

Comment

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Question 2

Do you consider that this part of the Local Plan is unsound because it is not: (tick all that apply)



Our ref:

Your ref:

Planning Policy, Economic Strategy and Environment
Darlington Borough Council
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**For the attention of: Planning Policy, Economic
Strategy and Environment Team**

17 September 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN 2016 – 2036: PROPOSED SUBMISSION VERSION

Highways England welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Submission Local Plan 2016 -2036, alongside the Sustainability Appraisal both dated August 2020.

The SRN within the Darlington Borough

The SRN within the Darlington Borough comprises of the A1(M) and A66. The A1 (M) provides a north-south link through the west of the district ultimately connecting the south of England with the Scottish border. The A66 provides an east – west link through the south of the district ultimately connecting the North West as far as Workington to the North East towards Middlesbrough.

Ongoing Collaboration

Highways England is currently working with Darlington Borough Council [DBC] to assess the impact of the Local Plan on the Strategic Road Network [SRN]. This work approaching its conclusion and the agreed position with respect to the impact of the Local Plan on the SRN will be included with a Statement of Common Ground [SoCG] between Highways England and DBC.

Local Plan Proposed Submission Review

Several of the policies and proposals within the document that do not link directly to the remit of Highways England, which is to maintain the operation and safety of the SRN. In these cases, no particular comment has been provided within this letter.

Again, given the assessment working currently being finalised and the forthcoming SoCG, matters relating to the traffic impact at existing SRN junctions have not been specifically commented upon within this letter. Highways England are satisfied that these issues are being addressed through other work streams and will be concluded in time for the Local Plan Examination in Public [EiP]. The key issues discussed below are those of policy and principles relating to how necessary mitigation is identified within the Local Plan and the delivery mechanism.

Paragraph 6.2.14 of the Local Plan sets out that Appendix B provides allocation statements for each site and that specific infrastructure requirements will need to be dealt with at the

planning application stage. The allocation statements do not appear to mention the need for improvements to the SRN. Improvements to the SRN will be required as part of the Local Plan and these are not considered to be site specific. Appropriate funding mechanisms, including developer contributions will need to be identified within the Local Plan. Highways England are concerned that if contributing to SRN improvements are not identified within the allocation statements or elsewhere within the Local Plan the delivery of the SRN improvements may not come forward making the plan unsound. It is appreciated that work is still ongoing to identify and secure the appropriate improvements and the improvements will be identified within the Infrastructure Delivery Plan [IDP] however, some wording within the Local Plan identifying that sites which impact on the SRN will be expected to contribute towards improvements identified within the IDP will help provide more certainty that contributions can be collected and the necessary infrastructure can be delivered.

Policies H10 and H11 deal with Strategic Site Allocation of the Skerningham and Greater Faverdale areas. Both identify at bullet h) that other necessary infrastructure as required by the IDP and identified at the time of submitting a planning application will be needed to be provided. This is welcomed by Highways England. In addition, for the Skerningham site, provision is made to ensure the ability to connect to the Northern Relief Road is required. Although the Plan does not rely on the Northern Relief Road, ensuring the ability for developments to appropriately connect to the Northern Relief Road is seen as appropriate.

Chapter 10 of the Local Plan considers transportation and infrastructure. Policy IN1 deals with delivering a sustainable transport network. Part A) iv. Sets out the ambitions to improve local connections across busy transport corridors which act as a barrier to local access. This will include working with Highways England to ensure permeability of the A66. Although Highways England is supportive of a sustainable transport system and will work with DBC to achieve this aim, it should be noted that provisions for pedestrian and cyclists cannot be implemented if they bring detriment to the safety and efficient use of the SRN. Consideration needs to be given to the function of the SRN which is to safely and efficiently move long distance traffic.

Highways England is supportive of the policies with part C) of this policy. However, mechanisms for deliver of any mitigations need to be clear.

The SRN is considered in paragraphs 10.5.7 to 10.5.9. This identifies some locations where junction improvements are required. Once the work to establish the necessary improvements is complete, this list will need to be updated to align with the mitigations identified within the IDP.

Paragraph 10.5.8 identifies potential funding streams including bids to funding bodies and the potential for major developments to contribute towards funding through developer contributions. Through the work being undertaken with DBC to identify potential schemes for the SRN, it will need to be demonstrated that any necessary mitigation has a realistic prospect of being funded and if necessary, wholly through developer contributions.

Although the Local Plan identifies the Northern Relief Road it does not make any provisions for safe guarding the necessary land and does not rely on it in order to mitigate the impact of the Local Plan.

Policy IN3 sets out that support for the preparation and implementation of Travel Plans and Transport Assessments. Highways England welcome this policy but notes that proposals will be supported if they improve transport choice, minimise single occupancy vehicle trips and contribute to managing congestion. Consideration should be given to adding to this policy that residual impacts of developments will need to be mitigated.

Summary of Response

Highways England are working with DBC to derive the necessary mitigation on the SRN to support the Local Plan growth aspirations. These mitigations will need to be included with the IDP with identification of funding and delivery mechanisms.

Highways England is generally support of relevant wording with the Local Plan although some minor changes, as identified above, to ensure that the necessary mitigations are delivered and funded would be beneficial.

I trust this response will be helpful, however should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Bell
Asset Manager
Highways England
