

**DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN 2016 - 2036:  
FEEDBACK, STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND NEXT STEPS**

---

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Chris McEwan,  
Economy and Regeneration Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth**

---

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To set out the background to and progress made, against the Local Plan process timetable.
2. To consider responses to the Stage 1 consultation process, and endorse the Local Plan Consultation Statement (**Annex 1**).
3. To approve the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Framework (**Annex 2**).
4. To highlight the main issues arising from the consultation which will need to be considered in developing Stage 2 of the Plan.
5. To explain the ‘Call for Sites’ process and set out the results (**Annex 3**).
6. To agree the strategic Vision, Aims and Objectives for the Local Plan.
7. To explain the process for identifying preferred Strategic Development Locations (**Annex 4**).
8. To approve the Local Plan Strategic Framework as a basis for the Stage 2 detailed assessment (**Annex 5**).
9. To outline the next steps in the Local Plan process.

**Summary**

10. In April 2016, Cabinet approved various documents as the basis for beginning to prepare, and consult on, a new Local Plan for the Borough. These included the Local Development Scheme (LDS), the Draft Statement of Community Involvement, a Housing Requirement Technical Paper and the Strategic Options

and Scoping Paper. The LDS set a challenging three year timescale for getting the Plan adopted. The first stage, completed within the deadlines set out in the LDS, to consult on Issues and Scoping and identify strategic locations for development to be considered as the plan progresses, is covered in this report.

11. The Local Plan 2016-36 Issues and Scoping report was the subject of consultation throughout the summer. Three main methods were used to engage a wide variety of people, businesses and interest groups – direct consultation, key stakeholder events and through the use of multimedia. The details of the consultation process are set out in the Consultation Statement at Annex 1. The Council also consulted on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report. The comments received have been considered, and the revised Sustainability Appraisal Framework is attached for Members approval at Annex 2.
12. It is a requirement to set out the Vision and associated Aims and Objectives of the Plan, that will provide the framework for the land allocations, policies and proposals. As part of the consultation process respondents were asked to consider to what extent, if any, the existing Core Strategy Vision and Objectives remain relevant. In addition, a Visioning event was held with local groups and organisations to understand what they value about the Borough and what it could look like in 20 years' time. The output from the workshop has been considered alongside the written representations to help produce a new Vision, and associated Aims and Objectives.
13. The consultation also set out the Council's current position on planning policy issues in terms of the most up to date evidence and the strategy taken in previous adopted and draft policy documents. Stakeholder's attention was also drawn to areas where the updated evidence indicated that a different approach would be required in future, particularly in relation to allocating land to support the provision of jobs and housing. This report summarises the Council's existing position, any significant emerging issues, stakeholders responses to those and the Council's next steps in developing new planning strategies and policies.
14. As expected the consultation generated a range of views and comments both pro and anti-development. Although there is a general recognition that the plan should pursue a growth agenda, this should not be at the expense of maintaining the distinctive cohesive character, and quality of life provided in the Borough. Some respondents question the housing need figures generally and raise particular concerns about the potential impact of new development in the villages. Others, mainly developers and landowners, support the scale and approach to meeting housing needs. Common concerns/issues raised include the impact of new development on the transport network, achieving sustainable travel, and the need to ensure other physical and social infrastructure such as schools, health services and community facilities are provided. There is strong support for protecting the natural and built environment, recognising the important role green infrastructure, biodiversity, and industrial heritage play in making places people want to live and work in.
15. A key element in preparing a new Local Plan is to establish what land is available for development within the Borough over the plan period. As part of the consultation process therefore, the Council asked landowners, agents and developers to submit

details of their suggested sustainable and developable sites through a ‘Call for Sites’ process. Submissions range in size from relatively small extensions adjacent to existing villages through to a large expanse of land to the west of the A1, an area put forward as a potential new settlement. Elsewhere, the submitted sites form major clusters at the urban fringe, concentrated to the south west, north west, north and north east of the town (Annex 3).

16. As previously described to members, it has been identified that a significant increase in housing delivery will be required to meet the Borough’s housing needs, particularly over a longer time period than was previously being planned for. Given the constraints and other opportunities present in the Borough, and support for such an approach at the national level, options for large scale, strategic development sites to help deliver this housing were explored as part of this consultation. The Council also publicised its intention to take a master planning approach to securing delivery on a strategic location (or locations) over the plan period. This report sets out the views received in response to this proposal, explains the approach to selecting these strategic locations and identifies the Strategic Development Locations. This is brought together in Annex 5, The Local Plan Strategic Framework.
17. The next stage of Local Plan preparation will begin in November using project management techniques to ensure key tasks, milestones and deadlines to meet the timetable agreed by cabinet. A key element of the work will be the detailed analysis and assessment of the strategic development locations through master planning techniques, and the assessment of individual sites, through the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) process, to inform the evidence for housing allocations. The Council will need to refresh the evidence base to demonstrate the plan is compliant with regulations, the National Planning Policy Framework, and meets the Vision, Aims and Objectives. **Annex 6** sets out the proposed Governance Structure for managing the next stage of the Local Plan process.
18. Where necessary, other evidence will be refreshed or updated to support policy development, although much of the evidence available from the Making and Growing Places document remains applicable. There will be ongoing consultation with greater emphasis on more focused engagement on particular topics and geographical areas. Bespoke engagement plans will be developed again with emphasis on making information available online with regular updates on the Local Plan Microsite and links also provided on the Council’s existing Social Media Channels.

## Recommendations

19. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
  - (a) Notes the progress achieved against the Local Plan timetable .
  - (b) Endorses the Consultation Statement at Annex 1.
  - (c) Approves the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Framework at Annex 2.

- (d) Agrees the Strategic Vision, Aims and Objectives set out in this report as the framework for establishing the policies and proposals within the Local Plan.
- (e) Agree the preferred Strategic Development Locations set out in The Local Plan Strategic Framework (Annex 5) as the basis for further detailed assessment work under Stage Two of the Local Plan process.
- (f) Endorses the next steps process as described.

## **Reasons**

20. The recommendations are supported to meet Regulation 18 (The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) which requires the Council to outline the Strategic Issues and Options to be covered in the Local Plan, and make them available to key stakeholders for comment.

**Ian Williams**  
**Director of Economic Growth**

Steve Petch 6476

S17 Crime and Disorder	The Local Plan has a role in reducing crime through the design and location of development.
Health and Well Being	A key objective of Local Plan policies will be to improve people's health and wellbeing by protecting and improving the economic, social and environmental conditions in the Borough.
Carbon Impact	A Sustainability Appraisal will be carried out at each stage of the plan making process. Achieving sustainable development will be a fundamental objective of the Local Plan.
Diversity	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out on the emerging Local Plan. A key objective of the plan is to be inclusive and to benefit the whole community.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	Work on the Local Plan has been carried out within existing budgets. The Local Plan will ultimately form part of the Council's Policy Framework and will influence the Council's growth ambitions that both increases the Council's tax base but also introduce additional demands for services
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The Local Plan will represent the spatial expression of the overarching aims of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
Efficiency	The proposed timetable aims to be the most efficient way to produce the Local Plan having regard to the legislative and engagement requirements.

## MAIN REPORT

### **Background**

21. In April 2016, Cabinet approved various documents as the basis for beginning to prepare, and consult on, a new Local Plan for the Borough (Min. ref. C141 (2)). These included the Local Development Scheme, the Draft Statement of Community Involvement, a Housing Requirement Technical Paper and the Strategic Options and Scoping Paper.
22. This report aims to set out the outcome of the consultation process undertaken over the summer looking at the Vision, Aims and Objectives of the Local Plan and consideration of strategic growth areas and planning issues. Consultation with statutory consultees, members of the public and other interested bodies has enabled us to develop a strategic vision for Darlington over the next 20 years that meets the requirements of national planning policy but with local aspirations reflected. Consultation material consisted of an Issues and Scoping Report setting out the councils initial findings on the scope of a new local plan which linked to our Interim Planning Position Statement (IPPS) issued in April 2016.
23. This report covers Stage 1 of the Local Plan process setting the strategic framework to guiding the further development of the plan and the strategic issues to be addressed. Stage 1 has been completed within the timetable set in the LDS. This report concludes with an outline of the next steps in developing Stage 2 of the Plan.

### **Engagement Process – Overview**

24. Details of the Stage 1 consultation process and responses are set out in the Consultation Statement at Annex 1. Copies of the original e-mails/letters received are available on the Council's website. When complete, with the inclusion of the Stage 2 process, this document will form part of the evidence submitted to the Examination in Public.
25. Three main methods were used to consult a wide variety of people, businesses and interest groups on the Local Plan Issues and Scoping document – direct consultation, key stakeholder events and through the use of multimedia.
26. At the start of the consultation an email or letter was sent directly to some 400 contacts on the Local Plan public consultation database, explaining that all of the information relating to the consultation could be seen at the Council's new Local Plan microsite ([www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan)) and that comments could be provided online, by email, or by post until the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2016. A total of 64 responses were received from a variety of correspondents, including local residents, landowners, parish councils, community groups and statutory bodies.
27. Under the Duty to Co-operate statutory consultees and adjacent authorities were consulted via e-mail. In addition, officers have met with neighbouring authorities to identify strategic issues of mutual interest.

28. Officers attended various existing group meetings (Association of Parish Councils; Healthy New Towns workshop; Town Centre Board; Darlington Partnership; Darlington Youth Partnership; Property Forum and the Tees Valley Nature Partnership) and organised additional events (Darlington Business Summit; Housing Delivery Event; Visioning Event) in order to gain the views and opinions of a variety of key stakeholders.
29. A Housing Delivery Event was organised by the Council and included invitees who had submitted sites as part of the 'Call for Sites' as well as relevant local land owners, developers, agents and other allied professions. The purpose of the event was to engage these groups of people in discussions about the housing need in Darlington over the next 20 years in order to ensure that there is sufficient land available across the Borough to meet its needs. Attendees heard presentations on the progress of the Local Plan and the Council's strategy for delivering housing sites, place making in Darlington, ATLAS' master planning approach and current HCA funding schemes, as well as attending workshops to give their feedback on the Council's approach to delivering housing over the plan period.
30. The Planning Policy Team also organised an event targeted at local organisations and community representatives, as well as interested members of the public to explore residents' priorities for the Borough and to understand the aspects of the town they most valued. This event included presentations by members of the Planning Policy Team and representatives from ATLAS, followed by workshop sessions. These workshops produced detailed notes which have informed the Vision, Aims and Objectives for the new Local Plan.
31. Having identified that the existing Council webpages relating to planning policy had become complex and difficult to update as well as navigate, officers developed a bespoke website for the new Local Plan. This included pages relating to the timetable for the plan's production, all the consultation documentation and materials, news, frequently asked questions, the 'call for sites' submission forms and a comments portal. The micro site will continue to be developed as the plan progresses providing interested parties with up-to-date information and opportunities to get involved.
32. Social media was used to publicise the consultation, and the Cabinet Portfolio Holder held a live Facebook / Twitter question time session. The local press carried various articles/stories on the Local Plan covering the issues raised and some of the events and feedback. Similarly, articles highlighting the Local Plan issues and opportunities for involvement were included in the One Darlington Magazine. Information about the Local Plan consultation was included in Members Newsletters.
33. Criticism was received from a few residents that the consultation was not sufficiently widely publicised and they had not received sufficient notification. However, the Planning Policy Team has reflected on the consultation activity and engagement undertaken and concluded that it both met the relevant regulations and produced numerous relevant and useful consultation responses. The Local Plan microsite ([www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan)) will continue to be updated regularly, alongside information being published in One Darlington as appropriate,

as the plan progresses.

34. Concerns were also raised about the consultation material provided; suggesting the process was designed to be ‘opaque and confusing’; and arguing that the ‘Issues and Scoping Report’ is too vague in relation to housing sites. As such it did not provide sufficient detail and information to effectively consult. Consultation on Stage 1 of the Plan was aimed at understanding high level strategic locations and issues and therefore did not include the level of detailed information that will be generated through the next phase of the plan making process.
35. Notwithstanding the above, in general the approach taken to engagement was welcomed by participants, most of whom responded positively to the process. Officers are satisfied that the process was robust and captured the pertinent points for consideration at this stage. Where lessons can be learnt from the exercise they will be.
36. The Council is committed to involving the local community throughout the Plan-making process, and it is anticipated that where significant proposals are being considered through Master Planning or Briefs, that local people will be engaged specifically in the process, as well as more generally in the broader issues.
37. In line with comments made, officers accept the Local Plan document will need to be easy to navigate for the non-specialist with clear headings and sub-headings throughout, and a glossary of terms.
38. Contrasting views have been submitted on the proposed 20 year timespan for the Local Plan. Some comment that 15 years is more appropriate as this provides more certainty on delivery and, anyway the Plan will be reviewed in 5 years. Others support the 20 year timescale. Officers have taken the view, based on the OAN evidence base to 2036, the added certainty for housing supply and supply chain activities, and the alignment with potential long term strategic infrastructure projects, that a twenty year plan is appropriate. Furthermore, the nature of the Borough and its sites are such that a longer term and bolder plan is required if the accompanying infrastructure is to keep pace with development.
39. Using criteria to make choices about where development should occur is supported for bringing clarity, certainty and transparency to the process. Similarly, the use of master planning as an approach to achieving attractive places is acknowledged. However, this should not, a developer argues, place onerous expectations on developers bringing forward sites. Officers have drawn up a specification for master planning in consultation with (ATLAS) and developers to achieve fairness and consistency in the content of those plans and importantly, the evidence base to support site allocations and the Local Plan.
40. Finally, despite general support for the need to prepare a Local Plan, a couple of respondents have suggested the time and effort involved is a waste of Council resources. Another has pointed to the lack of control over housing proposals in the interim until the plan is adopted. Members will be aware that national policy requires Local Authorities to prepare a Local Plan and officers have aimed to achieve process efficiencies where possible, within resource constraints. Whilst the new plan is being prepared, housing proposals will be considered against the

National Planning Policy Framework, the adopted Core Strategy and the Interim Planning Position Statement. It is acknowledged that when adopted the new local plan will provide greater certainty and control but it will need to be in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

41. The Stage 1 consultation has focused on identifying strategic locations and issues. Some respondents have submitted detailed comments/objections on specific sites. Where appropriate these detailed comments have informed officer's considerations, otherwise they will be carried forward to Stage 2 of the plan preparation where site specific assessments will be carried out.
42. It is encouraging to note that the Council's Local Plan engagement process, and positive approach to planning has been recognised as good practice at RTPI events.

### **Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and Framework**

43. In accordance with Section 19 of the 2004 planning and Compensation Act, the Council must consult on and carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the new Local Plan, as an integral part of its preparation. The first stage of this process involved producing the 'Draft Darlington Local Plan 2016-2036 – Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Scoping Report setting out what the Council intended to include in the SA and how it would be used.
44. The consultation on the Draft SA began on 19 August and lasted until 23 September. E-mails and letters were sent to all relevant specific bodies and contacts as well as being made available on the Local Plan micro website. Responses received are available on the website, and are summarised at Annex 1 (as part of the Consultation Statement).
45. Officers have considered all the comments made and amendments have been made to the draft scoping document where necessary. Cabinet is recommended to approve the Sustainability Appraisal Framework (Annex 2) as the basis for carrying out the required Sustainability Appraisal throughout the Local Plan process.

### **Vision, Aims and Objectives**

46. A fundamental element of the new Local plan will be the overarching Vision and associated Aims and Objectives, which will provide the framework for the land allocations, policies and proposals. These issues were explored in detail at the "Darlington 2036 - Planning a Better Place for All" visioning event held in August 2016 and described in more detail in Annex 1.
47. As stated in the Issues and Scoping document, the existing Core Strategy includes a Vision (see below), and part of the recent consultation asked whether that Vision is still the right one, or needed to be changed in light of changing circumstances, issues and opportunities.

*'..... Darlington will be a more sustainable community, where a real step change has been achieved in enhancing the quality of life and local environment, and expanding local opportunities for work and for sustainable travel. Those who live*

*in, work in or visit the Borough will enjoy the opportunities and vibrant life of an ambitious city, but within the fabric of a friendly, historic market town with a distinctive atmosphere, surrounded by attractive countryside and villages'*

48. In general, the consultation responses support the existing Vision as a valuable starting point for the new Local Plan, although some key messages have come forward, from a range of respondents, which look to either add to, or change the emphasis of, some parts of the Vision as currently stated. Suggestions included:
  - (a) reaffirm the need to develop around existing resources where there is most need;
  - (b) more emphasis on preservation of the countryside and villages;
  - (c) more emphasis on resilient economies and communities able to respond to climatic, economic and social changes;
  - (d) reference to conservation and enhancement of natural and historic environment and landscapes;
  - (e) need to reflect changing lifestyles as well as proposed physical changes proposed;
  - (f) greater emphasis on housing delivery to meet the needs of all sectors of the current and future population, to deliver sustainable communities;
  - (g) Quality housing in places people want to live;
  - (h) need to be more ambitious in terms of economic growth drawing on the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan and Darlington's Economic Strategy;
  - (i) more emphasis on building on recent economic success, and reputation for innovation and technology; and
  - (j) support for the significance of the Boroughs sporting/leisure facilities and further investment to create healthy lifestyles.
49. Comments received also note that the Plans objectives will need to be amended to reflect changes to the Vision where appropriate. An example being the suggestion to include reference to the need to maintain a continuous 5 year supply of housing.
50. The visioning workshop, facilitated by ATLAS (HCA's strategic development support and advisory service) gave local groups, organisations and individuals the opportunity to identify and discuss the issues facing the Borough, what they value about the Borough and what it could look like in 20 years' time.
51. The workshop groups, containing a cross-section of interests, were asked to consider issues around 'Planning for the Whole Borough', 'Local Planning Matters', 'Social and Community Issues' and 'Environmental Issues'. Not unexpectedly there was much common ground among the groups although some more 'individual' views were also put forward. The detailed feedback notes, included in the

Statement of Engagement at Annex 1, are summarised below.

52. The attendees generally recognised the need for development, both in terms of housing and employment, to underpin sustainable economic growth, but also highlighted their concerns about the potential impact on Darlington's distinctiveness. The workshop identified aspirations for development to meet a range of aims around quality, choice, connectivity, accessibility, social cohesion, and health, with a view to creating 'communities' not just housing estates.
53. The output from the workshop has been considered alongside the written representations, and views from Place Scrutiny Committee, to help inform the following proposed new vision:

**'Building on our ingenuity, cherishing our quality'**

*'In 2036, Darlington Borough will have maintained its identity as a cohesive historic market town situated amongst countryside and villages, whilst developing its reputation for ingenuity and its status as an economic driver in the Tees Valley. Its coherent community, natural and historic environment will continue to be cherished protected and celebrated. The opportunities available in Darlington and its links with other centres will make the Borough an attractive place for both residential and commercial investment, with the Borough's needs for housing, jobs and other development being met, supported by new and improved infrastructure and community facilities. Together with excellent national and regional connectivity and accessibility, these characteristics will mean Darlington continues to thrive and be a great place to live, work and invest.'*

54. To achieve the above Vision, the following draft Aims and Objectives are proposed.

**(a) Overarching Aims**

- (i) Deliver sustainable development to meet the Borough's needs through a cohesive plan which makes the best use of land and resources.
- (ii) Protect or enhance the quality of Darlington's built, natural and historic environment, and to use it positively to create great places.
- (iii) Deliver new development that is capable of facilitating local or strategic infrastructure.
- (iv) Contribute to the happiness, fulfilment, health and well-being of the population of the borough.

**(b) Specific Aims and Objectives**

- (i) **Facilitating Economic Growth** – facilitate sustainable economic growth of 6,000 new jobs within the borough. To achieve this Aim, our Objectives are:
  - a) Create the conditions to attract and retain investment, with a range and continuous supply of employment development opportunities in sustainable locations.
  - b) Provide a choice and range of sites capable of delivering this growth. These will include established areas of existing economic

development but also be flexible enough to be responsive to accommodate growth industries or the changing needs of established sectors.

- c) Support clusters of economic activity in the context of the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan and the Council's Economic Strategy.
  - d) Promote Darlington Town Centre as the main location for shopping, leisure, culture and employment and strengthen its role as a regional centre for such activities.
  - e) Diversify the rural economy to support businesses and existing communities whilst also protecting the boroughs valued open countryside.
  - f) Facilitate the delivery of strategic infrastructure that supports economic growth, including the supply of appropriate housing.
- (ii) **Meeting Housing Needs** – enable the development of at least 10,000 new homes in order to meet the housing needs and aspirations of those living and working in the borough. To achieve this Aim, our Objectives are:-
- a) Maintain a supply of land for new housing developments that meets the needs of the growing number of households.
  - b) Achieve and maintain a 5 year supply of housing land.
  - c) Provide a range of housing products providing types and tenures of homes suitable for all people, including people who are unable to access housing on the open market and for the boroughs aging population.
  - d) To have a portfolio of sites of different sizes, different housing products and delivery rates for the short, medium and long term.
- (iii) **A Well Connected Borough** – to capitalise on Darlington's excellent existing connections to the national strategic transport network and seek improvements to regional connectivity across the borough. New development that supports delivery of key infrastructure and a sustainable pattern for growth will be supported. To achieve this Aim our Objectives are:
- a) Ensure that new development is in places where it will be reasonably accessible by public transport, cycling and walking.
  - b) Maintain and improve transport links between communities within the borough and further afield.
  - c) Support development that enhances regionally and nationally important transport links including those offered by Banktop Station, Durham Tees Valley Airport, Teesport and Strategic Road

Network.

- d) Delivery of communication infrastructure, including broadband, to enhance business and social interaction.
  - e) Improve the local highway network by managing out strategic highway demands.
- (iv) **Create Cohesive, Proud & Healthy Communities** – create and support cohesive communities through good place-making to achieve lively, well located and distinctive places with an increased sense of civic pride. To achieve this Aim, our Objectives are:-
- a) Protect, maintain and enhance Darlington's identity as a historic market town, set amongst countryside and surrounding villages with strong links to Railway, Quaker and industrial heritage.
  - b) Maintain a vibrant, attractive and safe market town centre that embraces its historic character whilst functioning as a modern centre offering retail, culture, leisure, tourism and employment opportunities.
  - c) Secure provision of necessary infrastructure to support growth including improvements to existing services.
  - d) Ensure convenient access to local goods and services.
  - e) Ensure residents have reasonable access to education facilities within the borough and where necessary contribute to the provision of education facilities in sustainable locations.
  - f) Improve access to green spaces for leisure and recreation.
  - g) To build healthier homes and environments that support independence at all stages of life.
  - h) Tackle unhealthy environments by creating walkable neighbourhoods, delivering improved infrastructure for safe, active travel and more accessible public transport.
  - i) Create connected neighbourhoods, with local social infrastructure and inclusive public spaces that enable people of all ages and abilities from all backgrounds to develop strong communities.
  - j) Create healthy workplaces, schools and leisure facilities that make the most of opportunities to encourage physical activity, healthy eating and positive mental health and wellbeing.
- (v) **Protect and Enhance the Countryside and Natural Environment** – maintain and enhance the biodiversity, character and appearance of the countryside and wildlife habitats. To achieve this Aim, our Objectives

are:-

- a) Development within and around existing urban areas will be expected to protect, and add to, the boroughs rich and accessible existing Green Infrastructure network.
  - b) Improve the amount of quality accessible greenspace where deficiencies in provision are identified.
  - c) Protect and enhance bio-diversity across the Borough.
  - d) Mitigate flood risks through environmental and ecological improvement of the River Skerne and River Tees.
- (vi) **Responding to Climate Change and Reducing Energy Consumption**  
– support the continued move towards a low carbon community by encouraging efficient use of resources, good design and well located development, whilst increasing resilience to impacts from climate change. To achieve this Aim, our Objectives are:-
- a) Manage flood risk from all sources.
  - b) Maximise opportunities to generate and use renewable energy in all developments.
  - c) Encourage energy and water efficient design in new development.
  - d) Locate development in areas not susceptible to flooding and encourage flood resilient design where necessary.

55. The Vision, Aims and Objectives will inform the development of the Local Plan and be used to measure its effectiveness over the plan period.

## **Policy Issues and Development**

56. As identified in the Issues and Scoping Consultation, the Local Plan 2016-2036, will encompass a wide range of planning issues, excluding only Minerals and Waste issues as these have been dealt with jointly by the Tees Valley authorities in a separate Core Strategy and Site Allocations documents.
57. The Council's approach to the majority of local planning issues is set out in the Interim Planning Position Statement agreed by the Council in April 2016. Whilst this statement is not statutory planning policy, it is built on the evidence and extensive public and stakeholder consultation undertaken to inform the Making and Growing Places DPD, withdrawn earlier this year. As it was not envisaged that there would be substantial changes from the approach taken to most issues in the Making and Growing Places DPD, this formed the basis of the Issues and Scoping consultation in those areas.
58. The comments made in response to the Issues and Options consultation are covered below under the Local Plan Aims detailed above. A summary of these

responses can be viewed at Annex 1 or on the Local Plan Microsite. In reviewing these topics and the evidence upon which conclusions were based, it has become apparent that in some cases, the data collected and conclusions reached may need to be updated to reflect both changing circumstances and the longer plan period.

59. Local Authorities have a ‘Duty to Co-operate’ with various statutory bodies and adjacent authorities, to ensure cross-boundary/strategic issues are considered by all relevant parties. At this early stage in the plan process, formal comments have been limited to identifying some areas of mutual interest, for example the potential impact of major development on the strategic road network, the future accommodation of Gypsies and Travellers, and future housing requirements and market assessments. Officers will continue to liaise with the relevant bodies and organisations as the plan progresses. They will also be involved as neighbouring authorities prepare their own local plans.

## **Facilitating Economic Growth**

60. Places and communities need jobs to thrive and be successful. This is why economic growth is a priority nationally, and locally. In Darlington, we need to build on our recent successes attracting and retaining businesses like the DfE, CPI and Sub-sea businesses, and securing new investment like at Feethams, Lingfield Point and Central Park. We are planning to sustain this level of success for the next 20 years.
61. Darlington has a choice of land and premises for new or expanding businesses in a range of locations across the Borough, but there are shortages in particular sizes, types and quality for the businesses growing in Darlington now and those likely to be attracted here in the future. For example, there is a lack of supply of grade A office accommodation in the town centre which is identified as a growth sector nationally, and in the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).
62. The future demand and availability of business land and premises was last reviewed in 2013. This information needs updating to take account of any new or different requirements of likely end users and gains/losses in the supply, and to roll forward the demand forecasts to 2036.
63. The approach in the Interim Planning Position Statement (IPPS) will be the starting point for developing a new policy. The priority locations for encouraging new employment development will be reflected in the emerging policies for the Growth Zones (Central, Eastern and North West, and any new growth zones identified in the Local Plan).
64. There is general agreement amongst respondents that economic growth needs to be high on the Council’s agenda, including creating the right employment opportunities, and ensuring employment and housing provision is aligned fully with the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan and the Council’s Economic Strategy. However, some responses suggest that the economic growth aspirations need to be revisited post ‘Brexit’.
65. There is some support for the current IPPS approach towards employment sites, including safeguarding employment land from other uses. However, one

respondent reminds the Council of the NPPF position on avoiding long term protection of sites where there is no reasonable prospect of the site being used for that purpose. Going forward, Stage 2 of the plan will consider the above issues in relation to ensuring a sufficient choice and supply of employment land to accommodate the envisaged growth across different sectors, but also the potential to allocate the land for other uses on underperforming sites. A review of the employment sites and premises study will also be required, as part of the Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA).

66. The ability to adapt to the changing role and function of the town centre will be a key element of the new Local Plan. In particular, the contribution it can make to the broader tourism economy and growth ambitions of the borough. Respondents support the ‘town centre first’ approach to ensuring the town continues to attract business and maintain the vibrancy of the centre. A decision on the proposed Designer Retail Outlet at Scotch Corner is pending. If approved, and it proceeds, the implications for the future of the town centre could be significant, and the Local Plan will need to consider how the local policy approach will respond. This may require a review of the approach to building out of town schemes within the Borough.
67. The IPPS identifies the Darlington town centre boundary and primary and secondary shopping frontages. As the IPPS reflects significant recent research and takes account of feedback from consultations, we proposed taking these forward into the Local Plan, unless trends in the way town centres are used dictates otherwise.
68. The Council also proposes to retain and protect the existing hierarchy of district and local centres set out in the IPPS and the Core Strategy, but it may be necessary to identify new/expanded one(s) if significant new housing is planned in an area not already well served by existing shops and services. It also proposes to keep the local requirement on developers to provide retail impact assessments for proposals for out of centre development as long as it continues to accord with national planning policy. Consultation respondents concur with this approach.
69. Economic growth will always have some cross boundary implications with movement of workers between administrative areas. There are existing links with employment uses to the North of the Borough in South Durham and also with Stockton but other industries also have associated supply chain businesses. Retail activity also has cross boundary implications so the council proposes to have ongoing dialogue with neighbouring authorities on the linkages between areas.

## **Meeting Housing Needs**

70. Darlington’s Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2015) and subsequent work on setting a housing requirement identified a need for around 10,000 dwellings to be built in Darlington by 2036. These homes will be delivered on sites with deliverable planning permissions, or sites which were identified as sustainable and suitable through Policy CS10 of the Core Strategy (adopted in 2011) and the Making and Growing Places DPD (MGP) Revised Preferred Options consultation in 2014 – the last public consultation before the document was officially withdrawn. Significant

additional sites will be required to meet the Borough's housing needs.

71. The Issues and Scoping consultation proposed that a policy setting out the annual housing requirement and, how its delivery will be phased, should be included in the Local Plan, alongside site allocations policies which will ensure that the most sustainable sites are developed over the plan period. Additional land will also need to be allocated to ensure the housing target is met even if some sites do not progress, or progress is slower than expected. This is in line with NPPF advice that a 5%-20% 'buffer' over and above need should be planned for to take account of delays on the delivery of sites.
72. The Issues and Scoping consultation referenced the 45+ sites identified in the IPPS, which have already been the subject of public consultations, are within or on the edge of the main urban area of Darlington and are considered suitable for sustainable new housing developments in the next five years. These sites will be reassessed as part of the HELAA to confirm their status. To meet the requirements of the new Local Plan, the Council issued a 'call for sites' (see para. 78) as part of the consultation process and sought opinions on drawing up the criteria that would be used to decide which additional strategic locations should be allocated for housing.
73. A number of consultation comments questioned whether the number of dwellings identified was accurate, expressing concern that the number of new homes was too high with particular reference to the availability of jobs and the impacts of the country leaving the European Union. It was noted that the relationship to economic growth targets would need to be monitored closely, and that any updates to the sub national population projections would need to be taken into account as the plan went forward.
74. A number of stakeholders with an interest in developing land within the Borough commented that the SHMA and related studies, including evidencing a five year supply of deliverable housing sites and the types of housing required (such as affordable homes, starter homes, self-build homes and homes suitable for older people), would require further work and updating as the local plan progresses. It was noted that a wide range of sites (in terms of size, market and location) would be required to maintain delivery rates over the plan period.
75. Alongside concern regarding the accuracy of the objectively assessed housing need evidenced in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), some respondents also commented on how this would be translated into a housing requirement. There was concern that the Council should not over plan for housing, because this would flood the market with planning permissions resulting in less certainty regarding deliverability. Conversely, a number of development industry stakeholders considered that flexibility should be built into the housing requirement to ensure the need for dwellings is met over the plan period, with the requirement being viewed as a minimum rather than a ceiling and any backlog being dealt with as soon as possible.
76. The concerns/issues raised above need to be considered in relation to national and local circumstances. There is a national housing crisis which may or may not be impacted by the Brexit decision and its impact on the economy, however

Darlington's own housing needs are based on local demographics with some job aspiration aligned to the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan. Furthermore, at this stage the 10,000 need figure is a working assumption and not set in stone. It will need to be reviewed next year, for example in light of latest population projections, and that will influence the phasing of delivery in the Plan.

77. Numerous local respondents commented on the design and layout of new housing, with particular reference to ensuring that Darlington retains its distinctive character, rather than encouraging estates of houses which could be located anywhere. It was also considered important that there was scope to include affordable dwellings, homes for first time buyers and homes for older people within housing schemes.

### **Call for Sites**

78. A key element in preparing a new Local Plan is to establish what land is available for development within the Borough over the plan period. The Council has been made aware of numerous potential development sites through previous evidence gathering such as the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the Employment Land Review. These sites have been explored in detail and in some cases, they have been included in draft policy documents as potential site allocations, the Council's Interim Planning Position Statement or have progressed to planning applications.
79. The Council issued a 'call for sites' as part of the consultation process. Landowners, agents and developers were asked to submit details of their suggested sustainable and developable sites using an online form including, a plan and basic site details.
80. Map 1 at Annex 3 shows the scale and distribution of the sites submitted as potential development allocations. Many of these have been submitted and considered through previous plan making cycles, however others are new suggestions responding to the Council's suggestions for achieving strategic housing delivery over a longer plan period. They range in size from relatively small extensions adjacent to existing villages, through to a large expanse of land to the west of the A1, an area put forward as a potential new settlement. Elsewhere, the submitted sites form major clusters at the urban fringe, concentrated to the south west, north west, north and north east of the town.
81. In considering the potential Local Plan housing site allocations, the Council will consider these submissions alongside sites already identified for consideration through previous planning exercises, mainly the SHLAA 2015 which provides an assessment of the Borough's ability to accommodate housing development over the Local Plan period. Previous work on the Local Plan Making and Growing Places housing allocations, now included in the Interim Planning Position Statement, are also shown on Map 1. The Council will need to assess all these sites to inform decisions on the Local Plan allocations needed to meet the housing requirement. The first part of that assessment is a high-level sift to identify the preferred strategic development locations.

## Selecting Strategic Development Locations

82. The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) promotes sustainable development and encourages local planning authorities to plan positively for their area, preferably for a 15 year plus period, and to take account of longer term requirements. In order to do this, the Council must objectively assess its development needs and set out how they will be met, including identifying strategic priorities for the Borough and defining broad locations and/or specific sites where development will be promoted.
83. Core Strategy Policy CS10 proposes the delivery of significant numbers of new dwellings, over the plan period, in the urban area, the Town Centre Fringe, the North Western Urban Fringe and the Eastern fringe. These sites remain sound and the new Local Plan represents a Core Strategy Plus approach.
84. As highlighted in the Issues and Scoping consultation, Officers consider that, given the scale of housing need, and opportunities and constraints present in the Borough, a strategic housing site (or sites) may be the most sustainable way in which to deliver the housing required. Paragraph 52 of the NPPF supports this approach stating that 'new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning for larger scale developments, such as new settlements or extensions to existing villages and towns that follow the principles of Garden Cities'.
85. Initial consideration of opportunities and constraints within the Borough was carried out through cross-departmental internal workshops, with input from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and ATLAS. This led to a number of areas of search for housing sites being identified around the Borough which formed the basis of the Issues and Scoping consultation in relation to housing. A number of areas or strategic options were identified as having the potential to accommodate residential development on a strategic scale. These were:
  - (a) An urban extension in northern Darlington
  - (b) An urban extension to the south west of Darlington
  - (c) Expanding Middleton St George village
  - (d) An urban extension to the south of Newton Aycliffe
  - (e) Creating a new settlement within the rural area
  - (f) Extending existing villages
86. Under the Duty to Co-operate, it was necessary to consider the option of importing or exporting housing need from or to adjacent housing market areas. The consensus among all Local Authorities was there are no reasons to do this and therefore the Local Plan will need to accommodate our own Borough's need only.
87. This approach to meeting the housing requirement through strategic sites received varying levels of support during the consultation. A number of respondents emphasised the importance of protecting open and green spaces, the countryside and villages from further development. There was support for building on brownfield sites and resisting 'urban sprawl', as well as the potential to make better use of sites already identified through the plan process and as being in need of regeneration, vacant sites and properties within the town centre.

88. Maintaining the focus on existing regeneration sites and the sites adjacent to the existing urban area identified in the Interim Planning Position Statement received support, both in terms of site allocations and phasing policies which would support their delivery before new greenfield sites are taken up. There was also a suggestion of using Council owned land to support housing delivery.
89. Respondents generally considered it important that areas of new housing should include infrastructure which would make them attractive, well-functioning places to live in their own right and, not impact negatively on existing settlements. Traffic congestion was noted as an issue in numerous locations, as well as concern about the impacts of increasing the capacity of the road network. In the north, reference was made to a potential need for a new link road between the A1 and Teesside. There was also support for locating new homes close to existing facilities and services, and spreading them across the area to spread the impact on infrastructure.
90. There was some support for a new settlement in a rural part of the Borough, including an extensive site submitted to the west of the A1. The landowners comment that this kind of strategic site would be attractive to the market, would reduce the impact of new housing on existing villages, could provide a mix of dwellings and fund new infrastructure. However, contrasting comments asserted that a new settlement would have a negative impact on the countryside and would require many new facilities, reducing its sustainability – particularly in the early years of the development.
91. Extensions to existing villages were not generally supported by local people, although those with land interests considered that they could support local infrastructure and facilities, increasing sustainability. Comments were received from representatives of Neasham, Middleton St George and Hurworth Parish Councils, expressing concern the villages would lose their character and form and that there would be a detrimental effect on the infrastructure in the villages. It was suggested by Middleton St George Parish Council that growth in the village is taking place in a piecemeal fashion and that a planned approach should be taken to any further development to ensure sufficient infrastructure was in place. At Neasham, the Parish Council considered that whilst there were some potential development sites within and around the village, they would need to be developed sensitively and with appropriate infrastructure. It was felt to be unlikely that they would make a significant contribution to the Borough's housing needs. Concerns about the impact on wildlife, landscape and the rural area's character were also expressed in relation to village development generally.
92. The proposal to create an urban extension to the north of Darlington town received support from the landowners in the area including a number of site submissions through the 'call for sites'. It was considered that this could utilise and build on existing infrastructure and services to provide an area of strategic growth. In contrast, others raised concerns regarding the large scale of the area being considered, building on floodplains, the potential impact development would have on wildlife, transport, and the potential loss of public rights of way and agricultural land. Residents in the vicinity of the Muscar House Farm site commented on its potential development with concerns including transport issues, impact on habitats, loss of the open space and agricultural land and the impact on the historic

environment.

93. Numerous responses to the issues and scoping consultation considered that the reuse of previously developed land within the existing urban area should be prioritised above greenfield sites, including parts of the Town Centre Fringe and other vacant industrial sites. The NPPF also encourages the reuse of previously developed land where it is not of high value. Where these sites have been put forward by their owners or identified by the Council, they have been considered through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and included in the development plan process as appropriate. This will continue to happen as the Local Plan progresses. However, to be included in the housing supply, sites must be shown to be developable, which includes an assessment of their viability and attractiveness to the market. In addition, some sites may be valued in their current use (such as industrial locations), or be otherwise unsuitable for housing development.
94. In order to plan effectively, determine which areas and sites will best achieve Darlington's Local Plan Vision, Aims and Objectives, and deliver good planning outcomes, potential areas for strategic scale development have been assessed against a number of criteria (summarised below) to determine whether they will be taken forward into Stage 2 of the Local Plan process. These have been based on draft Local Plan Vision, Aims and Objectives outlined earlier in this report and the issues and objectives identified in the Sustainability Appraisal Framework.
  - (a) The delivery of a distinctive place – a cohesive market town surrounded by countryside and villages, with a strong sense of community, heritage and an attractive environment.
  - (b) Contributing to a sustainable pattern of development (connectivity and relation to the existing urban form, integration and cohesiveness of communities), both Borough wide and within the area itself.
  - (c) Enabling the local management of the transport network to reduce the impact of congestion as a consequence of growth.
  - (d) Facilitating the Tees Valley and Northern Power House wide/sub regional economy including improving east-west connectivity and accessibility.
  - (e) Potential to enhance and deliver new infrastructure and amenities on a neighbourhood, local or regional scale infrastructure (including social).
  - (f) Potential to deliver a significant number of dwellings between now and 2036 in an appropriately phased and planned fashion, including a mix of tenures, types and price of the type which would allow the borough to attract and also retain the population profile to needed in the area.
95. Annex 4 includes the assessment of the strategic options set out in the Issues and Scoping consultation (para 85 above), and sites submitted during the consultation. The list below confirms the broad locations assessed and states whether they should be taken forward into Stage 2 of the Local Plan process as Strategic

**Development Locations:-**

- (a) A new settlement west of A1 - Do not include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (b) South West Darlington - Include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (c) South Darlington – Do not include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (d) North West Darlington – Include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (e) North Darlington - Include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (f) North East Darlington - Include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (g) Middleton St George Village – Do not include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.
- (h) South of Newton Aycliffe – Do not include in Stage 2 as Strategic Development Location.

96. Where not selected as strategic locations for the next stage of the local plan process, there may, nevertheless be individual sites worthy of further consideration for inclusion in the Plan. These will be assessed as part of the HELAA process or through the planning application process.
97. Given the need for the plans to deliver housing across the plan period there is need to consider what sites could be brought forward early in the plan to avoid a back loaded profile and to even out delivery as far as practical. In this context it will be necessary to encourage sites to come forward during the plan making process that are NPPF compliant and this will include consideration of development options within the villages.
98. It is not recommended at this stage that the villages are identified as strategic locations but rather that the opportunities for further development are explored on a more local basis; possibly through Neighbourhood Plan processes, to reconcile some growth options with local issues such as education provisions. Without this approach, the Council is likely to be vulnerable to planning by appeal.

**Gypsies and Travellers**

99. The Issues and Scoping consultation proposed that the Local Plan would make provision for gypsy and traveller accommodation to meet the needs of the Borough. Views received expressed concern that sporadic development over recent years has affected the character of areas, and that there is a need for a firm, clear policy position, around any planned increase in provision.
100. Officers propose to review the evidence regarding needs, against new national policy taking into account sub regional issues and the Duty to Co-operate with other

relevant bodies, and adjust the Local Plan accordingly.

## A Well Connected Borough

- 101.Consultation responses from residents indicate concern about levels of road congestion and identify that some of this traffic is caused by ‘through traffic’ coming to and from other areas. There is particular concern about the northern part of town although this is a common issue for all of the identified growth zones. Also raised is the importance of supporting and properly integrating sustainable transport into new developments in order to move away from a reliance on private motor vehicles. Responses suggest that parking arrangements and the Parking Strategy should be revisited in light of the additional development proposed.
- 102.Neighbouring authorities have advised further work will be required to understand the impact on the strategic road network. There is also some criticism that the consultation material at this stage offered no indication of likely highway mitigation measures.
- 103.Officers recognise the concerns raised about traffic levels and future capacity, however some context is needed here. The Tees Valley is the most free-flowing traffic system in the country, so whilst there are no doubt local issues on the network, there is no fundamental reason why development can not proceed in this national context. Stage 2 of the plan will identify strategic and local infrastructure requirements necessary to meet and mitigate the long term development ambitions of the Plan.
- 104.The existing evidence base, at the strategic and local network levels, provides a well understood narrative around the potential impact and mitigation requirements resulting from major development over the next 10 to 20 years. A study<sup>1</sup> was commissioned as part of the Making and Growing Places DPD evidence base that considered the likely traffic impacts of the development proposed in that document and the traffic model indicates that at peak times by 2030 both the A66 and A1150/Burtree lane corridors will experience traffic volumes greater than the capacity of those roads. Other pinch points are also identified by this study at specific junctions but these were all known areas of congestion. Should traffic growth occur as predicted, beyond the period of the Local Plan (previously up to 2026) to avoid increased levels of congestion further traffic mitigation measures will need to be considered.
- 105.This study also reflects the known issue that parts of the Darlington local highway network carries a significant proportion of strategic vehicle movements (ie. Vehicles using the local network to get from one strategic road to another). The main examples of such strategic traffic movements across the town are:
- (a) North to North East - between the A1 Junction 59 and A66 at Great Burdon travelling via Salters Lane North and Whinfield Road.

---

<sup>1</sup> Darlington Local Plan, Strategic Transport Modelling Report, 16/06/2015, JMP

(b) North West to South West – Between the A1 Junction 58 at Faverdale to the A66 at Blands Corner travelling via West Auckland Road and Carmel Road.

106. As such the Local Plan and its aims and objectives look to encourage development that can help to deliver parts of an incomplete strategic highway network to provide a radial route around the North and West of Darlington to provide enhanced connectivity to support the Borough's economic growth agenda.

107. The highway modelling work for the MGP looked at the potential of a 'Northern Relief Road' which included a notional alignment of a new road between the A1(M) Junction 59 near Newton Aycliffe and the A66 Roundabout near Great Burdon. Modelling shows this new road result in significant improvements to road conditions on the A66 and A1150 Burtree Lane corridors.

108. Highways England have also been investigating options to improve West/East connectivity between the A1 and A19 corridors as part of the 'Northern Trans Pennine'<sup>2</sup> Connectivity improvements which includes considering options to upgrade the A66.

109. As part of the Northern Powerhouse agenda Transport for The North have set out in their Report on 'Northern Transport Strategy'<sup>3</sup> the need to improve east-west connections and in particular access to Teesport within the Tees Valley. This is also being reflected in Tees Valley Combined Authorities Strategic Transport Priorities as part of the proposed Tees Valley Devolution Deal.

110. Another programme to address constraints on growth identified in the Tees Valley Devolution Deal is to ensure Darlington Station is HS2 ready with new platforms and improved links to adjacent developments.

111. More detailed work will need to be developed in the next stage of the plan to understand the highway and other transport impacts of the amount of development being proposed over the next 20 years and the growth in travel that would occur even if no new development was planned. The work is also needed to help identify what new improvements are necessary to the local road network, bus and rail services, and cycling and walking infrastructure to support development, encourage sustainable travel choices and avoid significant road congestion.

112. Officers will continue to pursue sustainable transport initiatives as part of the Local Plan policies in line with the Tees Valley Transport Strategy and the Darlington Local Transport Plan.

113. The existing Parking Strategy (2014-26) will be the starting point for any new parking policy development. It will be reviewed to take account of changes to existing parking following the completion of new developments in the Feethams area, and to understand and plan for more that is needed by 2036. The general approach to short stay, long stay, contract car parking and residents parking zones set out in the IPPS is likely to be retained, to support town centre vitality and

---

<sup>2</sup> London to Scotland East Route Strategy, Highways England, April 2015

<sup>3</sup> The Northern Powerhouse: One Agenda, One Economy, One North, A report on the Northern Transport Strategy, Transport for the North, March 2015

manage demand.

114. Officers will work with the major utility providers to make sure that all new development can be readily connected to ICT, gas, electric, water supply and sewerage facilities without delay, and that this can be done without harming the delivery of these utilities to existing homes and businesses already in the Borough. To support local businesses and improve residents' quality of life, it is proposed to ask for superfast broadband capability for all new developments. All this will be set out in an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, to be prepared alongside the new Local Plan.

115. Transport will be a key duty to cooperate matter as policies are developed.

Darlington plays a key role as an access point to the Tees Valley for both road and rail transport and continues to provide the only airport facility in the Tees Valley all of which have a sub-regional role. There is also a key interaction between Darlington Borough and South Durham which will require ongoing dialogue.

## **Protect and Enhance the Countryside and the Natural Environment**

116. The adopted Core Strategy identifies that the Borough is part of three distinct natural landscape character areas (Tees Lowland, Durham Magnesium Limestone Plateau and Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe), whilst more detailed recent landscape character work (2015) identified ten distinctive local landscape character areas, and assessed the capacity of some areas to accommodate new development. It is proposed to retain the adopted policy approach identifying and seeking to protect and enhance the distinctive landscapes in the context of the national presumption in favour of sustainable development. This means that landscape character is most likely to be a factor in deciding how to design and plan new development (see IPPS), and only in very exceptional cases, is it anticipated that impact on landscape would be a show stopping issue.

117. The Council has an up to date policy and evidence base on Green Infrastructure (2013) and this will need to be refreshed and extended into new areas for proposed developments.

118. Biodiversity is an important indicator of environmental well-being. Whilst Darlington has relatively few nationally designated biodiversity and geodiversity sites, there is about 300 hectares of locally important wildlife friendly green space, including land along the river corridors and becks, Local Nature Reserves (e.g. Geneva Woods) and Local Wildlife Sites. Comprehensive up to date information is reflected in the Green Infrastructure Strategy. The 'conserve and where possible enhance' policy approach set out in the IPPS, the GIS and the Core Strategy is well developed and unless any national policy changes or significant changes to local circumstances warrant it, it is proposed to reflect the current policy approach in the new Local Plan.

119. There is a strong emphasis in the consultation comments received on the protection of the natural environment of Darlington and its surroundings, particularly in relation to green infrastructure and enhancing the network already in existence. Protecting landscape character and the context of the existing villages within this landscape is also a key concern with a fuller understanding of landscape character

encouraged.

120.In its response, Northumbrian Water has urged greater consideration of the core principles of flood risk and sustainable water management in preparing the plan in order to support the resilient future of healthy communities. This may involve updating of documents like the Tees Valley Water Cycle Study (2012) and Darlington SFRA (2010) and also that any new strategic growth areas within flood zones should be subject to sequential test. Regard to the Water Framework Directive and Northumbria River Basin Management Plan is vital. Evidence will need to be robust in relation to constraints so as to be able to test whether any harm to these constraints will 'significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits' of delivering the full OAN for housing.

121.Protection and improvement of the natural environment and landscape character of the Borough will be a key aim of the Local Plan. Officers acknowledge the comments received and will carry forward the points made into the next stage of the plan.

122.Cross boundary issues are picked up in the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy and where necessary will be discussed with adjacent authorities and Statutory Consultees.

### **Create Cohesive, Proud and Healthy Communities**

123.Heritage and archaeology are at the heart of what makes Darlington distinctive. The Council proposes a policy to promote, protect and enhance its quality and integrity. Work on this is already well advanced, and is reflected in the Interim Planning Position Statement. It covers heritage and archaeology that has already been formally recognised, as well as that which has not. Unless there are changes to national policy, it is proposed to retain the existing policy approach.

124.Consultation responses show strong support overall for the protection of Darlington's distinctive local heritage. There are a number of comments supporting the existing approach identified in the Interim Statement. Of particular importance is the protection of the character of the town centre and surrounding villages. The importance of the Stockton and Darlington Railway route and associated railway heritage assets has also been referenced by a number of respondents and they consider more should be done to acknowledge their importance.

125.Access to local primary health and hospital facilities are significant local concerns, reflecting a national issue. The Council is not the provider of these services, but through the local plan, will work with the NHS and the Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group to help make sure that for any new facilities planned, land in appropriate locations, e.g. as part of wider new housing development, is kept free for that purpose.

126.There is a strong positive link between education and health. New housing often generates the need for more local primary and secondary school places, and new nursery places. The Local Plan can help make sure that when new housing takes place, the developer contributes to the cost of providing new school places, whether it is with new, altered or extended buildings, and/or by reserving suitable

land within large new housing schemes.

- 127.Darlington is well provided with higher education opportunities now that Teesside University has a successful campus in the town, complementing Darlington College and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College. The proposed amalgamation of Darlington and Stockton Colleges is intended to enhance the education offer further. The Council will continue to work with these institutions to ensure further education infrastructure is accommodated.
- 128.Indoor and outdoor sport and recreation facilities, including sports centres, community halls, playing fields and green space for childrens' play and informal recreation are essential to support healthy lifestyles. Compared to other towns, Darlington has a lot of open space for its population, but it is not all attractive to use, and may not all be easy to reach and accessible. The existing policy approach aims to safeguard and improve sport and recreation facilities from other forms of development in most circumstances, but with flexibility built in, so that the Council and other providers can adapt to new models of delivery. The Council currently seeks an appropriate level of new provision with new development, or asks for developer contributions to improve facilities nearby. It proposes to retain this approach, as it is based on recent sport and physical activity strategies. Any refinements will be to reflect more up to date evidence, such as for playing pitch needs, or any changes to national policy.
- 129.Comments received highlight the importance of safeguarding and protecting cultural and community facilities, and encouraging new provision, as part of sustainable development. Specific support for protection of pubs and other community facilities as valuable meeting places is balanced by comments that such an approach could result in buildings sat empty, subject to vandalism, etc.
- 130.Some respondents would like to see stronger emphasis placed on the Borough's sporting and leisure facilities and the benefits a successful sports team can bring to Darlington and the wider region. As such reference should be made to expanding the range of sports provision and giving support to diversification to support the longevity of sporting clubs and facilities.
- 131.A view put forward is the need to present need for community facilities transparently, stating clearly what DBC believes should be provided and the evidence which supports these requirements. Viability will also have to be considered as part of this process.
- 132.Respondents emphasised the need for integration of infrastructure within new developments including schools and health care. In order for Darlington to remain the 'gateway to the Tees Valley' without significant investment this could become a constraint on future growth. Superfast broadband provision also should be a key requirement alongside more traditional utilities.
- 133.The protection and celebration of railway, and other heritage assets, will remain an important element of the Local Plan vision and be reflected in policy development at Stage 2. Pubs and other community venues can be valuable local meeting places, enriching users with a sense of wellbeing and community belonging. Officers acknowledge that the scenarios around community and cultural facilities

should be given careful consideration in writing the Local Plan. In addition, an Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be produced as part of the Local Plan and will be tested at the Examination in Public.

134.The former Stockton to Darlington Railway extends into Durham County Council and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council areas. Discussions will be held with both regarding the policy approach proposed.

### **Protect our Climate and Reducing Energy Consumption**

135.Recent technological advances, changes to national planning policy and incentive schemes all indicate a full review of the Core Strategy policy approach is needed. The review will also take account of the shift in how energy efficiency improvements in new development will be secured, away from the planning system to the building regulations regime.

136.Comments have been received relating to energy efficiency, carbon reduction including air quality and improved building standards. Some respondents seek significant improvement others request that such matters be left to Building Regulations.

137.National Policy requires Local Plans to be supported by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and develop policies to manage flood risk from all sources, taking account of advice from the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk management bodies. In the next stage of plan development this work will commence.

138.Given the detailed nature of these issues and uncertain picture in relation to national standards relating to energy efficiency in construction, they will be considered later on in Stage 2 of the plan preparation process, when hopefully there will be greater clarity at national level.

139.Management of Flood Risk has the potential to be a duty to cooperate issue and we will continue to maintain dialogue with adjacent authorities in relation to such matters.

### **Place Scrutiny Feedback**

140.On 20 October, Place Scrutiny Committee (with various Ward Members, Parish Councillors and individuals also attending and contributing) considered issues covered in this report. The main points raised, recommendations to Cabinet, and actions taken are summarised below.-

- (a) The Committee endorsed the proposed Local Plan Vision and Objectives and the criteria for selecting strategic development locations.
- (b) Given the importance of the issues, it was suggested that an all-Member briefing be held prior to Cabinet, to inform the Cabinet debate. A briefing was held on Tuesday 1 November 2016.

- (c) Concerns were raised about not meeting the government's 2017 deadline for an approved Local Plan. Officers remain of the opinion that within the current definition DBC would not be penalised. The position will continue to be monitored.
- (d) A concern that the overall housing need figure (10,000 dwellings) is based on too aspirational Tees Valley employment forecasts. Officers explained the DBC employment figure of about 6,000 jobs is realistic, and that the majority of the housing need figure is based on demographic changes. Officers informed Scrutiny that the housing figures would be reviewed as part of Stage 2 of the Plan.
- (e) Notwithstanding the general support for the Vision, and the need for some 'proportional' development, the reality of current pressure for housing applications, particularly in certain villages, is that the Local Plan will be too late. The potential role for Neighbourhood Plans to shape the future of villages was acknowledged and officers will be working with Parish Councils to assess the best approach.
- (f) There were concerns raised about a map shown at the meeting which appeared to show the villages of Heighington and Middleton St George as strategic locations, on a par with the much larger areas identified at the North East and North West of the town. The view was put that these villages, and others such as Hurworth, should not be considered as strategic locations (and therefore excluded from any indicative map). Officers accept this point and the relevant map has been amended accordingly.
- (g) On the issue of strategic transport infrastructure, the suggestion was made that the focus should be on upgrading existing Junction 57 rather than considering a Northern Relief Road. Officers confirmed that both options will be assessed, but that they would achieve different outcomes in relation to addressing strategic and local network issues and therefore it is not a case of either or.
- (h) It was suggested that the proposed Strategic Development Locations identified for more detailed assessment, were driven by developers and not necessarily good planning. Officers reminded Scrutiny the key role developers play in delivering development and the importance of being able to evidence to an Examination in Public, that land is available and deliverable. However, the selection of Strategic locations and subsequently detailed site allocations is based on sustainable planning criteria.

## **Developer Session Feedback**

141. Evidence that the Local Plan can be delivered, will be a crucial element of the Examination in Public. It is important therefore that the development industry understands and supports the strategy.

142. On Thursday 28 October, following on from two previous events, various developers, landowners and agents were invited to a local plan update session. Over 40 interested parties attended. Officers explained the position reached in the Local Plan process, including the outcome of the consultation process, the draft

Vision, Aims and Objectives, the proposed strategic location selection process, and the recommended strategy going forward. During the discussion that followed there was support for the ‘sensible’ and ‘logical’ approach taken by the Council to considering strategic locations and recognition of the ‘ambitious’ infrastructure requirements.

143.The second part of the event focussed on the next 12 months, highlighting the role the development industry will need to play in co-ordinating evidence collection whether that be through master planning (for strategic locations), neighbourhood planning (in the villages) or individual site assessments (through the HELAA process). Officers explained the proposed approach to the governance of the whole Local Plan, highlighting a key role for stakeholders (**Annex 6**). Again there was support for the governance structure and route map approach and an implicit acceptance that landowners and developers will need to provide resources to support the process.

### **Local Plan Strategic Framework**

144.This report represents the end of Stage 1 of the Local Plan preparation process as set out in the Local Development Scheme. Based on the adopted Core Strategy, evidence gathered during the preparation of the, now withdrawn, Making and Growing Places document, and more recent evidence updating key areas such as housing needs, the strategic Issues and Scoping document was published for consultation. Extensive engagement has provided valuable feedback on the overriding Vision, Aims and Objectives, on the scale and distribution of potential development areas/sites, on the key planning issues facing the Borough and on the options for strategic development locations going forward.

145.Officers have considered all of the above in developing the Local Plan 2016-36 Strategic Framework (Annex 5). Cabinet is recommended to approve the Framework as the basis for further detailed assessment work under Stage 2 of the Local Plan process.

### **Next Steps**

146.Over the next few months work will be progressing in a number of key areas to develop Stage 2 of the Local Plan. The Council will need to refresh the evidence base to demonstrate the plan is compliant with regulations, the National Planning Policy Framework, and meets the Vision, Aims and Objectives.

147.Where development sites are proposed, evidence will be gathered to meet the following 7 questions:-

- (a) Is there a clear objective/aim for what is intended to be achieved in the overall development?
- (b) Can key site constraints be identified - both those that are fixed and those that need to be overcome or mitigated?

- (c) Are all the different land uses/proposals that the site is to accommodate identified, together with an indication of their scale i.e. housing, employment, community facilities?
- (d) What infrastructure is needed (e.g. transport, education, social and community services) to make that development an attractive, sustainable location?
- (e) How will the infrastructure be provided and by whom – focussing on phasing and delivery, including funding and viability?
- (f) Is an implementation route in place?  
For sites to be delivered within 5 years: milestones for progression of the development, e.g. application submission and commencement on site, phasing and consequences if missed. For delivery of Broad Locations in 5 – 15 years: this could be left to a later development plan.
- (g) Is there a master plan in place or emerging?  
For delivery within 5 years: is there a Strategic Framework Plan in place and will further detail be worked up in a more detailed master plan and/or site-specific SPD? - For delivery in 5 – 15 years: is it clear how the detail will be worked up later in the plan period, specifying timescales for delivery AND following this question through, especially relevant here where development is being planned for a longer term horizon how will that be secured and delivered?

148. Project management techniques will be used to ensure key tasks, milestones and deadlines necessary to get a comprehensive Local Plan submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in early 2018, are met. They will assist in project managing the process of plan development, explain the governance arrangements supporting master planning and local plan processes, and set out requirements for stakeholder engagement.

149. All proposed housing sites will be assessed through the HELAA. Consideration will be given to their allocation in the Local Plan, either in isolation or in combination with other sites as the document progresses.

150. Officers have identified master planning as a useful tool for quality place making on a strategic scale. In order to achieve delivery in this way, it will be necessary for the Council and other stakeholders to undertake work over and above that required for delivering smaller numbers of houses and/or smaller discrete sites. This could include securing strategic infrastructure such as new road links or utility provision, but also onsite arrangements such as access points, schools and health care which require multiple land owners and developers to work together to produce the most sustainable places for the future. Initial discussions with developers and land owners on the principles of this approach have revealed their willingness to participate in and contribute to such an approach. With this in mind, the Council has engaged ATLAS, (the Advisory Team for Large Applications, part of the Homes and Communities Agency), to support it in exploring how a strategic site could support sustainable housing delivery and other key objectives in Darlington, as well as how deliverability and viability could be demonstrated over a 10 to 15 year implementation period. It is anticipated that ATLAS will continue to support the

Council through this process and that the approach can be extrapolated to other sites and potentially in neighbourhood planning areas. Where this is successful, it will go on to form part of the evidence for a site allocation and related policies in the Local Plan. **Annex 6** sets out the proposed Governance Structure for managing the next stage of the Local Plan process.

151. Measures to inform the update of the Local Plan evidence base will be required.

This will include:-

- (a) An update of the Objectively Assessed Needs Assessment (OAN) to reflect the latest demographic forecasts;
- (b) An update of the HELAA and 5 year land supply assessment;
- (c) An assessment of whole plan viability and review of Section 106/CIL position;
- (d) Other specialist studies including updates of employment land reviews and traffic modelling work will also require commissioning.

152. Neighbourhood Planning could play a useful role in informing/supporting the Local Plan process, especially within the villages. Officers will provide support and advice to Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums where appropriate, to ensure any such plans conform with the emerging Local Plan policies.

153. As officers develop the plan there will be ongoing consultation with much greater emphasis on more focused consultations on particular topics and geographical areas. Bespoke engagement plans will be developed for these stages but owing to the success of new consultation methods so far there will be a greater emphasis on making information available online with regular updates on progress on the Local Plan Microsite with links also provided on the Council's existing Social Media Channels.

### **Financial Implications**

154. Resource is available across the Economic Initiatives Division which covers, amongst other things, the costs associated with Local Plan preparation (for example legal and consultant's fees for evidence gathering, consultation events and materials and printing). Further evidence gathering and consultation work will give rise to a continuing need for resources for these activities. To ensure a robust and sound evidence base, various pieces of work will need to be refreshed. Existing in-house staff will be able to complete some of the tasks, but external consultants will be required to complete the remainder. It may be necessary to request additional funds over and above existing budgets as the plan progresses.

155. There will also be a requirement for the Council to host a Public Examination into the Local Plan in 2018 including providing the venue, appointing a Programme Officer, and paying for the Inspectors time. Appropriate funding has already been identified to support this work.

156.Under the 'Next Steps' section above, reference is made to the need for developer input into the proposed master planning approach to ensure sufficient evidence of delivery for Public Examination. There will be a need to co-ordinate the Council's input and oversee the work of the developers and their consultants, to achieve a consistent, transparent process. It is anticipated that extra staff resources may be required to perform this role and officers are investigating opportunities to fund such a resource. For example recent government announcements regarding potential resource funding packages to support strategic housing site delivery will be considered. The potential for developers to contribute to resourcing the local plan evidence base will also be assessed.

## **Legal Implications**

157.Regulation 18 (The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) requires the Council to outline the Strategic Issues and Options to be covered in the Local Plan, and make them available to key stakeholders for comment. This report explains the process undertaken to meet those requirements, and based on the initial work and consideration of the stakeholder responses, sets out the strategic framework for developing the next stage of the Local Plan.

## **Annexes**

Annex 1	Consultation Statement
Annex 2	Sustainability Appraisal Framework
Annex 3	Call for Sites Map
Annex 4	Strategic Development Locations – Selection Assessment
Annex 5	Local Plan 2016-36 Strategic Framework
Annex 6	Governance Structure