
**LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
CORE STRATEGY: ISSUES AND OPTIONS 2008 -
CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND NEXT STEPS**

Purpose of Report

1. This report is to consider the consultation process carried out on the Core Strategy: Issues and Options, and the representations that have been made in response to it. At this stage, Scrutiny is being asked to consider only the further work required to assess the comments made. Consideration of the content of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options will come later in the year.

Information and Analysis

2. The Core Strategy is the key, overarching document in the Local Development Framework. It will include:
 - (a) A long term spatial vision and strategic objectives for the Borough;
 - (b) A spatial strategy setting out broad locations for delivering housing and employment as well as other strategic development such as retail, public services and transport development;
 - (c) Core policies; and
 - (d) A monitoring and implementation framework with clear objectives for securing delivery.
3. It will set out the land use planning and spatial elements of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed as well as the complementary Climate Change Strategy.
4. It will draw on other Council strategies which have implications for the development and use of land including the Local Transport Plan, the Darlington Gateway Strategy and the Open Spaces Strategy. It will also seek to implement the policies and reflect the priorities of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy and those of other regional and sub regional strategies.
5. At the Cabinet Meeting on 11 December 2007 (Minute C130 (4)), it was agreed that the Core Strategy: Issues and Options be published as the basis for public and other consultations.

Main provisions of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options

7. As recommended by emerging Government Guidance the Core Strategy was closely aligned with the draft Sustainable Community Strategy. The Core Strategy identifies 33 key issues under the following headings:
 - Vision and Objectives
 - Theme 1: Achieving A more Sustainable Community
 - Theme 2: Quality Housing For All
 - Theme 3: A Prosperous Darlington
 - Theme 4: A Distinctive, Greener and Cleaner Environment

- Theme 5: A Healthy and Safe Darlington
 - Theme 6: A Vibrant Town Centre and Quality Local Shops and Services
 - Theme 7: Efficient and Effective Transport Infrastructure
8. The focus was on those issues where there were genuine choices at a local level. It had regard to the likely scope of the Core Strategy but did not pre-judge its eventual content or form. The approach and amount of detail varied between issues as a result of the difference in the issues, the degree and importance of choices, as well as work already undertaken.

Community and Stakeholder Consultation Undertaken

9. In accordance with regulatory requirements and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, a period of public participation was held from 7 January to 15 February, alongside that for the draft Sustainable Community Strategy. The programme of events and activities involving the public and other interested groups included:
- a. Throughout the consultation period 15 morning/evening/weekend drop-in sessions at the Council's Talking Together events complemented by additional events at the Cornmill Centre, Morrison's (North Road), Hurworth Grange, Sadberge and Heighington Village Halls and High Coniscliffe Primary School;
 - b. Presentation to Special Meetings for the Community Partnerships and Voluntary Sector, the Rotary Club, CVS and Middleton St George Parish Council representatives;
 - c. Members Briefing and Members Workshop on the 3 January and 15 February;
 - d. Presentation and discussion with members of GOLD at Havelock Community Centre on 16 January;
 - e. Presentation to, and discussion with, Darlington Planning Forum on 7 February;
 - f. Planning for Real workshop with 27th Darlington Brownie pack on the 21 and 28 January.
 - g. Presentation to, and discussion with the Darlington Partnership's Economy and Environment Sub-Group on 28 February.
10. An advertisement publicising the consultation was placed in the Northern Echo on 7 January. The drop-in consultation events were advertised in the Northern Echo and Darlington Advertiser on 4 and 16 January respectively. The January and February editions of the Town Crier each carried a full page editorial publicising the opportunity to comment. The consultation events were also publicised in Cockerton East and Haughton East Ward Councillors newsletters and were advertised locally.
11. In addition to the above, 922 letters were sent out to interested organisations, agencies and others to notify them about the consultation, and to provide them with information about the Core Strategy: Issues and Options. The information included the document itself, a summary leaflet and a general leaflet providing information on the Core Strategy and the Local Development Framework. A dedicated page about the Core Strategy was created on the Council's website, with all documents available there, together with an on-line reply form.

General Response to the Consultation

12. A total of 101 written responses were received during the consultation period, of which 15 were posted using the on-line reply facility. The majority of the comments were made and sent on response forms. In addition to responses from statutory organisations and planning agents/representatives, 35% of responses came from the general public, an increase on the 2005 Issues and Options consultation, where there was minimal response from residents. There was considerable interest from Heighington, with 21 responses received from residents of the village. Verbal comments were also recorded at the various consultation events held.

Responses Arising from the Consultations

13. This section identifies the key issues raised in the consultation responses, under the theme headings of the Core Strategy. All respondents raised useful points, though not all were Core Strategy issues. These will be addressed as appropriate in other Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents.

Vision and Objectives

- A number of respondents felt it was important to protect and enhance the special character and quality of the market town and the distinctiveness of the rural area. There was a strong view from residents of rural communities that any development in the villages should be complementary to and enhance the character of the village environment.
- Turley Associates for Durham Tees Valley Airport felt that the importance of the Airport as a key economic driver and gateway to the region should be promoted.
- The key factor for many respondents was that sufficient infrastructure should be made available to meet the needs of new development and the aspirations of the vision.
- Most respondents supported the sequential approach to development.
- Sport England felt that sports facilities should be included in objective 13.

Proposed Key Actions:

- To strongly reflect the land use planning and spatial elements of the One Darlington: Perfectly Placed vision which promotes the distinctive character of the Borough.
- Revisit the vision and objectives and consider wording in light of comments made.

Theme 1: Achieving a More Sustainable Community

- There was strong landowner/developer support for being a key centre in the Tees Valley City Region (option 1C) to conform with the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy, to maximise Darlington's strategic position and economic potential, whilst reflecting and enhancing the Borough's distinctiveness. Linked to this was the desire to promote population growth and economic growth (Option 2B) to meet the economic aspirations of the Borough to benefit residents and employers.
- In terms of maximising accessibility the majority of respondents supported a combination of options (3E but excluding option 3D), as the best way to improve public transport facilities, enhance sustainable transport and reduce car trips. Whilst it was felt this approach would reflect the objectives of locating new development in sustainable locations in and on the edge of urban areas, several respondents felt this should be extended to cover the whole Borough.
- The majority of respondents felt that it was important to promote high quality, safe, distinctive design in all development (combination of 5A and 5B). Many residents added that this approach could generate improvements to degraded landscapes, not just in identified areas but across the Borough. Many landowners/developers felt that more innovative, high quality design should be promoted at gateways and in the approaches to the town centre as these are focal points for visitors and could improve investment potential.
- There was general agreement that it would be difficult to specify a particular renewable energy technology on or off site as each case would need to consider detailed technical information, local issues and economic viability. Thus an energy mix for Darlington was seen as the best way forward (option 6C and 6I). Landowners/developers supported the standards set for sustainable buildings and renewable energy provision in the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (options 6K and 6M) as higher standards could impact upon the economic viability of a development. A counter argument submitted was that to significantly impact upon the affects of climate change the standards should be set higher to promote sustainable development in the long term.
- Support was given for adopting the sequential approach to development in sustainable locations (option 7C). Strong representations were submitted by residents of Heighington and Middleton

St George against the extension of development limits in the villages. A counter argument was that some development should be supported in the villages, where there was an identified local need as this could help improve physical and social infrastructure for residents and provide for economic growth (option 7D). One respondent felt that the definitions of the different village types should be reconsidered.

- Landowners/developers strongly supported determining the type and level of planning obligations on a site by site basis to take account of local needs and site specific circumstances. One respondent suggested the Council would need to undertake an audit of sports facilities, consistent with national guidance before planning obligations could be sought for this issue.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Undertake further consultations with key stakeholders to establish a policy framework for design, consistent with the emerging Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document
- Analyse the findings of the emerging Tees Plain and East Durham Limestone Wind Capacity Study.
- Consider what other technical assessments may need to be undertaken relating to the benefits, feasibility and viability of renewable energy provision and sustainable building standards.
- Consider the benefits of different approaches to planning obligations in line with emerging government guidance.
- Undertake an audit of sports facilities in the Borough as part of the LDF evidence base.
- Re-consider the settlement hierarchy definitions.

Theme 2: Quality Housing for All

- There was strong landowner/developer support for market led housing growth (option 9C), to conform with the emerging RSS, match the planned regional/sub regional economic growth, and enable more affordable housing to be provided. Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners for Theakston Estates felt the Council should seriously consider over-allocation, given economic growth forecasts, strong market demand, and Tees Valley Housing Growth Point bid. A counter argument submitted was that local environmental capacity and protection of local distinctiveness should inform decisions about appropriate levels of housing growth
- Most respondents felt that new housing should be located through limited growth in the urban area (option 10A), with a range of sustainability considerations cited in support, though this was tempered by some concern for the potential threat of ‘town cramming’ to local distinctiveness of this option. Developers/agents/landowners generally supported moderate or substantial growth, citing the benefits of flexibility in meeting housing demand and the need for some housing in villages.
- There was support for the provision of all the types of specialist housing (affordable, lifetime and live-work) suggested, though the impact of provision on site viability, the need to consider the market for live-work units and the possible policy overlap of lifetime homes with building regulations and the national Code for Sustainable Homes were raised as concerns.
- Few respondents seemed to understand the nature of the options being presented for improving older housing.
- Meeting the needs of gypsies and travellers for accommodation on existing Council sites and private sites only (option 13A) attracted the greatest support. No response received from gypsy or traveller groups; there may have been a misunderstanding of the issues.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Revisit assumptions about how much housing is required to match projected economic growth;
- Consider implications of potential Housing Growth Point Bid status
- Consider how best to secure lifetime homes;
- Further consultations with key stakeholders on the options for older housing;

- Undertake specific consultations with gypsy and traveller groups about development of this policy.

Theme 3: Prosperous Darlington

- Most respondents felt that we should plan to maintain modest employment growth (option 14B), though some felt that high growth is needed to maintain competitiveness regionally and capitalize on Darlington's location, and to fund social development. Others were concerned about the capacity of the environment, physical and social infrastructure to support high growth.
- In the distribution of new employment development, over half of respondents supported a managed employment land supply across the Borough (option 15B). The low provision scenario was supported by those with sustainability and protection of the countryside as primary concerns, whilst others pointed out that the market-led approach offers greatest flexibility.
- Redevelopment of existing employment land with new employment provision (option 16b) was strongly supported, and some concern was expressed about the sustainability of the trend towards relocating businesses to peripheral greenfield sites.
- As regards tourism, several respondents felt Darlington needs to develop a role complementary to that of more established tourist destinations nearby. Suggestions included building on the vibrant, historic market town image and the sustainable transport links to surrounding tourist destinations. The 'rural city' concept did not seem to be readily understood.
- There was general acceptance of need for employment development in the countryside, but only to sustain existing communities. Some felt it should be limited to uses linked to the land, others that it should be of an appropriate (small) scale only, to preserve the unspoilt countryside around the town that contributes to its attractiveness. There are possible water/sewerage infrastructure capacity issues in some rural areas and villages.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Further consult key stakeholders to establish the merits and realism of high versus modest employment growth;
- Analyse the findings of the King Sturge Employment Land Review to underpin policy development on the distribution of new employment development.
- Further internal consultations on the appropriate policy approach to tourism.

Theme 4: A Distinctive, Greener, Cleaner Environment

- In relation to the urban fringe, respondents identified positive aspects of each option, thus a combination (option 20E) would help maintain and enhance its assets, improve accessibility and ensure the fringe was properly used and interpreted.
- Several key stakeholders identified the need to enhance biodiversity and geological conservation and heritage across the Borough and not just in designated sites/buildings and landscapes. Respondents indicated that a combination of biodiversity options (option 21F) would be the most sustainable and appropriate outcome. Natural England felt that the policy for trees should be incorporated with the approach to biodiversity to provide a more sustainable, comprehensive approach to the management of habitats.
- Key stakeholders supported the combination of 23B and 23C being consistent with national and regional guidance to reduce the opportunity for flood risk and the impact of surface water run off.
- The Environment Agency felt that the issue should include water pollution. Turley Associates for Durham Tees Valley Airport felt strongly that the Core Strategy should include detailed guidance/diagrams identifying the different types of safeguarding zones that cover the Borough.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Consider what other issues need to be reflected in a comprehensive approach to biodiversity.
- Consider the appropriate approach to safeguarding zones and whether this is a Core Strategy matter.

Theme 5: A Healthy and Safe Darlington

- In general, respondents supported the protection of open spaces, playing pitches and play areas for children and young people, with development on them an exception. Respondents agreed that the Council's Open Space Strategy and Playing Pitch Strategy should provide the basis for all future developments proposals on open space as they are consistent with national and regional guidance.
- Several respondents identified access to facilities as a concern, with several suggesting improving access to school sports facilities as being an approach to consider (option 26A). Safety at all sites was another identified issue.
- Respondents stated that provision for facilities in rural areas should be decided on a local basis, through consultation with the local community (Option 29B).
- DTZ for County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust identified the omission of the provision, development and modernisation of health care facilities in the Borough.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Undertake specific consultations with the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust and other health providers in relation to the development of health facilities in the Borough.
- Consider how best to secure improved access to open spaces and playing pitches.

Theme 6: A Vibrant Town Centre and Accessible Local Shops and Facilities

- Most respondents thought that a rigorous and pro-active approach to promoting the vitality and viability of the town centre is needed, though not at the expense of retaining local shops and service in rural and suburban areas. A number of respondents set out 'wish lists' of things that they felt the town centre should contain, such as a bowling alley, more and better shops, more quiet areas for relaxation and a new bus station.
- As regards the hierarchy of centres, the option to designate further local centres (option 31B) attracted most support, with one respondent suggesting that geographical gaps in the coverage of local centre catchments should be filled, e.g. Albert Hill, Skerne Park. Additional local centres were suggested by respondents for North Road/Harrowgate Hill and Lingfield Point, whilst West Park and The Square, Middleton St. George have also been suggested as district centres. Some suggested that existing retail destinations, e.g. Netto/Wickes, Haughton Road, should also be included in the retail hierarchy.
- No clear preference emerged in the responses to the issue of access to local facilities (Issue 32). The importance of local consultation and viability of facilities in rural areas was raised, and the point was made that new facilities associated with new development could be better located overall than existing provision. One respondent asked for short stay parking to be considered an integral element of local centre provision whilst another felt linking provision to a sustainable transport network was important.

Proposed Key Action:

- Consider in more detail the benefits of designating further local centres and how that could be justified in relation to current national planning policy (PPS6).

Theme 7: Efficient and Effective Transport Infrastructure

- Twice as many respondents felt that the line of the central section of the Cross Town Route should continue to be safeguarded than not if it can be supported by a detailed technical assessment. Those for retaining the route pointed to the continuing potential economic/accessibility benefits of having an east-west link, to match town's economic growth aspirations, whilst those against cited impact on local residents living nearby and the adverse impact of blight on securing the regeneration of land adjacent to the protected route. Open space for wildlife and railway heritage interpretation were suggested as alternative uses for the land.

- Several respondents felt that a wider range of transport policy issues should be addressed under this theme, not just roads. Suggestions included the airport, cycleways, footpaths, community transport, park and ride and a northern bypass for the town.
- Development should only be permitted if the transport infrastructure is able to cope with it.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Undertake a detailed technical assessment of the benefits, feasibility and viability of the central section of the Cross Town Route.

Other Comments

- The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly suggested further work should be undertaken with North Yorkshire authorities in relation to future Catterick Garrison proposals upon the Core Strategy.
- Responses made must be published and properly considered.
- Respondents suggested several further studies and data should be developed. These include:
 - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
 - Strategic Housing Market Assessment
 - Feasibility study for renewable energy provision
 - Local Needs Assessment of sports facilities
 - Up-to-date health check data is needed, and constraints on growth need to be identified;
 - Up-to-date retail assessment needed.
 - Detailed technical assessment of the benefits, feasibility and viability of the central section of the Cross Town Route.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Consider the need to undertake the studies identified.
- To assess the responses made and use them to inform the next stage of the Core Strategy or other Development Plan Documents or Supplementary Planning Documents, as appropriate.
- Undertake specific consultations with the adjoining local authorities of North Yorkshire and regional bodies to assess the impact of the Catterick Garrison proposals on the Borough.

Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulation Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment

14. People also had the opportunity to comment on the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options during the consultation process. SA Recommendations were highlighted next to the relevant issue in the Core Strategy. The documents were available alongside the Core Strategy and could be viewed or downloaded on the Council's website.
15. SA and HRA are statutory requirements and the reports were prepared by planning consultants BDP, with the assistance of an officer working group from across the Council. The SA looked at the social, economic and environmental effects of the Core Strategy issues, whilst the HRA assessed their impact on European designated nature sites (outside the Borough). Comments included:
 - Natural England suggested several additional baseline indicators, plans and programmes to be included to enhance the SA whilst another welcomed the provision of a robust evidence base and suggested that more rigorous targets should be used in future.
 - Banks Development felt the SA assessment of option 6iB for wind energy provision was too negative and without supporting evidence would discourage provision in the Borough.
 - The outcomes of the HRA were supported.

Proposed Key Actions:

- Revise the SA evidence base and ensure the baseline indicators and targets are up to date and reflect the indicators for One Darlington: Perfectly Placed.
 - Revisit the assessment of 6iB as new supporting documents, such as a feasibility study for renewable energy provision become available.
16. In accordance with Council policy, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqA) was also carried out. This demonstrated that the consultation process would involve a wide range of ethnic, disability, gender, religious and age groups. The EqA also noted that many location specific bodies were sent direct consultations including parish councils, Community Partnerships and community and residents groups. This will help ensure that as many different people from a variety of backgrounds and locations in the Borough had the opportunity to be involved in the preparation and future development of the Core Strategy.
17. A full schedule of the representations and other comments received during the public participation period are set out on the Council's website www.darlington.gov.uk/planning.

Other Considerations

18. Since the substantive work was done on the preparation of the Core Strategy, two key documents have been published that are relevant:
- a. Planning Policy Statement 1 Supplement: Planning and Climate Change (DCLG December 2007). This provides guidance on local requirements for decentralised energy to supply new development and sustainable buildings.
 - b. Regional Spatial Strategy: Further Proposed Changes (DCLG, February 2008). The full changes were discussed at the Cabinet Meeting on 18 March 2008 (Item 8m). Key changes include:
 - A new policy relating to reducing the activities that contribute to climate change
 - New strategic gap between Darlington and Newton Aycliffe
 - Reference to Central Park, Darlington in Policy 13 has been replaced by Central Darlington, to reflect the point that 'Darlington may have sustainable locations for a number of mixed use proposals'.
 - Faverdale Reserve (and Heighington Lane West) reinstated as 120ha site with potential for distribution and logistics.
 - Guideline housing figures have increased from an average of 310 per year to 395 per year 2004-2021
 - 74 additional Gypsy and traveller pitches are required in Darlington/Middlesbrough/Redcar and Cleveland/Stockton by 2020.

Next Steps

19. All respondents raised valuable points, though not all were Core Strategy issues. These will be addressed as appropriate in other Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents. Relevant comments made will be considered alongside the SA findings and new information outlined above, as well as the outcomes of other work including the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the Employment Land Review and the Housing Growth Point Bid. Further targeted consultations to progress proposed key actions will also be undertaken. Together these will form the basis of the next stage; the Core Strategy: Preferred Options. It will be presented to Cabinet and then the Council, with a recommendation that it be agreed for consultation. Consultation on the Preferred Options is expected in Autumn 2008.

Legal Implications

20. 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

21. 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.

Conclusion

22. Preparation of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options was carried out in accordance with the regulatory requirements and the provisions of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The consultation successfully raised awareness of the Core Strategy and the Local Development Framework, both with key stakeholders but also importantly with the Borough's voluntary and community sector, Members and the general public. A positive and generally substantial response was received, improving on previous consultations. The preparation of the next stage will take account of all relevant comments made, responses to Core Strategy consultations in 2005, the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal, recent changes to Government and regional planning policy and the outcomes of new documents that will form part of the Local Development Framework evidence base.

Recommendations

23. It is recommended that:-
 - (a) the contents of this report be noted;
 - (b) that Members agree the proposed actions indicated in the report, that need to be taken to inform decisions on the content of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options to be taken later in the year;
 - (c) that Members note the representations and other comments received.

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Background Papers

Core Strategy: Issues and Options 2008
Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options
Habitats Regulation Assessment of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options
Equalities Impact Assessment of the Core Strategy: Issues and Options
www.darlington.gov.uk/planning

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