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# Inspector's Matters Issues and Questions

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Examination of the Darlington Local Plan

Part 1 Hearings

(Matter 3 – Vision, Aims and Spatial Strategy)



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## Introduction

We have been instructed on behalf of our clients, Hellens Land Limited and Homes England, to submit a response to the Examination of the Darlington Local Plan: Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions. Hellens Group have over 40 years' experience of delivering a range of housing, leisure and infrastructure developments across the North of England. Homes England is a non-departmental public body which works to accelerate housing delivery, working with developers across the country to improve neighbourhoods and grow communities.

Our client's joint interest is in respect of the Burtree Village which is located north west of Darlington and is located within the jurisdiction of Darlington Borough Council. These representations have been submitted to support the proposed strategic allocation for 2,000 residential dwellings, 200,000 sqm of employment space, community facilities, link road and associated infrastructure at Greater Faverdale (Burtree Garden Village).

This Statement should be read in conjunction with all previous representations made on behalf of our clients in relation to Burtree Garden Village.

Our clients are committed to ensuring the strategic allocation (and the Publication Draft Local Plan) is sound and robust. Our comments will therefore focus on the following Matters:

- Matter 1: - Legal and Procedural Requirements and other General Matters
- Matter 2: Amount of development needed in the Borough
- Matter 3: Vision, aims, objectives and spatial strategy
- Matter 4: Housing development
- Matter 5: Meeting particular housing needs
- Matter 7: Economic Development
- Matter 8 – Town Centres and Retail Development
- Matter 9- – Transport and other infrastructure
- Matter 10 - Other strategic and development management policies
- Matter 11 - Other Issues

# Inspector's Matters Issues and Questions

Hellens Land Limited and Homes England

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This statement addresses a number of questions raised by the Inspector under Matter 3: Vision Aims and Spatial Strategy

## Matter 3 – Vision, Aims and Spatial Strategy

### Presumption in favour of sustainable development (Policy SD1)

**SQ3.1. Subject to the Council's proposed modification, is policy SD1 consistent with national policy and would it be effective in helping decision makers know how to react to development proposals?**

The modifications ensure that Policy SD1 is closer to the definition as set out within paragraph 11 of the NPPF to ensure the policy wording is sound, avoiding ambiguity and ensuring consistency with national policy as required by paragraph 35 of the NPPF.

### Settlement hierarchy (policy SH1) and the distribution of housing and employment development allocations

**Q3.2. Is the settlement hierarchy set out in policy SH1 based on evidence that is relevant, up to date, adequate and proportionate? Is the hierarchy and associated broad distribution of development reasonable, having regard to alternatives that were considered during the preparation of the Plan and the findings of the sustainability appraisal?**

The settlement hierarchy set out in policy SH1 is a continuation of previous spatial strategies established within the adopted Core Strategy (2011) and Local Plan (1997) as noted in the Spatial Distribution of Development Topic Paper. However, most notably it is reflective of the justified approach documented within the Council's Sustainability Appraisal (SA).

Strategic Development Options 1-6, which were deemed the most sustainable within the SA, focused upon the growth of various parts of Darlington itself, namely to the north west, north/north-east, east, south, south west and central areas of the settlement. These areas, whether part of the existing settlement or representative of a sustainable urban extension form part of what is referred to in the PDLP as the Darlington Urban Area and forms the sequential starting point for planned growth. Indeed, as demonstrated within the SA the expectation of the vast majority of new growth to be delivered within Darlington is justified as the most efficient and sustainable option, given it reduces the need to travel to existing communities, shops, services and employment opportunities and with ease of access to the A1 and the wider region. Furthermore, in a similar manner the development of larger service settlements like Middleton St George were also justified in the SA as a secondary focus of development with proportionate growth to meet local needs is reflected and permitted within SD1. Paragraph 7.11 of the SA makes references to other options which were considered but discounted, including the extension of existing smaller villages. Whilst the expansion of existing villages was not appropriate to deliver strategic growth, it was noted as "*likely to be included as part of the overall development strategy*" and is also included in SH1 as a result. There has been no evidence submitted through the plan making process to discourage the sustainable growth of Darlington in favour of a more remote and dispersed approach in the form of a new settlement which was also discounted due to an absence of suitable land.

Table SH1 within Appendix D of the SA provides further context to the three forms of settlement hierarchy considered as a means of reflecting the options analysis, including environmental considerations. With option B reflecting a balanced approach which retained the preferred emphasis on Darlington and service villages but also permitting some growth in rural villages whilst minimising potential adverse environmental effects that would be associated with a more dispersed approach and with additional growth within the countryside.

As noted in our response to Matter 1 – Legal and Procedural Matters, the PDLP has been based on a sound and lawful SA approach which has taken into account projected employment growth included the proportionate testing of reasonable alternatives and a justification as to why alternative options would not be justified or effective. Policy SD1 effectively forms the starting point for the plan in establishing the parameters for growth based on the outcome of the SA and is justified, effective and therefore sound.

### **Q3.3. Is the broad distribution of housing and employment development proposed through commitments and allocations in the Plan consistent with the settlement hierarchy set out in policy SH1?**

In the context to our response Question 3.2 above, yes, the allocations in the plan are reflective of the Settlement Hierarchy (as justified within the SA) with the strategic growth comprising the infilling or extension of the existing settlement of Darlington, including two government backed Garden Village projects in northern Darlington. This forms part of what is recognised within SH1 as the Darlington Urban Area and the starting point for growth with 6,478 of a total 6,709 allocated dwellings being delivered with the settlement limits of Darlington (including urban extensions) to 2036. Commitments are also broadly reflective of this approach with the larger scale commitments located firstly at West Park Garden Village (Darlington Urban Area) and secondly Middleton St George as a Service Village. A number of smaller commitments have been consented where they would provide infilling within the urban area, remaining consistent with the SA and SH1.

### **Development limits**

### **Q3.4. Are the development limits to the Darlington urban area, three service villages, and eight rural villages defined on the policies map based on evidence that is relevant, up to date, adequate and proportionate?**

With specific reference to the development limits in North West Darlington (as shown on the PDLP proposals map), Hellens Land and Homes England can confirm that the limits to development associated with the Greater Faverdale Strategic Site, reflect the up-to-date boundaries of land associated with the Garden Village. The proposed development limit here responds strongly to natural physical boundaries in the form of Burtree Lane to the north and the A1 and A86 to the west, with established development to the south and east. The means of establishing the development limits of the Urban Area as set out in appendix 3 of the Spatial Distribution of Development Topic Paper is sound and justified in this regard. The development limits in this area are considered relevant, up to date and adequate to deliver the planned amount of growth as set out in Policy H11. Further details on this allocation and the evidence associated with it are set out in response to Matter 4 – Housing Development.