
**VIEW: SHAPING THE NORTH EAST – CONSULTATION DRAFT
REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR THE NORTH EAST**

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

Responsible Director(s) - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Cabinet of the status and main contents of the Consultation Draft Regional Spatial strategy for the North East (RSS), highlighting the key implications for the Council.
2. To seek Cabinet approval for the submission of various objections and statements of support as part of the current consultation process.
3. To seek Cabinet endorsement of new procedures introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, relating to the preparation of sub-regional strategies.

Information and Analysis

4. “View: Shaping the North East” is the Consultation Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East. The Strategy sets out a long term strategy for the spatial development of the North East. It has been prepared by the North East Assembly, in liaison with local authorities and other regional stakeholders. A Pre-Consultation Draft RSS was circulated to key stakeholders in summer 2004, and officers made various comments, both on the overarching principles (locational strategy), and specific policy issues such as housing and employment.
5. Existing Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (RPG1) became the interim RSS in September 2004 when the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) came into force, and the emerging RSS will ultimately supersede the RPG1 document. RSS has a wider remit than RPG1 and considers the spatial implications of broader issues such as health, education and crime. The RSS has statutory status, as part of the development plan, which increases its importance in relation to future development decisions within the Borough.
6. A consultation exercise is currently underway and will end on 4 February 2005. Copies of the relevant documents are available in the Members Room, and on the Internet at www.viewnortheast.com.
7. The new draft RSS is strongly influenced by the ‘Northern Way’, an economic growth strategy for three northern regions prepared with the involvement of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the three regional development agencies and others.

8. The overriding theme of RSS, in line with the Northern Way, is to reduce the economic and social disparities between the North East and other regions. To address this situation, a step change is envisaged in economic activity and a renaissance throughout the Region by:
 - (a) delivering economic prosperity and growth;
 - (b) creating sustainable communities;
 - (c) conserving, enhancing and capitalising upon the Region's natural and built environment, heritage and culture; and
 - (d) improving connectivity within the Region and beyond.

Proposed Comments

9. The opportunity to comment on the Draft RSS is welcomed and, in highlighting the main issues and implications for the Council, a series of recommendations are being made for Cabinet to consider.
10. **Locational Strategy**- research undertaken for the preparation of the Northern Way Growth Strategy concluded that two city regions in the North East – Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley- are key to any effort to accelerate economic growth in the North.
11. The current version of the RSS represents the City Region concept in an acceptable way. Policies 5 (Locational Strategy) and 6 (City Regions) and the associated text give equal priority to Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Darlington and Hartlepool. They seek to concentrate the majority of new development in the conurbations *and main towns* within the City Regions. This recognition of the important roles different parts of the Tees Valley can play in economic regeneration is welcome.
12. Similarly, Policy 8 (Tees Valley City Region) suggests priority should be given to the key proposals at Stockton/Middlesbrough, Hartlepool (Victoria Harbour) and Darlington (Central Park), again with no differentiation between the conurbation and main towns. Paragraph 2.49 also clearly reflects the vital role for Darlington within and beyond the sub-region/City Region. Again this is to be welcomed and supported.
13. Perhaps one area of concern remains from previous officer drafts on this issue. Despite the comments above, paragraph 2.46 does include the following statement:

“At the centre of the City Region lies the towns of Middlesbrough and Stockton and the areas along both banks of the River Tees lying between them. This area is the economic powerhouse of the Tees Valley. For the City Region to grow and prosper it is vital that priority is given to the regeneration of this urban core between and including the two towns.”
14. The RSS needs to be clear that the policies do mean what they say and see the main towns as integral to the future development and prosperity of the Tees Valley City Region and not somehow second in priority order to the conurbation. Cabinet is recommended to support the locational strategy and associated policies as set out in Section 2 of RSS, but to ask that the word “priority” is replaced by “attention” in the sentence in paragraph 2.46 quoted above.
15. **Economic Prosperity and Growth** - The RSS highlights the increasing need to focus economic growth in the most sustainable locations, particularly the conurbations and main

towns, where the greatest economic and social benefits can be achieved. Furthermore, it is recognized 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.

16. The policy approach in RSS differentiates between major mixed-use schemes (Policy 16), Prestige Employment Sites (Policy21) and Reserve Sites (Policy22). (The development of the Durham-Tees Valley Airport is considered separately below). Although the overall objectives and aims of the Strategy are generally welcome, there are some concerns about this policy approach. The mixed-use schemes represent major brownfield regeneration projects being developed in the region, including Central Park. Despite the mixed nature of the potential uses these sites aim to attract employment and, as such, have a similar role to the prestige employment sites. Perhaps unintentionally, the policies appear to give priority to prestige sites (para. 3.27). This needs to be altered to ensure that major mixed-use sites are given the same priority as prestige sites.
17. Policy 20 makes provision for 45 hectares of general employment land in Darlington. Throughout the preparation of the RSS, officers have questioned the source and validity of this figure and as such an objection should be raised to its accuracy. The correct figure should be 156ha. The provision for all types of employment land should be sufficient to enable Darlington fully to realise its 'Gateway' potential, recognised elsewhere in RSS.
18. Members should also note that key strategic greenfield sites at Faverdale and Heighington Lane West (Sedgefield/Darlington) have been identified as Reserve Sites, in order that the region can respond quickly to the potential needs of large-scale inward and mobile investors.
19. **Airport** – In the Draft RSS, the sustainable growth and expansion of Durham-Tees Valley Airport, for airport-related development, is supported. Draft RSS currently applies a definition of 'airport-related' which it claims comes from the Tees Valley Structure Plan (although it is not in Structure Plan policy), namely:
 - (a) aircraft apron;
 - (b) aircraft maintenance;
 - (c) airline sales, reservations and booking office;
 - (d) airline training centres;
 - (e) aviation and vehicle fuel storage facilities;
 - (f) avionics maintenance and supply;
 - (g) car hire operations and parking;
 - (h) flight packaging, provisions and supply units;
 - (i) in-flight and terminal catering preparation and storage facilities;
 - (j) internal highways and infrastructure;
 - (k) offices for ancillary and supporting functions;
 - (l) service vehicle maintenance and valeting operations; and
 - (m) warehousing and offices for air freight forwarders and agents
20. In practice, this definition has sometimes been restrictively narrow, and there is a need for some flexibility to attract companies which want/need an airport-related location, but may not fall precisely into these categories. As part of the Northern Way Growth Strategy, a review of the definition of 'airport-related' is being carried out by the regional development agencies, and RSS should be amended in the light of that.

21. As an important economic driver, the Airport plays an essential role in maintaining and attracting new development and investment and is a significant source of employment in its own right. Policy 23 of RSS supports the sustainable expansion of facilities at Durham Tees Valley Airport to accommodate an anticipated growth in passenger numbers to 2 million per year by 2016. This figure conflicts with the 3 million passengers, forecast in the Air Transport White Paper, upon which the airport expansion plans are based. The Policy should therefore be amended to reflect the forecast growth to 3 million passengers per year.
22. To support the growth of the Airport there is a need to improve surface access links by all modes, particularly public transport. At Durham Tees Valley priorities will be to:
 - (a) Improve bus services to Darlington, Middlesbrough and Durham City;
 - (b) improve in the longer term, rail services and rail integration with the main terminal buildings; and
 - (c) improve access on the surrounding road network.
23. These improvements should be welcomed as essential to reinforcing the Airport as an international gateway.
24. **Sustainable Communities** – 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 27 should therefore be supported.
25. The locational strategy for housing is influenced by Housing Market Restructuring, new development needing sustainable locations and the role of urban areas in the economy’s step change. Throughout the preparation of the draft RSS there have been extensive discussions about the scale and distribution of housing development. However, while there is a broad level agreement about the appropriate housing strategy for the region, there remains a range of views about the precise scale and location of development. Given the level of disagreement and uncertainty, it likely that the dwelling provision figures for the period 2004 – 2021, set out in Policy 32, will be revised prior to RSS being submitted to the Secretary of State in March 2005. On this basis it is considered inappropriate to accept the dwelling provision figure for Darlington of 5450 without further consideration and justification of the regional and sub-regional scenarios.
26. Notwithstanding the figure itself, dwelling provision in Darlington should be in accordance with the preferred development option namely “reducing economic disparities with development focussed within both the conurbations and towns in the city regions.” Through the ‘Darlington Gateway’ programme, Darlington has the potential to make a unique contribution to the region’s economic growth. Any housing allocation should be seen as enabling economic growth, investment, and regeneration, and not act as a constraint to achieving these goals. For example, recent build rates in the Borough have averaged over 400 dwellings per year compared with the 320 per year to 2021 envisaged in RSS. The new strategy needs to reflect that the Darlington housing market remains strong and

attractive to developers who recognise the opportunities available to build high quality, popular schemes in sustainable locations. Furthermore, the Council's Urban Capacity Study indicates that the majority of new housing can be achieved on brownfield land within the existing urban area, in accordance with national planning guidance.

27. In summary, to capitalise on the economic, social and environmental assets of the town and thereby contribute significantly to the objectives of the Northern Way and RSS, a realistic housing provision should recognise the recent development rates, aim to reverse the static/falling population, meet the requirement for affordable housing and replace demolished properties. In relation to housing requirements therefore, it is recommended that a holding objection be made to the dwelling provision figure in Policy 32, until further consideration has been given to the Regional and sub-regional distribution.
28. **Transport** - improving connectivity within and beyond the region is a crucial theme of Draft RSS. The focus of the transport strategy is to target investment to improve public transport and increase the role of demand management. However, to complement these measures various major highway improvements are proposed to support regional economic growth and competitiveness. Upgrading of the A66 bypass around Darlington is identified as a priority (Policy 52) to address potential future constraints on economic development in the Tees Valley.
29. Policy 54 supports the development of a 'Core and Feeder' public transport system focused on a network of key regional and sub-regional interchanges. Darlington is identified as one of the Strategic Public Transport Interchanges which should prioritise the development of high quality interchange facilities and service integration between all modes of transport. It is recommended that Members support the Transport Strategy which has significant implications for Darlington as described above.

New Procedures

30. One of the new procedures to be introduced by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 relates to the preparation of sub-regional strategies. The Act sets out that the Regional Planning Body must seek the advice of one or more county councils, unitary authorities or a National Park authority (referred to as Section 4(4) authorities in the Act), whenever a Regional Planning Body wishes to draw up policies to address the distinct needs of a particular area within the region. The Act does provide the flexibility for the Regional Planning Body and the Section 4(4) authorities to agree that this work should be carried out either by the Regional Planning Body itself or by the District Authorities.
31. The North East Assembly (NEA) is the Regional Planning Body in the North East. When this issue was considered by the Regional Spatial Strategy Management Group it was unanimously agreed that it would not be appropriate to enter into such agreements with the Section 4(4) authorities at this late stage in the preparation of the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy, particularly as it would result in unnecessary delay to the preparation process. This view was subsequently endorsed by the Chief Executives Advisory Group and the Planning and Transport Advisory Group, and was formally endorsed by the Assembly Executive on 28 September 2004.
32. The NEA has written to the Council to request its formal endorsement of the above approach. For the reasons set out in paragraph 30 it is recommended that Cabinet endorse

the approach.

Consultation

33. NEA is seeking the Council's view on the draft RSS and it is for NEA to seek the views of other stakeholders and the public.

Legal Implications

34. 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 & Disorder Act 1998

35. 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

36. The RSS is part of statutory Development Plan system. Local Planning Authorities prepare the other component of the Development Plan Document, the Local Development Framework (see Item elsewhere on this agenda), which should be in general conformity with the RSS. At this consultation draft stage the policies and proposals will not carry much weight in the planning application decision-making process. However, as the document progresses towards adoption in 2006, they will become more influential.

Decision Deadline

37. A decision is required by 4 February 2005 in order to meet the consultation deadline set by the North East Assembly.

Conclusion

38. In summary, it is recommended that the Council supports most of the draft RSS and specifically supports the Locational Strategy, the Transport priorities, the recognition of the role of Durham Tees Valley Airport, and the recognition of Darlington's role in economic, retail, leisure and related development.
39. A holding objection should be made to the housing requirement figure for Darlington, pending further work by NEA on housing distribution. Changes in the draft RSS should also be sought in relation to:
- (a) wording of a sentence on priorities within the Tees Valley which does not reflect the policies in the document;
 - (b) giving major mixed-use sites equal priority to prestige employment sites;
 - (c) the employment land figure for Darlington;

- (d) the wording of policy on airport-related development;
- (e) the number of passengers per year to be accommodated at Durham Tees Valley Airport.

Recommendations

40. It is recommended that:-

- (a) The comments and objections set out in this report be forwarded to the North East Assembly as the Council's formal response to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy Consultation process;
- (b) Members endorse the approach proposed by the North East Assembly relating to the preparation of sub-regional strategies, outlined in its letter of 24 November 2004.

Reasons

41. 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 4 February 2005;
- (b) To enable the Council to influence emerging regional and sub-regional spatial development policy.

John Buxton
Director of Development and Environment

Background Papers

View: Shaping the North East – Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East
Consultation Draft (November 2004) North East Assembly
Letter from North East Assembly, 24 November 2004

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