

Strategic Options and Scoping Paper for the New Darlington Local Plan

The Darlington Local Plan

1. Darlington Borough Council is embarking on the production of a new Local Plan for Darlington. Creating a plan for the Borough is a complex process. We must contribute to achieving national and regional goals for sustainable development and economic growth, whilst reconciling the views of the local community about how land in the Borough should be used, protected and enhanced, and the interests of our stakeholders and investors. Many of the topics the plan must cover are interrelated and a change in one aspect of the plan can have far reaching consequences. The plan should give clarity and confidence to investors, but the twenty year time frame means there must also be scope for flexibility.
2. Because land is a finite resource, it is rarely possible to create a plan which does not involve making compromises. Creating the Local Plan means addressing these issues and, on occasion, making difficult choices. In order to make the best choices we can for the Borough, we must set out our vision and objectives for how the Borough will be at the end of the plan period. We then scope out the issues and options associated with achieving our aims, before selecting the best combination of solutions. This is often where compromises must be made. Finally, our plan is examined by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State to ensure it is a sound plan for the Borough.
3. To write our Local Plan, we need to understand the kind of place we want Darlington to be in the future. The Core Strategy includes a vision for the Borough in 2026 as follows:

‘By 2026 Darlington will be a more sustainable community, where a real step change has been achieved in enhancing the quality of life and local environment, and expanding local opportunities for work and for sustainable travel. Those who live in, work in or visit the Borough will enjoy the opportunities and vibrant life of an ambitious city, but within the fabric of a friendly, historic market town with a distinctive atmosphere, surrounded by attractive countryside and villages’
4. The first stages in the process of Local Plan preparation will begin to explore this vision with our stakeholders, understand whether this vision is still the right one and whether it can be extended for a longer plan period. This discussion will take into account the national, regional and local plan making context, including the constraints on future development, opportunities for improving the Borough’s sustainability and the aspects of the Borough which should be protected and enhanced.
5. Taking into account the national, sub-regional and local context, officers have identified the following outcomes for the Local Plan. Through the early stages of the plan process, these will be developed into a Darlington specific vision and detailed objectives.
 - Well planned, high quality, sustainable places

- Economic growth, new jobs and prosperity
- Inclusive and accessible places, to serve all needs and communities
- An attractive place to live, visit and invest
- A vibrant Town Centre
- Accessible shops and services
- Celebrated and protected heritage assets, important landscapes and key open spaces
- Integrated strategic social and physical infrastructure, phased to meet the needs of new development
- Increased resilience to climate change
- Greater certainty for residents, investors and stakeholders

The National Context

6. The nature and content of the Local Plan will be guided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Key points about the content of Local Plans set out in the NPPF include:
 - Local planning authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three.
 - Local Plans should be aspirational but realistic.
 - Local Plans should set out the opportunities for development and clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and where.
7. With reference to planning policies, the NPPF states that local planning authorities should set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:
 - the homes and jobs needed in the area;
 - the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
 - the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
 - the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
 - climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.
8. Detailed guidance on how these policies should be developed and evidenced is included in the NPPF and the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) which supports it. The Planning Policy Team has been developing policy in accordance with these documents since they were published in 2012 and 2013 respectively and much of the policy in the Core Strategy and the withdrawn MGP was compliant with their requirements.

The Regional and Sub-regional Context

9. Darlington is part of Tees Valley Unlimited, the private and public sector Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) striving to deliver jobs and economic growth, and part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority. The Combined Authority has secured a devolution deal with central government which provides for the transfer of significant powers for employment and skills,

transport, planning and investment from central government to the Tees Valley. Darlington has committed to working with the other Tees Valley authorities and their partners in the LEP to achieve growth in the sub region, as set out in TVU's Strategic Economic Plan and other associated documents. This will be expressed spatially through the authorities' Local Plans.

10. As well as working with the Tees Valley sub-region as a whole, Darlington also shares boundaries with Stockton-on-Tees, the North Yorkshire districts of Hambleton and Richmondshire, and Durham and North Yorkshire. The Council works closely with its neighbours as appropriate, however in planning we are also bound by the requirement to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis to maximise the effectiveness of Local Plan preparation in the context of strategic cross boundary matters. This is known as the Duty to Cooperate. When submitting a Local Plan for Examination, the Council must demonstrate it has made every effort to secure the necessary cooperation on strategic cross boundary matters throughout its preparation.

The Local Context

11. The Council is proposing to produce a single Local Plan which will deliver sustainable development in Darlington up to 2036. This will be a new plan and will include new and refreshed policies, but it will have regard to the knowledge gained and the evidence gathered through the production of the Core Strategy (adopted 2011) and the Making and Growing Places DPD (withdrawn in April 2016, prior to publication).
12. 'One Darlington, Perfectly Placed' is the Sustainable Community Strategy for Darlington, originally adopted in 2008 and revised in 2014 to respond to the impact of economic change on local businesses, public services and the wellbeing of local people. It seeks to create and maintain a good quality of life for everyone in Darlington (One Darlington), and make Darlington the best possible place to live and work (Perfectly Placed). The themes of the 2008 edition of 'One Darlington, Perfectly Placed' were key to developing the Core Strategy's framework of vision and objectives; this will continue to be the case for the new Local Plan as appropriate.
13. The local context will continue to be explored and documented through the Local Plan preparation process by gathering technical evidence and seeking the views of the local community and other stakeholders. This will inform the policies which compose the plan.

The Plan Period

14. The Council must establish the time period that the new Local Plan will cover. It is intended that the plan period will be from the time of adoption until 2036 to match the most recent work on assessing housing needs in the Borough. This means that the plan can be strategic and comprehensive, planning for long term investment and growth rather than seeking short term, piecemeal solutions.
15. Some elements of the plan will seek to deal with circumstances which occurred before the plan period, such as the undersupply of land for particular uses. In some areas, it will look

beyond the plan period, seeking to establish conditions for further sustainable development after 2036.

Exploring Strategic Issues and Options

16. In order to begin the new Local Plan, the Council has begun to explore strategic issues and options for development in the Borough over the plan period to deliver the outcomes set out in paragraph 4. More detailed debate will be required on the issues and options surrounding the key challenges for delivering these outcomes. It is anticipated that much of the evidence which informed the Making and Growing Places DPD will continue to be relevant and will form the basis of the emerging plan. However, evidence will be refreshed where necessary and new issues identified will be addressed through the plan making process.

Delivering Housing to Meet the Borough's Needs

17. The most significant change from the Council's previous planning strategy relates to delivering housing. The most recent evidence shows that in order to meet the needs of its population in the coming years, Darlington will need to accommodate significantly more new homes than were previously planned for (around 11,000 between 2016 and 2036). Whilst the Core Strategy's locational strategy is still considered to be a sound approach to guide the Borough's development, it cannot accommodate sufficient sites to meet the Borough's objectively assessed housing need as identified in the SHMA 2015 (available online) over the identified plan period. The strategy must therefore be developed to accommodate this.
18. Work has been undertaken to convert the Borough's objectively assessed need for housing into a housing requirement; this is detailed in the Housing Requirement Technical Paper. As the plan develops and specific sites are identified, these figures will be refined further to spread the number of dwellings over the plan period, taking into account the housing market, the delivery of infrastructure and interrelationships with other plans and projects. Judgements will also need to be made regarding the level of flexibility which should be included in the plan to ensure that sufficient housing sites come forward during the plan period – this means allocating more sites than would be required to meet housing need if full delivery could be guaranteed. These decisions can only be taken when the sites to be allocated are known, along with detailed knowledge of their potential for delivering housing over the plan period.

Identifying Housing Sites

19. The scale of the Borough's housing requirement means that promoting housing delivery will be a significant part of the new Darlington Local Plan. The selection of housing sites will shape the Borough's development over the plan period and beyond.
20. Prior to its withdrawal, the Making and Growing Places DPD included numerous sites for housing development. These went through a rigorous site assessment, including

sustainability appraisal and public consultation and would have progressed to the final version of the plan had work not paused in late 2015. It is intended that, where these remain suitable and continue to be promoted for housing development, they will be included in the new Local Plan, although site boundaries may be revised to accommodate changed circumstances when the new Local Plan is adopted. In particular, some sites may become larger, or may take on different roles and forms to facilitate other areas of land coming forward for development. Further consideration of the suitability of these sites for development can be found in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), available online and to be updated through the plan preparation process.

21. However, even if all the sites identified through the Core Strategy and Making and Growing Places DPD deliver housing at the yields anticipated in the Making and Growing Places DPD, a significant number of additional dwellings will need to be delivered to meet the Borough's housing requirement from adoption of the plan to 2036. The Council has therefore begun work to identify options for strategic locations where those additional houses could be developed during this time period and beyond.
22. Initial consideration of opportunities and constraints within the Borough has been carried out through cross-departmental internal workshops, with input from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and the Housing and Communities Agency (HCA). This work has led to a number of areas of search for housing sites being identified around the Borough.
23. The identification of these areas is intended to stimulate debate, whilst focusing discussion on those areas with the greatest potential for achieving the Borough's aims and commitments. They are not intended to be definitive, their boundaries are not fixed and significant further work needs to be undertaken before they can be identified as suitable housing sites. Officers have sought to be bold and to consider all potential options rather than ruling out areas at the early stages; some of these may be dismissed when more detailed assessment is undertaken. Similarly, the exclusion of sites from the areas of search does not mean that they will not be considered as part of the plan making progress – landowners and developers will be asked to put forward sites they believe can contribute to sustainable development as part of the initial consultation stage.
24. In order to develop these options pragmatically, a number of high level assumptions were made about sustainable development patterns in the Borough with a view to identifying initial areas of search. These will be open to challenge through the initial consultation stages, but provide a useful starting point for discussion about strategic options. The constraints it was assumed would guide development include flood risk, the presence of designated and undesignated heritage assets, physical barriers such as existing development and land use, railway infrastructure and rivers, the capacity of the strategic and local road networks, the potential to develop sustainable transport networks, the capacity of social infrastructure such as schools, and opportunities to protect and enhance environmental assets and landscapes. Some of these are shown on Plan 1.

25. However, it is also recognised that the long plan period means that there are opportunities to master plan sites and to develop new infrastructure to meet their needs. Therefore the lack of existing infrastructure has not led to large sites being discounted, even though capacity, services and facilities may not be available at the present time or in the early years of the plan. As the local plan develops, consideration will need to be given to how this infrastructure will be provided and how the different sites will work together with each other and other land uses in order to deliver Borough wide sustainable development.
26. The areas of search being highlighted as potential locations for development and initial discussion are as follows and are shown on Plan 2:
- Northern Darlington Extension
 - South Western Darlington Extension
 - Extending Villages (including villages on Darlington's boundary)
 - Create a new settlement within the rural area
 - Importing or exporting an element of housing need between neighbouring local authorities

Areas Identified as Having Potential for New Housing Development

27. The potential of these areas of search to provide significant new housing over the plan period will be explored with members of the public, land owners and developers and others stakeholders through the initial consultation phase.

Working with Neighbouring Authorities

28. Should an authority's plan making work conclude that it cannot identify sufficient sustainable capacity to meet its housing needs in full within its housing market area consideration would need to be given to exporting the need to other areas. This could mean that Darlington was asked to consider accommodating housing need from another housing market area, or would need to ask other authorities to consider accommodating need which could not be met within Darlington's housing market area (identified in the SHMA 2015 as the Borough boundary). Should Darlington wish to export housing need, neighbouring authorities would need to be asked to consider whether it was within their sustainable capacity to do so. The opposite would apply if Darlington was asked to accommodate need from elsewhere.
29. Whilst it may become necessary to consider this strategic option, it is generally considered to be a last resort and is most often seen in very urban authorities, where administrative boundaries separate conurbations and town centres from their more rural hinterlands. By exporting housing needs, each authority would also risk sacrificing the benefits of housing delivery. At this stage, it is not considered that this is a likely or attractive scenario for the borough or its neighbours.

Other Strategic Issues

30. Whilst housing delivery is likely to be the most controversial and complex issue in the new Local Plan, other significant issues will also be within the document's scope. It is recognised that increased housing delivery will have related impacts on other land uses. Land for employment uses and other investment opportunities will need to be delivered in tandem with housing development to ensure the Borough's growth is sustainable. In addition, there will be changes to demand for retail and leisure facilities, social infrastructure and transport infrastructure. As demand for development increases in the Borough, consideration will also need to be given to which areas of land should be protected and (where appropriate) enhanced, for example due to their contribution to the landscape, their heritage value or their value as open spaces. These issues will all be part of the conversation as the plan is developed.

- Economic development and employment land
- the provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- the provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk management, and the provision of energy (including heat);
- the provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

Minerals and Waste

31. In 2011, the five Local Planning Authorities in the Tees Valley (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees) adopted two joint development plan documents (DPDs) setting planning policies and site allocations for minerals and waste developments until 2026. The Minerals and Waste Core Strategy DPD contains the long-term spatial vision and strategic policies for minerals and waste developments. The Minerals and Waste Policies and Sites DPD identifies specific sites for minerals and waste development and provides policies which are used to assess minerals and waste planning applications. The DPDs cover the whole of the Boroughs of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees and the part of Redcar and Cleveland Borough that does not lie within the North York Moors National Park and are available on the Council's website.

32. Because the policies in these documents are considered to be compliant with the NPPF and remain up to date with local and sub-regional circumstances, minerals and waste issues will not be considered within the scope of new Local Plan for Darlington.

Next Steps - Master Planning Approach and Community Engagement

33. The Council intends to develop its strategic options through a series of conversations with key stakeholders about strategic objectives, site specific issues and thematic issues. These will address the strategic issues that need to be addressed to meet the plan's objectives

including what should be within the plan's scope, where best to accommodate the development in the Borough, how and when development can be provided to ensure good place making.

34. These will take place as part of a formal consultation period to meet the Regulation 18 consultation requirement over the summer of 2016, and will include the local community, investors (local and larger than local), neighbouring authorities, statutory agencies and infrastructure providers.
35. Master planning has been identified as a useful tool for quality place-making on a strategic level. Examples from other areas have shown they can be developed alongside the Local Plan and ultimately provide useful detailed evidence on delivery at the Examination in Public. Initial discussions with developers on the principles, has revealed their willingness to consider contributing to such an approach. Furthermore, discussions with ATLAS, the HCA's strategic development support and advisory service, suggests Darlington could use their expertise in master planning to demonstrate the deliverability of the Borough's Plan effectively and efficiently.