

Prepared by BDP Planning  
for Darlington Borough Council

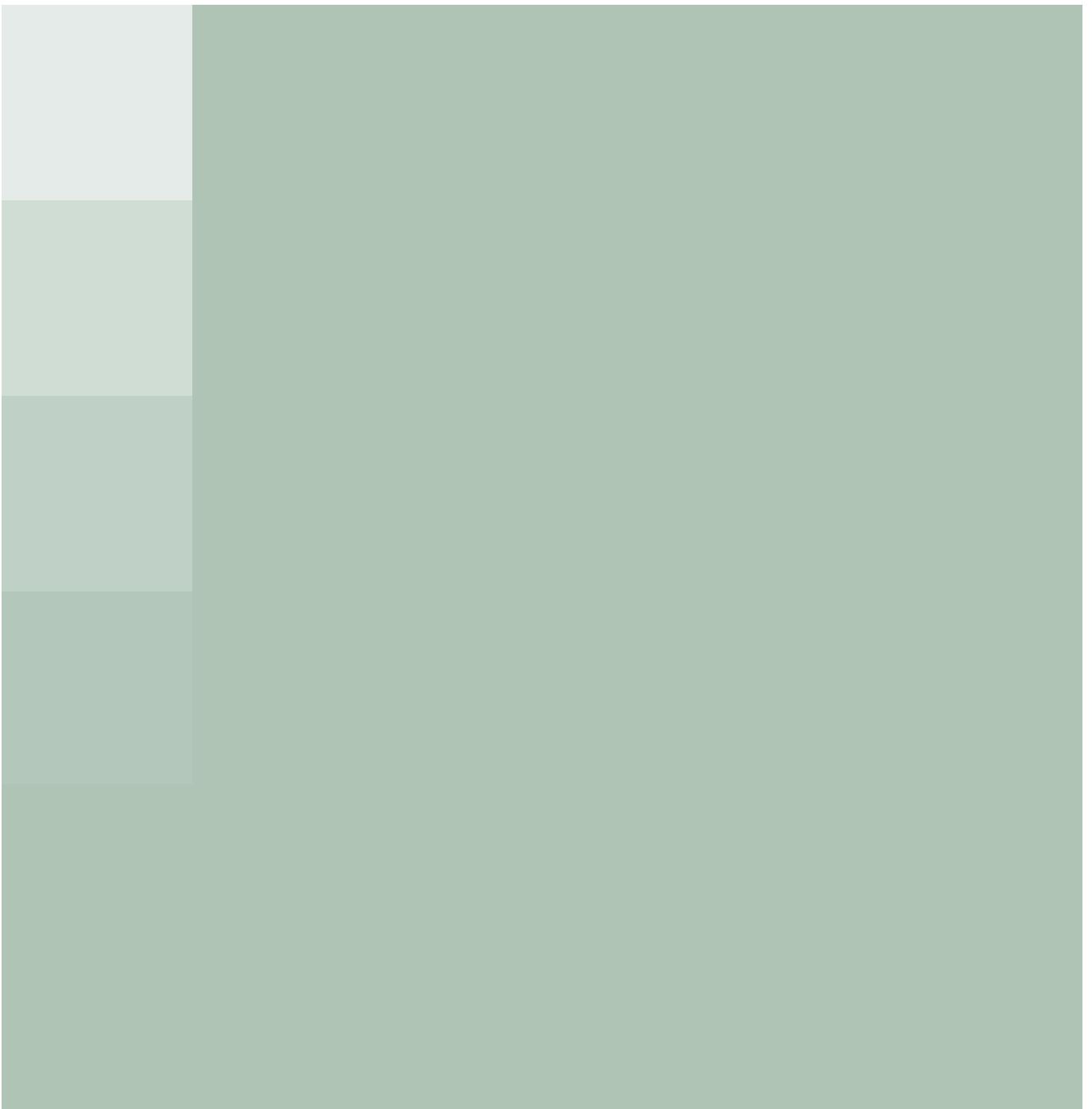


Darlington Borough Council Open Spaces Strategy

# Sustainability Appraisal

Non-Technical Report

August 2006



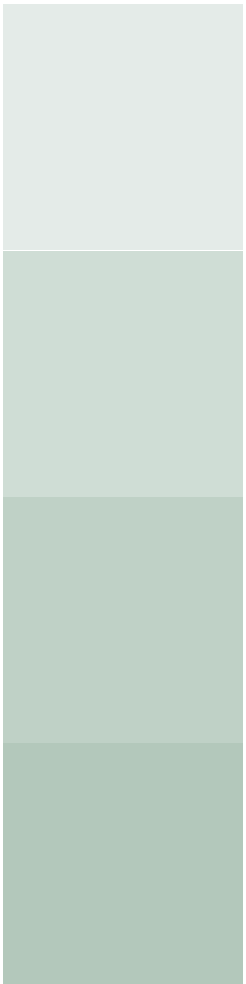
# 1 NON-TECHNICAL REPORT

## Introduction

- 1.1 BDP Planning has been commissioned by Darlington Borough Council to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of their Open Spaces Strategy (OSS). The full appraisal is contained within the final sustainability appraisal report of the Darlington Open Spaces Strategy, which this non-technical report summarises.
- 1.2 The Darlington OSS sets out a strategy for the protection, enhancement and management of open spaces within Darlington Borough. It is the Council's intention to integrate the land use policies that will appear in the finalised version of the Open Spaces Strategy into the appropriate documents of the Local Development Framework.
- 1.3 In June 2005 a Scoping Report for SA was completed that set the scope and Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the SA of the OSS. The Scoping Report was circulated to the four statutory consultees (English Nature, English Heritage, Environment Agency and Countryside Agency) and the Darlington OSS SA forum. The Darlington OSS forum comprises of representatives of a range of departments across Darlington Borough Council, other relevant bodies and the community. The combined knowledge of the SA Forum Group and the statutory consultees has ensured that all key issues have been included in the scope of the Darlington OSS SA.
- 1.4 Three options have been developed by Darlington Borough Council for their OSS. These options were reviewed by the Darlington OSS SA forum to ensure all reasonable options were considered for the OSS. The options vary in their level of intervention and approach to the management of open spaces within Darlington Borough. The options are described as follows:
  - Option 1: Existing Local Plan Policy – No Open Spaces Strategy ('do nothing' option).
  - Option 2: Proposed Approach for the OSS – Step change from local plan policy; considers a wider range of open space issues such as quality and accessibility as well as provision. Also considers the importance of open space types according to how they function and catchment area.
  - Option 3: Alternative Approach to the OSS – Takes the policies given in proposed approach and generally adds further polices or slightly amends Proposed Approach policy. In most cases this option implies a higher level of intervention and aspiration than the Proposed Approach.
- 1.5 The SA for the OSS appraised the sustainability of three options for Darlington's Open Spaces Strategy. The appraisal was undertaken by BDP Planning and reviewed by the OSS SA forum. The results of this appraisal are incorporated within the final sustainability appraisal report.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- 1.6 The appraisal of the three options found Option 2, the 'Proposed Approach' for the OSS, to be the most sustainable option.
- 1.7 The appraisal, however, revealed that the Proposed Approach could result in some significant negative impacts. These negative impacts can be mitigated, as described below. Inclusion of this mitigation in the OSS is a strong recommendation of the SA of the OSS options and will contribute to sustainable delivery of the OSS. Mitigation recommended by the SA of the OSS includes:
- The delivery of the OSS should complement the delivery of other programmes and strategies to improve health through healthy recreation and sport.
  - Delivery of the OSS should complement implementation of the Local Transport Plan, which promotes the use of public transport, walking and cycling to reach open spaces.
  - The OSS should include policies to ensure access into open spaces for people with children or disabled people, where this would be appropriate.
  - Reassessment of low value sites before they are disposed of, considering their value in terms of neighbourhood uses, landscape value or biodiversity value.
- 1.8 The proposed approach also has a series of significant positive impacts that must be secured if the OSS is to be sustainable. The sustainability appraisal report outlines a series of recommendations that should be included in the OSS to ensure these predicted positive impacts are delivered. These include:
- Ensuring that open space quality is improved in the east of Darlington as a priority, where there are fewer high quality open spaces.
  - Ensuring that open space access improvements are prioritised for the wards in Darlington that have deficiencies in some open space types that effects accessibility.
  - The inclusion of more explicit policies within the OSS to improve and maintain the biodiversity value of open spaces, to ensure all open spaces have biodiversity value as a secondary function.
  - The addition of more explicit policies within the OSS to improve and maintain the landscape value of all open spaces, to ensure all open spaces have optimal landscape value.
  - Ensuring that the implementation of the OSS is tied closely with events and programmes that aim to improve the health of the community through sport and recreation.
- 1.9 The appraisal concludes that if the Proposed Approach is delivered incorporating the recommendations for mitigation and securing positive impacts included in this report, it will be the most sustainable option for the OSS.
- 1.10 A draft monitoring framework is also proposed that should be implemented to monitor the effects of the OSS. The monitoring framework has been developed using the OSS Action Plan actions and targets as well as the indicators and targets in the SA framework. This monitoring framework should be finalised once the final draft of OSS has been realised and implemented alongside the OSS.



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