
Darlington Local Plan Examination

Hearing statement prepared on behalf of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council

Matter 10 Statement – Other strategic and development management policies May 2021

1. Introduction and context

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared by Jo-Anne Garrick Ltd on behalf of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Parish Council (LC&MPC). The parish council has made detailed representations at each stage of the preparation of the Darlington Local Plan (DLP). Furthermore, LC&MPC engages fully in development management process, providing detailed comments on planning applications within and potentially impacting on the parish.
- 1.2 LC&MPC was the first parish in the Darlington Borough Council area to successfully prepare a neighbourhood development plan. The plan was subject to referendum in May 2019, where there was a 46.23% turnout, it was supported by 94.7% of those who voted. The Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in June 2019.
- 1.3 The parish council 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 Questions

Sustainable design principles and climate change – policy DC1 (Q10.1)

- 2.1 LC&MPC consider that as a result of the prominence the government is now placing on the role neighbourhood plans have in ensuring good design (PPG – ID 26-004-20191001) reference should be made within policy DC1 or the supporting text to new development needing to accord with the provisions of neighbourhood plan design codes.

Flood risk and water management – policy DC2 (Q10.2)

- 2.2 Whilst LC&MPC does not have any detailed comments in response to this question, there is concern that the policy approach has been undermined as a result of the strategic flood risk assessment process not informing the site selection process. It is also not clear whether there has been full consideration given to the potential flooding impacts of the development of the Coniscliffe Park sites, particularly as a result of surface water flowing into the Baydale Beck which runs into the River Tees. This could cause flooding in both waterways.
- 2.3 LC&MPC support the submissions made by the Darlington Green Party regarding flooding matters.

Health and wellbeing – policy DC3 (Q10.3), safeguarding amenity – policy DC4 (Q10.4),
Historic environment – policies ENV1 and ENV2 (Q10.1)

- 2.4 LC&MPC does not have any specific comments to make in response to Q10.3 to Q10.5 but wishes to reserve the right to make further representations regarding these issues in so far as they may impact on the parish.

Rural gaps – policy ENV3 (Q10.2)

- 2.5 LC&MPC supports the need to retain the openness and green infrastructure functions of the rural gaps within the borough. However, the policy approach is not effective as policy ENV3 does not refer to a rural gap between Darlington and the rural villages Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent. This approach is clearly contrary to the vision of the plan which is that Darlington will have “*maintained its identity as a cohesive historic market town situated amongst countryside and villages...*”. Without this rural gap, there is a significant risk that the villages will be consumed by the conurbation and that future development would not protect and enhance the landscape character, setting and identity of the area. Furthermore, it could risk the loss of connectivity of the green infrastructure network and associated biodiversity.
- 2.6 In order for the policy to be sound, it is requested that policy ENV3 should be amended to add the gap between Darlington and Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent to the list of rural gaps. In order for this policy to be effective it is submitted that the rural gaps referred to in policy ENV3 should be clearly defined on the policies map.

Green wedges – policy ENV3 (Q10.3)

- 2.7 LC&MPC does not have any specific comments to make in response to Q10.3 but wishes to reserve the right to make further representations regarding this issue in so far as it may impact on the parish.

Local and strategic green corridors – policies ENV3 and ENV4 (Q10.4, Q10.5, Q10.6 and Q10.7)

Q10.4:

- 2.8 LC&MPC supports the intentions of policy ENV3(B) however would question its effectiveness given the apparent lack of the clear spatial detail of the extent of green corridors and historic routes. It is submitted that these should be clearly defined on an interactive policies map (see response to Q10.7). It is also unclear as to why the policy would not want to protect on existing identified green corridors and not those that were created or identified in the future.

Q10.5:

- 2.9 LC&MPC supports the requirement of ENV4(a) for all development within, or immediately adjacent to, the buffer of an existing strategic or local green corridor to conserve and enhance the function, setting, biodiversity, landscape, access and recreational value of the corridor.

Q10.6:

- 2.10 LC&MPC supports the requirement of policy ENV4(b) for all development that is crossed by a proposed strategic or local green corridor to incorporate the corridor into the site's layout and design.

Q10.7:

- 2.11 LC&MPC consider that to ensure policies ENV3B and ENV4 are effective, the policies map should be changed to define the existing and proposed local and strategic corridors and their buffers.

Historic routes – policy ENV3 (Q10.8)

- 2.12 LC&MPC supports the requirements of policy ENV3(B) for all development that adjoins the six specified historic routes to meet criteria (i) to (v) and considers that the policies map should be changed to define those routes.

Urban and rural parklands – policy ENV3 (Q10.9)

- 2.13 LC&MPC supports policy ENV3(C) relating to the specified urban and rural parklands and considers that the policies map should be changed to define those sites.

Loss of existing open space – policy ENV4 (Q10.10) and open space provision – policy ENV5 (Q10.11)

- 2.14 LC&MPC does not have any specific comments to make in response to Q10.10 and Q10.11 but wishes to reserve the right to make further representations regarding these issues in so far as they may impact on the parish.

Local Green Space – policy ENV6 (10.12)

- 2.15 LC&MPC supports the identification of the LGS14 which is proposed local green space within the parish. This site is already allocated within the LC&M Neighbourhood Plan, along with four other sites.
- 2.16 LC&MPC support the amended wording proposed by the council in relation to policy ENV6.

Biodiversity and geodiversity – policies ENV7 and ENV8 (Q10.13)

- 2.17 LC&MPC does not have any specific comments to make in response to Q10.13 but wishes to reserve the right to make further representations regarding this issue in so far as it may impact on the parish.