

Darlington Local Plan

Skerningham Estates Limited (ID: 1250841)

Matter 3 Statement - Vision, aims, objectives and spatial strategy

Issued April 2021

1.1 Our Client (Skerningham Estates Limited) responds to Questions 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.

Presumption in favour of sustainable development (policy SD1)

Q3.1. 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?

1.2 Our Client considers that Policy SD 1 is positively worded and consistent with national policy. In particular, we welcome the text which states:

"Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the Darlington Borough."

1.3 The Council's suggested Main Modifications [DBC2] would result in the deletion of text which could be interpreted as being ambiguous when read with the extract above.

1.4 Therefore, with the proposed modification, we consider Policy SD 1 to be consistent with national policy and effective.

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?

1.5 In answering this question, it is relevant to consider the make-up of Darlington Borough. Darlington is the key centre and settlement in the Borough and is the most sustainable location to focus new development. Other settlements comprise villages of varying scale; many of which have seen growth or have committed developments which will ensure that some development is apportioned to these locations.

1.6 The preparation of the local plan provides the opportunity for plan-led growth and to direct development to the most sustainable locations.

1.7 The Spatial Distribution of Development Topic Paper (February 2021) provides further background on the approach taken. It describes how the approach taken is a continuation of the approach in the previous development plan which seeks to direct the majority of development to the main town.

- 1.8 At paragraph 7.22 it describes how brownfield sites within the main urban area cannot be solely relied upon to meet the housing needs and that “*urban extensions are the next most logical approach to delivering new homes*”, given that such sites are adjacent to existing services and transport routes. NPPF paragraph 72 also recognises that the supply of housing can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development and are supported by the delivery of necessary infrastructure and facilities.
- 1.9 Paragraph 7.26 in the Topic Paper describes how the distribution of sites across the Borough was not set by specific requirements but an intention to focus development to the main urban area and allow for sustainable development in the service villages and other villages. It also states:
“The approach was simply to allocate the most suitable and sustainable sites for development”.
- 1.10 As set out in our response to Matter 1 Question 1.5, the other options were considered in the Sustainability Appraisal and the approach has been justified. The Sustainability Appraisal [CDO3] assessed three main options in terms of the settlement hierarchy:
- A: settlement hierarchy based on the urban area and service villages;
 - B: settlement hierarchy based on the urban area, service villages and other medium sized rural villages with development limits; and
 - C: settlement hierarchy based on the urban area, service villages and all rural villages/hamlets.
- 1.11 Option B to focus development on the urban area but allow sustainable development in the villages was assessed as being the option which would have potential positive effects in terms of the location of new development.
- 1.12 In identifying the locations and strategic options for growth, the Council considered a number of alternatives through in the HELAA. From an initial position of twelve broad strategic development options, three were discounted leaving nine to be considered further in the Sustainability Appraisal. This process led to further assessment and discounting of options with areas adjoining the main urban area of Middleton St George emerging as the preferred locations.
- 1.13 An assessment of the proportion of existing dwellings in each of the three categories identified in the Settlement Hierarchy in Policy SH1 highlights; 87% of existing dwellings are located within the Urban Area, 9% in Service Villages and 4% in the Rural Villages.

Table 1 Comparison of existing stock proportions across the Settlement Hierarchy

	Current proportion of dwellings (Census 2011)
Urban Area	87%
Service Villages	9%
Rural Villages	4%

Source: Lichfields analysis

- 1.14 This analysis supports the conclusions of the Sustainability Appraisal which favoured options which focused growth in and around Darlington and Middleton-St-George (one of three identified Service Villages). The subsequent broad distribution of development set out in Policy

SH1 is also supported and is proportionate to the existing balance of housing stock in Darlington.

- 1.15 In the context of the above, and the Council’s approach to plan for large scale development as extensions to the main urban area, our Client considers the approach taken to be reasonable and justified.

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?

- 1.16 The broad distribution of housing and employment development proposed through commitments and allocations in the Plan are consistent with the settlement hierarchy set out in policy SH1, focusing future growth in the Urban Area.
- 1.17 Analysis of the housing allocations identified in policy H2 and existing commitments from Table 6.4 of the Plan are shown in Table 2. This highlights in terms of allocations that, if the urban extensions are assumed given their location on the edge of the Urban Area to be part of the Urban Area, 86% of allocations and remaining dwellings to be completed on existing commitments are within the Urban Area. A further 13% are within Service Villages and 1% in Rural Villages (all from remaining dwellings to be delivered on existing commitments).

Table 2 Comparison of housing allocations and commitments – proportion split by Settlement Hierarchy

	Current proportion of dwellings (Census 201)	Proportion of allocations and remaining dwellings on existing commitments
Urban Area/Extensions	87%	86%
Service Villages	9%	13%
Rural Villages	4%	1%

Source: Lichfields analysis

- 1.18 In respect of commitments, there has been a greater proportion of recent completions (and remaining) brought forward in the Service Villages; 34% and 36% respectively. 3% of remaining commitments will be brought forward in the Rural Villages.
- 1.19 The greater proportion of existing commitments (remaining to be built) in the Service Villages adjusts the balance in this part of the settlement hierarchy in respect of a lower proportion of future allocations in Service Villages. Service Villages receive a lower proportion of allocations compared to existing stock levels (9%) set out in Policy H2.
- 1.20 In terms of future employment development, 74% of the net available employment land is found in the Urban Area, with the remaining 26% located within the Service Villages. There are no employment allocations found in the Rural Villages which aligns with the settlement hierarchy which seeks to protect the rural characters of the villages and is focused on use of existing buildings and infill opportunities.
- 1.21 Existing employment opportunities are focused within the Urban Area (87% of the net available hectares). This aligns with the settlement hierarchy which states that the Urban Area will aim to maintain its role as a leading sub-regional centre for transport connectivity, services, employment and retail and leisure.

1.22 Based on this analysis, Skerningham Estates Ltd support the broad distribution housing and employment development proposed which are consistent with the settlement hierarchy in Policy SH1.

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