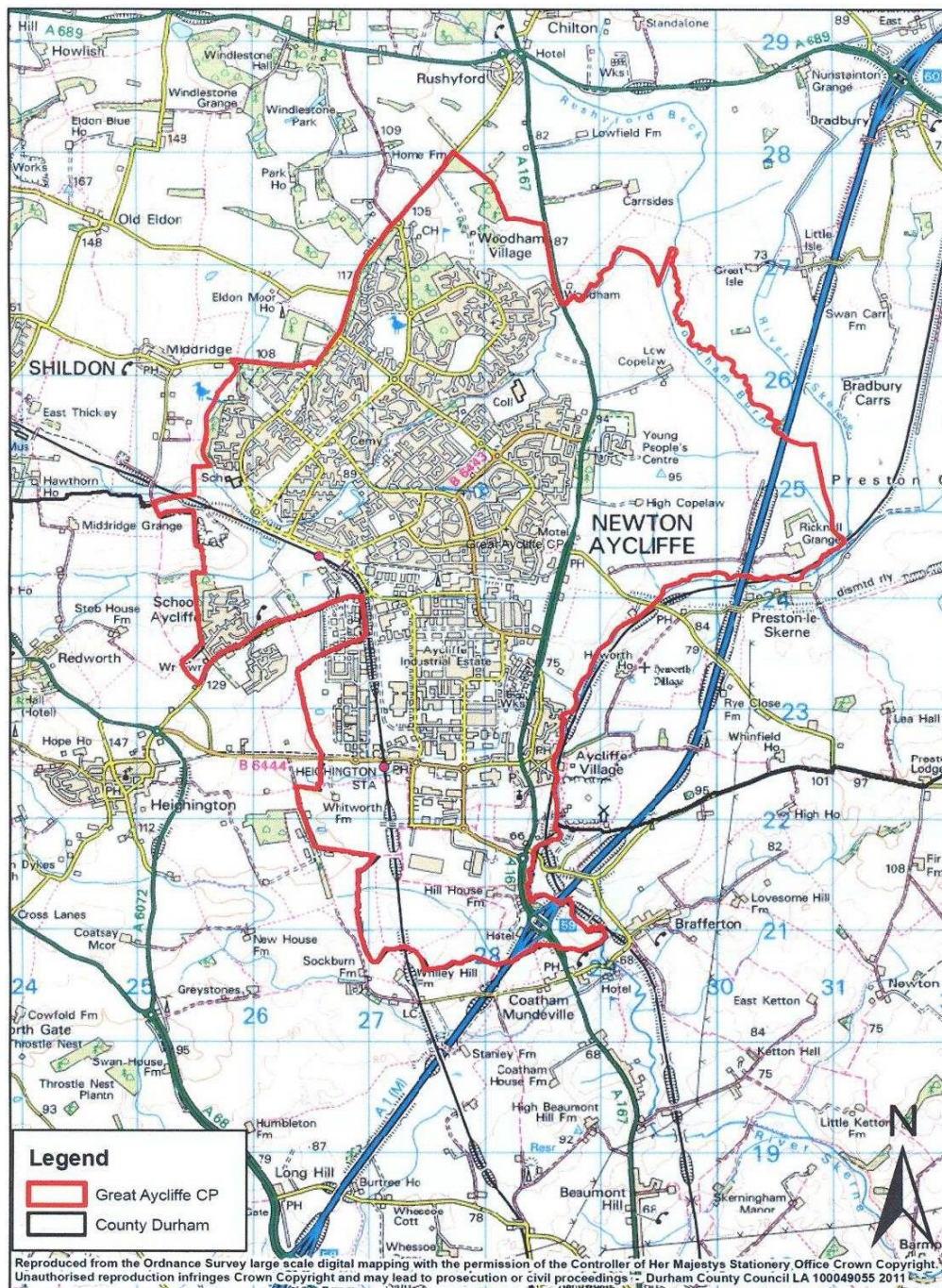


# Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan

## Strategic Environmental Assessment & Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report



April 2016



	SUMMARY	
0.	SCREENING SUMMARY	3
1.	INTRODUCTION	7
2.	LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND	13
3.	SEA SCREENING	16
4.	HRA SCREENING	25
5.	RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	43



## 0 Screening Summary

Table 1 Summary of Neighbourhood Plan

Details of Neighbourhood Plan	
Name of Neighbourhood Plan	Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan
Geographic Coverage of the Plan	Parish of Great Aycliffe (approximately 2,400 hectares)
Key topics / scope of Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan (GANP) sets out the vision, objectives and policies to ensure the Parish of Great Aycliffe maintains its uniqueness over the period 2016 to 2036.</li> <li>The vision is: <b>“To make Great Aycliffe a vibrant community</b> the Neighbourhood Plan will seek to enhance the natural environment, support and encourage high quality housing, local jobs and improved retail and leisure facilities in a healthy, green and attractive town”</li> <li>Key topics include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environment, including green spaces, urban sprawl and parking.</li> <li>Housing, including older persons accommodation, number of bedrooms and energy efficiency.</li> <li>Retail, including facilitating and encouraging local provision and local jobs.</li> <li>Community Infrastructure Levy or Section 106 monies, including local priorities for investment.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 2 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion

Details of Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion	
Name and job title of officer undertaking screening opinion	Dean Pearson, Sustainability Officer
Date of assessment	April 2016
Conclusion of assessment	SEA is not required.

Details of Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Opinion	
Reason for conclusion	The draft GANP does not allocate land for development and any provisions within the Plan that either have the potential to conflict with environmental objectives or benefit one environmental objective to the detriment of another can be rectified through the addition of further wording. Accordingly, the GANP is not considered likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
Name and job title of officer approving screening opinion	Stephen McDonald, Senior Sustainability Strategy Officer
Date of approval	7th April 2016
Date of final screening document	

Table 3 Summary of Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion

Details of Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Opinion	
Name and job title of officer undertaking screening opinion	Dean Pearson, Sustainability Officer
Date of assessment	April 2016
Conclusion of assessment	The GANP will not result in likely significant effects to European Protected Sites. Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Reason for conclusion	The majority of policies will not lead to built development and the parish is 9km from the nearest protected European Site (Thrislington SAC) and so the Plan is unlikely to have significant effects on it.
Name and job title of officer approving screening opinion	Terry Coult, Principal Ecologist
Date of approval	11th April 2016
Date of final screening document	

Table 4 Summary of Consultations

Statutory Consultee	Summary of Comments
Historic England	
Environment Agency	

Statutory Consultee	Summary of Comments
Natural England	



## 1 Introduction

**1.1** This document details the findings of the first screening step of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) process of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan. As the 'competent authority' under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) as amended, Great Aycliffe Town Council is required to assess its Neighbourhood Plan through the HRA process.

**1.2** The definition of 'Habitat Regulations Assessment' is simply an assessment which must be appropriate to its purpose under the Habitats Directive and Regulations. According to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) as amended, regulation 102 requires:

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

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

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

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

**1.3** The purpose of HRA of land use plans is to ensure the protection of the integrity of European sites which are of exceptional importance in respect of rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species within the European Community. The European network of sites are known as Natura 2000 and include Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the EU 'Wild Birds' Directive and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the EU 'Habitats Directive' and European Marine Sites (EMS). In addition to these sites the UK Government's National Planning Policy Framework requires that listed or proposed Ramsar sites should be given the same protection as European sites. <sup>(i)</sup> Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, designated under the Ramsar Convention 1979.

**1.4** As Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan can be described as a 'plan or project' and it is not directly connected to the management of European sites it is not excluded or exempt from the regulations. The Plan will therefore need to be screened for likely significant effects to fulfil the legal requirements. If likely significant effects are identified an appropriate assessment will be required. This document provides the screening opinion.

### Background to the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan

**1.5** The Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan (GANP) sets out the vision, objectives and policies to ensure the Parish of Great Aycliffe maintains its uniqueness over the period 2016 to 2036. The vision is: **"To make Great Aycliffe a vibrant community the**

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i Communities and Local Government National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012)

Neighbourhood Plan will seek to enhance the natural environment, support and encourage high quality housing, local jobs and improved retail and leisure facilities in a healthy, green and attractive town”.

**1.6** The Parish of Great Aycliffe comprises the town of Newton Aycliffe, part of School Aycliffe and Aycliffe Village and covers over 2,400ha. The population of Great Aycliffe is approximately 26,633 (*Census data 2011*) and is projected to grow over the next few years. It is in a semi-rural setting and is bounded on all sides with open countryside with road links to the A1. Newton Aycliffe has a train station on the Darlington to Bishop Auckland rail line, as well as a station to serve the Aycliffe Business Park. The Business Park is a major employer and the largest in the North East.

**1.7** The Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan (GANP) sets out a vision, for the next 20 years and sets objectives on key identified themes around environment, housing and retail. It builds on current and planned activity and says what the Town Council and its partners will work towards. The GANP aims to continue making Aycliffe ‘greater’ by protecting the character and heritage of the area whilst planning for the future.

Map 1 Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Area



**1.8** The nearest European Protected site is Thrislington SAC National Nature Reserve, which is around 9km from the centre of Newton Aycliffe. Other European Sites are more than 10km from the Parish but those within the 20km buffer include Castle Eden Dene SAC, the North Pennine Moors SPA, the North Pennine Moor SAC and the North Pennine Dales Meadows SAC. The Neighbourhood Plan Area contains no SSSIs but is within 5km of Redcar Field SSSI, Newton Ketton Meadow SSSI, Railway Stell West SSSI and Middridge Quarry SSSI. The Parish also contains Aycliffe Village Green, The Moor Local Nature Reserve, Byerly Local Nature Reserve, two woodlands and most of the Great Aycliffe Way, which includes sections of The Burn. It also contains thirteen grade II listed buildings, one grade I listed building (Church of St Andrew's) and one scheduled monument being the 'Coatham Mundeville medieval village, fishpond and areas of rig and furrow'.

**1.9** It is intended that the policies will be reviewed every 5 years and, if necessary, changed to keep them up to date. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the Planning Authority, Durham County Council. The objectives the planning policies are aiming to achieve are:

### Environment

- Objective 1: To protect and retain the traditional green areas, open spaces and environment for the community.
- Objective 2: To alleviate existing, overwhelming parking problems whilst allowing grass to be retained as the dominant finish.
- Objective 3: To retain and protect the green and leafy character of the area.
- Objective 4: To protect Aycliffe Village from urban sprawl and maintain the traditional village feel

### Housing

- Objective 5: To ensure that all future developments should meet the needs of residents and be of good design by -
  - a. Having sufficient suitable older persons' accommodation provided when developments are near to services.
  - b. Supporting the development of more two bedroomed accommodation.
  - c. Avoiding small one bedroomed accommodation (through the use of a multi-functional room).
  - d. Ensuring adequate parking and storage is provided.
  - e. Ensuring the green and open feel, all new development should include sufficient green space to retain the garden city framework of the 'Beveridge vision'.
  - f. Ensuring all new developments are built to the highest energy efficiency standard, incorporating renewable energy measures, such as solar panels, where possible.

### Retail

- Objective 6: To facilitate and encourage improved retail provision for Newton Aycliffe.
- Objective 7: To support and encourage local jobs for local people.

## **CIL/ Section 106**

**1.10** To ensure the Parish needs are considered first when CIL or Section 106 monies are available from future developments our proposals are:

- That the Town Council is consulted in advance where CIL or Section 106 monies will be available.
- To set local priorities for investment.

## **Purpose of this Report**

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

**1.12** This report will also screen to determine whether or not the GANP requires an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive and with Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). An Appropriate Assessment is required when it is deemed that significant negative effects are likely to occur to protected European wildlife sites known as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Ramsar sites as a result of the implementation of a plan or project. The term Habitats Regulations Assessment, HRA for brevity, has come into use for describing the overall assessment process including screening and the specific Appropriate Assessment stage.

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



## 2 Legislative Background

### Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

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

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

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

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

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

(2001/42/EC)

### Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

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

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

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

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

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



### 3 SEA Screening

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

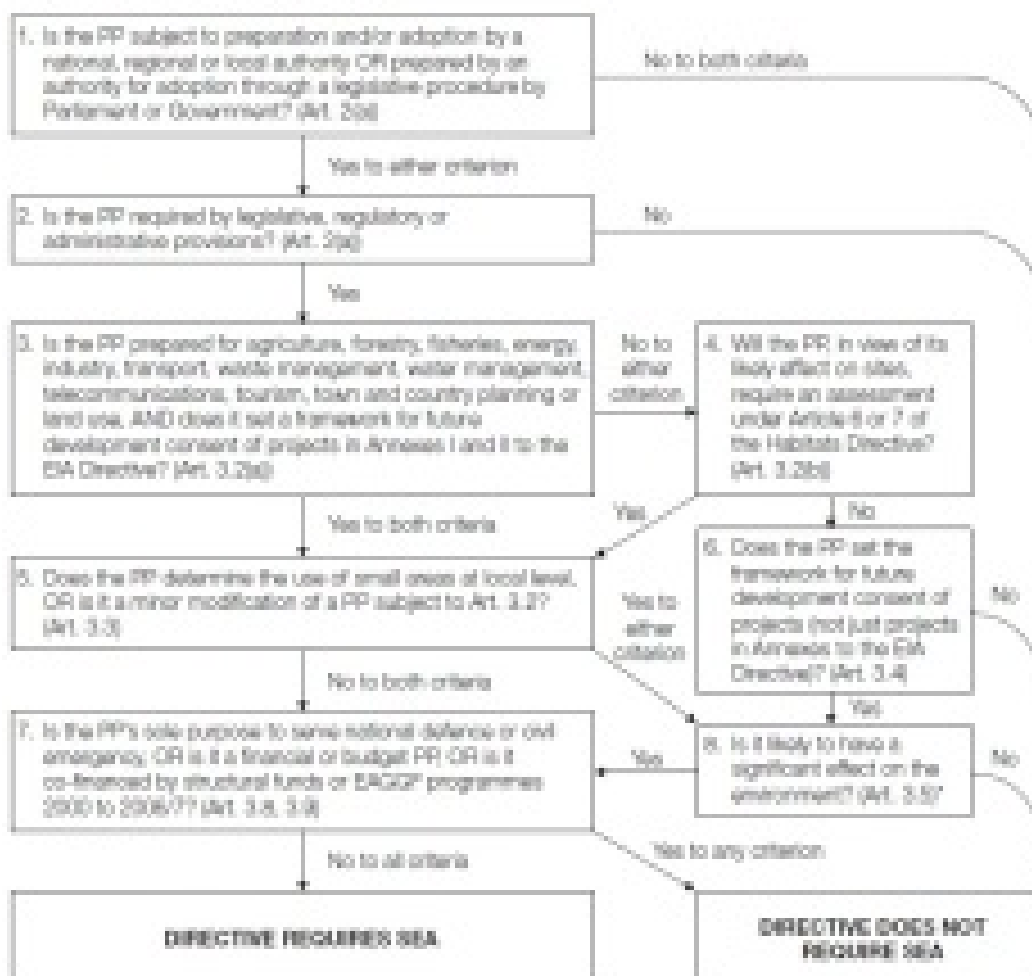
**3.2** The screening opinion assessment is undertaken in two parts: the first part will assess whether the plan requires SEA (as per the flow chart which follows). The second part of the assessment will consider whether the Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment,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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Stage	Answer	Reason
2. Is the PP required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Art. 2 (a))	N	Communities have a right to be able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. However, communities are not required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to produce a Neighbourhood Plan. This plan, however, is subject to 'provisions' that require it to be prepared in a formal way and if adopted would form part of the statutory Development Plan. Therefore, it is considered necessary to answer the following questions to determine further if a SEA is required.
3. Is the PP required for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Art.3.2(a))	N	The GANP is prepared for town and country planning or land use but it does NOT set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive.
4. Will the PP, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Art.3.2(b))	N	See HRA screening assessment in Section 4 of this report.
5. Does the PP determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Art. 3.3)	N/A	Not applicable.
6. Does the PP set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Art. 3.4)	Y	The GANP sets policies which planning applications within the GANP area must adhere to.
7. Is the PP's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7 (Art. 3.8, 3.9)	N/A	Not applicable.

Stage	Answer	Reason
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Art 3.5)	N	Please see Table 2.
<b>Conclusion</b>	The GANP does NOT require SEA	

Table 6 Assessment 2: Likely Significant Effects on the Environment

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
<b>The characteristics of the Neighbourhood Plan, having regard to:</b>	
The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	The GANP would, if made, form part of the statutory Development Plan and as such does contribute to the framework for future consent of projects. However, these will be localised in nature and are likely to have limited resource implications.
The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The GANP will need to be in general conformity with the relevant Development Plan. Therefore, the GANP should not significantly influence other plans and programmes.
The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	<p>It is a condition of Neighbourhood Planning that Neighbourhood Plans are to demonstrably contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development. The GANP aims to promote sustainable development through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting and retaining the traditional green areas, open spaces and environment for the community.</li> <li>• Alleviating existing, overwhelming parking problems whilst allowing grass to be retained as the dominant finish.</li> <li>• Retaining and protect the green and leafy character of the area.</li> <li>• Protecting Aycliffe Village from urban sprawl and maintain the traditional village feel.</li> </ul>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring the green and open feel, all new development should include sufficient green space to retain the garden city framework.</li> <li>• Ensuring all new developments are built to the highest energy efficiency standard, incorporating renewable energy measures, such as solar panels, where possible.</li> </ul>
Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite rail and bus links to Durham, Bishop Auckland, Darlington and Aycliffe Business Park, parking is an issue in Newton Aycliffe, especially the older part of the town.</li> <li>• Retail has been a issue for residents and businesses for approximately 30 years. The privately owned Newton Aycliffe Town Centre is situated on a constrained site and is inward facing, which could contribute to travelling further afield for retail purposes.</li> <li>• Urban sprawl towards Aycliffe Village and risk of it being incorporated into Newton Aycliffe.</li> <li>• Housing issues including energy efficiency, available parking, design (small square buildings with flat roofs) and size.</li> <li>• Development reducing and encroaching on green areas in the Town.</li> <li>• Retaining the semi-rural and tree-lined avenues green character of the Parish.</li> </ul>
The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).	The GANP is not directly connected to the implementation of European legislation.
<b>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to:</b>	

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
<p>The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.</p>	<p>As the GANP does not allocate land for development, it is considered highly unlikely that provisions in the Plan will lead to significant environmental effects. However, where the draft Plan gives its support for a specific activity or measure (which in some cases may benefit one environmental objective to the detriment of others), further wording should be added to make clear that the activity is only supported where win-win solutions between competing objectives can be sought and significant adverse environmental effects are avoided. The support of the following measures within the Plan are considered likely to require the addition of further wording: (Suggestions for such wording is given within Section 5 of this Report):</p> <p>Environmental Objective 2: to alleviate existing, overwhelming parking problems whilst allowing grass to be retained as the dominant finish by developing some green spaces.</p> <p>REASON: to recognise potential for adverse effects upon Aycliffe Village Conservation Area, flood risk, biodiversity, listed buildings and wider landscape character and conflict with Environmental Objective 1.</p> <p>Policies GANP H5 and GANP H6 on bungalow development on land adjacent to Woodham Community College.</p> <p>REASON: to recognise potential for adverse effects on flood risk and Woodham Burn.</p> <p>The reversibility of effects in terms of the overall sustainability of planning in the area and any undesired or unintended effects would depend upon a review of the GANP. This means that the Plan will require monitoring over time. There may be some merit in adding a paragraph within the draft GANP document to make clear that the cumulative effects of policies will be monitored and the plan reviewed if necessary.</p>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
The cumulative nature of the effects.	<p>Suggestions for further wording is given within Section 5 of this Report.</p> <p>No significant cumulative effects are anticipated but the Plan will require monitoring over time.</p>
The transboundary nature of the effects.	There are not expected to be any significant transboundary effects arising from the Neighbourhood Plan.
The risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents).	The provisions within the Plan do not provide unacceptable risks to human health or the environment.
The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected).	The Parish covers an area of around 2,400 hectares and the population is approximately 26,633 ( <i>Census data 2011</i> ). Significant transboundary effects are not anticipated and any effects would be localised in nature.
<p>The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage.</li> <li>• Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values.</li> <li>• Intensive land-use.</li> </ul>	<p>The nearest European Protected site is Thrislington SAC National Nature Reserve, which is around 9km from the centre of Newton Aycliffe. Other European Sites are more than 10km from the Parish but those within the 20km buffer include Castle Eden Dene SAC and the North Pennine Moors SPA and SAC.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan Area contains no SSSIs but is within 5km of Redcar Field SSSI, Newton Ketton Meadow SSSI, Railway Stell West SSSI and Middridge Quarry SSSI.</p> <p>The Parish also contains Aycliffe Village Green, The Moor Local Nature Reserve and Byerly Local Nature Reserve.</p> <p>It also contains twelve grade II listed buildings, one grade I listed building (Church of St Andrew's) and two scheduled monuments.</p> <p>Soil quality is either Grade 3 (average) or Grade 4 (poor).</p> <p>The GANP is not expected to exceed environmental limits.</p>

SEA Directive criteria and Schedule 1 of Environmental Assessment of plans and programmes Regulations 2004	Assessment Commentary
	<p>The GANP does not allocate any land for development.</p> <p>Proposals will be expected to make the most efficient use of land in conformity with the relevant Development Plan.</p>
The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	The GANP is not expected to have a significant effect on on areas or landscapes with protection status.
<b>Assessment 2 Conclusion</b>	<p>The draft GANP does not allocate land for development and any provisions within the Plan that either have the potential to conflict with environmental objectives or benefit one environmental objective to the detriment of another can be rectified through the addition of further wording. Accordingly, the GANP is not considered likely to have a significant effect on the environment.</p>



## 4 HRA Screening

**4.1** County Durham contains within its boundaries a number of sites (or parts of sites) which are designated for their European importance. The sites are broadly divided between the coastline and the western uplands.

**Table 7 European Protected Sites within County Durham**

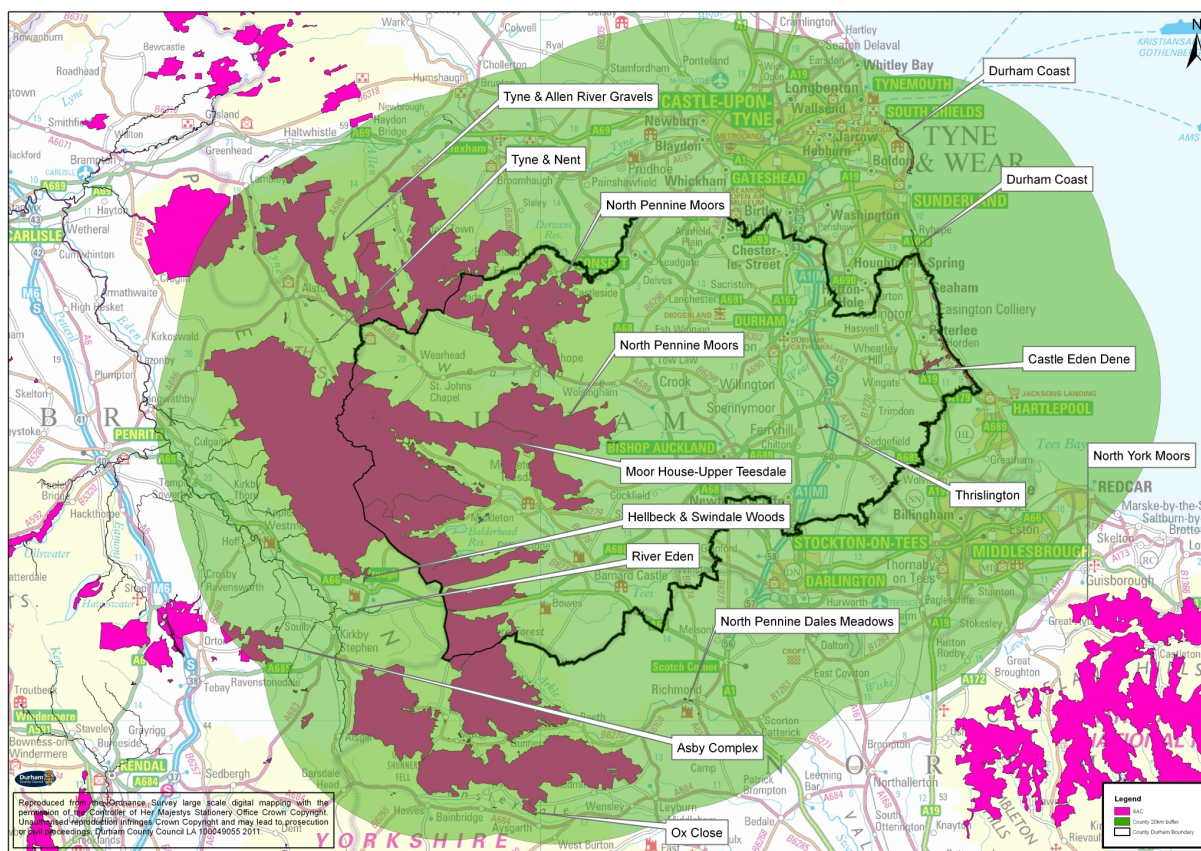
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Special Protection Area (SPA)
Castle Eden Dene	Northumbria Coast
Durham Coast	Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast
Thrislington	North Pennine Moors
Moor House Upper Teesdale	
North Pennine Dales Meadows	
North Pennine Moors	

**4.2** In addition to the sites within County Durham's administrative boundary the following sites fall within 20km of County Durham:

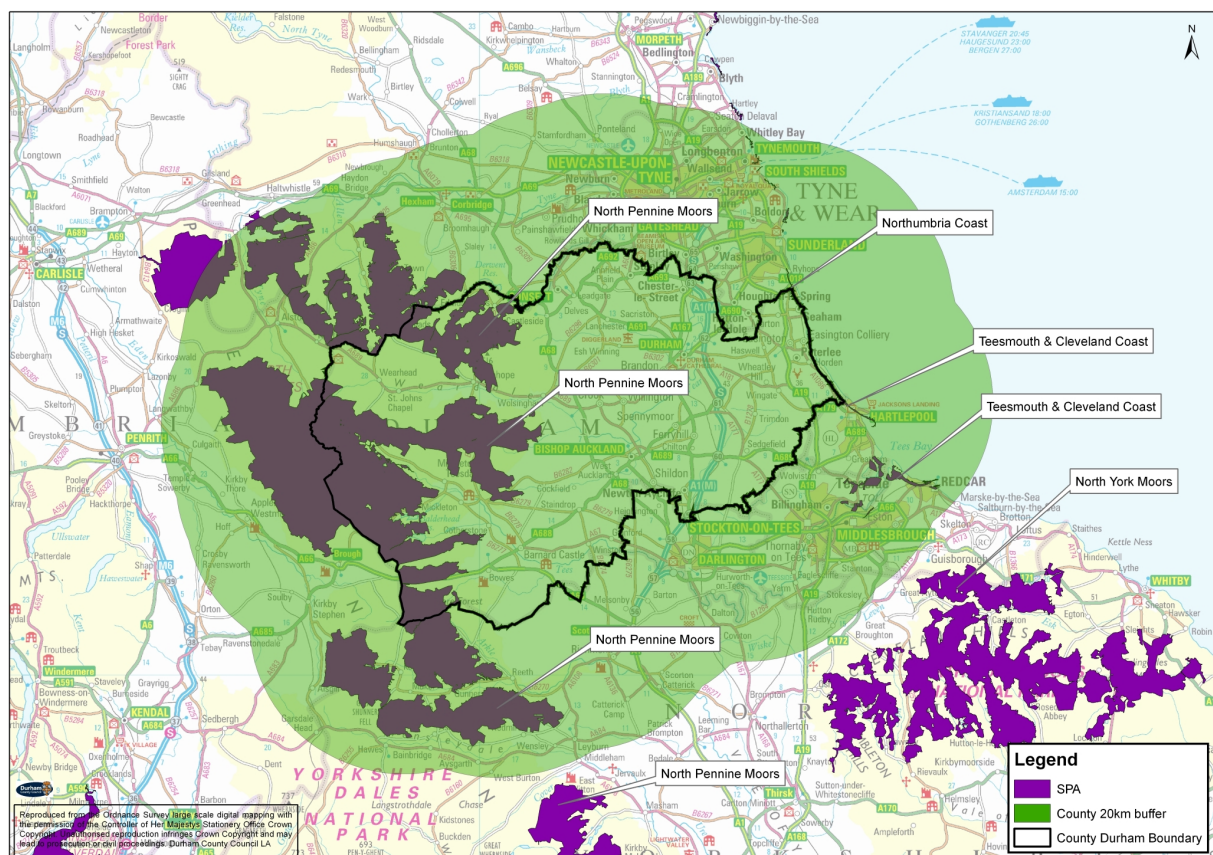
**Table 8 European Protected Sites within 20km of County Durham**

Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Special Protection Area (SPA)
Tyne and Allen River Gravels	Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast
Oxclose	North Pennine Moors
Helbeck and Swindale Woods	
Asby Complex	
Tyne and Nent	
River Eden	

Map 2 SAC's within 20km of County Durham



Map 3 SPA's within 20km of County Durham



## Relevant Sites

**4.3** In order to determine if any European Protected Sites are likely to be affected at all, the policies of the Neighbourhood Plan need to be subject to screening, taking into account the vulnerabilities of the sites and potential impact pathways such as changes to air quality, water quality or quantity, direct or indirect loss of habitat and disturbance.

**4.4** Thrislington SAC at approximately 9km from Great Aycliffe's defined neighbourhood area. Other European Sites are more than 10km from the Parish but those within the 20km buffer include Castle Eden Dene SAC, the North Pennine Moors SPA, the North Pennine Moors SAC and the North Pennine Dales Meadows SAC. As the River Tees is within the boundary of the neighbourhood area, consideration was also given to determining whether Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA situated downstream of the neighbourhood area should be included within the HRA. However, it is considered that adverse effects are extremely unlikely to occur based upon the distances involved between points of discharge and the SPA at Teesmouth (approximately 26km).

**4.5** The SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 23 hectares south of the village of West Cornforth. Thrislington SAC is a small site but nonetheless contains the largest of the few surviving stands of CG8 *Sesleria albicans-Scabiosa columbaria* grassland. This form of calcareous grassland is confined to the Magnesian Limestone of County Durham and Tyne and Wear. It now covers less than 200 hectares and is found mainly as small scattered stands.

## Qualifying Features

- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone.

## Key Environmental Conditions

**4.6** The key environmental conditions required to support site integrity comprise the following:

- No reduction in extent.
- Continuous management by seasonally-adjusted grazing.
- No fertiliser input.
- Control of invasive species.
- Control of over grazing.
- Limited air pollution.

**4.7** As the River Skerne is within close proximity to Great Aycliffe neighbourhood area, consideration was also given to determining whether Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA should be included within the screening assessment, given that the River Skerne is a tributary of the River Tees and there may be potential for adverse effects to the SPA arising from changes to water quality. However, it is considered that adverse effects are extremely unlikely to occur based upon the distances involved between points of discharge and Teesmouth.

## Relevant European Protected Wildlife Sites

**4.8** In line with the agreed methodology of the HRA of the County Durham Plan, all sites within 20km of the plan area (in this case the neighbourhood plan area) should be included within the HRA screening exercise, in addition to those outwith the 20km radius that are ecologically/ hydrologically linked or are likely to be subject to increased recreational pressure. Maps 4 and 5 show that sites falling within the 20km radius include:

- Thrislington SAC.
- Castle Eden Dene SAC.
- North Pennine Moors SAC.
- North Pennine Moors SPA.

Map 4 SAC's within 20km of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan Area



Map 5 SPA's within 20km of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan Area



**4.9** The sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the sites subject to screening were fully identified in the HRA of the County Durham Plan and are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9 Description of Relevant European Sites

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
Thrislington SAC	Thrislington SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 23 hectares south of the village of West Cornforth. Thrislington SAC is a small site but nonetheless contains the largest of the few surviving stands of CG8 <i>Sesleria albicans</i> - <i>Scabiosa columbaria</i> grassland. This form of calcareous grassland is confined to the Magnesian Limestone of County Durham and Tyne and Wear. It now covers less than 200 hectares and is found mainly as small scattered stands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone</li> </ul>	<p>The conditions of these grasslands are dependent upon continuous management by seasonally-adjusted grazing and no fertiliser input. The site is a National Nature Reserve and management on these traditional lines is undertaken at the site. However, as per Durham Coast SAC, the qualifying species of Durham Coast SAC are sensitive to trampling and nutrient enrichment which can occur as a result of dog walking activities. Should recreational pressure increase at the site the Management Plan linked to the National Nature Reserve may need to be revised accordingly.</p> <p>Furthermore, any proposed changes to the working method of the adjacent Thrislington quarry may need to be subject to Habitat Regulations Assessment to ensure no significant adverse effects will arise from dust emissions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No reduction in extent</li> <li>Continuous management by seasonally-adjusted grazing</li> <li>No fertiliser input</li> <li>Control of invasive species</li> <li>Control of over grazing</li> <li>Limited air pollution</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
Castle Eden Dene SAC	<p>Castle Eden Dene SAC was designated in April 2005 and covers an area of approximately 194 hectares. Castle Eden Dene SAC represents the most extensively northerly native occurrence of <i>Taxus baccata</i>; Yew woods in the UK. Extensive yew groves are found in association with <i>Fraxinus-Ulmus</i>; Ash-elm woodland and it is the only site selected for yew woodland on magnesian limestone in north-east England.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Taxus baccata</i> woods of the <i>British Isles</i>; Yew-dominated woodland</li> </ul>	<p>No vulnerabilities were recorded within the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for the site which states: Yew woodlands are distributed throughout the site in a matrix of other woodland types. The site is managed as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and the NNR Management Plan provides for regeneration of this special woodland type.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No loss of ancient semi-natural stands</li> <li>At least current area of recent semi-natural stands maintained, although their location may alter</li> <li>Woodland natural processes and structure / structural diversity maintained</li> <li>Natural regeneration to maintain canopy density over a 20 year period</li> <li>Limited loss of native woodland species to non-native or other external factors (e.g. Pollution, eutrophication from run-off, disease)</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited air pollution</li> <li>Maintain species, habitats and structures characteristic to the site</li> </ul>
North Pennine Moors SAC	<p>The North Pennine Moors (along with the North York Moors) hold much of the upland heathland of northern England. At higher altitudes and to the wetter west and north of the site complex, the heaths grade into extensive areas of blanket bogs. The site is considered as supporting the major area of blanket bog in England. A significant proportion remains active with accumulating peat,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath</li> <li>European dry heaths</li> <li><i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands; Juniper on heaths or calcareous grasslands</li> <li>Calaminarian grasslands of the <i>Violetalia calaminariae</i>; Grasslands on soils rich in heavy metals</li> </ul>	<p>All interest features have been affected by excessive livestock grazing levels across parts of the site. These have been, and are still, encouraged by headage payments, but agreements with graziers and moorland owners, including those in Wildlife Enhancement and Countryside Stewardship schemes, are starting to overcome the problems of overgrazing. In places, the difficulty of reaching agreements on commons, which cover much of the site, means that successes are limited at present, and continues to prevent restoration. Drainage of wet areas can also be a problem; drains have been cut across many areas of blanket bog,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control of grazing</li> <li>Appropriate moorland management including management of scrub/tree/bracken encroachment</li> <li>Limited air pollution</li> <li>No drainage of wet areas - maintenance of wet areas</li> <li>Maintenance of water quality - organics/ silt form physical disturbance</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
	although these areas are often bounded by sizeable zones of currently non-active bog, albeit on deep peat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands; Montane acid grasslands</li> <li>Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>); Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone</li> <li>Blanket bogs</li> <li>Petrifying springs with tufa formation (<i>Cratoneurion</i>); Hard-water springs depositing lime</li> <li>Alkaline fens; Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens</li> <li>Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galepsietalia ladani</i>); Acidic scree</li> </ul>	<p>disrupting the hydrology and causing erosion, but in most parts these are being blocked and the habitat restored under agreements. Burning is a traditional management tool on these moorlands, which contributes to maintaining high populations of SPA breeding birds. However, over-intensive and inappropriate burning is damaging to heath and blanket bog and further agreements are needed with the landowners to achieve sympathetic burning regimes. Restoration, to some degree, of a mosaic of more natural habitats across parts of the site is desirable. Acid and nitrogen deposition continue to have damaging effects on the site. Recreational activity may also be problematic.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited erosion by human impacts (e.g. Recreation)</li> <li>Very little peat extraction (no mechanised extraction)</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Plants in crevices in base-rich rocks</li> <li>• Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation; Plants in crevices on acid rocks</li> <li>• Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles; Western acidic oak woodland</li> <li>• <i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>; Marsh saxifrage</li> </ul>		
North Pennine Moors SPA	The habitat of North Pennine Moors SAC supports breeding pairs of Hen harrier, Merlin, Peregrine falcon, European Golden plover, Dunlin and Eurasian curlew.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Circus cyaneus</i>; Hen harrier (Breeding)</li> <li>• <i>Falco columbarius</i>; Merlin (Breeding)</li> <li>• <i>Falco peregrinus</i>; Peregrine falcon (Breeding)</li> <li>• <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>; European golden plover (Breeding)</li> </ul>	As for North Pennine Moors SAC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No loss of area of habitat</li> <li>• Grazing to maintain suitable moorland</li> <li>• Control of erosion and peat extraction</li> </ul>

Site	Overview	Qualifying Features	Vulnerability	Key Environmental Conditions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>; Dunlin (Breeding)</li> <li>• <i>Numenius arquata</i>; Eurasian curlew (Breeding)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity, age and structure of vegetation</li> <li>• Food availability (birds, day flying moths, small mammals, soil and ground surface invertebrates)</li> <li>• Open landscape</li> <li>• Lack of disturbance and persecution (moor burning, vehicles, stock, dogs and walkers)</li> </ul>

## Assessment of Effects

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

**Table 10 Categorisation of Likely Effects**

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

Category	Sub Category	Description
3. Likely significant effect alone	-	Policy could impact upon a European Site because it provides for, or steers, a quantity or type of development that may be very close to it, or ecologically, hydrologically or physically connected. Alternatively, it may increase disturbance as a result of increased recreational pressure.
4. Likely significant effect in combination	-	The policy would have no significant effect alone but the cumulative effects when combined with those of other policies or projects are likely to be significant.

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

**Table 11 Categorisation of GANP Policies**

Policy/ Measure	Thrislington SAC	Castle Eden Dene SAC	North Pennine Moors SAC	North Pennine Moors SPA
Policy CH1: Landscape Character and Landscape	1E	1E	1E	1E
Policy CH2: Protection of Green Space	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy CH3: Amenity Open Spaces & Recreational Areas	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy E1: Green Corridors	1A	1A	1A	1A
Policy E2: Aycliffe Village Green Wedge	1E	1E	1E	1E
Policy E3: Conservation Area	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy E4: Tree Retention and Removal	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy E5: Tree Protection	1E	1E	1E	1E
Policy H1: Bungalow Provision	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H2: Dwellings Appropriate to the Needs of Residents	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H3: Affordable Housing	1B	1B	1B	1B

Policy/ Measure	Thrislington SAC	Castle Eden Dene SAC	North Pennine Moors SAC	North Pennine Moors SPA
Policy H4: In-Fill Developments	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H5: Parking Mitigation	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H6: Parking Standards for new Residential Development	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H7: Provision of Facilities and Services	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H8: Provision of In-Curtilage Parking and Storage	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy H9: Energy Standards	1A	1A	1A	1A
Policy AV1: Enhanced Bungalow Provision on Land Adjacent to Woodham Community College	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy AV2: Garden Provision on Land Adjacent to WCC	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy DB1: Large Scale Development Requirements	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy R1: Economic Retail Viability for Betting Offices	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy R2: Economic Retail Viability for Pay Day Loan Shops	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy R3: Restrictions on Change of Use	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy R4: Local Jobs	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy CIL1: Contributions	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy T1: Parking Impacts on Existing Infrastructure	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy T2: Design Finish, Off-Street Parking	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy T3: Cycle Provision and Walking Routes	1A	1A	1A	1A

Policy/ Measure	Thrislington SAC	Castle Eden Dene SAC	North Pennine Moors SAC	North Pennine Moors SPA
Policy EE1: Domestic Scale Renewables	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy EE2: Community-led Energy Efficiency Projects	1B	1B	1B	1B
Policy EE3: Business Energy Efficiency	1B	1B	1B	1B

**4.12** The findings of the assessment show that all of GANP policies will have no negative effect upon European Protected Sites.

### Conclusion

**4.13** Following assessment it can be concluded that the implementation of a re-worded GANP will **not result in likely significant effects** upon any of the relevant European Protected Sites.



## 5 Recommendations and Conclusion

**5.1** The SEA and HRA screening opinions have concluded that the draft GANP is unlikely to legally require a Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations. However, the following wording is suggested for addition to the draft GANP to emphasise that activity is only supported where win-win solutions between competing objectives can be sought and significant adverse environmental effects are avoided:

- Land adjacent to Woodham Community College, GANP AV2 Garden Provision: Smaller gardens or community garden space will be acceptable on this site to allow for a larger number of bungalows to be provided and to accommodate older or less physically able residents who may not want to maintain large gardens. **A flood risk assessment would need to be undertaken and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems incorporated as appropriate due previously identified surface water flood risk on site. Advice should be sought on an appropriate development buffer from Woodham Burn to prevent any significant adverse effects on the local nature reserve.**
- GANP T2 Design Finish, Off-Street Parking: Where an area has been identified with a significant parking problem and where there is only limited scope to provide off-street parking a geo-grid, or similar design material, type approach must be used to allow grass to be the dominant final finish. **Due consideration should be given to changes to flood risk as a result of increased parking provision and a flood risk assessment should be undertaken and SUDs incorporated as appropriate.**

**5.2** There may also be some merit in adding a paragraph within the draft GANP document to make clear that the cumulative effects of policies will be monitored and the plan reviewed if necessary.

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