improvement Plan for County Durham 2015–2018 (Durham County Council, 2015d) is the third ROWIP for County Durham. The “opportunities” (essentially the policies) identified in the plan include protecting and maintaining the network, modernising by improving existing routes, and influencing travel and lifestyle choices by creating and promoting well-designed, high-quality active travel routes. In relation to development there is an aim that paths are provided and improved as part of developments, and to improve gateway sites to public green spaces. Enhancements to the natural environment and biodiversity should be progressed wherever possible as part of improvement schemes.

4.73 A key document is the County Durham Open Space, Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment (2016b, currently being updated). The complementary Playing Pitch Strategy (Durham County Council, 2011a, 2012c) contains an audit of provision and aims to ensure that the quantity and quality of playing pitches and accessibility of playing pitches meets the needs of the local population now and in the future. The previous 2010 open space, sport and recreation needs assessment (Durham County Council, 2010a,b) identified deficiencies of Green Infrastructure within the Durham City Area Action Partnership area (which covers a wider area than Our Neighbourhood):

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. (2010a, p.83).

4.74 As well as policies in this theme that address issues related to open green spaces, community Policy C5.

4.75 Durham City falls within The Wear Lowlands character area of the County Durham Landscape Character Assessment and Landscape Strategy (Durham County Council, 2008a,b). The strategy for the Wear Lowlands 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." (Durham County Council, 2008b, p.104). These documents contain detailed contextual information and numerous objectives. Baseline information on biodiversity and geodiversity is available in the Council's Technical Paper No. 12 (Durham County Council, 2009a).

4.76 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 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, wildlife corridors and local nature reserves, and cycling and walking networks. (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a: E1,2,2A,5,5a, 0,14 to 20,25,26; R5,11 to 13; Q5,6). A number of these policies have been incorporated into the policies below.

4.77 The Durham City Regeneration Masterplan (Durham County Council, 2014c) and its update (Durham County Council, 2016f) has a number of implementation projects and actions relevant to the green infrastructure of Our Neighbourhood (a subset of the Durham City area covered by the Masterplan), i.e. 'Keeping Durham Green' by e.g. the renovation of Wharton Park (now completed), care of the River Wear banks, adding to existing green spaces.

4.78 Local strategies and initiatives emphasise the importance of the green infrastructure within the City, in particular the Durham City Conservation Area Appraisal (Durham County Council, 2016e) and the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan (Durham World Heritage Site, 2017). 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" (Durham County Council, 2016e, Executive Summary, p.2). Management proposals for each character area are available, which include management, conservation and enhancement of green assets. However, the management plan for the Durham City Conservation Area has not yet been published. Most of Our Neighbourhood falls within the area covered by the World Heritage Site and by its inner setting. The immediate setting of the river and the tree lined river banks is a key component of the site's Outstanding Universal Value. The inner setting of the site, and protection of views to and from the site, is another key component.

4.2(b).4 Planning Policies and Proposals for Land Use

4.79

- Policy G1: Preserving and Enhancing Green Infrastructure
- Policy G2: Designation of Local Green Spaces
- Policy G3: Creation of the Emerald Network
- Policy G4: Enhancing the Beneficial Use of the Green Belt

Policy G1: Preserving and Enhancing Green Infrastructure

Preserving and enhancing green assets (defined in para 4.62)

G1.1: Development proposals of 0.4 hectares or 10 housing units (or equivalent other type of development), or greater, will be supported if they:
greater, will be supported if they:

1. provide additional good quality green assets on site for new and existing residents' needs; or
2. provide green assets which 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. incorporate native species and habitats, or seek to create new appropriate habitats supporting local protected and priority species; or
4. contribute to the network of interlinked green routes that connect residential areas with nearby destinations and the open countryside and reduce the fragmentation of green corridors or habitat; or
5. address deficiencies of green assets within Our Neighbourhood; or
6. contribute to the Emerald Network, where applicable.

G1.2: Development proposals under 0.4 hectares or 10 housing units (or equivalent other type of development) will be supported if they provide 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: Development proposals 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 the current Open Space Needs Assessment); and
3. a compensatory amount of green assets of an equivalent or better quality is provided in, or adjacent to, Our Neighbourhood.

Protecting Public Rights of Way

G1.4: Development proposals that would result in the loss of, or deterioration in the quality of, existing Public Rights of Way will not be permitted, 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.

Protecting biodiversity, green corridors, habitats, protected species and geological features

G1.5: Development proposals that lead to the creation of islands of biodiversity, permanently severed from other areas, will be refused unless measures to ensure ecological connectivity are included in the design.

G1.6: In considering development affecting green corridors:

1. development proposals 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 connectivity, and alternative routes are provided or enabled; and
2. development proposals that are adjacent to, or encroaching upon, identified green corridors must maintain or enhance their functionality and connectivity.

G1.7: Where wildlife habitats, protected species, or features of ecological, geological and geomorphological interest have been identified on development sites, development proposals that would cause irreversible or serious damage to such habitats, or species or features will be refused unless:

1. acceptable mitigation measures to minimise these adverse effects are provided; or
2. compensation measures to offset any harm which cannot be completely avoided or mitigated is provided.

In order to enhance the nature conservation value of Our Neighbourhood, development

proposals that create new wildlife habitats will be encouraged and supported.

Protecting trees and hedgerows

G1.8: In considering development affecting trees and hedgerows:

1. development proposals which would result in the loss of ancient woodland or ancient trees will not be permitted, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss; and
2. application for tree preservation orders should be considered as required; 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, an equivalent number of trees and hedgerows will need to be planted in, or adjacent to, Our Neighbourhood.

Protecting and enhancing the banks of the River Wear

G1.9: New developments, or major redevelopments, next to the banks of the River Wear in Our Neighbourhood will be required to provide a safe pedestrian path along the riverbank, and if possible a green corridor for wildlife and cycle access, in that order of priority. Existing green corridors and dark corridors must be retained.

G1.10: Development proposals which provide additional access points to the banks of the River Wear will be supported. Existing green corridors and dark corridors must be retained.

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, as shown on the proposals map, comprise:

1. The River Wear corridor that lies within Our Neighbourhood; and
2. Observatory Hill; and
3. Flass Vale Local Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve and North End allotments and leisure gardens; and
4. St Margaret's Cemetery plus St Margaret's allotments; and
5. DLI grounds; and
6. Woodland on the south side of the City, comprising Maiden Castle Wood, Great High Wood, Hollingside Wood and Blaid's Wood; and
7. Battle of Neville's Cross: the undeveloped area of the registered battlefield site within Our Neighbourhood.

G2.2 Development in these Local Green Spaces must be consistent with NPPF policy

for Green Belts.

4.80 The NPPF guidance defines Local Green Space designation as a way to provide special protection against development for green areas of particular importance to local communities. The areas above (see Map 6 - <http://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/the-plan/maps/>) have been designated as local green spaces for the following reasons:

1. 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 World Heritage Site 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. Respondents to the Forum's priority survey (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2015) listed the riverbank setting and riverside walks as the second highest attribute of what is good about Durham city. 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 within Our Neighbourhood. 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 (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a). Our Policy G1 (points 9 and 10) seeks to retain existing, and support new, footpaths, wildlife corridors, dark corridors and cycle paths along the river where the physical space allows.
2. Observatory Hill, adjoining Potters Bank and near to Durham School, is within both the inner bowl of the World Heritage Site 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 World Heritage site 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 (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a).
3. Flass Vale Local Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve and North End allotments and leisure gardens. Flass Vale is an historic area of woodland lying within the Green belt. Its wildlife value has been recognised by designation as a Local Wildlife Site; part of the site is registered as Common Land and part is designated as a Local Nature Reserve. Maiden's Bower, a Bronze Age round cairn and scheduled ancient monument, is located in Flass Vale. Local legend says Maiden's Bower was the site of a vigil held during the battle of Neville's Cross. The North End allotments and leisure gardens that lie to the North East of the site are an integral part. Such a central site is always under threat of development, and new permitted developments have 'nibbled away' at the edges of this site. The local importance of this site is demonstrated by the active group the 'Friends of Flass Vale' who manage and care for the site.
4. St Margaret's Cemetery plus St Margaret's allotments, between Crossgate and South St, provide 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 (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a).

5. DLI grounds. The DLI grounds are within the Green Belt. The significance of these grounds as a resting place for the ashes of members of the DLI Regiment makes this a site of huge importance and value 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 a possible Art Centre or arts facilities within the DLI building, with the current DLI car park providing necessary car parking for people using these grounds and facilities.
6. Woodland. Maiden Castle Wood, Great 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, Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance and Sites of Ecological Value. All these woods provide a near continuous block of woodland with public access. They are used by the public for walking, cycling and leisure activities. The 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." (Durham University. Biodiversity Policy)
7. Nevilles Cross Battlefield: the undeveloped area of the battlefield site within Our Neighbourhood, including land lying on both sides of the registered public footpath forming part of a boundary walk around the edge of the Battlefield site to the immediate west of Crossgate Moor. The battle of Neville's Cross, between Scottish and English forces, took place on 17th October 1346, on moorland just to the west of Durham. This was a significant battle as the Scots were comprehensively defeated, and this loss led to English occupation of parts of Scotland south of the Forth and Clyde rivers. It was over a century before the Scots could recover this land. The battlefield is built-over on the eastern side, although some of the area the around Crossgate Moor is still undeveloped. The land on the west (outside Our Neighbourhood) is mostly agricultural. The remains of a Cross commemorating the battle is sited in the built-up area of Nevilles Cross and is a scheduled ancient monument. The battlefield is registered in the Register of Historic Battlefields.

Justification

4.81 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). Some of the areas designated here as local green spaces also possess other types of designation, e.g. being within the Green Belt or a conservation area or being a wildlife site or heritage asset. The NPPF states that land that is already protected can be designated as a Local Green Space if there is additional local benefit (PPG para. 010 and 011 Reference ID: 37-011-20140306). Different types of designation achieve different purposes. The areas listed here are of particular importance to the local community as the reasons given above demonstrate. Additionally, these areas are not as secure as their existing protections would imply. The development pressure in a small constrained area such as Our Neighbourhood is high. There is recent history of planning approvals for large scale developments in the Green Belt with predicted future plans for much more development in the Green Belt. In the Forum's priority survey (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2015) respondents had high regard for the 'woodland' wedges bringing green space into the City, were concerned about loss of / lack of open and green spaces and threat to green belt, and wanted to protect green spaces/green belt and the environment.

4.82 New sites might become available in Our Neighbourhood that might merit designation as Local Green Spaces. This would require amendment of the Neighbourhood Plan. One such site is Mount Oswald. This formed part of an area of open space protected under saved Policy E5.2 of the City of Durham Local Plan (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a). The Mount Oswald site, previously a golf course, was land that had not been built on since the Middle Ages when it was agricultural land. It therefore contains assets of wildlife value including mature trees and a pond containing protected species. The current housing development on this site needs to be placed within the context of a long battle by local residents to retain this green space. The Mount Oswald site is currently being developed to a level greater than provided for in the City of Durham Local Plan. Open spaces retained within that development, including a complex of interconnected parks and open spaces (which retains and adds to the existing green assets) are therefore of particular importance to the local community and likely to warrant designation as a Local Green Space. As areas of open space in this development are being defined through a series of reserved matters applications, it isn't possible to finalise boundaries at this time. Inclusion, and enhancement, of existing green assets within new developments is the aim of Policy G1. New residential areas might include green areas that were planned as part of the

development. Such green areas might be designated as Local Green Space if they are demonstrably special and hold particular local significance. (PPG, para. 012 Reference ID: 37-012-20140306).

Policy G3: Creation of the Emerald Network

G3.1: An Emerald Network is designated which comprises sites of wildlife interest within 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. Flass Vale; and
2. Baxter Wood (the part that lies in Our Neighbourhood); and
3. Lowesbarn; and
4. Moorhouse Wood, Borehole Wood, Farewellhall Wood (the part that lies in Our Neighbourhood); and
5. Low Burnhall; and
6. Durham University Botanic Gardens; and
7. Hollingside Wood, Great High Wood, Little High Wood, Blaid's Wood; and
8. Houghall/Maiden Castle; and
9. Pelaw Wood (the part that lies in Our Neighbourhood); and
10. Peninsular Woodlands; and
11. The Sands; and,
12. Hoppers Wood; and
13. Aykley Heads; and
14. Wharton Park.

G3.2: Development proposals to improve the biodiversity and / or amenity of sites or footpaths in the Emerald Network will be supported. Proposals that would result in a deterioration in the wildlife value of a site in the Network will be refused.

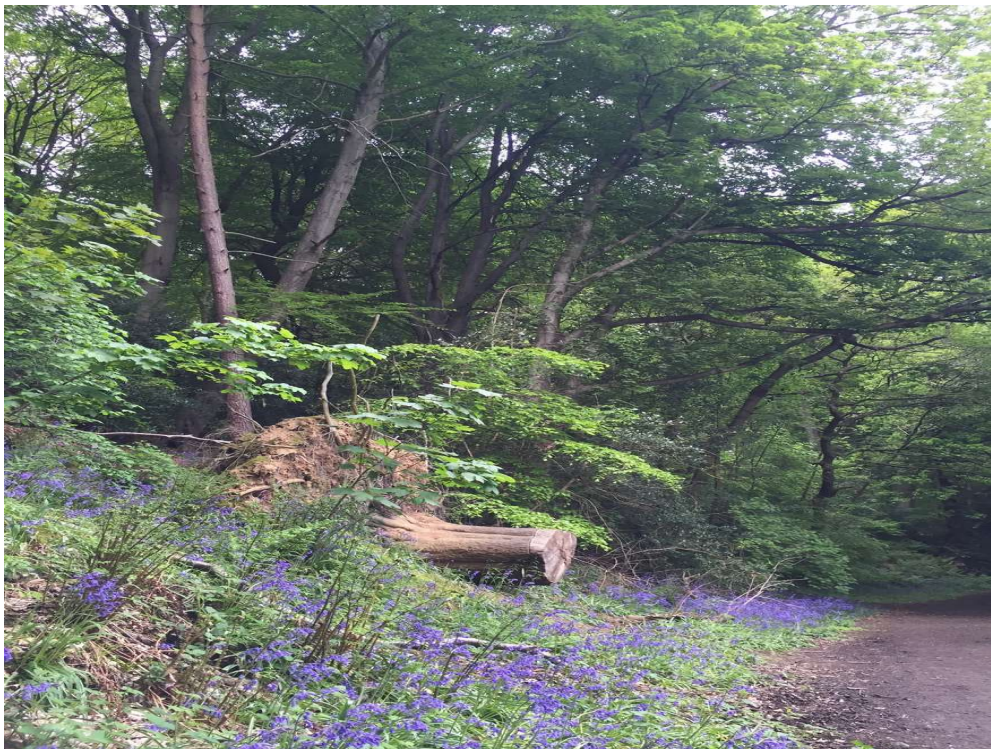
4.83 The Emerald Network sites are shown on Map 7 (<http://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/the-plan/maps/>). Some of these sites have designations (see Table E1 in Appendix E). The Emerald Network also links to a number of sites of wildlife interest that lie immediately adjacent to Our Neighbourhood. These comprise: part of Baxter Wood, part of Farewellhall Wood, Old Durham Gardens, part of Pelaw Wood, Frankland Wood and Kepier Wood. The sites are connected by public footpaths. Durham County Council provides a 'Definitive Public Rights of Way' map online. Other Local Wildlife sites in Our Neighbourhood have not been included in the Emerald Network as they are not accessible by public footpaths. Policy Implementation Project 1 in Chapter 5 indicates how this policy could be taken forward.

Justification

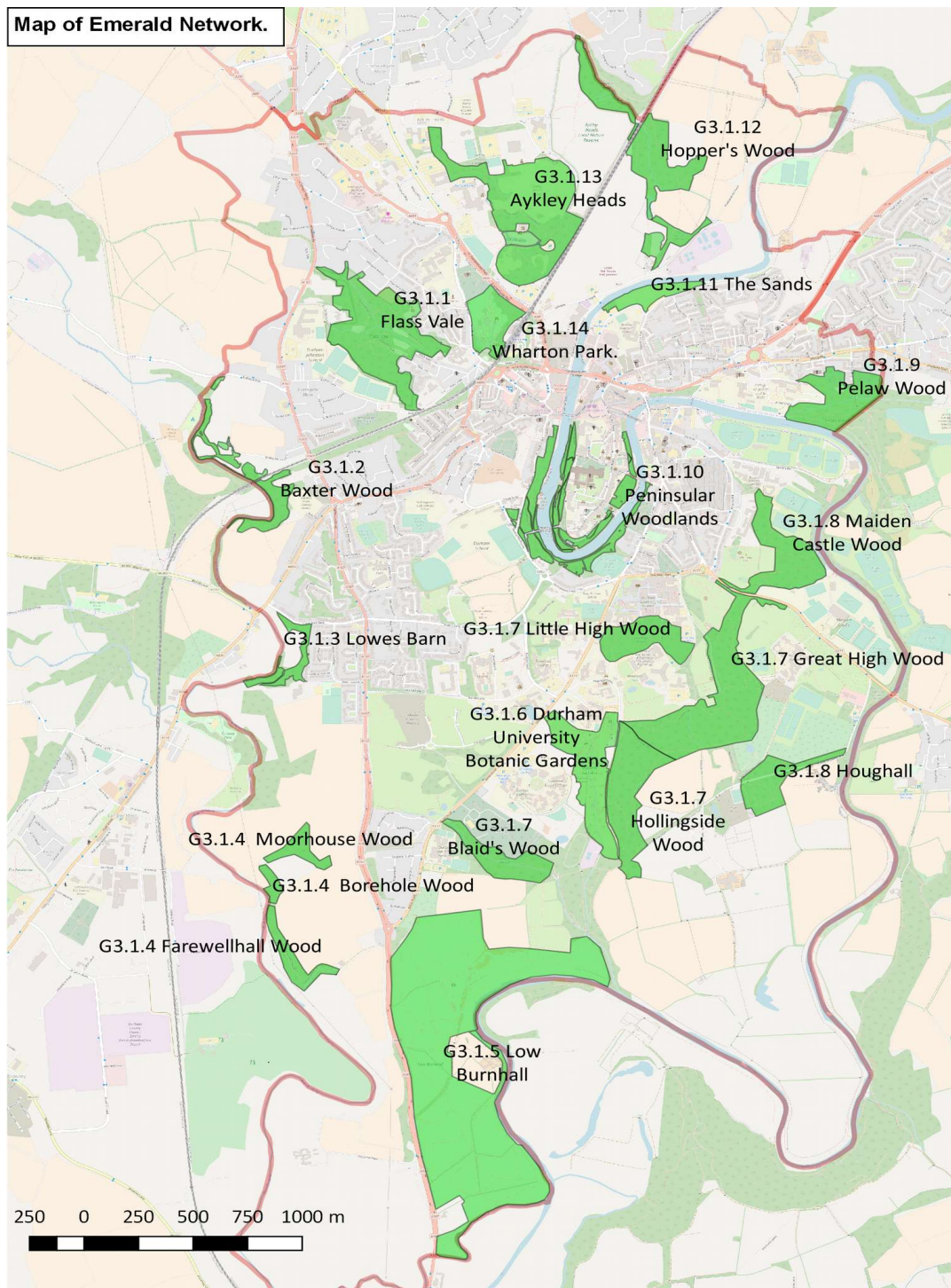
4.84 The idea for an Emerald Network developed from discussion between the Forum and the Friends of Flass Vale (comprising a membership of 250 people). It builds on policy R13 'River Wear Walkway' from the City of Durham City Local Plan saved policies and incorporates policies E5, E26 and T21 (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a). Policy R13 was developed by the Council into the idea of a Necklace Park but this idea was never implemented.

4.85 The Emerald Network will create a 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 providing 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 animal 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.



Map 7: Map of Emerald Network. The boundary of Our Neighbourhood is indicated and shows which sites are in the Network and which adjacent sites the Network links to.



Policy G4: Enhancing the Beneficial Use of the Green Belt

Development proposals within the Green Belt land in Our Neighbourhood which would lead to:

- improved access and connectivity, or:
- opportunities for outdoor sport or recreation, or:
- improved landscape, or:
- improved biodiversity, or:
- enhanced visual amenity, or:
- improvements to damaged and derelict land

will be encouraged and supported.

Justification

4.86 The NPPF (section 9) attaches great importance to the Green Belt and to its protection from development. Inappropriate development "should not be approved except in very special circumstances" (NPPF, para 87). Local people, as shown by responses to the Forum's survey (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2015) and by the existence of community bodies such as 'The Friends of Durham Green Belt', do not consider that there are any 'very special circumstances' (NPPF, para 88) present in Durham City that would merit development on the Green Belt (except for permitted development allowed by the NPPF (para. 89, 90)). Therefore no policy in our Neighbourhood Plan includes development on the Green Belt, other than for proposals that meet the NPPF exceptions criteria (NPPF para 89). The Green Belt is particularly important to Our Neighbourhood because of one of its purposes "to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns" (NPPF para. 80). A number of saved policies of the City of Durham Local Plan are relevant to the Green Belt (City of Durham Council, 2004; Durham County Council, 2015a: E1,2,2A) and these have been incorporated into this policy.

4.87 However, there is the opportunity to enhance the Green Belt. 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." (NPPF, para 81). The NPPF (para. 89) notes that an exception for new buildings on the Green Belt is "provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it".

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