

Date: 07 September 2016  
Our ref: [REDACTED]  
Your ref: Darlington Local Plan SA Scoping Report



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**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Dear [REDACTED]

**Planning consultation:** Darlington Local Plan 2016 – 2036 Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 19 August 2016 which was received by Natural England on the same day.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England broadly welcomes the approach taken in the 'Darlington Borough Council Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report of the Darlington Local Plan 2016 – 2036', which we consider sets out a good framework for the assessment of these documents.

**Question 1 – Are there any other plans, policies or programmes that you think should inform the Sustainability Appraisal of the Darlington Local Plan?**

Natural England is not aware of any other plans, policies or programmes that would need to be taken into consideration.

**Question 2 – Have we identified all of the relevant issues? If no, what other issues should be included and what are the objectives needed to tackle them?**

Within Table 3 we note the absence of any mention of the 4 statutorily designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest found within Darlington Borough (Hell Kettles, Neasham Fen, Newton Ketton Meadow and Redcar Field) – the most appropriate section of the table to include these sites would be within the biodiversity and geodiversity section.

We also note the lack of reference to best and most versatile agricultural land. This is land graded at 1, 2 or 3a in the agricultural land classification. We would suggest that this should be included in either the environmental protection or biodiversity elements within Table 3.

**Question 3 – Do the objectives adequately address the issues identified? Is the decision making criteria appropriate?**

We advise the inclusion of a further decision making criterion within Sustainability Objective 3 – 'Will it lead to the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land?'

We welcome the inclusion within Table 4 (Sustainability Objective 6) of the references to protecting and enhancing ecological networks, habitat corridors and linking routes, and advise this should also include a reference to sites.

Furthermore we welcome the inclusion at Sustainability Objective 7 of the reference to improving access to green infrastructure and open space.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact me on [REDACTED] or [a \[REDACTED\]](#). For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to [g \[REDACTED\]](#).

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
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