

Response to Inspector's Matters Issues & Questions on Darlington Local Plan

Matter 2 – Amount of development in the Borough

Q 2.1 – No, this aim is not well evidenced or justified, especially in relation to recent events such as Covid and Brexit (Tees Valley being a major exporting region, and investment in some manufacturers there has moved to the EU) – many jobs have also been lost due to austerity in recent years, so the town and wider region will struggle to replace these let alone add 7000 extras. Even in the context of evidence presented, much of it is questionable extrapolation.

Also, an aim to provide more jobs should never then be used to require more housing as a result, since there is no evidence that this aim would become reality, and the aim of good planning should be to ensure the needs for employment of the local residents are met, hence there is no evidence that even if this number of jobs were created, that almost 10,000 extra homes would be required in Darlington.

Q 2.2 – No, there has been long-term allocation for employment land in the past that has not been used, so the allocation of additional land does not necessarily allow the creation of the aimed-for 7000 jobs. Indeed, previously allocated employment land at Faverdale and Lingfield Point have now been reallocated to mixed development with housing, and with both housing and retail at Faverdale, suggesting that excess land has been allocated.

Q 2.3 – Absolutely not! As assessed¹ by Darlington Green Party's planning consultant Jo Ellis of Blue Kayak planning, the council argues exceptional circumstances to avoid using the standard methodology – I do not agree that the argument for exceptional circumstances has been met. They use an unacceptable and invalid method of calculating the housing need including projecting from the “most favourable” housing growth trends and disbelieving those which they do not wish to take into account. This is not positively prepared and completely invalid – so not consistent with national policy - and should be abandoned in favour of the standard methodology, or re-calculated using up to date figures and full, proper and transparent temporal analysis to show long terms trends. The methodology used is not properly explained and justified therefore incomprehensible to most Darlington residents why we require 2.5 times the number of new homes as stated by the OAN using ONS statistics.

Q 2.5 – No, whilst this has been changed by recent events around Covid and Brexit to mean more working from home, less commuting to other larger centres (which could benefit the economy of Darlington if adequately integrated into town and district centre design) so greater need for small hotdesking services with high-quality video-conferencing facilities. As more people shop online there is less need for large retail sites but more for smaller start-ups and independent shops (which may also sell online) and instead greater requirement for cafes and other entertainment reasons to come to a town or district centre, and greater need for town centre residential development. It is likely that now habits have changed, people are more likely to stick with them, and we should plan based on that expectation, especially where that would result in positive outcomes for the town's economy and vibrancy.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LdMSST6j9dulUzn2VEXqhZcjrO04A2iK/view?usp=sharing>