Technical Paper - Green Network

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1 Executive Summary

1. This paper explains how the Council has reviewed and updated the Green Network definition and designation for the *Telford & Wrekin Local Plan* (2011-2031). The updated Green Network is shown on the Local Plan Policies Map and is covered by Policy NE6.

2. The Council is retaining the long established Green Network designation in the Local Plan but has revised the definition, justification and mapping to bring it up to date, to identify and remove errors and to bring the designation in line with *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) and other government guidance.

2 Introduction

2.1 This technical paper is part of the background technical work to inform the Local Plan and explains, in greater detail than is possible in the plan itself, the process by which the Council has revised and updated the definition, justification and mapping of the Green Network.

2.2 This technical paper should be viewed in light of Policy NE6: Green Network in the Submission Versions of the Local Plan and also the Green Network designation as shown on the accompanying Local Plan Policies Map.

3 The History of the Green Network

3.1 The Green Network is a local open space designation which was first introduced as part of the innovative design of Telford. It was adopted in the *Telford Local Plan* and was carried forward into the *Wrekin Local Plan* (1995 – 2006) and the *Core Strategy* (2007 – 2016).

3.2 The Green Network concept emerged through the planning of Telford as a "New Town." It was intended to protect important open spaces within the urban area from development and to maintain green spaces which were valuable to local communities. Repeated surveys conducted by the Council demonstrate strong public support for the Green Network of Telford.

3.3 The Green Network is unique to Telford and is a concept ingrained in the identity of the town. Many of the open spaces, wooded pit mounds, Local Nature Reserves and recreational spaces are highly visible when travelling through the town and are valued by its residents. Early engagement during the local plan process revealed how highly the natural environment of the borough is valued.

3.4 The original Green Network mapping was carried out in the late 1980's and was digitised some time later from paper maps. The designation was then carried forward from plan to plan with some revisions but largely unchanged. In some areas it contained significant errors including roads, car parks and housing being included within the designation. There is no record of the original justification for the inclusion of individual parcels of land within the designation.

3.5 This approach has, in recent years, become difficult to operate and the responsibility has shifted from the developer needing to demonstrate why development in the Green Network was acceptable to the Council having to justify the protection of Green Network land.

3.6 Green Network land was not originally mapped using a justifiable, evidence based methodology and was not mapped against MasterMap or any other recognised base map, and in many areas even where the mapped land is green space it is difficult to measure its value when assessed against the six broad aims of the designation. The aims were largely subjective and, in some cases, difficult to assess. The original aims can be found in the *Wrekin Local Plan* text supporting policy OL3: Green Network.

3.7 The original Green Network approach is now outdated, poorly evidenced and not in line with the NPPF or *Making Space for Nature: A Review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network* by Professor Sir John Lawton (September 2010). The principle of protecting a network of open spaces in the borough remains valid, accords strongly with the aims of *Making Space for Nature,* and the results of early public engagement shows strong public and political support for the concept.

3.8 A review of the Green Network designation was necessary in preparing the Local Plan and was carried out in advance of a new draft of the Green Network being presented on the Policy Map accompanying the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation. That draft as been subject to further assessment, error checking and refinement in response to comments received during that consultation. Following the Regulation 19 Publication Period a small number of additional errors were identified and corrections have been proposed as Minor Modifications in the Submission Version of the Local Plan.

4 Policy Justification for the Green Network

4.1 The Green Network has its origins in the vision of the Telford New Town Commission which was to produce a 'forest city.' Telford followed the pattern of other new towns which were masterplan led and were intended to be laid out as settlements with extensive areas of green space and segregated land uses which would be attractive to new business, inward migrating residents and provided a welcoming natural environment[(1)].

4.2 The concept of a green network, whether under that specific name or not, has remained an important planning tool in New towns in England and can be either led by specific policies or as a plan principle shown on the proposals map.

4.3 Some other councils have sought to protect open spaces using policy tools similar to Telford's Green Network where open space policies are based on corridor, grid or network systems.

4.4 This review revealed the following initiatives among councils with pre-NPPF adopted Local Development Plans:

- The City of Sutherland Unitary Development Plan (1996) contains a saved policy for Washington New Town in Policy WA17: Environmental Identity that seeks to protect the unique design characteristics of the area including inter village walkways, the separation of potentially conflicting land uses and the provision of substantial landscaping, particularly between main roads and residential areas.

1 http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/TCPA_New_Towns_Study_Stage_1_An_Introduction_EMBARGOED.pdf

- The Stevenage Local Plan (2004) seeks to retain green links shown in saved policy EN10: Green Links and on the borough's proposal map. This principle is being preserved in the new replacement Local Plan Policies EN4 and NH4 in the emerging Local Plan.
- Welwyn Hatfield's Local Plan (2005) seeks in Policy OS1: Urban Open Land to retain and protect urban open land and to reinforce the openness of the Green Belt which surrounds Welwyn Garden City's urban boundary. Land covered by this policy is shown on the Policies Map.
- The Harlow Local Plan (2006) adopts Green Wedges in Policies NE1 and NE2 which are intended to preserve the form of the original landscape.
- The Redditch Local Plan No.3 (2005) seeks in policy R.1 to protect 'Primarily Open Space' defined in the policy and shown on the Policies Map from built development.
- The Bracknell Core Strategy (2008) identified in Policy CS7: Design the commitment to promoting a high quality of development across Bracknell Forest that builds on local character and protects Open Space of Public Value as well as Passive Space of Public Value.
- The Peterborough Core Strategy 2011 in Policy CS19: Open Space and Green Infrastructure and shown on the Policies Map seeks to protect open space from development and is informed by an early Green Grid Strategy report. This was translated in Policies PP14, PP15 and PP16 of the Planning Policies DPP (2012) which was adopted post-NPPF.

4.5 Some New Town planning authorities with post-NPPF Local Development Plans have also retained similar concepts:

- The Milton Keynes Core Strategy 2013 promotes a linear park and extension in the Proposals Map and requires Strategic Land Allocations and other major sites (in Policies CS5 and CS6) to contribute towards the principles of the linear park and its extension. These spaces are seen as necessary to support other planning outcomes including reducing health inequality (Policy CS18) and promtion of the historic and natural environment (Policy CS19).
- The West Lancashire Local Plan 2013 has a strategic policy covering Skelmersdale New Town (SP2) which seeks to regenerate the town while maintaining the network of green spaces through and around the original new town. Other development management policies on nature conservation (NE2), open space (EN3) and infrastructure (INF4) dictate how the spaces should be protected and promoted. Land covered by Policies EN2 and EN3 are shown on the Policies Map.
- The Halton Borough Core Strategy Local Plan (2013) covers Runcorn New Town. It has two policies which protect green spaces. Policy CS1: Halton's Spatial Strategy seeks to promote strategic green spaces in the town. Policy CS21: Green Infrastructure uses similar language to that in the Submission Version of the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan 'Halton's green infrastructure network will be protected, enhanced and expanded, where appropriate.' The extensive network of green spaces in the town is similar to that found in Telford.
- The Dacorum Core Strategy 2013 has policies specific to Hemel Hempstead New Town which seek to protect its distinct open character and to promote and protect other space including the New Town's Green Gateways, its urban wildlife corridor and strategic wildlife corridor.
- The Crawley Borough Local Plan 2015 recognises the value of the network of green infrastructure around which the new town was designed and built and in Policy ENV1: Green Infrastructure seeks to protect and enhance this resource.

4.6 In Paragraph 7 of the NPPF the Government confirms the three dimensions of sustainable development which is the golden thread running through the planning system. The Green Network helps to deliver each aspect of the definition:

- Economic benefits since it makes Telford an attractive area for inward investment;
- Social benefits since it helps to create a high quality built environment with opportunities for recreation; and
- Environmental benefits since the retention of the Green Network and its expansion enhances the natural environment and delivers a range of ecosystem services.

4.7 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF affirms that none of the aspects of the definition of sustainable development can be viewed in isolation. In Telford the protection and enhancement of the Green Network forms an integral part of the Destination Telford offer which is part of the Invest in Telford economic strategy [(2)] with the aim of giving residents a high quality of life.

4.8 In having policies which protect the Green Network the council is seeking a high quality of urban design to retain a high level of amenity for existing and future users of land and buildings in the borough, to help to provide differentiation between different areas, to conserve and enhance the natural environment and to manage and reduce pollution.

4.9 Section 11 of the NPPF makes multiple references to the need for planning policies to map componants of ecological networks and to protect those ecological networks through the planning process. The Green Network includes aspects of ecological networks including core areas, corridors and stepping stones along with the other locally relevant functions against which the land has been assessed.

4.10 The Green Network is particularly appropriate for the borough since it also helps to deliver a number of wider council strategies. The Green Network:

- Supports sustainable transport by providing opportunities for walking and cycling;
- Promotes high quality living environments and good design;
- Promotes healthy communities by promoting healthy, inclusive environments;
- Helps to secure the protection of green and open areas that are valued by local people;
- Contributes to the protection and enhancement of valued landscapes;
- Contributes to the provision of ecosystem services;
- Contributes to the protection of the borough's heritage assets.

4.11 The council is confident that the maintenance of the Green Network in the submission version of the Local Plan does not harm economic development or the government's desire to boot significantly the supply of housing since a range of suitable sites covering 149ha has been identified in the Local Plan.

2 http://www.investintelford.co.uk/

5 Revisions to the Green Network for the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan (2011 – 2031)

5.1 The *Telford & Wrekin Local Plan* (2011 – 2031) seeks to update and maintain the Green Network designation which is seen by many as a key policy tool in protecting and maintaining open green land within the urban area of Telford. The Local Plan seeks to bring the designation in line with NPPF and the Lawton Report, to revise the definition and aims and to update the mapping of the Green Network which will be shown on the Local Plan Policy Map.

5.2 The Local Plan also extends the protection of valuable open green land through the Green Network designation to the Market Town of Newport. Although it is appreciated that Newport is a traditional Market Town and did not emerge by the same mechanism as Telford as a New Town, it is clear that there are green spaces in Newport which contribute to the functions of the Green Network and are valuable to local communities.

5.3 The Green Network remains an urban designation and has not been extended beyond the settlement boundaries of Telford and Newport into the rural areas. Ecological Networks as described by the Lawton Report extend through both urban and rural environments and are given weight by NPPF and will be protected in the rural environment by the Local Plan through policies on biodiversity and trees and woodlands. Development in the borough is focused through the Local Plan to Telford, Newport and a limited number of named rural settlements and it was not appropriate to extend the Green Network designation, which has always been limited to urban areas, to rural areas.

6 Revisions to the definition and aims of the Green Network

6.1 The *Wrekin Local Plan* Green Network definition read "The Green Network is an inter-linked system of open land and landscape within the Town, which has a collective value for ecology and nature conservation, recreation, access and visual quality".

6.2 The Local Plan defines the Green Network as a "strategic interconnected network of open spaces within the urban areas of Telford and Newport."

6.3 The definition has been primarily amended in order to bring it in line with the NPPF and the Lawton Report which use the language of functioning networks for ecology and ecosystem services. The references to ecology, nature conservation etc have been removed from the definition since they are covered under the six functions which underpin the designation.

6.4 It should be noted that the Green Network is intended to be a strategic network and, therefore, does not include every area of open space or land with biodiversity value in the urban areas. The designation is intended to protect an interconnected network and to work alongside Local Plan policies on biodiversity, trees and public open space. It is recognised that smaller incidental open spaces and play areas also have value to local communities but do not necessarily qualify for inclusion in the designation.

6.5 There were originally six aims of the Green Network included in the Wrekin Local Plan which ranged from "maintaining the borough's image as an attractive place to live" to "providing easily accessible 'green lungs' to promote urban cooling." These aims used outdated and subjective language and were not in line with NPPF or the Lawton Report.

6.6 The original six aims have been revised as six functions of Green Network land against which each parcel of land within the updated Green Network mapping has been assessed and justified. This assessment of each parcel of land within the Green Network against the functions provides a new level of justification against which the Green Network can be interrogated by the Council and will be available to developers and members of the public following the adoption of the Local Plan.

6.7 The new six functions of the Green Network are:

- To provide significant visual amenity value in the form of extensive views over green open areas, water bodies or woodland;
- To provide separation between built up areas by significant open green areas, water bodies or woodland which help to retain and enhance the individual identity of local communities;
- To provide an appropriate supply of open land to meet the diverse recreational needs of an expanding population, combining the more formal parkland and recreation areas with wider landscaped areas valuable for informal recreation;
- To maintain, protect and enhance the borough's ecological value in terms of natural habitats and species by providing ecological networks, corridors and stepping stones by which wildlife can move through, and thrive within, urban environments;
- To maintain, protect and enhance the unique geological and archaeological features within the borough as a legacy of its early place in the Industrial Revolution;
- To provide open space linkages through which footpath, cycleways and ecological corridors can connect different parts of Telford or Newport forming accessible 'green ways' through urban areas.

6.8 Function four directly addresses the requirements of the Lawton Report in mapping Ecological Networks through identifying core areas, corridors and stepping stones.

6.9 In order to assess each parcel of land within the revised Green Network against the six functions quantifiable criteria have been set against each of the functions. The intention is to make it possible for Telford & Wrekin Council officers, developers and members of the public to easily see and understand the reasons why a particular parcel of land is included within the Green Network designation.

6.10 The criteria against which parcels of land have been assessed under the six functions can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Table 1 Functions and Qualifying Criteria for the Green Network

Function	Qualifying Criteria
Significant visual amenity	Open & unimpaired views (comprising an aspect of at least 90°) from more than one dwelling, an employment facility or along a major road (motorway, A or B road) of areas natural or semi-natural habitat.
Separation of built up areas	An area of natural or semi-natural habitat separating one group of buildings from another of at least: A) 100m between two residential areas; or

Function	Qualifying Criteria
	B) 50m between land used for employment and a residential area; or C) 30m between a major road (motorway, A or B road) and a residential area.
Supply of recreational open land	Land identified as public open space by being either: A) A registered or formal park; or B) A Local Nature Reserve or proposed Local Nature Reserve; or C) A publicly accessible playing field or sports facility; or D) A publicly accessible children's play area; or E) A Telford & Wrekin Council owned site protected under the Council's "Green Guarantee" for public use in the long term; or F) A site with established public access agreed by the land owner; or G) A site with a network of public Rights of Way allowing controlled access.
Ecological value	Land with identified ecological value including land which meets the criteria for core areas, corridors and stepping stones set out in the Lawton Report including: A) Designated sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites); or B) Areas of natural or semi-natural habitats; or C) Areas with an assemblage of historical species records held by the Shropshire Ecological Data Network (SEDN); or D) Areas with the potential to act as wildlife corridors or stepping stones.
Geodiversity & archaeological value	Land with identified geodiversity and archaeological value including: A) Local Geological Sites (formally Regionally Important Geological & Geomorphological Sites (RIGS)); or B) Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated for geology; or C) Scheduled Ancient Monuments; or D) Sites known locally for their archaeological or local heritage interest (including industrial heritage).

Function	Qualifying Criteria
Green space linkages	Sites which allow linkages for walking, cycling or horse riding in natural or semi-natural habitats within, between or linking urban areas including: A) Sites with public Rights of Way; or B) Sites where ordnance survey maps show paths, cycleways or bridleways.

6.11 The Local Plan also incorporates an element of Green Network land in Newport. Newport was not originally included within the Green Network but the Local Plan recognises and protects areas of land in Newport which meet to the Green Network definition and contribute to delivering its six functions.

7 Updating the Green Network mapping

7.1 The mapping which is shown on the Local Plan Policies Map has undergone a rigorous desk based assessment to:

- Identify and remove areas of land which were included in error or due to historic lack of accuracy in mapping techniques (roads, car parks, buildings and other development);
- Identify and remove areas of land where development had been allowed to take place through the planning process;
- Identify and remove areas of land where planning permission has been granted or which are allocated for development;
- Assess parcels of land within the Green Network designation against the six functions of the Green Network and to remove areas of land where inclusion cannot be justified; and
- Justify the mapping against MasterMap to ensure accuracy of boundaries.

7.2 The assessment work began in advance of the Regulation 18 consultation on the draft Local Plan and continued in preparation for the Regulation 19 publication period. Comments received during the Regulation 18 consultation and the Regulation 19 publication period have been taken into account.

7.3 The updated mapping has been largely carried out using a desk based methodology making use of best available aerial photography, MasterMap and Telford & Wrekin Council's mapping information system displaying planning applications, permissions and incorporating development completion figures from the Annual Monitoring Report.

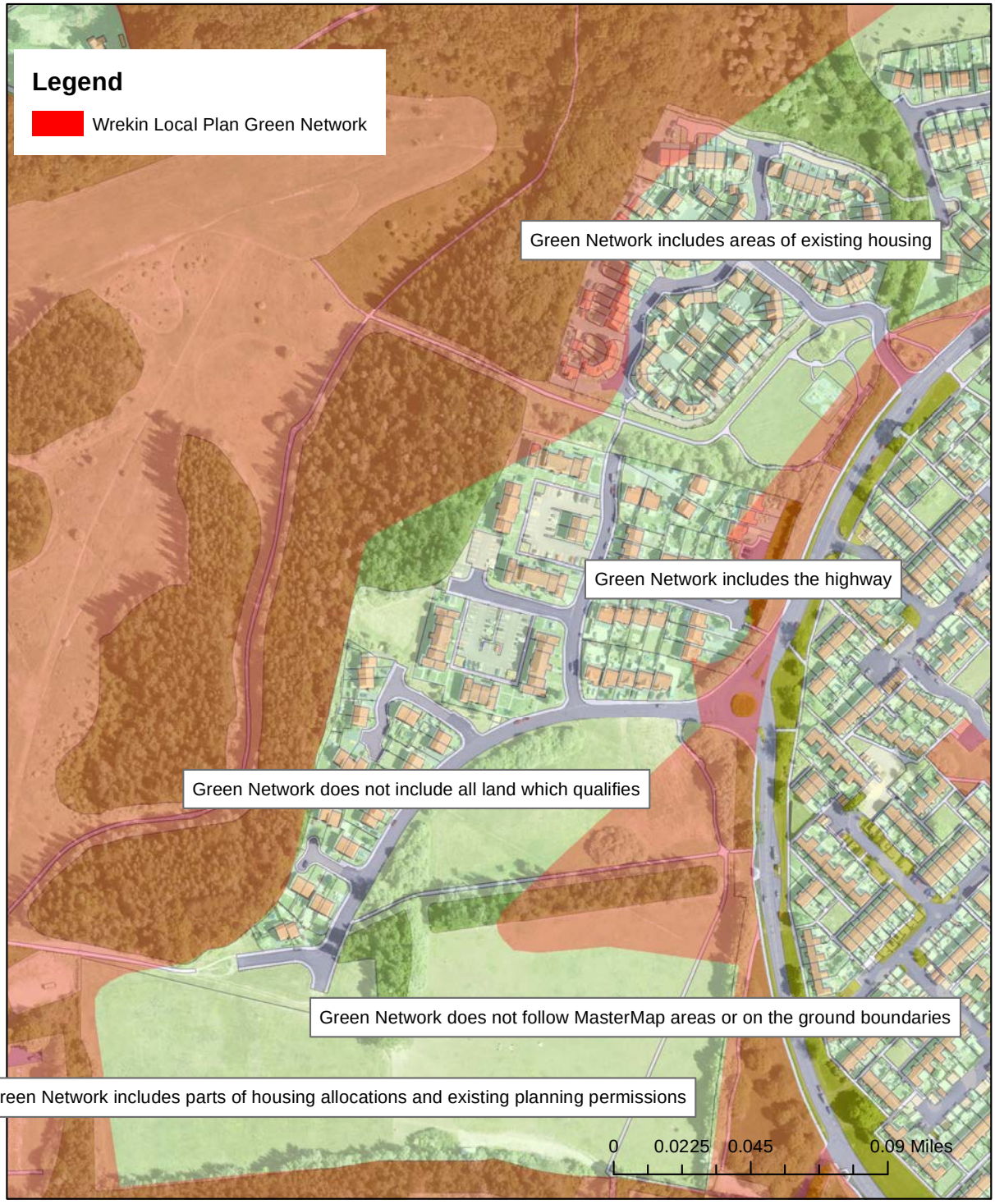
7.4 It is appreciated that this methodology is limited by the age and quality of resources available, particularly aerial photography, and challenges with aerial photograph interpretation and some ground truthing has been carried out across the network. It was not possible, with the time and resources available, to visit every area of the Green Network.

7.5 The justification of the designation against MasterMap is vital to accuracy and fundamental to the designation being fit for use in the planning process. Previously the Green Network boundaries crossed parcels of land and land uses without justification, included roads or parts of roads and other areas of non-green land and the boundaries wavered from obvious features on the ground without justification.

7.6 The use of MasterMap in mapping the new Local Plan Green Network means that the maps look different, have white land between and around areas of Green Network, for example where roads run through green spaces, and follow justifiable boundaries and features.

7.7 Figures 1 and 2 below show an area of the Green Network in Madeley, Telford. Figure 1 shows the area with the old Wrekin Local Plan Green Network where areas of existing housing and highways are included in the Green Network in error, where not all qualifying land is included in the Green Network and where land with planning permission or allocated for housing development is included. Figure 2 shows the Local Plan Green Network for the same area with all the issues resolved.

Figure 1: Wrekin Local Plan Green Network



a co-operative council

Telford & Wrekin COUNCIL

Business & Development Planning
Telford & Wrekin Council
Wellington Civic Offices
Telford
TF2 2FH

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Wrekin Local Plan Green Network
Madeley, Telford

Date: 20 January 2016

Drawn By: Fran Lancaster

N W E S

Figure 2: Local Plan Green Network

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Business & Development Planning
Telford & Wrekin Council
Wellington Civic Offices
Telford
TF2 2FH

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Local Plan Green Network
Madeley, Telford

Date: 20 January 2016

Drawn By: Fran Lancaster

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7.8 The Local Plan Green Network mapping has been subject to internal consultation with officers across the Council and public consultation as part of the Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation and the Regulation 19 Publication Period. The Council acknowledges that the Regulation 18 consultation draft Green Network did contain errors. Comments received during the consultation period have been taken into account during the revision work. Following the Regulation 19 Publication Period a small number of further cartographical errors have been identified and these are proposed as Minor Modifications in the Submission Version of the Local Plan.

7.9 Each area of land within the Local Plan Green Network is justified against the six functions and the attribute data behind the mapping will identify which of the six functions each area of land meets: significant visual amenity, separation of built up areas, recreational open land, habitats and species, geodiversity and archaeology and open space linkages.

7.10 The Local Plan is accompanied by a printed version of the Policy Map which shows the Green Network designation and this is considered to be the definitive legal copy of the Policies Map.

7.11 The Council will also produce an interactive version which will be located on the Telford & Wrekin Council website. This is an online mapping tool which allows users to interrogate the Green Network mapping down to a site level. Following the adoption of the Local Plan in late 2016 this interactive resource will be updated to include justification for the inclusion of each parcel of land against the six functions.

8 Conclusion

8.1 The Council proposes the ongoing protection of the long established Green Network under Policy NE6 of the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Submission Version. This protection is in line with the NPPF and is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.