

Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan

Settlement Boundary Background Paper

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to explain the process which has led to the proposed designation of settlement boundaries around the villages of Middleton St George, Middleton One Row and Oak Tree in the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 As part of the consultation on the pre-submission draft neighbourhood plan, the parish council invited comments on the proposed settlement boundaries. This paper has been updated to reflect feedback, where appropriate.

2. Background

Settlement boundaries

- 2.1 A settlement boundary is a line that is drawn on a plan around a village, which reflects its built form, this is also known historically as a 'village envelope'. A settlement boundary is used as a policy tool reflecting the area where a set of plan policies are to be applied. The settlement boundary does not necessarily have to cover the full extent of a village or be limited to its built form. In general, there is a presumption in favour of development within the settlement boundary. Any land and buildings outside of the boundary line are usually considered to be open countryside, where development would be regulated with stricter planning policies. However, it should be noted that any land which has been included within the boundary line does not have a guarantee of approval of planning permission, as there will be other planning policies which will need to be adhered to also, for example; the protection of the character of a settlement.
- 2.2 Settlement boundaries have a number of advantages, they seek to:
- Ensure development is directed to more sustainable locations, both in terms of accessibility to and support of existing services and transport;
 - Protect the countryside from encroachment of land uses more characteristic of built up areas, which can help conserve and enhance cultural heritage and natural beauty, including landscape;
 - Provide an easy to understand tool that gives certainty for landowners, developers and the community over where development is likely to be acceptable and where it is not;
 - Direct development to specific parts of the area. This can help increase the viability of local services, as well as encourage new ones to establish;
 - Ensure a plan-led and more managed approach to future development, providing a firm basis for protecting the countryside from unnecessary encroachment;
 - Support the presumption in favour of sustainable development of sites that are too small to be identified as formal allocations;
 - Make it easier for local residents to obtain planning permission for domestic outbuildings within a settlement boundary than outside;
 - Provide a guide for appropriate locations for rural exception sites to deliver affordable housing for local needs (in locations adjoining and outside of the settlement boundary); and
 - Ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach.
- 2.3 However, there can also be some disadvantages of settlement boundaries:
- By restricting development, settlement boundaries can artificially increase land values within the settlement compared with land outside, as the likelihood of successfully gaining planning permission differs;
 - Artificially increase land values on land adjoining the settlement boundary due to future 'hope value', with landowners seeking the possibility of the boundary being realigned at some point in the future to accommodate growth of the settlement. This could mean fewer rural exception sites coming forward, as the landowner may wish to take a longer-term view;
 - The general presumption that development within settlement boundaries is acceptable can result in pressure for the development of unsuitable land, such as valued open spaces within settlement boundaries. Although, this can be overcome through ensuring that any open space valued by the community is protected through formal designation;

- The use of settlement boundaries can lead to the perception that they result in denser development in already well-developed settlements e.g. within private gardens; and
- Settlement boundaries can be crude and inflexible. For small rural communities with a character of dispersed development, it can be difficult to draw a logical boundary around a village.

The Development Plan

- 2.4 The Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan proposes a general presumption in favour of sustainable development within the settlement boundaries of the three settlements in the plan area: Middleton St George, Middleton One Row and Oak Tree.
- 2.5 The current development plan for the Plan area comprises the: Darlington Core Strategy (2011) and the saved policies of the Darlington Local Plan (1997). Local plan policy E2 defines settlement limits for all three villages within the plan area and requires most new development to be located within settlements across the borough. Outside settlement boundaries, policy E2 restricts development to: agricultural or forestry operations; small scale development beneficial to the rural economy or the needs of rural communities; operational development; and countryside related sports or recreation activities.
- 2.6 Whilst the emerging Darlington Local Plan, which was submitted for examination in December 2020, proposes changes to the existing Middleton St George settlement boundary and removal of the Oak Tree settlement boundary, the policy approach is to focus the majority of new development within the defined settlement boundaries.

3. Settlement Boundary Methodology

- 3.1 As explained in section 1, the concept of settlement boundaries is to identify a policy line which separates built-up areas (within which development is, in principle, acceptable), from the countryside (within which, with limited exceptions, development is not acceptable).
- 3.2 There is a presumption in favour of development if land is within a settlement boundary and therefore land should only be included within the boundary if that is where development is considered acceptable in principle, subject to compliance with other policies. There is a judgement to be made as to whether other development or areas adjacent to, but outside the current settlement relates more to the built environment than to the surrounding countryside.
- 3.3 There is no definitive methodology to establish settlement boundaries and different approaches have been taken by local planning authorities and neighbourhood plan groups across the country. This settlement boundary methodology for the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan, has been informed by a review of a number of different approaches and has been prepared in the context of the parish. It follows a five-stage process which is described below.

Stage 1 – Desktop review:

This first stage involves a review of existing evidence documents, including:

- Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map (1997);
- Emerging Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map (2020);
- Darlington Landscape Character Assessment (2015);
- Middleton One Row Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2010);
- Darlington Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment 2017-2018 (2018);
- Review of current planning applications/ permissions;
- Evidence base supporting the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan, such as the 'Design Principles' document prepared by AECOM; and
- Aerial mapping (Google Earth).

Stage 2 – Identification of a draft boundary and on-site review:

Following the desktop review, an initial draft boundary is identified which can then be viewed on site. In order to establish robust settlement boundaries for villages within the plan area there are a number of guiding principles:

- Where practical, the boundary should follow clearly defined physical features, such as walls, fences, hedgerows, roads and water courses;
- Areas to be included are:
 - Built development that visually forms part of the settlement;
 - Those with extant planning permissions for built development which is physically and functionally related to the villages;
 - Agricultural buildings if they are well related in terms of scale and positioning to the rest of the village;
 - Community facilities where they are within the built-up area;
- Areas to be excluded are:
 - Curtilages of properties which have the capacity to extend the built form of the settlement - including large residential gardens;
 - Recreational or amenity space at the edge of settlements which primarily relate to the countryside;
 - Allotments, unless within the built-up area;
 - Isolated buildings, not well related to the settlement;

- Designated wildlife sites, unless within the built-up area;
- Woodlands, orchards and other community green spaces, including cemeteries and churchyards, unless within the built-up area;
- Car parks on the edge of settlements;
- Community facilities clearly outside the settlement e.g. pubs/ hotels.

Stage 3 – Engagement:

- Public feedback on the draft boundary as part of the consultation on the pre-submission draft plan.

Stage 4 – Review:

- Review of comments received and amendment where necessary.

Stage 5 – Submission/ adoption:

- Inclusion of proposed settlement boundaries within submission draft plan, if endorsed through examination and referendum, will be adopted as part of the neighbourhood plan.

4. Desktop review – key findings

- 4.1 A number of key considerations were identified as part of the desktop review, these are set out below.

Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map (1997)

- 4.2 Policy E2 of the Darlington Local Plan defines development limits for settlements across the Borough. The settlement boundaries for Middleton St George, Middleton One Row and Oak Tree area are set out in figures 1 to 3.

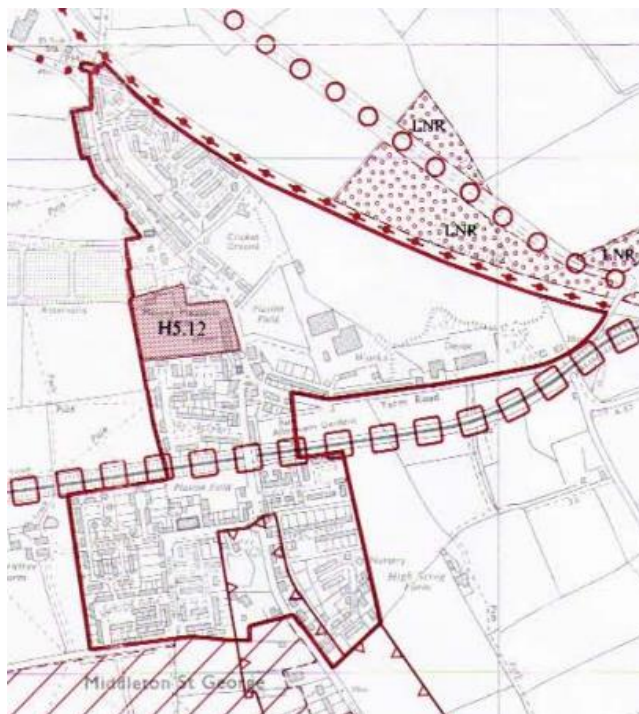


Figure 1: Extract from Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map – Middleton St George Settlement Boundary

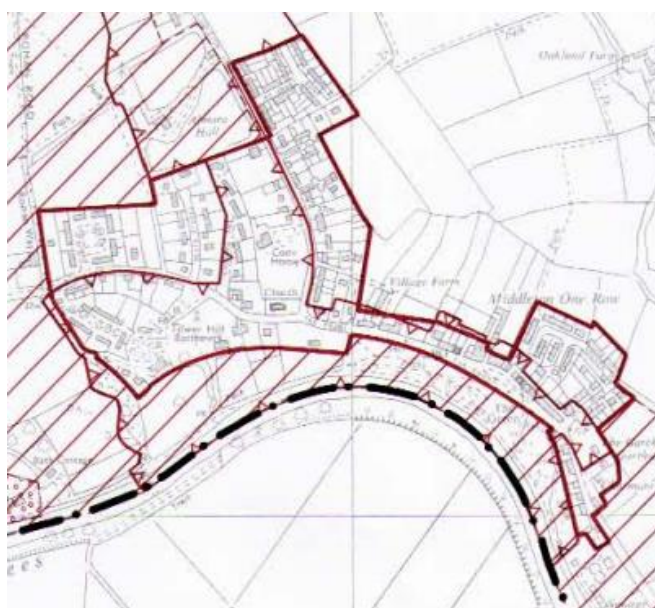


Figure 2: Extract from Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map – Middleton One Row Settlement Boundary



Figure 3: Extract from Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map - Oak Tree Settlement Boundary

Emerging Darlington Local Plan Policies Map (2020)

- 4.3 Policy H3 of the proposed submission Darlington Local Plan proposes changes to the settlement limits of Middleton St George. No changes are proposed to the boundary for Middleton One Row and the current Oak Tree settlement boundary is proposed to be removed. This is illustrated in figures 4-6 below.

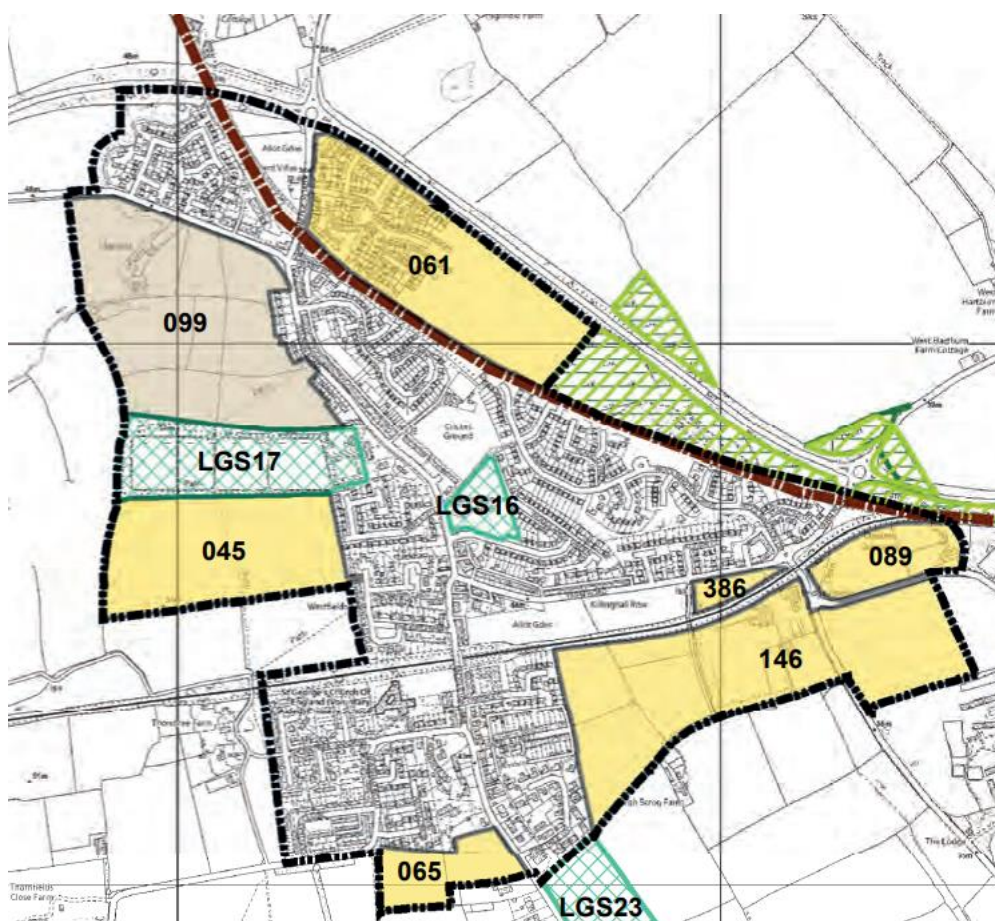


Figure 4: Extract from the draft Darlington Local Plan policies map - Middleton St George settlement boundary

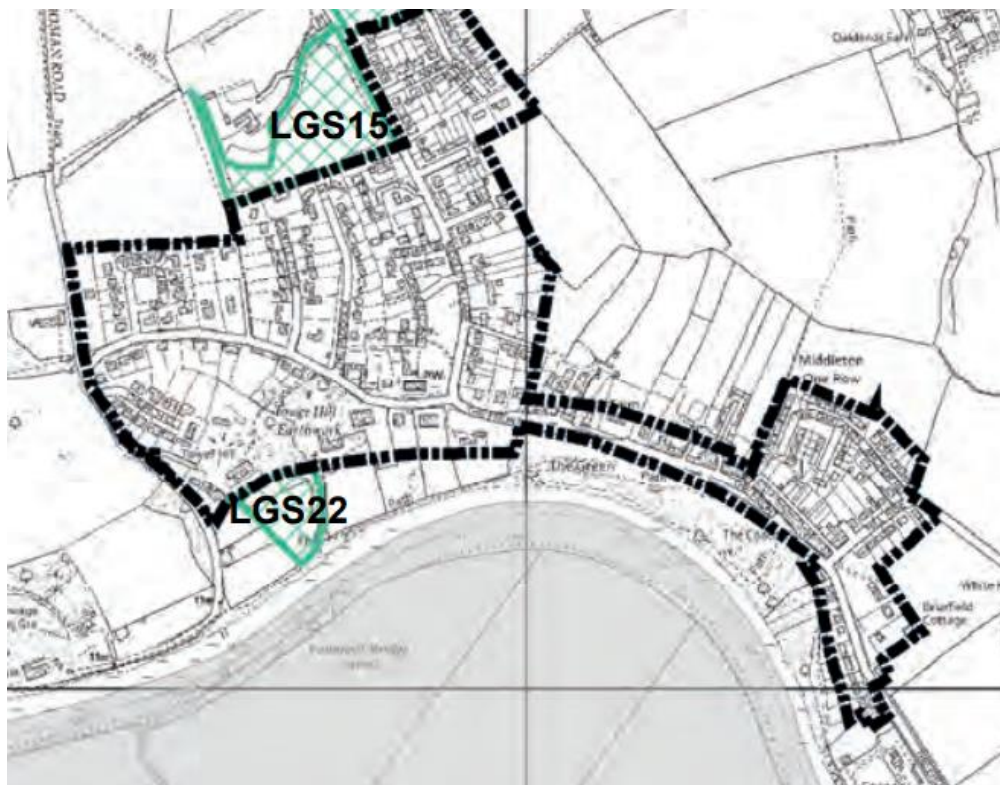


Figure 5: Extract from the draft Darlington Local Plan policies map - Middleton One Row settlement boundary



Figure 6: Extract from the draft Darlington Local Plan policies map - Oak Tree

Darlington Landscape Character Appraisal (2015)

- 4.4 The Darlington Landscape Character Appraisal considers landscape and visual sensitivity to built development, highlighting the importance of the historic character and form of small villages within the character areas covered by the plan. Therefore, there is a need to retain strong settlement boundaries to ensure that development which may affect this important landscape setting is carefully considered.

Middleton One Row Conservation Area Character Appraisal (2010)

- 4.5 The conservation character appraisal explains that the Middleton One Row Conservation Area was designated for the following reasons:

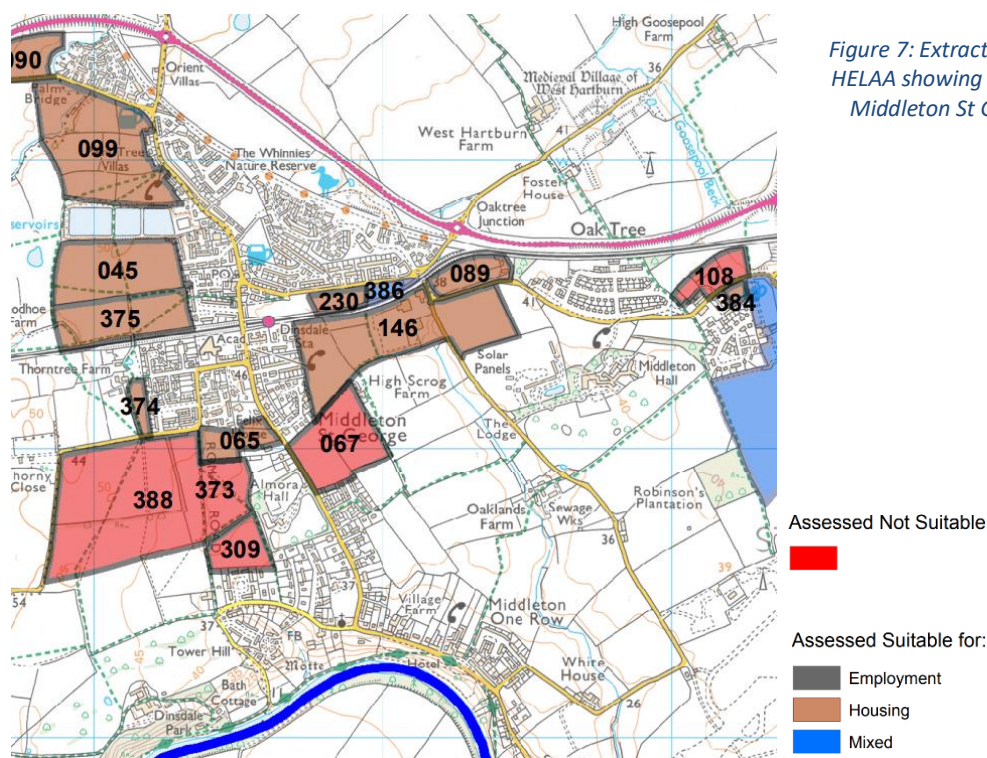
‘Middleton One Row commands sweeping views over open country from its dramatic position nearly one hundred feet up the steep wooded bank of the Tees. Though not the only village in the county having a single-side street which takes advantage of riverside views, it is the grandest and most spacious example. It became modestly fashionable when a spa opened at Dinsdale in the late eighteenth century, though with a few exceptions the architecture does not reflect this, being later and humbler than Regency. A Roman road crossed the river to the west of the village and the Tower Hill earthwork is believed to be part of the crossing’s defence works. Brick and slate predominate as building materials but with a good proportion of render and pantiles.’

- 4.6 The statement of special interest explains that the landscape setting of the conservation area has a major impact on the character of the area. This includes open countryside, mature tree cover, private gardens and the greenery surrounding the River Tees. The character appraisal describes the problems, pressures and capacity for change within the conservation area. It highlights the importance of the green spaces within the village and well as the adjacent countryside.

Darlington Housing Employment Land Availability Assessment (2018)

- 4.7 There are 15 sites contained within the Darlington HELAA that are relevant to the consideration of the identification of settlement boundaries for the villages within the plan area:

- 045 – High Stell;
- 065 – Land between Middleton Lane and Neasham Road;
- 067 – East of Middleton Lane, MSG;
- 089 – Land West of Oak Tce, MSG;
- 099 – Maxgate Farm, MSG;
- 108 – Oak Tree Farm, Yarm Road, MSG;
- 146 – Land south of railway, MSG;
- 230 – Land between Yarm Road and railway line west, MSG;
- 309 – North of Hunters Green, MSG;
- 373 – Land south of Neasham Road, MSG;
- 374 – Land south of Thorntree Farm, MSG;
- 375 – Land south of High Stell, MSG;
- 384 – Oak Tree, MSG;
- 386 – Land between Yarm Road and railway line east, MSG;
- 388 – South of Neasham Road (extended).



- 4.8 The parish council agree with Darlington Borough Council's published assessment of sites 067, 108, 309, 373 and 388 that the sites are not suitable for housing and therefore should not form part of the settlement boundaries.
- 4.9 It is noted that a number of the site have planning permission: 045; 065; 089; 146; 230; 384; and 386. Planning applications are currently pending consideration for sites: 099 and 375.
- 4.10 The parish council does not consider sites 099 and 375 are suitable for development. Site 099 has a number of constraints, including: access, flooding, infrastructure capacity and impact on historic assets (namely the Cades Roman Road). Highway's England objected to the proposed site allocation within the emerging local plan as a result of potential impacts on the strategic road network. Site 099 is proposed for development within the emerging local plan.
- 4.11 With regard to site 375, it should be noted that the emerging local plan does not include this site. It is understood the council consider there are issues with access and amenity, which they are not convinced can be overcome. In addition, Highway's England objected to the proposed housing allocation within a previous draft of the emerging local plan.
- 4.12 Previous parish council responses to the pending application for the development of site 375 illustrate that there are significant access and highway infrastructure capacity issues. The proposed access to the site is not within the same ownership and would only be able to be provided at this point if number 20A The Greenway was purchased and demolished. It is also considered that the proposed access route does not and could not meet the council's highway standards in terms of width of road to be provided and the provision of the required footpaths. Traffic survey data illustrates that the development of the site could cause result in significant highway safety issues.
- 4.13 The site has archaeological constraints as a result of its relationship with the Roman (Cade's) Road. In addition, the development of the site is likely to impact on the character of the historic

village of Middleton St George. As a result of the deliverability and suitability issues, the sites are therefore not considered appropriate for inclusion within the settlement boundary and should therefore be discounted.

- 4.14 Site 374 is considered suitable by Darlington Borough Council but there is no planning permission in place. Site 374 lies on the edge of the built-up area and is rural in nature.

Middleton St George Design Guide (April 2020)

- 4.15 As part of the government's support programme for neighbourhood planning, the parish council commissioned AECOM to prepare a design guide to inform the work on the plan. The design guide describes the growth of the parish, landscape character, importance of green spaces, as well as statutory and non-statutory designations. The gaps between the settlements and glimpses of views into the countryside are identified as important. This is recognised within the design vision, which states 'the three sub-settlements will remain separated by green gaps and hold on to their unique identity and different roles within the parish'.
- 4.16 The design guide includes design codes, which must be taken into consideration in the development of design proposals. Identified within the design code (see figure 8), is the need to retain two green gaps. The first is the gap between Middleton St George and Oak Tree. The purpose of the gap being to preserve the distinct identity and sense of place, whilst integrating them through ease of movement and connectivity.
- 4.17 The second green gap is identified as lying between Middleton St George and Middleton One Row. Again, this is important to preserve the distinct identity and sense of place but also to protect and enhance the significance of the Middleton One Row Conservation Area. This area has been subject to numerous development proposals over recent years, including a proposal for 280 dwellings and a 60-bed care home on land to the west of Middleton Lane. This application was refused by the council in March 2019¹. Whilst an appeal was submitted, it was subsequently withdrawn.
- 4.18 The green gap also includes land to the east of Middleton Lane. This has been subject to three residential planning applications, all of which were refused by the council. The most recent refusal² was subject to an appeal, which was dismissed³. In the decision letter, the inspector refers to the importance of site, as a key feature of green space along Middleton Lane. Also, that the site allows the countryside to permeate the built-up area with its largely undeveloped agricultural appearance, therefore contributing to the rural qualities of the conservation area and its significance. Reference is also made to the importance of views through the site to the wider countryside and that the coalescence would unacceptably alter the character of the area.

¹ DBC application reference 18/00275/OUT

² DBC application reference 18/01108/FUL

³ APP/N1350/W/19/3240898

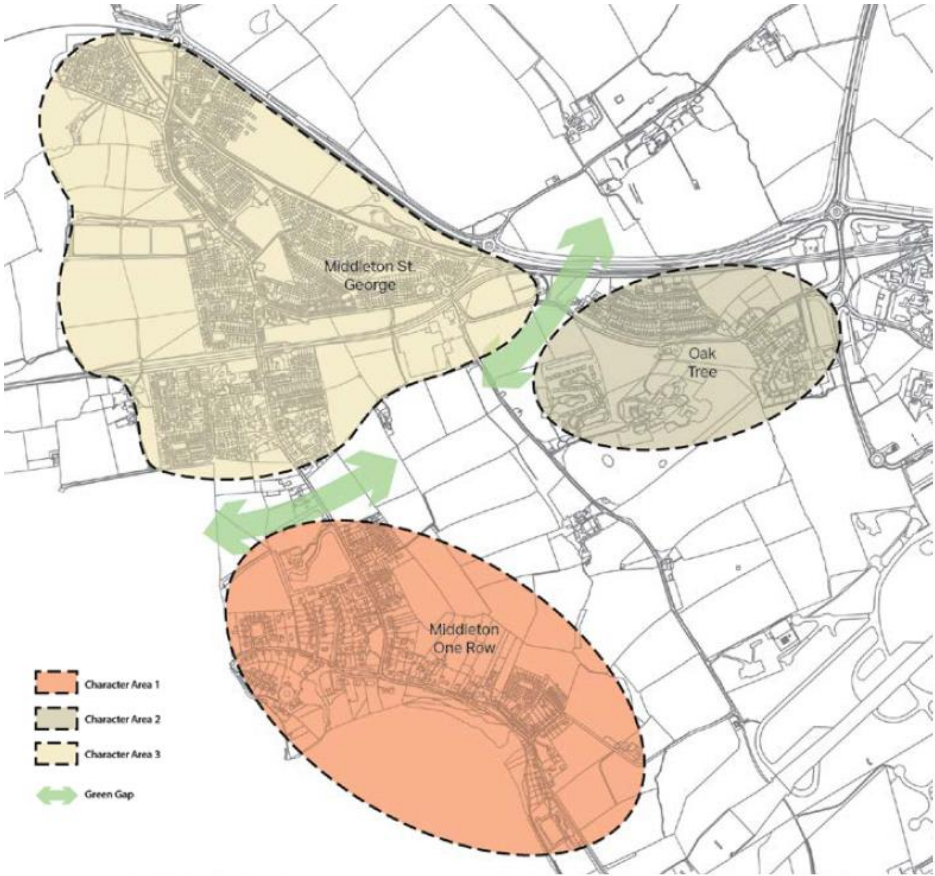


Figure 8: Extract from Middleton St George Design Guide

5. Identification of a settlement boundary

5.1 As identified above, the impact of future development on the landscape and setting of the villages has been critical in the definition of the settlement boundaries as well as ensuring the boundaries support the sustainable growth of the plan area. The proposed boundaries:

- Take into account extant planning permissions;
- Will manage development to around to ensure that it does not have a negative impact on the landscape setting of the village;
- Will manage development to seek to ensure that it conserves and enhances the Middleton One Row Conservation Area;
- Establishes a logical shape to the edges of the villages, again seeking to conserve and enhance the character of the area;
- Avoids irregular incursions into the open countryside; and
- Have been drawn along features which are easily identified on the ground.



Figure 9: Proposed Middleton St George Settlement Boundary



Figure 11: Proposed Middleton One Row Settlement Boundary



Figure 10: Proposed Oak Tree Settlement Boundary