
**DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY:
REVISED PREFERRED OPTIONS**

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor John Williams, Economy Portfolio
Responsible Director - Richard Alty (Assistant Chief Executive, Regeneration)**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides information about the key draft planning policies and proposals that are set out in the Darlington Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options document. It seeks Cabinet's agreement that the document be published as the basis for public and other consultations, and authorisation for officers to carry out any further consultations that are required in the period leading up to finalising the Core Strategy for submission to the Government.

Summary

2. This LDF Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options document has been prepared as the next stage towards getting an adopted Core Strategy in place. The Core Strategy sets out a spatial vision, strategic objectives and locational strategy for the Borough for the period up to 2026. It includes draft policies encompassing the economy, town and district centres, housing, open space, sport, leisure and cultural provision, design, environmental protection and transport infrastructure. Once adopted, the Core Strategy will form part of the development plan for the Borough, and will replace many of the policies in the Borough of Darlington Local Plan, that are currently 'saved'.
3. The Revised Preferred Options document has been prepared in response to feedback received during consultations last autumn on a Preferred Options document (Min C63 and Min EE51 refer). Significant additional work has also been undertaken to amass robust and credible evidence to underpin policy development (Min EESC, refers). Studies such as the Darlington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, the Employment Land Review 2009 and the Darlington Connections Study have all been recently completed and inform the revised draft policies presented in this new document.
4. Key changes from the Preferred Options document published last year are the addition of more information about how much new housing and employment development needs to be provided in the plan period, where and when, and more information on the infrastructure that will be required to support new development, including new transport provision.
5. Publication of the document and carrying out public and other consultations are important steps towards fulfilling the regulatory requirements for preparing a LDF Core Strategy, and maintaining progress in LDF preparation, in accordance with the Council's Local

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that:-
- (a) The contents of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options be agreed.
 - (b) The Local Development Framework Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options form the basis for carrying out public and other consultations, in line with regulatory requirements and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.
 - (c) The Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration), in consultation with the Economy Portfolio Holder, be authorised to make any minor changes to the wording prior to finalising the Revised Preferred Options document;
 - (d) The Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration), in consultation with the Economy Portfolio Holder, be authorised to undertake any further consultations that are necessary to enable a sound Core Strategy to be presented to Council and finalised for submission to the Government for public examination, in accordance with the timetable of preparation set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2009-2012.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) To continue to progress towards fulfilling the statutory requirements to have an up to date Local Development Framework in place.
 - (b) To avoid unnecessary delays in the remaining stages of LDF Core Strategy preparation.
 - (c) To fulfil the regulatory requirements of Local Development Framework document preparation.

Richard Alty
Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)

Background Papers

Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy: Issues and Options, January 2008
Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy: Preferred Options, October 2008
Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Preferred Options: Summary of Consultation Responses, February 2009 – see www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, Darlington Partnership 2008
Darlington Climate Change Strategy, 2006-2010 and Darlington Climate Change Action Plan 2009/10, Darlington Partnership, published in 2006 and 2009 respectively.
Darlington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, March 2009

Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment, February 2009
Darlington Employment Land Review, December 2009
Darlington Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Study, 2009
East Durham Limestone and Tees Plain Wind Farm Development and Landscape Capacity Study – Addendum, 2009
Darlington Gateway Strategy, 2006
Tees Valley Hotel Futures, September 2009
Darlington Retail Study, November 2008
Darlington Housing Strategy 2008-2012
Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2008
Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment, 2009
Tees Valley Green Infrastructure Strategy 2008
Darlington Open Space Strategy, 2007
Durham Biodiversity Action Plan, 2007
Darlington Sports and Recreation Facilities Strategy, 2009
Darlington Playing Pitch Strategy, 2009
Darlington Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2009
Darlington Connections Study, 2009
Darlington Transport Strategy, 2006-2030
Darlington Second Local transport Plan 2006-2011
Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options: Sustainability Appraisal Report, December 2009
Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options: Equalities Impact Assessment, November 2009
Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options: Disability Equalities Impact Assessment, November 2009

Valerie Adams: Extension 2477

S17 Crime and Disorder	Crime and Disorder is specifically considered in a policy CS2 that deals with the design of new development.
Health and Well Being	The Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options includes a theme ‘a healthy and safe Darlington’ which contains draft policies on green infrastructure and sport and recreation provision. This theme, together with a draft policy that promotes cycling and walking, will encourage and enable people to lead more active lifestyles and improve health and well being.
Sustainability	A sustainability appraisal has informed the preparation of the Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options and will be published alongside it. A Habitats Regulation Assessment has also been carried out.
Diversity	An Equalities Impact Assessment and disabilities impact assessment has been carried out on the LDF Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options, and informed policy development.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	Preparation of the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options is a key milestone in LDF preparation identified in the Council’s Regeneration Division Service Plan for 2009/10.
Key Decision	Yes.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision. On 22nd October, a Special Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the findings of technical studies that have underpinned this document’s preparation.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The LDF Core Strategy is the spatial expression of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
Efficiency	Some key pieces of work underpinning the preparation of the LDF Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options, such as the Employment Land Review, Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and the Sustainability Appraisal have been carried out ‘in house’, rather than being outsourced to consultants at greater cost. All consultations will be by e-mail where people are happy to receive information in this way, and people will be directed to the Council’s website, to look at material, saving costs on the number of paper documents that have to be distributed.

MAIN REPORT

Purpose of the Report

8. This report is to outline the content of the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options document, highlighting the revised approach proposed to some key planning issues and to seek Members' views on any of the content of the document.
9. The LDF will guide the development and use of land in Darlington to achieve the priorities set out in One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, and reflect the North East Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) at the local level. The Core Strategy will be the principal document of the LDF, overarching other more detailed policy documents, such as a forthcoming Accommodating Growth (site allocations) Development Plan Document, the adopted Design of New Development and the adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). More detail on these can be found in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2009-2012, available on the Council's website and agreed by Council in July 2009.

Previous Consideration

10. Members will recall:
 - (a) Cabinet 11th December 2007 (C130(4)) which considered the LDF Core Strategy: Issues and Options report and agreed that the report form the basis of public and other consultations.
 - (b) A Members Workshop on the LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options on 15th February 2008, where Members aired their views on specific issues in facilitated round table sessions.
 - (c) Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee 24th April 2008 (Min EE58/2008) which considered the consultation responses and next steps in the preparation of the LDF Core Strategy, following consultations on Issues and Options in February 2008;
 - (d) Cabinet 7th October 2008 (C63) which considered the LDF Core Strategy: Preferred Options and agreed its contents and that it form the basis for carrying out public and other consultations. Particular reference was made at the meeting to congestion issues that required to be tackled.
 - (e) Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee 26th February 2009 (Min EE51/2009), which received a report outlining the LDF Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation responses and next steps. The Committee resolved that additional consultations be undertaken to enable preparation of the Core Strategy to advance and that a further progress report be submitted to future meetings of the Committee
 - (f) Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee 22nd October 2009, which received a report outlining the evidence underpinning policy development for the LDF Core Strategy.

Outcome of Consultation

11. Over 75 written responses were received as a result of consultations on the Preferred Options last year, together with comments made by people who attended the 23 consultation events and meetings, including for younger people, older people, disabled people and black and minority ethnic people. A summary of responses received was published on the Council's website in February; this will be updated with how each comment has been responded to at the same time as the Revised Preferred Options are published, so that people can see how their comments have been taken into account.
12. A targeted consultation was also carried out in August 2009 on the proposed criteria to be used in assessing potential broad locations for new housing development. Responses were received from house builders/developers, service and utility providers and local interest groups. Their comments were taken into account in finalising the approach to identifying new housing locations and a note summarising the comments received and the response to them will be published on the Council's website at the time the Revised Preferred Options are published.

Sustainability Appraisal

13. It is a regulatory requirement that sustainability appraisal/strategic environmental assessment (SA) is carried out when developing the revised preferred options. SA was carried out during the process of policy development, so that the draft policies that appear in **Appendix 1** have taken account of the findings of SA.

Equalities Impact Assessment and Disability Equalities Impact Assessment

14. Equalities Impact Assessment and Disability Equalities Impact Assessment have been carried out during the preparation of the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options document, and these assessments will be published alongside the revised preferred options document – please see background papers.
15. Some key changes that have been made to address issues identified include:
 - (a) an amendment to the 'Housing for All' draft policy, so that the mix of housing that will be sought should include both housing for people with disabilities, and housing for older people, with the latter including housing capable of being readily adapted to meet a range of needs;
 - (b) replacing references to 'accessibility' to 'accessibility for all' in several policies;
 - (c) including reference in the 'Vibrant Cultural and Tourism Offer' draft policy to the range of visitor accommodation required, that should include provision to meet the needs of disabled people.
 - (d) An amendment to the 'Paying for Development Infrastructure' policy to indicate that planning obligations may be sought for the provision of special need housing as well as affordable housing.

LDF Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options - Content

16. The LDF Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options sets out a vision, strategic objectives, draft policies and proposals for the spatial planning of the Borough, together with information about how its provisions will be delivered, where, when, by whom. It also

indicates, to the extent that is possible with the information available, where the funding to implement the Strategy is expected to come from, and how progress in implementing the Strategy will be monitored.

17. The document is structured around the same seven themes that were presented in the earlier Issues and Options and Preferred Options documents. The themes are:
 - (a) achieving a more sustainable community;
 - (b) prosperous Darlington;
 - (c) a vibrant town centre and accessible local shops and services;
 - (d) quality housing for all;
 - (e) a distinctive, greener, cleaner environment;
 - (f) a healthy and safe Darlington; and
 - (g) efficient and effective transport infrastructure.
18. The draft policies and proposals are the revised preferred options for tackling the issues identified in the Issues and Options Report, and other issues subsequently identified, as further information has become available. The draft policies have been drawn up taking account of the responses received to the Issues and Options consultation and to the consultation on the Preferred Options. They also reflect One Darlington: Perfectly Placed, the sustainable community strategy for Darlington, and the most up to date national and regional planning policy, such as The North East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy, published in July 2008. The findings of the sustainability appraisal, a Habitat Regulations Assessment and equalities and disabilities equalities impact assessments have all also shaped the revised preferred options document. New local data, studies, plans and programmes, such as were outlined to the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 22nd October, have also informed policy development.
19. The remainder of this report highlights how the LDF Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options document tackles some of the key issues previously identified. It focuses on areas where there have been significant changes from the policy approach that was set out in the Preferred Options document, agreed by Cabinet in October 2008. A copy of the draft Core Strategy: Revised Preferred Options document is attached (**Appendix 1**); the version that will be published, if this report is agreed, would include additional illustrative diagrams and maps, introductory text and completed appendices. All background material, such as the sustainability appraisal and technical studies will also be published prior to or at this time.

The Spatial Vision and Strategic Objectives

20. These are not significantly different to those set out in the Preferred Options document, as they link directly to One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. Economic growth is at the heart of delivering the kind of environment and facilities in Darlington that people aspire to, but this is balanced by consideration of other quality of life issues, such as retaining the town at a human scale, safeguarding heritage, and creating an attractive and safe environment.

The Locational Strategy

21. Draft Policy CS1 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the locational strategy, including the key strategic locations where new development and regeneration will take place. The broad locations identified have not changed from those set out in the Preferred Options document, but the policy now provides more information about how much and what type of development is

envisaged in each location (e.g. housing, employment, town centre uses), and the priority order for delivery. The focus will be the main urban area, particularly the most accessible locations within it. New development at the town centre, in the town centre fringe and at Central Park will be key to delivering the overall spatial vision, but key locations around the urban fringe, such as the North West Urban Fringe and the Eastern Urban Fringe, together with the Durham Tees Valley Airport area, will also be needed for development to deliver the amount of new housing and employment development that Darlington needs to fulfil its economic aspirations, regional and sub-regional role, and to house local people and those that we want to attract to the Borough to work.

22. The broad locations encompass areas of land that already have planning permission for development/redevelopment and other areas that do not. It will be for another planning policy document, the Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document, to identify precisely which parcels of land should be allocated for different types of new development. The timetable for preparing this is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme 2009-2012, agreed by Council in July 2009. Work will begin on preparing this document in early 2010.

Promoting Good Quality, Sustainable Design

23. Draft Policy CS2 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the key considerations for architects and developers designing good quality, sustainable developments. The proposed policy differs from the Preferred Options version, in that it now accords with national sustainable building standards (the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM, as reflected in the recently adopted Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document). This change takes account of housebuilders comments about the feasibility and cost of achieving the higher standards set out in the Preferred Options version. Some of the technologies required to achieve the higher standards are not available yet, so requiring higher standards may have rendered much development in Darlington undeliverable.
24. The revised draft policy now also includes a reference to anti-social behaviour and removes reference to fear of crime, to reflect the approach taken by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and includes promoting energy management to ensure consistency with the regional planning policy approach.

Promoting Renewable Energy

25. Draft Policy CS3 (**Appendix 1**) has changed significantly from the one in the Preferred Options document, as it now includes renewable energy generation as part of all new developments generally, as well as commercial scale renewable energy generation.
26. The draft policy indicates that at least 20% of the energy supply of new developments in the strategic locations identified (see para. 21 above) should be from on-site or decentralised renewable or low carbon sources of energy, such as wind power, combined heat and power plants, and micro-renewables (e.g. small scale solar panels and wind turbines), and that for other major developments it should be at least 10%. The percentage required is higher in the strategic locations because these are not expected to come forward until 2016 at the earliest, by which time significant technological improvements are expected to make this readily deliverable.

27. Regarding renewable energy schemes as a form of development, the draft policy has been amended to reflect the need to consider schemes in the context of the wider sustainable development and climate change agenda. Three broad locations have been identified for commercial scale renewable energy developments, though these are not to the exclusion of other sustainable locations. The broad locations are:
- a) The North-east, North-west and South-east areas of the Borough for wind energy;
 - b) The town centre and Town Centre Fringe for biomass/combined heat and power installations; and
 - c) The town centre and Town Centre Fringe to support a district heating and cooling network.
28. Both these new elements of the policy are required to ensure that development in the Borough makes the appropriate contribution to regional and national targets for renewable energy provision and for the reduction of carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. This approach also accords with both ‘One Darlington: Perfectly Placed’ and Darlington Partnership’s Climate Change Strategy and related Action Plan.

Paying for Development Infrastructure

29. Draft Policy CS4 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the kinds of infrastructure that will be required as part of new developments. It provides the framework for securing contributions from developers towards the cost of affordable housing and the physical, community and green infrastructure required to create sustainable developments. Contributions can be for local provision directly related to the development, and in the case of larger schemes, for strategic infrastructure that meets the needs arising from many developments and the wider community.
30. The policy is not significantly different from the one that appeared in the Preferred Options document. Further work to assess the viability of housing land needs to be undertaken to understand how many of the infrastructure items listed in the policy, e.g. affordable housing, school places, etc. are likely to be deliverable on different sizes and types of sites within the Borough, under different scenarios of housing land value in the future. This work is essential to ensure that developer contributions are sought at a level that enables viable development in Darlington; if the requirements on developers are too much, they may not come to Darlington at all, putting key economic growth and housing delivery objectives in jeopardy.
31. The working detail of any approach to securing contributions from developers for infrastructure provision will be set out in a supplementary planning document on Paying for Community Infrastructure, preparation on which will begin shortly.

Supporting the Local Economy

32. Draft Policy CS5 (**Appendix 1**) now indicates the type of employment development proposed in each strategic location, e.g. logistics, business and general industry in the Faverdale area, and mixed use for more centrally located areas. Sites with special attributes for employment will also be safeguarded, so that a balanced portfolio of land for employment purposes is maintained.

33. The revised policy is underpinned by the recently completed Darlington Employment Land Review 2009, which updates work originally carried out as part of Taking Forward Darlington Gateway in 2006.

Vibrant Cultural and Tourism Offer

34. Draft Policy CS6 (**Appendix 1**) has been amended to take account of the findings of the 2009 Tees Valley Hotel Futures Study, and to give more prominence to cultural facilities both as part of the tourism offer, but also for its contribution to overall quality of life and opportunities for building stronger communities. Leisure facilities are now dealt with in a separate new 'sport and recreation provision' policy (see paragraph 65 below).
35. The approach to hotel development is essentially market led, but with particular prominence given in the policy to the encouragement that will be given to a new high quality hotel at Central Park. The hotels study found that hotels seeking to locate elsewhere would be complementary to, rather than competing with they type of hotel envisaged for Central Park.
36. Consideration was also given as to whether the policy could include a firm commitment to delivering a cultural quarter in the town centre fringe, in the general area of the Civic Theatre. This was rejected because initial feasibility work has not yet been undertaken. Wider consultations on the town centre fringe area, which will be undertaken in early 2010, could also be the appropriate forum for identifying the level of community support for it. The reference to a cultural quarter in the draft policy is therefore limited to encouraging the provision of a diverse range of cultural attractions and creative arts industries, particularly in the Town Centre Fringe to create the Darlington Cultural Quarter

Town Centre Development and Future Retail Provision

37. Draft policies CS7 to 9 (**Appendix 1**), which set out the proposed approach to town centre development and future retail provision, have not changed significantly from the Preferred Options versions. Policy CS7 does include more detail about the amount and type of new floor space required, to reflect the findings of the Darlington Retail Study (November 2008), and makes it clearer that the town centre will be the first preference for town centre uses, such as retail, offices, leisure and entertainment.
38. The prosperity of the town centre is fundamental to the well-being of the Borough. Draft policy CS7 aims to safeguard and enhance the centre's vitality and viability, and continues to embody both a proactive approach - encouraging and directing appropriate new development there - and a defensive one to proposals elsewhere which might undermine it. Retailing, particularly of comparison (non-food) goods, underpins the economy and role of the centre and the policy stresses the importance of securing the proposed development at Commercial Street ('the Oval' or a successor to it). The town centre also needs to diversify and other parts of the centre are identified as being the first priority location within the Borough for appropriate non-retail development, including office, leisure, entertainment uses; the Feethams/Beaumont Street area is specifically referred to.
39. The Town Centre Fringe is identified as the area for future expansion of the town centre when non-retail 'town centre uses' can no longer be accommodated within the inner ring road. Such extension of the town centre boundary is proposed to be in phases (in order to

maximise impact and the return on investment in infrastructure), with the first priority being eastwards from the present town centre towards the main line railway, with development there subject to improved connections for pedestrians and other non-car users across the inner ring road being in place.

40. Draft policy CS9 reaffirms the position of Darlington town centre at the top of the hierarchy of centres, and continues to propose as additions to the hierarchy 'local centres' at West Park and Middleton St. George.

New Housing: Housing Numbers

41. Draft policy CS10 (**Appendix 1**) sets out how many new homes need to be delivered in the Borough from 2011-2026, where and when, and the percentage that will be built on previously developed (brownfield) land.
42. About 6,000 new dwellings will be needed between 2011 and 2026 to meet the housing requirements set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). About 2,200 will be needed in the first five years (2011-2016), about 1,800 from 2016-2021 and about 2000 from 2021 to 2026, taking account of national policy, which indicates that some flexibility needs to be built into the housing requirement figures to avoid the need for frequent updating. These figures translate to about 450 dwellings each year from 2011-2016, about 350 per year from 2016-2021 and about 400 per year for 2021-2026. These compare with levels at around 500 dwellings per annum that were achieved during the early to mid 2000s, when the housing market was at its peak. The figures are the same as were set out in the Preferred Options document, except for 2011-2016, where 50 dwellings fewer per annum are proposed, reflecting lower confidence in delivery of the higher house building rates envisaged 12 to 18 months ago.
43. The figures do not allow for the accelerated housing delivery that the Tees Valley is committed to as part of its Housing Growth Point (HGP) status. This is because in the economic downturn, the focus of HGP work has been on unlocking stalled housing sites to maintain housing delivery, a more achievable and deliverable objective.

New Housing: Selecting Strategic Locations

44. The new housing required can largely be accommodated, particularly in the first 10 years of the plan period, on sites that already have planning permission within the main urban area of Darlington, such as West Park, Central Park and Lingfield Point, and on sites that have been identified as suitable, available and deliverable in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Study, completed in March 2009. Over the plan period, existing planning permissions are expected to yield about 3300 new houses, and sites identified in the SHLAA could provide about 700 new dwellings on urban sites. However, in the periods 2016-2021 and 2021-2026, new housing development is likely to be needed on greenfield land on the urban fringe. The number of new houses for which new land needs to be identified is about 1000 in 2016-2021, and about 1300 in 2021-2026.
45. In accordance with the RSS, which indicates that priority should be given to identifying land for new development in the most accessible locations, and where it makes use of previously developed land, the 'Town Centre Fringe' (an area extending from Northgate

and the Bishop Auckland Branch Line in a clockwise direction around the town centre as far as the Bank Top Station and Feethams area to the south, and bounded by the East Coast Rail Line to the east), and the 'Darlington Urban Area' in general are identified as the first and second priority as strategic locations for new housing development (see plan at **Appendix 2**). The Town Centre Fringe is estimated to be able to accommodate about 750 additional new dwellings over the plan period, and the wider urban area a similar number.

46. Following the approach to the site selection set out in the RSS, five broad locations around the urban fringe (see plan at **Appendix 2**) have been assessed as potential strategic locations for new housing development. These broad locations are the North West Urban Fringe, Northern Urban Fringe, North-Eastern Urban Fringe (including north and east areas), Western Urban Fringe and Southern Urban Fringe. The criteria for assessing the potential locations were drawn from the RSS and national planning policy guidance, together with some local criteria, finalised after targeted consultations with key stakeholders in August 2009. The criteria cover things like access to local shops and services, access to high frequency bus services, walking and cycling routes, the capacity of the highway and other physical and social infrastructure, such as schools, to support significant new development. A range of environmental factors, such as flood risk and potential for energy to be supplied from renewable or low carbon sources, were also taken into consideration.
47. Taking into account all the information collected for each of the criteria (see summary at **Appendix 2**), the North Western Urban Fringe emerged as the most suitable strategic locations at the urban fringe for new housing development, and the Eastern Urban Fringe as the second most suitable. Over the Core Strategy period, it is anticipated that the North Western Urban Fringe location could deliver an additional 600 dwellings and the Eastern Urban Fringe about 200; both locations would have the potential for further housing development beyond 2026, and this would be needed in order to support the provision of the necessary infrastructure to create sustainable communities, e.g. primary schools, local shops and other services, high frequency bus routes.
48. The RSS sets a previously developed land (PDL) target of 75% for the North East overall by 2016. Existing commitments and housing completions on sites that already have planning permission will contribute to meeting the 2016 target, but the delivery of new housing in the strategic locations of Central Park, the Town Centre Fringe and Lingfield Point will be key to delivering a high proportion of new dwellings on PDL.

New Housing :Density

49. The proposed density range for new development of 30-50 dwellings per hectare would allow for a range of new housing layouts to be provided across the Borough, to meet identified needs and demand, and would concentrate high density in the areas with the greatest accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport. The density range proposed accords with the target range set out in the RSS.

Meeting Housing Needs

50. Draft policy CS11 (**Appendix 1**) sets out how housing to meet needs and aspirations will be achieved. An important way of securing a mix of housing, including affordable housing and special needs housing, is as part of new private housing developments, though the Council's own newly reinstated housebuilding programme will complement this.

51. The findings of the Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2009) enable us to be more precise now about the type of new housing that is most needed in the housing stock generally (detached family housing of 4 or more bedrooms), and whilst lifetime homes are still considered desirable, the proposed policy approach recognises the additional costs associated with providing these, and refers to housing capable of being readily adapted to meet a range of needs instead, and places this alongside specific reference to housing for older people to be part of the new housing mix. This approach should enable more homes overall to be delivered with layouts or features built in that minimise the cost of the most frequently requested and most costly adaptations that are increasingly being sought.
52. However, great care needs to be taken in imposing requirements on developers, because if these are too onerous, they could dissuade housebuilders from developing in the Borough at all, particularly in the housing market conditions that are likely to prevail in the first part of the plan period. This could make it difficult to provide both the total number and the types of new houses that are needed. Also, because of limited value in new housing developments, requiring more affordable housing could reduce the amount of adaptable housing that developers can provide, so the policy attempts to balance these two key 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed' housing priorities. The economic assessment of land (see paragraph 30 above) will provide the evidence to underpin affordable housing targets, which will need to be finalised and consulted on before the Core Strategy is published for public examination; development viability has been introduced to the draft policy to flag up this issue.
53. No changes are proposed to the threshold size of development that triggers the need to contribute towards the provision of a mix of housing, including affordable housing; these are the thresholds set out in the Council's Affordable Housing SPD which have now been in place for two and a half years and are standing up to the test of time.

The Existing Housing Stock

54. Draft Policy CS12 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the proposed policy relating to all tenures of the existing housing stock. This draft policy differs from the Preferred Options version in that it identifies the public housing areas (Parkside, Red Hall and Branksome) alongside the private housing areas (Town Centre Fringe and North Road area) where regeneration and improvement of existing housing will be focussed. It also highlights that priority will be given to repairing, adapting and remodelling existing housing, particularly to improve energy efficiency, where this is financially viable. Also, note that whilst the reference to community engagement has been removed from the policy, this is not diluting the Council's commitment to community engagement; this is already given in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement and does not need repeating in this policy, as it applies equally to all policies.

Accommodating Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

55. Draft Policy CS13 sets out the criteria that will be applied in the selection of new gypsy sites and in dealing with proposals for new gypsy sites. This policy is a national planning policy requirement.

56. The draft policy only differs from the Preferred Options version in that it now specifically encompasses Gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople, and indicates that the first choice for accommodating them should be locations within existing settlements, then edge of settlements and then brownfield land in other locations.
57. A Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment was completed this year, providing new evidence about the number of new pitches that are required in the Borough. However, further work is needed to translate the findings of the assessment into an apportionment for Darlington Borough of the sub-regional need identified. This figure can be included in the forthcoming Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document, where specific site allocations to meet the requirement identified will have to be made.

Local Character and Distinctiveness

58. Draft policy CS14 (see **Appendix 1**) now avoids overlap with other draft policies dealing with biodiversity and green infrastructure. Previously identified local landscape character areas have been replaced with references to Natural England's natural areas, to ensure consistency across regional and local policy. References to heritage have been expanded to reflect local aspirations to protect more locally important buildings and features, as well as nationally recognised listed buildings.

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

59. Draft policy CS15 (see **Appendix 1**) has been made more specific to Darlington, compared with the Preferred Options version; it reflects the Council's aspirations to protect and extend the priority habitats identified in the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan for Darlington, and now includes for the protection and improvement of watercourses and wetland, another emerging focus of the Countryside section's work.

Protecting Environmental Resources and Human Health and Safety

60. Draft Policy CS16 (**Appendix 1**) reflects national planning and other guidance on the protection of a range of environmental resources, such as areas of flood risk, air, land, water and aquifer quality. Through controls on new development, it also protects the community and the environment from adverse ambient conditions, such as noise and light pollution, and contaminated and unstable land. An updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment unpins this policy and its findings have also been taken into account in selecting the strategic locations for new development to ensure that future flood risk to Darlington's population and places of employment is minimised.

Green Infrastructure

61. Draft policy CS17 (see **Appendix 1**) has not been significantly changed: formal and informal open spaces and allotments have been added to the types of green spaces that are part of the green infrastructure network.

Sport and Recreation Provision

62. Draft policy CS18 is a new policy (**Appendix 1**) to address the strategic planning policy issues that have emerged from the findings of the Playing Pitch Strategy and the Sport and

Recreation Facilities Strategy, both completed in July 2009. The Playing Pitch Strategy identified a significant shortfall of junior playing pitches, and as a result, the draft policy sets out a presumption in favour of retaining all sport and recreation facilities (including playing pitches). It also identifies strategic hubs for playing pitches at Blackwell Meadows and to the north of the Football Arena, in addition to the existing hub at Eastbourne Sports Complex; the latter is also identified as a hub for indoor sport and recreation provision, along with the Dolphin Centre. The draft policy also requires secured community use of any new pitches or other sport and recreational facilities.

63. Without all the elements outlined above, together with the actions identified in the Playing Pitch Action Plan for Children's Services and Leisure Services (e.g. securing community use of school pitches, improving the quality of public pitches), there would be a need to identify significant additional land for playing pitches in the forthcoming Accommodating Growth Supplementary Planning Document.

Improving Transport Infrastructure and the role of Darlington Cross Town Route

64. Draft policy CS19 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the transport infrastructure improvements that are planned over the lifetime of the Strategy. The policy refers to, and gives public commitment to schemes like the Tees Valley Metro, where there is a reasonable prospect of implementation over the next 15 years or so. In this context, consideration has also been given to including the remaining sections of the Darlington Cross Town Route in the policy.
65. A corridor of land was safeguarded for the Darlington Cross Town Route (CTR) in Policy T6 of the adopted Local Plan. Of the whole route that was identified from the A68 at Faverdale to the A67 at Middleton St George, only two sections have been implemented, at Faverdale and the Eastern Transport Corridor.
66. Consultations on this issue have showed both support and opposition for continuing to safeguard the proposed route from development, the support coming largely from those with land and development interests in north-west Darlington, and opposition from environmentalists and a range of landowners and businesses with land and premises within or directly adjacent to the existing safeguarded route, who have already faced years of uncertainty.
67. Since consultation on the Preferred Options was undertaken, consultants Urban Initiatives were commissioned to undertake a study into the feasibility of the CTR, and consequential work from this has also been undertaken. This work has concluded that:
 - (a) The CTR would bring projected benefits to road users in specific parts of Darlington – along Brinkburn Road and West Auckland Road. However, it would cause significant additional delays on other roads, particularly the junctions with Haughton and North Roads. By encouraging more traffic to come through the middle of Darlington, the CTR will increase congestion rather than relieve it.
 - (b) construction of the Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor and Rotary Way has opened up much of the development land that the CTR was originally going to serve, removing the need to construct the central section for economic regeneration purposes;
 - (c) because the estimated scheme costs of at least £86m are so substantial, and because the scheme has no supportive policy context, nationally or regionally, it is highly unlikely to be funded in the foreseeable future;

- (d) continuing to reserve the corridor for the CTR central section is not cost free, since compensation may have to be paid to landowners;
 - (e) the visual impact and impact on residential amenity of the raised section that would be required would be significant in some areas, such as the Whessoe Road area, introducing a form of road-building alien to the quality of Darlington's urban environment.
68. The above conclusions indicate that the benefits of the scheme are marginal in funding terms, no funding has been committed, and there is little realistic likelihood of funding being committed in the foreseeable future. Because deliverability is a key test of soundness for a LDF document, no proposal for completing the remaining sections of the Cross Town Route have been included in draft revised policy CS19; if the Core Strategy is found to be unsound by the Planning Inspectorate, it would have to be withdrawn, setting the preparation process back by an estimated further year to eighteen months.
69. One of the issues that it was thought that completion of the Cross Town Route might alleviate is traffic congestion. Credible, proven, alternative actions exist to tackle congestion in the three pronged delivery of the Council's current Transport Strategy. This is focused on tackling congestion by, in the short-term, removing the pinch-points at key junctions (like on West Auckland Road/Woodlands Road) and better managing the network, whilst, in the longer term, reducing demand by providing alternative travel options. This strategy is beginning to show results and provides a better alternative to tackling congestion than planning to construct a road designed to bring more traffic through the centre of the town.

Achieving A Sound Plan

70. A key difference between the preparation of the Local Plan and the process of preparing documents for the LDF is the need for 'soundness' to be demonstrated. To be sound the Core Strategy needs to be founded on a robust and credible evidence base, it needs to be consistent with national policy, and the strategy it advocates should be the most appropriate, when considered against the reasonable alternatives. It also needs to be deliverable, flexible and able to be monitored. The test of deliverability is now a key one; sources of funding need to be identified to pay for development or infrastructure, and the evidence for this must be strong enough to stand up to independent scrutiny.
71. Independent scrutiny of the 'soundness' of the LDF Core Strategy will take place once the document has been submitted to the Government for examination (see Next Steps below). This scrutiny of soundness will be carried out by the Planning Inspectorate, and it will be binding on the Council to make any changes to the document that the Inspector recommends. There have been circumstances nationally where the changes that the Inspector wanted to make to an authority's LDF core strategy were so fundamental to the direction of the Strategy that it has been declared unsound by the Inspectorate and the authority has had no choice but to withdraw it and work on a revised version for resubmission.

Impact of Current Economic Circumstances

72. The LDF Core Strategy is for the period 2011-2026. Based on trends in the housing market, in unemployment and in the retail sector to mid 2009, some commentators are forecasting

that the economy may still be recovering to early 2008 levels in 2012-2014, the early years of the plan period. The implications of this for the plan are that:

- (a) levels of new housebuilding may fall even further behind RSS targets, making it difficult to achieve the total requirement for the whole of the RSS period (2004-2021) without significant public sector intervention. Policy CS10 indicates how the release of housing land in the strategic locations identified may have to be brought forward if there is insufficient progress on sites in more suitable locations like the Town Centre Fringe and the main urban area;
- (b) it may take several more years than currently anticipated for particularly complex and costly schemes, such as Central Park to become viable. Sites that were on the margins of viability in the strongest market conditions of 2007/08 (e.g. where significant contamination issues or and assembly needed to be tackled), will be unlikely to become viable again until well into the plan period, as developers favour less risky, more straightforward, often smaller schemes;
- (c) public sector funding may be less than currently envisaged, reducing the ability of the Council and others to create the conditions to support and accelerate economic growth and to support the development of more sustainable communities.

Next Steps and the Requirements for Consultation

- 73. Subject to Cabinet's agreement of the recommendations, public and other consultations will take place on the LDF Core Strategy: Preferred Options from late January, in accordance with regulatory requirements and the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement in Planning. A Members Briefing will also be arranged prior to consultations commencing.
- 74. These consultations are to find out what the public and other stakeholders think of the Council's Preferred Options. Respondents to this consultation may suggest that an option rejected by the Council or an option that has not yet be considered by the Council should be chosen instead. They may also provide new information that could change the Council's view about its Preferred Option.
- 75. All consultation responses will be considered alongside any further consultations that are necessary to finalise sound policies and proposals. A LDF Core Strategy, in the form that the Council would want to submit to the Government for public examination, will then be presented to Council for its agreement. With the further statutory stages that are required, it is anticipated that the Council will be able to adopt a finalised Core Strategy in 2011.