
Darlington Local Plan Examination**Hearing statement prepared on behalf of Middleton St George Parish Council****Matter 3 Statement – Vision, aims, objectives and spatial strategy
April 2021****1. Introduction and context**

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Jo-Anne Garrick Ltd on behalf of Middleton St George Parish Council (MSGPC). The parish council has made detailed representations at each stage of the preparation of the Darlington Local Plan (DLP). Furthermore, MSGPC engages fully in development management process, providing detailed comments on planning applications within and potentially impacting on the parish.
- 1.2 On 13 April 2021, MSGPC submitted the Middleton St George Neighbourhood Plan (MSGNP) to Darlington Borough Council (DBC) for examination. The plan has been subject to significant community engagement and substantial evidence work to inform the planning policy approach.
- 1.3 MSGPC is therefore an important stakeholder in the plan making process and welcome the opportunity to participate in the examination process.

2. Response to the Inspector's Matters, Issues and QuestionsPresumption in favour of sustainable development (policy SD1) (Q3.1)

- 2.1 MSGPC does not have any specific comments to make in response to question Q3.1, but they wish to reserve the right to make further representations regarding this issue in so far as it may impact on the parish.

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

Q3.2:

- 2.2 The need to identify a settlement hierarchy which then informs the distribution of development is supported. It is fully acknowledged that in order to support the future sustainability of the parish, further housing and other development is required in the parish, this must however be informed by an understanding of local needs.
- 2.3 MSGPC strongly dispute that the settlement hierarchy proposed within policy SH1 is based on evidence that is relevant, up to date, adequate and proportionate, it is therefore unsound. As explained within the matter 1 hearing statement, Middleton St George does not meet the definition of a service village as set out within paragraph 4.0.10, page 22 of the draft DLP (CD01). Middleton St George has a very poor bus

service, only serving the village hourly to 6pm Monday to Saturday, with no service on a Sunday. It is therefore not well connected to higher service centres. While it is accepted that there is a GP surgery within the parish, this is on the edge of the village, 25 minutes' walk from the centre (1.3 miles / 2 kilometres). Furthermore, there is no adequate bus service to the GP surgery, so it relies on access by car.

- 2.4 MSGPC therefore consider that the plan should be modified so that Middleton St George is not identified as a service village, it should be identified as a rural village.

Q3.3:

- 2.5 In accordance with the settlement hierarchy set out within policy SH1, service villages should accommodate a level of development to meet local needs. The consideration of the local needs of Middleton St George Parish is the main focus of the MSGNP. As explained in the matter 1 hearing statement, the Middleton St George Housing Needs Assessment (2020) that was prepared by AECOM, identifies the local housing need for the period 2019-2036 as between 119-136 dwellings in total.
- 2.6 The proposed modification to policy H1 (DBC2) identifies a housing requirement figure of 906 for Middleton St George neighbourhood plan area, this is over 10% of the total housing requirement for the whole borough. Since the start of the plan period, 287 dwellings have been completed and a further 697 have planning permission. The 2011 census identified the population of the parish as 4,337 residents, which is 4.2% of the population of the borough. It is submitted that the level of growth proposed for Middleton St George, would result in a 50% increase in population of a parish of only 4,337 people, is not that to meet local needs.
- 2.7 Furthermore, the approach to the distribution of housing development is not proportionate to other proposed service villages. Hurworth has 3.3% of the population of the borough and 1.9% of the housing target and Heighington has 2.3% of the population and 1.4% of the housing target.
- 2.8 It is noted that the council has recently published a spatial distribution of development topic paper (3 March 2021). Paragraph 5.9 of the paper (page 5) seeks to justify the level of development proposed in Middleton St George by stating that it has been the focus of increased development over recent years, particularly when the council could not demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. MSGPC submit that the level of housing development in the past should not be a justification for further growth. Indeed, it is considered that the impact of such high levels of housing growth should be fully considered before proposing further growth, particularly whether there are the services and infrastructure in place or planned to support it.
- 2.9 The lack of sound infrastructure planning was a main component of MSGPC representations to the regulation 19 consultation. Key concerns regarding the ability of

the village road infrastructure to sustain the amount of traffic resulting from the levels of housing development. As explained in the hearing statement for matter 1, traffic monitor data collected by the parish council in 2019 illustrated that at the north of the village there were 1,685 vehicle movements per day and 1,704 to the south. Furthermore, the village is also prone to flooding, the drainage and sewerage system is Victorian, and residents experience recurring problems of sewerage coming into their own properties.

- 2.10 The topic paper goes on to state in paragraph 7.26 (page 13), that there is a greater proportion of housing growth identified at Middleton St George as sites within Hurworth and Heighington had more constraints and that Middleton St George had 'more logical options for expansion'. MSGPC dispute these conclusions. Throughout the plan preparation process the parish council has identified a number of constraints to development of the sites identified, which appear to have been ignored by DBC (see hearing statement for matter 4).
- 2.11 The topic paper suggests that housing development is required in Middleton St George to support the role of the settlement in providing services to communities to help retain their vitality and vibrancy. The parish council acknowledge the need for new housing development to support the sustainability of the local community. However, the level of development proposed in the local plan is excessive, going way beyond a level needed to support vitality and vibrancy. For example, it is understood that whilst there is capacity within the school, the levels of pupils is at a level that will secure its long term future. Furthermore, there is no evidence that local facilities are struggling to remain open as they have a good size customer base.
- 2.12 MSGPC has previously raised concerns regarding the lack of definition of 'local needs' within policy SH1. It is submitted that there needs to be specific wording to explain the nature of a village/ settlement within the context of its character, defining how this should be safeguarded.
- 2.13 In summary, MSGPC do not believe the broad distribution of housing development proposed in the plan are consistent with the settlement hierarchy as the level of development proposed in Middleton St George is far in excess of that required to meet local needs and is not proportionate, the plan is therefore unsound. Middleton St George should be reclassified as a rural village and in order to better reflect its position within the settlement hierarchy and to ensure that the plan is sound, the proposed site allocation 99 (Maxgate Farm) should be removed, as it is not required to meet local needs, particularly as a result of the substantial over provision of housing in Middleton St George in recent years. Policy SH1 should provide a clear explanation of what is meant by 'local needs' so this can be clearly interpreted through the development management process.

2.14 MSGPC fully supports the statement submitted by the Darlington Green Party with regards to the distribution of housing.

Development limits:

(Q3.4)

2.15 MSGPC do not consider the development limits identified within Middleton St George Parish are based on evidence that is relevant, up to date, adequate and proportionate. There are significant differences between the proposed development limits in the submitted DLP and the submitted MSGNP. The proposed settlement boundaries within the neighbourhood plan are based on a full assessment of local characteristics, informed for example by their design code. Whereas it appears that one of the clear motivations of the development limits proposed within the DLP is that of landownership.

2.16 The proposed neighbourhood plan settlement boundary for Middleton St George (figure 1), excludes housing site 099 and two areas of proposed local green space to the north and east of the village – indicated with the yellow circles on figure 1.

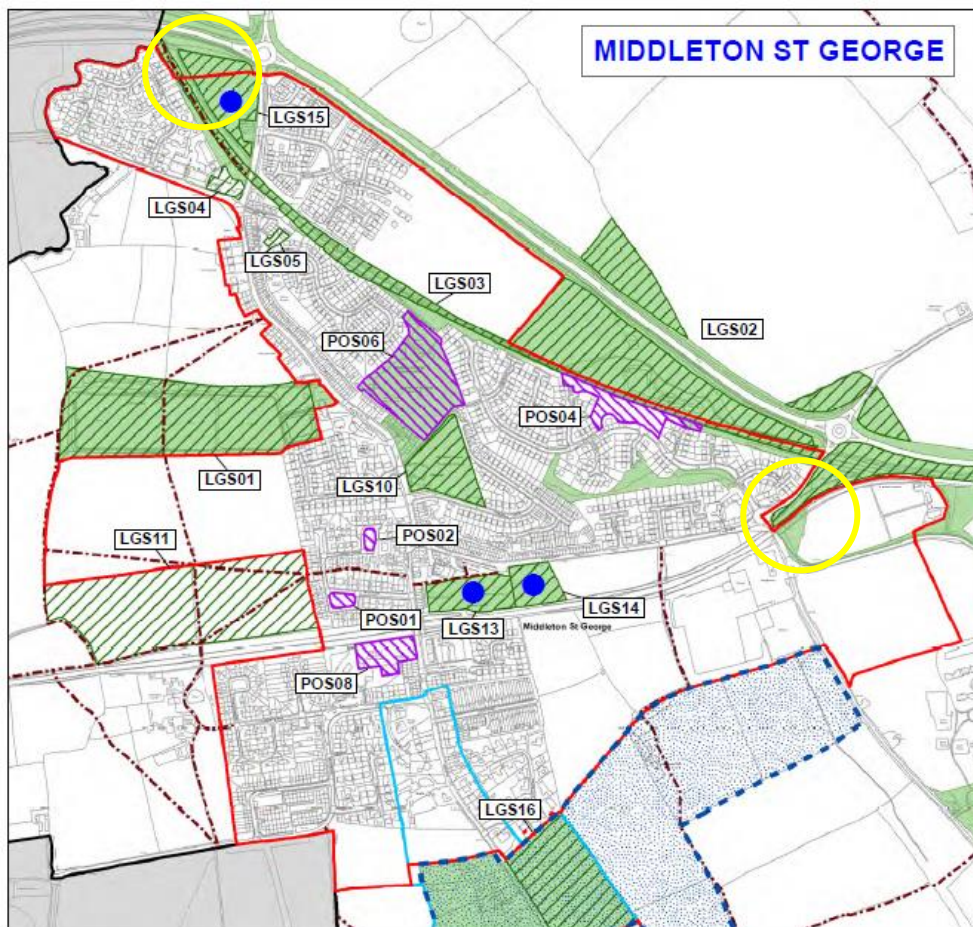


Figure 1: Extract from MSGNP Policies Map – Middleton St George settlement boundary shown in red

2.17 There are two elements where the proposed development limits for Middleton One Row are inconsistent with those contained in the MSGNP (see figure 2 – yellow circles).

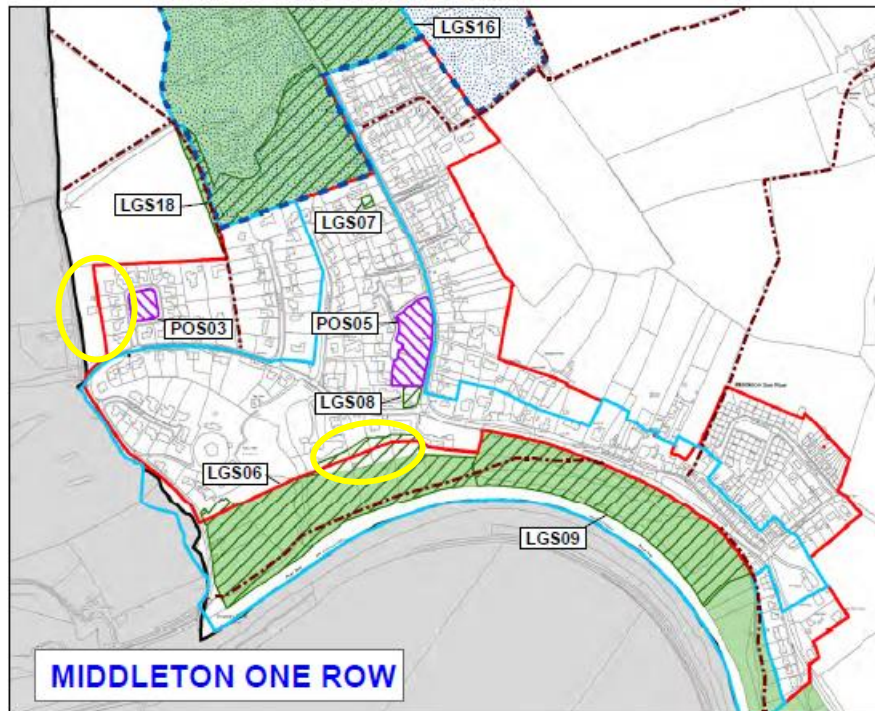


Figure 2: Extract from MSGNP Policies Map - Middleton One Row settlement boundary shown in red

2.18 The neighbourhood plan also proposes to retain a settlement boundary for Oak Tree (the current local plan has development limits for Oak Tree) – see figure 3.

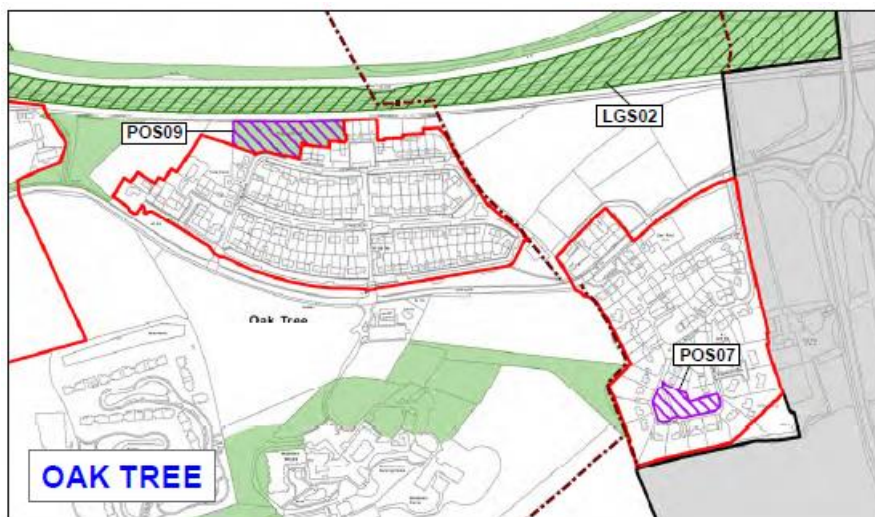


Figure 3: Extract from MSGNP Policies Map - Oak Tree settlement boundary shown in red

2.19 To ensure the DLP is sound, MSGPC submit the development limits should be modified to reflect those contained in the submission MSGNP. The settlement boundaries proposed within the neighbourhood plan are informed by work undertaken by the local community, which is summarised within the neighbourhood plan settlement boundary background paper.

Q3.5:

2.20 MSGPC do not have any specific comments to make on the proposed changes to the development limits to the Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent villages, although it is welcomed that DBC is proposing to amend the boundaries in accordance with the made neighbourhood plan.