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**DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK:  
CORE STRATEGY ISSUES AND OPTIONS –  
COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Economy Portfolio**

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

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To brief Members on progress on the Core Strategy, which forms part of the new Darlington Local Development Framework which is being prepared by the Council, and to seek their views on the subject matter for, and approach to, a fresh consultation with the community and stakeholders, in conjunction with consultation on the new Sustainable Community Strategy for Darlington.
2. The Local Development Framework is a set of planning policy documents that will replace the Darlington Local Plan, prepared within a wider planning policy framework established through national planning policy and guidance and the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North-East.
3. The Darlington Core Strategy, together with the Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Core Strategy (see item elsewhere on this Agenda), will provide the overarching strategic policy component of the Framework, and should be amongst the first of its constituent documents to be produced.

**Information and Analysis**

***Local Development Frameworks***

4. Local development frameworks are part of a move from considering planning as a purely regulatory activity to using it in a positive way to encourage and facilitate the right development in the right place at the right time, termed spatial planning. Particularly important from the Council's perspective is that they provide an opportunity to 'join up' the land use implications of all policies relevant to the Borough, such as those for education, health, waste, recycling and environmental protection. They can include policies that affect the use of land and buildings even where they are not delivered solely or mainly through the consideration of planning applications.
5. They are also the means by which a local authority can plan and deliver the spatial planning elements of its sustainable community strategy's long-term vision of what its area should be like. The core strategy plays a particularly important role here, its purpose being to:

- (a) set out a locally distinctive spatial vision for the area, together with a strategy for delivery over a time frame of at least 15 years; and
- (b) create a framework for private and public investment that promotes economic, environmental and social wellbeing for the area.

It should be based on good evidence and have a clear programme for delivery. Detail should be provided in other Local Development Framework documents.

6. Core strategies and other main local development framework documents are subject to extensive consultation and public participation, starting with 'Issues and Options', through 'Preferred Options', to a final opportunity to comment when the document is submitted for formal examination by, and the binding decision of, the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State.
7. Nationally few core strategies have so far successfully progressed through the submission and formal examination stages to adoption. Notwithstanding this, the Government is reinforcing the key place of local development frameworks in local authorities' corporate activities, as part of/in conjunction with delivery of their sustainable community strategies through their local area agreements (Local Government White Paper Strong and Prosperous Communities October 2006).

### ***Darlington Core Strategy***

8. Initial progress on preparation of the Darlington Core Strategy was good. This involved:
  - (a) consultation in July 2005 on Issues and Options;
  - (b) Environment Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the response at its meeting on 18 August 2005 (Min ENV17/Aug/05); and
  - (c) subsequent public participation on Preferred Options, starting in October 2005 following Cabinet's consideration at its meeting on 27 September 2005 (Min C64(1)/Sep/05).

Progress has since slowed, reflecting the national picture.

9. Revisions to the Darlington Local Development Framework programme and timetable considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 20 March 2007 (Min C166(9)/Mar/07), and agreed with Government Office at the time, involved further public participation on Core Strategy Preferred Options, in conjunction with the then envisaged consultation on an update of the existing Community Strategy, in November/December 2007. This would take into account:
  - (a) significant changes in national planning policy, particularly in respect of minimising the adverse impact of climate change, and increasing the supply of housing, particularly affordable housing;
  - (b) the progress of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy;
  - (c) changes in local circumstances, particularly patterns of population and employment change and related pressures for new development; and
  - (d) new evidence, particularly new population, household and employment projections, and work on housing and employment land capacity.

10. Further changes, since Cabinet's consideration, have justified another review of approach:
  - (a) the Council's decision on 19 July 2007 (Min 24(3)/Jul/07) to prepare a completely new Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement for Darlington, with consultation on a draft Strategy in December 2007/January 2008, and adoption in March 2008;
  - (b) the Planning White Paper (Planning for a Sustainable Future May 2007), that expands on the messages in the Local Government White Paper, with local development frameworks also expected to playing a more important role in the co-ordination of investment in roads, schools, hospitals, cultural and community facilities;
  - (c) the preliminary findings and recommendations of a consultants' commission to provide advice and support for the delivery of appropriate best practice in community engagement in planning in Darlington, including Local Development Framework consultations;
  - (d) the further reinforcement of the Government's new housing growth agenda in the Housing Green Paper (Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable July 2007) and more recent statements, which include giving priority to meeting new housing requirements identified in new Strategic Housing Market Assessments over those so far identified in regional spatial strategies; and
  - (e) the outcome of the work on taking forward the Darlington Gateway, and the commissioning of feasibility work leading to masterplanning/consultation/development of a local planning framework for the town centre fringe, considered by Cabinet on 18 September 2007 (Mins C57(2)Sep/07 and C63/Sep/07).
  
11. All of this points strongly towards full integration of public and stakeholder engagement in, and preparation of, the Core Strategy, the new Sustainable Community Strategy, and the town centre fringe feasibility work. This will involve, in brief:
  - (a) consulting on a new Issues and Options document before proceeding to the previously planned public participation on new Preferred Options;
  - (b) co-ordinating this Issues and Options consultation with the proposed consultations on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy and town centre fringe feasibility work in December 2007/January 2008; and
  - (c) developing aligned or shared visionary elements, themes and objectives for both strategies.
  
12. Public participation on the Preferred Options would need to be postponed to the latter half of 2008, to allow time for consideration of responses to the Issues and Options and to properly reflect the adopted Sustainable Community Strategy.
  
13. The Council must discuss the issues and options with:
  - (a) a range of statutory bodies that it considers that the Core Strategy affects, ranging from the Secretary of State to parish councils;
  - (b) voluntary bodies, bodies representing the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups, and bodies representing the interests of different religious groups; and
  - (c) other persons and bodies following the principles set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

## *New Core Strategy Issues and Options Document*

14. It is proposed to focus the consultation on a single document based on a full review of that used for the original Issues and Options consultation in 2005, aligning it as far as possible with the Consultation Draft Sustainable Community Strategy. This review would also address issues raised in the responses to the original consultation and to the public participation on the original Preferred Options, and the new and emerging issues already outlined. Government Office has written endorsing this approach, stating ‘... aligning preparation of the Core Strategy and the review of the Sustainable Community Strategy ... likely to increase the chances of the production of a sound development plan ... benefits will outweigh the disadvantages to delay to the production of the Core Strategy ...’
15. The latest working draft of the document is set out at **Appendix 1** which at the time of writing this is being updated to align with the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, as it emerges following Darlington Partnership Board's consideration at its meeting on 29 November 2007. This particularly involves the vision, objectives and theme linkages. Minor alterations may need to be made in consultation with the portfolio holder, to align the wording of that part of the document with the Community Strategy document.
16. The draft adopts a simpler, more cohesive structure than the original, using the following headings:
  - (a) Spatial Vision (based on those in the original Preferred Options);
  - (b) Strategic Objectives (based on those in the original Preferred Options);
  - (c) Theme 1: Achieving a more Sustainable Community (particularly bringing forward population growth, accessibility, design, climate change and development growth issues);
  - (d) Theme 2: Housing for All (particularly bringing forward housing growth and housing affordability issues);
  - (e) Theme 3: Creating and Sharing Prosperity (particularly bringing forward employment growth issues);
  - (f) Theme 4: Providing A High Quality Environment (particularly bringing forward heritage and biodiversity issues);
  - (g) Theme 5: Living Safely and Well (particularly bringing forward open space issues);
  - (h) Theme 6: A Quality Town centre and provision of Local Shops and Services (particularly bringing forward town centre viability/vitality and local servicing issues);
  - (i) Theme 7: Transport Infrastructure (particularly bringing forward the future of the Cross-Town Route proposal).
17. As previously, the focus is on those issues where there are genuine choices at a local level. Whilst the approach has regard to the likely scope of the Core Strategy, it does not pre-judge its eventual content or form.
18. At this stage there is no endorsement or pre-judgement by officers or the Council. The document is designed to generate constructive debate. The Council may ultimately choose one of the options, or another provided that it has emerged from the discussion or, for example, a change in national or regional policy.
19. At least one question is posed in each of the key issue areas, followed by a series of options that are put forward as possible responses. Background contextual information, references

to the current and emerging policy context, and consideration of possible outcomes (including reference to the results of sustainability appraisal), are provided for assistance. The approach and level of detail varies, reflecting differences in the nature of the issue, the degree of importance of the choice(s) to be made, and extent of background knowledge.

20. The published document would be professionally presented, with full graphics. It would be accompanied by a separate Sustainability Appraisal report, currently being prepared by consultants, which will assess the economic, social and environmental impacts of the options.
21. In accordance with Council policy an equalities impact assessment has also been carried out and the results will feed into consideration of the Preferred Options.

### ***Consultation Programme***

22. Issues and options consultations should take the form of continuous informal discussion with key community groups and stakeholders, as opposed to the more formal nature of the later public participation stage, for which there is a fixed six week period within which representations must be made.
23. It is proposed that the consultation is concentrated in a period from early January 2008 to mid-February 2008. This will overlap with the current consultation on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy.
24. The following consultation strands are proposed, in accordance with statutory requirements, Government advice, the Community Engagement Strategy, the Statement of Community Involvement (particularly Tables 1 and 3) and the consultants' recommendations on best practice in community engagement in planning in Darlington:
  - (a) publicity and public notices in local media, the Town Crier, libraries, main Council offices, and Council website;
  - (b) consultation documents available free of charge as hard copy, available from the Town Hall, and in electronic form, downloadable from the Council's website;
  - (c) direct contact, by post or e-mail, with a wide range of interests (over 300 addresses), drawn from a database aligned with that being used for the draft Sustainable Community Strategy and other Council consultations – this includes MPs, Government agencies and departments, other national organisations, North East Assembly, One North East, other regional organisations, neighbouring authorities, parish councils, utility energy and telecommunications providers, transport operators, businesses, community organisations and groups, land and property interests;
  - (d) meetings at the Council's request with key delivery agencies;
  - (e) meeting of the Planning Forum;
  - (f) workshop involving key delivery agencies;
  - (g) attendance at relevant events/meetings organised by others.
25. Particular emphasis would be given to establishing the views of the (existing) Community Strategy priority groups, and other communities of interest and identity identified in All Together Now. The following specific events are proposed:
  - (a) workshops with schools and youth groups;

- (b) workshops and drop-in session(s) for other groups eg disabled, racial/ethnic groups.
26. Opportunities will be taken wherever practicable to organise and attend meetings and events jointly with, or alongside, those for the consultation on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, and those being undertaken for the town centre fringe feasibility work.
27. A Members Briefing outlining the contents of the document and the consultations and publicity programme will be held before the consultation period begins.

### ***Following Stages***

28. It is proposed that Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee considers the response to the consultation in Spring 2008, and makes recommendations to Cabinet, in accordance with established practice (Min C81(3)/Sep/04). Cabinet would consider these recommendations before deciding on the Preferred Options, and approving arrangements for public participation on them, which could take place in the latter half of 2008.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

29. Consultation on the content of this report has been undertaken with relevant officers of the Council, Darlington Partnership and Government Office.

### **Legal Implications**

30. 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**

31. 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**

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

### **Decision Deadline**

33. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this is an urgent matter, in order that consultation can take place alongside and in conjunction with consultation on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy. Comments received will, in any event, be considered by a meeting of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee after the close of the consultation

period.

### **Key Decisions**

34. 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**

35. It is recommended that:-

- (a) the draft Darlington Core Strategy Issues and Options 2008 document (attached at **Appendix 1**) be agreed as the basis for consultation;
- (b) authorisation be given for the Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration) to agree to amendments to the draft report and appraisal prior to publication, in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for the economy portfolio, in response to wording of the Sustainable Community Strategy document.
- (c) consultation be undertaken alongside and in conjunction with consultation on the draft Sustainable Community Strategy, as outlined in this report;
- (d) the Sustainability Appraisal report be published and comments invited on it;
- (e) a further report be received, after the close of consultations and adoption of the new Sustainable Community Strategy:
  - (i) outlining the responses received and the views of Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee; and
  - (ii) presenting a proposed Darlington Core Strategy Preferred Options document and details of proposed public participation arrangements.

### **Reasons**

36. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-

- (a) to meet the regulatory requirements for preparing a core strategy development plan document; and
- (b) to accord with the Council's guiding principles and commitments for community engagement in planning set out in the Statement of Community Involvement.

**Richard Alty**  
**Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

## **Background Papers**

Letter from Government Office for the North-East to Director of Development and Environment dated 19 September 2007.

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