

**THE COUNTY DURHAM PLAN, LOCAL PLAN PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT:
CONSULTATION RESPONSE OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

REPORT BY THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Council has been consulted by Durham County Council regarding the next stage of its emerging Local Plan (The County Durham Plan). This report highlights specific issues arising from The County Durham Plan that will be of significance to the future development of the city. Endorsement is sought for the response.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE COUNTY DURHAM PLAN

- 2.1 The Local Plan sets out the preferred spatial strategy for the county and will guide future development and growth up to 2030. Known as the Pre-Submission Draft, this is the fifth significant stage in the development of the plan. It is also the final, formal stage of consultation and marks the last opportunity to make comments on the plan before it is submitted to the Secretary of State, for examination by a planning inspector. The closing date for responses is Monday 9th December.
- 2.2 The City Council has responded at all stages of the consultation on the Local Plan. The last was in December 2012 following the publication of the Preferred Options version of the Plan. This report focuses on how the latest Plan has been amended to reflect these responses and highlights any areas of concern that may have emerged.

3.0 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROPOSALS

Housing

- 3.1 The Plan identifies a net dwelling requirement of at least 31,400 dwellings to 2030, this is an increase of 1,400 on the previous Preferred Options version of the plan (2012). It is stated in the current Plan that the number has risen in the light of new information from the 2011 Census being released. This information has been used to update the population, household and employment forecasts that underpin the Plan.
- 3.2 In housing terms, this new information indicates that the population of the County could rise from 513,000 to 560,000 over the plan period. In calculating the resulting dwelling requirement the Plan takes a “mid-way” assumption between 2008 and 2011 household formation rates.
- 3.3 The table below sets out how the proposed housing numbers have changed over the different versions of the plan.

Durham Local Plan: Proposed Housing Allocations

	Proposed Housing Allocation (2010-30)	Dwellings Per Annum	Methodology
Issues & Options (June 2010)	29,000 dwellings	1,385	RSS Target
Core Strategy Policy Directions (June 2011)	38,200 dwellings	2,010	2008 ONS Population/ Household Projections
Local Plan (September 2012)	30,000 dwellings	1,500	Durham County Scenario 4 Model, incorporating 2010 ONS Population Projections
Local Plan (September 2013)	31,400 dwellings	1,650	2011 Census and DCLG Housing Projections

- 3.4 Policy 30 in the Plan details Housing Land Allocations. As can be seen in the table below, the number of new dwellings proposed in the four districts most likely to have an impact on the housing market in Sunderland, that is Durham City, Chester-le-Street, Seaham and Murton has decreased significantly from those set out in the Preferred Options Plan.

Durham Local Plan: Proposed Housing Allocations by District

	Pre-submission Proposed Housing Allocation (2013)	Preferred Options Proposed Housing Allocation (2012)	Core Strategy Policy Directions (2011)
Durham City	4222	5120	4750
Chester- le-Street	1090	1300	850
Seaham	610	1150	700
Murton	-	350	600
Total	5922 dwellings	7920 dwellings	6900 dwellings

- 3.5 Apart from the site at Lambton Park in Chester-le-Street where 400 executive dwellings are proposed, there are few housing sites of any significant size identified in locations close to the City boundary. Most of the houses proposed in Durham City are in the three Strategic Housing Sites at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road.

Employment Land

- 3.6 The issue of employment land in Durham County has been the subject of review over the course of preparing the Plan. The earlier Employment Land Review (ELR) undertaken for the Council considered that the amount of employment land in the County (817ha) represented a significant oversupply. The Preferred Option Plan therefore proposed a requirement for 300ha of employment land.

3.7 The Submission Plan is now allocating 399 hectares of land. The reason given for this higher allocation is that the two Prestige Sites at Amazon Park and Newton Park take advantage of specific economic opportunities relating to the Hitachi plant, whilst that at the Drum Industrial Estate reflects the ongoing popularity of the estate. The Plan states that this is the optimum amount of employment land needed to meet quantitative and qualitative needs over the plan period; it therefore accords with the approach in the National Planning Policy Framework regarding the need to avoid an over-supply of employment land.

3.8 The employment land portfolio identified in the Plan therefore comprises:-

Prestige Employment Sites (3) – 94ha
General Employment Sites – 297ha

3.9 In addition, specific employment uses totalling some 221ha are proposed at NetPark (Research and development), Tursdale (railfreight), Seaham (film studio) and Lambton Park (business centre). Due to the “specialist” nature of these sites they are not included in the general employment land portfolio. Aykley Heads is identified as a Strategic Employment Site, primarily for B1 office uses.

Green Belt

3.10 National planning policy dictates that Green Belt boundaries should only be amended through the development plan process. The Submission Plan is proposing strategic Green Belt deletions in two locations, at Aykley Heads and Lambton Park, along with a number of smaller non-strategic amendments. The County Council has prepared a paper to support the proposed changes to the Durham Green Belt (October 2013). This is in addition to work undertaken during previous stages of plan preparation to identify and justify proposed amendments to the Green Belt in Durham.

3.11 These Green Belt sites are considered by Durham to have the least environmental impact, are practically feasible for development, and where development would be most likely to lead to the creation of sustainable communities.

Transport

3.12 Policy 50 of the Submission Plan concerns main transport routes. The Plan highlights the importance of the Leamside Line to improving rail infrastructure for both passenger and freight services and accordingly safeguards the route.

3.13 In addition, the Plan identifies a route for Phase 2 of the East Durham Link Road at Murton which leads it to the City boundary. This route is shown on the Proposals Map which accompanies the Plan.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR SUNDERLAND

Housing

- 4.1 The Plan proposes 31,400 houses to be developed to 2030. This is an increase of 1,400 over the Preferred Option Plan. Durham County Council have used a similar methodology for calculating future housing need to Sunderland. Proposed housing numbers appear sound and correspond with the County's proposed growth scenarios.
- 4.2 It is considered that due to their small size, those proposed housing sites close to the City boundary would be unlikely to have an adverse significant effect on the delivery of housing in Sunderland. Given its proximity to Sunderland's border and its own market area the site at Lambton Park (400 executive dwellings) could in part fulfil Sunderland's executive requirement without affecting the prospects of further executive housing development in the City.

Employment Land

- 4.3 The level of employment land proposed in the Plan appears reasonable. The Plan does not feature any new proposals for economic development that would directly affect employment sites in Sunderland or adversely affect the efforts of the City Council to secure the regeneration of the City.

Green Belt

- 4.4 The County Council has undertaken additional work on reviewing the Green Belt to support the Pre-submission Plan. None of the proposed deletions would weaken the Green Belt between Sunderland and Durham. In particular, the proposal to delete Green Belt land at Picktree Lane near Rickleton to accommodate new housing, as included in the Preferred Options Plan, has been deleted (see paragraph 5.1 below) and does not feature in this latest version of the Plan.

Transport

- 4.5 Policy 50 of the Plan concerns the allocation and safeguarding of transport routes and facilities in the County. Policy 50(e) states that the route of the East Durham Link Road (Phase 2 to Murton) will be safeguarded. The Proposals Map accompanying the Plan identifies a route for the road which leads it to the City boundary. This route was referred to in the Preferred Options Plan but was not shown in any detail.
- 4.6 This current proposal is only partially consistent with the Sunderland Core Strategy which states that ".....the City Council will continue to work with adjoining Durham County Council to investigate the possibility of a road link in the longer term, through the southern Coalfield, to connect with the East Durham Link Road/A19 near Dawdon (the Coalfield Regeneration Route)"

- 4.7 However, at present the policy safeguarded from the Easington Local Plan shows the East Durham Link Road (EDLR) extending from the west end of the existing road in a north westerly direction to join the A1285 Colliery Lane at its junction with Murton Lane. In addition the Proposals Map shows a realignment of the A1285 Murton Lane within Durham with both alignments converging at a junction just inside the Sunderland boundary.
- 4.8 These alignments as presently drafted are not consistent with the previously agreed alignment (UDP Policy HA28.2) as they would result in traffic from the new road in Durham being channelled through the Four Lane ends junction in Hetton and thence along the A182 through the centre of Hetton or along the B1284 North Road and also the need to build a new junction just inside the Sunderland boundary.
- 4.9 If the section of the EDLR into Sunderland is to be taken forward it must be developed in partnership with the Council and its implementation and construction coordinated with the Council's Coalfield Regeneration Route (Hetton Bypass) to avoid any adverse traffic effects on Hetton and Easington Lane and to ensure satisfactory junction arrangements where the overall route meets the A690. In this context we would ask that an alignment to the A182 at Snippersgate as previously agreed be protected.
- 4.10 The need for a co-ordinated approach to the development of this road was raised by Durham County Council in its recent response during consultation on the Sunderland Core Strategy, which requested that the City Council's Plan should safeguard the corresponding route to link the road with the highway network in Sunderland.
- 4.11 As it stands, the City Council cannot agree to this approach. As outlined in paragraph 4.6 above. The route does not feature as a specific highway scheme in Sunderland's Core Strategy, though the need to work with Durham County in investigating the possibility of a link road is highlighted. It should be noted that funding has not been identified for this route by either Council.
- 4.12 Therefore, at this stage the City Council submits a holding objection to Policy 50(e) of the Durham Local Plan. Further discussion between the two Councils needs to take place with a view to resolving this issue and agreeing upon an agreed alignment of the road.

5.0 CITY COUNCIL CONSULTATION RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS PLAN

- 5.1 In response to the 2012 Preferred Options Plan, the City Council made two specific objections:-

1) Objection to the lack of clarity around future housing sites

Whilst the Preferred Options Plan identified a requirement for 30,000 new dwellings, sites for only 20,562 dwellings were allocated in the Plan (Policy 30). The City Council objected on the grounds that the lack of certainty over the shortfall of sites (amounting to 9,438 new dwellings) meant that it was difficult to identify where these sites could come forward and therefore assess their potential impacts on housing development proposed in the City's emerging Core Strategy and the Council's wider housing regeneration strategy.

This has now been rectified and in the Pre-submission Plan all the housing sites needed to make up the 31,400 requirement have been identified and allocated.

It is considered that none of the housing sites proposed by the Plan are in locations or are of a scale that would adversely affect the housing market in Sunderland.

2) Objection to the proposed development of housing at Picktree Lane.

It was considered that development of this Green Belt site would result in the merging of two authorities, change the nature of the area, and further add to highway problems along Picktree Lane.

This site is no longer allocated for housing in the Plan and the site has been returned to its previous Green Belt designation.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Overall Sunderland welcomes the values underpinning the vision of County Durham's emerging Core Strategy to establish prosperous and sustainable communities many of which lie within Sunderland's hinterland.
- 6.2 Changes made since the Preferred Options draft have reflected emerging evidence. The Pre-submission Plan is considered to be robust and well-founded.

7.0 NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Because the closing date for consultation responses preceded the date of this Committee, a draft response has been forwarded to Durham Council. Unlike on previous occasions, due to the statutory nature of this stage of consultation, it has not been possible to secure an extension of time for the City Council to submit its responses to the Durham Plan.
- 7.2 Following consultation with the chair of Planning and Highways Committee, a copy of this report was forwarded to Durham County Council on 9 December as constituting the officer response to the

consultation on the Plan. Subject to Committee approval this report will be confirmed as constituting the agreed response of the City Council.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 Committee is requested to:

- i) Endorse the comments as detailed within this report and make any additional comments considered appropriate;
- ii) Authorise officers to forward a copy of this report to Durham County Council as the City Council's formal response to the Local Plan.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The County Durham Plan; Pre-submission draft Local Plan (October 2013)

The County Durham Plan; Preferred Options Local Plan (September 2012)

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