



Gladman House, Alexandria Way
Congleton Business Park
Congleton, Cheshire
CW12 1LB

T: 01260 288800

F: 01260 288801

www.gladman.co.uk

Planning Policy Team
Room 401
Town Hall
Darlington
DL1 5QT

Re: Sustainability Scoping Report Consultation

By email to: planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

Introduction

This letter provides the response of Gladman Developments Ltd. (hereafter referred to as "Gladman") to the above consultation. Gladman specialise in the promotion of strategic land for residential development and associated community infrastructure. From this experience, Gladman have been involved in the plan making process at a national level from the initial scoping stages to the examination in public.

Approach to Sustainability Appraisal

The preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) scoping report represents the first stage of undertaking the SA to support the preparation of the emerging Local Plan. Whilst at this stage Gladman have only a few specific comments **to make on the content of the Scoping Report and the Council's proposed approach, we look forward to reviewing the outcome of the Council's assessments in the future and** analysing whether these are based on fair and robust assumptions.

Under Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, policies set out in Local Plans must be subject to a SA. Incorporating the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the preparation of a SA is a systematic process that should be undertaken at each stage of **the Local Plan's preparation, assessing the effects of the Local Plan's proposals to deliver sustainable** development when judged against all reasonable alternatives.

The Council should ensure that the results of the SA process clearly justify its policy choices. In meeting the development needs of the area, it should be clear from the results of this assessment why some policy options have been progressed, and others have been rejected. **The Council's decision** making and scoring should be robust, justified and transparent and should be undertaken through a comparative and equal assessment of each reasonable alternative.

Gladman remind the Council that there have now been a number of instances where the failure to undertake a satisfactory SA has resulted in plans failing the test of legal compliance at Examination or being subjected to legal challenge. There are also numerous examples where deficiencies with SAs have led to timely suspensions of EIPs whilst **Council's ensure that the SA regulations have been adequately met.**

Through this brief submission, Gladman would like to take the opportunity to remind the Council how a justified and adequate SA should be undertaken to inform the policies and allocations made through the Local Plan. This should not be a cursory exercise, but should be a fundamental part of the plan preparation and help to inform the decisions made by the Council. In light of experiences in other local planning authorities, the

Council will need to ensure that the policy choices in the emerging Local Plan are clearly justified by the results of the SA process. Specifically, it should be clear from the SA process why some policy options have been progressed and others rejected.

In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the Council must take account of all reasonable alternatives when assessing and selecting their preferred policy choice. It **is integral that each reasonable alternative is assessed to the same degree of detail as the authority's preferred option**, and should only be rejected after a fair and comparable assessment of its sustainability credentials. The Council should not seek to progress a pre-determined strategy that unjustifiably influences the assessment process.

It is recognised in the document that the Council is seeking to **support the delivery of the borough's economic development** and the need to provide housing, both market and affordable housing to meet its objectively assessed needs to help a wide range of indicators and would urge the Council not to lose sight of these objectives. Importantly, whilst the delivery of housing is one aspect of what the emerging Local Plan will need to deliver it can have a profound positive impact on sustainability criteria, too often the SA process flags the negative aspects of development whilst not fully considering the positive aspects which can be brought above through new opportunities for housing development and how these can influence water quality, air quality, landscape issues, health and the economy.

It is important for the Council to carefully consider all options for the distribution of housing and employment growth to ensure that all objectives set out within the Framework are met so that the needs of all sectors of **the borough's communities are met** in full. This includes distributing growth to all sustainable settlements across the borough, including a meaningful level of growth to rural settlements. This will ensure that the rural **communities' needs are met in terms of access to market and affordable housing** and that rural services and **facilities are maintained and remain viable. This relates directly to the Framework's requirements, specifically** those requirements set out under §55, to promote sustainable development in rural areas where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

I hope you have found this letter to be constructive. If you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Faithfully

John Fleming
Policy Planner
Gladman Developments Ltd.