

2. CONTEXT

2.0.1 The draft policies and proposals in this document have been prepared having regard to national planning policy statements, such as the National Planning Policy Framework, and local strategies, such as the Darlington Economic Strategy and the Darlington Housing Strategy, that have been completed since the Core Strategy was adopted.

2.0.2 The policies are also being drawn up in consultation with neighbouring local planning authorities and other bodies with whom the Council now has a duty to co-operate (under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011) and the implications of neighbourhood planning, also introduced by the Localism Act, have been considered in developing this document.

2.1 Strategic Planning Policies

2.1.1 The Council's adopted Core Strategy sets out the strategic planning policies guiding the use and development of land in the Borough. The vision, objectives and policies of the Core Strategy are the starting point for developing the more detailed and site specific draft policies contained in this document.

2.1.2 The spatial vision for the Local Plan is set out in the Core Strategy. It states that 'By 2026 Darlington will be a more sustainable community where a real step change has been achieved in enhancing the quality of life and local environment, and expanding local opportunities for work and for sustainable travel. Those who live in, work in or visit the Borough will enjoy the opportunities and vibrant life of an ambitious city, but within the fabric of a friendly, historic market town with a distinctive atmosphere, surrounded by attractive countryside and villages'.

2.1.3 The strategic objectives in the Core Strategy have also shaped the policy approach of this document. The eight strategic objectives include two cross cutting objectives and six theme specific objectives are summarised in Table 2.1.1 below^{2.1}.

^{2.1}The objectives in full are on page 17 of the adopted Core Strategy.

Table 2.1.1: Summary of Local Plan Strategic Objectives

Objective No.	Content
1	Minimise the impact of and adapt to climate change, by making more sustainable use of land and resources, promoting sustainable development and reducing human exposure to environmental risks.
2	Providing equal opportunities for everyone, now and in the future, by helping to create more sustainable communities and reduce locational disadvantage.
3	Support sustainable economic growth by ensuring there is enough attractive and suitable land for local businesses to expand and to attract new businesses with well paid jobs.
4	Provide enough choice of land for housing and improve and reuse existing stock to better meet local needs and aspirations, including for older people and those needing affordable housing.
5	Protect and capitalise on the functions of Darlington Town Centre so it can continue to be a vibrant, attractive, safe, friendly and comfortable historic market town centre.
6	Protect and enhance the historic and natural environment, and providing and upgrading a range of community facilities, recognising that these all contribute to the happiness, fulfilment, health and well being of residents and visitors alike.
7	Strengthen the unique character, function, intrinsic quality and sense of place of the many facets and areas of Darlington Borough.
8	Support the promotion of sustainable transport and tackle congestion, to make travel for all as easy and affordable as possible, both with the Borough and on the key links to/from the Borough.

(source: Darlington LDF Core Strategy, 2011)

^{2.2}See adopted Core Strategy Policy CS1.

- 2.1.4 The Core Strategy also clearly sets out the priority locations for new development and regeneration in the Borough^{2.2}. The Town Centre, Central Park and then the Town Centre Fringe are the priorities for development and regeneration, whilst the same locations, as well as Lingfield Point, Faverdale, Morton Palms and Durham Tees Valley Airport are identified as the strategic locations for employment development. New housing will be focussed on the main urban area, particularly Central Park, the Town Centre Fringe and Lingfield Point, but significant additional land is also needed at the North West Urban Fringe and Eastern Urban Fringe. The Core Strategy also recognises Darlington's distinctive landscapes and townscapes, and it's built, historic and natural environments, and seeks to safeguard and enhance their intrinsic integrity.

2.2 National Planning Policy Context

- 2.2.1 New national policy documents, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning for Traveller Sites were published in 2012, after the Council adopted its Core Strategy in 2011. The Council has reviewed the policies in its Core Strategy (see background doc) and concluded that the plan is consistent with the NPPF, except for Policy CS10: New Housing Development. This does not reflect the new requirement in NPPF to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land.

- 2.2.2 Draft Policy MGP16 in this document is intended to rectify this; once adopted, the housing delivery and phasing indicated in this document will supersede that set out in Policy CS10 of the Core Strategy.

2.3 Sustainable Economic Growth

- 2.3.1 The NPPF reminds us that the focus of good planning should be sustainable economic growth. The Darlington Core Strategy provides that focus, and the more detailed policies, proposals and site allocations proposed in this document will give further expression to that. In doing so, this document reflects more up-to-date economic forecasts and the priorities indicated in the Darlington Economic Strategy 2012..

- 2.3.2 This document also recognises the contribution that housebuilding can make to the local economy. It allocates new land for about 2,300 homes, which is in addition to about 3100 new homes that have been completed since April 2011 or which are in the pipeline^{2.3}. It allocates both previously developed land in locations where development will be supported by significant public sector investment, as well as a range and choice of greenfield sites, both within and on the edge of the urban area.

^{2.3}with planning permission and either underway or not yet started.

- 2.3.3 Elsewhere in this document, the significant contribution of the town centre and retailing to the local economy is recognised, as is the potential of railway heritage tourism. Work done recently on a town centre strategy and a town centre fringe masterplan underpins new land allocations for retail, mixed use, leisure and commercial development in this document, whilst the work of the Rail Heritage Enquiry Group has informed proposals in the North Road/railway museum area.
- 2.3.4 Recognising that new development needs to be supported by investment in infrastructure, this document sets out the priorities for investment in it, including significant remodelling of the inner ring road, new car parking provision in/around the

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town centre, and the provision of a new north-south green corridor through the Town Centre Fringe, focussed on the River Skerne.

2.4 Presumption in favour of sustainable development

- 2.4.1 The NPPF also articulates a presumption in favour of sustainable development. This presumption is at the heart of the national approach to planning, and through the Planning Inspectorate, the Government is requesting that all Councils include a policy covering this in their Local Plan.
- 2.4.2 The option to not include the policy has been considered and rejected on the basis of the potential extra work and costs that would be involved in defending the Council's decision not to. As the approach accords with the Council's development plan approach, it was identified that there was no issue in including the policy.
- 2.4.3 This policy, together with others in the adopted Darlington Core Strategy and proposed in this document, will help to make sure that decisions are taken in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. It is included in this document because it is the first local plan document to be prepared since the NPPF was published, and it contains similar detailed development management policies.

Draft Policy MGP1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

A positive approach to considering development proposals will be taken that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. Where appropriate, the Council will work proactively with applicants to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan (including, where relevant, with policies in neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Proposed development that conflicts with the development plan will be refused, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then permission will be granted unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

- any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or*
- specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted.*

- 2.4.4 The policy will be implemented and monitored by making and reviewing decisions on planning applications. Following this consultation, the viability of the local plan overall will be assessed, taking into account the policy requirements set out in this plan, the Core Strategy and any of the Council's supplementary planning documents. This will be completed in time to inform the next version of this document, Making and Growing Places: Publication Draft.

2.5 Other local policies, plans, strategies and studies

2.5.1 The content of this document takes account of policies, plans, strategies and studies prepared by the Council and its partners. Some of the more recent examples include the Darlington Economic Strategy (2012), the Darlington Housing Strategy (2012) and the Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013). A full list of the local documents that have been taken into account is set out in **Appendix 3**.

2.6 Duty to Co-operate

2.6.1 Under its duty to co-operate, the Council has engaged with and will continue to engage with the organisations listed in Table 2.2 during the preparation of the Making and Growing Places DPD to date. The duty requires that councils and public bodies ‘engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis’ to develop strategic policies and for Council’s to consider joint approaches to plan making.

Table 2.6.1: Organisations engaged with under the Duty to Co-operate

Organisation
Durham County Council
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
Middlesbrough Borough Council
Hartlepool Borough Council
Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
Hambleton District Council
Richmondshire District Council
Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group
National Health Service Commissioning Board
Environment Agency
English Heritage
Natural England
Civil Aviation Authority
Homes and Communities Agency
Office of the Rail Regulator
Highways Agency
Darlington Council (as local highway authority)

2.6.2 In addition to the above, as required by Regulations, the Council has had regard to the Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership and the Tees Valley Local Nature Partnership in preparing this plan. A full statement of the actions taken by the Council under its duty to co-operate will be published alongside the Publication Draft version of this document in due course.

2.7 Neighbourhood Planning

2.7.1 The Localism Act 2011 gives local communities the power to help decide where development should go and the type and design of development, by preparing neighbourhood plans for their areas. The Act places a duty on the Borough Council to support such work.

2.7.3 Once adopted, neighbourhood plans become part of the statutory development plan for the area. Planning applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

2.7.4 Any neighbourhood plan prepared within Darlington Borough must be in general conformity with the strategic policies that are included in the Darlington Core Strategy. Further information on neighbourhood planning can be found in the planning policy

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area of the Council's website www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy or on
www.gov.uk.

- 2.7.2 As the Council is in the early stages of preparing its detailed Local Plan site allocations and development management policies for the area, it will be making efforts to engage with all sections of the community to get their feedback on the options in each policy area. It is hoped that through this engagement, the policies in the Local Plan that will guide where development should go and the type and design of development will, wherever possible, reflect local community wishes, without the need for communities to prepare their own neighbourhood plans.