

# **Hauxley Neighbourhood Plan**

## **Green Gaps Background Paper**

**September 2023**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this background paper is to provide further information to outline the evidence that has informed the proposed allocation of green gaps within the Hauxley Neighbourhood Plan. Throughout the preparation of the neighbourhood plan, the local community expressed concern regarding the impact of the growth and expansion of Amble and the implications of this on the parish. As a result, the neighbourhood plan vision highlights the importance of the physical and visual separation and the implications of different policy approaches were considered to seek to ensure that important character of the parish was conserved and enhanced.

## **2. What is a green gap?**

- 2.1 The concept of a green gap is not specifically defined in national planning policy. However, the use of green gaps, green wedges and green corridors regularly feature in development plan policies and allocations. In the context of Hauxley Parish, it is considered that green gaps form part of the important green infrastructure of the parish. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines green infrastructure 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 well-being benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.”*

- 2.2 Green infrastructure therefore has many purposes and the role of a green gap, as part of the green infrastructure network can accordingly be wide ranging.
- 2.3 Policy STP6 of the Northumberland Local Plan (NLP), refers to the contribution of both strategic and local green infrastructure to the health and wellbeing of Northumberland’s community. The NLP identifies strategic green infrastructure and sets the strategic framework for developing local green infrastructure, including through neighbourhood plans.

## **3. Why is the Hauxley Neighbourhood Plan proposing green gaps?**

- 3.1 The initial scope of the neighbourhood plan was informed by early engagement which took place during January 2019 and April 2022. Feedback from the local community expressed concern regarding the impact on the parish of the growth of Amble. Amble is identified within the NLP as a key centre in the northern part of the south east delivery area. As a result of its role and function, the town has witnessed a large amount of housing development in recent years, particularly since 2015. The NLP identifies that between 2016 and 2036, the town should deliver 540 dwellings. Alongside this, the town is also experiencing tourism and employment growth.

- 3.2 The main evidence base that has informed the identification of green gaps are described below.

### The Hauxley Design Code (2022)

- 3.3 As part of the preparation of the neighbourhood plan a design code was prepared. The purpose of the design code was to provide an appreciation of the existing character of the parish. It includes a design vision, which highlights the importance of views to the character of the area and the need to maintain separation between settlements. The design code considered the landscape character of the parish (section 2.3):

*“The topography of the Neighbourhood Area is relatively flat with a gentle change in level from the west to the sea in the east of approximately 10m. The dune system along the coastline rises*

up as it moves in land obscuring views out to sea from street level in some places. The most notable views in the area are those along the coastline looking out to sea, up the coast to the north and south and across to Coquet Island. There are however several vantage points within the Neighbourhood Area where inland views can be appreciated. These include views from within Hauxley Nature Reserve and views across the agricultural landscape with small pockets of woodland as landscape features... Though the neighbouring settlement of Amble abuts the parish boundary there is a natural green gap dividing the two areas.”<sup>1</sup>

- 3.4 Section 4 of the document provides design guidance and codes. It explains that it sets out the principles that will influence the design of potential new development. Section 4.2.6 contains a code on landscape and views. It highlights:

*“The landscape surrounding the settlements is sensitive to change and should be protected wherever possible. The areas of landscape or ‘green gaps’ between Amble, High Hauxley and Low Hauxley should be preserved to maintain a degree of separation between each settlement.*

*Any development that is proposed in the ‘green gaps’ separating the settlements should clearly form part of the existing settlement that it will be associated with. Large gaps between the historic settlements and a proposed development should typically be resisted to avoid resulting in a development that is visually divorced from a main settlement area (as with Kirkwell Cottages and High Hauxley).*

*Any development that could have an adverse impact on the visual amenity of the settlements should provide screening in the form of tree planting and hedgerows (as with Silver Carrs Caravan Site and Low Hauxley).*

*Development should not result in the loss or degradation of important views. Views out to sea, Coquet Island, along the coastline and across the Hauxley Nature Reserve should be protected.”*

- 3.5 The design code is therefore clear that the **green gaps have an important role in protecting the rural and coastal character of the parish, as well as preventing the coalescence.**

Northumberland County Council Landscape Documents

- 3.6 The Northumberland Landscape Character Assessment (2010 - LCA)<sup>2</sup> describes the essential landscape characteristics of the county. The plan area lies within the South East Northumberland Coastal Plain national character area and falls within two local landscape character areas: 39a Coastal Coalfields and 40a Druridge Bay (see figure 4) – most of the plan area lies within character area 40a.



Figure 1 gap between Kirkwell Cottages and High Hauxley



Figure 2 - gap between Low and High Hauxley



Figure 3 - gaps between High Hauxley and Amble and Kirkwell Cottages and Amble

<sup>1</sup> Hauxley Design Code, page 12

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Reports.aspx>

3.7 Landscape character area 40a Druridge Bay is described as an attractive, almost unbroken stretch of sandy beach and mature sand dunes, which is backed by a variety of landscapes, all of which owe their origins to the long history of mining and industrial activity in the area. Reference is made to the creation of accessible wildlife reserves on former derelict land including at Hauxley.

3.8 Landscape character area 39a (coastal coalfields) is described as relatively flat coastal plain which has been heavily modified by mining and industrial activity. That restoration has generally resulted in oversimplified geometric landscapes of pasture and conifer blacks, which lack distinctive features. There are however pockets of unaltered rural character, including fragments of ancient woodland and many of the older village centres.

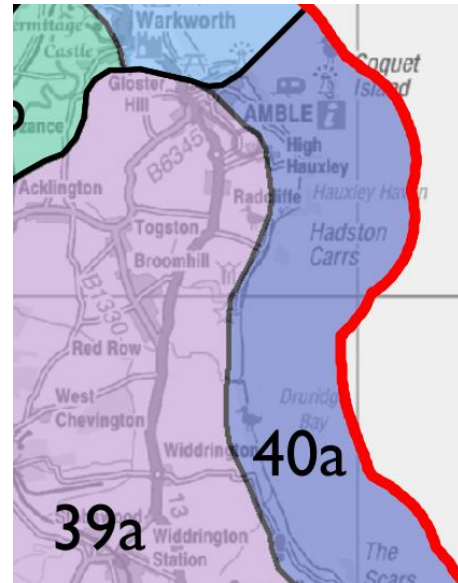


Figure 4 - landscape character areas

3.9 The LCA provides examples of forces for change, key qualities, guiding principles, land management guidelines and development guidelines for each landscape character type. Within area 40 the following are highlighted:

- Increased tourist/ recreational pressure leading to loss of tranquillity;
- Dynamic seascape environment with rich ecological heritage;
- Need to promote the improved management of important coastal habitats;
- Inappropriate development along the coast would affect the visual characteristics of this landscape; and
- Seek to protect key views along the coast and to seaward.

3.10 Within area 39, the following guidelines are identified: large-scale landscape with coastal and landward views, as well as improved management of woodlands and habitats.

3.11 The Northumberland Key Land Use Impact Study (2010)<sup>3</sup> considered the sensitivity of the landscape at settlement edges. It focused on main towns, secondary centres and growth point settlements – Amble being the relevant settlement for the plan area. The study concluded that areas to the south of Amble were considered to be of a lower landscape sensitivity and that the potential existed to enhance the southern settlement edge through careful localised development. This informed the strategic approach to development in Amble - with large levels of housing growth to the south of the town.

3.12 The Housing Distribution Technical Paper (2018)<sup>4</sup>, which formed part of the evidence base for the NLP highlighted that between 2016-2018 there had been 119 completions in Amble, at 30 September 2018 there was 1306 outstanding dwellings permitted and minded to approve applications, with total housing commitment of 1,425. This is a significant level of the development, the majority of which is now either completed or under construction to the south of the town.

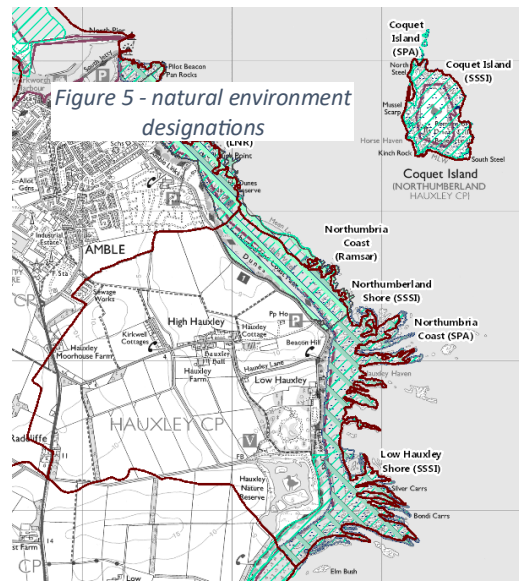
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Planning/Reports.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Studies%20and%20Evidence%20Reports/Housing%20Studies/Technical%20Papers%20for%20Housing/Housing-Distribution-Technical-Paper-December-2018.pdf>

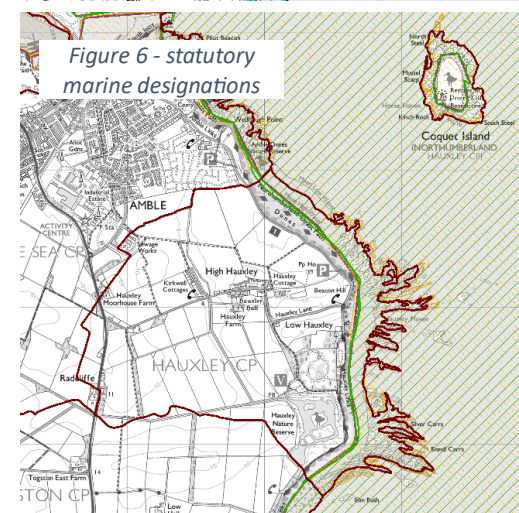
3.13 The NCC commissioned landscape evidence combined with the level of housing development illustrates a need to develop a policy approach which **protects the seascape character of the area and key views, prevents further coalescence with Amble and assists with the management of important coastal habitats.**

Natural environment designations

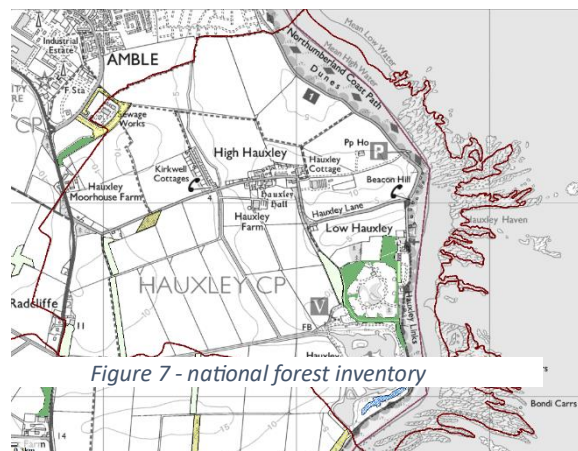
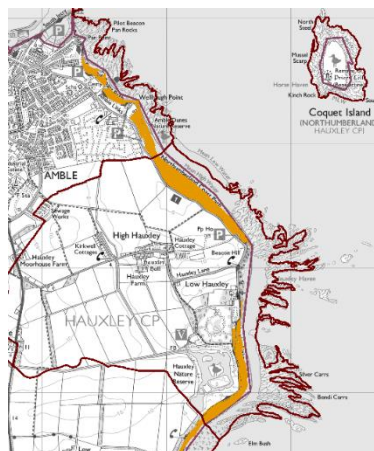
3.14 Figure 5 highlights the statutory land based designated which lie within the plan area. This includes the: Amble Dunes Local Nature Reserve; Northumbria Coast Ramsar Site, three Sites of Special Scientific Interest – Coquet Island, Northumberland Shore and Low Hauxley Shore, as well as two Special Protection Areas – Coquet Island and Northumbria Coast.



3.15 There are several statutory marine designations within the plan area, as illustrated in figure 6. These include the: Berwick to St Mary’s Marine Conservation Zone; Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area (marine components), Coquet Island Special Protection Area (marine components) and the Northumberland Marine Special Protection Area.



3.16 The plan area contains a number of important coastal habitats, including: the priority habitats of coastal sand dunes (figure 7). Figure 8 illustrates that the plan area contains land included on the national forest inventory and deciduous woodland (priority habitat). It also includes a number of important species, including farmland birds, curlew, grey partridge, lapwing, redshank, snipe, tree sparrow and yellow wagtail.



3.17 The level of designated sites within the parish highlights the importance of the gaps as part of the **valuable green infrastructure** of the area.



#### **4. Identification of an appropriate policy approach**

- 4.1 Whilst the proposed settlement boundaries for Low and High Hauxley will protect the open countryside from certain development, the purpose of the designation of the green gaps is more comprehensive given their role in protecting the character and green infrastructure of the parish. Draft policy H5 (sustainable location of new development) would require development outside the settlement boundaries to be assessed against the requirements of NLP policy STP1. Whilst this restricts market housing development, criterion 'g' identifies development that may be supported, including the sustainable growth and expansion of existing business or the formation of new businesses, agricultural diversification and other land-based rural businesses, sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments, affordable housing and infrastructure proposals.
- 4.2 The approach to green gaps would ensure that development would be supported where it would not conflict with the purpose of the designation. It would provide a locally specific approach which accords with the provisions of the strategic policies of the development plan:
- Criterion 'a' which seeks to ensure that new development would protect and enhance the rural character of the parish would accord with local plan policies: STP1i (sensitivity of the open countryside), ENV3 (protecting the character of the landscape), ENV4 (referring to protecting rurality);
  - Criterion 'b' preventing the coalescence of Amble and High Hauxley would accord primarily with local plan policy STP1;
  - Criterion 'c', to protect the important landscape character and visual amenity would accord primarily with local plan policy ENV3;
  - Criterion 'd' to retain a valuable wildlife corridor and habitat would accord with local plan policies STP6 (protecting/ improving green infrastructure) and ENV2 (biodiversity and geodiversity).
- 4.3 This paper has described the evidence for the approach is clearly set out within the design code (elements regarding the important character and views) and wildlife corridor and habitat (given the relationship with the internationally designated sites on the coast and habitats). In addition, the issue of potential coalescence is very relevant given the significant expansion of Amble.