

Miller Homes response to the Darlington Local Plan Examination
Inspector's Matter, Issues and Questions

Hedley Planning Services are instructed by Miller Homes in support of Land at Station Road, Middleton St George. The site was considered in part (northern section) in the Councils *Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (2018)* (Site 90 West of St Georges Gate, MSG) as suitable, available and achievable with an indicative yield of 109no. dwellings and in the Councils view could come forward within the 6-10 year period.

The southern section was not considered by the HELAA process.

Matter 3

Vision, aims, objectives and spatial strategy

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?

No Comments

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?

Policy SH1 sets out the proposed settlement hierarchy for Darlington Borough under three distinctive sub headings (Urban Area, Service Villages and Rural Villages). The service villages are identified, namely as Heighington, Hurworth and Middleton St George (MSG). The policy acknowledges that the Service Villages have a range of essential facilities and services, which means they are well placed to accommodate development which would assist in providing for a range of sites within the Borough.

Miller Homes have previously indicated that the three settlements differ significantly in their function. MSG is the largest of the three and benefits from a good range of local services and transport links making it arguably more sustainable than both Heighington and Hurworth. Miller Homes have previously argued that MSG should be designated as a 'larger service village' and moved up the hierarchy within policy SH1.

During the Issues and Scoping consultation process MSG was considered as a strategic development location and it was also considered by the Sustainability Appraisal to have *broadly positive implications for the borough in meeting housing needs in existing settlements with a good range of services, facilities and employment opportunities.*

The other two service villages were not considered for this purpose.

It seems from the supporting evidence that the Councils decision to not proceed with MSG as a strategic development location was due to the change in circumstance relating to the Standard Method, a reduction in housing requirement and a preference to focus growth on the Urban Area.

In Miller Homes opinion more weight should have been attributed to the proposed improved connectivity to and from MSG that will be brought about by the new internal distributor road (The Northern Link Road) which will effectively link the A1(M) and the A66. Furthermore, additional

consideration should have been given to the proximity of MSG to the Teesside International Airport allocations (Policy E1 and E2) which would make MSG an ideal location for more housing development in order to minimise cross-Borough commuting.

To be considered sound, in Miller Homes opinion, Policy SH1 should be amended to reflect the differing status of Service Villages, with Middleton St George identified as a ‘Larger Service Village’, and additional housing allocations should be identified to ensure both its local needs are met and to support the economic growth aspirations of the area.

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?

The Local Plan proposes to allocate a single development site in Middleton St George (Site Ref. 99 – Maxgate Farm, MSG).

For the reasons already set out above and also in Miller Homes previous representations we consider in addition to the Maxgate Farm, MSG allocation that further housing numbers should be distributed to MSG as the largest of the three service villages.

The Miller Homes site at Station Road, which in part has been considered suitable, available and achievable for development within a 6-10 year period within the HELAA and being located on the north western edge of Middleton St George, would be well suited for this purpose.

The vision document attached at **appendix 1** sets out the benefits of the site and indicates how the site could come forward in more detail.

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?

In the opinion of Miller Homes the inflexibility of ‘Development Limits’ as set out in Policy H3 means that the aim of Policy SH1 to maintain villages with a level of development to meet local needs is compromised.

In our opinion the development limits around MSG should be extended to include the Miller Homes site

Q3.5. Are the Council’s proposed changes to the development limits to Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent villages necessary to make the Plan sound?

No Comments