

**DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN 2016-36:
CONSULTATION STATEMENT**

STAGE 1: ISSUES AND SCOPING

1.0 Introduction

The Consultation on the 'Stage 1 Issues and Scoping Report' was carried out in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012, Part 6. Consultation letters and emails were sent out on the 15 June 2016, although publicity for the consultation began informally before this date. The Consultation ran for just over 8 weeks, ending on the 15 August 2016.

This report sets out the various methods used by the Council to consult a wide variety of people, businesses and interest groups on the proposals contained within Stage 1 of the emerging Darlington Local Plan 2016–36. It covers the level of consultation expected under the Darlington Statement of Community Involvement, and the detailed methods of consultation proposed in the Engagement Plan.

The results of the engagement processes are set out in **Appendices 2 & 3**.

2.0 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

- 2.1 As a result of changes in national planning guidance, and to shape the consultation of the emerging Local Plan, the decision was taken to review the part of the SCI covering the Local Plan.

The Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was approved in April 2016 by Cabinet as the basis for a 6 week consultation exercise, which ran until the 6 June. The consultation generated a few responses, mainly focused on how the Council should respond to individual requests for information. The SCI was also discussed in detail at the Place Scrutiny Committee on the 31 March 2016. As a result, the draft SCI was amended and the revised document adopted, in accordance with the resolution of Cabinet in April 2016.

The SCI sets out how people and organisations can get involved in shaping the Local Plan. Specifically it aims to provide a precise, clear and transparent approach to how the Council will consult the people of Darlington, and how it will address the comments received as a result of consultation. It details the minimum amount that the Council will undertake whilst allowing flexibility to encourage new and more effective consultation methods. The SCI Part 1 can be viewed at www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy

3.0 Engagement Plan

- 3.1 In addition to the overarching principles set out in the SCI, officers produced a detailed Engagement Plan, which set out how the Council would effectively engage the public and other interested stakeholders during Stage 1 of the Local Plan preparation.

3.2 **Appendix 1** includes the Matrix of Engagement from the Engagement Plan which lists the broad groups the Council engaged with, as well as how and when each of the activities took place.

4.0 Consultation Methods

4.1 Three main methods were used to consult on the Darlington Local Plan Issues and Scoping document – direct consultation, key stakeholder events and through the use of multimedia.

4.1 Direct Consultation

4.1.1 Prior to the commencement of the consultation on the Issues and Scoping Document, it was deemed necessary to review the consultees within the existing public consultation database. The original database contained statutory consultees in line with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 (known as ‘specific’ consultees), alongside a significant number of residents, businesses, land owners, interest groups and other parties who had asked to be on the list previously. It had been noted, during a previous consultation, that some of the consultation emails or letters which had been sent from the Council were no longer being delivered to their destination, as the address and/or contact details had changed over time. On the basis of this, and in the interests of cost and time efficiencies to the Council, all contacts on the database were asked, in the case of non-specific contacts only, to opt back into the database, using the online form or by informing the Planning Policy Section. Specific bodies were automatically retained and checked to ensure all details were correct. This allowed the Council to consult the people who wished to continue being part of the local plan process in this way, and it also provided an easy way for new contacts to become part of the consultation database, through using the simple online form.

4.1.2 At the start of the consultation on the Issues and Scoping stage, the Council sent an email or letter to each of the contacts on the new public consultation database. It outlined that all of the information required in relation to the consultation could be seen at the Council’s new Local Plan microsite (www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan) and that comments could be provided online, by email or by post until the 15th August 2016. A total of 64 direct responses were received from a variety of correspondents, including local residents, landowners, parish councils, community groups and statutory bodies. The responses received can be viewed in full at www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy and a summary of all the comments submitted through the consultation can be seen at **Appendix 2**.

4.1.3 Additionally, as part of the consultation, the Council included a ‘Call for Sites’, to identify sites within the Borough that may have potential for development to meet identified needs over the next 20 years. Again an online form was provided on the microsite, to allow ease of access to the process, asking a series of simple questions about the site which needed to be submitted alongside a site plan. Sites could also

be provided by post. The map at **Appendix 3** shows the submitted sites which range from 'super-size' to small, the largest being for about 14,000 homes.

4.2 Key Stakeholder Events

4.2.1 Officers of the Council attended existing group meetings and organised additional events in order to gain the views and opinions of a wide variety of individuals and groups. Details are set out below of the meetings/events attended and the main points raised are included at **Appendix 4**.

4.2.2 Association of Parish Councils – 8 June 2016

Representatives from Parish Councils across the Borough meet to discuss matters of mutual interest and share information and best practice. A member of the Planning Policy Team presented the Issues and Scoping Report and answered questions. The meeting was signposted to the website and consultation documents and encouraged to send their comments to the Council.

4.2.3 Town Centre Board – 8 June 2016

The Town Centre Board meets every 2 months and consists of local retailers and businesses based in the town centre of Darlington. A Council officer provided an update to the board on the new Local Plan process and proposed approach. See **Appendix 4(a)**.

4.2.4 Tees Valley Nature Partnership – 30 June 2016

The Nature Partnership includes representatives from Tees River Trust, CPRE, Environment Agency, HLF, and Stockton, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Councils. A Planning Policy Officer attended the meeting and provided a presentation on the role of the local plan with a discussion on the scope of the consultation. See **Appendix 4(b)**.

4.2.5 Healthy New Towns Stakeholder Network Event – 7 July 2016

Participants in the second Healthy New Towns Stakeholder Network event took part in various interactive sessions including topics such as Housing regeneration; Economic development and planning; and Sustainable transport. The role of the Local Plan (including the ongoing consultation process) was explained and participants informed of the opportunities to get involved.

4.2.6 Darlington Partnership – 11 July 2016

Darlington Partnership includes representation from the public, private and voluntary sector to agree what the major issues and opportunities are for Darlington and to ensure that action is being taken to address them. Steve Petch, Planning Services Manager, outlined the Darlington Local Plan 2016-2036 and advised on the consultation process including making members aware of the Visioning Event. Minutes of meeting can be viewed at **Appendix 4(c)**.

4.2.7 Business Summit – 18 July 2016

The Business Summit involved a group of over 60 business and academic institutions who met to discuss the issues surrounding infrastructure and place in relation to Darlington. A Planning Officer gave a presentation on the role of the Local Plan in relation to providing the conditions for economic growth and investment and explained to consultation process. See **Appendix 4(d)**.

4.2.8 Housing Delivery Event – 20 July 2016

This event, organised by the Council, was held at Teesside University in Darlington and included invitees who had submitted sites as part of the 'Call for Sites' as well as relevant local land owners, developers, agents and other allied professions. The purpose of the event was to engage these groups of people in discussions about the housing need in Darlington over the next 20 years in order to ensure that there is sufficient land available across the Borough to meet its needs. Attendees heard presentations on the progress of the Local Plan and the Council's strategy for delivering housing sites, place making in Darlington, ATLAS' master planning approach and current HCA funding schemes, as well as attending workshops to give their feedback. See **Appendix 4(e)**.

4.2.9 Darlington Youth Partnership – 20 July 2016

The Youth Partnership consists of Jess Halliday, Darlington's Member of the Youth Parliament, and other young people aged between 11-19 with the purpose of taking forward issues that children and young people from the Borough have identified and to campaign for change. A planning officer attended the meeting and explained the role of the Local Plan, alongside the themes it will cover and the scope of the current consultation. A discussion was held about the issues important to the Partnership and attendees were also invited to the Visioning workshop 4 August 2016. See **Appendix 4(f)**.

4.2.10 Property Forum Meeting – 22 July 2016

The Forum consists of a group of local property businesses including Recognition PR, Darlington Building Society, Northern Echo, Carvers Estate Agents, and Latimer Hinks. A planning officer provided a presentation to the Forum with regard to the Darlington Local Plan Stage 1 consultation, which was followed by a detailed conversation about the issues raised. See **Appendix 4(g)**.

4.2.11 Visioning Event – 4 August 2016

This event, entitled 'Planning a Better Place for All', was held at the Dolphin Centre, Darlington. Organised by the Council, it included presentations by members of the Planning Policy Team and representatives from ATLAS and its main aim was to inform predominantly residents and community groups about the Local Plan consultation. Around 50 people were in attendance and workshops were held to gauge the thoughts of these interested parties, See **Appendix 4(h)**.

4.3 **Use of Multi-Media**

4.3.1 The corporate Darlington Borough Council website has always included pages about the Local Plan and other related policy documents, which get updated regularly, for

example showing when a new consultation had begun, with details of where people could view the relevant information and make comments if required. Links to the Planning Policy webpages currently feature on the Council home page and within its featured items section.

It was decided that it would be beneficial to further enhance this online facility by creating a microsite which would focus purely on the new Local Plan. Links were made from the corporate site (www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy) to the Local Plan Microsite (www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan) which provides specific information and documents relating solely to the new Local Plan and access to both the online public consultation form and the online site submission form. Regular blogs are posted informing viewers of new legislation, news topics, forthcoming events and deadlines for consultation comments. A video was also posted of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder discussing the new Local Plan and what it means for Darlington. The provision of this video caused a peak in the traffic flow of visitors to the site, showing the effectiveness of multi-media as part of the consultation. A peak in traffic flow was also seen at the beginning of the consultation in April 2016 when consultation letters and emails were sent out. Up to the end of August, the microsite had 1,750 unique users to the site, 898 had accessed the site through manual input, 759 had used an external link from Facebook and 93 had used an external link from Twitter. Both of the websites continue to be checked, maintained and updated regularly.

- 4.3.2 The Council used the existing Corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts to send messages out in relation to key stages of the consultation, such as it being launched and the microsite being available. A total number of 31 posts were put on Facebook and Twitter over the course of the consultation, providing information about the consultation period, links to webpages and online comments facilities, links to the video prepared by Councillor McEwan and information about the various meetings and events that were held. Each post on Facebook had thousands of views, the highest (6250 views) being in relation to the event about the future of Darlington and asking people to come along. Twitter would appear to be viewed less, although there were 1383 views for Councillor McEwan's video through this form of social media. A full break down of the posts in relation to the Issues and Scoping Consultation on Facebook and Twitter and the number of views for each post can be seen in **Appendix 5**.
- 4.3.3 The Cabinet Member responsible for Local Plans held a Facebook and Twitter Question Time – 20 July 2016. A designated timeslot of one hour was allocated to answer questions posted live on Facebook and Twitter in relation to the new Local Plan. The session was advertised on the Local Plan microsite but interest in this particular social media option was limited.
- 4.3.4 One Darlington Magazine, produced jointly by the Northern Echo newspaper and DBC is delivered monthly to every home in the Borough. The Local Plan featured four times between January and September 2016, highlighting the background to the need for new homes, setting out the reasons for, contents of, and how to make comments on, the consultation documents and most recently an article in the

September issue which discusses the issues raised through the consultation and what happens next in the process (see **Appendix 6**).

- 4.3.5 Press releases and articles were published in the local media during the course of the consultation, all of which can be viewed at **Appendix 7**. The Northern Echo published articles from March 2016 to August 2016 in relation to the new Local Plan, the consultation including details of meetings, and reports highlighting the opinion of some local residents.
- 4.3.6 Brief details of the Local Plan consultation process and opportunities to get involved were included in Ward Member Newsletters (see **Appendix 8**). The Council only receive copies of the Ward Members newsletters when required to assist with the administration and printing of the newsletters, and it is possible that the Darlington Local Plan featured in more of the newsletters than the Council were officially aware of.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Engagement Plan – Communication Framework
Appendix 2	Summary of Consultation responses
Appendix 3	‘Call for Sites’ map
Appendix 4 (a-h)	Stakeholder Event Notes/press releases/bulletins
Appendix 5	Facebook / Twitter posts
Appendix 6	One Darlington Magazine – January, May, July, September
Appendix 7	Council press releases and articles
Appendix 8	Member Newsletter