

# **Green Infrastructure assessment**

**Whitburn Neighbourhood Forum**

**August 2021**



**Whitburn Neighbourhood Forum**

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## Introduction

This report sets out the presence of Green Infrastructure (GI) within the Whitburn Neighbourhood Area. GI is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) as:

*A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.*

Its multi-functionality is of great importance. High quality GI can contribute to the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the neighbourhood area. GI comprises various capital assets that perform crucial ecosystem services. For instance, green infrastructure can enhance biodiversity, amenity, access and local landscape. It can provide sustainable transport links, food provision (allotments), can incorporate sustainable drainage and can support climate change adaptation and mitigation. Green infrastructure can also support the delivery of net gains for biodiversity.

Recent studies have been discovering the far-reaching benefits of green spaces to health, wellbeing and the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns further increased the importance of being able to visit green space nearby. Green infrastructure is also shown to contribute to net zero and climate adaptation and mitigation<sup>1</sup>. Investment in green spaces are shown to save more money than what was spent on them, through health benefits<sup>2</sup>, higher house prices<sup>3</sup> and the use of green spaces by small businesses<sup>4</sup>.

It is also important to note that GI is not just a rural feature, rather high-value GI assets can also exist within urban areas, where they can have additional benefits, such as adapting to climate change effects (e.g. urban heat island effects and flood risk management).

It is therefore crucial to maintain and enhance local GI with high-quality natural capital assets that can perform a wide range of ecosystem services. GI is an important need for society and the environment, which needs to be resilient to withstand any future pressures such as climate change.

Of great importance to healthy GI is the presence of a variety of natural capital assets to provide the ecosystem services we need, but also their connectivity. Separated patches of GI cannot perform their functions well. For instance, wildlife needs to travel between habitats and sustainable transport links need cannot be fragmented.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=48c79345-ce99-4ca8-98fc-4104c97f0746>

<sup>2</sup> E.g. In Sheffield, every £1 generated £34 in health savings: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/904439/improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenspace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/urbangreenspacesraisenearbyhousepricesbyanaverageof2500/2019-10-14>

<sup>4</sup> E.g. dog walkers and ice cream vendors: <https://thelandtrust.org.uk/the-land-trust-charitable-aims/thebenefits/>

## Green Infrastructure in national policy

In recent years, the awareness of the importance of high-quality GI has been on the increase. This is for instance apparent in the update of the NPPF in 2021, to include a more comprehensive definition of GI. It also includes the policy to include tree-lined streets in any new development.

The National Design Guide and National Model Design Code also emphasise the importance of green infrastructure for the environment and quality of life, as well as for good design.

The importance of enabling access to more and better green spaces was also set out in the Planning for the Future White Paper in 2020.

Moreover, following up on a commitment in Defra's 25 Year Plan for the Environment, Natural England is developing a national Green Infrastructure Standards Framework, due to be launched in 2022. This includes a GI standards framework and GI principles, as well as GI Mapping and tools<sup>5</sup>. One of the principles of GI is that it should respond to local character, showing the importance of including GI in a Neighbourhood Plan.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/green-infrastructure-standards-recordings>

## Green Infrastructure in the Whitburn Neighbourhood Area

To identify existing GI in the area, the following evidence has been used:

- South Tyneside Council's Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013)
- STC Open Space assessment and addendum (2015 and 2019)
- Local Green Space Assessment (Whitburn Neighbourhood Forum, October 2019)
- South Tyneside Local Development Framework (2007)
- Whitburn Heritage Character Assessment (AECOM, 2017)

### Green Infrastructure Strategy

The GI Strategy identifies capital assets, wildlife corridors, a strategic network and areas of improvement. The strategic GI corridors within Whitburn are:

- Coastal corridor
- Green Belt corridor



<p><b>Coastal Corridor</b></p> <p>Coastal stretch from Littlehaven to Whitburn, including The Leas</p>		<p>The Coastal corridor runs along the eastern boundary of the borough and includes a range of different open space types and functions.</p> <p>The South Shields foreshore area is an important tourism resource with the parks and beaches attracting visitors to the area.</p> <p>The undeveloped coastal areas are of high biodiversity importance. The area between Trow Point and Marsden Bay is protected by a Special Protection Area (SPA), and the area between Trow Point and Whitburn Sands protected by a Special</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of ecology/biodiversity (SPA, SACs and SSSIs).</li> <li>• Improved access from town centre through Ocean Road improvements.</li> <li>• Improve linkages from Littlehaven to riverside as part of English Coastal route/improve C2C link.</li> <li>• Improved access to beaches with promenade improvements.</li> <li>• Protect green infrastructure network along coast.</li> <li>• Diversify/improve existing grassland habitats</li> </ul>
		<p>Area of Conservation (SAC). The area is also of geodiversity significance as it is the most northern outcrop of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau.</p>	<p>at the Leas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure dune restoration scheme to maximise biodiversity benefit and create associated new species rich grassland.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Green Belt Corridor</b></p> <p>Urban Fringe agricultural area</p>		<p>The Green Belt within South Tyneside is located to the south of South Shields, Jarrow and Hebburn, and surrounds the Urban Fringe villages.</p> <p>There are a number of green infrastructure functions accommodated with the Green Belt including golf courses, playing fields, cycle and bridal ways. The Green Belt also provides wildlife habitats and acts as an important wildlife corridor, linking up different areas of open space within the borough and between neighbouring authorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserve the separate characters of the Urban Fringe villages.</li> <li>• Maintain/ and where possible improve green infrastructure links/corridors with Sunderland and Gateshead Councils.</li> <li>• Prevent the merging of South Tyneside's urban areas with Sunderland, Washington and Gateshead.</li> </ul>



Figure 1 Strategic GI in and around Whitburn

As a result of these corridors, Whitburn is enveloped by strategic GI corridors. The boundaries are loosely drawn around Whitburn, without regard for the GI assets within the corridor. For instance, the corridor misses out important biodiversity sites to the east of the urban area, which comprises undeveloped coast and a local wildlife site (Firing Range). In addition, there are no connections within the urban area. Parts of the urban area contain important assets, such as mature trees and grass verges.

The Strategy includes a variety of GI types. These types, or assets, have been identified in Whitburn:

GI type	Location
<b>Parks and open spaces</b>	Cornthwaite Park Village Greens at North Guards and Front Street Whitburn Windmill Open space west of Church Lane and south of Front Street Recreation Ground at North Guards
<b>Allotments</b>	At Lizard Lane At Kitchener Road South of Front Street North of Myrtle Avenue
<b>Provision for children and Young people:</b>	Playground at Mill Lane / Kitchener Road Playground within Cornthwaite Park

<b>Formal outdoor sports facilities with public access</b>	Football fields at Cleadon Lane Cricket Grounds at Mill Lane At Whitburn Academy Whitburn Golf Course
<b>Outdoor sports facilities without public access</b>	At Marsden Primary School At Charlie Hurley Centre
<b>Cemeteries</b>	Cemetery at Mill Lane Graveyard at Church Lane
<b>Natural and semi-natural greenspace</b>	Whitburn Country Park Marsden Old Quarry Undeveloped coast in the south of the neighbourhood area
<b>Sites with high and medium biodiversity value</b>	Undeveloped coast Whitburn Point Nature Reserve Green fields south of Shearwater/ Firing Range Local Wildlife Site
<b>Wildlife corridors</b>	Undeveloped coast Green belt west of village Connection to the north of the neighbourhood area

Public rights of way and cycling links are also visualised in the Strategy, which shows access to GI in Whitburn:

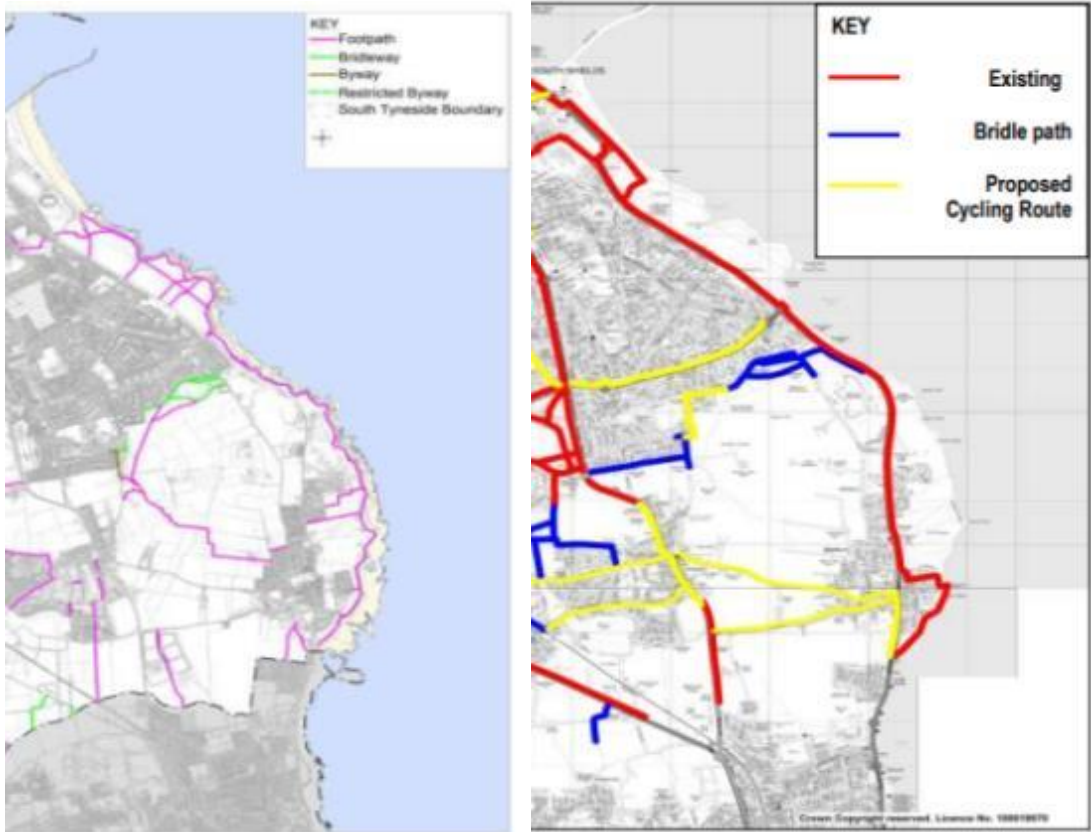


Figure 2 PROWs and cycling routes

The Strategy identified the following areas of biodiversity value:



Figure 3 Biodiversity sites



The Strategy identified wildlife corridors, including:

- South Pier to Trow Point – coastal sand dunes;
- Trow Point to Whitburn Steel – coastal grasslands, maritime cliffs and magnesian limestone grassland;
- Cleadon North Farm to Cleadon Hill – magnesian limestone grassland;
- Cleadon Lane to Marsden – magnesian limestone grassland.

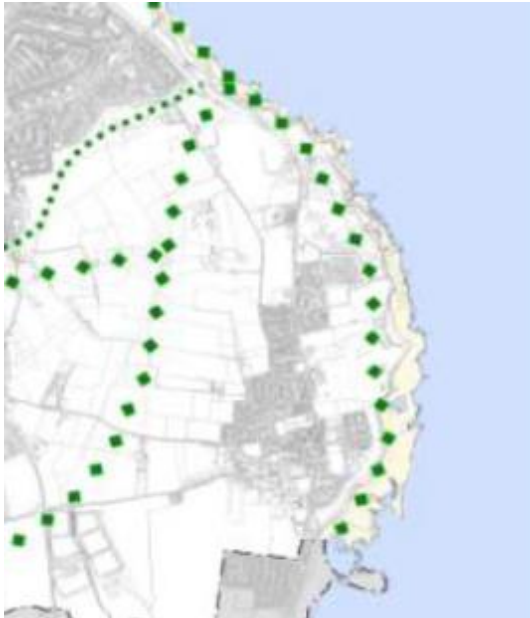


Figure 4 Wildlife corridors

The areas for improvement the Strategy identifies are the coastal corridor and accessibility improvements at Cleadon Lane, Moor Lane and the A183 south of the junction with North Guards:



Figure 5 GI improvements

## Open Space Assessment and Addendum

The Open Space Addendum shows the following green spaces:

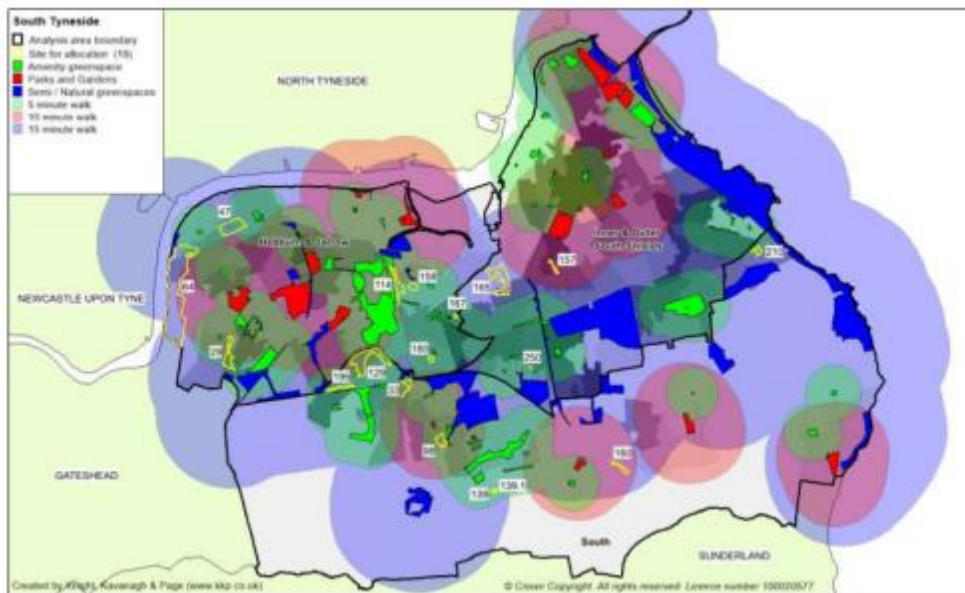


Figure 6 Green Space map Whitburn

The 2015 Green Space Standards report also maps allotments:

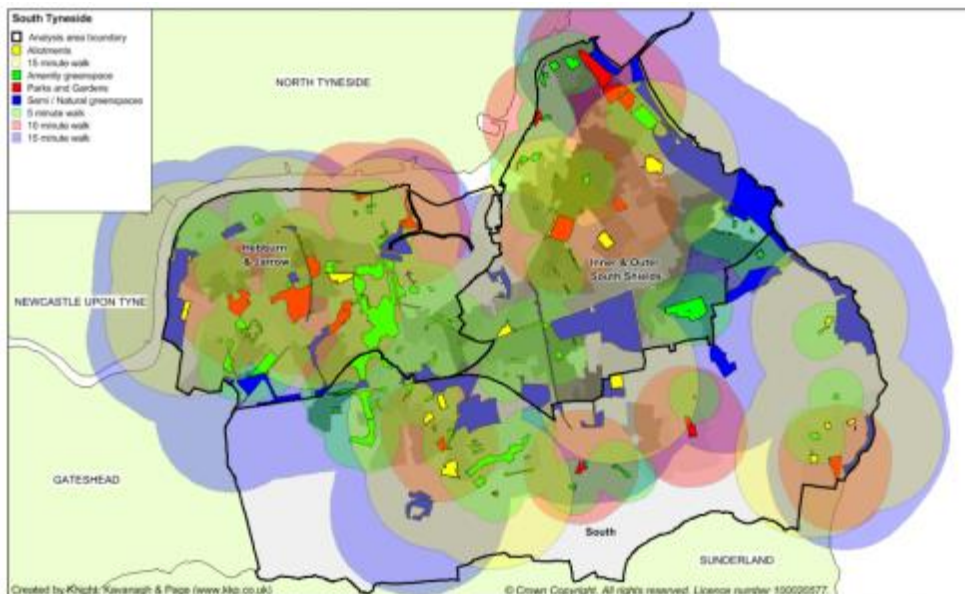


Figure 7 Allotments map Whitburn

Whitburn also contains two village greens and a section of the England coast path (providing access to GI). It also includes Local Nature Reserves (Whitburn Point LNR and Marsden Old Quarry LNR), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (Durham Coast SSSI), A Special Protection Area (Northumbria Coast SPA), a Ramsar site (Northumbria Coast Ramsar) and a Special Area of Conservation (Durham Coast SAC).

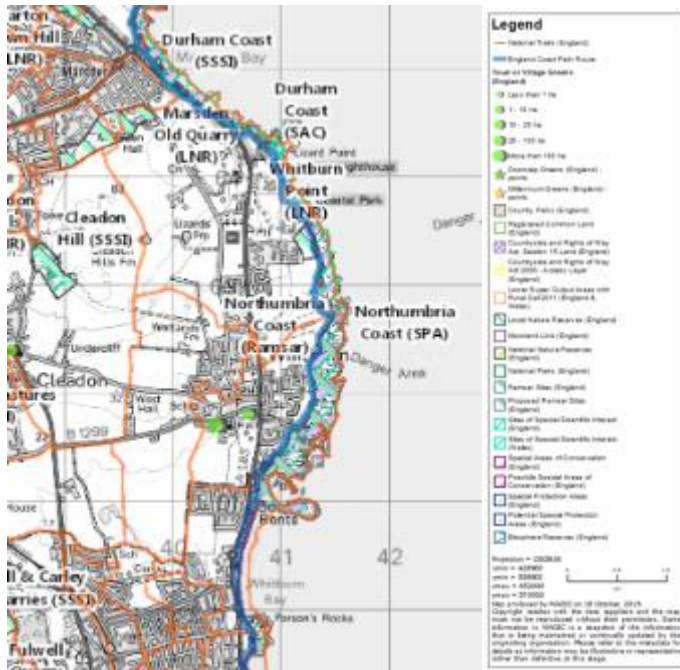


Figure 8 Biodiversity designations



Figure 9 Whitburn village greens

## Local Development Framework

The Local Development Framework shows the undeveloped coast, wildlife corridors and Green Belt around Whitburn. It also identifies a Habitat Creation Zone to create new Priority Habitats running through the north half of the neighbourhood area.

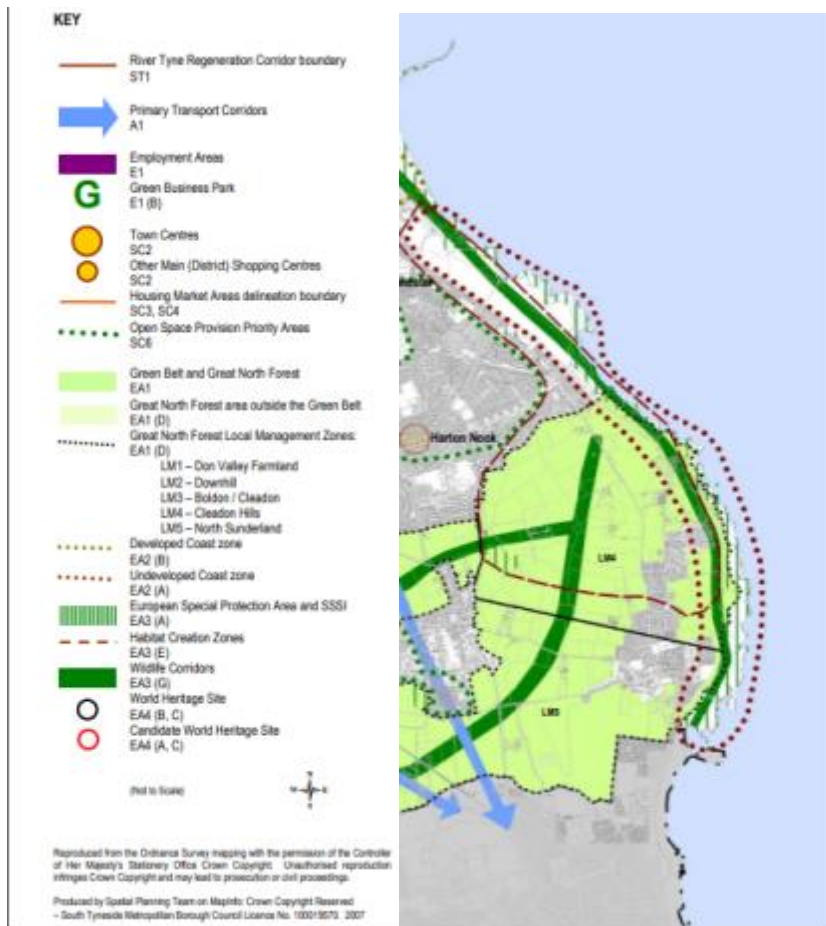


Figure 10 LDF policy map

## Whitburn Heritage Character Assessment

This report presents a summary of the history and character of Whitburn, including important landscape features, such as connectivity, land use and GI. It identified that GI is important to the character of the village but sensitive to development. It mentioned three important GI links:

- Mature trees and grassed areas along Front Street that provide green links to the surrounding landscape and Cornthwaite Park increasing ecological and amenity value;
- Open areas in the village, such as land to the south and west of the historic core of the village;
- The coastal park that surrounds Souter lighthouse is an important open area in the north, which forms a network of open space or green infrastructure that links the Cleadon Hills to the coast.

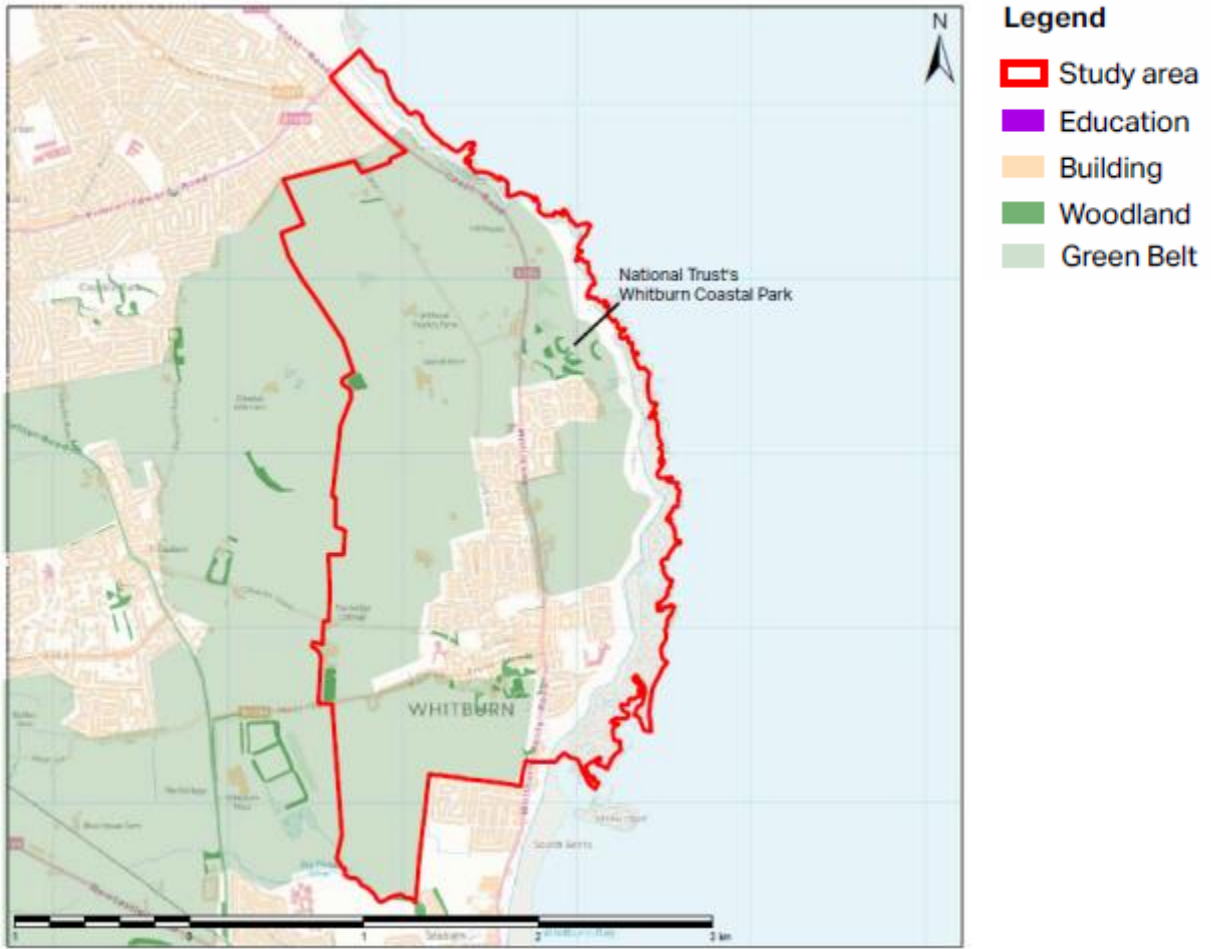


Figure 11 Land use

## Whitburn green Infrastructure corridor

It is proposed to identify a GI network at the neighbourhood area level. South Tyneside Council's strategic network is loosely drawn around Whitburn, and does not go into enough detail. GI needs to be connected within the urban area also. Whitburn has many valuable GI assets that connect. These assets include:

- Local Green Spaces identified in the Local Green Space Assessment;
- England Coastal Path and its immediate hinterland;
- The undeveloped coast;
- Recreational areas and allotments;
- Areas of woodland, hedgerows, and individual trees;
- Wildlife Corridors;
- Green Belt surrounding Whitburn village.
- Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geodiversity Sites.

This results in the following GI assets in Whitburn (see next page):

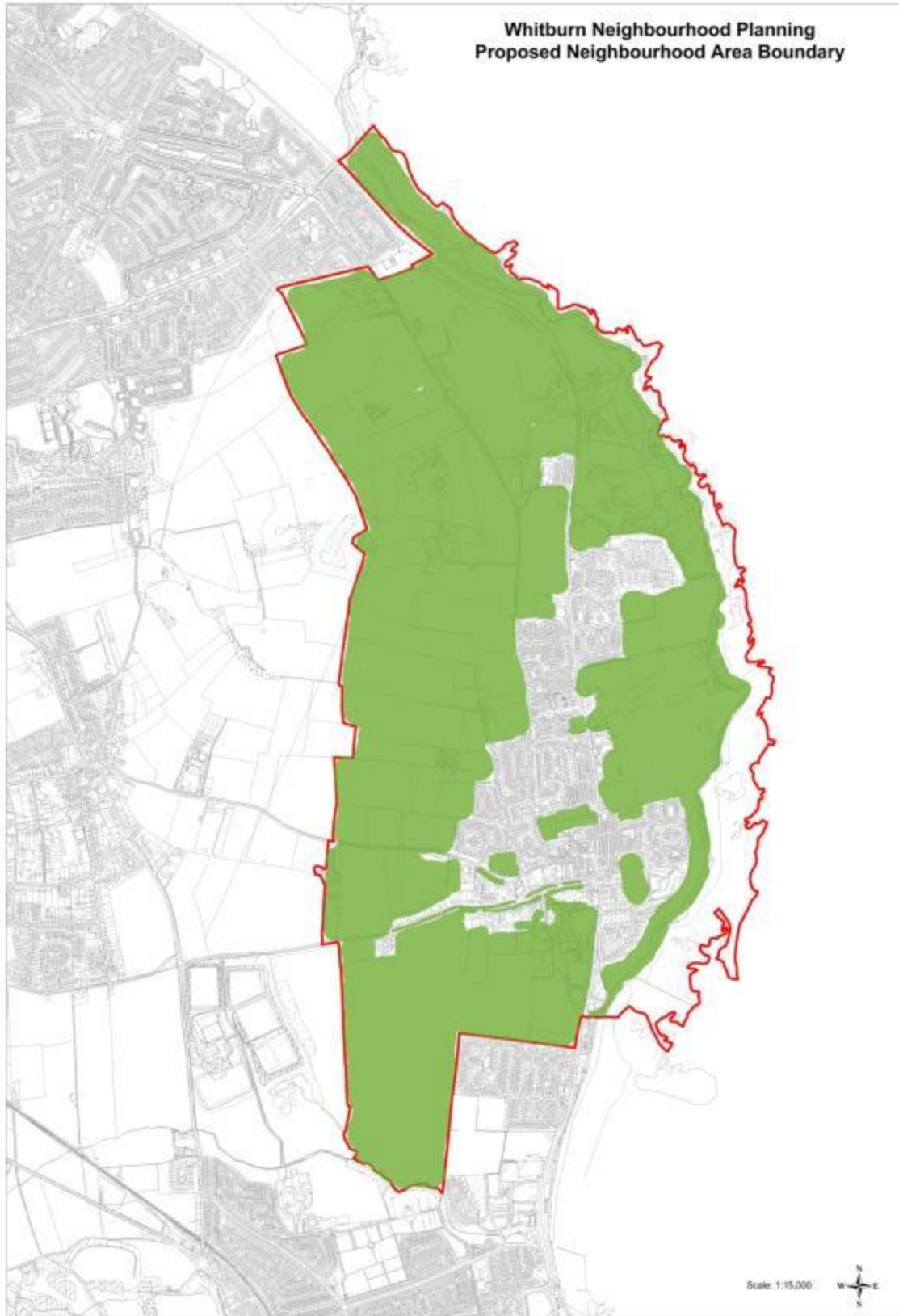


Figure 12 GI assets in Whitburn

Important green infrastructure links are:

- The coastal park connecting with the Cleadon Hills;
- Mature trees and grassed areas connecting Front Street to Cornthwaite Park and the surrounding landscape;
- Land to the south and west of the conservation area.

It is proposed to include all GI assets outside the urban area, following the Green Belt boundary. The map with the GI assets also shows the presence of important features within the village. It is proposed to improve the connection between GI assets within and outside the urban area to form two urban corridors connecting in the centre of the village. See the map on page 18.

Particular areas with potential for improvement are:

- Whitburn Coastal Park and the Leas;
- Tree cover and the long-term viability of mature trees;
- Hedges and hedge trees for landscape and habitat value.

It is proposed to include a GI policy into the Neighbourhood Plan, with the GI corridor showing on the Policies Map. It is also proposed to include where improvements need to be made to Whitburn's GI network. This results in the following policy:

**POLICY WNP7: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ENHANCEMENT AND CONNECTIVITY**

**Development proposals which restore, maintain and enhance the connectivity and biodiversity value, landscape value and where relevant, recreational value of the areas of local green infrastructure will be supported. The Green Infrastructure Corridor is shown on the Policies Map.**

**Green Infrastructure assets in the Neighbourhood Area with potential for expansion and improvement consist of the following:**

- **Local Green Spaces identified in Policy WNP9;**
- **England Coastal Path and its immediate hinterland;**
- **The undeveloped coast;**
- **Recreational areas and allotments identified in Policy WNP10;**
- **Areas of woodland, hedgerows, and individual trees;**
- **Wildlife Corridors identified on the Policies Map;**
- **Green Belt surrounding Whitburn village;**
- **Whitburn Coastal Park and the Leas;**
- **Increase in tree cover and improvement of the long-term viability of mature trees;**
- **The incorporation of native species mix hedges and hedge trees within development proposals to improve landscape and habitat value.**

**Areas of woodland, healthy trees and hedgerows should be retained and where necessary, improved, as part of any development proposal. Proposals where the loss of trees or hedgerows is unavoidable will not be permitted unless equivalent**



**tree and hedgerow cover is provided either within the development site, or within the Neighbourhood Area. The loss of ancient or veteran trees will not be supported.**

**Any major development will be required to incorporate Green Infrastructure into the development proposal through:**

- a) linking to green infrastructure adjacent or nearest to the development site;**
- b) the creation and/or enhancement of wildlife corridors through a development site;**
- c) the provision of sustainable drainage systems which provide biodiversity benefits;**
- d) linking green spaces with walking cycling routes to avoid isolated green spaces.**

**Such schemes must include details of long-term management and maintenance of any new green infrastructure.**

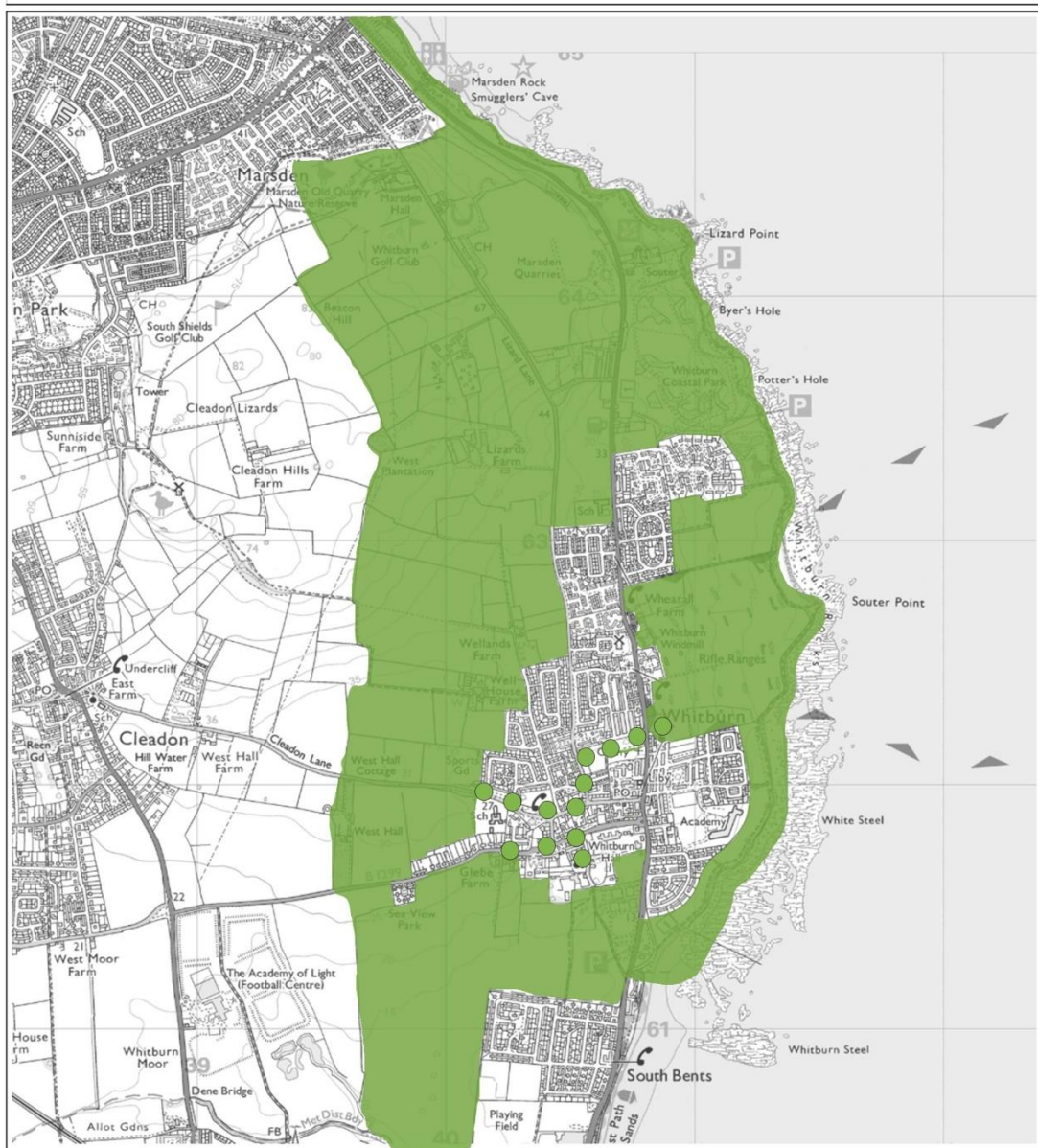


Figure 13 Proposed GI network