



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2025-2028

**Preparation Programme for the Darlington
Local Plan Documents**

February 2025

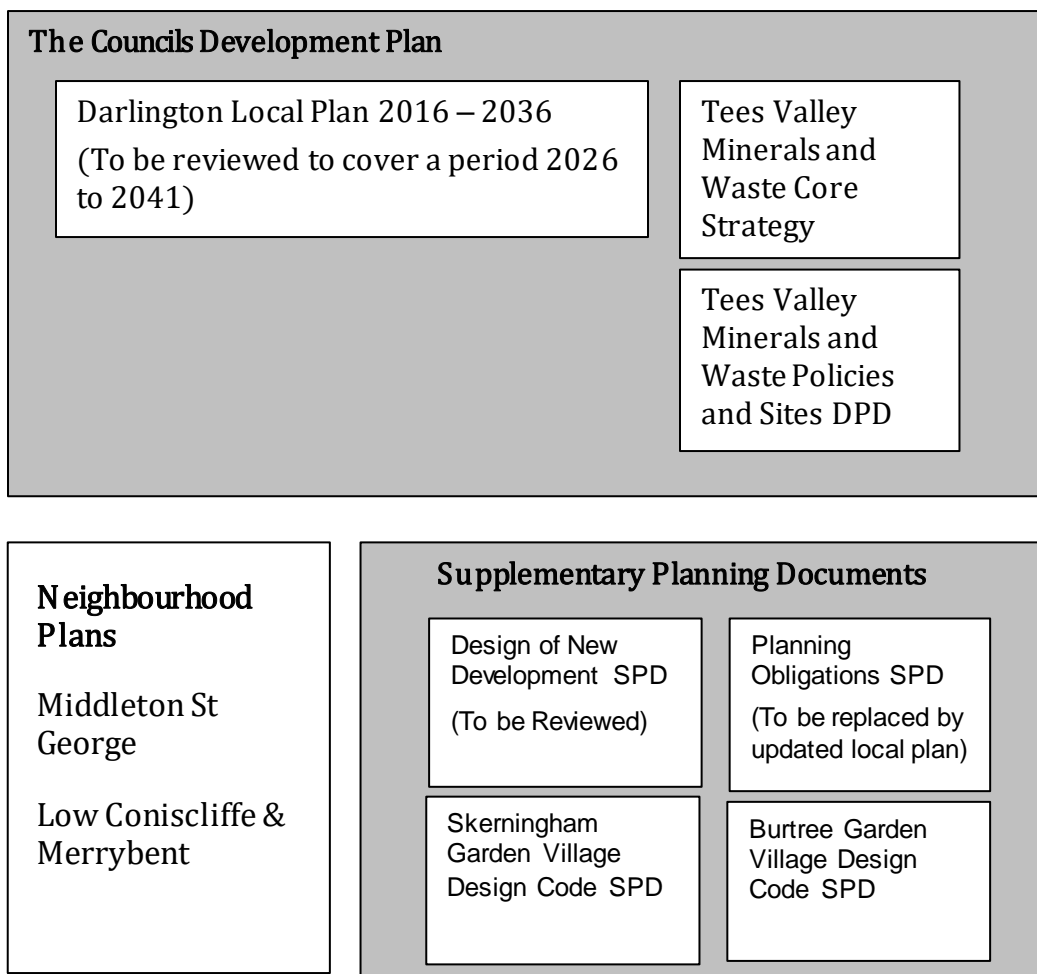
**Planning Policy
Economic Growth**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A Local Development Scheme (LDS) is required under Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). The LDS sets out the timetable for the Councils plan-making activities for the Local Planning documents which make up the Council's Development Plan. The LDS must be made available publicly and kept up to date. This LDS replaces the previous 2024-2027 LDS (March 2024).

- 1.2 Figure 1.1 below shows the Council's current planning policy documents, which are part of, or support the Council's Development Plan. It also shows the relationship of documents to one another. All statutory development plan documents and supplementary planning documents can be viewed on the Council's website, www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy.

Figure 1.1: Planning Policy Documents for Darlington Borough



3. THE DARLINGTON LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2025-2028

- 3.1 This Local Development Scheme (LDS) sets out the content, timing and resourcing of planning policy document preparation for the next three years, 2025-28. It plans for effective development plan coverage of the whole Borough and is published to provide up to date information direct to the public about the Council's plan making activities. It will be updated as necessary to ensure it remains realistic and definitive. This will replace the LDS 2024-27 (March 2024). An update has been necessary owing to the change in national policy and ongoing consultation on planning reform meaning an early review of the local plan would be beneficial. The LDS will be monitored and if necessary further revised prior to the end of 2028.

The Local Plan

- 3.2 The Darlington Local Plan 2016-2036 (the Plan) currently provides an up to date policy context against which all planning applications and development proposals will be assessed and determined. Following an Examination in Public, the appointed planning inspector found that, subject to a number of modifications, the Plan was sound. The Plan was therefore adopted by the Council on 17th February 2022.
- 3.3 A successful Local Plan helps create the conditions to deliver the following outcomes for Darlington:
- Well planned, high quality, sustainable places
 - Inclusive and accessible places, to serve all needs and communities
 - An attractive place to live, visit and invest
 - Economic growth, new jobs and prosperity
 - A vibrant town centre with strong retail, leisure and commercial sectors
 - Celebrate and protect Darlington's heritage assets and key open spaces
 - Integrated strategic social and physical infrastructure, phased to meet the needs of new development
 - Increased resilience to climate change
 - Greater certainty for residents, investors and stakeholders
- 3.4 Early review of the plan would extend the life of the current plan to cover the period 2026 to 2041 and should not require significant additional housing allocations to those already in the current plan. It will also enable updated policies and new policies to be incorporated including the latest changes in national policy. This could include updated approaches to renewable energy, biodiversity net gain, nutrient neutrality etc. It should be noted not all of the existing plan will require update.

Other Local Planning Documents

- 3.5 The Joint Tees Valley Minerals and Waste Core Strategy and Policies and Sites DPD remains the plans that minerals and waste proposals are assessed against.
- 3.6 The Design of New Development SPD sets out general and detailed design guidelines for new development to provide a framework to secure high quality, safe, distinctive, sustainable design in new developments. It needs to be revised to reflect changes to Building Regulations, Code for Sustainable Homes, and Development Management amenity issues. Further, there are matters that have arisen from the Healthy New Town Project that maybe usefully incorporated into this guidance.

- 3.7 The two Garden Community areas have their own Design Code SPDs. The Greater Faverdale/Burtree Garden Village Design Code SPD was adopted on 14 July 2022 and the Skerningham Garden Village Design Code SPD was adopted on 28 September 2023. The Design Codes aim to ensure development at both Garden Communities are distinctive, attractive and create a successful place in which to live and work.
- 3.8 **Table 1 (page 5)** gives an overview of the Local Development Scheme. More detail on the documents that will be prepared over the next three years is given in **Section 5** of this report.

Neighbourhood Planning

- 3.9 Introduced by the Localism Act 2011, the Council has a duty to support Parish Councils and neighbourhood forums that wish to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. When adopted Neighbourhood Plans form part of the statutory development plan alongside the Local Plan. The 5 areas, formally designated as Neighbourhood Plan Areas:
- Sadberge Parish Council, (decision subsequently taken not to proceed),
 - Low Coniscliffe Parish Council (Approved at referendum on 23 May 2019),
 - Middleton St George/Low Dinsdale Parish Councils (Approved at referendum on 11 August 2022),
 - Blackwell Neighbourhood Forum (On 29 May 2014 Blackwell Neighbourhood Forum and the associated area were formally designated), and
 - Hurworth Parish Council (On 26 May 2017 Hurworth parish council was formally designated as a Neighbourhood Area).
- 3.10 Other local communities may start work on Neighbourhood Plans during the period covered by this LDS.
- 3.11 No contingency has been built into the Planning Policy team's work programme to respond to requests for advice and support on Neighbourhood Planning, and the situation will be continually monitored.

TABLE 1 – LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME 2024-2027

Document Title	Status	Role and Subject	Chain of Conformity	Commence	Draft Plan	Publication	Submission	Examination	Adoption
Local Plan Review	DPD	To review and update where necessary the existing Local Plan.	National Planning Policy Framework	February 2025	September 2025	March 2026	September 2026	Spring 2027	Summer 2027
Revised Design of New Development	SPD	Design guidelines for new development	National Guidance & Development Plan	Underway	September 2025	November 2025	N/A	N/A	December 2025

4. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

- 4.1 This statement explains the approach to reviewing the Local Plan and how resources and risks will be managed.

Relationship with Local Strategies

- 4.2 Whilst the existing Local Plan was prepared to reflect the spatial aspects of the 'One Darlington Perfectly Placed', Darlington's Sustainable Community Strategy, this has now ceased to exist. Future planning documents will have reference to the newly adopted Council Plan.
- 4.3 Council, and other local strategies, with land use implications directly inform the preparation of DPDs and SPDs. These can all be found on the Council's website www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy. Key examples include the Housing Strategy, the Economic Strategy, the Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Parking Strategy and the Sport and Physical Activities Strategy.

Joint Working

- 4.4 The benefits of joint working on issues with strategic cross boundary implications have been recognised for some time by the local authorities within the Tees Valley. The Localism Act 2011 introduced the 'Duty to Co-operate' placing this work on a statutory footing. A Tees Valley Development Plans Officers' Group meets on a regular basis, to share information and best practice, facilitate joint working and explore further opportunities. Membership of the group also includes representatives of Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA), and approximately every quarter meetings have been opened up to local authorities adjacent to the Tees Valley in County Durham and North Yorkshire. The council will prepare a statement of common ground with adjoining authorities in line with national policy requirements.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 4.5 Sustainability appraisal (SA) is carried out for all the development plan documents prepared (and SPDs where screening indicates it is necessary), and is an integral component of all stages of plan preparation. SA identifies the significant environmental, social and economic impacts of the policies and proposals and identifies if/how policies and proposals can be amended to achieve net gains across all three dimensions of sustainability. The process is undertaken to accord with the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (European Directive 2001/42/EC). As part of the transposing of European law in to UK law following the UK's exit from the European Union the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) makes provision to replace the requirement to undertake a SA with the requirement to undertake an Environmental Outcomes Report. Secondary Legislation and further guidance on the process and content of these is awaited.

- 4.6 The Sustainability Assessment will be produced using internal resources.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 4.7 Equalities Impact Assessment and Disability Equalities Impact Assessment is undertaken and its findings will be submitted alongside the Proposed DPD and SPD if required. It is undertaken in-house within the team, with the views of protected characteristics groups being sought at key stages.

Staff Resources

- 4.8 The Planning Policy team is within the Economic Growth Directorate. It leads the preparation of the Local Plan and other planning policy documents. The team currently includes a Head of Planning Policy, Economic Strategy & Environment, one Principal Planning Officer, three full-time Planning Officers, (one seconded to a temporary Garden Communities Officer role), one part-time Planning Officer (4 Days a week) and two part-time Technical Officers.
- 4.9 Success in achieving the milestones set out in this LDS will depend on the amount of non-plan preparation work the team does, on the amount and timeliness of help from colleagues across the Council in specific policy areas, such as transport, climate change and housing, and on there being no further cuts to the staffing resources available for planning policy work.
- 4.10 Consultants are also used on specific pieces of work, particularly work carried out jointly by the Tees Valley authorities, and specialist technical studies and work. Officers from Tees Valley Combined Authority provide some statistical information and manage specific joint commissions of the Tees Valley authorities, such as for the economy and infrastructure.

Financial Resources

- 4.11 A consolidated budget has been established across the Economic Growth Division which covers the costs associated with Development Plan preparation (consultant's fees for evidence gathering, consultations and printing).
- 4.12 The programme proposed in the LDS assumes that the budgetary resources that have been allocated to Planning Policy work in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan are available in their entirety.
- 4.13 Some additional evidence gathering will be required and the Reviewed Local Plan will be subject to an examination in public.

Monitoring

- 4.14 The latest Local Plan Authorities Monitoring Report (AMR) was recently published reflecting the second financial year of the Local Plan 2023/24. It includes the following information:
- Progress in preparing the Darlington Local Plan, compared with the milestones set out in the latest LDS, reasons for and proposed actions to address any slippage
 - Any factors affecting the current year's LDS milestones and planned action.
 - The need for new evidence or research.
 - A review of policy effectiveness.
 - Information showing future housing provision against housing requirements.
- 4.15 Annual updates will continue to be provided.

Risk Assessment

4.16 A risk assessment has been carried out for the LDS. The key areas of risk have been identified below as well as the actions that will be put in place to mitigate the risks:

Risk Identified	Mitigating Actions
Implications of changes to the national planning system and policy framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep up to date with best practice, Inspectors and Court decisions relating to plan preparation. • Keep up to date with changes to national policy and implications for the Local Plan process (including December 2024 NPPF Update). • Maintain up-to-date local evidence base. • Not reviewing now will require the preparation of a 'new style' local plan with new requirements and a rigid 30 month timetable set by government.
Ability to maintain staffing levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly review the plan preparation programme through this LDS and its updates to match any changes in staff resources, changes of planning policy workstreams and other policy workstreams that staff are required to contribute to. • Recruit extra (temporary) staff, where necessary, to meet peaks in workload around key stages of plan development
Staff turnover, maternity leave or long term illness within core team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to be a challenge. • Prioritise recruitment activity as soon as notice given. • Manage workloads to reduce stress. • Spread knowledge within core team to ensure a back-up if specialist absent. • Use short and medium term work experience placements for mutual benefit.
Completion of evidence base takes longer than expected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear specification in consultancy briefs, and tighter project management of consultancy commissions. • Ensure core team is kept abreast of latest good practice cited on discussion fora and other sources. • Ensure team carries out appropriate CPD to keep up to date with best practice. • Allow contingency in LDS for project overrun.
Increased volume, complexity or scope of non Local Plan work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular review of extent of non Plan-making work handled by core team. • Assess options for further redeployment from within or outside of the Council.
Key stakeholders/ partners, such as infrastructure providers, unable to provide information or other input at key stages in the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure commitment to contributing to Plan-making at the highest level in partners organisations, highlighting role of Local Plan in delivering the sustainable community strategy. • Provide stakeholders/partners with good notice of what will be required of them, and when. • Investigate ways of pooling resources to achieve desired outcomes.
Volume and complexity of representations and comment exceeds expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with key stakeholders, developers, landowners and other local interests throughout the policy development • Build capacity outside of team to deal with processing representations received, e.g. colleagues within section and wider Division • Clarify through SCI how representations will be handled and do not respond on an individual basis. • Depends on number of comments at draft stage and how many we are able to negotiate to withdraw to save Examination time.
DPDs prepared are not found sound, have to be withdrawn, or are subject to legal challenge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking against the tests of soundness at each key stage of the plan preparation process, making use of the PAS self assessment toolkit. • Carry out community engagement in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement. • Be diligent in undertaking and recording actions against new 'duty to co-operate'.

5. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT DOCUMENT (LDD) PROFILES

5.1 This section provides a standard profile for each of the LDD’s we intend to prepare, as identified in **Table 1**.

Darlington Local Plan (Plan Review)	
DOCUMENT DETAILS:	
Role & Content:	Enables a selective review of the existing local plan to update and expand on policies already in the existing plan.
Geographical Coverage:	Borough Wide
Status:	Updated Local Plan with extended timeframe
Conformity Review	National Planning Policy Framework N/A
Timetable:	
Commence Review	February 2025
Consultation on Draft Local Plan Submission	September 2025 September 2026
Examination	Spring 2027 (will be determined by the Planning Inspectorate)
Estimated Date Adoption	Summer 2027
Production:	
Organisational Lead:	Head of Planning Policy, Economic Strategy and Environment
Lead Section	Planning Policy
Management Arrangements:	Cabinet Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Joint Management Team / Chief Officers Board Economic Growth Senior Leadership Team
Internal Resources:	Development Management Building Control Sustainable Transport Environmental Health Communications Unit Xentrall Design and Print Unit.
External Resources:	Consultants for selected technical evidence base updates.
Community & Stakeholder Involvement:	Other Tees Valley Authorities, Council Members, local people, Darlington Partnership, Parish Councils, development industry representatives, government agencies, in accordance with the Council’s adopted SCI.

Revised Design of New Development SPD	
DOCUMENT DETAILS:	
Role & Content:	Sets out general and detailed design guidelines for new development to provide a framework to secure high quality, safe, distinctive, sustainable design in new developments.
Geographical Coverage:	Borough of Darlington (excluding Skertingham and Burtree where bespoke Design Code SPDs are already in place)
PRODUCTION:	
Organisational Lead:	Head of Planning Policy, Economic Strategy and Environment
Lead Section	Planning Policy
Management Arrangements:	Cabinet Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee Joint Management Team / Chief Officers Board Economic Growth Senior Leadership Team
Internal Resources:	Development Management Building Control Sustainable Transport Communications Unit Xentrall Design and Print Unit.
External Resources:	None
EVIDENCE BASE	
Community & Stakeholder Involvement:	Other Tees Valley Authorities, Council Members, local people, Darlington Partnership, Parish Councils, development industry representatives, government agencies, in accordance with the Council’s adopted SCI
Status:	Supplementary Planning Document
Conformity:	National Planning Policy Framework and elements of Local Plan.
Review:	The existing SPD needs to be revised to reflect changes to latest thinking on design and other matters including Building Regulations, Code for Sustainable Homes, Development Management amenity issues, etc.
TIMETABLE:	
Commence preparation of Draft Revised SPD	Underway
Consultation on Draft Revised SPD	September 2025
Estimated Date Adoption	December 2025