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**NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY  
SECRETARY OF STATE'S PROPOSED CHANGES**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor David Lyonette,  
Regeneration and Planning Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To inform Cabinet of the status and main contents of the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East (RSS).
2. To seek Cabinet approval for the submission of various objections and statements of support as part of the current consultation process.

**Information and Analysis**

3. The RSS sets out a broad development strategy for the Region for the period up to 2021. It covers matters such as the scale and distribution of provision for new housing, priorities for the environment, such as countryside and biodiversity protection, transport, infrastructure, economic development, agriculture, mineral extraction and waste treatment and disposal. The RSS also incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), to ensure the integration of land use and transportation planning. The finally published document will form part of the statutory development plan and provide the strategic framework for the Council's emerging Local Development Framework.
4. Cabinet has considered various draft versions of the document over the last few years and agreed representations of support and objections during the relevant consultation periods. A draft revised RSS was submitted to Government by the North East Assembly (NEA) in June 2005 and following public consultation, an Examination in Public was held before an independent Panel from March to April 2006. The Report of the Panel was published in August 2006, which recommended a number of changes to the Submission Draft. Since then, Government has been preparing Proposed Changes, taking into account the recommendations of the Panel and other considerations, and the Proposed Changes are now published for public consultation.
5. Because of various recommendations from the Panel, Government has decided that it is in the interests of the public and all stakeholders to provide a two-stage consultation. The first stage seeks views on the changes now being put forward, with a deadline of 6 August 2007. The NEA has been asked to provide additional material in respect of housing allocations and major employment sites. Local authorities will contribute to, and inform this process. There will then be a further consultation to last 8 weeks to consider any further changes that may be made as a result of the additional material.

## Proposed Comments

6. The following comments and recommendations focus on new issues raised by the Proposed Changes and, those raised by this Council during previous consultation exercises and at the Examination in Public. A copy of the Proposed Changes document is available for inspection in the Planning Services Section, or can be viewed on line at [www.go-ne.gov.uk](http://www.go-ne.gov.uk). Members will note at various points in the report that further work and discussions will take place between the drafting of this report, and the Cabinet meeting. It may be necessary therefore to update Members at the Meeting on any matters that have progressed during that period.

## Climate Change (pages 19–23)

7. A new section is proposed which reflects the RSS view that “*climate change is the single most significant issue that affects global society in the 21st Century.*” Building on Government guidance the document highlights the uncertain risks posed by climate change including increased flooding and threats to biodiversity, soil and water resources, landscape, agricultural land uses, human health and quality of life. The challenge therefore is for the Region to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts that will result from climate change. A new policy in RSS (Policy 2A) aims to reduce activities that contribute to climate change, and to mitigate against it and adapt to its impact. In particular it aims to change peoples attitudes and behaviours to energy use; to move people and goods in ways which minimise emissions; to reduce energy consumption; to generate energy from renewable resources; to minimise water consumption; to adopt construction techniques that benefit the local environment such as including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) and to reduce levels of waste generated and deal with its disposal appropriately.
8. The addition of this new section is welcomed as a timely inclusion to the RSS. It provides a useful planning policy context for the Council’s Climate Change Strategy, and that of the Tees Valley, both recently adopted. As such, Cabinet is recommended to support the inclusion of Policy 2A.

## Locational Strategy (pages 28-33)

9. The overriding RSS locational strategy recognises that the North East exhibits a polycentric settlement pattern based on two city regions – Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley, which are viewed as key to any effort to accelerate economic growth in the North. The proposed changes define the Tees Valley City Region as the area which looks primarily to the Tees Valley Conurbation (the contiguous built up areas of Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar) and main settlements (Darlington and Hartlepool) for access to jobs and services. The Locational Strategy as set out in Policy 5A, and the associated text, continues to recognise Darlington’s potential, within the wider city region, focusing the majority of new housing, economic and infrastructure development in the conurbations and main settlements. Cabinet is recommended to support the locational strategy and associated Policy 5A.

## Tees Valley City Region

10. A key policy for Darlington and the Tees Valley authorities in general, is Policy 7, which includes a sub-regional strategy for achieving regeneration, economic prosperity, sustainable communities, connectivity, and environmental protection and enhancement across the City Region. The RSS recognises at paragraph 2.132 and 2.163 the vital role

Darlington plays as a gateway to the Tees valley and North East. However, wording changes have been made to reflect the proposed deletion of Faverdale Strategic Reserve employment site, and a revised description of improvements around the A66 (see below at paragraphs 17-19 and 11 respectively).

11. Changes to Policy 7 include:

- (a) Addition of reference to '*brownfield opportunities in Darlington*' alongside other core regeneration areas of SMI, River Tees, and Hartlepool Quays. (See paragraph 14 below).
- (b) Supporting '*appropriate*' development at Wynyard and NetPark.
- (c) Additional reference to supporting housing market renewal programmes.
- (d) Expanded statement of DTV Airport - '*encouraging the growth of passenger and freight services from DTVA in linking the region to international markets, and encouraging the development of 80 ha of land for airport related uses (as defined in RSS) to enable DTVA's potential as an economic driver to be realised and cater for its anticipated passenger growth*'.
- (e) '*Appropriate development of*' Teesport – as above.
- (f) Reference to '*sustainable transport*' infrastructure to support regeneration initiatives.
- (g) Additional statement '*Improving interchange facilities at the Strategic Public Transport Hubs of Darlington and Middlesbrough*'.
- (h) '*Investigating*' rather than 'supporting' improvements to the A66 Darlington bypass, new R Tees Crossing, and reducing congestion on A19.

This proposed change is reflected in paragraph 2.163 which states that "*improvements to the A66 (around Darlington) may be required ..*" whereas previous drafts have referred to such works as "*essential*".

At present, Officers are of the opinion that the A66(T) **will** require extensive improvement if further employment land is to be released and developed, unless significant mode switch occurs as a result of smarter travel to work choices (although there would still need to be select junction improvements). Consultants are currently carrying out a study of the A19/A66 that will assess the validity of this opinion. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet object to any weakening of the need and support, at this point in time.

- (i) Promoting bus based public transport improvements between the Other Regeneration Areas and the Tees Valley Conurbation and Main Settlements
- (j) Strategic gaps – perform a valuable function in preventing urban coalescence and contributing to urban regeneration. Two gaps:
  - (i) *Between Darlington and surrounding towns and villages;*

(ii) *Between Middleton St George and Darlington*

are identified for this purpose.

- (k) Green infrastructure - RSS identifies the importance of green infrastructure, linking existing and proposed greenspace with green corridors running through urban, suburban and urban fringe areas to the countryside. This is the ethos of Darlington's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which will in part be delivered through the Second Local Transport Plan. This is an important quality of life issue for Darlington. In addition, officers are contributing to the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Tees Valley.

Except where otherwise indicated above, Cabinet are recommended to support the proposed changes to Policy 7.

**Delivering Economic Prosperity and Growth (pages 82 – 108)**

12. The RSS highlights the increasing need to focus economic growth in the most sustainable locations, particularly the conurbations and main settlements, where the greatest economic and social benefits can be achieved. Furthermore, it is recognised that local planning authorities should ensure that there is a continuous supply of land to provide a variety of choice of sites in terms of size, quality and location.
13. The strategy highlights various major brownfield regeneration schemes progressing in the region, which comprise large mixed-use developments. Central Park is one of these flagship schemes, which aim to deliver sustainable economic activity and provide development and investment opportunities acting as a catalyst for wider regeneration.
14. The Panel Report recommended changes to acknowledge the contribution other mixed-use developments could make to the regeneration of the region. Lingfield Point was used as an example. The Proposed Changes suggests the deletion of the word 'Regional' from the relevant policy (Policy 13) title which allows the policy to encompass other major brownfield sites which could come forward in the plan period. An associated change was highlighted in bullet point one of paragraph 11 above, in that the previous reference to Central Park in Policy 7 has been replaced by a more general 'brownfield opportunities in Darlington'. This is in line with the position put forward by the Council at the EIP, and Cabinet is recommended to support the changes to Policy 13.
15. The employment land provision figures remain the same as those in the submission draft. An additional statement is included as follows 'a presumption in favour of regenerating and upgrading existing employment land and premises in advance of allocating new sites on greenfield land.'
16. A new policy (18A) and supporting text is included on Office Development outside City and Town Centres. It states:

*"City and town centres will be the preferred location for major office development (B1a) not ancillary to other uses.*

*Proposals for this form of office development, other than those already allocated in existing adopted development plans, will only be approved at Prestige Employment Sites, if it can*

*be shown that –*

- (a) *they cannot be accommodated in a city or town centre, in an edge of centre location, or in a regional brownfield mixed-use development;*
- (b) *And any such proposal will not put at risk the strategy set out in any approved Local Development Document for a city or town centre, or Master Plan for a major brownfield mixed-use development.”*

This new policy emphasises the importance of maintaining the vitality and viability of town centres and reflects the approach taken in PPS6- town Centre Uses, towards major office development. It is recommended that no objection be made to Policy 18A.

17. Cabinet may recall that key strategic sites at Faverdale and Heighington Lane West (Sedgefield/Darlington) were identified as Reserve Employment Sites (Policy 20) in previous drafts of RSS, in order that the region could respond quickly to the potential needs of large scale inward and mobile investors. Prior to the EIP, Cabinet agreed to a revised approach to the Faverdale site which, in light of the Argos development and likely demand for logistics development in this location, recommended that the site be allocated as a regional logistics site.
18. The Panel recommended that the Strategic Reserve sites at Faverdale and Heighington Lane West (and at Seaham) be deleted altogether. The Proposed Changes document provisionally deletes Policy 20 and supporting text, as recommended by the Panel. However, before making a final decision on this matter, the Secretary of State has asked the NEA to provide further information on the local circumstances for each site affected.
19. As part of this exercise, officers have provided further information supporting the need for a regional logistics site at Faverdale. The Secretary of State’s decision will be the subject of the second stage of consultation mentioned above (paragraph 5) and Cabinet will have the opportunity to respond to that consultation in the usual way later in the year. At this stage therefore, it is recommended that Cabinet agree to a holding objection to the deletion of Policy 20, subject to the further consideration by the Secretary of State of this policy. In addition, it is recommended that Cabinet agree to the submission of a new policy for a strategic logistics site at Faverdale.
20. The sustainable growth and expansion of Durham-Tees Valley Airport, for airport-related development should continue to be supported. Previously, the Council objected to the inclusion of a list of airport-related development, as inappropriate for a regional policy document. The Secretary of State has rejected this argument, and accepted the Panel’s view that a list should be incorporated in the RSS. Officers have considered the list and do not feel further objection to this point would be worthwhile. In general therefore, the airport policy (Policy 21) should be supported. It is interesting to note that statements suggested by the Panel about uncertainty over the future role of aviation and growth forecasts have not been accepted by the Secretary of State.

### **Delivering Sustainable Communities (pages 109 –130)**

21. Sustainable communities should be socially inclusive with access to the necessary jobs, facilities, good quality housing and living environments, and opportunities to maximise people’s health and quality of life. A key policy recommendation of RSS directs new development including retail, entertainment, leisure, culture, recreation, education, health,

business, public services and other high trip generating uses, where possible, in centres within defined urban areas. More specifically, it states that new retail and leisure facilities should be located in regional and sub-regional centres including Darlington. This acknowledges the wide range of services Darlington provides, to a large hinterland that crosses the boundaries with Yorkshire and Durham. Policy 25 should therefore be supported.

22. Throughout the preparation of RSS, there has been debate across the region about the appropriate regional and sub-regional housing requirement figures. District level figures are included in RSS and will set the framework for this Council's Local Development Framework.
23. While there is a broad level of agreement about the appropriate housing strategy for the Region – focussing the majority of new house building in the conurbations and main settlements – there remains a range of views about the precise scale and location of development. Given the level of disagreement and uncertainty, it is likely that the dwelling provision figures for the period 2004 – 2021, set out in Policy 30, will be revised, prior to the adoption of the RSS. Further work/information has been requested by the Secretary of State, and the NEA are currently liaising with local authorities prior to submitting their response. Officers from the 5 Tees valley authorities are working with the JSU to identify a proposed district allocation to submit to the NEA.
24. On this basis, it is considered inappropriate to accept the Proposed Changes dwelling provision figure for Darlington (see below) and therefore it is recommended that Cabinet object to Policy 30 as it stands.

	<b>2004-11</b>	<b>2011-16</b>	<b>2016-21</b>	<b>2004-21</b>
Dwellings per year	480	315	75	310
Dwellings total	3,360	1,575	375	5,270

25. The Secretary of State's request to the NEA for additional information provides the opportunity to put forward the case for increased regional and sub-regional housing allocations. The JSU is proposing a sub-regional requirement of 35,700 net dwellings. The distribution for Darlington would be as follows:

	<b>2004-11</b>	<b>2011-16</b>	<b>2016-21</b>	<b>2004-21</b>
Dwellings per year	525	345	260	395
Dwellings total	3,675	1,720	1,300	6,695

26. It is recommended that the above figures be accepted and agreed with the JSU for submission to the NEA. As with the employment land issues, Cabinet will get the opportunity to make representations on the housing allocations as part of the second stage of

consultation.

27. An important addition to this Policy is proposed which states:

*'The District Allocations should not provide the justification for the refusal of windfall housing proposals that fall within the guidance set out for Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments.'*

This is significant as it could provide some flexibility around the allocation numbers, which means where sites meet certain criteria, the overall allocation would not necessarily act as a restraint on further planning permissions in sustainable locations.

28. Importantly, the RSS Changes reflect latest Government policy as set out in PPS3 – Housing, directing local authorities to plan for a 15 year supply of housing from adoption of the relevant LDF policies. Policy 30 also sets a target for housing on previously developed land of 70% in the Tees Valley by 2008.

### **Natural and Built Environment (pages 131 –173)**

29. RSS recognises that the Region's built and natural environments are important resources and major assets, both in their own right and as a necessary component in contributing to economic growth, regeneration, health and quality of life. Protection and enhancement of the diverse landscape character of the Region; maintaining, improving and managing biodiversity; and maximising the social, economic and environmental opportunities trees, woodlands and forests provide, are all key objectives of RSS. In addition, planning for renewable energy generation, and sustainable waste management will contribute to the quality of the environment and the climate change agenda highlighted earlier in this report.
30. An important proposed policy change involves Policy 30 on flood risk. Emphasis is given to PPS 25 – and local authorities are required to prepare Strategic Flood Risk Assessments to inform LDF preparation and planning application decisions. The Tees Valley authorities have completed the production of such an assessment.

### **Improving Connectivity and Accessibility (pages 174 – 208)**

31. The RSS clearly identifies that Local Transport Plans and other strategies, plans and programmes should provide the focus for delivery on the transport related policies in the RSS. This establishes the strategic link not only between the RSS and LTP, which is already established, but also with related plans, programmes and policies that may be developed outside the LTP.
32. The proposed changes to the RSS provide a new emphasis on sustainable transport, both in the transport and non-transport policies. This change in emphasis supports Darlington's leading edge transport strategy and the initiatives already being delivered in the Borough through Darlington's status as both a Sustainable Travel and Cycling Demonstration Town. In the Tees Valley City Region the policy aims to explore the need for sustainable transport infrastructure improvements to support regeneration initiatives. Policy 51 Regional Public Transport Provision has also prioritized, for further investigation, the development of a rail based Metro system for the Tees Valley City Region. This work is now underway.

33. The new climate change policy has direct implications for transport planning. It proposes to focus substantial new development on locations with good accessibility by sustainable transport modes, particularly public transport, walking and cycling; reduce road traffic growth and promote sustainable alternatives to the private car; and integrate climate change considerations into all spatial planning concerns, including transport. This again supports Darlington's Second Local Transport Plan objectives.
34. There is an increased recognition in the RSS document that accessibility is key to delivering the wider economic and social agendas. For regional transport corridors the focus is on improving the efficiency of movement along key roads (A66 and A1) and key rail links (East Coast Main Line and Tees Valley rail line). Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor is part of this improvement and work, led by the JSU with the Highways Agency and Tees Valley local authorities, is ongoing to study the potential congestion on the A19/A66/A174 over the next 20 years. Schemes required to address increasing congestion will be implemented as part of the Local Transport Plan or as a major scheme bid or as part of the Highways Agency Investment Plan. At a more local level the emphasis is on improving public transport, walking and cycling.
35. The RSS proposes a more strategic approach to demand management across the region, with the Regional Assembly, Highways Agency and other authorities working together to develop a strategic framework for demand management. This is detailed in a new policy 53A Strategic Framework for Demand Management and includes a provision for potential contributions from business and other sectors to the implementation of demand management measures. Officers consider that RSS should set the agenda for relative demand management, so that lower order destinations can compete fairly with regional centres such as the Metro Centre and other major out of town centres which are not mentioned explicitly. New Policy 53A should strengthen criterion e) to reflect this.
36. In the Second Local Transport Plan Darlington Council supports the ethos of the Tees Valley Demand Management Strategy and that the Council already has strong and appropriate demand management measures in place that manage the use of the private car, whilst protecting local quality of life. On a detailed point, it is recommended that additional text is inserted at Policy 53A h) as follows:

*“h) identify the full range of demand management measures, including parking policies **and smarter travel choices**, that should be considered for implementation through programmes, LTPs and LDFs;”*
37. Policy 54 Parking and Travel Plans - The North East Assembly will prepare statements on parking standards for each City Region and for the rural areas. The Local Transport Plan and other strategies, plans and programmes should also ensure that the pricing of new parking provision does not undermine local parking regimes. This is an issue that will need to be addressed through the car parking strategy and Local Development Framework.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

38. No formal consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this report.



## **Legal Implications**

39. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

40. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

41. The RSS is part of the statutory Development Plan system. Local Planning Authorities prepare the other component of the Development Plan, the Local Development Framework, which should be in general conformity with the RSS.

## **Decision Deadline**

42. A decision is required by 6 August 2007 in order to meet the consultation deadline set by the Secretary of State.

## **Key Decisions**

43. This is a key decision as it affects the whole Borough.

## **Recommendation**

44. It is recommended that the comments and objections set out in this report, and any subsequent responses discussed and agreed by Cabinet, be forwarded to the Secretary of State (via the Government Office for the North East), as the Council's formal response to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East.

## **Reasons**

45. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
- (a) Consideration of, and decisions on, the matters covered is necessary at this stage to meet the consultation deadline of 6 August 2007;
  - (b) To enable the Council to influence emerging regional and sub-regional spatial development policy.

**John Buxton**  
**Director of Development and Environment**

**Background Papers**

North East of England Regional Spatial Strategy: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision Submitted by the North East Assembly (May 2007) Government Office for the North East

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