Darlington Local Plan 2016 - 2036
Sustainability Appraisal Framework

November 2016

Darlington Borough Council

Contents

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report sets out the framework for undertaking Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA / SEA) for the Darlington Local Plan. It explains the context, identifies sustainability objectives, and the approach to assessment, identifying relevant environmental, economic and social issues.

1.2 Sustainability is about ensuring that decisions taken now are the right decisions to improve our quality of life, and that of future generations. A Sustainability Appraisal is a technique that allows us to consider how much a plan will contribute to a range of environmental, social and economic factors which contribute to our quality of life.

1.3 The Council is required to carry out sustainability appraisal alongside local plan preparation by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). The appraisal also integrates an assessment of the significant environmental effects of the local plan and its reasonable alternatives, a requirement of the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. It is possible that a Habitats Regulations Assessment[1] of the local plan will also be required. If so, its findings will be reflected in this sustainability appraisal work.

1.4 This Framework should ensure that at each key stage of the Local Plan preparation, the Sustainability Appraisal considers all relevant significant environmental, social and economic sustainability issues appropriately.

1.5 This document therefore includes:

- Relevant policies, plans, programmes and objectives which will inform the Darlington Local Plan;
- Baseline information in relation to Darlington Borough;
- Sustainability issues;
- Sustainability objectives and appraisal methodology for considering individual policies and proposals, considering alternative potential site allocations, and considering cumulative effects of polices and proposals.

2. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Darlington Borough

2.1 Darlington Borough is in North East England. It is the most westerly of the five unitary authorities which make up the Tees Valley sub-region. It is a compact area of 75.9 square miles. The market town of Darlington is the main settlement and outside the

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[1] Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Habitats Regulations) – relates to potential adverse impacts on any European site of nature conservation importance.

main urban area there are three larger villages of Heighington, Middleton St George/Middleton One Row and Hurworth / Hurworth Place. The remainder of the area consists of villages and open countryside. The River Skerne runs through the urban area, whilst the River Tees runs to the south. North Yorkshire lies to the south of the Borough; the Tees Valley is to the east, the former coalfield areas of County Durham to the north, and rural Teesdale to the west.

2.2   The population of Darlington is approximately 105,564 and is set to increase to 112,500 in 2026. The Borough has a total of 46,670 households with 87% of the population living within the urban centre of the Borough. In terms of demographics, the Borough has an increasingly ageing population with a significantly lower proportion of younger people.

2.3   Darlington is ranked as the 104th most deprived area in the country, with 19% of the borough's neighbourhoods being amongst the 10% most deprived in the country, whilst 3% of neighbourhoods are amongst the country's 10% least deprived. Inequalities within the borough largely relate to educational achievement, employment, health and public realm. Health and unemployment are the areas where deprivation in the borough as a whole is rated worst; whilst it scores relatively well on education and living environment, and very well on access to housing and services. Darlington's status as a Healthy New Town should promote the health benefits of good quality housing and contribute to reducing inequalities.

2.4 Good transport links exist with the A1 (M) and the East Coast Main Line running past and through the town and other key roads and railways linking the Borough to the remainder of the North East and Yorkshire. The Durham Tees Valley Airport is in the eastern part of the Borough. Darlington town centre is of sub-regional importance for shopping and services, and the town is also an important employment hub.

2.5 The Borough has a rich and varied natural and historic environment. There are a variety of national, regional and local environmental and historic designations in the Borough. Darlington also has a high level of open space for a Borough of its size. Provision is generally good although there is a deficiency in quality and quantity in some areas

The new Darlington Local Plan 2016-36

3.6   The new Darlington Local Plan 2016-36 will be the main development plan document guiding the future use and development of land across the whole Borough, except for minerals and waste. It will contain a Vision, Aims and Objectives, and policies and proposals for the period up to 2036.

3.7   The new Darlington Local Plan will:

- identify exactly where new development and land use changes are planned;
- identify where there are particular constraints on development and things that need to be protected;
- set out policies and land allocations to address local planning issues and help guide and decide planning applications;

4

- help make sure that development and regeneration contributes as best it can to the prosperity, health and quality of life in the Borough, and achieves more sustainable development overall.
- provide the strategic policy framework for any community preparing a neighbourhood plan

3.8   Further detail on the scope and issues that the Council propose to address in the new Local Plan are set out in the separate 'Darlington Local Plan Issues and Scoping Report' (May 2016). The key steps in the timetable for preparing the new Local Plan are set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2016-2019.

3.9   The new Local Plan is not being prepared from a blank sheet of paper. In many instances, the starting point for new policy development will be the existing adopted Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011) and the recently agreed (April 2016) Interim Planning Position Statement. There may also be instances when saved policies of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan[2] are the starting point. It will also be taking account of the National Planning Policy Framework and any more up to date local information.

Sustainability Appraisal

3.10   Sustainability Appraisal will:

- find out how the Local Plan will contribute to achieve sustainable development;
- identify how the Local Plan is likely to affect baseline information and its trends;
- work out if the Local Plan policies and proposals are the most appropriate given the reasonable alternatives.

3.11   The output of Sustainability Appraisal will be a Sustainability Appraisal Report. The report will set out and evaluate the likely significant environmental, social and economic effects of implementing Local Plan policies and its reasonable alternatives.

3.12   It is possible that a Habitats Regulations Assessment[3] of the local plan will also be required. If so, its findings will be reflected in this sustainability appraisal work.

3.13   Section 5 below sets out how the Council will carry out the Sustainability Appraisal of the new Local Plan.

Sustainable Development

3.14   The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that it is the purpose of the planning system to contribute to achieving sustainable development. The definition of sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs[4].

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[2] A full list of these is on the website at www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan
[3] Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Habitats Regulations) – relates to potential adverse impacts on any European site of nature conservation importance.
[4] Resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly

3.15   This definition is set out in the (NPPF), as are the five nationally recognised[5] principles of sustainable development:

- living within environmental limits
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- achieving a sustainable economy
- promoting good governance
- using sound science responsibly

3.16   The NPPF also recognises the three dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, social and economic and indicates that a presumption in favour of sustainable development is at its heart. It goes on to advise that a local plan based on the presumption will contribute to achieving sustainable development, unless its adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the NPPF as a whole.

4.0 INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

4.1   Sustainability Appraisal is a stepped process that, as a minimum, must include a Scoping Report, a Sustainability Report[6] and a final statement of how the appraisal was taken into account. Table [7]1 sets out the information requirements of a SEA and SA and the stages at which this information will be reported. This report considers stages 1-5.

4.2   Much of the work in the Interim Planning Position Statement has already been subject to sustainability appraisal previously and this work will, wherever possible, be used to inform the Sustainability Appraisal report for this new Local Plan.

Table 1: SEA Requirements for the Sustainability Report of the Darlington Local Plan

SEA / Sustainability Appraisal Requirements checklist	Stage
1. An outline of the contents, main objectives of the plan or programme, and relationship with any other plans and programmes.	Scoping report. Sustainability Report
2. The relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme.	Scoping report. Sustainability Report
3. The environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected	Scoping report. Sustainability Report
4. Any existing environmental, social or economic problems relevant to the plan or programme including, in particular, those relating to any areas of a particular environmental importance, such as areas designated pursuant to Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC	Scoping report. Sustainability Report
5. The environmental protection objectives (and social and economic objectives), established at international, European Community or national level, which are relevant to the plan or programme and the	Scoping report. Sustainability Report

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[5] UK Sustainable Development Strategy: Securing the Future, 2005
[6] Also known as an Environmental Report
[7] Adapted from NPPG: The Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations requirements checklist

SEA / Sustainability Appraisal Requirements checklist	Stage
way those objectives and any environmental considerations will be taken into account during its preparation	
6. The likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors.	Sustainability Report
7. Measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme	Sustainability Report
8. Outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives dealt with and a description of how the assessment was undertaken including any difficulties encountered in compiling the required information	Sustainability Report
9. Monitoring measures	Finalised in submission Sustainability Report
10. Non-technical summary	In relevant reports above

Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes

4.3 Other plans, policies and programmes can be relevant in helping to identify the sustainability issues and objectives for the Borough and the things that could be monitored to check if the Local Plan is delivering sustainable development.

4.4 Table 2 provides a list of the relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes that should inform the Sustainability Appraisal of the Local Plan. This list does not include details of plans, policies and programmes at International, European Community level, which are all enshrined in national planning policy. This list will evolve as the Sustainability Appraisal process progresses.

4.5 Baseline data has been gathered from existing plans and strategies and available environmental, social, economic information. To provide a picture of the state of the Borough today and to help to identify any sustainability issues, problems and opportunities that the Darlington Local Plan could help address. This will help inform three tasks:

- Inform the production of the sustainability objectives;
- Provide an evidence base to predict the effects of the Darlington Local Plan;
- Produce a draft SA framework that will eventually be used to monitor the success of the Darlington Local Plan

Table 2: Relevant Plans, Policies and Programmes

Plans, Policies and Programmes
National
Cultural White Paper (DCMS 2016)
Historic England Good Practice Advice Notes in Planning
Historic England Advice Notes
Regional
North East Renewable Energy Strategy (2005)
North East Strategy for the Environment (2008)
North East Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2008)
North East Climate Change Action Plan (2008)
Delivery Plan for North East Regional Biodiversity Habitat Targets (2010)
Emerging York, North Yorkshire and North York Moors Minerals Waste Joint Plan
York, North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Economic Partnership Strategic Economic Plan
The Northumbria River Basin Management Plan 2016 (RBMP)
Flood Risk Management Medium Term Plan 2015 – 21 (EA)
Water Framework Directive (WFD);
Guidance on Flood Risk Assessments: Climate Change Allowances 2016
North East Case for Culture
Local planning documents (including SA) for:
Hambleton District LPA
Durham County LPA
Stockton Borough LPA
Richmondshire District LPA
North Yorkshire County Council
Sub-regional
Tees Valley Sub Regional Housing Strategy (2007)
Tees Valley City Region Transport Strategy (2007)
County Durham Biodiversity Action Plan (2007)
Environment Agency: The Tees Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (2008)
Environment Agency: Tees Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
Environment Agency: Wear Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009)
Environment Agency: River Basin Management Plan, Northumbria River Basin District (2009)
Tees Valley Sport Sub Regional Facilities Strategy (2009)
Tees Valley Area Action Plan (transport) (2009)
Tees Valley Economic and Regeneration Statement of Ambition (2010)
The Tees Valley Climate Change Strategy (2010-2020)
Tees Valley Geodiversity Action Plan (2011)
Tees Valley Advanced Manufacturing Action Plan 2012
Tees Valley Digital Action Plan 2012
Tees Valley Healthcare Action Plan 2012
Tees Valley Logistics Action Plan 2012
Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Study
Tees Valley Hotel Futures and Summary
Tees Valley Water Cycle Study
Local
Darlington Borough Council Conservation Area Character Appraisals
Ongoing Development Monitoring including Annual Monitoring Report
Darlington's Green Infrastructure Strategy 2013-2026 (October 2013)
Darlington Open Space Strategy 2007-2017 (April 2007 and 2010 update)
Sustainable Community Strategy - One Darlington: Perfectly Placed (2008-2026)
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (2009) and updates
Darlington Decentralised and Renewable or Low Carbon Study, Entec 2009 (& Update 2010)
Wind Farm Development and Landscape Capacity Study (August 2008)
Darlington's Climate Change Strategy and plan 2006-10
Darlington Connections Study (October 2009)
Darlington LDF Transport Area Action Plans (August 2010)
Economic Viability of Housing Land in Darlington including appendices (June 2010)
Core Strategy Strategic Housing Locations Options Appraisal (June 2010)
A Housing Implementation Strategy for Darlington (2011-2026)
Darlington Infrastructure Delivery Plan: Publication Draft (July 2010)
Darlington Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and surveys (2014)
Darlington Third Local Transport Plan
Darlington Local Plan – Strategic Transport Modelling
A68 Darlington Micro-simulation – Summary note
Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-17
Strategic Housing Market Assessment
Landscape Character Assessment

Plans, Policies and Programmes
Darlington Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 / 2
Darlington Town Centre Fringe Flood Mitigation Strategy
Darlington Town Centre Fringe Area Action Plan Scoping Report
Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance
Review of Business Sites and Premises (2013)
Economic Viability of Non-housing land
An Allotments Strategy for Darlington
Darlington Retail and Town Centre Study (2014)
Darlington Core Strategy (2011)
Darlington Characterisation Study
Planning Obligations SPD
Design of New Development SPD
Making And Growing Places Scoping Report and SA Scoping Report
Darlington Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Darlington Play Strategy

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

4.7 Following the review of relevant plans, policies and programmes, the following key sustainability issues and problems for Darlington Borough that are relevant to the preparation of the Local Plan are summarised in **Table 3.**

Table 3: Sustainability Issues and Problems

Sustainability Issue	Summary
Sustainable Development	
Climate Change and Energy	
Reducing carbon dioxide emission outputs and increasing renewable energy generation	To tackle climate continued effort is required to reduce C02 emissions and increase the generation of renewable energy at a local level.
Protecting and enhancing ecological networks and making space for changes to rivers.	DEFRA, Natural England and the Environment Agency identify principles of planning for space within which natural processes caused by climate change can occur. For example, a species may need to move from a site which climate change has made less suitable, to one which it has made more suitable; for this it would need a network of appropriate habitat between the two sites. Likewise, planning should allow space for natural changes to rivers caused by changing climatic conditions.
Environmental Protection	
High level of contaminated land	Mainly arising from Darlington's industrial past which has the potential to contaminate groundwater.
High number of development sites at some risk of flooding. Climate change and its effect on flood risk.	High proportion of potential development sites at some risk of flooding. Properties also at risk in neighbouring authorities downstream of Darlington Borough. Flood risk is likely to increase over the next 25 years due to the impacts of climate change.
Effective and efficient use of land in most sustainable locations.	Prioritising and promoting the reuse of previously developed land.
Some major rivers of poor potential ecological quality.	The Skerne and the Tees below the Skerne are of poor potential ecological quality and Neasham Stell is of poor ecological quality.
Biodiversity and Geodiversity	
Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land, priority habitats and species and expanding range where possible.	6 priority habitats present within the borough but all rare, fragmented or in decline. Works need to be done to slow or reverse current trends. 4 SSSI's (Hells Kettles, Neasham Fen, Newton Ketton Meadow and Redcar Field). 27 priority species identified for Darlington; populations vary greatly.

9

Sustainability Issue	Summary
Economy and Employment	
Increasing town centre vacancy and reduction in footfall	The town centre and town centre fringe has the highest retail floorspace vacancy rate and there are indications that footfall is decreasing in some parts of the town centre.
Building on Darlington's economic strengths – Increased potential to grow sectors	Identified need to build on Darlington's strengths in advanced manufacturing, business and financial services, logistics and a market town atmosphere with independent retailers, and also take advantage of the Tees Valley's strength in the digital sector.
Transport and Accessibility	
Congestion and network capacity leading to high levels of air pollution in parts of the borough	Identified need to tackle congestion and network capacity.
Need to support improvements to the rail and bus infrastructure	Programmes for rail and bus improvement, and further such for which the need has been identified, should be accommodated and supported.
People	
Shortfall in overall housing compared with needs	The borough has been underperforming against its housebuilding targets since the start of the recession.
Shortfall in affordable housing provision, especially in rural areas. Lack of social rented tenure	The borough has been underperforming against its affordable housing targets since the start of the recession.
Shortfall of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation	Local study published in 2014 shows an unmet need for sites
Ageing and growing population	Latest census results show the population has grown more than previously estimated over the last ten years.
Health and Recreation	
Shortfall in playing pitches	The ratio of playing pitches to adult population is 1 to 1,150 which does not compare favourably with the national figure. Only 50% of playing pitches are deemed to have secure public access.
Unequal distribution of open space and types of open space	Poor levels of provision coincide with areas of deprivation and there are geographical gaps in the provision of specific types of open space, in particular allotments.
Culture, Heritage and Landscape	
Potential risk to local heritage (built and natural) from new development and other pressures.	Locally important buildings and other heritage assets may be at risk from development and other pressures (e.g. neglect and decay) as they have not yet been classified and therefore key features and assets may not be appropriately considered and taken in to account in planning decisions. Increase Of heritage assets on the 'at risk' register. Heritage at risk registers do not yet include Grade II listed buildings so such buildings may be at risk without our knowledge. Process of undertaking appraisals has identified that there is a general perception of decline within the Borough's conservation areas. Development on outskirts of urban areas and villages, both within and beyond the borough, can have an impact on landscape quality.

4.8 As the SA process continues and through the development of the main document, additional issues may be identified later in the process.

5.0 FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES AND SUB-OBJECTIVES

5.1 The SA framework will appraise the compatibility of the Darlington Local Plan objectives and policies against the sustainability issues identified. It provides a way in which the sustainability effects can be described, analysed and compared. It is central to the entire SA process. The framework will comprise:

> ➢ a set of sustainability objectives with which to test the Darlington Local Plan throughout its evolution;
> ➢ decision making criteria to give precision to the requirements of each objective.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

5.2 **Table 4** shows the sustainability framework, with sustainability objectives and proposed decision-making criteria.

Table 4: Sustainability Framework

	Sustainability Objective	Decision making criteria
1	Provide a mixture of affordable, well designed and sustainably located new housing, and improve the standard of existing housing, especially to provide for young people, families and older people.	Will it deliver housing in sustainable locations with access to employment, and services by walking, cycling or public transport? Will it deliver market and affordable homes to meet identified Borough needs? Will it deliver adaptable housing to meet the lifelong needs of the population?
2	Increase the borough's resilience to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions	Will it reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, including by encouraging energy efficiency? Will it increase renewable energy generation? Does it consider updated climate change allowances? Will it ensure climate adapted design and resilient infrastructure? Will it include a sustainable approach to water management? Will it encourage sustainable travel?
3	Protect and improve the quality of land	Will it reduce contaminated sites and increase remediation? Will it minimise the loss of greenfield land to development? Will it maximise the use of brownfield land? Will it lead to the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land?
4	Avoid and reduce flood risk from all sources including fluvial, surface water and sewer flooding.	Will it increase flood risk elsewhere? Does it follow the sequential approach to avoiding higher flood risk areas? Will it include/encourage integrated drainage and rainwater harvesting? Will it increase the use of SUDS?
5	Protect and enhance air and water quality and make efficient use of water	Will it contribute to reductions in air quality monitoring pollutants at monitoring locations across the Borough? Will it reduce the risk of contamination to ground waters and surface waters? Will it protect or contribute to improving the ecological quality of rivers?
6	Protect and enhance biodiversity	Will it protect and enhance ecological networks, habitat corridors and linking routes and sites?

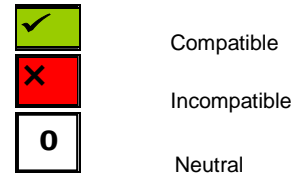| Sustainability Objective		Decision making criteria
7	Protect, and enhance access to, green infrastructure and provide opportunities for sports and recreation	Will it protect existing and / or enhance / create good quality and accessible green infrastructure or open spaces? Will it promote increased access to green infrastructure?
8	Promote traffic reduction and encourage the use of public and non-motor transport. Reduce the need to travel	Will it reduce the distance people need to travel to work or to access services and facilities and will it prioritise development on well located sites, especially the town centre? Will it encourage the use of alternatives to car travel, including by protecting and improving walking/cycling routes and public transport routes?
9	Conserve and enhance Darlington's distinctive and valuable historic environment	Will it conserve designated and non-designated heritage assets and other elements of the historic environment? Will it protect and enhance the quality and character of the landscape, including by promoting good design? Will it maintain separation between the main settlements in the Borough and those in surrounding districts?
10	Achieve ambitious, sustainable levels of economic growth and Increase employment levels and access to sustainable and high quality employment opportunities	Does it provide for opportunities to attract new business to the borough? Will it facilitate the expansion and development of existing businesses?
11	Improve the health and wellbeing of all, reduce health inequalities and promote healthier lifestyles	Will it encourage greater participation in healthy lifestyles, including nature based or outdoor leisure activities? Will it ensure the whole population has easy access to health facilities? Will it increase local food production?

COMPATIBILITY OF SUSTAINABILITY OBJECTIVES

5.3 In order to test the draft SA objectives' compatibility with one another, an appraisal matrix has been produced (see **Figure 1**).

5.4 The majority of the draft sustainability objectives proved to be either compatible or have a neutral impact on one another. However, potential incompatibility was identified between environmental objectives like improving or sustaining the quality of environmental resources, and the more socially and economically focussed sustainability objectives, such as achieving ambitious, sustainable levels of economic growth, and providing new housing.

5.5 The potential incompatibility mainly arises for the likely costs associated with achieving the most sustainable outcomes on matters like mitigating flood risk and safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity; by impacting on scheme viability, these would reduce the amount of value left in schemes to achieve social objectives, such as more affordable housing. In some instances, it could mean that economically beneficial schemes become unviable.

		Compatible
✔		Compatible
✗		Incompatible
0		Neutral

	Objective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Provide a mixture of affordable, well designed and sustainably located new housing, and improve the standard of existing housing, especially to provide for young people, families and older people.											
2	Increase the borough's resilience to climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions	✔										
3	Protect and improve the quality of land	✔	✔									
4	Avoid and reduce flood risk	✔	✔	✔								
5	Protect and enhance air and water quality, and make efficient use of water	✔	✔	0	✔							
6	Protect and enhance biodiversity	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔						
7	Protect, and enhance access to, green infrastructure and provide opportunities for sports and recreation	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔					
8	Promote traffic reduction and encourage the use of public and non-motor transport. Reduce the need to travel	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔				
9	Conserve Darlington's distinctive and valuable historic environment	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			
10	Achieve ambitious, sustainable levels of economic growth and Increase employment levels and access to sustainable and high quality employment opportunities	✔	✔	x	✔	x	x	✗	0	✔		
11	Improve the health and wellbeing of all, reduce health inequalities and promote healthier lifestyles	✔	✔	0	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	0	
	Sustainability Objective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11