

11.6 The connectivity, quality, and accessibility of green and blue spaces within South Tyneside are essential to ensuring that residents also benefit from these environments. Maintaining a well-planned and strategic network of green-blue infrastructure assets can help to deliver a range of sustainability targets. It can also help to improve the quality of environments by providing attractive and desirable spaces where communities want to live and can assist regeneration within South Tyneside. Furthermore, green and blue space can provide opportunities for sport and recreation which can support active lifestyle choices and improve the health and mental wellbeing of residents.

Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Ecological Networks

Policy 33: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Ecological Networks

1. To ensure the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, geodiversity, and ecological networks, development shall:
 - i. Avoid and minimise adverse impacts upon priority species and habitats and geodiversity in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy
 - ii. Secure effective compensation for unavoidable impacts and residual losses
2. For development which is likely to adversely affect priority species and habitats and/or geodiversity, planning conditions and/or obligations will be sought to secure the provision, maintenance and monitoring of appropriate mitigation, compensation and/or enhancement measures.

11.7 To protect biodiversity, geodiversity and ecological networks from inappropriate development and harm, the following principles of the mitigation hierarchy will be applied when determining planning applications:

- **Avoidance**

Avoiding adverse effects through good design should be the primary objective of any proposal. This may be achieved through the selection of alternative designs, alterations to site layout, or by selecting an alternative site where no harm to biodiversity would occur.

- **Mitigation**

Adverse effects that cannot be avoided should be adequately mitigated. Mitigation measures minimise the negative impacts of a development, examples include using pollution interceptors to minimise pollution of water courses or timing vegetation clearance to limit impacts on species. Mitigation measures should be secured through planning conditions or obligations and agreed with the Council and any other relevant bodies.

- **Compensation**

Compensatory measures are required for residual losses that cannot be adequately avoided or mitigated and should be used as a last resort in agreement with external decision-makers. If compensating for losses is not possible within the development footprint, or will not generate the most benefits for nature, off site compensatory measures will be required.

11.8 Where harm from a proposed development cannot be addressed through the mitigation hierarchy, permission will be refused. The mitigation hierarchy reflects paragraph 180 (a) of the NPPF (2023). The requirement to provide biodiversity net gain is in addition to any mitigation measures required to address potential harm created as a result of the development. Therefore, Biodiversity Net Gain requirements should only be applied after the

mitigation hierarchy has been addressed. Regard should be had to Policy 35 the emerging Biodiversity guidance on the application of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Internationally, Nationally and Locally Important Sites

Policy 34: Internationally, Nationally and Locally Important Sites

Internationally Important Sites

1. Priority will be given to protecting the borough's internationally important sites as defined on the Policies Map:
 - i. Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
 - ii. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
 - iii. Ramsar sites
 - iv. Any potential Special Protection Areas (SPAs), candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or proposed Ramsar sites

Development considered to result in a likely significant effect on these sites, irrespective of its location, and when considered both alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will be subject to an Appropriate Assessment

2. Development requiring Appropriate Assessment will only be allowed where it can be determined that the development and its necessary mitigation would not result in adverse effects on the site's integrity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Where this requirement cannot be robustly

demonstrated, development will only be considered acceptable where it meets the following criteria:

- i. there are no suitable alternatives
 - ii. the development is of overriding public interest and appropriate compensatory measures are provided
3. Mitigation proposals will need to be agreed with the Council, in consultation with relevant statutory consultees

Recreational Disturbance

1. All development for residential use (Use Class Order C3 or C4), including Change of Use and Prior Notifications within 7.2km of the Durham Coast Special Area of Conservation and Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area, as defined on the Policies Map, shall:
 - i. contribute to strategic recreational disturbance mitigation, as identified in the most up to date Mitigation Strategy or any successor document; or
 - ii. Agree alternative mitigation measures in agreement with the council and statutory consultees.
2. Proposals for leisure and tourism developments that have the potential to result in a likely significant effect on SPA/ SAC coastal designations will be required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment. Where recreational disturbance is identified as a likely significant effect, proposals shall, where applicable:

- i. contribute to strategic recreational disturbance mitigation, as identified in the most up to date Mitigation Strategy or any successor document; or
- ii. Agree alternative mitigation measures in agreement with the council and statutory consultees.

Nationally Important Sites

1. Development that is likely to have an adverse impact on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as defined on the Policies Map, including broader impacts on the national network and the combined effects with other development, will not normally be allowed. Where an adverse effect on the Site's notified features of interest is likely; the Council will only support an exception where the applicant can demonstrate that:

- i. The benefits of the development clearly outweigh both likely impact on the features of the site that makes it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the network of SSSIs
- ii. No reasonable alternatives are available
- iii. The appropriate level of mitigation, and/or, where necessary, the appropriate level of compensation, is provided to redress the impact

Locally Important Sites

1. Development that is likely to have an adverse impact on Local Sites (Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geodiversity Sites) or Local Nature Reserves as

defined on the Policies Map, will only be considered acceptable where it can be demonstrated that:

- i. The benefits clearly outweigh any significant adverse impact on the site
 - ii. No reasonable alternatives are available
 - iii. Mitigation, and/or where necessary compensation, is provided for the impact
2. Development proposals that would have a significant adverse impact on the value and integrity of a Wildlife Corridor, as defined on the Policies Map, will only be permitted where suitable mitigation and/or compensation, is provided to retain and where possible enhance the value and integrity of the corridor.

11.9 South Tyneside has several internationally, nationally and locally important sites. The Council has shown the international and national designations on the Policies Map for reference. The designation and mapped boundaries of these sites are set by other organisations.

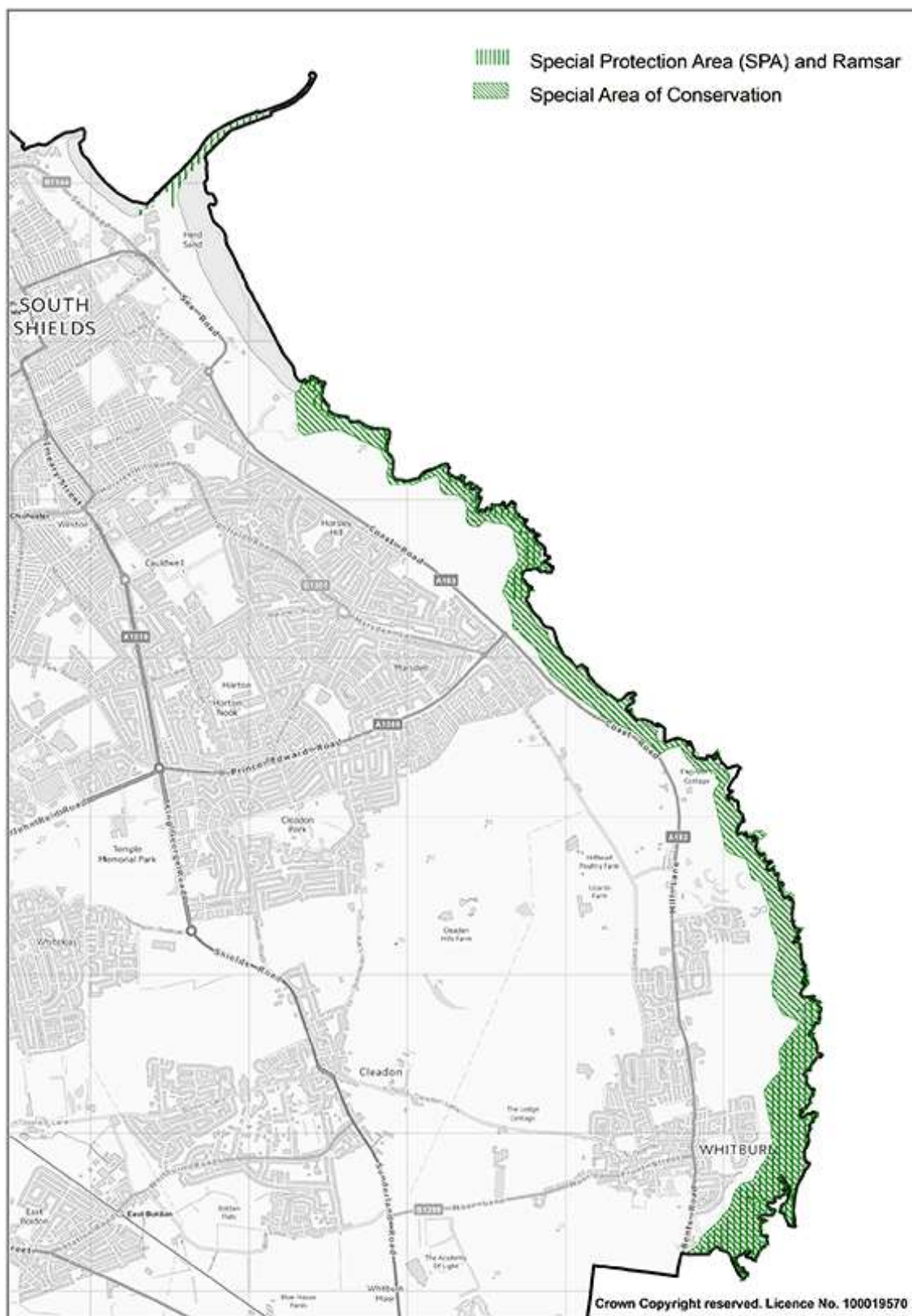
International Designations

11.10 Within South Tyneside there are three internationally important designations, known as Habitats sites:

- Durham Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Northumbria Coast Ramsar Site

11.11 Habitats sites are defined in the NPPF as: “Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites”.

Conserving and enhancing the Natural Environment



Map 27: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

11.12 The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 requires a Habitats Regulations Assessment

(HRA) to be undertaken to establish whether likely significant effects are likely to occur. The process involves an initial Screening stage followed by an Appropriate Assessment (AA). Development will not be permitted unless it can show it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the designated site, whether direct or indirect, having regard to avoidance or mitigation measures.

11.13 Land beyond the boundaries of the Habitats sites may be defined as functional land, where there is an identified functional link between the site and the qualifying species for which the SPA/SAC has been designated. Functional land is considered to contribute to maintaining the designated site or supporting the protected populations' favourable conservation status. Proposals affecting functional land may also be subject to an HRA/AA.

11.14 Proposals for any development within 400m of the Habitats sites are likely to cause additional effects which may be detrimental to the integrity of the site. Effects generated from the proposed use of the site and from the construction process may also need to be considered through Appropriate Assessment at the planning application stage. It is strongly advised that applicants for any development proposals within 400m of a Habitats site should contact the Local Planning Authority for further guidance.

Recreational Disturbance – residential development

11.15 All residential developments within 7.2 km of the Durham Coast Special Area of Conservation and Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area and Ramsar site are considered to have a likely significant effect on the integrity of the site through increased recreational use of the coastline.

11.16 Where proposals for residential development are within the 7.2km threshold, or for any other proposal which is likely to have a significant effect on any Habitats site, applicants are advised to contact the LPA for advice prior to submission of a planning application.

11.17 All new residential developments (Use Class C3 and C4, Change of Use to C3/C4) and Prior Notifications will be expected to contribute towards strategic mitigation measures as set out in the most up to date Mitigation Strategy or successor document, unless suitable alternative mitigation measures can be agreed with the Council in consultation with relevant statutory consultees. The emerging South Tyneside Recreational Mitigation Strategy identifies C3 dwelling house extension and Residential institutions (Use Class C2/C2A) as potentially resulting in recreational disturbance effects. These development proposals will be reviewed on a case-by case basis.

11.18 Ongoing monitoring of visitors at the coast will help inform and review the 7.2km zone of influence. The application of the zone should be informed by the latest evidence to ensure likely significant effects are identified and mitigation secured.

Recreational Disturbance – leisure and tourism developments

11.19 Leisure and tourism developments within the 7.2km threshold which have the potential to increase recreational use of the Habitats sites, will also be required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment and, where appropriate, provide suitable mitigation. Early consultation with the Local Planning Authority is advised. The emerging South Tyneside Recreational Mitigation Strategy identifies the following development types as possibly resulting in likely significant effects for recreational disturbance:

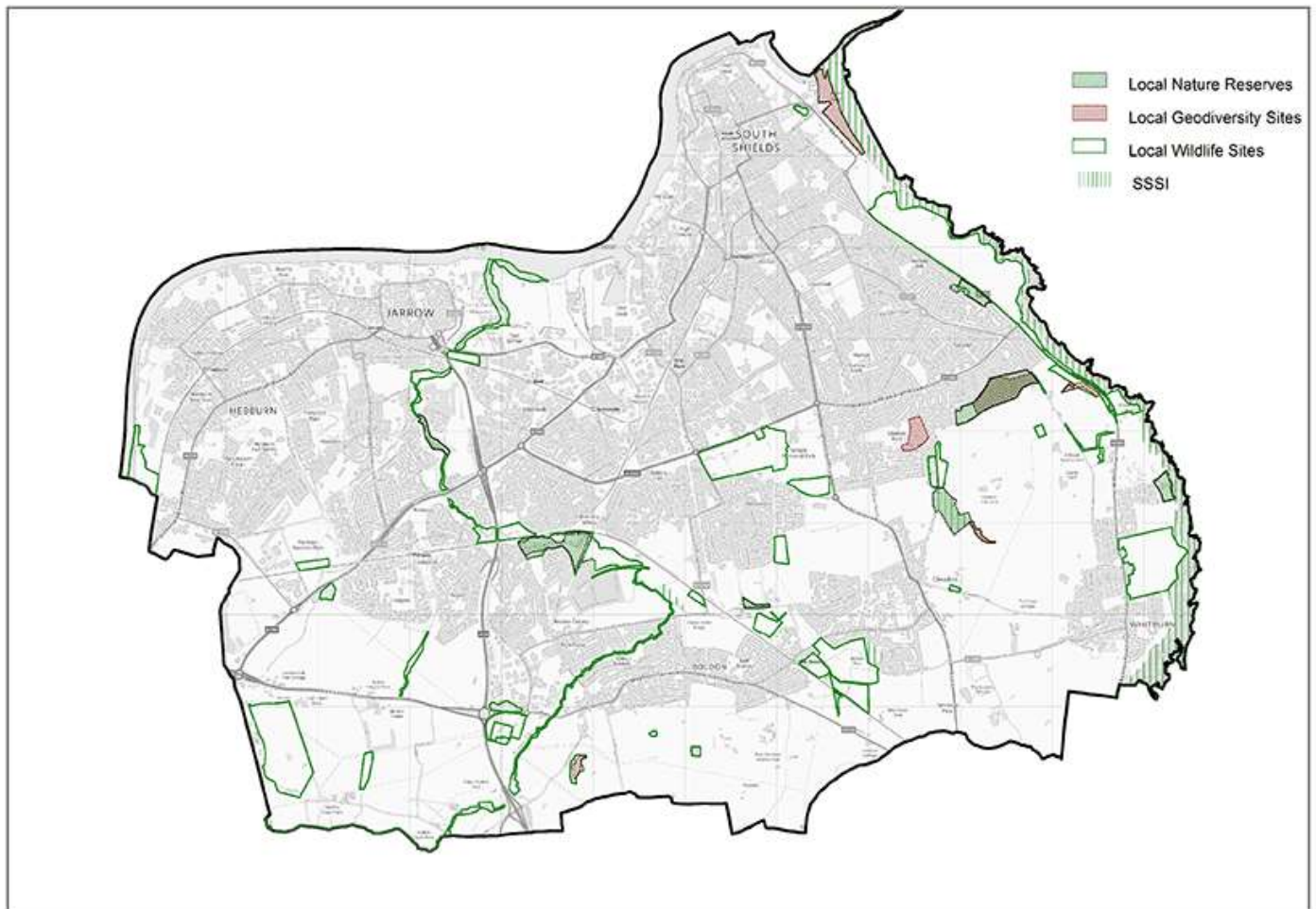
- Hotels (Use class C1)
- Holiday dwellings (Sui Generis)
- Café/ food outlet
- Visitor attractions

11.20 Development proposals within the 7.2km threshold for the above developments will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to consider links and effects on the coast and to identify whether there is a likely significant effect from recreational disturbance. Where effects are identified, proposals will be expected to contribute to strategic recreational disturbance mitigation.

11.21 Where, in agreement with the council, the only identified likely significant effect is recreational disturbance which can be addressed via a financial contribution to strategic mitigation, a full Appropriate Assessment will not be required to be submitted.

11.22 If an applicant chooses to present a proposal with individual measures that seek to avoid and mitigate for recreational pressure, they must provide robust evidence that allows the Council to determine whether the adverse effects on the Habitats Site's integrity has been prevented. It should be recognised that the package of measures funded by the implementation of a mitigation strategy are designed to work together to give certainty that adverse effects will be prevented into the long term.

11.23 Where the requirements of the Habitats Regulations are met, any sites secured as compensation for adverse effects on a Habitats site will be given the same protection as the Habitats sites themselves. Residential development would be unlikely to pass an imperative reasons of public interest (IROPI) test, as it can be located elsewhere.



Map 28: National and Local Designations

National and Local Designations

11.24 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) form a network of nationally designated sites which also underpin sites designated to meet international obligations. There are five SSSIs in South Tyneside. At the time of writing there are 52 Local Wildlife Sites, 6 Local Geodiversity Sites and 7 Local Nature Reserves covering over 500 hectares, all of which contribute to environmental quality and sense of place.

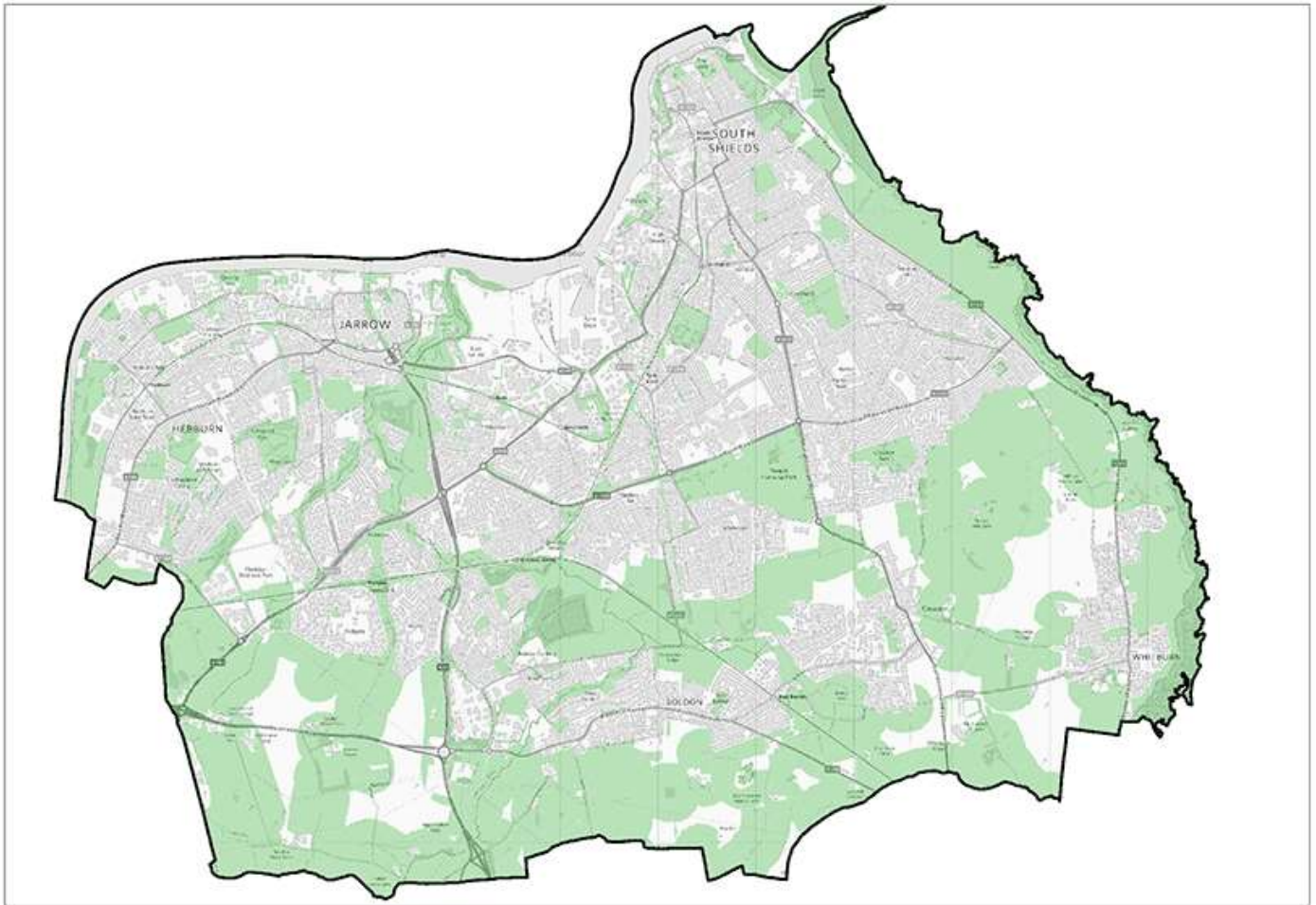
11.25 Local Wildlife Sites are not allocated through the planning process and site boundaries and designations may change within the Plan period. For the purposes of the Policies Map, current existing Local Wildlife Sites are illustrated. To ensure that Local Wildlife Sites are fully considered as part of any planning application, developers are advised to contact the local records

centre, ERIC NE (Environmental Records Information Centre North East), for up-to-date information.

11.26 Regard should also be had to any future Nature Recovery Strategies which are introduced over the Plan period.

11.27 Ecological networks comprising designated sites, other habitats, and wildlife corridors and steppingstones are necessary to maintain and enhance biodiversity and prevent fragmentation and loss of connectivity. This is essential if species are to adapt to climate change and if a net gain in biodiversity is to be achieved.

11.28 The NPPF requires Local Plans to identify and map wider ecological networks, wildlife corridors and steppingstones. The Wildlife Corridors Network Review (2020) identifies the ecological network throughout South Tyneside, Gateshead and Sunderland. The review identifies wildlife corridors made up of core sites, secondary features, stepping stones and buffers which are components of the wildlife corridor and contribute to the ecological network. The wildlife corridors are identified in Inset .



Map 29: Wildlife Corridors

11.29 Local Wildlife Sites are areas of land that are especially important for their wildlife. They are identified and selected locally using scientifically determined criteria and are some of our most valuable wildlife areas. As South Tyneside is such an urban borough there are already significant pressures on our Local Wildlife Sites, it is therefore important to protect such sites of identified ecologically quality from further adverse impacts. Developments should minimise impacts on wildlife corridors, and provide net gains for biodiversity, including by developing these ecological networks whilst ensuring they are more resilient to current and future pressures. Where significant harm cannot be avoided, suitable alternative locations must be considered.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Policy 35: Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain

1. Biodiversity Net Gain shall be secured and delivered in accordance with the statutory framework and shall maximise opportunities for the enhancement of ecological networks within South Tyneside and/or the South of Tyne and Wear Local Nature Recovery Strategy Area, and, where appropriate, support nature-based solutions to climate change.
2. Where ecologically appropriate Biodiversity Net Gain is demonstrated not to be deliverable onsite, the applicant shall prioritise the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain off-site in accordance with the following locational hierarchy:
 - a. Within the strategic nature recovery network within South Tyneside.
 - b. Within South Tyneside, outside of the strategic nature recovery network.
 - c. Within the wider South of Tyne and Wear Local Nature Recovery Strategy Area.
 - d. Within Gateshead or Sunderland, outside the strategic nature recovery network
 - e. Within a neighbouring Local Nature Recovery Strategy area, preferentially within the strategic nature recovery network.
 - f. Within a neighbouring National Character Area
3. Applicants relying on delivery of off-site Biodiversity Net Gain shall demonstrate to the Local Planning Authority they have used reasonable endeavours to secure that Gain in the most sequentially preferable location as set out in the above hierarchy, before

moving onto the next most preferable location. Ecological justification, including submission of supporting evidence, will be required to demonstrate where provision of BNG is not practicable in accordance with the above hierarchy.

4. Only where it can be demonstrated that there is no feasible possibility of delivering compensation within the locational hierarchy as set out in Section 2, will the purchase of national credits will be considered an appropriate means of delivering Biodiversity Net Gain.

11.30 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is the achievement of measurable gains for biodiversity through new development and occurs when a development leaves biodiversity in a better state than before development. Biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). The principle of BNG is also set out in the NPPF 2023 which states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity.

11.31 Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, every non-exempt grant of planning permission is required to deliver at least a 10% increase in relation to the pre-development biodiversity value of the development granted permission. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits.

11.32 Policy 35 sets out the expected delivery of BNG in the borough. It seeks to maximise opportunities for the delivery of BNG as close to the development site as possible. Onsite BNG must be appropriate and realistic, taking into account how any publicly accessible areas may be used and the impact that may have on the condition and ecological functionality of the habitat. Whilst onsite

BNG should be prioritised, it is considered likely that most significant BNG will need to be delivered offsite.

11.33 Policy 35 provides the locational hierarchy as to where South Tyneside Council would expect off-site Biodiversity Net Gain shall be delivered, with locations falling in subparagraph a) being the most preferable, and those falling within subparagraph f) the least).

11.34 The strategic network as referred to in Policy 35 is considered to be the Wildlife Corridor Network as identified in Inset Map 29, or the Local Nature Recovery Strategy within South Tyneside once confirmed. The delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain within this area will receive a higher biodiversity value in the biodiversity metric than they would in other locations as they are considered to be in a more strategic location for nature recovery. It is considered that where desirable, BNG enhancements should seek to enhance and support green and blue infrastructure networks within South Tyneside.

11.35 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a new England-wide system of spatial strategies that will establish priorities and map proposals for specific actions to drive nature's recovery and provide wider environmental benefits. South Tyneside is part of the South of Tyne & Wear LNRS area with Gateshead and Sunderland. The Council will work closely with all local authorities within the common LNRS area to plan effectively for the recovery of biodiversity across the area and direct action and resources to where they will achieve the greatest benefit for nature.

11.36 South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead Councils are working together on a common guidance to support the assessment and delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain. This will give clarity to applicants about what must be submitted as part of a planning application and will set out the Councils' approach to securing BNG through development.

Trees and Hedgerows

Policy 36: Protecting Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

1. Trees, woodland and hedges shall be protected and suitably retained as an integral part of the design of the development.
2. Proposals for new development which would result in unacceptable harm due to the loss of trees, woodland and/or hedgerows will not be permitted, unless it can be demonstrated that:
 - i. An overriding need for development and public benefit clearly outweighs harm to the landscape, ecological value, or the historical importance of the location, or
 - ii. Development cannot be relocated elsewhere within the development site, or
 - iii. Suitable mitigation and enhancement measures are provided and agreed with the council.
3. Where development would involve the loss of ancient or veteran trees it will be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists.
4. Proposals for new development must include new trees and landscape features which:
 - i. Enhance the landscape quality of the development site and the local area
 - ii. Enhance biodiversity and connectivity within the Wildlife Corridors; and

iii. Provide multifunctional environment benefits

11.37 Trees and hedges play an important role in supporting the natural environment and wildlife habitats. They make a significant contribution to mitigating the effects of climate change, provide key, such as controlling flood risk, temperature reduction and sequestration of residual carbon, and improving green corridors which allow wildlife to travel between key sites. Trees and hedges also add to the character, appearance and distinctiveness of the local area, and their presence can have a significant and positive effect on the local landscape character.

11.38 Where the loss of trees can be demonstrated in accordance with 2(i-iii), and accepted on balance, applicants will be required to provide suitable replacements with adequate provision for maintenance and long-term establishment, including underground rooting infrastructure where appropriate. Replacements shall be planted within the site unless the developer can show exceptional circumstances to support providing the replacement provision elsewhere. In such circumstances off site provision will be secured via planning contributions

11.39 Developments should ensure that new streets are tree lined. Trees and hedges, including younger specimens that have the potential to add significant value to the landscape character in the future, should be retained as part of any proposed development and reflected in the proposed development layout.

11.40 Development affecting trees on or adjacent to the development site will be required as part of the planning application to undertake a tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment, potentially leading to a tree protection plan and method statement. Surveys and arboricultural impact assessments must be prepared in accordance with British Standard 5837: Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction, Recommendations (2012), or its successor. This information should

guide feasibility and concept design and specify appropriate tree and hedge retention and protection measures, that will allow existing trees and hedges to be sustained in the long term.

11.41 Where the loss of a tree or trees is accepted, the applicant should endeavour to replace the lost vegetation on the development site to enhance the character and biodiversity value of the area. Only in exceptional circumstance, where the applicant has clearly demonstrated that this cannot be achieved onsite, would it be considered acceptable to plant elsewhere. In these circumstances a financial contribution towards the planting of trees off site will be required to meet the requirements of this policy.

11.42 As a member of the North East Community Forest (NECF), South Tyneside Council is committed to enhancing woodland and increasing its canopy cover, guided by a local forest plan. Where appropriate, development should enhance tree and hedge coverage on sites by planting trees and hedges in line with guidance provided by the NECF and forest plan. The type and quantity of trees should be carefully considered in line with good arboricultural practice and with regard to a changing climate and the need to provide mitigation for that change. Furthermore, planting should be designed in a way to allow sufficient space for new trees to grow to maturity, both above and below ground.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

Policy SP22: Green and Blue Infrastructure

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Network, as identified on the Policies Map, will be high quality, attractive, well managed, resilient and multifunctional. It will deliver a range of social, economic, health and environmental benefits for all by:

1. Maximising the role of Green and Blue Infrastructure to reduce place inequalities and enhancing access for all communities across the borough;

2. Working with natural processes to improve quality river and coastal waters and protecting the borough's vulnerable coastal habitats;
3. Supporting the recovery of the borough's nationally and locally designated sites and supporting the Local Nature Recovery Strategy;
4. Enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure opportunities for regeneration and wider economic growth;
5. Utilising the Green and Blue Infrastructure Network to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

New Development shall support and enhance the identified South Tyneside green and blue infrastructure network by:

6. Incorporating existing and/or new green and blue infrastructure within the design to ensure proposals are integrated into the surrounding area and enhance the wider green and blue infrastructure network. Where relevant, development proposals shall strengthen green and blue infrastructure connections with neighbouring authorities.
7. Ensuring new Green and Blue Infrastructure provision is resilient to the effects of climate change and supports opportunities for nature-based climate change adaptation and mitigation
8. Where there is an identified need, developer contributions will be sought to improve the quality, use and value of the green and blue infrastructure network

11.43 Green and Blue Infrastructure is a network of multifunctional green space and environmental assets which can deliver a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Protecting and enhancing the borough's Green and Blue Infrastructure network is essential to delivering a high quality and sustainable environment within South Tyneside. Green and Blue Infrastructure can include parks, private gardens, allotments, hedges, roadside verges, rivers, streams and ponds.

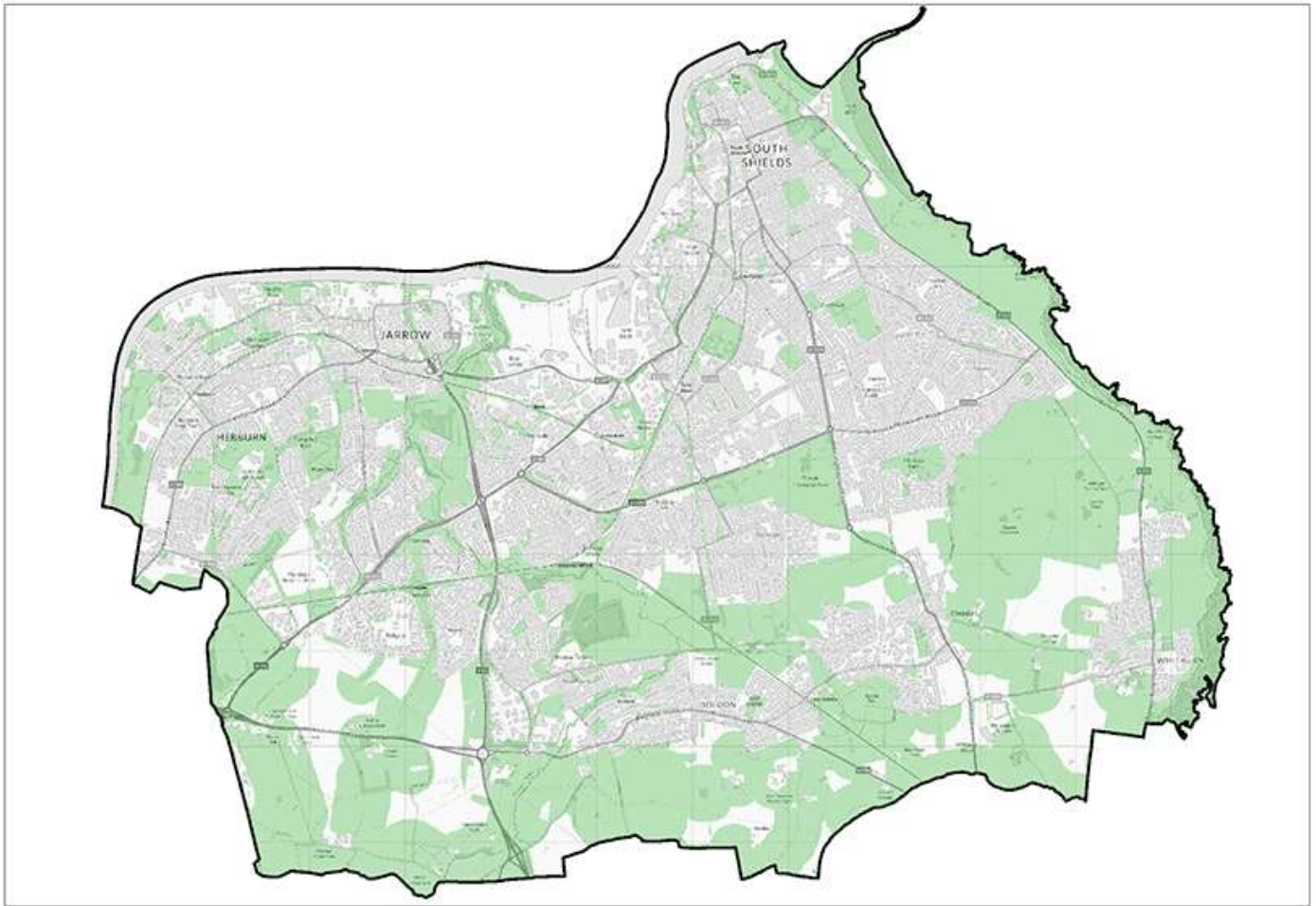
11.44 Green and Blue Infrastructure can contribute to the long-term sustainability of the borough by providing resources to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and flooding. It can also maintain and enhance the natural environment by strengthening wildlife corridors and protecting biodiversity assets.

11.45 New Green and Blue infrastructure provision should be resilient to the effects of climate change and provide opportunities to mitigate impacts; this can include increasing tree cover and other Green and Blue Infrastructure features to provide shade and reduce flood risk and prioritising nature-based solutions to flooding and coastal resilience.

11.46 Developments should prioritise Green and Blue Infrastructure at the design stage and consider the connections between the development and the wider Green and Blue Infrastructure network. Development can provide opportunities to create new Green and Blue Infrastructure assets and corridors; as well as strengthening the existing network. Well thought out, onsite Green and Blue Infrastructure provision can improve the quality and attractiveness of a site and help to mitigate the overall impact of the development.

11.47 The South Tyneside Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy (2023) Improvement Zones which are areas of Green and Blue Infrastructure deficit. To ensure the borough's Green and Blue Infrastructure network continues to provide good quality and accessible green spaces, developer contributions will be sought to help improve the existing Green and Blue Infrastructure network

and support the delivery of new projects within the Improvement Zones.



Map 30: Strategic Green - Blue Infrastructure Network

New and existing open space provision

Policy 37: Protecting and enhancing Open Spaces

Existing Open Space and Playing Fields

1. Designated areas of open space (as shown on the Policies Map) will be protected and enhanced.
Development proposals that would result in the loss