

DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION

OPENING STATEMENT

Prepared by Darlington Borough Council, 20th January 2011

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is to introduce the Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Development Plan Document (the Core Strategy) to the Examination, to outline how it was prepared and to introduce the team that will be appearing for the Council during the public hearing sessions.

2. Introducing Darlington

- 2.1 Darlington Borough is a unitary local authority area at the western end of the Tees Valley sub region, lying at the gateway to the Tees Valley and the North East region of England. The Borough comprises a main built up area, surrounded by countryside containing many attractive agricultural villages. There are about 100,000 people living in the Borough, and many more in the wider North Yorkshire/South Durham/Tees valley areas who rely on the historic market town for employment or for shops, services, entertainment and leisure. The town offers a high quality of life, with significant areas of greenery, street trees and historic buildings making it distinctive, and contributing to its attractiveness.
- 2.2 The town's development has been closely associated with the railway age and associated manufacturing. Nowadays, the employment base is much wider, encompassing a significant service sector, the public sector and specialist engineering.
- 2.3 A key characteristic of the Borough's population is that it is ageing, to the extent that 20% of the population is now of retirement age or older. There are also marked variations in the quality of life and life chances of people living within the Borough; 31% of people live in mostly inner urban wards that are amongst the 10% most deprived in the country, whilst about 7% live in two wards that are amongst the least deprived nationally. The most striking indicator of this variation is the 13 year difference in life expectancy between the best and worst wards.

3. Introducing the Core Strategy

- 3.1 The Core Strategy will be the principal document of the Darlington Local Development Framework, and is the first LDF development plan document that the Council has prepared. Once adopted, it will form part of the development plan for the whole Borough, and will replace specific identified policies of the currently adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan (CD019). The plan period for the Core Strategy is fifteen years, to 2026.
- 3.2 The Core Strategy is the spatial expression of the sustainable community strategy (SCS)(CD018), entitled 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed', prepared and agreed by Darlington Partnership in 2008, alongside the Issues and Options (CD020) consultation phase of Core Strategy preparation. The Core Strategy will deliver the physical aspects of the SCS vision through development and land use change. The cross cutting strategic objectives of the Core Strategy directly reflect the twin priorities of the SCS, 'one Darlington and 'perfectly placed', and the theme specific objectives match, as far as possible, the delivery themes of the SCS.
- 3.3 In general, the Core Strategy aims to:
- deliver continuing growth in employment and housing, whilst maintaining and enhancing the Borough's distinctive and attractive characteristics, reducing carbon

emissions and ensuring that development, land use change and the provision of associated infrastructure takes place in the most sustainable manner possible.

- safeguard and enhance Darlington's role as a sub-regional centre;
- safeguard its attractiveness to businesses that might otherwise not locate in the region or sub region;
- achieve a better relationship between overall housing and employment provision, so that more people will choose to and be able to both live and work in the Borough, reducing in and out commuting;
- provide suitable opportunities for development that meets sub-regional or regional needs, such as for town centre uses, for top end executive housing and for specific employment sectors, such as for logistics at the North West Urban Fringe;
- secure a better match between housing provision and local housing needs and aspirations;
- in achieving all of the above, to tackle deprivation and reduce inequalities between and within the Borough's communities (one Darlington) and realise the potential of the Borough arising from its 'gateway' location (perfectly placed), whilst retaining and enhancing local distinctiveness.

3.4 The spatial strategy for achieving the Core Strategy aims is essentially one of compact urban growth. The strategy is to make the most effective use of previously developed land within the main built up area of Darlington in the first instance, and only releasing land for new development at the urban fringe where this is necessary to provide a range and choice of development sites, and where it is needed to sustain the level of new development that is needed to deliver the Core Strategy vision. This is notwithstanding the identification of the Durham Tees Valley Airport area as a strategic location for airport related employment land uses.

3.5 The amount of new housing provision in the Core Strategy is related to regional economic growth ambitions averaging 2.5% per annum, and to the overarching imperative of creating more sustainable communities. It is also closely related to the economic and other local ambitions set out in One Darlington: Perfectly Placed (CD018), and in the Tees Valley sub-region's Economic and Regeneration Statement of Ambition (SD050). The confidence of the Council in its ability to work with partners to realise these ambitions is underpinned by unchanging factors, primarily the Borough's locational and quality of life advantages, and by emerging advantages, such as the growing University presence in the town.

3.6 The Core Strategy is accompanied by an infrastructure delivery plan (SD002), and the document itself includes information about how the policies of the strategy will be monitored, and what will trigger its review.

4. Preparation of the Core Strategy

4.1 The Council considers that it has prepared the Core Strategy in accordance with regulatory requirements, and how this has been achieved is documented in the Tests of Soundness Self Assessment that was submitted to the Secretary of State alongside the Core Strategy (CD012).

4.2 Preparation of the Core Strategy has also had regard to the national policy in place at the time the Core Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination. The Core Strategy is generally consistent with national policy, and a representation of support received from the Government Office for the North East at Publication Draft stage (006/01/CS0/S) indicated that the GONE considered the Core Strategy sound and legally compliant, and no issues of non-consistency with national policy were raised.

4.3 During the earlier stages of its preparation, the Core Strategy was prepared to be in conformity with the North East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). In response to consultations on the Revised Preferred Options, the (then) regional planning body, the

Association of North East Councils, responded (CSRPO/0008/ANEC, Feb. 2009) that the document was in conformity with the RSS and would assist with the implementation of regional policies. By the time that the Publication Draft Core Strategy (CD009) was issued, the Government had issued a parliamentary statement revoking all regional strategies (of which the RSS was one), and the statement indicated that regional strategies would no longer form part of the development plan. The Council responded to this by issuing a Publication Draft Core Strategy that did not contain any references to RSS. The Council considered that its local and sub regional aspirations, which fed into the preparation of the RSS, were in accord with and reflected in the approach of the RSS, and noted that many of the planning principles in the RSS were now enshrined in national planning policy.

- 4.4 More recently, on 10th November 2010, a judgement was made in a case brought by CALA homes in the High Court. The effect of the decision was to re-establish Regional Strategies as part of the development plan. On the same day, though, in a letter to Chief Planners, CLG indicated that local planning authorities should still regard as a material consideration the Government's intention to abolish Regional Strategies in the Localism Bill. A legal challenge to this letter has been made
- 4.5 In view of the above, the Council feels obliged to re-introduce into the submitted Core Strategy (DC009+CD009) appropriate references to RSS policies, on the understanding that the evidence base supporting RSS policies supports the Core Strategy policies, and with the intent that any future revocation of the RSS as a plan, will not materially affect the soundness of the Core Strategy.
- 4.6 The programme of preparation has been in accordance with the revised Local Development Scheme 2009-2012 (CD016), agreed by the Council in July 2009. Work on the Core Strategy effectively commenced in Autumn 2007, when preliminary work was restarted to ensure that it could be aligned with an emerging (substantially revised) sustainable community strategy for Darlington. An Issues and Options Report (CD020) was published in January 2008, and this was followed by a consultation on Preferred Options (CD021) from October to December 2008. As some significant pieces of evidence, such as an Employment Land Review and a Strategic Housing Market Assessment were then not yet complete, it was decided to publish and consult on Revised Preferred Options (CD022) in January 2010. Following this, the Core Strategy: Publication Draft (DC009) was published in August 2010, and this was submitted, together with a schedule of minor amendments (CD009), to the Secretary of State in October 2010.
- 4.7 Community engagement throughout plan preparation has been in accordance with regulatory requirements and the provisions of the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The original SCI (CD004) was replaced in March 2010 (CD005), so consultations from Publication Draft stage onwards have been in accordance with that document and not its predecessor. Details of the consultations carried out and the responses received can be found in the Regulation 30(1)(d) Consultation Statement (CD006) and in the Regulation 30(1)(e) Statement of Representations and Summary of Main Issues (CD007).
- 4.8 Sustainability appraisal (CD002) and equalities impact assessment (CD014) have been carried out at all the key stages of plan preparation, with the findings from one stage informing preparation of the document for the next stage. Non-technical SA summaries (CD003) have also been produced at each stage.
- 4.9 Screening was also undertaken (CD013) to establish whether a Habitat Regulations Appropriate Assessment was required; the conclusion of the screening was that it was not required.
- 4.10 The Council considers it has a robust and credible evidence base in place to justify each of the Core Strategy policies. All the evidence that has underpinned plan preparation was submitted to the Secretary of State alongside the Core Strategy, and has been available on the Council's website, www.darlington.gov.uk since at least the date of submission. Some of

the evidence has been completed much more recently than other evidence. Studies such as the Economic Viability of Housing Land were left as late as possible, to ensure they were as up to date as possible, whilst others, such as the Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the Employment Land Review needed to be completed earlier to inform the preparation of Preferred Options. Other studies, such as the Darlington Retail Study and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment have been updated during the course of plan preparation to maintain their relevance, whilst the need for other studies, such as the Darlington LDF Transport Area Action Plans, only became apparent during plan preparation, as other work (the Connections Study) was completed and to address consultation responses.

- 4.11 The iterative process involving publication of Issues and Options, Preferred Options and Revised Preferred Options, all within Regulation 25, has ensured that adequate consideration has been given to the full range of realistic alternatives available to deliver the plan strategy, whilst the Issues and Options Report provided the focus for debate about what the most appropriate plan strategy was likely to be. Sustainability appraisal work has been a key part of identifying the most appropriate alternatives, and this has been complemented by theme specific pieces of work, such as the Strategic Housing Locations Options Appraisal (SD003), the Connections Study (SD039 + SD040) and the Employment Land Review (SD017).
- 4.12 The Council considers that its Core Strategy is deliverable. Policies included in the Strategy are generally realistic and challenging rather than aspirational, and have been drawn up in consultation with the relevant key stakeholders and making the use of the best information available at the time. Because the strategy takes a 15 year view, the overall levels of development proposed may appear optimistic in the context of current national and local economic circumstances. However, the years of low economic growth are only expected to extend into the early years of the plan period, with economic and housing market recovery expected thereafter.
- 4.13 As mentioned earlier, the Core Strategy is also accompanied by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SD002), that sets out timescales, sources of funding and implementing organisations as far as this has been possible. Additional delivery information is set out for specific land uses; for example, a Housing Implementation Strategy (SD004) has been prepared setting out how housing delivery will be maintained throughout the plan period.
- 4.14 The Council has also been mindful that circumstances can change, and so has built flexibility into the policies in the Core Strategy. Key examples include Policy CS5: Supporting the Local Economy which sets out a sufficient amount and choice of locations of employment land to satisfy a wide range of potential employment uses throughout the plan period, and Policy CS10: New Housing Development, which set out how housing delivery will be maintained if delivery does not come forward as envisaged.
- 4.15 Since the Core Strategy was submitted, the Council has published the following documents to assist the Examination:
- Initial responses of Darlington Borough Council to representations made on the Core Strategy Publication Draft (DBC001)
 - New housing provision in Policy CS10: Position Statement (DBC002)
 - Provision of affordable housing in Policy CS11: Position Statement (DBC003)
 - The Employment Land Allocation in Policy CS5: Position Statement (DBC004)
 - Strategic Housing Locations Selection and Phasing: Methodology Statement (DBC005)

Also, as indicated earlier, a statement will be prepared setting out the appropriate RSS references that the Council wishes to include in the Core Strategy.

5. Hearing Sessions

- 5.1 The following officers of Darlington Borough Council will be taking part in the Hearing Sessions:

- Valerie Adams, Principal Planning Officer, Planning and Environmental Policy: appearing for the Council for Matter 1 – Strategy and for Policy CS11 under Matter 4 – Quality Housing for All. Supporting at all sessions.
- Brendan Boyle, Planning Officer: appearing for the Council for Policy CS7 and CS8 under Matter 3 – The Local Economy, and Matter 5- Transport
- Emma Williams, Planning Officer – appearing for the Council for Matter 1- Strategy, Policy CS5 under Matter 3 – The Local Economy, and Policy CS13 under Matter 4 – Quality Housing for All
- Bryan Huntley, Planning Officer: appearing for the Council for Policy CS6 under Matter 3 – The Local Economy, and supporting for Policy CS5 and CS8.
- Karen Johnson, Planning Officer: appearing for the Council for Matter 2- Sustainable Development and Infrastructure Provision.

5.2 Neil Cookson (solicitor and legal consultant) will support the Officers as necessary during the Hearing sessions). The Council's Housing Strategy and Renewal Manager, Alan Glew, will be appearing for the Council for the discussion of Matter 4: Quality Housing for All, and Paula Jamieson (Sustainable Development and Climate Change Officer) for the discussion of Matter 2: sustainable development and infrastructure provision. Matthew Sheppard of Turleys will be appearing in support of the Council for the Warmfield Group on Matter 3: the local economy.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Council considers that it has submitted a sound development plan document and that it has met all the statutory requirements for preparing a Core Strategy DPD. It considers that the submitted Core Strategy proposes the right actions for the area, will achieve what it sets out to achieve and is consistent with national policy. Officers have prepared statements and other material to support this position and will elaborate on anything in that material and respond to any relevant questions throughout the course of these public hearing sessions of the Examination.
- 6.2 Therefore, the Council recommends the Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy to the Inspector and all other interested parties. The evidence, analysis and community engagement underpinning the preparation of the Core Strategy has resulted in development plan document that spatially addresses the issues that matter to local people and spatially reflects the local ambitions, expressed in documents like One Darlington: Perfectly Placed (SD009), the Darlington Gateway Strategy (SD021) and the Tees Valley Economic and Regeneration Statement of Ambition (SD050)
- 6.3 By implementing the Core Strategy over the next 15 years, the Council is confident of progressing towards a more sustainable community, and achieving a real step change in enhancing the local quality of life and environment, expanding local opportunities for work and sustainable travel, and in doing so, reducing inequalities within the Borough. People will be able to enjoy the opportunities and vibrant life of an ambitious city, but within the fabric of a friendly, distinctive, historic market town, with attractive countryside and villages nearby.
- 6.4 Much of this will be achieved by economic growth, by new housing development that matches local needs and aspirations and by safeguarding, adding to and enhancing existing physical, social and green infrastructure. The Borough's 'gateway' location and its intrinsic qualities of place will ensure it remains an attractive place for doing business, and for living, working and being at leisure. The ability and commitment of the Council and its partners to be innovative and proactive in facilitating new development will help ensure the Borough's potential arising from this attractiveness is realised, and the and Core Strategy vision delivered.

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