

# Middridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2023 – 2038



*Submission Draft, June 2024*

# Middridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2023-2038 (Submission Draft)

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### *Explanatory note on 'Middridge' - the village and 'Middridge' - the Parish*

*As the village shares the same name as the Parish, it should be made clear at the outset that this Neighbourhood Plan covers the whole Parish of Middridge, not just the village.*

*Within the Plan, it should be clear from the written context of any reference to 'Middridge' whether it is referring to the village or to the wider Parish. However, the Plan has sought to make this clear where there may be any ambiguity.*

## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Welcome to the Neighbourhood Plan for the Parish of Middridge.

The Plan has been prepared to capture and respond to the aspirations and aims of the local community about the future development and conservation of the Parish, as identified through consultation and engagement.

The feedback which was received revealed a diverse range of issues, concerns and aspirations, both planning and non-planning related. A systematic review of these subsequently narrowed down the final focus of the Plan to: a) matters which represent the greatest priorities for the Neighbourhood Plan to address, and, b) matters which best lend themselves to being addressed through a Neighbourhood Plan.

The resulting subject matter dwells upon the things people value most about Middridge's essential 'village' character, which are in turn encompassed in the Plan's Vision, Objectives and Policies.

The first focus of this is upon the value attached to Middridge's setting within open countryside, particularly the vital role this plays in maintaining its historic individual identity and separateness from neighbouring settlements. The second focus is upon the valued attributes within the village itself which contribute to its character, vitality and community spirit.

These foci will give voice and fulfilment to the community's wishes once the Plan begins to be used in the determination of planning applications in the years to come.

In so doing, the Plan will provide a worthwhile and effective addition to the suite of national and local planning policies by bringing a locally relevant, community-led context to the management of development and land use in the Parish.

### Acknowledgements

The work of preparing the Plan has involved a lot of time and effort by a small and dedicated Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, made up of Parish Council representatives and members of the local community. The work of these and other key people has been essential to the progress of the Plan and it is fitting to acknowledge and thank them for their contributions:

*Neighbourhood Plan Working Group members*

- Parish Councillors past and present: Harold Howe (Parish Council Chair), the late Wally Mellors, Anne Clarke and Helen Alexander;
- Former Parish Council Clerk (and Working Group Secretary): Alan Jordan;
- Local residents: Tony Unsworth, Jill Unsworth, John Clarke and John Morland.

*Officers of Durham County Council*

Stuart Carter, John Russell, Ged Lawson and Darran Miller.

*Neighbourhood Planning Consultant*

Shaun Hanson of Planning Advice Plus.

The Neighbourhood Plan Group is also grateful for the support of the Parish Council and for the grant funding provided by Locality (UK).

Last, but not least, grateful thanks must also be extended to all those who took part in consultations and shared their views to help shape this Plan.

*Alan Jordan*

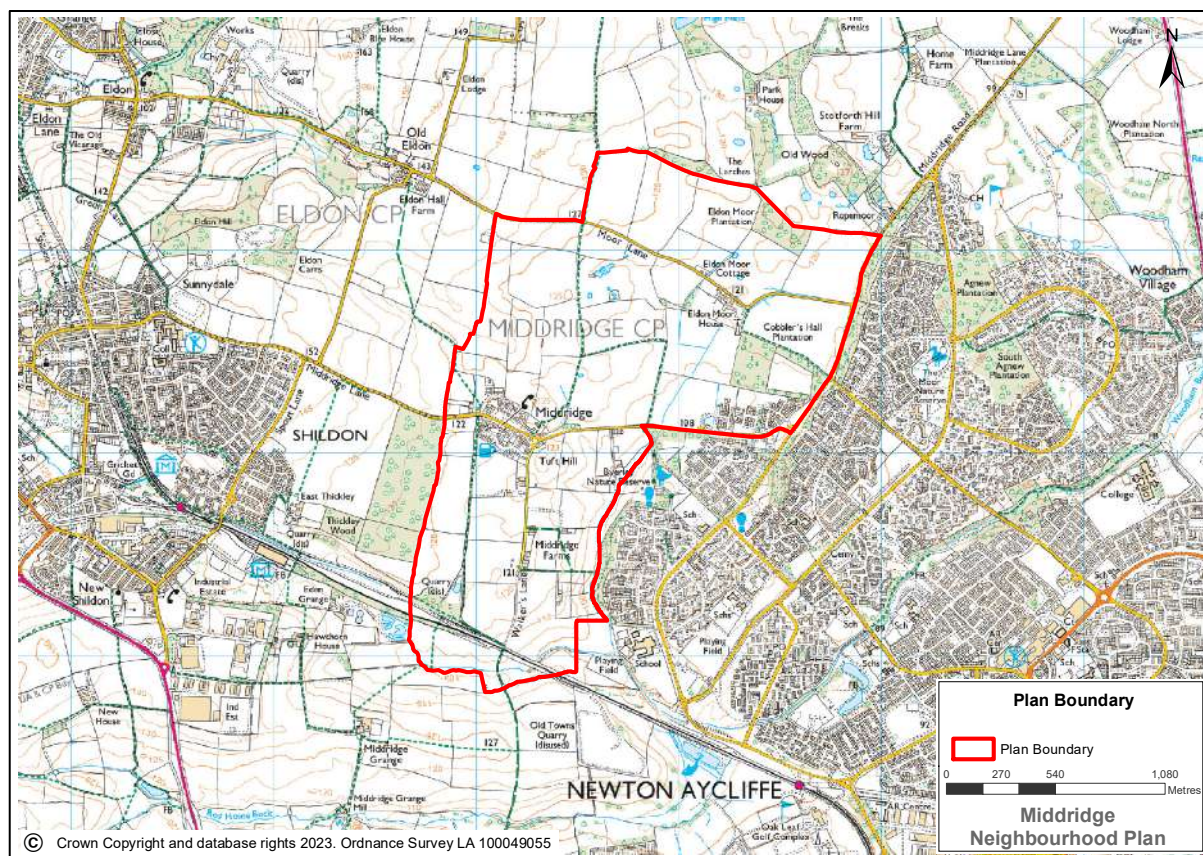
(Former Middridge Parish Council Clerk and Secretary of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group)



## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

### What is the Neighbourhood Plan, how will it operate and how is it structured?

- 1.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced new powers giving communities the ability to shape the development and conservation of their local areas by preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. This document is the result of that process for the Parish of Middridge.
- 1.2 The area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan is the same as the area covered by the Parish, thus the Neighbourhood Area boundary follows the Parish boundary as shown below.



*The Neighbourhood Area and Parish of Middridge*

- 1.3 Drawing upon evidence and community feedback, the Plan sets out a shared Vision and Objectives for the area, which are given effect to in planning policies. Once the Plan is operative, it will form part of the statutory planning framework and these policies will be used by Durham County Council in the determination of planning applications within the Parish.

- 1.4 In terms of its format, the Plan is made up of this written document, together with a set of Policies Maps and supporting Appendices at the end of the Plan. The Policies Maps consist of Ordnance Survey bases, which are overlaid with the area, sites and assets that the policies relate to. Different scale maps are used according to the nature of what is identified and/or the level of detail required.
- 1.5 Other (non-policy) maps are also included in the main body of the Plan for information, reference and illustration. Widespread use is also made of photos throughout the Plan for the same purposes.
- 1.6 The written document is arranged into chapters, starting with those which set the scene for the Plan and then moving onto the substantive topic chapters (chapters 4 and 5). Chapter 4 of the Plan sets out a compelling rationale and policy to safeguard the valued rural setting of Middridge village, whilst chapter 5 sets out policies to identify and protect the most valued attributes within the village.
- 1.7 The policies are presented in bold type within a shaded box and identified by a specific policy number. A background to each policy is provided, along with an explanation of how it operates. For any unfamiliar planning terms used in this Plan, attention is drawn to the glossary contained in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>1</sup>. A more comprehensive guide to terms can be found on the Planning Portal<sup>2</sup>.

*What period of time will the Neighbourhood Plan cover?*

- 1.8 The Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to cover a 15 year period, commencing in 2023 and ending in 2038. Once it becomes operative, it will be subject to regular monitoring and review by Middridge Parish Council to ensure that its policies continue to be relevant and effective. More details of this are in chapter 6.

*Why has a Neighbourhood Plan been prepared for the Parish?*

- 1.9 Prior to embarking on a Neighbourhood Plan, Middridge Parish Council has had a long history working with and for the local community to help maintain the character of the village and to protect and enhance its valued attributes. A prime manifestation of this is that it has been keenly aware of recent growth of the neighbouring towns of Newton Aycliffe and Shildon and the implications of this upon the character and identity of Middridge village and its rural setting.

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<sup>1</sup> See - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary>

<sup>2</sup> See - <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/directory/4/glossary/category/7>

1.10 Against this background, and, following the introduction of the 2011 Localism Act, the Parish Council expressed an early interest in the opportunity to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. It was recognised that such a Plan, if properly prepared, could be a beneficial tool, providing locally tailored policies to help protect the valued character and attributes of the village.

1.11 There was an acknowledgement that a Neighbourhood Plan would have the same statutory status as a Development Plan prepared by the County Council. Its policies would therefore carry real weight in assessing planning applications and help future decisions to better reflect the aspirations of local people.

*What process was followed in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan?*

1.12 As a Qualifying Body, the Parish Council first made an application to designate the whole Parish as a Neighbourhood Area in May 2014. This raised no objections and was granted by Durham County Council on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2014. A map showing the boundaries of the Neighbourhood Area is on page 3.

1.13 A Neighbourhood Plan Working Group was formed to spearhead and manage the tasks of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan. It comprised a mix of Parish Council representatives and interested local residents. Meetings were led by the Chair of the Parish Council with attendance by the (then) Parish Clerk, who acted as Secretary to the Group.

1.14 In anticipation of embarking on the preparation of the Plan, the Group undertook some preliminary community engagement in August 2013<sup>3</sup>. This was a broad brush exercise, aimed primarily at gathering information about the characteristics of the Parish population and their attitudes to various local issues.

1.15 Whilst the responses encompassed many non-planning matters, even at this early stage some clear themes emerged that the Neighbourhood Plan could consider. As anticipated, a particular prominence was attached to safeguarding the essential village character of Middridge and the rural character of the wider Parish by curbing further housing growth and protecting the countryside.

1.16 In the event, the subject of housing development soon assumed a central focus of attention in the Parish more generally because of ensuing proposals for major

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<sup>3</sup> Note that this was prior to the Parish receiving formal Neighbourhood Area status.

residential development on land at Eldon Whins<sup>4</sup>. This consisted of two large adjoining blocks of land as follows:

- A 9.2 hectare area of land, then owned by the Homes and Communities Agency (subsequently Homes England) which, in March 2016, became the subject of an application for 240 new dwellings<sup>5</sup>.
- Adjoining this, a further 10.3 hectare area of land which, since October 2014, had been the subject of a pending application by Persimmon Homes for 241 dwellings<sup>6</sup>.

1.17 In the light of these applications, the Working Group decided to initiate a second community consultation exercise in April 2016 to concentrate specifically on the subject of housing development. This consisted of a short questionnaire, ostensibly to inform the Neighbourhood Plan but also, more pressingly, to gather local opinion to help the Parish Council respond to the contemporaneous planning application.

1.18 Given the sentiments expressed in the first consultation exercise, this unsurprisingly confirmed that the overwhelming majority of respondents (over 90%) were opposed to new housing at Eldon Whins.

1.19 This early engagement with the community provided definitive feedback on housing growth and seeking to safeguard the valued character of the village and its rural setting. However, there remained some important gaps in terms of community opinion, where further local input would help to create a broader foundation and scope for the Neighbourhood Plan. At the same time, the Working Group recognised that it would also benefit from the provision of dedicated support to ensure the Plan as a whole was progressing along the right tracks.

1.20 Having secured professional help, a comprehensive, topic-focused questionnaire was prepared in 2017. Its purpose was to gather more relevant and targeted feedback to inform the development of the Plan, as well as further detail on the key themes which had already emerged. This was the subject of consultation over the spring of 2018<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This adjoins the edge of Newton Aycliffe, but lies wholly within the Parish of Middridge.

<sup>5</sup> The application (reference DM/16/00985/OUT) was on land which had historically been allocated for housing in the former Sedgefield Borough Local Plan and subsequently in the draft County Durham Plan.

<sup>6</sup> This application (reference DM/14/03153/OUT) fell mostly outside the housing allocation within open countryside. It was eventually withdrawn in March 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Full details of all the community engagement undertaken over the course of the Plan's preparation are set out in the 'Consultation Statement' submitted to Durham County Council with this Neighbourhood Plan.



1.21 From analysis of the resulting feedback, a set of three recurring aspirations emerged, which broadly reinforced previous community sentiments –

- 1) To protect and enhance the village’s character and attractiveness;
- 2) To protect and enhance the rural setting of the village and its separateness from neighbouring settlements;
- 3) To protect and enhance local green spaces and other valued assets in the village.

1.22 Aspirations 2) and 3) were essentially a sub-set of 1) and together provided the basis for a ready-made pair of objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan which could then be brought together into an overarching Vision. The Vision and Objectives in turn provided the starting point for developing the Plan’s policies, as summarised in Chapter 3.

1.23 Armed with these building blocks, background work was undertaken to examine options to implement the objectives, and to gather the information and evidence necessary to underpin the chosen policy approaches. This included undertaking detailed assessments to examine, narrow down and justify the valued areas, sites and assets which the Plan sought to identify and protect. Planning policies and supporting text were gradually built up from this raw material to form the substantive topic chapters of the Plan (chapters 4 and 5).

1.24 The ongoing involvement and support of the County Council was an integral and invaluable part of the Plan preparation process from the earliest stages. This ranged from attendance at meetings to the provision of information, advice and feedback and practical mapping support.

*How does the Neighbourhood Plan fit into other planning policies or legal requirements?*

1.25 Before a Neighbourhood Plan can be brought into legal force, it must pass a set of tests collectively known as ‘Basic Conditions’. These require that the Neighbourhood Plan:

- a) Is prepared having regard to national policy;
- b) Is in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan;
- c) Contributes to the achievement of sustainable development; and
- d) Is compatible with European Union obligations.

1.26 How these requirements are met is set out in the ‘Basic Conditions Statement’ submitted to Durham County Council with this Neighbourhood Plan.

- 1.27 However, in brief, the intent of the Neighbourhood Plan is that its policies will operate alongside and be supportive of the existing framework of planning policies at a national and local level in fulfilment of a) and b) above.
- 1.28 Looking firstly at national planning policy, this is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), as updated in December 2023. The NPPF draws a distinction between strategic and non-strategic policies. Generally speaking, Neighbourhood Plans provide a particularly appropriate context for non-strategic policies as they can set out more detailed and locally relevant requirements for specific areas, sites or types of development. However, these *'must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in any development plan that covers their area'* (NPPF footnote 16).
- 1.29 Looking then at the County level, the local planning policy position is set out in the County Durham Plan (CDP), adopted in October 2020.
- 1.30 The policies of this Neighbourhood Plan seek to provide a local amplification and focus for the Parish to the related policies of the CDP in respect of:
- The valued rural setting of Middridge in Chapter 4 (cross reference CDP Policies 6 and 10);
  - Its valued local green spaces and village assets in Chapter 5 (cross reference CDP Policies 26 and 6).
- 1.31 Turning to the achievement of sustainable development in respect of c) above, the NPPF identifies the 3 components of this as being economic, social and environmental (paragraph 8). Essentially, sustainable development is about enabling development to meet the needs of current generations, without compromising those of future generations.
- 1.32 Given Middridge's rural nature and the sensitivities of its setting, assets and character, this Neighbourhood Plan focuses particularly on the environmental element by seeking to identify, conserve and, where possible, enhance those aspects which are most valued for the benefit of current and future generations. This will help ensure that future development does not lead to a loss of the contributions they make to its character, identity and sense of place.
- 1.33 A final legal requirement for the Neighbourhood Plan is that it must be in line with European Obligations on Strategic Environmental Assessments and Habitat Regulations (ref d) above). Screening of the Plan by Durham County Council has confirmed that no further assessments are required in respect of these matters.

*What stage is this Neighbourhood Plan at and what happens next?*

- 1.34 This is the 'Submission' version of the Neighbourhood Plan<sup>8</sup>. It follows the publication of the Pre-Submission version, which was the subject of consultation over the period from 5 February to 17 March 2024. The submissions which were received during this period have been carefully considered and, in response to them, revisions to the Plan have been made along with minor revisions to update and/or clarify text where appropriate.
- 1.35 Details of the submissions, responses to them and resulting changes to the Plan are set out in the Consultation Statement, which also sets out details of all other consultation undertaken during the preparation of the Plan. The Consultation Statement, along with the Basic Conditions Statement have been submitted with this Neighbourhood Plan to Durham County Council in accordance with Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 1.36 The County Council will arrange a further publicity period for this Submission Plan, following which it will be reviewed and assessed by an independent examiner to decide whether it meets Basic Conditions (see paragraphs 1.25 and 1.26). Assuming it does, the Plan (with any agreed modifications) will proceed to a referendum. If more than 50% of those voting support the Plan, it will be brought into legal force to form part of the statutory Development Plan for the area.

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<sup>8</sup> Known as the 'Regulation 15' stage under the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

## **CHAPTER 2: A PROFILE OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA**

2.1 The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the Neighbourhood Plan by providing a descriptive overview of Middridge and its people. This will include a brief account of the Parish’s geography and environment, its history, population and housing characteristics, its local economic activity and the key land use issues and priorities it faces looking ahead to the next 10 to 15 years. This then provides a natural context for the Plan’s Vision and Objectives, as summarised in Chapter 3.

### *Geography and Environment*

2.2 Extending to approximately 322 hectares in area<sup>9</sup>, the Parish of Middridge is situated about 10 miles south of Durham in the former Borough of Sedgefield<sup>10</sup>. The townships of Shildon<sup>11</sup> and Newton Aycliffe<sup>12</sup> lie close to the west and east of the Parish respectively. Indeed, the eastern boundary of the Parish is mostly coterminous with the built extent of Newton Aycliffe, with the exception of the recent Eldon Whins development which lies inside the Parish boundary (dealt with later in this chapter).

2.3 Aside from these urban neighbours, the northern part of the Parish’s western boundary (north of Shildon) adjoins Eldon Parish, while to the north lies the Parish of Windlestone. Lastly, the Parish of Heighington adjoins to the south, which falls within the area administered by Darlington Borough Council. Each of these three Parishes are predominantly rural in character (see geographical context map overleaf).

2.4 In plan form, the village of Middridge is a nucleated settlement, with dwellings originally laid out in two rows set behind village greens – one row to the north of Middridge Lane (Northside) and one to the south (Southside). This archetypal settlement form is clearly illustrated in the earliest OS map of the village dating from 1857 (see page 15). Today, the larger areas of green on the north side of the road remain largely intact, but much of those to the south have been encroached into by car parking and domestic curtilages over the years.

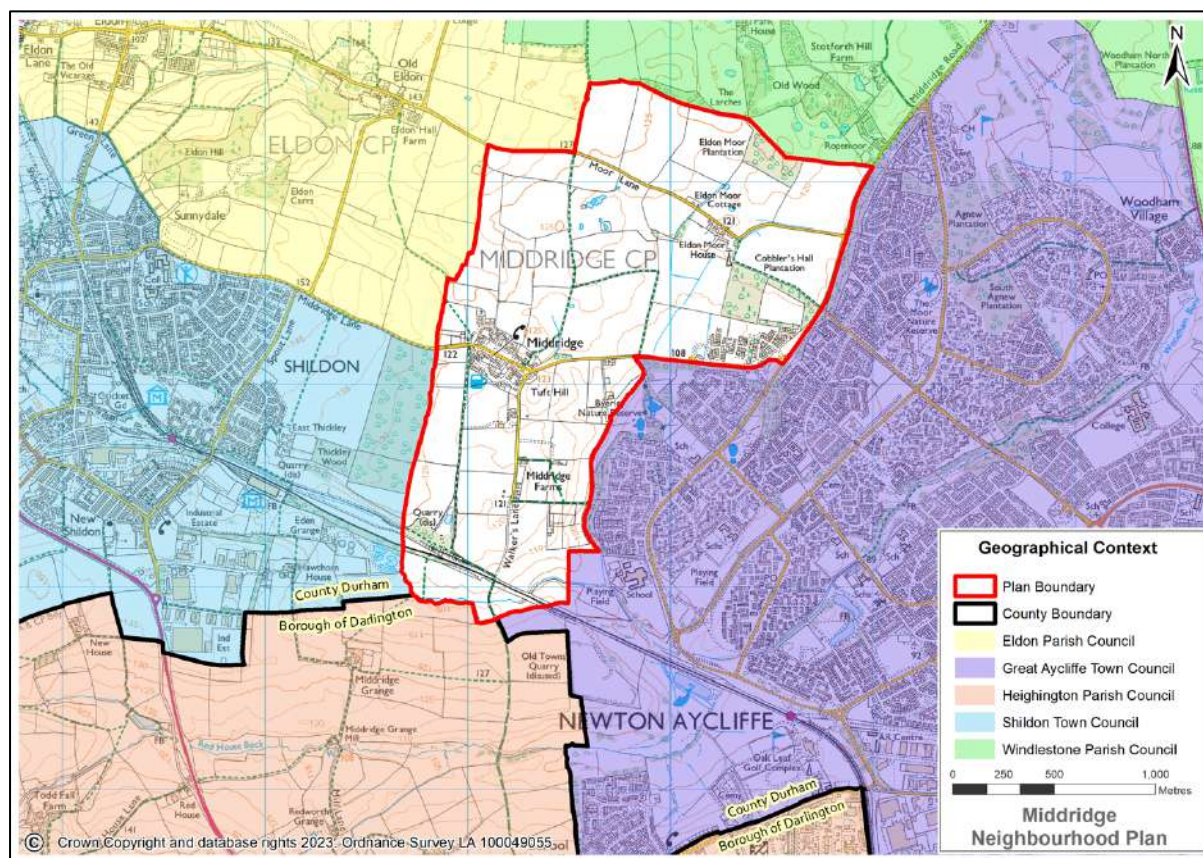
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<sup>9</sup> Equivalent to one and a quarter square miles or 3.22 square kilometres.

<sup>10</sup> Sedgefield borough was abolished in 2009 as part of local government reorganisation.

<sup>11</sup> Falling under Shildon Town Council.

<sup>12</sup> Falling under Great Aycliffe Town Council.



Showing the wider geographical context of Middridge Parish

2.5 The immediate setting of the village is rural farmland. Indeed, this characterises the rest of the Parish area, with the exception of the afore-mentioned Eldon Whins development. However, within this wider area are a further 19 dwellings in three separate pockets of built development. These comprise –

- a) A row of 5 pairs of semi-detached dwellings at 1-10 Walker’s Lane to the south of the village;
- b) A row of 3 pairs of semi-detached dwellings at 11-16 Middridge Farms to the east of the village;
- c) Eldon Moor House<sup>13</sup> and Eldon Moor Cottage on Moor Lane to the north east of the village.

2.6 The dwellings referred to in a) and b) were built in the inter-war period in association with the establishment of the Middridge Farms Smallholdings, further details of which are in this chapter’s section on ‘History’ (paragraph 2.19)

2.7 The topography of the village is largely flat, lying at an elevation of approximately 115m above sea level. As for the wider area, ground levels tend to be higher in the

<sup>13</sup> Note – this is comprised of 2 dwellings.

north and west of the Parish than the south and east. There is also a raised area at the north western edge of the village which was originally an embankment for the tramway associated with the former Middridge Colliery (Charles Pit). A further natural raised area, known as Tuft Hill, lies at the diagonally opposite (south eastern) edge of the village. The watercourse of Woodham Burn runs close to the southern boundary of the Parish, with a small section of the historic route of the Stockton to Darlington Railway also crossing this area.

- 2.8 Lastly in the south of the Parish is Middridge Quarry, a former limestone quarry, now a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The designation recognises the site's fossil-rich marl slate which has yielded plant and animal fossils of international palaeontological significance.

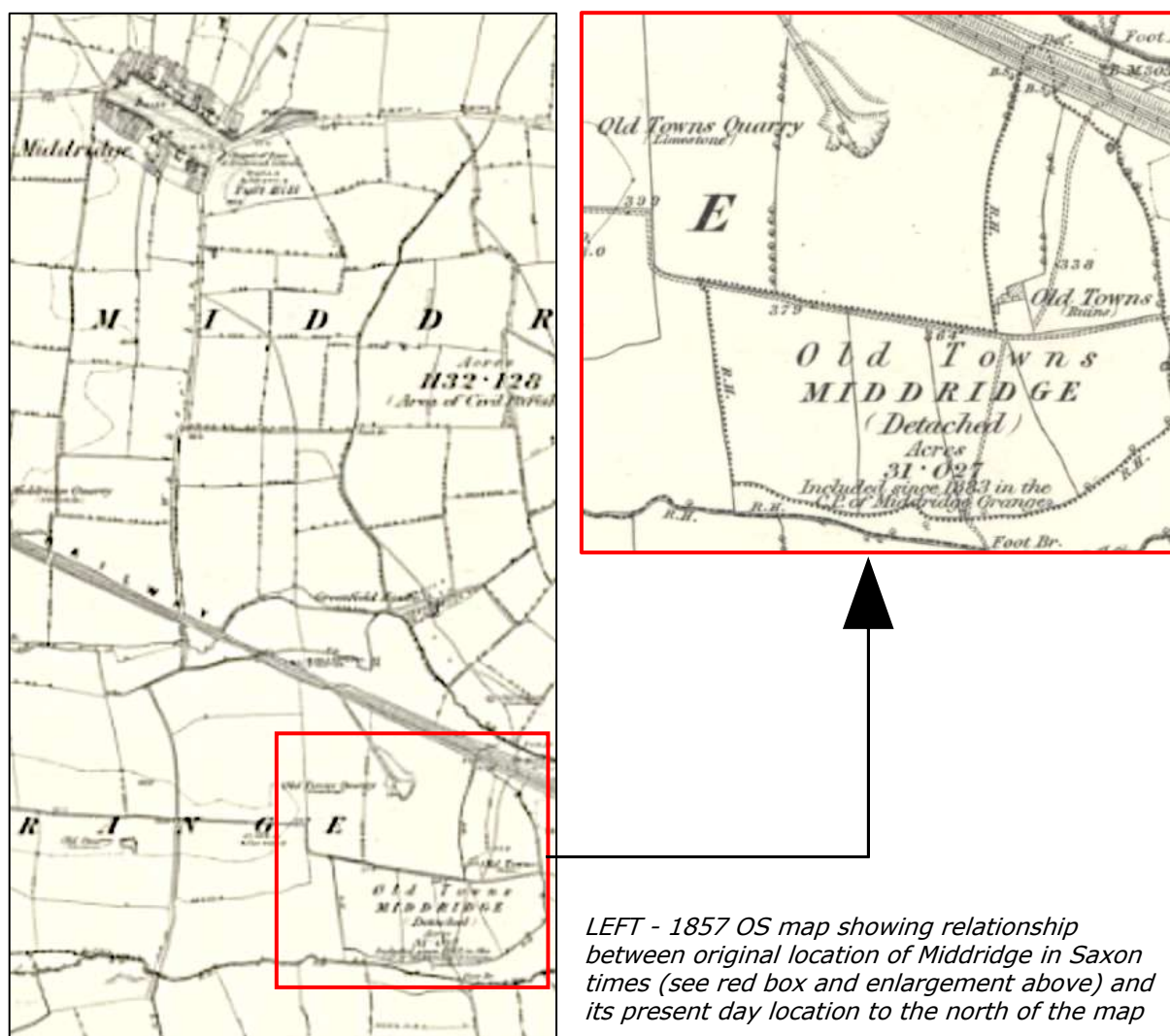


*Middridge Quarry SSSI*

- 2.9 In terms of transport linkages, the main road through the village is Middridge Lane (the C35) which connects to Shildon and Bishop Auckland in the west and Newton Aycliffe and Darlington to the east. It is also a bus route, with bus stops located in the centre of the village. Moor Lane runs through the northern part of the Parish connecting Newton Aycliffe with Eldon. Finally, Walkers Lane heads south out of the village providing access to the dwellings previously mentioned (paragraph 2.5a), before becoming an unsurfaced farm track.

History

2.10 As a place, Midridge dates from Saxon times, although the settlement at that time was understood to be about a mile south of its present location, near to what is now Aycliffe Golf Course. This would logically explain the choice of its name, 'Midridge' as this original location was on the 'middle ridge' between Old Eldon and School Aycliffe. The location also coincides with the historic mapped use of the name 'Old Towns Midridge', documented since the 15<sup>th</sup> century and clearly depicted on early maps of the area, as shown below<sup>14</sup>.



LEFT - 1857 OS map showing relationship between original location of Midridge in Saxon times (see red box and enlargement above) and its present day location to the north of the map

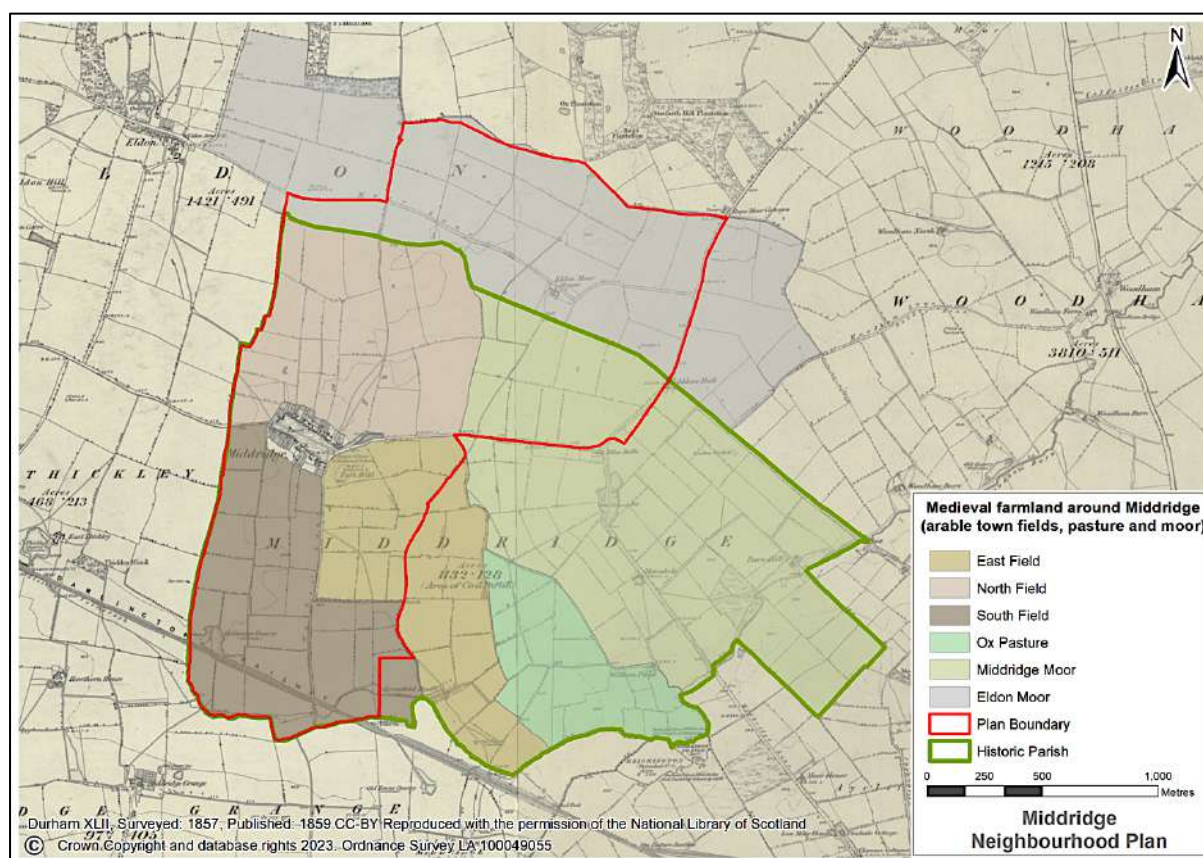
2.11 Following the 11<sup>th</sup> century Norman invasion and occupation of England came the 'Harrying of the North', the savage campaign by William the Conqueror to quell any rebellion from the Anglo-Saxon peoples of northern England. The ensuing battles and famine laid waste to the original settlement of Midridge and the surviving subjugated inhabitants were moved to a new site, namely the present location of the

<sup>14</sup> Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland - <https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>

village. It is likely that the basic shape of the village, with its two long rows of houses facing on to a green, dates back to this time.

2.12 The first written reference to Middridge was in the 'Baldon Book', the great survey of lands held by Hugh de Puiset (Bishop of Durham), which was compiled in 1183. This recorded that, at that time, a feudal system was in operation at Middridge, with a total of 15 'villeins' (bondmen legally tied to the lord of the manor) working as peasant farmers and each responsible for 30 acres of land producing malt, meal and oats.

2.13 From its earliest establishment as a settlement, this shows that there was an inextricable association between Middridge and its rural setting. During the medieval period, an agricultural landscape became established around the village comprising arable town fields, pasturelands and moorlands (see map below).



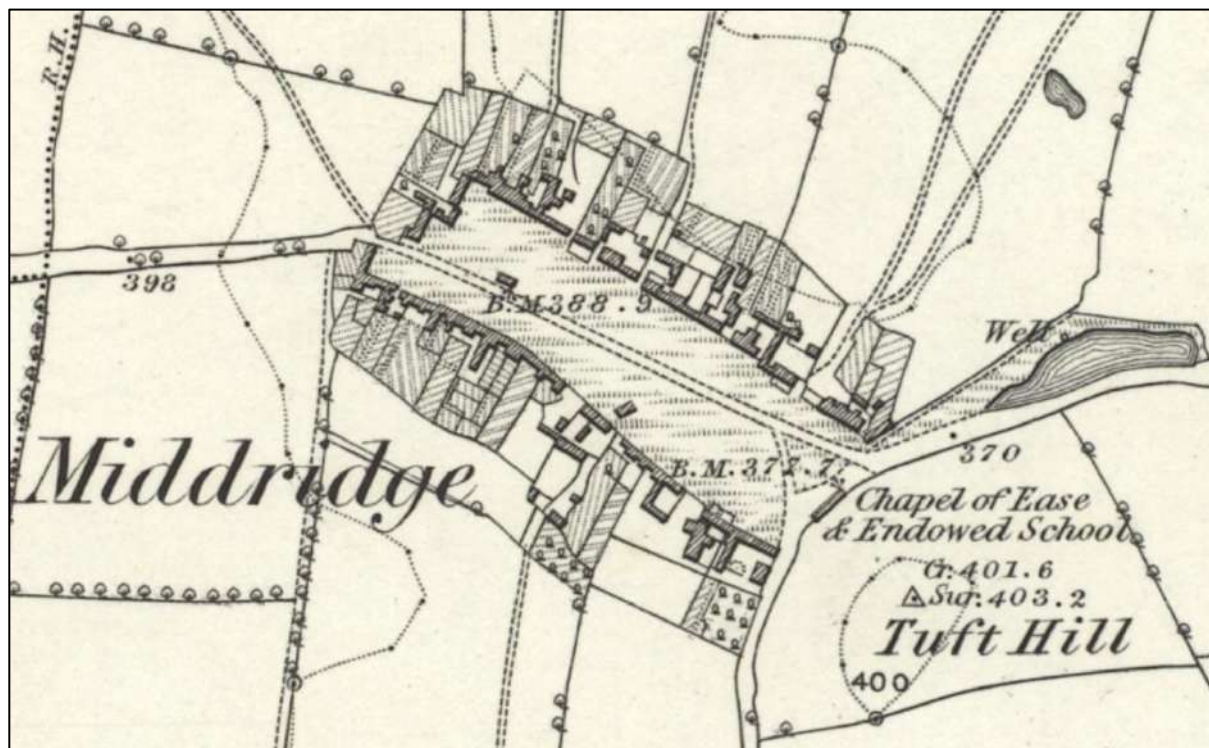
*Medieval layout of agricultural lands in the historic Parish of Middridge<sup>15</sup>*

2.14 In addition, many of the cottages which had been established facing the green possessed long and narrow rear gardens, a characteristic of 'burgage plots'. These

<sup>15</sup> Map is based on a study of town fields contained in a 1977 publication entitled 'Rural Durham' by Vera Chapman (Durham County Library Local History Publications No 11).

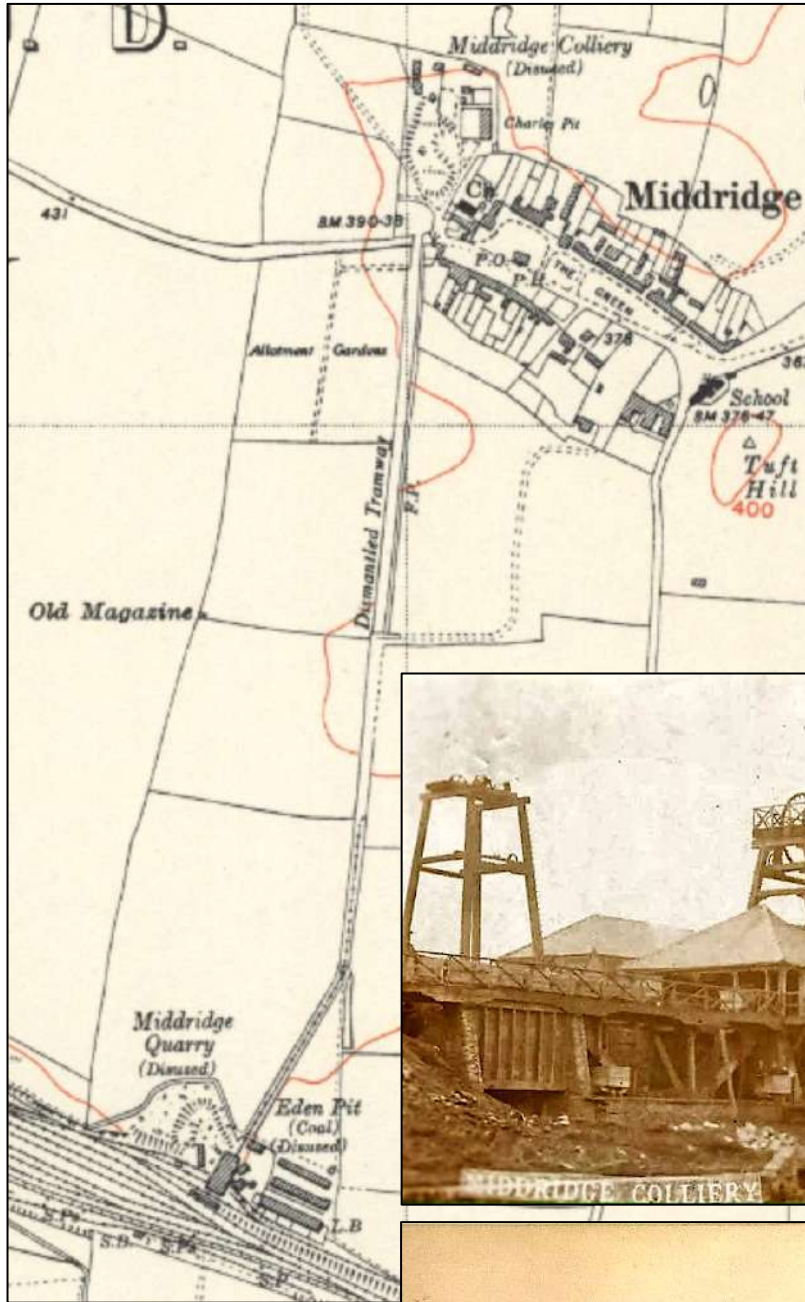


are still clearly evident in the earliest OS map of the village, dating from 1857 (see below).



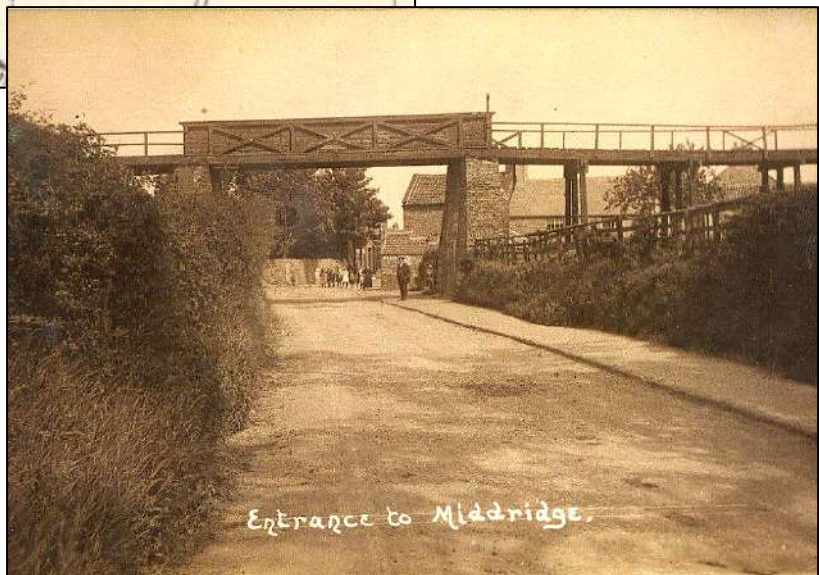
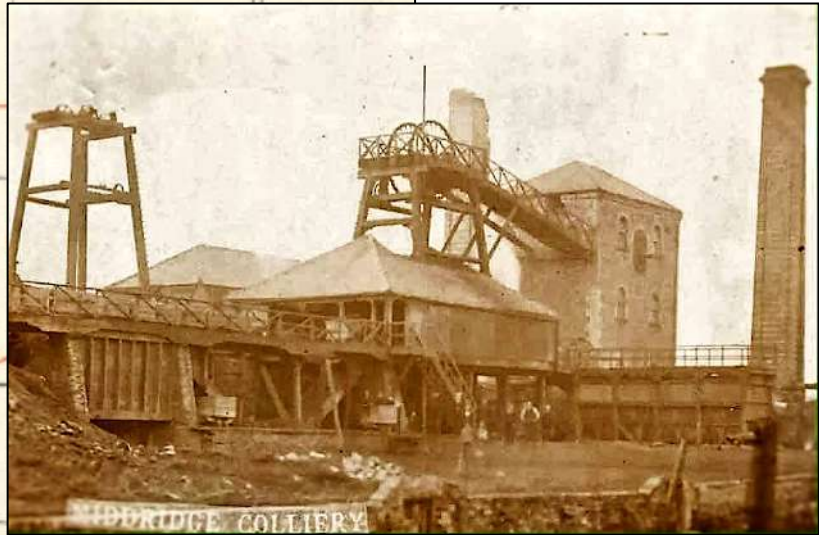
Midldridge in 1857<sup>14</sup>

- 2.15 By the early 1800's, a thriving village community was in evidence, with records from the time referring to a schoolroom, built in 1817, a chapel of ease and two public houses.
- 2.16 Shortly after, in 1825, the famous Stockton and Darlington Railway was opened to convey coal from Shildon through Darlington and on to the port at Stockton on Tees. A small part of the line runs through the southern part of the Parish. This lies adjacent to the former Midldridge Quarry which was itself established to provide stone for the construction of the railway.
- 2.17 Later in the nineteenth century, the expansion of the coal mining industry saw two pits open in Midldridge - Eden Pit (1872), which was situated next to Midldridge Quarry and Charles Pit (1874), which was situated on the north western edge of the village. Collectively known as Midldridge Colliery, these were linked by a tramway which crossed the road over a trestle bridge (see map and photos overleaf). From Eden Pit, the coal was then dropped on to the Stockton and Darlington Railway ready for transportation.



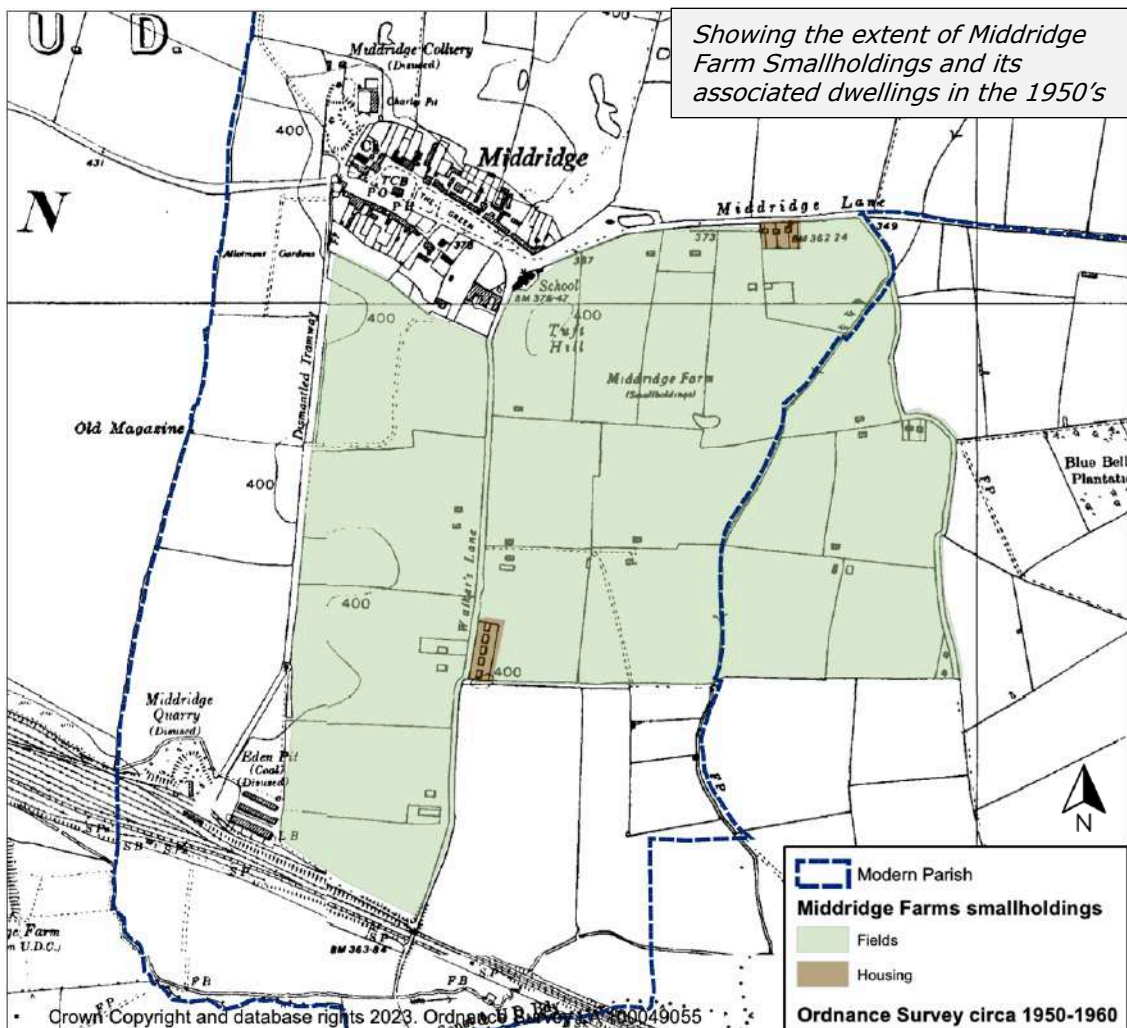
LEFT: 1951 OS map <sup>14</sup> showing the location of the northern Charles Pit and southern Eden Pit, linked by tramway and also the site of the former Midridge Quarry adjacent to the Stockton and Darlington Railway

BELOW: Historic photos showing (top) the Charles Pit and (bottom) the tramway bridge over the road



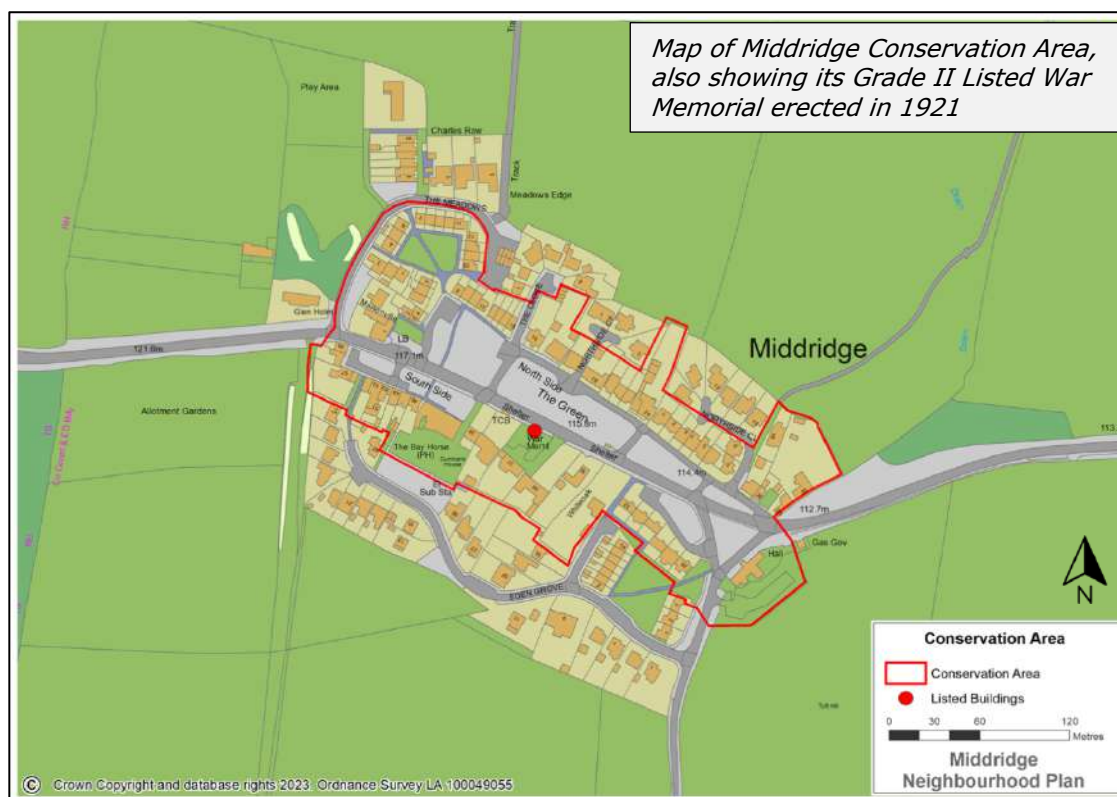
2.18 In its heyday (the 1890's), the colliery provided employment for hundreds of people, while producing a combined daily total of 600 tons of coal. New housing for miners and their families was built. At Charles Pit, this comprised Charles Row, a terrace of 6 dwellings, whilst at Eden Pit a community of 37 houses was built. However, mining at Middridge dwindled rapidly in the early twentieth century and had completely ceased by the time of the first world war. Whilst Charles Row still exists today, the settlement at Eden Pit fell into disrepair and was demolished in the 1950's.

2.19 With the demise of coal mining and the impacts of the Great Depression, there was a severe lack of employment opportunities in the interwar period. In the late 1930's, Middridge Farm Smallholdings was established to give unemployed people an opportunity to make a modest income from the land. By the 1950's, a total of 16 dwellings<sup>16</sup> had been built for the tenants on Walkers Lane and Middridge Lane as shown in the map below. This represented a further chapter in Middridge's long and valued association with its rural farmland setting.



<sup>16</sup> Note that a further 4 dwellings were also built, but these lie outside the modern-day Parish boundary.

- 2.20 More significantly at around the same time were the changes taking place to the wider rural setting of Middridge brought about by the planned development of a new township to the north of Aycliffe Village. Building of what would become Newton Aycliffe began in the late 1940's, and by June 1953 the settlement had rapidly grown to 1000 houses, changing forever the hitherto extensive rural hinterland to the east of Middridge. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 4.
- 2.21 As for Middridge itself, further growth occurred in the 1960's and 70's with the implementation of a regeneration plan led jointly by the Aycliffe Development Corporation and Shildon Urban District Council. This led to new Council housing being built on the north side of the village (The Meadows) and a private estate (Eden Grove) to the south. As part of the regeneration, the head workings and much of the spoil tip at Charles Pit was also cleared.
- 2.22 Following this, from the late 70's into the 1980's and 90's, there was significant infilling on the north side of the village with new development creating The Close, Northside Court and Northside Close. Together with the development outlined in the preceding paragraph, this ended up more than doubling the size of the village.
- 2.23 Notwithstanding the additional development that Middridge has experienced over the years, it retains its archetypal and historic village green layout and was designated a Conservation Area back in 1993.



2.24 Whilst the size of Middridge village has remained largely static since the 1990's, the Eldon Whins development has recently taken place at the eastern edge of the Parish, adding significantly to its overall population. More details are below and in Chapter 4.

### Population<sup>17</sup>

2.25 Parish level data from the 2021 census<sup>18</sup> shows that the Parish had a usually resident population of 414 people (up from 312 in 2011), made up of 199 households (up from 149 in 2011). This growth is easily explained by the development of new housing at Eldon Whins. Indeed, the Parish's population, household and dwelling numbers has grown still further in the period since the 2021 census as dwellings at Eldon Whins have continued to be built and occupied (see 'Housing' below).

2.26 In terms of the age profile of Parish residents in 2021, the percentage in the 0-15 age group was broadly comparable to that in County Durham as a whole. In contrast, the working age population was approximately 3% smaller and the non-working age (65+) 3% larger than the County figure. However, when comparing the Parish's age profile since 2011, it is noteworthy that the proportion in the 0-15 age group has risen by about 6%, whilst the number in the non-working age bracket has reduced by over 3%. This is again most likely explained by the influx of more families with younger children into the new housing at Eldon Whins.

2.27 The gender balance of the Parish in 2021 reveals a smaller proportion of males to females in the Parish (48.3% v 51.7%), though this differs little from the County M/F split of 48.9% v 51.1%.

### Housing

2.28 The total dwelling stock of the Parish in 2021 was 196 dwellings (up from 152 in 2011). As already noted, this increase has been as a result of new housing at Eldon Whins, the rapid development of which has taken place since about 2018. In fact, as the census figure only represents the position in March 2021, the number of dwellings has since grown still further, such that approximately two thirds of the planned housing has now been completed. In terms of dwelling numbers and extent, the position at the time of writing<sup>19</sup> is summarised in the table and map below.

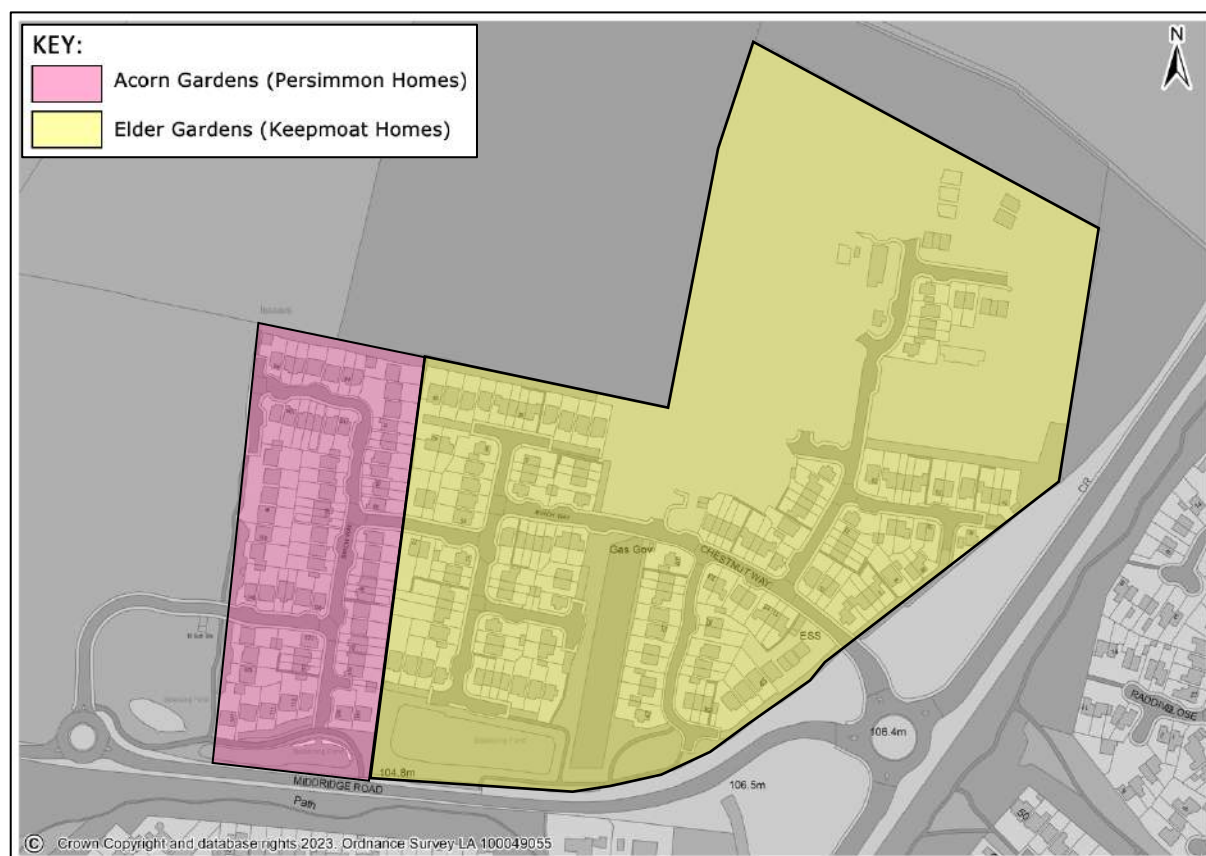
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<sup>17</sup> Census sources - <https://middridge.parish.uk/> and <https://www.censusdata.uk/e04010665-middridge> and <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> Data released by the Office for National Statistics in August 2023.

<sup>19</sup> November 2023.

NAME OF DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPER	DWELLINGS PROPOSED	DWELLINGS COMPLETED	DWELLINGS PENDING
Acorn Gardens (Persimmon Homes)	72	72	0
Elder Gardens (Keepmoat Homes)	256	158	98
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>98</b>

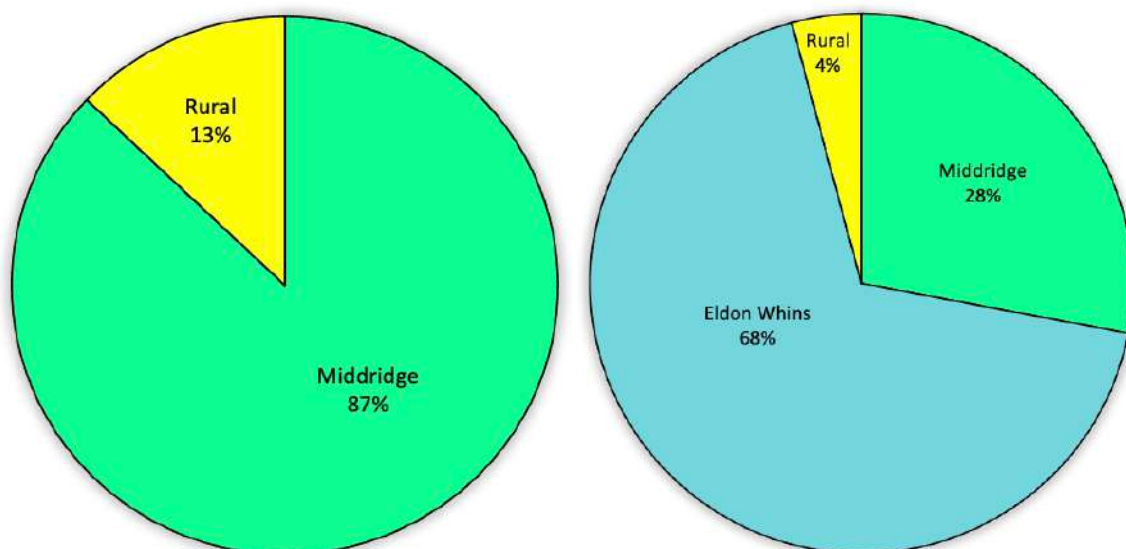


*Above table - summarising total dwelling numbers and completions at Eldon Whins  
 Above map –showing extent of development at Eldon Whins  
 (both as at time of writing, see footnote 19)*

2.29 It is acknowledged that the location of Eldon Whins is such that it has a relationship to Newton Aycliffe, being technically a northerly extension of its westernmost edge<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, it occupies its own distinct pocket of land, cut off in spatial terms by the busy Middridge Road and new four-exit roundabout intersection constructed as part of the development (see above map). More fundamentally, the land in question is clearly part of the Parish of Middridge and its development has therefore played a significant role in shaping the scope and focus of this Neighbourhood Plan. Specifically, it has helped sharply highlight both the vulnerability and the importance of Middridge’s rural setting and separation from neighbouring settlements.

<sup>20</sup> ie – the portion west of Greenfield Way.

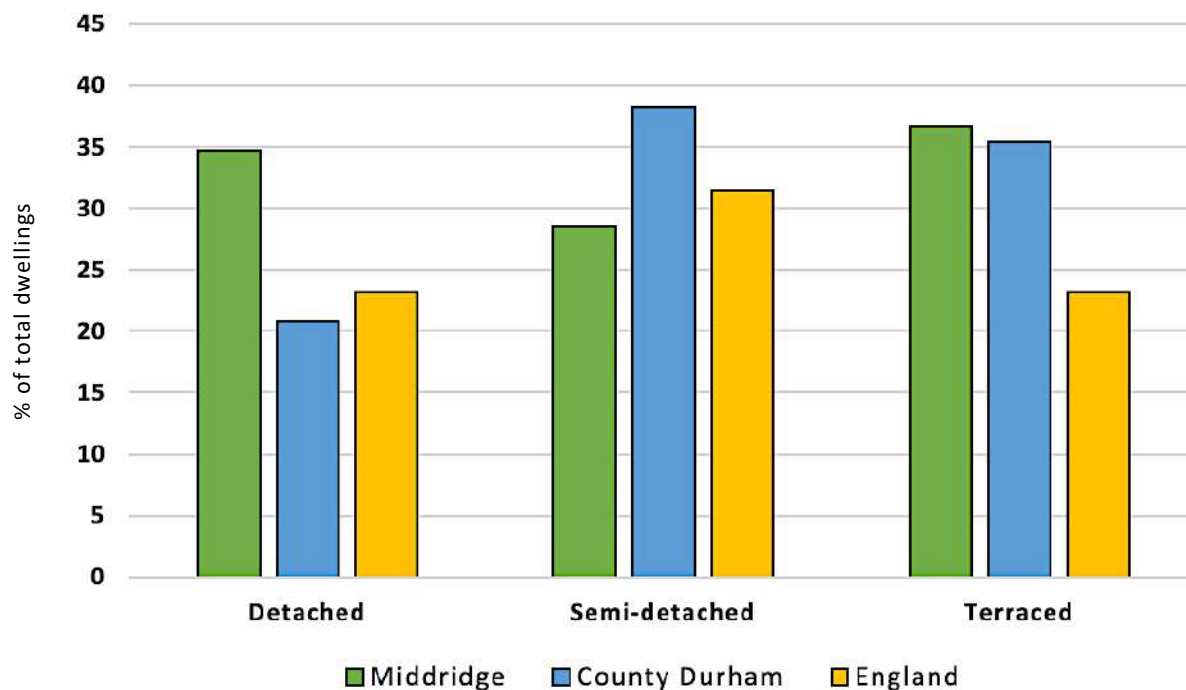
2.30 However, on a simple statistical level, a striking fact is that, when complete, Eldon Whins alone will contain more than twice the number of dwellings that exist in the entire rest of the Parish. The following pie charts illustrate this diagrammatically by showing the proportional distribution of dwellings in Midldridge Parish historically (pre Eldon Whins) and once Eldon Whins is completed.



*Pie charts showing the proportional distribution of all dwellings within the Parish, split into 'Midldridge' (dwellings within the village), 'Rural' (dwellings outside the village) and 'Eldon Whins'. The left hand chart represents the position pre development at Eldon Whins, whilst the right hand chart represents the position as it will be when development at Eldon Whins is complete*

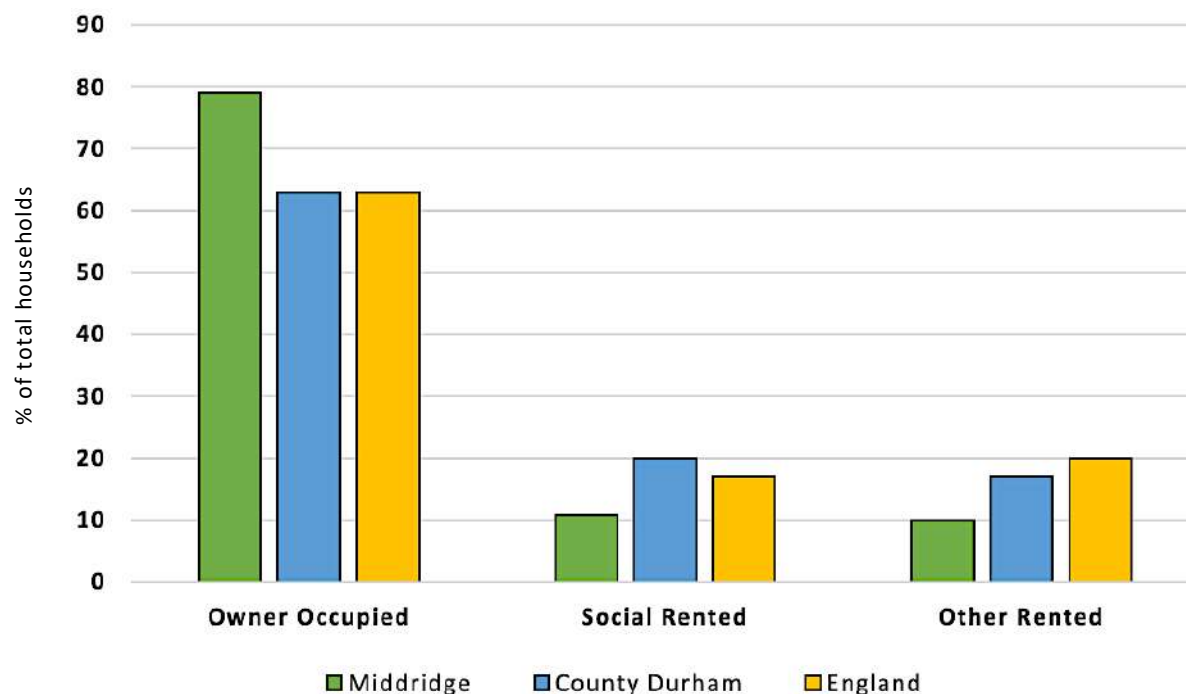
2.31 Turning to the nature of housing in the Parish, the graph overleaf breaks down the different house types that exist, alongside comparative figures from County Durham and England as a whole. This shows that, in 2021, almost 35% of the housing stock in the Parish was made up of detached dwellings, a proportion which is notably higher than the figure for both County Durham and England.

2.32 Conversely, the proportion of semi-detached properties (29%) is less than that found in County Durham or England-wide. Lastly, terraced properties make up 37% of the Parish's housing stock, a proportion which is marginally higher than in the County but markedly higher than in England as a whole.



House types in Middridge Parish compared to County Durham and England<sup>21</sup>

2.33 In terms of dwelling tenure, the graph below similarly breaks down the different tenure types within Middridge, County Durham and England.



Dwelling tenure in Middridge Parish compared to County Durham and England<sup>20</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Sources: <https://middridge.parish.uk/census/> and [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census\\_2021/report?compare=E06000047](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E06000047) and <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/housingenglandandwales/census2021>



2.34 It shows that by far the largest proportion of dwellings are owner occupied, with the number exceeding that for County Durham and England as a whole. The rented sector is contrastingly smaller in Middridge than in County Durham and England.

### *Economic Activity*

2.35 Census data<sup>22</sup> indicates that, in 2021, 58% of the adult population<sup>23</sup> of the Parish were economically active, which is higher than the County Durham figure of 54%. The economically inactive proportion (42%) was consequently lower than the County Durham figure of 46%. However, the proportion of Parish residents who were retirees was greater than in County Durham as a whole (29% versus 26%).

2.36 An interesting feature of the Parish's workforce is that over half (55%) are recorded as being in managerial, professional and associated professional and technical occupations. This contrasts with the equivalent County Durham figure of 39%.

2.37 As for local economic activity within the Parish, the principal areas include farming and related activities, a livery business, the public house and several small home-based businesses.

2.38 Looking ahead, the growth in the Parish's population from housing at Eldon Whins should help in sustaining existing business activity and community facilities and services, as well as potentially facilitating their growth in the coming years.

### *Key land use issues and priorities for the Neighbourhood Plan*

2.39 These opening chapters of the Plan have set a clear context for the issues it sets out to tackle, which in turn are encapsulated in the Vision, Objectives and Policies which follow.

2.40 In short, they have resulted in a Plan which sets its priorities firmly upon the long term protection and enhancement of characteristics which are most cherished by the local community. These give Middridge its essential character, identity and sense of place and are, respectively, the valued rural setting of the village and the valued attributes which are within it.

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<sup>22</sup> Sources: <https://www.censusdata.uk/e04010665-middridge/ts066-economic-activity-status> and [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census\\_2021/report?compare=E06000047](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E06000047)

NB - Middridge figures are calculated by adding up the values for census output areas contained within the Parish. They may therefore be slightly inaccurate due to administrative boundaries not precisely aligning with census boundaries.

<sup>23</sup> Aged 16 and over.

## CHAPTER 3: THE VISION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

- 3.1 The issues, concerns and aspirations of the community were captured and explored via public consultation and analysis of feedback undertaken in preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.2 The key findings were brought together to arrive at a proposed Vision for the Parish and Objective for each respective topic area. The draft Vision and Objectives were shared with the community to ensure that they properly encapsulated the key messages which had been raised and were the appropriate building blocks for the Plan’s policies.
- 3.3 Subsequent minor wording changes took place to ensure the Vision and Objectives accurately reflected the final content and nomenclature of the Neighbourhood Plan and these are set out below, together with the policies of the Plan which seek to implement them.

### Overall Vision:

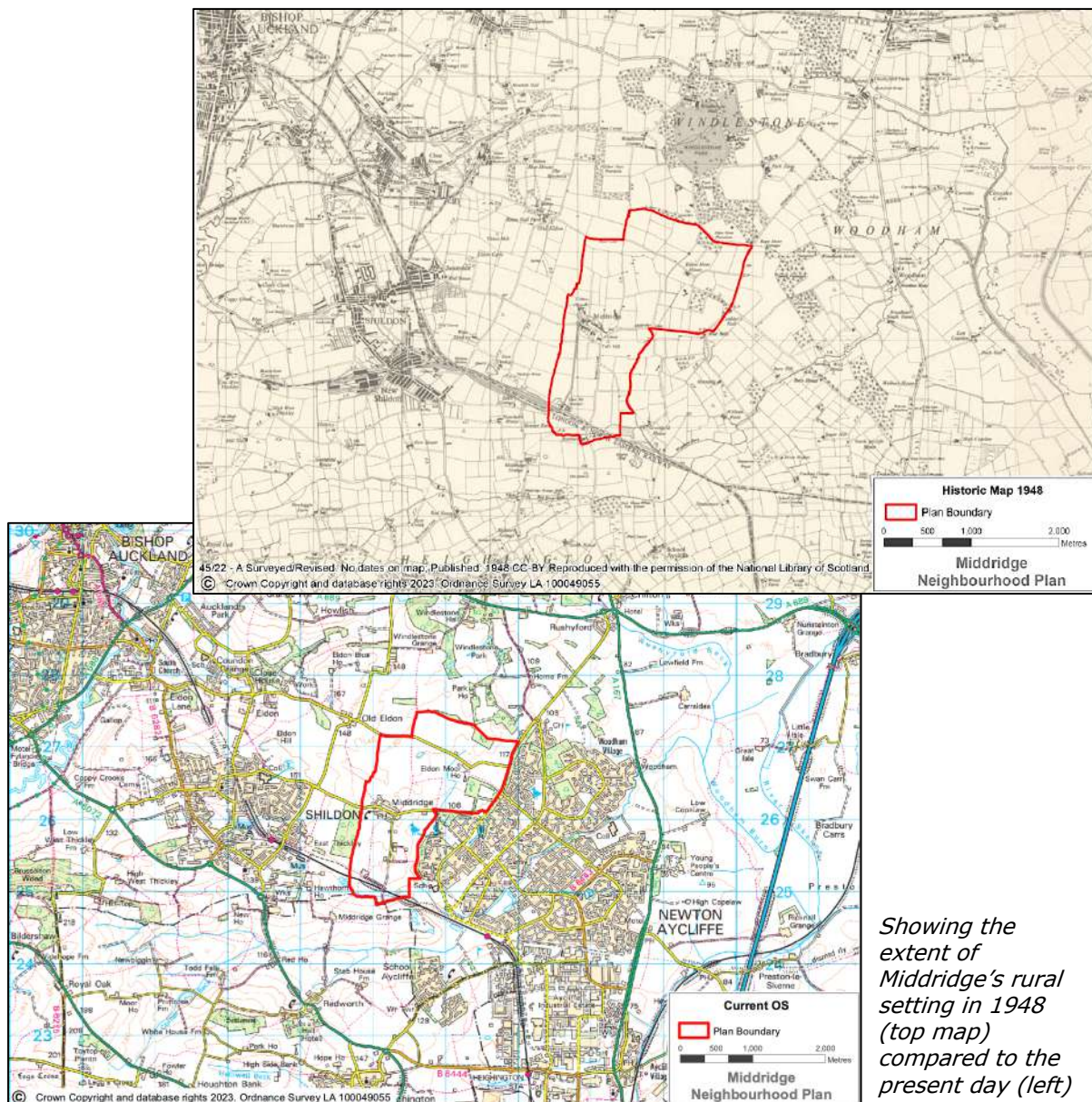
*To safeguard the valued rural setting of Middridge village and maintain its separateness from neighbouring settlements, whilst also protecting and enhancing the valued open spaces and built assets which contribute to the village’s character and wellbeing of the community.*

### Topic Chapters, Objectives and Policies:

CHAPTER		TOPIC OBJECTIVE	POLICY/POLICIES TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVE
4	The Valued Rural Setting of Middridge Village	<i>'To safeguard the valued rural setting of Middridge village and maintain its separateness from neighbouring settlements'.</i>	<u>Policy MNP1:</u> Protected Rural Setting (p.29)
5	The Valued Attributes of Middridge Village	<i>'To protect and enhance the valued open spaces and built assets which contribute to the village’s character and wellbeing of the community'.</i>	<u>Policy MNP2:</u> Local Green Spaces (p.39) <u>Policy MNP3:</u> Valued Village Assets (p.41)

## CHAPTER 4: THE VALUED RURAL SETTING OF MIDDRIDGE VILLAGE

- 4.1 As set out in Chapter 2, Middridge has for centuries existed as a village settlement with extensive open countryside surrounding it. Indeed, this remained the case until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast, the development of nearby Newton Aycliffe only began in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as a New Town settlement, with Shildon growing primarily in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of coal mining and the early development of the railway.
- 4.2 The subsequent growth of these towns has been significant, particularly in recent times. The dramatic effect of this upon Middridge’s ruralness can be clearly seen in comparing an OS map from as recently as 1948 and one from today (see below).



4.3 Safeguarding the valued rural setting of Midldridge village represents the single most significant planning issue facing the Parish and accordingly takes centre stage in the matters to be tackled in the Neighbourhood Plan. The justification for doing so stems from an amalgam of compelling reasons –

- a) **Maintaining the essential ‘rural village’ identity and character of Midldridge:** a fundamental attribute of Midldridge is that it is distinctly a village - a small self-contained settlement with its own individual identity, character and sense of place. Its countryside setting is a crucial prerequisite to maintaining its separateness from neighbouring towns and ensuring that this rural village identity remains intact and safeguarded, now and into the future.

It is important to recognise that this separateness is not just a product of physical ‘space’ between the village and its urban neighbours, but also one’s ability to visually perceive its rural setting in the landscape.

In this regard, it is fortunate that a combination of factors come together to help maintain a strong impression of Midldridge’s ruralness, notwithstanding the close physical proximity of neighbouring towns. These factors range from the gently rolling ‘lie of the land’ at and around the village, to the screening effect of trees and the alignment of the eastern and western road approaches. As the photos below demonstrate, these all help reinforce the sense of ruralness, whether one is at the edge of the village looking out, or at vantage points (roads/footpaths) looking towards the village.



*Showing the close relationship between Midldridge and its rural setting:*

*Above shows roofscape of dwellings on Northside Close as viewed from Moor Lane*

*Left shows dwellings on Eden Grove as viewed from footpath which leads to Midldridge Quarry*

b) **Safeguarding the historic association between Middridge and surrounding farmland:** whilst the heritage values of the village are recognised in its Conservation Area status, there has been a strong historic connection between it and the surrounding rural landscape from its earliest beginnings as a settlement. As explained in Chapter 2<sup>24</sup>, a system of arable town fields, pastureland and moorland had become established around the village in medieval times, providing vital food resources for the village population from crops and livestock grazing. Even into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the valued role of rural land around the village was re-affirmed with the creation of Middridge Farms Smallholdings, also discussed in Chapter 2 (paragraph 2.19). Further historic associations are to be found with the former Middridge Quarry, Eden Pit (and former tramway serving it) and the site of the Eden Pit colliery settlement, all lying in rural land to the south of the village. The rural setting of Middridge is therefore inextricably bound up in the long history of the village and its inhabitants, providing an integral part of its identity and heritage significance as a Conservation Area<sup>25</sup>.

c) **Recognising the significant shrinkage of Middridge’s rural setting and close proximity of neighbouring towns:** as the maps at the start of the chapter starkly show, the area of countryside surrounding Middridge to the east and west has drastically reduced over the last half century or so. This has created a situation where, at their closest points, there is now barely half a kilometre separating Newton Aycliffe from Middridge. On the ground, this equates to the width of two fields, which is all that is left separating the new town of Newton Aycliffe from the historic village of Middridge.

The separation from Shildon is marginally greater (900m), but there is still only a narrow gap separating its closest eastern edge (the northern end of Spout Lane) from the western edge of Middridge.

This minimal remaining extent of eastern and western separation must be maintained and not be allowed to be further eroded or the very real possibility is that Middridge will effectively be lost as an identifiable separate village and coalesce with either Newton Aycliffe and/or Shildon.

d) **Recognising the continuing pressure for development:** significant new housing has continued to take place at the edges of Newton Aycliffe (Eldon Whins) and Shildon (Middridge Vale). At Middridge Vale, a total of 276 new dwellings have

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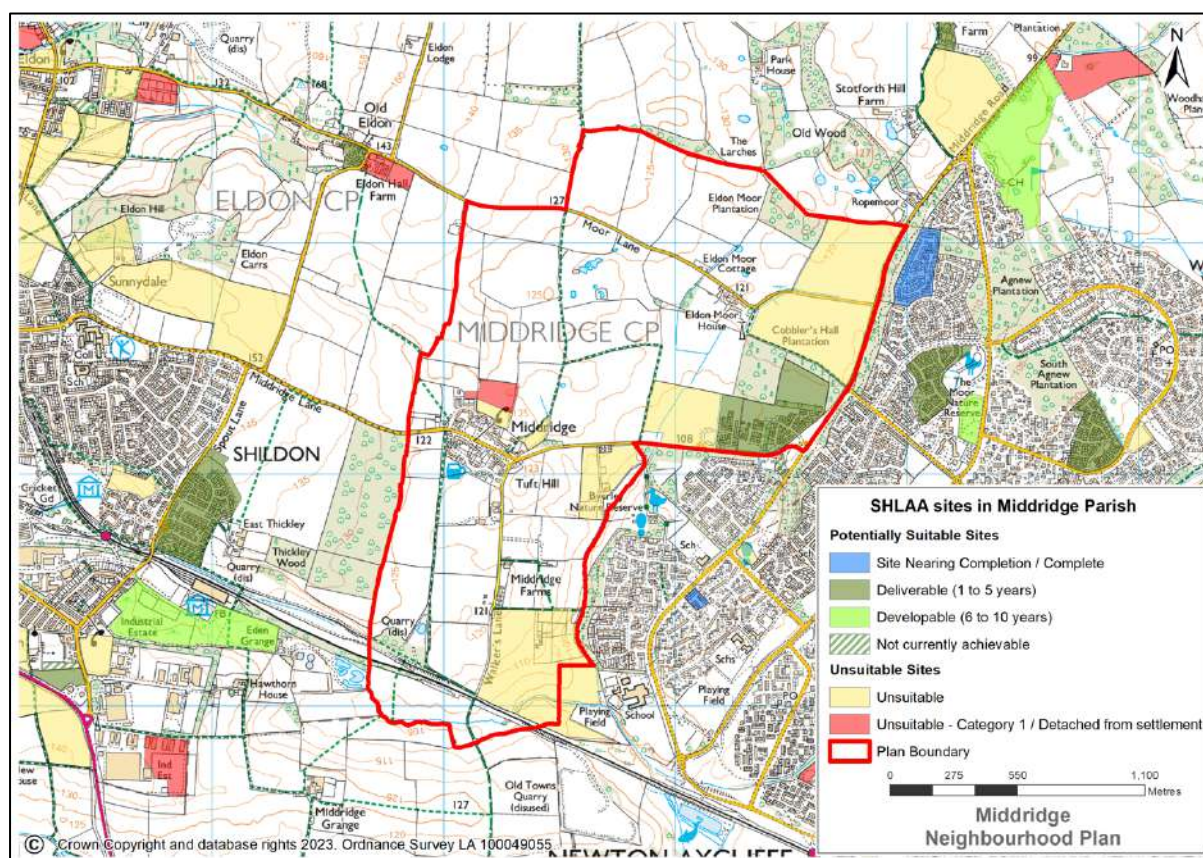
<sup>24</sup> See paragraphs 2.12 and 2.13.

<sup>25</sup> The glossary to the NPPF makes clear that '*Significance derives not only from a heritage asset’s physical presence, but also from its setting*'.

recently been added to the eastern edge of Shildon, whilst at Eldon Whins, the total figure is 328 dwellings. Although Middridge Vale lies outside the Parish, Eldon Whins is wholly in it and, when complete, will contain almost two and half times the dwellings that exist in the whole of Middridge village.

Both developments are significant in 'leap-frogging' the former urban edges of these towns. In the case of Shildon, this was previously formed by Spout Lane which provided containment to the eastern extent of built development, but is now breached with Middridge Vale extending across the other side of it over the southern half of its length. In the case of Newton Aycliffe, it was previously formed by Middridge Road, which provided containment to the western and northern extent of built development, now breached by Eldon Whins.

As well as these developments however, there is evidence of further developer interest to extend Eldon Whins westwards even closer to Middridge, as well as interest in other sites within the Parish – see map below.



Map showing the sites in Middridge Parish which feature in Durham County Council's 2019 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The colours in the map represent a traffic light system to distinguish between sites that are potentially suitable or potentially unsuitable for housing development. Red denotes sites classed as unsuitable, amber denotes those that are potentially unsuitable, and those in green are potentially suitable. For more information, the 2019 SHLAA report is at - <https://durhamcc-consult.objective.co.uk/file/5244169>

e) **Responding to public opinion:** in terms of public opinion, the issue of maintaining the separateness of Middridge village from Newton Aycliffe and Shildon emerged as a top priority for the Neighbourhood Plan, with feedback showing over 99% of respondents agreeing with its importance. This was clearly backed up in comments received, with many respondents highlighting that they valued and wanted to safeguard the rural setting of Middridge in order to protect its individual village identity, character and sense of place.

4.4 As set out above, the burden of evidence, together with the strongly held views of the community, combine to create a robust and cogent rationale for protecting the rural setting of Middridge village.

4.5 To effectively tackle this, the policy approach that the Plan takes is to identify an area of countryside extending out from the village which, in spatial terms, most closely responds to and addresses the matters outlined in a) to e).

4.6 The resulting area is accordingly defined as a Protected Rural Setting (PRS) and is shown on Policies Map 1. Development proposals within the PRS will be assessed in accordance with Policy MNP1.

**POLICY MNP1 - PROTECTED RURAL SETTING:**

Policies Map 1 identifies an area of countryside extending out from Middridge village as a 'Protected Rural Setting' (PRS).

The rural nature of the PRS will be safeguarded in order to maintain the historic character and identity of Middridge as a self-contained village surrounded by countryside.

Accordingly, development proposals within or encroaching into the PRS will not be supported where they will diminish the rural character of the PRS or the role it plays in maintaining the physical separation between Middridge and the neighbouring settlements of Shildon and Newton Aycliffe.

*Policy Explanation*

4.7 The countryside around Middridge plays a vital role in maintaining the historic nature of the settlement as a rural village with its own individual identity and character, set apart from its nearest neighbours of Newton Aycliffe to the east and Shildon to the west.

4.8 In addition, it provides a backdrop to the village which is intrinsically valuable in visual and landscape terms, a quality which clearly also applies to the rural land adjoining the recent Eldon Whins development (see photos below).



*Showing the relationship between Eldon Whins and its rural setting:*

*Above photo – as viewed from Middridge Road*

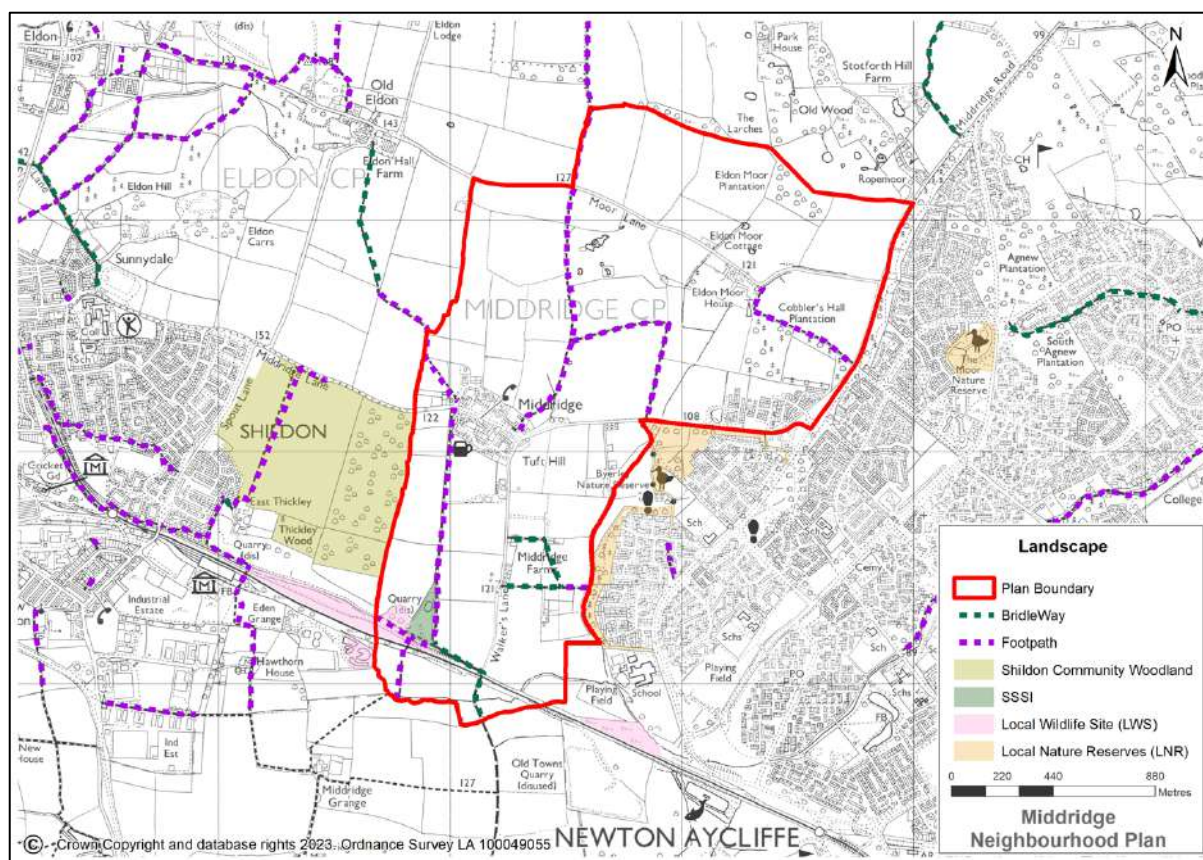
*Right photo – as viewed from Moor Lane*



4.9 The countryside is crossed by and visible from a number of public footpaths and bridleways accessible both from within the village and from points outside it, including Moor Lane to the north and the railway line to the south. This visual and physical connectivity allows the countryside to be enjoyed and its role in providing the setting and separateness of Middridge to be clearly understood and valued.

4.10 These values are reinforced still further, on the Shildon side, by the creation of the Shildon Community Woodland, and on the Newton Aycliffe side by the Byerley Local Nature Reserve (LNR) which sits on the western fringe of the town. Both of these lie immediately adjacent to Parish boundaries. A further significant asset in the countryside south of the village is Middridge Quarry SSSI. All of these are identified on the map below.





Map showing the network of public footpaths and bridleways around the village, Shildon Community Woodland, Byerley LNR and Middridge Quarry SSSI

4.11 The extent of the PRS was determined by considering the following key factors –

- Its role in forming the village’s setting and its essential quality of ‘ruralness’, and/or;
- Its intrinsic attributes/qualities, and/or;
- Its role in providing physical separation from neighbouring settlements, and/or;
- Its historic connectivity and association with the village, including historic elements within it (ref paragraph 4.3b), and/or;
- The need for the PRS to follow firm and meaningful boundaries.

4.12 To elaborate on the last of these bullet points:

- The northern boundary is marked by Moor Lane, which provides a clear and logical physical edge to the PRS, with tangible visual evidence of its role in providing setting and separation to both Middridge and Eldon Whins, as shown in photos earlier in the chapter<sup>27</sup>.
- The southern boundary likewise follows the clear and logical boundary formed by the railway line, allowing the PRS to take in Middridge Farms, the former

<sup>27</sup> For Middridge, see first photo after para 4.3(a); for Eldon Whins, see second photo after para 4.8.

Midldridge Quarry, Eden Pit (and former tramway serving it) and the site of the Eden Pit colliery settlement, all of which have inextricable historic associations with the village.

- The eastern boundary of the PRS follows the Parish boundary from the railway line up to Midldridge Lane as this is contiguous with the western built extent of Newton Aycliffe and so safeguards the integrity of the rural land separating it from Midldridge. North of Midldridge Lane, the PRS continues to follow the Parish boundary, up to the point where it meets and once again follows the western built extent of Newton Aycliffe as now formed by the new Eldon Whins development. It then continues on the same north alignment up to Moor Lane adjacent to the Cobbler’s Hall Plantation. This likewise safeguards the integrity of the vulnerable rural gap between Eldon Whins and Midldridge, a mere half a mile (800m) away. Photos below provide further demonstration of the narrowness of this gap.



*Showing narrowness of separation from Eldon Whins to Midldridge:*

**Top** – shows 11-16 Midldridge Farms (middle of photo) as viewed from the edge of Eldon Whins

**Middle** – shows Eldon Whins as viewed from 11-16 Midldridge Farms

**Bottom** – shows built edge of Midldridge village as viewed from 11-16 Midldridge Farms



It is also noteworthy that the interface between the edge of Eldon Whins and the rural land beyond is particularly prominent and visually clear cut, providing a strong and legible boundary to the PRS. This can be readily seen, whether viewed from the road and roundabout entrance to the development, or along the recently formed footpath approaching from the west (see photos below). This contrasts markedly with corresponding development south of Middridge Lane, which is well concealed and contained by existing trees and the Byerley Nature Reserve.



*Showing the clear cut and prominent interface between Eldon Whins and the adjoining PRS land:*

*Above – as viewed from the roundabout entrance on Middridge Lane*

*Left – as viewed from the footpath approaching the development from the west*

- Lastly, the western boundary simply follows the western boundary of the Parish, from Moor Lane in the north to the railway line in the south. Whilst this is first and foremost an administrative boundary, it represents the logical western extent given that the PRS cannot extend beyond the legally defined Neighbourhood Area to the edge of Shildon, as explained further below.

4.13 It should be noted that the PRS cannot extend outside Parish boundaries as the Neighbourhood Plan has no jurisdiction beyond them. This is not an issue in respect

of the PRS east of the village as the Parish boundary follows the edge of Newton Aycliffe. However, the PRS west of the village cannot similarly extend to the edge of Shildon as this would encompass land which lies beyond the Parish boundary. However, the area in question clearly performs the same vital role of maintaining the remaining open gap separating it from Middridge. In planning terms, the rationale for its protection would therefore be the same as for that within the Parish/Neighbourhood Area boundary.

- 4.14 The PRS provides a means of formally identifying the rural setting of Middridge, highlighting exactly why it is valued and allying it with a policy (MNP1). The policy fulfils a necessary and legitimate planning purpose, which is to ensure that future development proposals protect the rural character and integrity of the PRS. In turn, this provides an appropriate and meaningful way for the Plan to give effect to its first core objective which is *'To safeguard the valued rural setting of Middridge village and maintain its separateness from neighbouring settlements'*.

## CHAPTER 5: THE VALUED ATTRIBUTES OF MIDDRIDGE VILLAGE

- 5.1 The preceding chapter explains how the rural setting of Middridge is highly valued for the role it plays in maintaining its historic character and identity as a self-contained village surrounded by countryside.
- 5.2 However, there are other attributes which play an equally important role in maintaining the character and appeal of the village and the wellbeing of those that live, work or visit there. The purpose of this chapter is to identify what these are and set out policies which apply to any development proposals affecting them.
- 5.3 In gathering views from the local community during preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, it became evident that the attributes in question broadly fell under two headings:
- a) The valued village greens and other open spaces within Middridge (the term used to identify these in the Plan is 'Local Green Spaces')
  - b) The valued facilities, amenities or services within Middridge (the term used to identify these in the Plan is 'Valued Village Assets')



*View of part of the village green and the Bay Horse public house, both valued attributes in the village*

- 5.4 Forming part of the Plan’s overall Vision (see chapter 3), the objective which this chapter of the Plan accordingly seeks to implement is - *'To protect and enhance the valued open spaces and built assets which contribute to the village’s character and wellbeing of the community'*.
- 5.5 In feedback during Neighbourhood Plan preparation, an unequivocal 100% of respondents agreed that it was important for the Neighbourhood Plan to identify local green spaces for protection. Potential candidates for identification were put forward as part of this response and these were in turn assessed, along with other potential sites, to help arrive at a final list of sites for protection in the Plan. Similarly, suggestions were made for built assets within the village that should merit identification and protection in the Plan.
- 5.6 The approach the chapter takes is therefore to set out separate policies dealing in turn with the village’s valued local green spaces (Policy MNP2) and then its valued village assets (Policy MNP3). These collectively represent the valued attributes of Middridge village.
- 5.7 In responding to the clear aspirations of the community, each policy seeks to conserve these attributes by requiring that development does not lead to their loss or reduced value, and that opportunities to enhance or add to them will be supported.

#### *Local Green Spaces*

- 5.8 The focus of Policy MNP2 is specifically upon the Local Green Spaces (LGS’s) of the village as this reflects the significant value attached to them by residents, the established status of LGS’s as a planning tool, and the recognised role Neighbourhood Plans can play in their identification and protection.
- 5.9 At the local planning level, the adopted County Durham Plan (CDP) relies on a catch-all generic approach to protecting open spaces as part of its ‘Green Infrastructure’ policy (Policy 26). In other words, the open spaces which are to be protected are not specifically identified in a list or on a map in the CDP. Instead, the policy includes a section on ‘Loss of Provision’, which seeks to ensure that development proposals do not result in the loss of open space.
- 5.10 However, at the national policy level, the NPPF recognises that *'The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them'* (paragraph 105). This importance can derive from attributes such as their visual amenity, historic, wildlife or recreational value or indeed a combination of these. The

County Durham Plan similarly notes that *'Neighbourhood Plans can identify any ... spaces that are considered worthy of local designation..'* (paragraph 5.450).

5.11 It is widely acknowledged that green spaces contribute to the quality of the built environment, helping make places more attractive to live, work in and visit. They are a key measure of the quality of an area, and play a large part in community wellbeing.

5.12 In the case of Middridge, they can also form an integral part of the heritage and essential character of the village. This is particularly exemplified in the village greens, which lie both at the approach to, and at the heart of the village (see photos below). As well as these, other sites include the village's play area, allotments and several other valued recreation/amenity spaces throughout the village (see photos overleaf).



*Three views of Middridge's attractive village greens (LGS1)*



*Examples of Middridge's varied local green spaces.*

*From top to bottom:*

- *The village play area (LGS2)*
- *The village allotments (LGS3)*
- *Amenity area linking Walkers Lane & Eden Grove (LGS6)*
- *Amenity area fronting The Meadows (LGS4)*



5.13 These sites each provided the focus for assessment in accordance with criteria set out in paragraph 106 of the NPPF. This resulted in a list of 7 sites<sup>28</sup> which met the criteria and were therefore justified in being identified and designated in the Plan as Local Green Spaces. A summary table of the assessment outcomes for the sites is included in Appendix 1 and each site is individually identified in Policies Map 2.

5.14 Policy MNP2 consequently brings these together, formally identifies them as Local Green Spaces and sets out the manner in which they will be safeguarded.

#### **POLICY MNP2: LOCAL GREEN SPACES**

The sites listed below and identified in Policies Map 2 are designated as areas of Local Green Space (LGS). The management of development within areas of Local Green Space will be consistent with that for development within Green Belts. Proposals that will enhance existing LGS's or create new ones will be supported in principle.

**LGS1: Village Greens**

**LGS2: Village Play Area**

**LGS3: Village Allotments**

**LGS4: Amenity area fronting The Meadows**

**LGS5: Amenity area off Eden Grove**

**LGS6: Amenity area linking Walkers Lane & Eden Grove**

**LGS7: Amenity area fronting 29-31 South Side**

5.15 The intention of Policy MNP2 is to ensure that the valued Local Green Spaces in the village are protected from development in order to safeguard the open space roles they fulfil<sup>29</sup>. The scope for development within a Local Green Space is intended to be restricted in the same manner as it is for Green Belts (NPPF paragraph 107). Where opportunities arise to enhance the values and roles of Local Green Spaces, or create new ones, these will be supported, subject to other planning considerations being acceptable.

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<sup>28</sup> Note – this includes the village greens which, whilst comprising a number of parcels of land, have been grouped together as LGS1 for the purposes of Policy MNP2.

<sup>29</sup> The various roles for each site are identified in the Local Green Spaces Assessment Summary Table in Appendix 1.

### Valued Village Assets

- 5.16 At the national policy level, the NPPF (paragraph 97) highlights the role of planning policies in guarding *'against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day to day needs'* (sub-section c), as well as ensuring *'that established shops, facilities and services are able to develop and modernise and are retained for the benefit of the community'* (sub-section d).
- 5.17 Likewise, paragraph 88 sets out what is needed to help support a prosperous rural economy, including *'the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship'* (sub-section d).
- 5.18 Turning to the local authority level, as with open spaces, the adopted County Durham Plan (CDP) similarly takes a generic approach to safeguarding essential community facilities, stating at paragraph 5.57 that *'It is important that the unnecessary loss of shops, community or cultural facilities within the county's smaller settlements is avoided'*. At the policy level, this is reinforced in Policy 6 which states that development proposals must *'not result in the loss of a settlement's or neighbourhood's valued facilities or services unless it has been demonstrated that they are no longer viable'* (sub-section g).
- 5.19 The CDP does not specifically identify the facilities or services in question. Again however, like local green spaces, it notes that *'Neighbourhood Plans can identify any buildings ... that are considered worthy of local designation..'* (paragraph 5.450).
- 5.20 Whilst Midldridge is overwhelmingly made up of residential properties, there are two such buildings which are highly valued by local people for the contribution they make to the character and appeal of the village and to the local economy and community wellbeing. These are the Village Hall and The Bay Horse village pub.
- 5.21 These featured prominently in consultation feedback as strong and indisputable candidates for protection as Valued Village Assets (VVA's) in the Neighbourhood Plan<sup>30</sup>, an outcome which was amply confirmed in their subsequent assessment as part of the Plan's preparation.

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<sup>30</sup> Other suggestions were put forward, but these were already subject to existing protections. Examples included the Grade II Listed Village War Memorial, Midldridge Quarry SSSI and the village allotments (identified as LGS3 in Policy MNP2 and also listed in its own right as an Asset of Community Value).

5.22 A summary table of these assessment outcomes is included in Appendix 2 and the VVA's are each identified in Policies Map 3. Below, Policy MNP3 identifies the two VVA's and sets out the manner in which they will be safeguarded.

**POLICY MNP3 – VALUED VILLAGE ASSETS**

Listed below and identified on Policies Map 3 are assets within the village which are of significant value to the local community and are accordingly defined as Valued Village Assets (VVA's):

**VVA1: Middridge Village Hall**

**VVA2: The Bay Horse Public House**

Proposals involving the loss of a VVA will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that:

- a) There is no longer any need or demand for it, or
- b) It is no longer economically viable, or
- c) Provision is made for the relocation of the VVA to an equally or more appropriate and accessible location within the village or wider Parish area.

Proposals to improve the VVA's or provide new community facilities, services or amenities will be supported in principle.

5.23 The intention of Policy MNP3 is to protect VVA's within Middridge for the important role they play in maintaining the character and appeal of the village and the contribution they make to the social, economic and community wellbeing of those that live, work and visit there.

5.24 Finally, whilst the Neighbourhood Plan cannot of itself bring about the improvement of VVA's, or the provision of new ones, MNP3 does set out a positive policy approach to support and encourage such development, subject to other planning considerations being acceptable.



*Midridge's Valued Village Assets: the Village Hall (top) and The Bay Horse Public House (bottom)*

## CHAPTER 9: MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

- 9.1 The Midldridge Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared to operate for the period 2023 to 2038. This does not however mean that it will be left unchecked throughout this 15 year period. Appropriate monitoring is essential to ensure that its objectives remain relevant and its policies effective.
- 9.2 Monitoring will allow changing circumstances to be considered, whether in terms of shifts in wider planning policy frameworks, or emerging issues, trends or development patterns. If these indicate a need for changes, then the Neighbourhood Plan can be reviewed and, where appropriate, revised.
- 9.3 The Government’s Planning Practice Guidance confirms that *‘Communities in areas where policies in a neighbourhood plan that is in force have become out of date may decide to update their plan, or part of it’*.<sup>31</sup>
- 9.4 Durham County Council have their own monitoring and review procedures in place for their planning policies and this will include the relationships between the County Durham Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.
- 9.5 However, as the Qualifying Body behind this Neighbourhood Plan, Midldridge Parish Council will undertake its own monitoring in liaison with the County Council to ensure that the Plan remains relevant and effective and aligned with the County Durham Plan. This will include –
- a) Reviewing the operation of the Neighbourhood Plan at timely intervals;
  - b) Assessing the extent to which policies are being effectively implemented;
  - c) In the light of b), identifying whether steps need to be taken to ensure policies are more effectively implemented, or whether any need to be amended or replaced;
  - d) Identifying whether policies need amending or replacing to reflect changes in national or local planning policy or changed circumstances since the policy was drafted.

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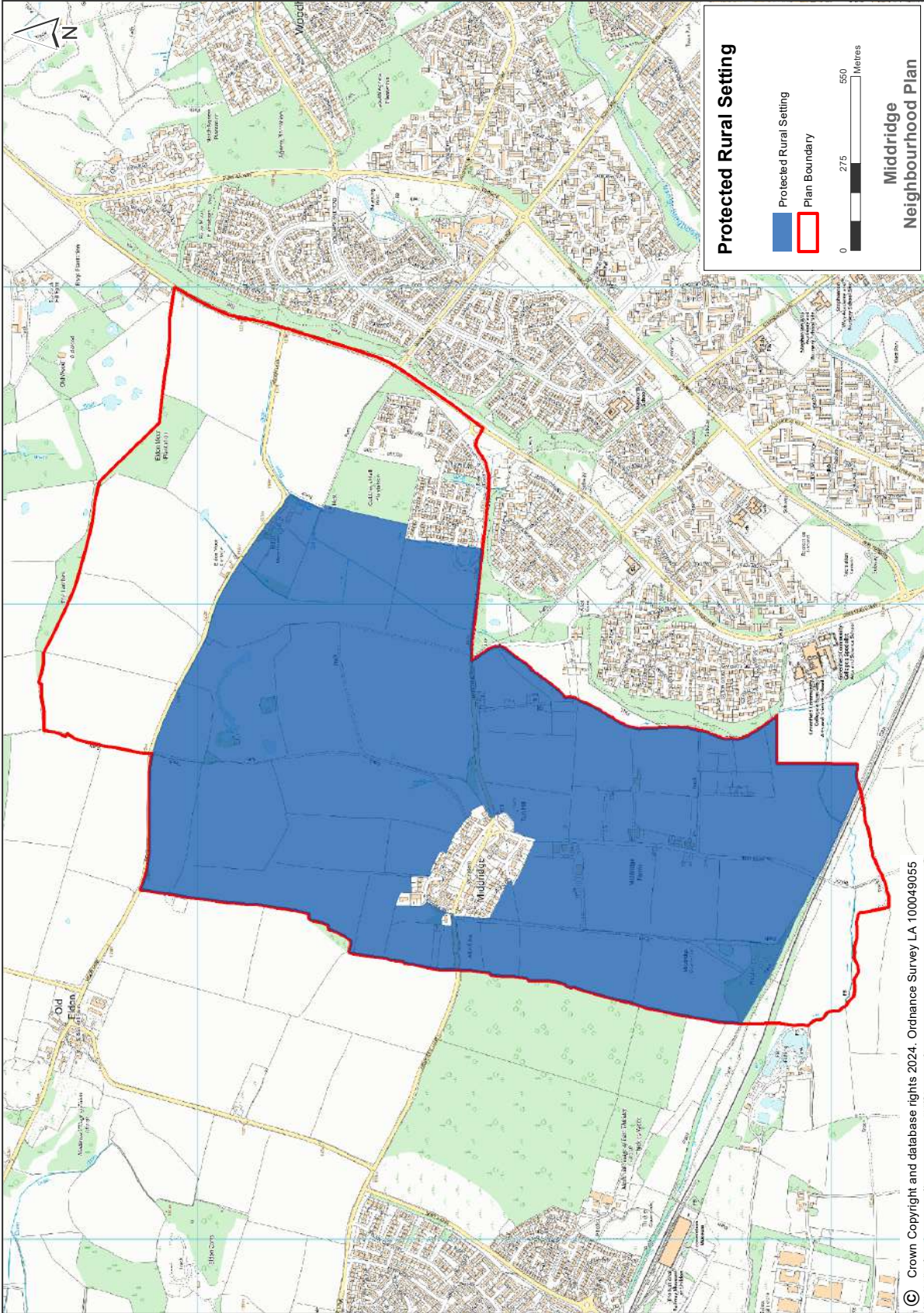
<sup>31</sup> Reference – Planning Practice Guidance Paragraph: 084 Reference ID: 41-084-20190509.

# POLICIES MAPS

The following Table provides a summary of the Policies Maps which follow.

POLICIES MAP	PAGE No	RELATED POLICY	DESCRIPTION OF MAP
1	45	Protected Rural Setting (MNP1)	Policies Map 1 is a single map identifying the Protected Rural Setting of Middridge village.
2	46	Local Green Spaces (MNP2)	Policies Map 2 is a single map identifying seven Local Green Spaces (LGS's) within or at the edges of Middridge village.
3	47	Valued Village Assets (MNP3)	Policies Map 3 is a single map identifying two Valued Village Assets (VVA's) within Middridge village.

### POLICIES MAP 1: Protected Rural Setting (Policy MNP1)

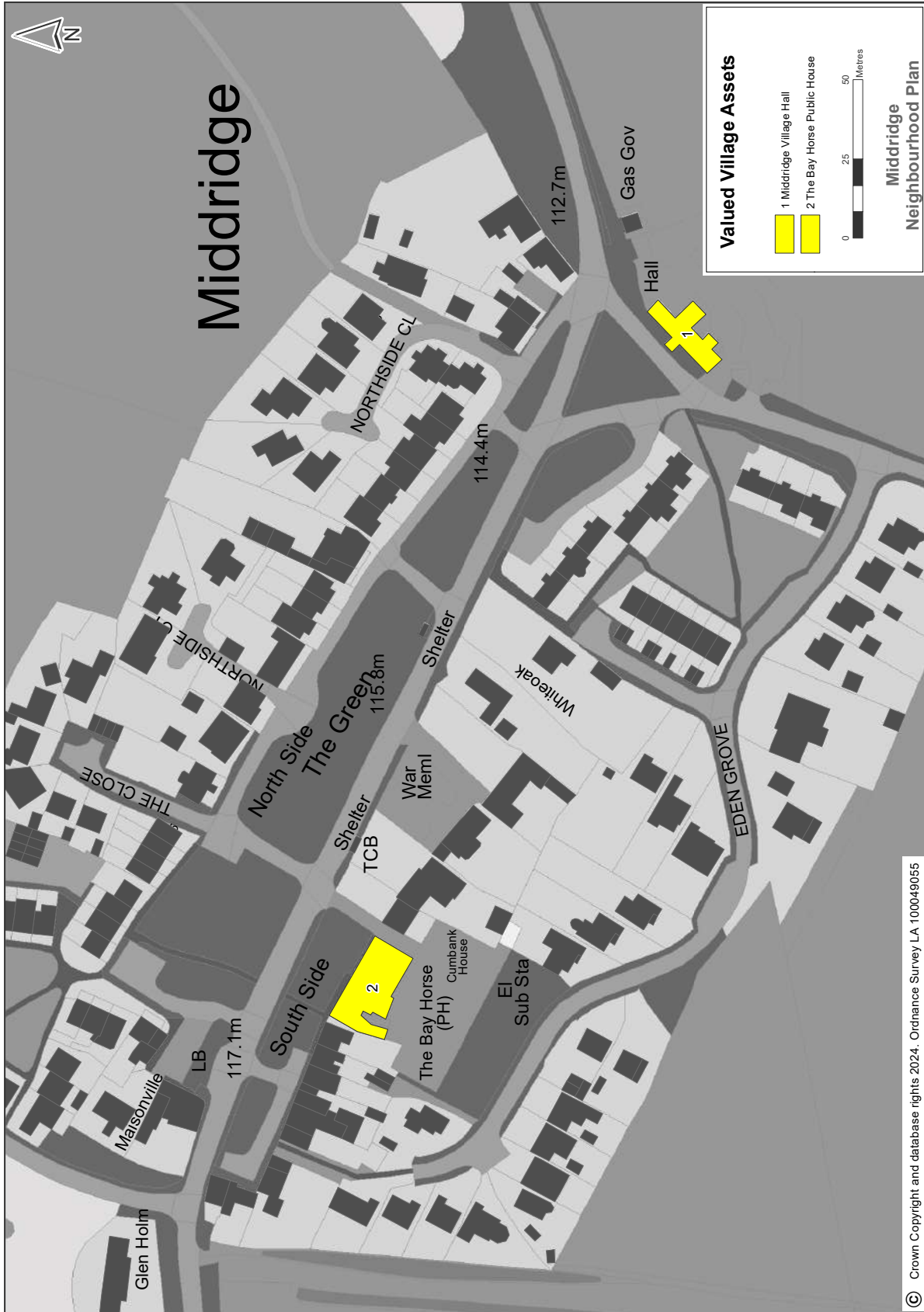


POLICIES MAP 2: Local Green Spaces (Policy MNP2)





### POLICIES MAP 3: Valued Village Assets (Policy MNP3)



# APPENDICES

The following Table provides a summary of the Appendices which follow.

<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>PAGE No</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
1	49	Local Green Spaces: Assessment Summary Table
2	50	Valued Village Assets: Assessment Summary Table

## APPENDIX 1: Local Green Spaces – Assessment Summary Table

<i>Key to LGS values and attributes in columns 1 to 8 below:</i>												
1) Beauty; 2) Historic value; 3) Recreational value; 4) Tranquillity; 5) Wildlife value; 6) Reasonably close to community; 7) Local in character; 8) Not extensive												
Site Ref	Site Name	Size (ha)	DEMONSTRABLY SPECIAL TO COMMUNITY:					Brief summary of justification for LGS	OTHER ATTRIBUTES:			Ownership
			1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	
LGS1	Village Greens	1.13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Registered Medieval Village Greens prominently sited on either side of the road through the village, forming open spaces of significant visual attractiveness and providing the essential character and setting of the built form of the village	✓	✓	✓	Middridge Parish Council
LGS2	Village Play Area	0.83	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Attractive village play area, featuring brand new play equipment and seating set in well maintained grassed and treed landscape	✓	✓	✓	Middridge Parish Council
LGS3	Village Allotments	1.13			✓	✓		Well established and used allotments meeting ongoing local demand for allotment plots	✓	✓	✓	Durham County Council
LGS4	Amenity area fronting The Meadows	0.10	✓		✓	✓		Attractive area of open space with trees and seating providing a pleasant outlook and amenity for residents of The Meadows as well as a pedestrian route from the village green through to the play area	✓	✓	✓	Durham County Council
LGS5	Amenity area off Eden Grove	0.08	✓		✓			Open amenity area with trees providing a pleasant visual break within housing on Eden Grove	✓	✓	✓	Durham County Council
LGS6	Amenity area linking Walkers Lane & Eden Grove	0.17	✓		✓		✓	Pleasant open space with mature trees and grassed areas set behind stone walls on Walkers Lane and linking through via a footpath to a larger open amenity space on Eden Grove	✓	✓	✓	Durham County Council
LGS7	Amenity area fronting 29-31 South Side	0.05	✓				✓	Pleasant grassed open space with mature trees set behind a stone wall, providing an attractive outlook for residential properties which face it and, together with the village greens, adding to the pleasant open outlook as one enters the village from the east	✓	✓	✓	Durham County Council

## APPENDIX 2:

### Valued Village Assets – Assessment Summary Table

Key to VVA attributes A, B and C below: A = Locally valued; B = Well used; C = Important to community wellbeing					
Ref	Name	A	B	C	Summary of justification for inclusion as VVA
VVA1	Middridge Village Hall	✓	✓	✓	The Village Hall is a much valued and well-used asset to the village and wider Parish. It provides a venue and focal point for a whole range of community groups and clubs and is therefore of great importance to the social well-being and interests of the local community.
VVA2	The Bay Horse Public House	✓	✓	✓	As the only remaining pub in Middridge, the Bay Horse is a significant asset to the social life of the village and is well used and appreciated both by locals and visitors from further afield.