
Inspector's Matters Issues and Questions

Examination of the Darlington Local Plan

Part 1 Hearings (Matter 5)



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Introduction

We have been instructed on behalf of our clients, Story Homes, to submit a response to the Examination of the Darlington Local Plan: Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions.

Story Homes are a medium-sized housebuilder with 30 years' experience of delivering high quality aspirational housing in the North East, Cumbria, Lancashire and Scotland. Story Homes have successfully delivered several schemes in the Borough of Darlington including Paddocks View in Middleton St George and The Willows in Blackwell.

Story Homes continues to invest in the Borough and the representations made to the emerging Darlington Local Plan ('eDLP') provide constructive comments necessary to ensure the Borough continues to grow.

Story Homes is promoting three sites through this local plan process; Great Burdon (Allocation 020); Middleton St George (Allocation 099) and Hurworth on Tees (Unallocated).

This Statement should be read in conjunction with all previous representations made on behalf of our clients.

Our clients are committed to ensuring the promoted allocations and the eDLP are 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 9- – Transport and other infrastructure
- Matter 10 - Other strategic and development management policies

This statement addresses a number of questions raised by the Inspector under Matter 5: Meeting particular housing needs.

Matter 5 – Meeting Particular Housing Needs

Housing mix (policy H4)

Q5.1. Is the Council's proposed modification to the opening paragraph of policy H4 necessary to make the Plan sound and, if so, would it be effective in so doing?

Our client supports the proposed modification to Policy H4 which provides additional flexibility to future housing supply whilst also indicating the Council's policy aims and objectives with regard to housing mix. For a policy to be effective (as per paragraph 35 of the NPPF) it must be deliverable over the plan period. A firm expectation that each residential application will provide the housing mix in the latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment is not effective because it is unlikely to be deliverable, mainly because each site, location and context is different and this will need to be factored into any policy requirements. An effective approach is to introduce flexibility to this expectation which is what the proposed modification does. Flexibility is important and is espoused by paragraph 11 of the NPPF (the presumption in favour of sustainable development) which states that *"plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area, and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change"*

In our view, and as set out in representations to the Regulation 19 consultation, this change is required to make the plan sound and would be effective in doing so.

Q5.2. Is the Council's proposed modification to the requirement in policy H4 for accessible and adaptable homes necessary to make the Plan sound? Is the modified requirement (47%) justified by up to date and proportionate evidence including about need and viability having regard to relevant national guidance?

The modification to Policy H4 is to reduce the requirement for accessible and adaptable homes from 80% to 47%. The modification paper states that this is required *"to ensure Policy H4 is justified by reflecting the most recent evidence in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2020"*. Our client welcomes this change which is based on more up to date information.

We note that the policy as currently written also provides additional flexibility around the provision of accessible and adaptable homes, with the requirement in Policy H4 *"subject to consideration of site suitability and site viability"*. This is important because some of Darlington's housing supply will be able to provide more accessible and adaptable homes than others. This is best exemplified by the make-up of Darlington's housing requirement which actually includes an adjustment for institutional older persons housing within it, with the expectation that care homes, nursing homes and sheltered homes, which could come under the C2 use, can be captured as part of the Council's housing supply. Applications for these uses will contain a significantly greater proportion of adaptable and accessible housing (in most cases 100%) and will therefore make up for reduced proportions of such homes on unsuitable or unviable sites. There must therefore be flexibility and planning judgement for such requirements.

Furthermore, the modification to Policy H4 states that 47% of all dwellings will meet category 2 requirements, however the evidence in the 2020 SHMA appears to include within it not just dwellings but C2 uses (see paragraph 1.4). It is therefore not clear if 47% of all dwellings is the correct requirement. Should it be a lower requirement for dwellings given C2 uses will accommodate a significantly greater level of wheelchair access and adaptability? This isn't clear from the evidence and should be clarified.

Affordable housing (policies H5 and H6 and appendix E)

Q5.3. Are the affordable housing requirements of policy H5 table 6.5, which sets out three different levels of affordable housing for different parts of the Borough (which are defined on the map in Appendix E), justified by up to date and proportionate evidence relating to need and viability?

In respect of our Matter 1 statement we identified the requirement for viability (which is a moving target subject to site specific issues and changing policy and building requirements) to be understood flexibly in the local plan. We would reiterate this comment again and would refer the Inspector to these comments.

Q5.4. Is the Council's proposed modification to the affordable housing tenure split in policy H5 necessary to make the Plan sound and, if so, would it be effective in so doing?

The modification is supported by Story Homes. It should be noted that the detailed application for 260 homes on Maxgate Farm is policy compliant in respect of both affordable housing quantum and tenure.

Q5.5. Is the exemption for executive housing schemes to provide on-site affordable homes consistent with national policy which aims to create mixed and balanced communities⁴⁸, or otherwise justified?

Our client supports the mechanism in Policy H5 that provides flexibility around the requirement for on-site affordable for executive housing schemes. This is required to create mixed and balanced communities for the following reasons:

1. Executive housing is a small but important part of the housing mix of any authority.
2. On-site affordable housing could, on certain executive schemes, affect the marketability and therefore deliverability of the scheme.
3. Consequently, the ability to meet the affordable housing requirement for executive schemes in an alternative way is important for the overall housing mix across the Borough and for the creation of a mixed and balanced community. As this would only affect a small minority of applications, it is unlikely to affect wider considerations around community cohesion, of the sort that is typically addressed through on-site affordable housing provision.