

9 ENVIRONMENT

Safeguarding the Historic Environment

- 9.1.1** National planning policy(30) requires Local Planning Authorities to set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. It emphasises the importance of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and acknowledges the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring.
- 9.1.2** The historic environment includes areas and buildings, archaeological sites, historic streets and transport routes, historic landscapes, parks and other green spaces. It is a non-renewable, shared resource, and any loss or harm to it is usually irreversible. Understanding the significance of the historic environment and the contribution that the setting of historic assets makes to their significance is essential to guide good decisions about land use change and development affecting them.
- 9.1.** As a group, Darlington's archaeology and historic buildings are of considerable significance not least because of its potentially significant railway, industrial and Quaker history. The Borough's designated heritage assets(31) include:
- Over 550 Listed Buildings;
 - 20 Scheduled Monuments;
 - 17 Conservation Areas; and
 - 2 Registered Parks and Gardens.
- 9.1.4** The Borough also contains a wealth of non-designated heritage and archaeological assets. Non-designated heritage assets can be summarised as parts of the historic environment including buildings, structures, areas and archaeology that are considered by the Local Planning Authority to be locally significant. They can be identified through strategic planning and development management, included on a Local List, and can sometimes be as significant as designated assets.
- 9.1.5** The origins of the town of Darlington first appeared in writing in 1003. The small Anglo-Saxon settlement experienced medieval growth as a result of Darlington's position in the Durham bishopric. The market flourished to serve an agricultural hinterland and those passing through the town on the Great North Road between London and Edinburgh. Around St Cuthbert's Church, a prominent Grade I listed town centre landmark, grew an ecclesiastical complex, with the Bishop's palace at its heart (1164 -1870). By the 1530s Darlington was described as the best market town in the bishopric outside of Durham. In 1585 a fire destroyed most of medieval Darlington. The town was rebuilt within the medieval streets and burgage plots and this pattern of central yards and wynds survives in the town centre today. There was little building beyond the confines of the medieval settlement, other than the mansions of the influential Quaker families on the fringes of the urban core, until growth was triggered by the arrival of the railway(32).

30 Chapter 16 of the NPPF (Feb 2019).

31 Identified on the Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Durham County Council's Archaeology Service on behalf of Darlington Borough Council.

32 Gillian Cookson: The Townscape of Darlington (2003).

- 9.1.6** Opened in 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway was funded by Edward Pease a prominent Darlington Quaker as the world's first publicly financed passenger railway. This is covered by a standalone policy (see Policy ENV 2) due to its national significance.
- 9.1.7** Darlington has a particularly significant Quaker history and associated heritage assets. Darlington Quakers played an active part in the government, industry, commerce and development in the town during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were responsible for many of Darlington's landmark Victorian public buildings and manor houses, parks and cemeteries including South Park, the indoor market and clock tower, Crown Street Library, and the Friends Meeting House. The value and significance of these assets is recognised, for their contribution to the unique identity of the borough and their potential contribution to tourism. Non-designated heritage associated with the Quaker movement includes Elm Ridge Methodist Church and Carmel School.
- 9.1.8** Darlington has also played a significant role in the development of industry. It has a number of designated heritage assets of significance to industries like leather, tanning, textiles and steel. Designated assets include Tees Cottage Pumping Station and the Cummins building on Yarm Road, the latter being the most contemporary building – constructed in 1965 - to be listed.
- 9.1.9** 'Experience Darlington' is an overarching concept promoting heritage assets as part of the Visitor Economy Strategy(33) that seeks to link and make the most of Darlington's locally distinct heritage as summarised above.
- 9.1.10** The vision for Darlington's Town Centre Fringe and its historic environment is set out in the Conservation Management Plan(34) and aims for the area to be transformed into a vibrant urban area with well-maintained historic buildings, exciting small scale modern development, a thriving tourism industry based on railway heritage and a healthy, accessible river.
- 9.1.11** The Borough contains a significant Roman settlement at Piercebridge and other characterful rural villages and hamlets. These villages are home to a high concentration of listed vernacular cottages and historic farm buildings and are generally designated as Conservation Areas. Several of the Conservation Area villages are located along the River Tees corridor and this relationship with the river setting is an integral part of their historic and aesthetic value. Walworth Castle is a prominent Grade I listed building in a picturesque rural setting within the Borough. The character of the Borough's rural historic environment and the heritage assets integral to it will be protected, enhanced and promoted.
- 9.1.12** The Council will support proposals which conserve and where appropriate enhance the historic environment of Darlington. Particular consideration will be given to ensure that the significance of those elements of the historic environment which contribute most to Darlington's distinctive identity and sense of place are not harmed. These include:
- The buildings, spaces, trackbed and other infrastructure associated with the Stockton and Darlington Railway.
 - The medieval streets and burgage plots associated with medieval Darlington.
 - Evidence of Roman activity such as the settlement at Piercebridge.
 - The mix of buildings and spaces associated with the Quaker movement including Victorian public buildings, manor houses, parks and cemeteries.

33 Experience Darlington: A Visitor Economy Strategy 2016-2026, DBC.

34 A Conservation Management Plan for Darlington Town Centre Fringe, 2010, Archaeo-Environment.

- Remnants of Darlington's industrial heritage including leather, tanning, textiles and steel and its associated infrastructure.
- The historic farm buildings and rural villages and hamlets, including those along the River Tees.
- The range of its places of worship.
- Conservation areas and listed buildings across the Borough.
- Key cultural assets encompassing parklands, woodlands, landscapes, canals and riversides, museums, libraries, art galleries, public art, food and drink, customs and traditions.

Policy ENV 1

Protecting, Enhancing and Promoting Darlington's Historic Environment (Strategic Policy)

A) Designated Heritage Assets

When considering proposals affecting a ~~all~~ designated heritage assets (including Listed Buildings, Historic Registered Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Monuments and Conservation Areas ~~or an~~ archaeological sites of national importance) or non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest, demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, great weight will be given to the assets conservation. Proposals should conserve those elements which contribute to ~~its~~ such assets significance, including any contribution made by ~~its~~ their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm. Proposals resulting in less than substantial harm to such elements designated heritage assets will be permitted only where this ~~harm~~ is clearly justified and outweighed by the public benefits of the proposal. Proposals resulting in substantial harm ~~to~~ or total loss ~~to~~ of the significance of a designated heritage asset (or an archaeological site of national importance) will only be permitted only in exceptional circumstances where this is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss, or, all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage assets prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and;
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back in to use.

Development involving the alteration, extension or change of use of a listed building or construction of any structure within its curtilage must:

- protect its significance as a listed building; and
- protect existing historic hard and soft landscaping features including trees, hedges, walls, fences and surfaces; and
- protect historic plot boundaries and layouts; and
- ensure the optimum viable use of the building, where appropriate.

Any development affecting the setting of a listed building will be permitted if the proposal conserves or enhances either its significance and/or the contribution its setting makes to its significance. Proposals involving the demolition of a listed building or structure within the curtilage of a listed building will not be permitted, except in exceptional circumstances as detailed in national policy.

Development will only be permitted in Parks and Gardens of National Interest where it cannot be accommodated elsewhere, is directly related to the conservation management of the park or garden, and does not harm those elements which contribute to its enjoyment, layout, design, character, appearance or setting (including key views from or towards the landscape).

B) Conservation Areas

In addition to the requirements in part A proposals affecting a conservation area, involving the alteration, extension or change of use of a building or construction of any structure should preserve and enhance those elements identified in any conservation area appraisal as making a positive contribution to the significance of that area. Special attention should be given to:

- i. existing architectural and historic character and associations by having regard to the positioning and grouping, form, scale, massing, detailing of development and the use of materials in its construction; and
- ii. existing hard and soft landscaping features including areas of open space, trees, hedges, walls, fences, watercourses and surfacing and the special character created by them; and
- iii. historic plot boundaries and layouts; and
- iv. the setting of the conservation area.

~~Built~~ Development will not be permitted that would lead to the loss of ~~on~~ public ~~and~~ or private open spaces within or adjacent to conservation areas where they the existing openness makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the area or its setting, as identified in the conservation area appraisal, including landscape and townscape and views ~~and vistas~~ into or from or within the conservation area, unless it can be demonstrated that the public benefit demonstrably outweighs the harm.

The demolition of buildings or structures in a conservation area will not be permitted if:

- v. the building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area (as identified within the conservation area appraisal); and
- vi. the structural condition of the building is repairable; and
- vii. there are no approved detailed plans for the redevelopment of the site and a contract has not been entered into for the implementation of that redevelopment; and
- viii. there has been insufficient consideration of other options to re-use the building in its current form.

C) Archaeological Sites

Proposals affecting archaeological sites of less than national importance should conserve those elements which contribute to their significance in line with the importance of the remains. In those cases where development affecting such sites is acceptable in principle, mitigation of damage will be ensured through preservation of the remains in situ as a preferred solution. When in situ preservation is not justified, the developer will be required to make adequate provision for excavation and recording before or during development. Subsequent analysis, publication and dissemination of the findings will be required to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority and deposited with the Historic Environment Record.

Development proposals involving ground disturbance in Areas of High Archaeological Potential (as identified in APPENDIX C), must be accompanied by an archaeological evaluation report. Householder development and extensions, and alterations to existing commercial premises of 40 metres squared or less, are exempt from this requirement unless the proposed development is likely to affect a Scheduled Monument.

Outside Areas of High Archaeological Potential, planning applications on sites of more than 1 hectare must be accompanied by an archaeological evaluation report, unless the area is already known to have been archaeologically sterilised by previous development (such as mineral extraction).

D) Non-Designated Heritage Assets

Proposals which would remove, harm or undermine the significance of a non-designated heritage asset will only be permitted where the benefits are considered to outweigh the harm ~~to the character of the local area~~. Proposals ~~must protect and enhance the~~ should seek to avoid harm to those

features, including setting, which contribute to the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, including its setting, through measures such as good design.

~~Applications involving the demolition of a non-designated heritage building or structure must demonstrate that there is no sustainable use of the building.~~

E) Heritage at Risk

Proposals that would help to safeguard the significance of and secure a sustainable future for Darlington's heritage assets, especially those identified as being at greatest risk of loss or decay, will be supported.

F) Securing the optimum viable use

If the existing or original use of a heritage asset is no longer viable development proposals will be required to secure the optimum viable alternative use consistent with its conservation.

9.1.13 The Council has a statutory duty to protect listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments. Great weight will be given to the conservation of heritage assets in line with national planning policy(35).

9.1.14 In addition to the Council's statutory obligations regarding the historic environment(36) , the Council will:

- a. Seek to identify, protect and enhance local heritage assets;
- b. Promote heritage-led regeneration, including in relation to development opportunities in Darlington's Town Centre Fringe and proposals in relation to the Stockton & Darlington Railway Heritage Action zone;
- c. Produce conservation area appraisals and management plans;
- d. Maintain its positive approach to safeguard the future of heritage assets at risk.
- e. Adopt a proactive approach utilising development opportunities to increase the promotion and understanding of the area's archaeology.

9.1.15 The Council will encourage developments promoting the educational, recreational and/or tourism potential of the locally distinct heritage, landmarks and historic villages of the Borough through sensitive management, enhancement and interpretation of these heritage assets as set out in the Visitor Economy strategy.

9.1.16 The Council will also seek to deliver the vision for Darlington's Town Centre Fringe over the plan period, to be transformed into a vibrant urban area with well-maintained historic buildings, exciting small scale modern development, a thriving tourism industry based on railway heritage and a healthy, accessible river, as set out in the Town Centre Fringe Conservation Management Plan.

35 Paragraphs 193 to 196 of the NPPF (Feb 2019).

36 Town and Country Planning Act 1990; Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; and, Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Area Act 1979.

- 9.1.17** A Heritage Impact Assessment has been produced to inform the Local Plan that assesses the suitability of a number of allocation sites from an historic environment perspective. Design and mitigation measures recommended by the assessment have been incorporated into the development criteria contained in APPENDIX B HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT ALLOCATION STATEMENTS and the policies for the Skertingham and Greater Faverdale strategic allocations.

Conservation Areas

- 9.1.18** In Conservation Areas particular attention must be given in all planning decisions to the desirability of conserving and enhancing a conservation area's significance. The Council will consider introducing Article 4 Directions where a conservation area is identified as 'At Risk' when annually surveyed by the Local Authority in conjunction with Historic England.
- 9.1.19** As part of the Council's positive strategy for the historic environment, it will prepare and review Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans for each conservation area, including any proposed new or extended areas, as the basis for determining proposals within or where it would affect the setting of conservation areas.

Listed Buildings

- 9.1.20** The Borough of Darlington is fortunate in having a large stock of important listed buildings within its boundary, including those associated with the early railways. A listed building can be any kind of structure, such as a signpost, postbox, bridge, or telephone kiosk, for example, and not necessarily a building.
- 9.1.21** Any changes affecting the character or appearance of a listed building are likely to require Listed Building Consent. For example historic fabric such as doors, windows, fireplaces and so on are important to the character of the building and consent is likely to be required for their alteration, removal or replacement. Applications for Listed Building Consent are dealt with by the Council's Planning Team, alongside applications for Planning Permission and other planning-related applications (e.g. proposals for a change of use, extension or other alteration to the envelope of the building, or development within its curtilage). It is always advisable to consult the Borough Council's Planning Services section before proceeding with any changes.

Archaeological Sites and Scheduled Monuments

- 9.1.22** Significant archaeology (designated and non-designated) in the Borough include those from the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval periods. New archaeological investigations and finds continue to be added to the Historic Environment Record(HER)allowing greater understanding of this element of the historic environment. Survey and recording prior to development is an important way of adding to the record, particularly in areas of known local historical interest, such as within designated Conservation Areas, and Areas of High Archaeological Potential (see APPENDIX C), where archaeological finds are more likely unless the area has already been archaeologically sterilised by an activity such as mineral extraction.
- 9.1.23** In line with national planning policy(37), applications for development involving ground disturbance within Areas of High Archaeological Potential will require the submission of an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation. Where archaeology is found to be present the Council will require a mitigation strategy involving

either preservation in situ, or excavation, analysis and reporting, or a combination of the two. Proposals affecting archaeological sites or monuments will only be approved where satisfactory mitigation measures can be implemented. Exemptions are made in Policy ENV 1 for small scale householder and commercial development that are unlikely to affect a Scheduled Monument.

- 9.1.24** Outside of the identified Areas of High Archaeological Potential, Durham County Council take the approach that an appropriate desk-based assessment ~~and, where necessary, field evaluation~~ is required for all development proposals affecting an area of 1 hectare or more, unless it is already known to have been archaeologically sterilised by previous development such as mineral extraction. Should the desk-based assessment identify archaeological potential, a geophysical survey should be undertaken to identify any unknown anomalies. Following the results of the geophysical survey targeted trial trenching may then be required. The reasoning underpinning this is that archaeological investigation and research in recent decades has shown right across the country that the number and geospatial density of archaeological sites is far higher than previously imagined and so the likelihood of encountering archaeology on a site of this size or larger has increased.

Historic Parks and Gardens

- 9.1.25** A Register of Parks and Gardens of "Special Historic Interest" is maintained by Historic England to encourage their protection and conservation but has no associated statutory controls. The two registered sites within Darlington Borough are both Grade II, and both publicly owned: South Park and West Cemetery.

Non-designated Heritage Assets

- 9.1.26** The significance, character and setting of heritage assets of local interest will be identified using the criteria provided at APPENDIX C and protected through the development management process (including pre-applications), through plan making (including neighbourhood plans), the production of Conservation Area Character Appraisals and Management Plans, and other Council activities.

Heritage at Risk

- 9.1.27** Heritage at Risk includes buildings, structures and sites whose preservation is threatened, often by vacancy or lack of regular repair and maintenance. Darlington Borough Council maintains a register of Grade II Listed Buildings at Risk (available online and on request). The ultimate responsibility for a historic building lies with its owner. However, the Council has the authority to issue enforcement notices to require necessary works to ensure a heritage asset is no longer at risk. These powers are used sparingly; it is in the best interests of all parties if work is carried out voluntarily and before emergency work is required. The Council adopts a proactive approach to heritage at risk by actively engaging in advice for proposals to enhance Heritage at Risk resulting in sustainable uses. Proposals that either secure the future of heritage at risk or prevent assets from becoming 'at risk' in the first place will be encouraged where the significance of the asset can be adequately protected. Securing the

Optimum Viable Use

- 9.1.28** For statutorily protected buildings, those within conservation areas and non-designated heritage assets, the Council will seek to secure the optimum viable use. Keeping a building in its original use is preferred, as it generally has the least impact on its character or

appearance. It may be converted to a new use, if it can be demonstrated that it will be consistent with its conservation and compatible with the significance and the setting of the historic building, and not detract from other evidential, historic, aesthetic or communal heritage values, or unless there are public benefits which outweigh the harm.

Assessment of Heritage Significance

- 9.1.29** The Council has a responsibility to consider whether a building or structure is a heritage asset, either designated or non-designated, when exercising its planning powers. In Darlington many heritage assets will be related to the railways, Quaker's and industry but there are assets that have other local significance. The Council intends to produce a Local List, with community involvement and support, that would also include the relevant content of adopted neighbourhood plans. In the meantime, the Council has published a Criteria for Assessing Non-Designated Heritage Assets, based on Historic England guidance. This will enable the identification of non-designated heritage assets as they are brought to the Council's attention, particularly when proposals to alter them are received. Developing community skills and building capacity to identify non-designated heritage assets will help the Council to proactively meet its statutory duties in this regard. The Council is looking at options to set up an interactive way for people to nominate local heritage as well as comment on those put forward by the Council.
- 9.1.30** National planning policy(38) requires applicants to assess the significance of heritage assets likely to be affected by a proposal including any contribution made by its setting(39) and the impact of development on them. Further information is available on the Council's website to assist in compiling an assessment of significance. This should be submitted in a Heritage Statement or Heritage Impact Assessment. Potential developers are advised to contact the Council in advance to find out what level of detail will be required, as this will vary for the type and size of proposal, and the number and significance of heritage assets likely to be affected. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

Planning Applications

- 9.1.31** Permission will not be granted for applications which are not fully justified and accompanied by the information necessary to fully assess the impact of the proposal on the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset or assets. Proposals that affect heritage assets should be accompanied a Heritage Impact Assessment to demonstrate that the architectural and historic interest of the structure has been understood and accounted for in any proposals. Proposals that affect assets of the highest significance should also be accompanied by a Statement of Significance(40) , which may form part of a Design and Access Statement.
- 9.1.32** Where permission is granted for a development which would result in the total or partial loss of a designated heritage asset, approval will be conditional upon the asset being fully recorded and the record and commentary deposited with the Local Planning Authority and the Historic Environment Record.

38 Paragraph 189 of the NPPF (Feb 2019).

39 Historic England defines the setting of a heritage asset as "The surroundings in which a place is experienced, its local context, embracing present and past relationships to the adjacent landscape".

40 As defined in paragraph 194 b) of the NPPF (Feb 2019).

Protecting, Enhancing and Promoting the Stockton and Darlington Railway

9.2.1 The route of the Stockton and Darlington Railway through the Borough is mostly intact and still serves a transport function. The route includes several important structures, but only some, such as the scheduled Skerne Bridge, have statutory protection. The area around North Road Railway Station and within the Northgate Conservation Area has a particular concentration of railway heritage, including the Museum, Carriage Works, Lime Cells and Goods Shed and associated Victorian residential terraces. In addition to designated assets, Westbrook Villas, the Coal Drops to the rear of Westbrook Villas and the Railway Tavern Public House on Northgate are examples of non-designated assets to be found in the Borough with strong links to the town's railway heritage.

Policy ENV 2

Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR) (Strategic Policy)

Proposals which will conserve and enhance elements which contribute to the significance of the Stockton and Darlington Railway and its setting, including its trackbed and branchlines, will be supported.

Proposals will be supported where they include measures that preserve any physical remains along the route, include site interpretation and where appropriate reinstate a legible route where those remains no longer exist.

Development proposals that support the development of the S&DR as a visitor attraction including the creation of walking and cycling paths along its route will be encouraged.

9.2.2 Where a development is on or within 50 metres of the trackbed, or relates to a designated or non-designated heritage asset associated with the route, The 1825 Stockton and Darlington Railway: Historic Environment Audit should inform proposals and accompanying Heritage Statements and Heritage Impact Assessments.

9.2.3 In partnership with Historic England, Durham County Council, Stockton Borough Council and other key stakeholders, the Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone initiative (2018-2023) will provide greater understanding of significance through historic area assessments, historic buildings assessments and archaeological investigations. Proposals for development associated with the S&DR must be informed by any research undertaken as part of the Heritage Action Zone, and subsequent planning documents, adopted by the Council.

9.2.4 The Council, with its partners, will develop further planning guidance, including a Conservation Management Plan, to ensure the protection, enhancement and promotion of this locally distinct and nationally significant heritage asset in advance of the 2025 bicentenary celebrations.

9.2.5 It is the long term aspiration to create a walking and cycling route along the full 26 mile route of the Stockton and Darlington Railway along with providing associated interpretation, opening up the route for leisure and tourist visits, and as an education resource.

Local Landscape Character

9.3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates that valued landscapes should be protected and enhanced. The Darlington Local Plan protects and seeks to appropriately enhance the distinctive character of the Borough's natural and historic townscapes and landscapes, including unique features like rural gaps, green wedges, green corridors, historic routes and parklands. However, there are some parts of the inner urban area where landscape or townscape quality could be improved, in particular to better promote Darlington's railway heritage (see Policy ENV 2).

- 9.3.2** All perform an important role in helping to keep the permanence of the landscape over the plan period particularly by protecting the Borough's settlement pattern and maintaining the openness between different neighbourhoods, so that each keeps their unique identity. As the Borough continues to grow each feature will in different ways help safeguard the identity of communities, particularly in areas that face growth pressures.

Policy ENV 3

Local Landscape Character (Strategic Policy)

The character and local distinctiveness of the urban area, villages and rural area will be protected and improved by:

- A) Retaining the openness and green infrastructure functions of:
1. The rural gaps, between Middleton St George and Middleton One Row, Middleton St George and Oak Tree, Hurworth on Tees and Hurworth Place, and between Darlington and the villages of Great Burdon and Barmpton; and
 2. The green wedges of Cocker Beck/Mowden, Blackwell/Skerne Park and Haughton/Red Hall. Within these areas, development will only be permitted where it:
 - i. Protects and enhances the landscape character, setting and identity of the area;
 - ii. Enhances biodiversity value by promoting protected and priority habitats and species;
 - iii. Retains connectivity within the green infrastructure network; and
 - iv. Is ancillary to a green infrastructure use.or:
 - v. The development proposed is for limited infilling on previously developed land, which would not have greater impact on the openness of the landscape than the existing development.
- B) Retaining and enhancing the length, continuity, biodiversity, amenity and heritage value of:
1. The ~~existing strategic and local~~ green corridors and their ~~buffer zones~~ in line with Policy ENV 4; and
 2. The historic routes of the Darlington/Middleton St George/A66/A67/ Stockton Corridor, the Former Barnard Castle Trackbed, Salters Lane, Honeypot Lane, Nunnery Lane and Cemetery Lane.

Development that adjoins these corridors and routes should:

- i. Positively respond to the landscape setting;
 - ii. Conserve and enhance traditional landscape features including ancient and semi-natural woodland and hedgerows;
 - iii. Retain and support their connectivity for people, habitats and wildlife;
 - iv. Protect and enhance their ecological and heritage value in accordance with Policies ENV 1, ENV 2, and ENV 7; and
 - v. Incorporate appropriate interpretation for ecological and heritage features.
- C) Retaining and improving the special landscape, heritage and ecological qualities of urban and rural parklands at South Park, North Lodge Park, West Cemetery, Blackwell Grange, Rockcliffe Park, Middleton Hall, Walworth Castle, Redworth Hall, Hall Garth, Newbus Grange and Neasham Hall.
- D) Protecting and enhancing the natural quality of the rural landscape, where appropriate, reinstating traditional natural and built features.
- E) Seeking high quality design in areas of low landscape quality in the urban area, to strengthen local character and distinctiveness, ~~in accordance with~~ having regard to the Darlington Characterisation Study, Darlington Landscape Character Assessment and the Revised Design of New Development SPD, or their subsequent replacement.

- 9.3.3** Rural gaps have allowed more than one village to develop separately but nearby over time, for many years. Today these relatively small gaps remain important to the rural settlement pattern, to the character of the rural area and to its residents. This policy together with Policy H 7, will protect the rural gaps, conserving the character, openness and links to the wider landscape in order to maintain the attractiveness of the Borough's settlements and their settings.
- 9.3.4** The three green wedges, identified in the Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy, extend to the proposed development limit of the main urban area to ensure that their land uses, landscape components, openness, topography, nature of their urban edges and their relationship and importance to the character of Darlington is protected and appropriately enhanced.
- 9.3.5** ~~Local Green Spaces are a relatively new designation; national planning policy indicates that they should be close to the community they serve, be local in character, have significance because of attractiveness, heritage, recreational or biodiversity value, not be extensive in size and complement investment in homes, jobs and essential services. But their primary role is to maintain the openness and permanence of the landscape.~~
- 9.3.5** The ~~existing strategic and~~ local green corridors identified in Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy have a unique character that contributes to the identity and setting of adjoining neighbourhoods, such as the River Tees and the former Darlington and Stockton Railway corridor. Their length, distinctiveness and ~~buffer zones~~ width vary (see Policy ENV 7). A number are also historic routes, that have historically connected nearby towns, villages, hamlets and scattered farms to the market town of Darlington, and provide insights into the past. Some, like Cemetery Lane, have kept much of their original width and features including walls and gateposts, others like Salters Lane have original hedgerows, ditches and banks in places.
- 9.3.6** Within and adjacent to these routes development should reflect variations in the local landscape character by enhancing local distinctiveness, guided by the Revised Design of New Development SPD and Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy, or their replacement. The use of interpretation and public art to provide greater understanding of ecological and heritage features will be supported.
- 9.3.7** The Borough has eleven historic ornamental parklands. The Local Plan seeks to protect and enhance the integrity and landscape quality of the seven rural parks and four urban parks. Any national and local designated features within their boundaries will be protected through national legislation and national planning guidance (see Policy ENV 1).
- 9.3.8** The rural landscape is characterised by mostly open, arable farmland with a mix of unique landforms, including ditches and cuts, village greens and in places traditional field patterns, hedgerows and wetlands. All help distinguish the rural area from the rest of the Borough, and so will be protected through this policy.
- 9.3.9** There are landscapes and townscapes in the Borough which detract from or do little to positively contribute to the Borough's attractive and distinctive character. If not addressed, these areas can adversely affect the image of the Borough and its attractiveness to businesses and investors. Development in these areas should include environmental quality improvements to restore or enhance the local landscape or townscape and help attract investment to the Borough, informed by the Darlington Characterisation Study, Landscape Character Assessment and the Revised Design of New Development SPD, or their replacement. Within the rural area, natural features such as hedgerows, field margins and wetlands should be re-created where appropriate.
- 9.3.10** As Darlington's unique environment contributes much to its distinctiveness, and that this is an objective of the Local Plan, the following policy identifies the key elements of the existing townscape and landscape that will be prioritised for protection and enhancement to help safeguard the distinctive environment of the Borough. Together with more specific detailed

documents such as the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan, it will also help attract public sector funding and other investment to the Borough.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

9.4.1 Darlington benefits from an extensive green and blue infrastructure network; its multi-functional green spaces, green corridors, rivers and watercourses provide links within the Borough and to the rest of the Tees Valley, Durham and North Yorkshire. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, a landscape scale approach to green infrastructure will be adopted, using and managing land for what it is best suited to. Through investment, management and maintenance across the network, priority projects will be delivered that will make more of the network so that a range of green and blue infrastructure needs are delivered in each local area, and in the Borough, as a whole.

9.4.2 Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy facilitates the planning, design and management of the network to meet the environmental, social and economic needs of the community; by supporting recreation, sport and play, walking and cycling, food production, flood storage and sustainable drainage benefits (see Policy DC 3) as well as the biodiversity and geological features that are found within it (see Policy ENV 7). It can also contribute to achieving the appropriate sustainable building standards (see Policy DC 1) required in new developments and enhance amenity for residents (see Policy DC3).

9.4.3 The Green Infrastructure network in Darlington is made up of numerous public and private green spaces, landscapes and features (see Figure 9.1 taken from Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy) including:

- ~~Strategic and local~~ Green corridors;
- Green wedges (see Policy ENV 3);
- Wildlife friendly green space, including designated wildlife sites⁽⁴¹⁾;
- Informal recreational open space, children's play areas and landscape amenity space;
- Playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities;
- Formal parks, cemeteries and civic spaces;
- Trees, woodland and community woodland;
- Urban fringe;
- Agricultural land;
- Public rights of way and wider countryside access; and
- Open countryside.

41 In Darlington designated wildlife sites include Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Local Nature Reserves (LNR) and Local Wildlife Sites (LWS).