

## 4. PROSPEROUS DARLINGTON

### 4.1 PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

#### Context

<sup>4.1</sup> Darlington Core Strategy (May 2011); Policy CS1 and CS5.

4.1.1 The Core Strategy<sup>4.1</sup> indicates generally where and how a continuous and diverse supply of employment land will be provided within the Borough to meet the needs of existing and future economic development. It planned for up to 235ha of additional land for general and mixed use employment across the Borough in the period to 2026.

<sup>4.2</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2012) Paragraph 22

4.1.2 National planning policy<sup>4.2</sup> suggests that employment sites should not be protected over the long term if there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. It also indicates that where that is the case, planning applications for alternative uses should be treated on their merits, having regard to market signals and the relative need for different land uses to support sustainable local communities.

<sup>4.3</sup> Review of Business Sites and Premises; NLP/DTZ, 2013

4.1.3 Since the Core Strategy was adopted, a business sites and premises review has been carried out<sup>4.3</sup> updating earlier evidence<sup>4.4</sup> and taking account of the latest local economic strategy<sup>4.5</sup>. It found that the Borough's economy experienced strong job growth during the early-mid 2000s, but a severe contraction post-recession. Currently strong economic sectors include services, manufacturing, advanced engineering and construction, whilst emerging strengths are forecast to include digital and media, subsea, and telehealth and telecare.

<sup>4.4</sup> Darlington Employment Land Review; Report and Recommendations (DBC, 2009)

4.1.4 The study also found that although the area's office stock has been enhanced by a number of recent developments, the town is still a secondary office location. It also found there to be a significant supply of available employment land. The study suggests that:

<sup>4.5</sup> Economic Strategy for Darlington 2012-2026 (DBC, Darlington Partnership)

- embedding major 'footloose' businesses within the local economy should remain a key priority;
- about 110ha of employment land should be provided in the Local Plan;
- land next to the main highway and rail infrastructure should be protected to support development within the advanced manufacturing and subsea sectors for Darlington; and
- more premises of 250-600ft<sup>2</sup> and more move-on space is needed in the Borough's main industrial estates, either as new build development or subdivision and refurbishment of larger, older buildings;

4.1.5 Since the study data was collected, new national initiatives to support employment growth have been announced and new information has become available. For example:

- the Council is contributing to work to secure City Deal status for the Tees Valley, which, if successful could bring more public investment to prepare key employment sites for development to Darlington;
- Tees Valley Unlimited is researching the needs of the large scale logistics markets to better understand how large scale sites such as those at Faverdale Reserve (Policies Map ref KEL1) could attract such uses;
- There is new interest in certain sites, such as for a data centre on the Faverdale Reserve site (see Policies Map KEL1), for employment development on the Faverdale East Business Park site which is currently being marketed (see Policies Map EN1), and Yarm Road South<sup>4.6</sup>, where a Regional Growth Fund bid is being submitted to reflect current employment interest in the site.

<sup>4.6</sup> The site area has reduced slightly since the BSPR work was undertaken to take in some land to the adjacent nature reserve .

**Issues**

4.1.6 The main issues considered in developing a policy promoting employment opportunities were:

- what are the employment land needs over the plan period;
- what existing employment land should be protected;
- where and how many allocations of available employment land should be made; and
- whether more flexibility of uses should be applied to any of the employment sites.

4.7 Business Sites and Premises Review (BSPR) (NLP, 2013)

4.1.7 The business sites and premises review<sup>4.7</sup> suggests far less land (about 110ha) is needed than is currently allocated (about 360ha), taking into account forecasts of employment growth and what employment land supply is needed for the growth of particular sectors within the borough. The review also assessed a wide portfolio of potential employment land<sup>4.8</sup>, including existing employment sites currently in use, unused land within existing sites that could provide for expansion, sites currently included in saved policy EP2 of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan, sites suggested in previous consultations<sup>4.9</sup>, and the poorest sites recommended for deallocation<sup>4.10</sup>.

4.8 BSPR Section 5 and Employment Land Review; Report and Recommendations (DBC, 2009)

4.9 Accommodating Growth Issues and Options Consultation (November 2010)

4.1.8 The sites and premises review also recommended applying flexibility and pragmatism within the planning process to ensure that employment developments can be brought forward, suggesting that alternative uses within existing employment sites should be considered where it can clearly be shown that these improve or enhance the overall area.

4.10 Business Sites and Premises Review; (NLP, 2013) Section 5

**Options Considered**

4.1.9 The options considered regarding how much employment land to allocate were;

- a) allocate employment land entirely in accordance with the sites and premises review recommendations. This would result in 112.96ha of land being allocated for employment uses, with a further 27.9ha identified for airport-related uses at Durham Tees Valley Airport, and 50.93ha in the Yarm Road South and Faverdale Reserve areas being reserved for employment beyond the plan period. Land currently allocated at Drinkfield and McMullen Road East would be deallocated, and part of the land at the North West Urban Fringe would be identified to help to address the shortfall in high quality office accommodation (see Policy MGP5). This would accord with the views expressed by stakeholders at a recent consultation<sup>4.11</sup>.
- b) allocate employment land taking account of the sites and premises review evidence and other up to date local economic information. This would allow account to be taken of the complementary information set out in 4.1.5 above.

4.11 Accommodating Growth Issues and Options consultation, winter 2010/11.

4.1.10 The only option considered regarding flexibility of uses within employment areas was as recommended in the sites and premises review (see Para 4.1.8 above).

**Preparing a Draft Policy**

4.12 Accommodating Growth Development Plan Document (DPD) Issues and Options consultation November 2010

4.1.11 The sustainability appraisal general found option (b) to be the most sustainable. The two options presented differ only in their exclusion or inclusion of three large potential employment sites. The sites scored positively on both social and economic sustainability objectives, but negatively against environmental ones. However, the appraisal indicates that they are not the least sustainable of other sites considered as part of the exercise that are included in option (a). Overall, provided the required mitigation measures are carried out, the appraisal found option (b) to be the most sustainable, since its advantage in terms of social and economic sustainability outweighs the additional environmental impact that will come from development of its three additional sites.

4.1.12 Previous consultations<sup>4.12</sup> generated a variety of views on employment land issues. In 2010, general comments included support for the broad locations for new employment development, a need for more manufacturing, a view that there was inadequate provision of high quality business parks and too much employment land, and a number of site specific comments. Comments were also received regarding the impact of employment uses, e.g. traffic congestion, noise, effect on local nature sites.

4.13 Further details of the responses, together with the outcome of the Business Survey, are included within the Business Sites and Premises Review

4.1.13 A more recent event with developers and commercial agents active in the Borough<sup>4.13</sup> suggested that Darlington should be economically aspirational, and plan to deliver growth, by distinguishing itself in the wider economy and property market. Views were also expressed that additional land allocations could be potentially harmful to existing allocations, given the current oversupply of employment land, and that there should be fewer restrictions and more flexibility on single uses of sites, including to enable higher value uses to cross subsidise speculative development or the provision of infrastructure on employment sites. Alternative uses should be similar in character to the allocated or existing use, e.g. in terms of job numbers, environmental impact, etc.

4.1.14 The review recommendations have been balanced against other considerations, such as the momentum that could be generated by more recent interest and initiatives (outlined in paragraph 4.1.5 above) and the need to have a range and choice of sites. Also, in Darlington Borough, the disadvantages of retaining large areas of land for employment use that might not get taken up in the plan period are not considered to outweigh the benefits indicated above. For example, land at Faverdale East Park is not considered suitable for other uses<sup>4.14</sup>.

4.14 Darlington Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment Update (3) Autumn 2011; Site 97 St Modwens Site, Faverdale (DBC, 2012)

4.1.15 Taking account of all of the above, Option b) has been selected as the preferred option, and is reflected in Policy MGP 11 below. It recognises that it would be premature to deallocate sites until the outcomes of ongoing work and recent expressions of interest are known, as there is still a reasonable prospect of employment uses being delivered on the three sites identified. Their retention does not prejudice identifying enough suitable land for other uses in the plan, and will ensure that a range and choice of employment land is available to meet all user requirements over the plan period.

4.1.16 The policy also includes a requirement for a particularly high standard of design on those sites where it is considered justified due to location (prestige employment locations), and land is identified for high quality business parks in a range of locations to address consultation responses and the sites and premises review findings.

4.1.17 The preferred option also recognises the contribution that alternative uses can make to employment areas, where they comply with the objectives of the plan and are applied consistently, and can help to realise the development of employment uses, and the continued retention and attractiveness of employment sites. Acceptable uses are predominantly those that have a similar character to employment uses, but may not be in the same use class, and could include training centres related to employment in the industries on the estate, or related to a particular occupier, genuinely ancillary uses, or more diverse uses where they relate to the function of the estate or the surrounding area.

4.1.18 The preferred option, whilst planning for employment development in specific locations, recognises that employment uses outside of the employment areas identified can make a contribution to the local economy, where they are in suitable locations with compatible uses able to co-exist alongside one another. To this extent it is required that employment uses outside of employment areas will be suitable where they comply with the other policies in the plan and have no adverse

effect on: the amenity of adjacent occupiers, the character of the area, and the surrounding environment.

- 4.1.19 The proposed planning approach at Durham Tees Valley Airport, which includes provision for employment uses, is dealt with in draft Policy MGP 7. The identification of land for a small high quality office development at the North West Urban Fringe, for small and medium sized enterprises, will be identified through masterplanning for the wider site (see draft Policy MGP 5).

#### **Draft Policy MGP 11: Promoting Employment Opportunities**

##### **Existing employment areas**

*The following existing employment areas, as shown on the Policies Map, are safeguarded as employment areas. Within these areas, planning permission will be granted for business (Use Class B1), general industrial (Use Class B2) and storage and distribution (Use Class B8) uses, and initiatives to improve (through refurbishment, subdivision or replacement) existing buildings, to allow their continued contribution to the local economy:*

EE1 Faverdale Industrial Area (including Faverdale East Business Park);  
EE2 Cleveland Street;  
EE3 Albert Hill;  
EE4 Red Barnes Way  
EE5 Banks Road;  
EE6 Lingfield Point;  
EE7 Yarm Road Industrial area;  
EE9 Aycliffe Industrial Estate  
EEP1 Yarm Road South  
EEP2 Morton Palms

*Sites EEP1 (Yarm Road South) and EEP2 (Morton Palms), as shown on the Policies Map, are safeguarded for Prestige Employment Development.*

##### **New Employment Sites**

*The following sites, as shown on the Policies Map, are allocated for new employment within use classes B1, B2 and B8, to meet employment needs over the plan period:*

EN1 Faverdale East Business Park (32.38ha);  
EN2 Yarm Road South Extension (32.64ha)  
EN3 McMullen Road West (6.62ha);  
EN4 Heighington Lane North (4.54ha).  
EN5 Lingfield Park (See Policy MGP 6)  
EN6 Albert Hill (1.87ha)  
EN7 Cleveland Street (0.81ha)  
EN8 Faverdale Industrial Estate (11.41ha)  
EN9 Banks Road (0.72ha)  
ENP1 Yarm Road North (30.56ha)  
ENP2 Former Torrington's Site Yarm Road (7.41ha)

*Site ENP1 (Yarm Road North) and site ENP2 (Former Torrington's Site Yarm Road) as shown on the Policies Map, are safeguarded for Prestige Employment Development.*

##### **Office / Business Park development**

*The following sites, as shown on the Policies Map, are allocated for B1 (Business) use:*

ENB1 Morton Palms (8.18ha);

*ENB2 South East Town Centre Fringe (1.59ha) (mixed use);  
ENB3 Central Park (2.16ha) (mixed use).*

*Within all areas safeguarded or allocated for Prestige Employment or for office/business park development, any development will be required to achieve a particularly high standard of design and landscaping in accordance with Policy CS2 (Achieving High Quality, Sustainable Design) of the Core Strategy and the Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document.*

*Within all the employment areas identified above, the Council will particularly encourage good quality accommodation for a range of small and medium sized enterprises (23-60m2).*

*Uses other than those identified for each site may be permitted, where the proposed use is of similar character to the uses for which they are identified. Where such uses form part of the comprehensive development of the site for employment purposes, it must be demonstrated that they contribute to the economic growth objectives of the plan. Where ancillary uses are proposed, it must be demonstrated that these will benefit the immediate area, its existing occupiers, and where applicable, occupiers of neighbouring estates.*

**Key employment locations**

*The following sites, as shown on the Policies Map, are allocated for B1, B2 or B8 uses to meet the needs of new or emerging growth sectors, innovative or large user requirements or other uses not provided for elsewhere in the Borough, as identified in Policy CS5 of the Core Strategy:*

*KEL1 Faverdale Reserve (120ha); and  
KEL2 Heighington Lane South (6.42ha)*

**Employment Development outside of allocated areas**

*Proposals for B1, B2 or B8 uses outside of the allocated areas will be assessed on their merits, subject to the land not being designated for another use. Proposals must be in conformity with other policies within this plan and should have no adverse effect on: the amenity of adjacent occupiers, the character of the area, and the surrounding environment.*

**Making it Happen**

4.20 By implementing the land based actions in Darlington Economic Strategy.