

Mr G Raistrick's response to the Darlington Local Plan Examination  
**Inspector's Matter, Issues and Questions**

Hedley Planning Services are instructed by Mr G Raistrick in support of Land at Heighcroft House, Heighington. Mr Raistrick's land is in single ownership and has not been considered either in the Darlington Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA, March 2018) or in the Heighington and Middleton St George - Draft Spatial Plan Consultation (December 2017).

### **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?**

Mr Raistrick supports the proposed modification to policy SD1.

**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.

Mr G Raistrick has previously highlighted the inequitable distribution of proposed housing between the Service Villages. In the Council's *Spatial Distribution of Development Topic Paper* (February 2021), a qualitative assessment of the three proposed Service Villages is carried out in Appendix 1. In summary, all three are considered to have a 'good' sustainability rating and therefore suitable for development.

The Topic paper also differentiates between Heighington and Hurworth / Hurworth Place being 'a service village' and MSG being a 'Large service village'.

To ensure that policy SH1 is based on evidence we consider that the hierarchy be amended to:

***Policy SH 1***  
***Settlement Hierarchy (Strategic Policy)***

*The broad distribution of development in the Local Plan area will be shaped by the role and function of places, based on the following hierarchy of settlements:*

- 1. **Darlington Urban Area** - will remain the focus of future development within the Borough. As a single urban centre within the Borough it will aim to maintain its role as a leading sub-regional centre for transport connectivity, services, employment and retail and leisure. Sustainable and accessible locations will be selected to enable further development;*
- 2. **Large Service Villages** (~~Heighington, Hurworth and Middleton St George~~) - will be maintained as a villages that offers a range of facilities and services, where a level of*

*development will meet local needs and facilitate the economic diversification of ~~rural~~ the areas. Development should safeguard and reinforce the distinctive character of ~~each~~ the settlement and not detract from ~~their~~ the landscape setting;*

*3. Service Villages (Heighington and Hurworth) - will be maintained as villages that offer a range of facilities and services, where a level of development will meet local needs and facilitate the economic diversification of rural areas. Development should safeguard and reinforce the distinctive character of each settlement and not detract from their landscape setting;*

*4. Rural Villages (Bishopton, Brafferton, High Coniscliffe, Low Coniscliffe, Merrybent, Neasham, Piercebridge, Sadberge) - The character of the Rural Villages, including their relationship to and setting within the surrounding countryside, will be protected and where possible enhanced. Development in these villages will make efficient and sustainable use of existing buildings and infill opportunities. On the edges of Rural Villages, housing development will meet clearly identified local needs, recognising that an element of open market housing may be required to deliver essential affordable units.*

*In meeting the objectives for each level of the settlement hierarchy, development should not compromise the ability to meet the objectives for other tiers in the hierarchy.*

*Only those places with defined Development Limits are classified as settlements for the purposes of this Policy. All areas outside the Development Limits are to be regarded as 'countryside' unless specifically identified for other uses in the plan (including Policies E 1, E 2 and E 3). The Development Limits are defined on the Policies Map.*

This differentiation will promote sustainable development in the rural areas of the Borough, ensuring that housing development will “enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities”, in accordance with paragraph 78 of the NPPF, which requires:

78. *To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.*

To be considered sound, in Mr Raistrick’s opinion, Policy SH1 should be amended to reflect the differing status of the Service Villages, with an appropriate distribution of housing to support the range of facilities and services available to ensure that they grow and thrive.

**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 Heighington (Site Ref. 95 – Beech Crescent East, Heighington), with an indicative yield of 20 houses. This equates to 1.33 dwellings per year over the remaining 15 years of the proposed plan period. No allocation is proposed for Hurworth.

Given the projected reduction in average housing size (as referred to in paragraph 2.22 of SD09 Darlington Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2017 and paragraph 3.2 of the Housing Topic Paper February 2021), this will result in reduction of population of Heighington over the remainder of the plan period.

Therefore, the allocation of a single site for 20 dwellings in Policy H2 will not ensure that there is a “*level of development will meet local needs and facilitate the economic diversification of rural areas*” as required by Policy SH1.

We strongly object to the non-inclusion of the Land at Heighcroft House, Heighington as a proposed housing allocation in Policy H2.

An indicative layout (prepared by POD, Appendix 1) also accompanies these representations and sets out the development potential of the site for 17 self/custom build plots on land at Heighcroft House. The existing bungalow onsite will also be renovated as part of the proposed development, which will mean when complete there will be 18 houses in total on the site.

The site is a sustainable location for development and will contribute towards all three dimensions:

**Social benefits** – the development would make an important contribution to the supply of housing. The occupiers of the development will make use of the local facilities and services in the village and contribute towards and participate in any local social events. The improved right of way would provide safe access to Heighington Playing Fields Beech Crescent, and an alternative route to Hall Lane, which is a very narrow and dangerous highway with no footpath.

**Economic benefits** – the construction of the development would generate short term construction jobs and will benefit other companies in the housing supply ‘chain’ that would provide materials and trades. The occupiers of the development would contribute to an increase in expenditure on goods and services from local businesses.

**Environmental benefits** – the development would retain the existing trees and hedgerows on the boundary of the site and additional landscaping would provide additional planting to enhance the potential for the site to support wildlife. The development can also include measures that will provide new habitat to encourage wildlife. Facilities and services within the village are accessible by foot and cycle and public transport services are available to connect the village to Darlington which will assist in minimising the use of private cars. New building standards also ensure that new homes are very efficient with respect to the energy needed for power and heating.

The site is available and there are no significant constraints to overcome. The site benefits from access to Beech Crescent, with easy access to the A6072, thereby reducing additional traffic through the village centre.

**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?**

We consider that 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 over the remaining 15 years of the plan period is compromised.

In relation to Heighington, when the Development Limits Methodology as set out in Appendix 3 of the *Spatial Distribution of Development Topic Paper* (February 2021) is applied there is no justification for the exclusion of the land at Heighcroft House. This is further compounded by the site not being considered either in the *Darlington Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment* (HELAA, March 2018) or in the *Heighington and Middleton St George - Draft Spatial Plan Consultation*

(December 2017), which has been drawn to the Council's attention both at Regulation 18 and 19 consultation stages.

In our opinion, the development limits around Heighington should be extended to include the land at Heighcroft House.

**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