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**DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY:  
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON PREFERRED OPTIONS**

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

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

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**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to consider and make recommendations on:
  - (a) preferred options for the core strategy of the new Local Development Framework;
  - (b) the arrangements for public participation on the preferred options; and
  - (c) the involvement of Members, leading up to the start of participation.
2. The Core Strategy, when adopted, will provide the overarching strategic policy component of the new Local Development Framework

**Summary**

3. The main body of the report:
  - (a) summarises the preliminary consultation that has been taking place on the Core Strategy;
  - (b) outlines the content and function of the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report;
  - (c) outlines the content of the documentation on spatial vision, strategic objectives and preferred options proposed as the focus for public participation;
  - (d) outlines the content and function of the Sustainability Appraisal Report;
  - (e) outlines the proposed timing of, and approach to, the public participation;
  - (f) outlines the next steps; and
  - (g) recommends, amongst other matters, that that the Director of Development and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet member responsible for the planning and regeneration portfolio, be granted delegated authority to finalise the necessary documentation and make arrangements for public participation on the Core Strategy preferred options.
4. Three **appendices** set out the proposed:
  - (a) spatial vision
  - (b) strategic objectives
  - (c) preferred options

5. A fourth **appendix** provides further details on policy and procedural matters which inform the report and these appendices.

## **Information and Analysis**

### ***Previous Consideration by Members***

6. At its meeting on 10 May Cabinet (Min C271(2)/05) resolved:
  - (a) That the Local Development Scheme for Darlington, as submitted to the Government Office for the North-East on 16 March 2005, takes effect, as from 10 May 2005.
  - (b) That the proposed arrangements for consultation with key stakeholders on Core Strategy issues and alternative options, as outlined in the submitted report, be approved.
  - (c) That Officers report on the response to the consultation, and on proposed Core Strategy options, to the meeting of Cabinet scheduled for 27 September 2005.
7. Public participation on Core Strategy preferred options is the next major Local Development Scheme milestone. It is scheduled to commence in October 2005. Preparatory to this, issues and alternative options have to be considered in consultation with key stakeholders. Cabinet, at its meeting on 10 May 2005, agreed that this should build on the work undertaken in connection with the review of the Borough Local Plan before the recent town and country planning legislation came into force, taking in new requirements for:
  - (a) the identification of alternative options; and
  - (b) strategic environmental appraisal and sustainability appraisal

### ***Core Strategy: Preliminary Consultation on Issues and Options***

8. Having regard to new and emerging national, regional, sub-regional and local policies, and changed local circumstances, officers drafted an Issues and Options Report to help inform the consultation. This identified over fifty issues, suggested alternative options, and identified possible outcomes, in eight themed papers under the headings:
  - (a) Theme 1: Strategic Aims and Vision
  - (b) Theme 2: Development Strategy
  - (c) Theme 3: Housing
  - (d) Theme 4: Business, Industry and Employment
  - (e) Theme 5: Environmental Resources
  - (f) Theme 6: Spaces and Places
  - (g) Theme 7: Town Centre
  - (h) Theme 8: Transport and Accessibility
9. They gave a snapshot picture of work in progress, on the clear understanding that they did not represent the final views of officers or the Council, but were aimed at generating constructive debate from which preferred options would come forward.

10. The consultation was launched as planned at a plenary session of the Darlington Assembly on 22 June 2005. Copies of the Issues and Options report and a response form were sent to all of the bodies required by the relevant Regulations, and a wide range of additional bodies in the categories identified at Table 3 of the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement. Copies were also placed on the planning policy pages of the Council's website and can be inspected there and at the Town Hall.
11. Further details of the consultation, and of the response to early August 2005, are contained in a report considered by Environment Scrutiny Committee at a special meeting on 18 August 2005. It was resolved that the officer response be approved and forwarded to Cabinet (Min ENV 17/Aug/05).
12. Members of the Darlington Planning Forum considered brief discussion papers and expressed views on selected issues under the broad themes of housing, business, industry and employment, and spaces and places, at its inaugural meeting on 15 August 2005. It was agreed that the comments and opinions expressed at the meeting be taken into account when developing the Core Strategy.
13. The minutes of both meetings, which outline the matters discussed, were *received* by Environment Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 1 September 2005.
14. Most of the representations can be taken forward for further consideration as part of the preparation of the Core Strategy. Some relate to detailed matters more appropriately covered in other development plan documents or supplementary planning documents. A small number relate to matters that cannot be covered by the local development framework. No one issue or option stands out as having attracted particular comment. Few omissions have been identified.
15. Responses have continued to be received. A summary schedule of all responses received, incorporating officers' comments and recommendations, is regularly updated. It has been placed on the planning policy pages of the Council's website and can be inspected there and at the Town Hall.

### ***Core Strategy: Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report***

16. Consultants BDP, with the assistance of a sustainability appraisal group (see Appendix 4), have prepared a draft sustainability appraisal scoping report and issued it for consultation. This includes:
  - (a) a brief description and explanation of the appraisal process;
  - (b) a summary of relevant plans and programmes significant at the international, national, regional and local levels;
  - (c) a summary information base;
  - (d) key issues for the core strategy to be built into the sustainability framework, as identified by the sustainability appraisal group;
  - (e) a sustainability appraisal framework or 'toolkit' for Darlington, which includes objectives, indicators and targets;
  - (f) the testing of draft core strategy objectives, and issues and options, against sustainability appraisal objectives;
  - (g) the proposed structure and contents of the Core Strategy sustainability appraisal report which will be subject of consultation at the participation stage alongside the preferred

options.

17. It was placed on the planning policy pages of the Council's website and can be inspected there and at the Town Hall.
18. The report and the consultation response are a key input to the preparation of the documentation which will inform public participation on preferred options.

***Core Strategy: Public Participation on Preferred Options***

19. The aim of this next stage is to give people the opportunity to comment on how the Council is approaching the preparation of the Core Strategy and to ensure that it is aware of all possible options before preparing the final document for submission to the Secretary of State. Sufficient information has to be provided to ensure that people can understand the implications of the preferred options.
20. Participation must be in line with the Statement of Community Involvement, if this is in place, or minimum requirements set out in Regulations if it is not. It is proposed that it be based on the submission draft Statement of Community Involvement as:
  - (a) the final version is unlikely to be in place in time, the Inspector's report on it not being expected until October; and
  - (b) the submission draft more than meets the minimum requirements.

A considerable quantity of supporting documentation will be necessary to meet the requirements of the relevant guidance and Regulations. This will require careful management and presentation so as not to overwhelm potential participants.

21. Officers have drafted the following consultation documentation:
  - (a) long term spatial vision for the Borough
  - (b) strategic objectives
  - (c) preferred options

With appropriate illustrative material this could form the main focus for public participation.

22. Copies of the suggested spatial vision and suggested draft objectives are attached at **Appendices 1 and 2** respectively. These draw on, and attempt to provide a local spatial context for, those contained in the Community Strategy, key Council strategies, and the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy. They have evolved from drafts already considered by the sustainability appraisal group.
23. Taking these into consideration, together with the response to the consultation on, and sustainability appraisal of, the issues and options, officers have identified a number of potential preferred options. Options relating to minerals and waste have not been considered further at this stage, as officers are investigating joint arrangements with the other Tees Valley authorities. Some unrealistic options have been discounted, some options have been consolidated, and some potential new options have emerged. The resulting options have been evaluated, and the suggested policy content of the preferred options

drafted.

24. The outcome is summarised in the schedule at **Appendix 3**, which comprises a tabular panel for each issue, grouped under the same theme headings as those in the Issues and Options Report. An outline of the content of each of the preferred options is highlighted at the top of each panel. This is followed by a brief background section outlining the issue, why it is important, the nature of the suggested policy approach, and how it differs from existing local plan policy
25. The form of the preferred option wording is as close as possible to that suggested to be used for consultation purposes. It deliberately outlines the suggested scope and content of the policy, to encourage respondents to focus on principles. It is not a draft of the precise wording of the policies which will be contained in the submission core strategy, to be written next year.
26. The layout and wording of the supporting text is in outline form at this stage. It is intended that in its final form it will indicate more fully for each of the preferred options:
  - (a) the reasons for its selection, together with the alternatives which were considered, (in particular consideration of the information base, and the consultation response on, and sustainability appraisal of, the issues and options);
  - (b) appropriate targets and indicators, and their relationship to sustainability objectives, targets and indicators; and
  - (c) relationship to existing and emerging national policy and advice, regional policy, and current development plan policy; and
  - (d) how the option will be progressed in other local development documents.

This will involve cross-referencing to supporting documentation wherever possible in order to keep the main consultation documentation to manageable proportions.

### ***Core Strategy: Sustainability Appraisal Report***

27. Consultants BDP have independently appraised the preferred options, with the assistance of the sustainability appraisal group. The outcome of this appraisal is incorporated in a separate sustainability appraisal report, which comprehensively documents the work carried out throughout the entire appraisal process, together with the resulting outputs and outcomes. This will be subject of consultation at the participation stage alongside the preferred options.

### ***Public Participation Arrangements***

28. It is proposed that the consultation will be launched in late October 2005, for a six week period extending through November until early December, following the principles set out in Chapter 2 and Table 1 of the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement. Documentation, in web and paper form, will focus on the strategic vision, objectives, preferred options and sustainability appraisal report, supported by, for example, targets and indicators and evidence base.

29. Involvement will be more wide-ranging than under the old system, including, for example:
- (a) open events and exhibitions;
  - (b) events for community representatives, organisations and individuals;
  - (c) focus groups;
  - (d) attending other meetings;
  - (e) arranging specific events for groups who need particular encouragement to get involved;
  - (f) 'orientation' events for hard-to-reach groups;
  - (g) discussion at Darlington Planning Forum.
30. Officers are investigating the most appropriate and effective means of involvement, including, for example, joint/shared arrangements, and the use of consultants/facilitators specialising in innovative consultation techniques and/or involving the more hard-to-reach groups. Members will be appraised of the proposed arrangements through a Members' briefing before the start of the consultation.

### *Next Steps*

31. The next key Core Strategy milestone will be submission to the Secretary of State in August 2006. Before then there will be extensive consideration of, and negotiation in respect of, representations made in response to the consultation. Members will have opportunities to consider the representations through Environment Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with the procedure/protocol endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting on 21 September 2004 (Min C81(3)/Sep/04).
32. The first Annual Monitoring Report has to be submitted to the Secretary of State by the end of December 2005. It is proposed to report on this to Cabinet at one of its meetings in November 2005.
33. It is proposed that this be followed by a report on the review and updating of the Local Development Scheme. This could cover, amongst other matters, the findings of the Annual Monitoring Report, and options for dealing with minerals and waste policies, proposals for which are currently being drawn up by the Joint Strategy Unit

### **Outcome of Consultation**

34. Consultation and participation arrangements and responses are the principal subject matter of this report. No other consultation was required in its production.

### **Legal Implications**

35. 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**

36. 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**

37. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

### **Decision Deadline**

38. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

### **Key Decisions**

39. In accordance with the Council's constitution this is classed as a Key Decision as it affects one or more Wards within the Borough.

### **Recommendation**

40. It is recommended that :-
- (a) the preliminary consultation that has taken place with key stakeholders on core strategy issues and options, and the main issues raised in response, be noted;
  - (b) the recommendations of Environment Scrutiny Committee thereon, made at its meeting on 18 August 2005, be accepted;
  - (c) the content of the draft long term spatial vision, the draft strategic objectives, the preferred options, and Sustainability Appraisal Report, as set out in this report, be endorsed as the focus for public participation starting in October 2005;
  - (d) the Director of Development and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for the planning and regeneration portfolio, finalise the necessary documentation and make arrangements for public participation in accordance with the relevant statutory requirements;
  - (e) the next steps in the preparation of the Core Strategy be noted; and
  - (f) officers report to future meetings of Cabinet in respect of the first Annual Monitoring Report and updating the Local Development Scheme.

### **Reasons**

41. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
- (a) the Council must consider the issues raised by the responses received to the preliminary consultation on Core Strategy Issues and Options before proceeding with public participation on preferred options

- (b) consideration of, and decisions on, the matters covered is necessary at this stage to assist in meeting the next Local Development Scheme key milestone for the Council.

**John Buxton**  
**Director of Development and Environment**

### **Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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