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

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. This report is to consider consultations carried out on the Local Development Framework Core Strategy: Preferred Options (CSPO), and the comments that have been made in response to it. It also outlines key actions and the next steps in preparing the Core Strategy and the new information that will need to be considered in doing so.

**Summary**

2. As part of the preparation of the LDF Core Strategy, consultations were carried out on Preferred Options from 24th October to 5th December 2009. Over 75 written responses to the consultation were received, together with comments made by people who attended the 23 consultation events and meetings, including for younger people, older people, disabled people and black and minority ethnic people. The consultation was widely publicised, and responses were received from government bodies, landowner/developer interests, local interest groups and members of the public.
3. Consultation responses covered the whole range of planning issues. A key consultee, the Government Office for the North East has made significant objections to the draft plan, whilst landowners, developers and local business interests have taken the opportunity to promote their sites for development or to suggest changes to the plan that would cement or improve their current stake in the Borough. The renewable energy policy attracted a significant body of local adverse opinion, particularly as it relates to wind farms, but other interests, such as the Government Office offered a contrary view on the same issue. Some frequently aired issues, such as the need for a bus station, continue to generate responses to any consultation.
4. Specific actions are proposed to take forward the development of policies for the LDF Core Strategy, taking into account the responses to consultations, the findings of the sustainability appraisal, a habitat regulations assessment, the equalities impact assessment and a disabilities impact assessment. Additional studies that have been or are being completed since the Preferred Options were drafted also need to be taken into account, along with consideration of how the markedly changed economic outlook will affect the initial years of the plan period. Because this all represents a significant body of work and may well result in policies that are quite different from the draft policies presented in the Preferred Options document, further consultations will need to be programmed prior to finalising the plan for submission to the Government for inspection.

## Recommendations

5. It is recommended that:
  - (a) Members note the representations and other comments received;
  - (b) Members consider the key actions and next steps indicated in the report, particularly the need for additional consultations, so that progress can continue to be made on advancing Core Strategy preparation;
  - (c) the Committee receives further reports outlining the key findings of recent and soon to be completed technical studies that will underpin further Core Strategy policy development.

**Richard Alty**  
**Assistant Chief Executive: Regeneration**

## Background Papers

Darlington LDF Core Strategy: Preferred Options

One Darlington: Perfectly Placed

The North East of England Plan: Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021

Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options

Habitats Regulation Assessment of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options

Equalities Impact Assessment of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options

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S17 Crime and Disorder	The draft design policy (CS2) includes safety and security in the criteria for new buildings and open spaces.
Health and Well Being	Draft policies on green infrastructure (CS17), new housing for all (CS11) and the existing housing stock (CS12), together with a draft policy (CS18) that includes supporting improvements to travel on foot and by bike, will all contribute to better health and well being of residents of Darlington.
Sustainability	The Core Strategy: Preferred Options has been subject to sustainability appraisal and this has informed policy development.
Diversity	An equalities impact assessment was carried out on the Core Strategy Preferred Options.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	Work on the Core Strategy is being carried out within the budget allocated to the service.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The Core Strategy is the principal document of the Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is the spatial embodiment of the sustainable community strategy.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

6. The Core Strategy will be the principal document in the Local Development Framework, which will replace the adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan. The Core Strategy 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 section identifying clearly how the plan will be delivered, by whom and when, and how delivery of the plan will be monitored and measured.
7. The Core Strategy will set out the land use planning and spatial elements of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed and the Climate Change Strategy. It also reflects other Council strategies that have implications for the development and use of land, including the Local Transport Plan, the Darlington Gateway Strategy and the Open Spaces Strategy. The Core Strategy will also implement the policies and reflect the priorities of the Regional Spatial Strategy and those of other regional and sub regional strategies and programmes, such as the Tees Valley's Housing Growth Point programme of delivery.
8. At the Cabinet Meeting on 7th October 2008 (Minute C63(b)), it was agreed that the Core Strategy: Preferred Options (CSPO) be the basis for carrying out public and other consultations, in line with regulatory requirements and the Council's commitments to community engagement.

### Main provisions of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options

9. The CSPO sets out a spatial vision for Darlington for the year 2026, followed by eight strategic objectives and 19 draft policies. These were arranged, where possible, according to the themes set out in 'One Darlington: Perfectly Placed', to emphasize the strong links between the two documents. The overarching theme of 'achieving a more sustainable community' sets out four key policies, namely the locational strategy for Darlington, promoting good quality, sustainable design, paying for development infrastructure and a renewable energy policy.
10. Publication of the document marked a significant advance in plan preparation from the Core Strategy: Issues and Options, on which consultations took place in early 2008. For the first time, consultees had the opportunity to comment on the precise wording of proposed policies, and could clearly see if and how the Council proposed to tackle the issues that interest them through planning policies. The CSPO also contained information on what had been taken into account in preparing the draft policies, including earlier consultation responses, the findings of technical studies commissioned or undertaken by the Council, and the requirements of the national and regional planning policy framework.

## **Community and Stakeholder Consultation Undertaken**

11. In accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and to meet regulatory requirements regarding public participation in the preparation of a development plan document, public and other consultations were carried out on the CSPO between 24th October and 5th December 2008. The programme of events and activities involving the public and other interested groups included:
  - (a) Members' briefing prior to the start of consultations;
  - (b) drop in sessions at the Cornmill Shopping Centre, Morrisons Morton Park and Cockerton Library, and drop-in sessions held concurrently with ward surgeries at Eastbourne School, Alderman Leach School and Borough Road Nursery;
  - (c) an information stall at the International Day and Darlington Civic Trust Open Day;
  - (d) presentations to meetings of the Town Centre Traders Association, Heighington Parish Council, the Central Partnership, Darlington Association of Parish Councils, GOLD and the Greener and Prosperous Darlington Theme Groups of Darlington Partnership;
  - (e) Darlington Planning Forum;
  - (f) The four area youth forums, about 170 children in two groups at Longfield School and a member of the school council at Hummersknott School.
12. Items about the consultation and the planning issues it covered were carried in The Northern Echo and the Herald and Post, and the November edition of the Town Crier carried a double page spread publicising the consultation. The consultation was also advertised in the Council's business engagement e-newsletter 'Interface' and in some Councillors' newsletters. The documents and comments forms were also available at all the libraries.
13. In addition to the above, over 900 interested organisations, agencies and others were contacted by letter or e-mail to notify them about the consultation, and to provide them with information about the Core Strategy: Preferred Options, and the accompanying sustainability appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). Published information included the document itself, a summary leaflet and an introductory leaflet, the SA and a non-technical summary of the SA and the HRA. All these documents, and the opportunity to reply to the consultation on-line, were available on a dedicated page about the Core Strategy on the Council's website.

## **Outcome of Consultation**

14. Over 90 written responses were received during the consultation period. 61% were received electronically, and of these, 17% were submitted using the on-line reply facility. The majority of responses were received from statutory organisations, planning consultants and other landowner interests and local interest groups. Only 14 written responses came from the general public, a decrease on the number received during the Issues and Options consultation in early 2008, though a range of verbal comments were made by local residents who attended the consultation events and these have also been recorded.

15. A strong response was expected from developers and landowners at this stage, as these interests seek to ensure that the emerging policies and strategy favours their land or business interests. Where policies tackled issues of specific local concern, a stronger public response was received, e.g. from the residents and their representatives of the north-eastern corner of the Borough regarding the renewable energy policy, particularly as it related to wind turbines.
16. Whilst consultation of this type tend to attract comments expressing a variety of views and questions about the Council's approach, a number of positive comments have also been received. The Government Office felt that a strength of the document was the regard it has for the sustainable community strategy. The Darlington District Committee of the CPRE supported a number of individual policies, e.g. the town centre policy, new housing for all local character and distinctiveness, and One North East welcomed and supported several elements of the plan, e.g. the importance the document places on promoting good quality and sustainable design, and on developing all parts of the Borough's employment sector, and the inclusion of a policy on promoting commercial scale renewable energy generation.
17. A detailed schedule of all the comments received, arranged so that all the comments made on one policy, issue or theme are grouped together has been prepared, and is available to view on the Council's website at [www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy), or is available in paper form in Member's rooms and in Room 407 at the Town Hall. Because of the range of issues on which comments were made, only a selection can be covered within this report.
18. Because of the timing of the consultation, several respondents questioned the priorities and ambitions of the plan, in the context of the current credit crunch. Several also felt that the policies were too loose and undeveloped. Whilst it is acknowledged that further work is needed on some policies, the nature of the Core Strategy is that the policies are not over detailed; detailed matters like defining limits to development and allocating sites for new development will be done in subsequent development plan documents. Regarding the impact of the credit crunch, this is not currently expected to be an issue for the LDF in anything beyond the initial years of the plan period, and the plan needs to make assumptions about future delivery based on expectations of a substantial if not complete market recovery within the first 5 years of the 15 year plan period.

## **Consultation Responses on Specific Issues**

### ***Housing Numbers***

19. A view was expressed that housing should not be limited to 500 dwellings per annum whilst others asked whether the high housing targets were now realistic, given the rapid and sustained economic downturn that is likely to be experienced for the next year or so.
20. Government guidance is clear that the LDF should reflect the housing requirement set out in the regional spatial strategy (about 500 dwellings per annum up to 2016), and this, together with the award of Housing Growth Point Status to the Tees Valley, was the basis for draft CSPO policy CS10. However, additional guidance from Government about how the policy should take account of the impact of the 'credit crunch' is expected shortly, and the approach will need to reflect whatever the guidance contains. A consultation event on 10th February specifically for those involved in developing new housing may provide new insights into this, and the outcome of this event will be reported verbally to the Committee.

## ***Proposed New Housing Development***

21. Several landowners and developers have requested that sites around the edge of the existing urban area where they have an interest in land be identified as strategic locations for new housing development, or as strategic mixed use locations. Requests included:
  - (a) 42 ha at Berrymead Farm, Beaumont Hill for 865 dwellings and community open space;
  - (b) land adjacent to the Harrowgate Hill/Darlington Golf Course and Whinfield to the east of the A167 - for housing, countryside recreation, community facilities and, potentially, a Darlington Northern Bypass;
  - (c) Land at Hall Farm, to the west of the Branksome Estate;
  - (d) Coniscliffe Grange Farm, at the western fringe of the urban area;
  - (e) About 8ha land immediately to the east of Lingfield Point;
  - (f) West Park;
  - (g) Land at Snipe Lane, north of the A66 bypass and east of the main railway line; and
  - (h) at Bishopton Lane and Great Burdon.
22. Other locations where housing is sought include the former Corus land at Whessoe Road, land at Cleveland Street and Weir Street, three sites at Bishopton amounting to 1.7ha, and two sites amounting to about 6ha on the edge of Middleton St George.
23. It is not the role of the Core Strategy to identify specific sites for new housing, only general locations, and the approximate proportions of the overall housing required that will be provided in each general location. Other comments received have indicated that the plan needs to be more explicit about the priority that will be given to using previously developed land and about how much development can be accommodated in each of the locations identified. It has also been suggested that a differentiation be made between service villages and other villages, with the former having some potential for further development.
24. All the sites that have been submitted in response to this consultation are being assessed as potential housing sites through the strategic housing land availability study (SHLAA). The SHLAA is already underway and is due for completion in March 2009. It will identify the potential for housing development of about 60 private and publicly owned sites across the Borough, in terms of their suitability, availability and deliverability. Once complete, this study will inform the decisions about which are the most appropriate locations for housing. It will also inform the preparation of a separate LDF document that will contain housing and other land allocations.

### **Key Actions**

25. The findings of the SHLAA will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee, and will inform the refinement of Policies CS1: Darlington's Sub-regional Role and Locational Strategy and CS10: New Housing.

### ***Affordable Housing***

26. Consultees have indicated that targets for affordable housing for the whole of the plan period are needed and that they need to be subject to economic viability tests. Respondents from Heighington opposed any more affordable housing there.
27. Updated data on affordable housing has been published in the Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment (TVSHMA). The data, based on house prices in autumn 2007, shows that there is an estimated affordable housing need of 634 dwellings per annum in the Borough for the next five years. As this figure is higher than the annual RSS housing requirement figure, realistic targets for affordable housing provision will need to be set, taking into account the public funding likely to be available and the economic viability of private housing schemes. Rising rates of unemployment and the limited availability of mortgage finance suggest that the need for affordable housing will remain high, despite the average house price in Darlington having fallen by 12.7% in the period November 2007 to November 2008 (source: Land Registry).
28. On the supply side, declining land values are affecting the ability of developers to provide affordable housing units as part of private schemes, but in the short term some private developers are seeking to maintain their business by building social housing and transferring suitable unsold units to registered social landlords. Further intelligence from developers/ housebuilders about their forecasts of viability will emerge from the consultation event on the 10th February.

### **Key Actions**

29. The findings of the Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee, and further consultations with private housebuilders and registered social landlords to establish realistic and viable affordable housing targets and site size thresholds for affordable housing provision will be needed. This will result in amendments to Core Strategy draft Policy CS11: Housing for All.

### ***Land for Employment Uses***

30. The owners of the former Torringtons site, Yarm Road and land to the west of the A66 and east of Lingfield Point have both sought clarification that their sites will continue to be allocated for employment uses.
31. It is not the role of the Core Strategy to identify specific sites, only general locations. However, in its current form the policy is not clear on what the role of existing employment areas will be in contributing to the overall employment land supply and this needs to be addressed.
32. An employment land study was carried out by King Sturge in 2006 provides some evidence to inform this work, but the 2005 data it relies on needs updating, and this is a key piece of work that needs completing before any further policy development can take place.

### **Key Action**

33. Update the 2006 King Sturge employment land study, and revise Core Strategy draft policy CS5: Supporting the Local Economy to indicate the role of existing employment areas in contributing to the overall employment land supply.

### ***Renewable Energy***

34. Several respondents felt that draft Policy CS4: Promoting Commercial Scale Renewable Energy Generation is too vague, whilst others felt that the principle of promoting renewable energy across the Borough should be investigated, rather than focussing only on the north-eastern part of the Borough. There was specific opposition to the policy from parishes and local residents in the north-west corner of the Borough (including Sadberge Parish Council, Seven Parishes Action Group (SPAG), CPRE and Great Stainton Parish Meeting), where a number of wind farm proposals are currently being proposed by developers. Cumulative impact on landscape and quality of life of residents were cited as issues, with SPAG, Sadberge Parish Council and the CPRE all proposing alternative policy wording and approaches.
35. The north eastern part of the Borough was subject to an assessment carried out to underpin policy development in the RSS. It is acknowledged that the same detailed information is not available for the rest of the Borough, and consideration needs to be given as to whether this needs to be addressed prior to developing this policy any further. At the same time, consideration needs to be given to the comments of the Government Office that the draft policy fails to give significant weight to the wider environmental and economic benefits of renewable energy proposals, and that the Council needs to play its part in working towards the RSS minimum target of 20% of consumption to come from renewable energy sources by 2020.

### **Key Actions**

36. To give consideration to the need for further evidence to underpin the renewable energy policy, taking into account the comments of all respondents on this matter.

### **Consultation Responses from Specific Groups**

37. Whilst responses from all types of interested parties were received on most of the issues, there were some aspects of the document that were of more interest to specific groups than others, and these are summarised in the next sections of this report.

### ***Statutory Consultees and Government Agencies***

38. The Government Office (GO-NE) has substantial objections to the document and most of the draft policies. The objections are designed to give the Council a clear steer as to what needs to be done to develop the document further to ensure that the plan can be found 'sound' later in the process. GO-NE is particularly concerned that not all the evidence that is needed was in place before the draft policies were published, that it is not clear enough who, how and when elements of the strategy will be delivered and that more information is needed regarding how much and what type of development is proposed at the strategic locations identified. Discussions are ongoing with GO-NE to establish what work needs to be completed before progressing to the next stage.



39. The North East Assembly consider that the CSPO is in general conformity with the RSS, but ask that the plan place more emphasis on prioritising the reuse of previously developed land and more clearly indicate the phasing of new development. Other key statutory consultee and government agency responses were as follows:
- (a) One North East say that the sequential approach to site selection should be applied to identifying a location for a strategic tourism opportunity;
  - (b) English Heritage feel that the historic environment should be given more prominence in the plan, including the monitoring and implementation framework, to achieve parity with other environmental objectives
  - (c) Natural England is concerned that many policies are unlikely to meet the effectiveness test set out in PPS12 (2008) in part because of ambiguity and lack of clarity in text and policy.
  - (d) Environment Agency recommends that no housing allocations are included in Flood Zones 2 and 3, point out that that the draft environmental protection policy (CS16) does not fully conform to the principles set out in PPS25, and want climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gases better reflected in the draft design of new development policy (CS2).
  - (e) Sport England is concerned that a sport and recreation local needs assessment and an up to date Playing Pitch Strategy were not in place to inform the Preferred Options, but acknowledge that progress is being made by the Council to remedy this.

#### Key Actions

40. To complete the playing pitch strategy and the sport and recreation needs local assessment and to continue dialogue with statutory consultees and government agencies throughout policy development to ensure their concerns are resolved.

#### ***Landowners and Developers***

41. Most landowner and developer responses were either to promote particular sites for development or to ensure that sites were safeguarded from alternative forms of development (see land for employment uses and proposed new housing development sections above). However, some other matters that these respondents expressed views on were as follows:
- (a) Paying for development infrastructure: the plan should be clear about what strategic infrastructure is and how any monies collected for this from developers are fairly and reasonably related to proposed developments. The Council should consider the cumulative effects of Section 106/development costs on scheme viability.
  - (b) Design of new development: some felt that the Core Strategy draft policy CS2 is too onerous, particularly in relation to sustainable construction standards proposed, which will affect the commercial viability of schemes. One respondent questioned why the Council wanted to impose these in advance of national programme and another felt they were overoptimistic and that further research was needed.

- (c) Transport and Accessibility: One respondent felt that the plan should avoid safeguarding routes which have no realistic prospect of funding, to avoid blighting land in sustainable locations, and another asked that the need for a Darlington Northern Bypass be considered in the Core Strategy.
- (d) Retailing: A pension fund wants the No Frills DIY store included in the North Road District Centre.

### Key Actions

- 42. Work is underway to prepare a local infrastructure plan. This will inform finalising the 'paying for development infrastructure' policy. It is acknowledged that sustainable construction practice is evolving and consideration will be given as to whether the latest developments and market conditions warrant a change in this policy approach. Regarding the transport infrastructure required to support the plan, a study has been commissioned to address transport and congestion issues across the Borough.

### ***Existing Business Interests in the Borough***

- 43. Comments from significant business interests in the Borough (in addition to those mentioned in previous sections) include:
  - (a) Town centre development and retail policies: Sainsburys question the soundness of how the Commercial Street and Feethams/Beaumont Street areas have been identified as possible retail expansion areas and suggest that an expansion of the town centre to the south would be a preferable alternative. Other responses suggested that West Park should be designated a district rather than a local centre, and that the need for a new local centre to the south of the new Eastern Transport Corridor to serve the Lingfield Point area should be recognised.
  - (b) DTVA want the plan to be clearer about the amount of land available for development at the airport in Darlington Borough, and for it to highlight further the role of the airport and its expansion in driving regional economic growth;
  - (c) The County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust consider that the Core Strategy does not appropriately address the matter of healthcare provision and delivery cover within the Borough of Darlington despite this being a key objective of One Darlington Perfectly Placed. It wants the Core Strategy to incorporate maximum flexibility in its strategy, spatial vision, policies and proposals to ensure future healthcare related development and redevelopment and proposals are not prejudiced, so that high quality healthcare services are provided to the Borough of Darlington and its strategic targets can be met.

### Key Actions

- 44. Retail policy development will be informed by the findings of the Darlington Retail Study that was completed and published in December 2008. The findings of the study will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee. The amount of land available for development at the airport will be made clear when the update of the Employment Land study has been updated (see para – above) and further consideration will be given as to how

the important role of the airport can be better reflected in the Core Strategy.

45. The response from the County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust is welcomed as it has opened dialogue with a body that has previously not got involved in the plan preparation process. The implications for the LDF of the outcome of its recent consultation 'Seizing the Future' will have to be considered as soon as this is known.

### ***Local people, Interest Groups and Parish Councils***

46. The comments made by local people, interest groups and Parish Councils ranged across all planning policy themes, and beyond in some instances. Some of the issues that the strongest and/or most numerous representations were made about include:
- (a) Bus station: there continues to be calls for inclusion of proposals for a new bus station in the town centre, for local buses and long distance coaches;
  - (b) There was both support for and opposition to the idea of a strategic tourism development opportunity in the vicinity of the A1/A68 interchange, but also a call for more clarity about what is envisaged;.
  - (c) Design quality: still a public concern;
  - (d) A call for more certainty needed about the type of development that will allowed to take place at the airport.
  - (e) Concern about expansion of the urban area into the countryside, particularly in the Faverdale area, with industrial expansion and the potential rural Cattle Mart relocation.
  - (f) Green issues have been compartmentalised in the plan.
  - (g) The Council should be seeking to reduce congestion by reducing car use, then reallocate the freed up road space to more sustainable travel modes such as cycling.
  - (h) Non-LDF comments included those about bus services and bus routes, the need for additional pedestrian crossings and one Parish Council wants more consultation on planning proposals.

### **Key Actions**

47. The arguments regarding the merits or otherwise of a bus station have been rehearsed several times in recent years, and there is nothing in current funding programmes to indicate its provision is a priority or could be funded. The strategic tourism opportunity at Faverdale is just that; the Council has no firm ideas regarding the nature of any scheme there and it would be for the market or other agencies to bring it forward in the medium to long term. Further consideration will need to be given as to whether it can continue to be included on that basis.
48. A Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document is currently in draft form and has recently been consulted on. Once finalised this, together with the overarching Core Strategy policy, will provide a level of clarity about appropriate design in Darlington that has never previously been in place. It will be possible to firm up the type of

development that will be appropriate at the airport and the amount of land that will need to be identified for employment at Faverdale once the update of the Employment Land study has been completed. The potential rural Cattle Mart relocation is the subject of a current planning application, a decision on which will be made in advance of finalising the Core Strategy.

49. One respondent also suggested that green issues have been compartmentalised. This may appear to be so because the structure of the Core Strategy is aligned, where possible, to that of One Darlington: Perfectly Placed. However, green themes run through several of the themes in the plan (achieving a more sustainable community, a distinctive greener, cleaner Darlington, and a healthy and safe Darlington), and the wider green issue of climate change and the need to reduce carbon emissions is one of the cross cutting strategic objectives.
50. Comments beyond the scope of planning policy or the Core Strategy have been shared with colleagues within the Council to be addressed appropriately.

### **Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment**

51. People also had the opportunity to comment on the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Core Strategy: Preferred Options. A non technical summary of the SA was prepared, and all the documents were available alongside the Core Strategy and could be viewed or downloaded from the Council's website.
52. SA and HRA are statutory requirements. The SA looked at the social, economic and environmental effects of the strategic objectives, and draft policies, whilst the HRA assessed their impact on European designated nature sites (outside the Borough). The only comment received on these reports was a letter from English Heritage, a statutory consultee, whose view is that the sustainability appraisal/strategic environmental assessment (SA/SEA) report does not do sufficient to fully satisfy the requirements of the SEA directive, particularly because of the lack of indicators and targets to measure the performance of the Core Strategy in regard to safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Borough, and because there are no recommendations to strengthen the Core Strategy in respect of the historic environment.

### **Key Action**

53. The Council's recently appointed Sustainable Policy and Projects Officer is reviewing and updating the sustainability appraisal work to ensure it fully satisfies the requirements of the SEA directive and will be making a detailed response to English Heritage to ensure that the issues it raises are resolved.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment and Disabilities Equalities Impact Assessment**

54. A generic Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and following a meeting with the D.A.D Disabilities Equalities Impact Assessment Steering Group on 10th September, and an assessment has been carried out to specifically look at the impact of the CSPO policies on disabled people. The D.A.D Group did not want policies for disabled people compartmentalised and they wanted the differing needs of disabled people to be recognised. They also did not want disabled people to be given special treatment.

55. The generic assessment found that equality is being promoted by the plan, through a strategic objective, and draft policies such as CS18 (Sustainable Transport Infrastructure), CS7(district and local centres and freestanding facilities), CS11 (New housing for all) and CS17 (Green Infrastructure) which are designed to ensure that there is good access to shops, housing, services and other facilities for all, wherever people live. The assessment also found that travelling groups are treated differently from other service users, in that there is a specific draft policy (CS13) that seeks to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by inadequate accommodation provision.
56. The disabilities assessment that was carried out identified some key areas where the plan could be improved:
- (a) a fuller reference to the One Darlington priority in the introduction, and of how the spatial policies of the LDF can contribute to the ‘narrowing the gaps’ perspective of One Darlington, together with an amendment to strategic objective 2 so that it is more explicit that it refers to a range of potentially disadvantaged groups of people, such as disabled people, as well as geographical communities;
  - (b) amendment to CS1 to emphasise that sustainable locations for new development are ones that support good accessibility for everybody by public transport, walking and cycling;
  - (c) amendment to the reasoned justification supporting CS14 to emphasise that conservation, particularly of buildings with public access, must be balanced with accommodating the needs of disabled and other potentially disadvantaged groups;
  - (d) amendment to CS18 and/or reasoned justification to recognise and promote the accessibility needs of everybody, including people with mobility impairments.

The chair of Darlington Association on Disability has proposed the retention of Policy R2 of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan, ‘Access for People with Disabilities’, because it provides a valuable policy ‘hook’ in discussing proposals with developers. However, it is not proposed that Policy R2 be carried forward because it does not align with either the core policies or detailed guidance of the LDF, but it is important that the combination of the policy amendments referred to above, together with the draft Design of New Development SPD provide the tools needed to safeguard appropriately the interests of disabled people.

### Key Actions

57. The approach of each policy will be reviewed prior to finalising policies at the next stage in the Core Strategy preparation process, so that any adverse impacts are identified and addressed before the plan is published.

### **Next Steps**

58. Subject to the Committee’s comments, the proposed key actions and a range of other actions will be undertaken to advance the preparation of the Core Strategy as quickly as possible. Particular attention will be paid to addressing the comments of the Government Office and other statutory consultees to ensure that when the plan is submitted for Examination, the Council has done everything it can to ensure that it will be found to be a sound plan. To achieve this, a further round of consultations may need to take place, and the timetable for this will be set out in a revised Local Development Scheme, due to be presented to Cabinet in the Spring.

59. Officers will also consider the findings of studies recently completed or due to be completed shortly. These include the Darlington Retail Study 2008, the Tees Valley Strategic Housing Market Assessment, the Tees Valley Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and the Tees Valley Hotel and Visitor Accommodation Study. It is recommended that the key findings of these reports be presented to the next meeting of this Committee.
60. It is recommended that a later meeting of this Committee consider the findings of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, the Congestion Study, the Playing Pitch Strategy, the indoor sport and leisure facilities local needs assessment, and consider a draft local infrastructure plan. It is anticipated that all the above studies and plans will be completed by mid 2009.