

Allerdale Borough Council

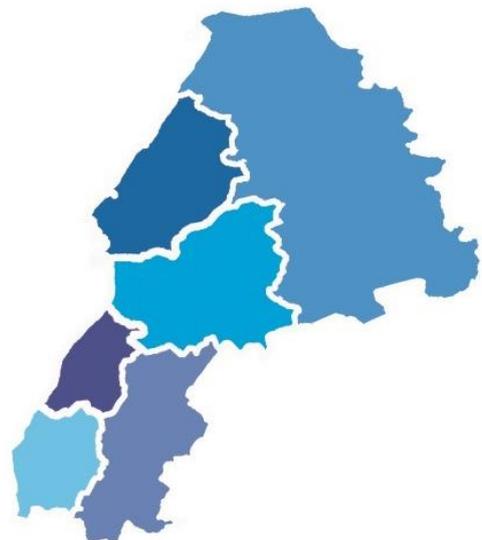


Allerdale Local Plan (Part 2) Site Allocations

Examination Matters and Issues

Matter 8 – Natural Environment

April 2019



Issue 8: Whether the proposed approach towards natural environment is justified, effective and consistent with national policy and the ALPP1?

Issue 8a: Amenity Green Space (Policy SA51)

Q82. Is the basis for assessing, selecting and rejecting Amenity Green Space objective, consistent and justified by robust evidence?

- 8.1 The Open Space Designation Review 2017 (LPP9) sets out the background to the review of open space designations saved from the Allerdale Local Plan 1999 (ALP 1999).
- 8.2 The Call for Sites, undertaken in 2013, provided the opportunity for local communities to submit areas of open space which they considered important and worthy of protection. Only a small number of sites were put forward as part of this exercise, and as a consequence the views of the Parish/Town Councils were sought specifically on this issue in 2015 to make sure that all open space would be considered. Those sites put forward, along with those sites identified on the ALP 1999 proposals maps as ~~REN1~~ within the local service centre and rural village tier of the settlement hierarchy have been reviewed together with a small number of sites suggested for consideration by Development Management Officers.
- 8.3 Saved Policy REN1 in the ALP 1999 relates to all undeveloped land within the village settlement limits defined on the proposals maps, requiring consideration of the amenity and/or streetscape value of all open spaces and undeveloped land in the assessment of proposals. Those sites of particular importance to the character and amenity of the settlements are identified on the proposals maps as REN1, where development would only normally be permitted in the most exceptional of circumstances. These identified ~~REN1~~ sites were designated for a variety of reasons, and encompass recreational open space, informal open space, and private open space not accessible to the public but visually important. The visual importance of these open spaces and their contribution to village character and amenity is recognised; village greens in particular are seen to warrant protection through this policy.
- 8.4 Succeeding policies in the ALPP1 address some of the considerations encompassed by the REN1 designation. The importance of sports and recreation/ play areas for example is recognised in the strategic objectives of the ALPP1¹ and principles of sustainable development set out in Policy S2, promoting health, well-being and active lifestyle by protecting, maintaining and enhancing green infrastructure, sports and recreation facilities². Policy S25, Sports, leisure and Open Space³ in particular seeks to maintain, enhance, and protect the provision of formal and informal sports and recreation facilities and public open space with regard to the Allerdale Open Spaces, Sports, and Recreation Strategies⁴ which is consistent with the NPPF⁵. The consideration

¹ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) SO5c page 16

² Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S2 Development Principles page 20

³ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S25 Sports Leisure and Open Space page 114

⁴ Allerdale Open Space Study (2014) EB9 & EB10 & Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan EB11

of open/greenspace and visual amenity are also embedded within policies in the ALPP1, the quality of the environment and amenity are referenced in the strategic objectives for the district and the sustainable development principles set out in Policy S2. The design principles and development principles set out in Policies S4 and S5 reinforce the requirement for new development to respond positively to the character history and distinctiveness of its location and enhance, protect and integrate effectively with the historic and natural environment, safeguarding environmental quality. These policies align with the NPPF which takes account of the different roles and characters of different areas⁶, requires development to respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings⁷

- 8.5 Proposed Policy SA51, in supporting the policies above, reaffirms the importance of open space in villages in particular. The Council is seeking to protect those sites which make the most significant contribution to village character and appearance, or play an important community role where development is ruled out other than in very special circumstances. Such sites are often intrinsic to village character, or offer opportunities for informal recreation which might not otherwise be available.
- 8.6 Although the REN1 sites were designated for a variety of reasons, encompassing recreational open space, informal open space and private spaces, visual importance took into account the following considerations:
- setting for listed or important historical buildings, archaeological monuments or other important features;
 - providing an important visual element in the village scene, especially in Conservation Areas
 - framing an important visual element in the village scene, especially in Conservation Areas
 - framing or allowing an important view to exist
 - Providing a buffer between conflicting uses
 - Providing well defined visual relief in an otherwise built up frontage.
- 8.7 The starting point for the review was the existing REN1 designated sites, to examine whether there was any merit in continuing their protection under the proposed amenity greenspace designation taking into account the purpose for which they were originally selected, and an evaluation against the above criteria. These criteria also formed the basis for the guiding principles looking at other sites put forward to the Council for consideration. REN1 sites were also examined to see whether they had changed, and whether there were any other reasons why a designation might not be appropriate.
- 8.8 The NPPF sets out how local communities can identify green areas of particular importance to them for protection by designating land as Local

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraphs 73 & 74 page 18

⁶ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraphs 17 page 5

⁷ National planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 58 page 15

Green Space⁸, although it makes clear that this designation is not appropriate for most green areas or open spaces; they must be unique in the benefits they provide to local communities. The framework sets out the criteria for identifying Local Green Space sites:

- The green space should be in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- The green area should be demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife;
- The green area should be local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

8.9 Although the sites were not put forward specifically as Local Green Space by local communities, they were considered against the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance criteria for Local Green Space as an aid to decision-making. Failure to meet the requirements for Local Green Space as set out in the NPPF does not necessarily mean that a site would not be defined as amenity green space; the amenity green space designation proposed under Policy SA51 is a local designation that also includes private open space of visual importance to village character. Nevertheless the criteria were a helpful tool in the decision-making process.

8.10 As part of the review, all of the sites and villages were visited by development management officers, photographed, and a site visit proforma completed, designed to record essential site characteristics, appearance, accessibility, visibility in addition to any other observations. In addition to a consideration of the principles outlined above in respect of Local Green Space, visual importance and the original purposes of REN1 designation, sites were discarded from the process in the following circumstances.

- Sites that lie outside settlements in the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy S3 of the ALP (Part 1), or wholly in open countryside have also been excluded from further consideration for designation.
- Whilst acknowledging that very small areas of amenity greenspace on housing estates make an important contribution to the character and appearance of an area, these generally have been discounted from designation, with protection conferred through amenity policies within the ALPP1.
- Sports fields and play areas which are largely protected by Policy S25, but do not otherwise make a crucial contribution to the character and appearance of the immediate locality have been discounted.
- Sites covered by other designations. Many of the saved REN1 sites are already identified as Village Greens, and therefore require no further designation. It is the intention that Village Greens will be shown on the proposals maps which form part of the ALPP2.

⁸ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraphs 76-78 pages 18-19

- Sites which have gained planning permission. Some sites have gained planning permission or have been built upon.
- 8.11 Although proposed Policy SA51 requires that proposals on all designated and undesignated open space and undeveloped land in settlements are considered against policies which seek to protect settlement character, local distinctiveness or natural features which provide valuable local amenity, it is just the most significant sites that have been identified on the policies maps.
- 8.12 The very different character and nature of the settlements within the district has meant that direct comparisons between the sites is not possible, the individual village context has had to be considered in each case. There are few sites where the proposed SA51 amenity greenspace designation on the policies map applies to private space informing village character, most of these sites were previously identified as REN1 in the ALP 1999. These sites have been reviewed in conjunction with the Council's Conservation Officer in order to confirm their importance to village character.
- 8.13 In summary, the sites were reviewed against the baseline of the original REN1 designation, which fulfilled a variety of functions, and against the Local Greenspace criteria in the NPPF. All sites have been visited. The Council considers that the basis for the assessment and selection of sites for designation as Amenity Green Space has been robust, fair, reasonable and consistent as far as possible taking into account the nature of the different settlement characters. The designated sites are small-scale and local in character, the policy is not being used to safeguard large amounts of land from development, but protect open spaces that are central to village communities and play a positive role in defining village character and amenity.

Q83. Is the Council policy to designate and protect amenity green space in the lower tiers of the settlement hierarchy only, justified and consistent with national policy and the ALPP1?

- 8.14 Policy S25 of the ALPP1 sets out how the Council seeks to maintain, enhance and protect the provision of formal and informal sports and recreation facilities and public open space, using the Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategies⁹. The Amenity Greenspace designation proposed under Policy SA51 supplements Policy S25, and other policies in the ALPP1 that seek to protect local distinctiveness or natural features which provide valuable local amenity. Policy SA51 is designed to apply to the lower tiers of the settlement hierarchy to protect those sites that make a significant contribution to village character and appearance or community role. It is in the villages where open space is most often intrinsic to village character and life.
- 8.15 In the larger settlements there are a greater number of open spaces to consider, variable in nature and function, and largely identified in the Allerdale Open Space Study (2014)¹⁰. Rather than use an amenity open space

⁹ Allerdale Open Space Study (2014) (EB9 and EB10) Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan (EB11)

¹⁰ Open Space Assessment Report (July 2014) Standards Paper (EB9 and EB10)

designation it was considered more effective to assess each open space on an individual basis when developer proposals arise by applying Policy S25 and existing policies relating to open space, green space and amenity; there was concern that it would be difficult to adequately capture every open space of value. Furthermore, the Council's approach in the upper tier of the settlement hierarchy is to identify green infrastructure under proposed Policy SA52, which reinforces the importance of open, green spaces by recognising them on the policies map as part of the green infrastructure network.

- 8.16 Only a small number of sites were put forward as open space in the Call for Sites undertaken in 2013, and few of these were in the Principal and Key Service Centres.
- 8.17 The Council considers that its approach is an effective mechanism to the management and protection of open spaces and amenity green spaces in the Principal and Key Service Centres, and consistent with paragraphs 73 and 74 of the NPPF, with which Policy S25 of the ALPP1 aligns. Paragraph 77 of the NPPF makes it clear that the Local Greenspace Designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. Each open space of value in the larger settlements may not go to the heart of settlement character unlike open space in a village setting. The Council believes that restricting the application of the local amenity green space policy proposed to a limited number of sites in the lowest tier of the settlement hierarchy (the village setting), is consistent with the thrust of the framework

Issue 8b: Green Infrastructure (Policy SA52)

Q84. Is the approach to the protection and enhancement of the Green Infrastructure network in Policy SA52 effective and justified? Is the identification of the green infrastructure network on the Policies Map appropriate? Is the policy likely to result in conflict with other aims of the plan and national policy considerations and if so does the policy need to be modified so as to minimise conflicts?

- 8.18 The Council believes that its approach to the Green Infrastructure (GI) network in Policy SA52 to be effective and justified, consistent with the NPPF and policies within the ALPP1.
- 8.19 GI is integral to the achievement of sustainable development, contributing strongly to the environmental role of the planning system set out in the NPPF¹¹ and to the positive improvement in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment set out in the framework, particularly with reference to net gains in biodiversity, and improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure¹². The multifunctional benefits of GI are recognised as a core planning principle¹³, and its function in helping to meet

¹¹ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 7

¹² National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 9

¹³ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 17

the challenges of climate change is acknowledged.¹⁴ It performs a role in the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment (Section 11) and in the promotion of healthy communities (Section 8).

- 8.20 GI is also embedded within the ALPP1, appearing in the vision for the district in which Allerdale *will be a place that has adapted to meet the challenges of climate change, and has a diverse and extensive network of accessible green infrastructure,*¹⁵ and included in the Council's Strategic Objectives SO6e *Promoting, protecting and providing a comprehensive network of green infrastructure, incorporating multi-functional green and blue spaces both within developments, and linking across and between settlements throughout the area,* and SO5d *Enhancing green infrastructure by developing a comprehensive network of high quality open space such as parks, woodlands, gardens, natural green spaces allotments*¹⁶. It is incorporated within the sustainable development principles set out in Policy S2¹⁷, and addressed specifically by strategic Policy S24, Green Infrastructure¹⁸.
- 8.21 The Council considers that the approach to the protection and enhancement of the GI network in Policy SA52 to be appropriate and consistent with the importance placed on GI in the achievement of sustainable development in the NPPF and the ALPP1. The highlighting of key areas of GI in the urban areas ensures that its importance is not lost and it receives appropriate consideration at the design stage, and in building on existing GI features on site, creating new features, and incorporating new linkages, the network will be strengthened and enhanced, from which multifunctional benefits accrue.
- 8.22 The district is a predominantly rural district, defined as a Rural-80 Local Authority in the DEFRA rural/urban local authority (LA) classification, with the majority of the population being located in the more urban settlements in the south of the district, Workington, Maryport, and Cockermouth. It is in the Principal and Key Service Centres where there is most development pressure, and therefore where the identification of the network is most crucial. Without any identification on the proposals map there is a risk that development will erode the GI network in the urban areas and fail to secure opportunities for enhancement, to the detriment of its multifunctional benefits and the achievement of sustainable development. A spatial presence on the proposals map raises the profile of GI, and ensures that the network will be properly taken into account as part of development proposals, providing greater clarity to both developers and decision-makers, and makes the identification of potential linkage points simpler.
- 8.23 The network identified consists of an amalgamation of environmental assets such as Main Rivers, sites in the Allerdale Open Space Study 2014¹⁹, the

¹⁴ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 99

¹⁵ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Page 12

¹⁶ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Page 16-17

¹⁷ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Page 20

¹⁸ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Page 111

¹⁹ Allerdale Open Space Study (2014) EB9 & EB10

Coastal Change Management Area²⁰, County Wildlife Sites, and public rights of way. Further input was received from the Council's Ecologist, and in Workington, the Town Council made a significant contribution. The explanatory text in the policy (as modified) does however make it clear that the GI shown on the proposals map is not exhaustive, and that other assets may exist that would need to be taken into account.

- 8.24 The Council believes the policy to be reasonable and necessary to ensure that the GI network is protected and enhanced, consistent with the aims of the framework and the objectives of the ALPP1 in achieving sustainable development. The policy does not prevent development, but seeks to incorporate GI at the heart of the design process. Furthermore, the requirements to extend and strengthen the network are restricted principally to major development. The NPPF clarifies that to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system²¹, and its pursuit involves seeking positive improvements²². The Council does not consider that the policy is in conflict with other aims of the plan and national policy considerations, nor does it believe that the policy requires modification.

Q85. Are the suggested Main Modifications MM42, MM43, MM44 and MM45 justified? Are they necessary in the interests of soundness?

- 8.25 Main Modification MM42 provides additional supporting explanatory text to Policy SA52, referencing the strategic policy governing green infrastructure in the ALPP1, Policy S24, which underpins Policy SA52. This is not necessary for soundness, but aids understanding of the policy approach.
- 8.26 The insertion of additional wording of Main Modification MM43 provides further clarity and guidance in the policy, emphasizing the importance of the connectivity and functionality aspects of the components of the green infrastructure network in the consideration of proposals, increasing the effectiveness of the policy in maintaining and enhancing the GI network.
- 8.27 Main Modification MM44 amends the supporting explanatory text to Policy SA52, to clarify that not every single element of the green infrastructure network is represented on the policies maps, and that consideration will still need to be given to any other assets that contribute to the network. It also reiterates the significance of the functionality and connectivity characteristics of the network. These amendments assist in the understanding and the implementation of the policy, which should make it more effective in enhancing the GI network.
- 8.28 Main Modification MM44 inserts an additional paragraph of explanatory text to Policy SA52, to reiterate the Council's intention to prepare an SPD on Green

²⁰ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) Policy S37 pages 144-145, & appendix 5 Page 196

²¹ National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 8

²² National Planning Policy Framework (2012) Paragraph 9

Infrastructure, as originally outlined in the ALPP1, and what this might include, incorporating advice from Natural England. This does not affect the soundness of the policy, but offers further clarity on what the Council will examine in order to augment the effectiveness of the green infrastructure policy.

Issue 8c: Green gaps (Policy SA53)

Q86. What is the justification for 'green gaps' between Kirkbampton and Thurstonfield and Prospect and Oughterside?

Kirkbampton and Thurstonfield

- 8.29 Kirkbampton is a rural village lying in the north easterly part of Allerdale, close to the district boundary with Carlisle. It is generally linear in form along the B5307, apart from more modern estate-style development at its eastern end, to the north of the highway. The adjoining village to the east, Thurstonfield (within Carlisle District) extends along the northern edge of the B5307, the two villages being separated by a single field measuring approximately 114 metres along the road frontage, along which there is a pavement. This field lies within Allerdale District, and is bound by a post and wire fence adjacent to the pavement.
- 8.30 Kirkbampton is identified as a Limited Growth Village in the ALPP1²³ where new housing and employment will be restricted to small-scale development within the designated settlement boundary. New housing has recently been erected in Thurstonfield at Croft Farm at the north western end of Thurstonfield, and there has been development pressure on the single field between the two villages.
- 8.31 Travelling along the B5307 on foot or by car, particularly in a westerly direction, the field offers views towards open countryside to the north, whilst hedge-lined agricultural land rises gently to the south; the combined effect of this open aspect contributes to the perception of entering different settlements, and is integral to their individual identities.
- 8.32 Although the single field separating the two settlements is of key concern, its effectiveness in maintaining the separate identities of the two villages is also reliant on the land to the south remaining open in character.
- 8.33 The Council has no control over development within Thurstonfield, which abuts the district boundary. Carlisle City Council does not identify settlement boundaries in its local plan, where Thurstonfield is identified as a rural village. The green gap has been established to reinforce and maintain the historical independent identity of Kirkbampton which the Council and the Parish Council considers to be important, and where coalescence is a real prospect. Development other than housing also has the potential to prejudice the gap.

²³ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S3 Page 22-25

Prospect and Oughterside

- 8.34 Prospect occupies an elevated position along the A596, with housing on the land that falls to the south of the highway towards the village of Oughterside. It is identified as a Local Service Centre in the settlement hierarchy set out in the ALPP1²⁴, a larger village with some services. In combination the 11 Local Service Centres will receive up to 20% of the housing growth required for the district for the plan period up to 2029. It is separated from the smaller village of Oughterside which lies to the south by two hedge-lined undulating fields, and two pavement lined roads link the two settlements. Oughterside is identified as an infill and rounding-off village where only very small scale development may be appropriate to respond to local needs and to contribute to the vitality of rural communities²⁵. The two settlements are very different in nature, Prospect with a large portion of modern housing, and Oughterside being far more traditional and rural in character.
- 8.35 Travelling along the highways in either direction, by foot or by car, the two settlements appear distinct; the undulating topography of the land between them contributing to their independent identities despite their close proximity.
- 8.36 A significant amount of land was put forward between the two settlements in the site allocations process. Planning permission has been approved on one of the sites put forward and part of one of the sites has been selected for allocation. Pre-application advice has been sought for housing on the one remaining piece of land that had not been submitted for consideration in the site allocations process. Given the nature of the topography, and the role of Prospect in the settlement hierarchy, its expansion will necessarily diminish the gap between the two settlements. The establishment of the green gap in this situation guides the future growth of Prospect whilst protecting and maintaining the separate identities of the two settlements. The gap defined represents a single field division between the two, and the retention of its open character will protect the integrity of both settlements.

Q87. How were the green gaps identified on the Policies Map and what process was followed? What evidence-based documents were used to inform this process?

- 8.37 Proposals for gaps between settlements in the district were suggested to the Council by consultees at different stages in the consultation process, although these submissions were not generally accompanied by plans identifying precise areas of land to be considered. A specific area of land was only put forward for consideration as a green gap between Kirkbampton and Thurstonfield by Kirkbampton Parish Council. In reviewing the areas suggested, advice was sought from the development services team to consider whether there were any other locations where a green gap might be appropriate to address potential coalescence issues.

²⁴ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S3 Page 22-25

²⁵ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S3 Page 22-25

- 8.38 The assessment involved an initial desk-based exercise involving consideration of the position of the settlements in the settlement hierarchy outlined in the ALPP1 and any planning history affecting land that could potentially be part of a gap site, and whether any of the land was referenced in the Allerdale Open Space Study 2014 (EB9)²⁶. The settlements were also examined on a map basis, including reference to historic maps, and considered against the Cumbria Landscape Character Guidance and Toolkit.²⁷
- 8.39 Subsequent site visits examined the land and the village context, where the land would be viewed from in terms of public vantage points and perceptual character. In defining the green gaps, where possible boundaries have been drawn to follow defined field boundaries for clarity, identifying the minimum land necessary to perform the function of maintaining separate identities. The Council did not designate all of the land suggested by Kirkbampton Parish Council.

Q88. Are the green gaps justified, effective and consistent with national policy? Are there any significant factors that indicate that these areas should not have been designated?

- 8.40 The Council considers that the creation of the green gaps identified is an appropriate strategy to preserve the individual identity and character of settlements, in circumstances where there is limited land separating them, and where development would result in their effective coalescence. The designation supports development principles set out in the ALPP1 which seek to reinforce the importance of local character, identity, and the history of areas and wider surroundings, and the protection of local distinctiveness²⁸. It identifies land that is important to retaining the identity of these particular settlements. The green gaps guide development in these localities.
- 8.41 The green gap is a local designation which is consistent with the Core planning principle set out in Paragraph 17 of the NPPF, taking account of the different character of different areas, and the design principles set out in Paragraph 58, in establishing a strong sense of place and responding to local character and history, reflecting the identity of local surroundings. The land designated as green gaps will fulfil these purposes and will sustain for the lifetime of the plan. The policy is clear on what will and will not be permitted within the green gaps.
- 8.42 The Council has been very selective when applying this designation, concentrating on locations where the designated gap would bring most benefit in terms of protection and identity.

²⁶ Allerdale Open Space Study (2014) EB9 & EB10

²⁷ Cumbria Landscape Character Guidance and Toolkit Part 1 and Part 2 EB17, EB17a

²⁸ Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) (SD21) Policy S4 Design Principles Pages 29-30, Policy S5 Development Principles Pages 31-32