
**NORTH EAST OF ENGLAND REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY
SECRETARY OF STATE'S FURTHER PROPOSED CHANGES**

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Economy Portfolio

Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Cabinet of the status and main contents of the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East (RSS).
2. To seek Cabinet approval for the submission of various objections and statements of support as part of the current consultation process.

Information and Analysis

3. The RSS sets out a broad development strategy for the Region for the period up to 2021. It covers matters such as climate change, the scale and distribution of provision for new housing, priorities for the environment such as countryside and biodiversity protection, transport, infrastructure, economic development, agriculture, mineral extraction and waste treatment and disposal. The RSS also incorporates the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), to ensure the integration of land use and transportation planning. The finally published document will form part of the statutory development plan and provide the strategic framework for the Council's emerging Local Development Framework.
4. Cabinet has considered various draft versions of the document over the last few years and agreed representations of support and objections during the relevant consultation periods. A draft revised RSS was submitted to Government by the North East Assembly (NEA) in June 2005 and following public consultation, an Examination in Public was held before an independent Panel from March to April 2006. The Report of the Panel was published in August 2006, which recommended a number of changes to the Submission Draft. Government then prepared Proposed Changes, taking into account the recommendations of the Panel and other considerations and, a first stage of consultation on these changes was subject to public consultation in summer 2007. At its meeting on 10 July 2007 Cabinet approved various objections and representations of support, including suggested changes to the document. In addition to the comments received during that consultation, additional work by the NEA, in association with local authorities, on housing and employment land provision, was taken into account in preparing the "Further Proposed Changes".

Proposed Comments

5. The following comments and recommendations repeat the structure of the July 2007 Cabinet report, highlighting the extent to which the Further Proposed Changes meet the

objections, and reflect the representations of support, this Council (and the Tees Valley Joint Strategy Committee) made during previous consultation exercises and at the Examination in Public.

6. A copy of the Further Proposed Changes document is available for inspection in the Regeneration Division, or can be viewed on line at www.go-ne.gov.uk.

Climate Change (pages 22–28)

7. A new section is proposed which reflects the RSS view that “*climate change is the single most significant issue that affects global society in the 21st Century.*” Building on Government guidance the document highlights the uncertain risks posed by climate change including increased flooding and threats to biodiversity, soil and water resources, landscape, agricultural land uses, human health and quality of life. The challenge therefore is for the Region to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impacts that will result from climate change. A new policy in RSS (Policy 2A) aims to reduce activities that contribute to climate change, and to mitigate against it and adapt to its impact. In particular it aims to change peoples attitudes and behaviours to energy use; to move people and goods in ways which minimise emissions; to reduce energy consumption; to generate energy from renewable resources; to minimise water consumption; to adopt construction techniques that benefit the local environment such as including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) and to reduce levels of waste generated and deal with its disposal appropriately.
8. The inclusion of this section was welcomed by Cabinet as a timely inclusion to the RSS. It provides a useful planning policy context for the Tees Valley and the Darlington Climate Change Strategies, as well as the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Development Framework. The Further Proposed Changes include significant amendments to update and clarify the text addressing climate change and, on this basis, Cabinet is recommended to support amended Policy 2A and associated explanatory text.

Locational Strategy (pages 32-37)

9. The overriding RSS locational strategy recognises that the North East exhibits a polycentric settlement pattern based on two city regions – Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley, which are viewed as key to any effort to accelerate economic growth in the North. The original Proposed Changes defined the Tees Valley City Region as the area which looks primarily to the Tees Valley Conurbation (the contiguous built up areas of Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar) and main settlements (Darlington and Hartlepool) for access to jobs and services. The Locational Strategy as set out in Policy 5, and the associated text, continues to recognise Darlington’s potential, within the wider city region, focusing the majority of new housing, economic and infrastructure development in the conurbations and main settlements. In addition, the Further Proposed Changes, here and throughout the document, amend the text to delete references to “core areas” within conurbations as priority areas for regeneration. Cabinet is recommended to support the locational strategy and associated Policy 5 as amended.

Tees Valley City Region (61-74)

10. A key policy for Darlington and the Tees Valley authorities in general, is Policy 7, which includes a sub-regional strategy for achieving regeneration, economic prosperity,

sustainable communities, connectivity, and environmental protection and enhancement across the City Region. The RSS recognises at paragraph 2.129 and 2.160 the vital role Darlington plays as a gateway to the Tees valley and North East.

11. Further Proposed Changes to Policy 7 include:

- (a) Reference to '*brownfield opportunities in Darlington*' remains alongside other regeneration areas of Stockton-Middlesbrough Initiative, the River Tees, and Hartlepool Quays. Here again, reference to "core regeneration areas" is deleted.
- (b) Previous reference to "*city scale*" leisure, cultural and retail development in Stockton and Middlesbrough is deleted as it is considered too vague a term.
- (c) Addition of reference to "*logistics based accommodation*", to build logistics into the RSS.
- (d) Prestige Employment sites are renamed "*Key Employment Sites*", moving away from specifying sites to locations.
- (e) "*supporting and encouraging the sustainable development of Teesport*"
- (f) "*Investigating*" rather than 'supporting' "*improvements to the A66 Darlington bypass, new R Tees Crossing, and reducing congestion on A19*".

This proposed change remains, and is reflected in paragraph 2.160 which states that "*improvements to the A66 (around Darlington) **may** be required ..*" whereas previous drafts have referred to such works as "*essential*".

At the previous consultation stage, Officers opinion was that the A66(T) **will** require extensive improvement if further employment land is to be released and developed, unless significant mode switch occurs as a result of smarter travel to work choices (although there would still need to be select junction improvements). Consultants are currently carrying out a study of the A19/A66 that will assess the validity of this opinion. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet maintain it's objection to any weakening of the need and support, at this point in time.

- (g) Strategic gaps – perform a valuable function in preventing urban coalescence and contributing to urban regeneration. Previously supported, two gaps were identified for this purpose:
 - (i) *Between Darlington and surrounding towns and villages and Newton Aycliffe;*
 - (ii) *Between Middleton St George and Darlington*

The Further Proposed Changes has added "Newton Aycliffe" as indicated above. Although such a strategic gap has not been identified in previous planning policy documents such as the Structure and Local Plan, Cabinet is recommended to support this amendment.

Except where otherwise indicated above, Cabinet is recommended to support the Further Proposed Changes to Policy 7.

Delivering Economic Prosperity and Growth (pages 83 – 113)

12. The RSS highlights the increasing need to focus economic growth in the most sustainable locations, particularly the conurbations and main settlements, where the greatest economic and social benefits can be achieved. Furthermore, it is recognised 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.
13. The strategy highlights various major brownfield regeneration schemes progressing in the region, which comprise large mixed-use developments. Central Park is one of these flagship schemes, which aim to deliver sustainable economic activity and provide development and investment opportunities acting as a catalyst for wider regeneration.
14. The Panel Report recommended changes to acknowledge the contribution other mixed-use developments could make to the regeneration of the region. Lingfield Point was used as an example. The Proposed Changes suggested the deletion of the word ‘Regional’ from the relevant policy (Policy 13) title which allowed the policy to encompass other major brownfield sites which could come forward in the plan period. An associated change was that the previous reference to Central Park in Policy 7 had been replaced by a more general ‘brownfield opportunities in Darlington’. Cabinet supported the changes to Policy 13.
15. The Further Proposed Changes has suggested additional amendments to Policy 13 – which sees “*Central Park, Darlington*” replaced by “*Central Darlington*”. This reflects the point that “*Darlington may present sustainable locations for a number of mixed use proposals*”.
16. Following the work carried out by the NEA, and, in response to representations, important changes have been proposed to the employment land provision figures.
17. Cabinet may recall that key strategic sites at Faverdale and Heighington Lane West (Sedgefield/Darlington) were identified as Reserve Employment Sites (Policy 20) in early drafts of RSS, in order that the region could respond quickly to the potential needs of large scale inward and mobile investors. Prior to the EIP, Cabinet agreed to a revised approach to the Faverdale site which, in light of the Argos development and likely demand for logistics development in this location, recommended that the site be allocated as a regional logistics site.
18. The Panel recommended that the Strategic Reserve sites at Faverdale and Heighington Lane West (and at Seaham) be deleted altogether. The Proposed Changes document provisionally deleted Policy 20 and supporting text, as recommended by the Panel. However, before making a final decision on this matter, the Secretary of State asked the NEA to provide further information on the local circumstances for each site affected.
19. As part of this exercise, officers provided further information supporting the need for a regional logistics site at Faverdale. As well as renaming Prestige Sites as Key Employment Locations, “*Faverdale, Darlington*” (and Heighington Lane West) has been included in revised Policy 19, identifying an “*approximately 120ha location with potential for distribution and logistics*”. This is a welcome proposed change, which Cabinet is

recommended to support.

Delivering Sustainable Communities (pages 113 –136)

20. 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.
21. Throughout the preparation of RSS, there has been debate across the region about the appropriate regional and sub-regional housing requirement figures. District level figures are included in RSS and will set the framework for this Council's Local Development Framework. An additional paragraph is proposed highlighting the Housing Green Paper, to reflect the latest national policy position.
22. While there is a broad level of agreement about the appropriate housing strategy for the Region – focussing the majority of new house building in the conurbations and main settlements – there has been a range of views about the precise scale and location of development.
23. It was considered inappropriate to accept the Proposed Changes dwelling provision figure for Darlington (see below) and therefore it was recommended that Cabinet object to Policy 30.

Proposed Changes ('07)	2004-11	2011-16	2016-21	2004-21
Dwellings per year	480	315	75	310
Dwellings total	3,360	1,575	375	5,270

24. Further work/information was requested by the Secretary of State, and the NEA in liaison with local authorities, submitted their response. Officers from the 5 Tees valley authorities worked with the JSU to identify a proposed district allocation that was submitted to the NEA. The latest housing provision figures, revised to reflect population and housing projections, reflect the totals recommended by the Tees Valley authorities, and as such are recommended for support.

Further Proposed Changes ('08)	2004-11	2011-16	2016-21	2004-21
Dwellings per year	525	340	265	395
Dwellings total	3,675	1,720	1,300	6,695

25. An important addition to the supporting Policy text (para. 3.71) explains the housing provision figures are guidelines only. *“It is emphasised that the ... dwelling provisions set out in Policy 30 are guideline figures and do not represent a ceiling; LDFs may make the case for higher figures as appropriate.”* This statement clearly reflects central governments recent emphasis on promoting housing growth across the country, and provides local authorities with some flexibility in the provision and allocation of sites through the LDF process.
26. To reflect the 2004 Housing Act’s duty on local housing authorities to carry out an assessment of accommodation needs of Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople, a new section has been included in the RSS. This reflects work carried out by consultants to identify the unmet requirement for pitches in the Region. Across Darlington, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland the current unmet requirement is estimated as 23 pitches with a total of 74 by 2020. Revised Policy 32 states that LDFs should include policies to ensure identified need is dealt with fairly and effectively. This issue, including the required provision between boroughs, will be considered in more detail as the emerging LDF is progressed.

Natural and Built Environment (pages 137 –181)

27. RSS recognises that the Region’s built and natural environments are important resources and major assets, both in their own right and as a necessary component in contributing to economic growth, regeneration, health and quality of life. Protection and enhancement of the diverse landscape character of the Region; maintaining, improving and managing biodiversity; and maximising the social, economic and environmental opportunities trees, woodlands and forests provide, are all key objectives of RSS. In addition, planning for renewable energy generation, and sustainable waste management will contribute to the quality of the environment and the climate change agenda highlighted earlier in this report.
28. The 2007 Climate Change Bill is now referred to in the RSS. In particular, Policy 39 on sustainable construction seeks to encourage and promote opportunities for new developments or the redevelopment of existing buildings to achieve high energy efficiency. This fits well with the Council’s emerging Climate Change Action Plan and will be progressed as part of the LDF and Supplementary Planning guidance on Design. Cabinet is recommended to support the additional references to sustainable construction.

Sustainable Waste Management

29. Waste management is facing a period of unprecedented change. The amount of waste produced in the region continues to grow, with consequential environmental, social and economic costs. There is a need to limit and eventually reverse this trend. There is also an urgent need to reduce the region’s dependence on landfill disposal and to move towards more sustainable methods of managing waste. To acknowledge the importance, the text is proposed to be updated to include reference to a Regional Sustainable Waste Board which will prepare and implement a sustainable waste management plan for the North East. Changes are also proposed to the recycling and recovery targets in Policy 47 to reflect updated national targets, in particular the target of recycling and composting 33% of household waste by 2015 has been raised to 40% by 2010. Cabinet is recommended to support the further proposed changes.

Improving Connectivity and Accessibility (pages 181 – 218)

30. The RSS clearly identifies that Local Transport Plans and other strategies, plans and programmes should provide the focus for delivery on the transport related policies in the RSS. This establishes the strategic link not only between the RSS and LTP, which is already established, but also with related plans, programmes and policies that may be developed outside the LTP.
31. The Further Proposed Changes continue to provide an emphasis on sustainable transport, both in the transport and non-transport policies. This emphasis supports Darlington's leading edge transport strategy and the initiatives already being delivered in the Borough through Darlington's status as both a Sustainable Travel and Cycling Demonstration Town. In the Tees Valley City Region the policy aims to explore the need for sustainable transport infrastructure improvements to support regeneration initiatives. Policy 51 Regional Public Transport Provision has also prioritized, for further investigation, the development of a rail based Metro system for the Tees Valley City Region. This work is underway.
32. The climate change policy has direct implications for transport planning. It proposes to focus substantial new development on locations with good accessibility by sustainable transport modes, particularly public transport, walking and cycling; reduce road traffic growth and promote sustainable alternatives to the private car; and integrate climate change considerations into all spatial planning concerns, including transport. This again supports Darlington's Second Local Transport Plan objectives.
33. There is a recognition in the RSS document that accessibility is key to delivering the wider economic and social agendas. For regional transport corridors the focus is on improving the efficiency of movement along key roads (A66 and A1) and key rail links (East Coast Main Line and Tees Valley rail line). Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor is part of this improvement and work, led by the JSU with the Highways Agency and Tees Valley local authorities, is ongoing to study the potential congestion on the A19/A66/A174 over the next 20 years. Schemes required to address increasing congestion will be implemented as part of the Local Transport Plan or as a major scheme bid or as part of the Highways Agency Investment Plan. At a more local level the emphasis is on improving public transport, walking and cycling.
34. The RSS proposes a more strategic approach to demand management across the region, with the Regional Assembly, Highways Agency and other authorities working together to develop a strategic framework for demand management. This is detailed in a new policy 53A Strategic Framework for Demand Management and includes a provision for potential contributions from business and other sectors to the implementation of demand management measures. Officers consider that RSS should set the agenda for relative demand management, so that lower order destinations can compete fairly with regional centres such as the Metro Centre and other major out of town centres which are not mentioned explicitly. Policy 53A should strengthen criterion e) to reflect this.
35. In the Second Local Transport Plan Darlington Council supports the ethos of the Tees Valley Demand Management Strategy and that the Council already has strong and appropriate demand management measures in place that manage the use of the private car, whilst protecting local quality of life. On a detailed point, it was recommended that

additional text is inserted at Policy 53A h) as follows:

*“h) identify the full range of demand management measures, including parking policies **and smarter travel choices**, that should be considered for implementation through programmes, LTPs and LDFs;”*

This has not been amended in the Further Proposed Change, and the comment should be resubmitted.

Outcome of Consultation

36. No formal consultation was undertaken in the preparation of this report.

Financial Implications

37. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

Legal Implications

38. 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 and Disorder Act 1998

39. 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

40. The RSS is part of the statutory Development Plan system. Local Planning Authorities prepare the other component of the Development Plan, the Local Development Framework, which should be in general conformity with the RSS. However, this report does not alter Council policy or the Council policy framework.

Decision Deadline

41. A decision is required by 2 April 2008 in order to meet the consultation deadline set by the Secretary of State.

Key Decisions

42. This is a key decision as it affects the whole Borough.

Recommendation

43. It is recommended that the comments and objections set out in this report be forwarded to the Secretary of State (via the Government Office for the North East), as the Council's formal response to the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East.

Reasons

44. The recommendation is 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 2 April 2008;
 - (b) To enable the Council to influence emerging regional and sub-regional spatial development policy.

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Background Papers

North East of England Regional Spatial Strategy: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Draft Revision Submitted by the North East Assembly (May 2007) Government Office for the North East

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