

Darlington Local Plan
2016 – 2036

ISSUES AND SCOPING
May 2016

Darlington Borough Council

Introduction

A new 20 year Darlington Local Plan 2016-2036 is being prepared for the whole Borough. Once adopted, it will be the development plan for all matters except minerals and waste. It will replace the existing adopted Darlington Local Development Framework Core Strategy (2011) and saved policies of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan.

This document sets out our initial thoughts about what the scope of the new Local Plan should be, and the planning issues that we think it should address. It provides more accessible and comprehensive information on likely issues than was set out in the Strategic Options and Scoping Paper for the New Local Plan (April 2016). It also sets out the key material that we will be using as a starting point for developing new planning policies.

Your views

We want to know what you think about all this. To help guide your thinking, there are 10 key questions we would like you to consider:

- Q1:** Is the period up to 2036 the right period for the new Local Plan? If not, what do you suggest, and why?
Q2: Do you agree with the range of matters that we propose to cover in the new Local Plan? Is anything missing?
Q3: Is this vision still the right one? If not, how should it be changed?
Q4: Are the aims and objectives linked to this vision still the right ones, and should any be prioritised?
Q5: Are the issues highlighted in the documents the right ones?
Q6: Are there any others that we should consider?
Q7: Are there any issues or themes for which you think we have not identified the right 'starting point' material for developing new policies?
Q8: Is there any further research that you think is needed before new policies can be developed?

In addition, for new housing, a key theme of the new Local Plan:

- Q9:** Do you particularly support or object to any of the potential strategic options for new housing identified?
Q10: Are there any other options that you can think of? If so, what is there to commend them?

Please see the end of this document to find out how to send in your views.

The closing date for making comments is **Monday 15th August 2016.**

A Vision for Darlington

The new Local Plan will include a vision of what the Borough will be like in 2036, as well as aims, objectives, policies and proposals - all designed to achieve the vision.

The existing Core Strategy vision is a useful starting point for thinking about the new Local Plan. It says that by 2026:

'..... Darlington will be a more sustainable community, where a real step change has been achieved in enhancing the quality of life and local environment, and expanding local opportunities for work and for sustainable travel. Those who live in, work in or visit the Borough will enjoy the opportunities and vibrant life of an ambitious city, but within the fabric of a friendly, historic market town with a distinctive atmosphere, surrounded by attractive countryside and villages'

The new Local Plan looks 10 years further into the future, to 2036. It will:

- (a) identify exactly where new development and land use changes are planned;
- (b) identify where there are particular constraints on development and things that need to be protected;
- (c) set out policies and land allocations to address local planning issues and help guide and decide planning applications;
- (d) help make sure that development and regeneration contributes as best it can to the prosperity, health and quality of life in the Borough, and achieves more sustainable development overall.
- (e) provide the strategic policy framework for any community preparing a neighbourhood plan).

Economic Growth

Places and communities need jobs to thrive and be successful. This is why economic growth is a priority nationally, and locally. In Darlington, we need to build on our recent successes attracting and retaining businesses like the DfE, CPI and Modus, and securing new investment like at Feethams, Lingfield Point and Central Park. We are planning to sustain this level of success for the next 20 years.

Employment

An ambitious but realistic jobs target policy is proposed. It will reflect the economic growth ambitions of the latest Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan and the Council's own Economic Strategy. Research forecasting population change and housing needs indicates that there will be enough working age people to fill all the jobs if the strategic jobs targets were met.

New Housing

Recent housing needs research shows that about 10,000 new homes will be needed over the next 20 years. A policy setting out the annual housing requirement and how its delivery will be phased is proposed.

Strategic Infrastructure

New development needs new or improved infrastructure to function effectively. Without certainty around what is needed, who will provide it and when, development sites will not be attractive and the conditions for people already living and doing business in the Borough could worsen.

A policy is proposed to highlight the main items needed, and to link their need unequivocally to economic growth and the delivery of new housing. It might include things like improvements and extensions to the strategic highway network, improvements to facilities and services at Bank Top station, and potentially new rail halts to serve new development.

Place Making

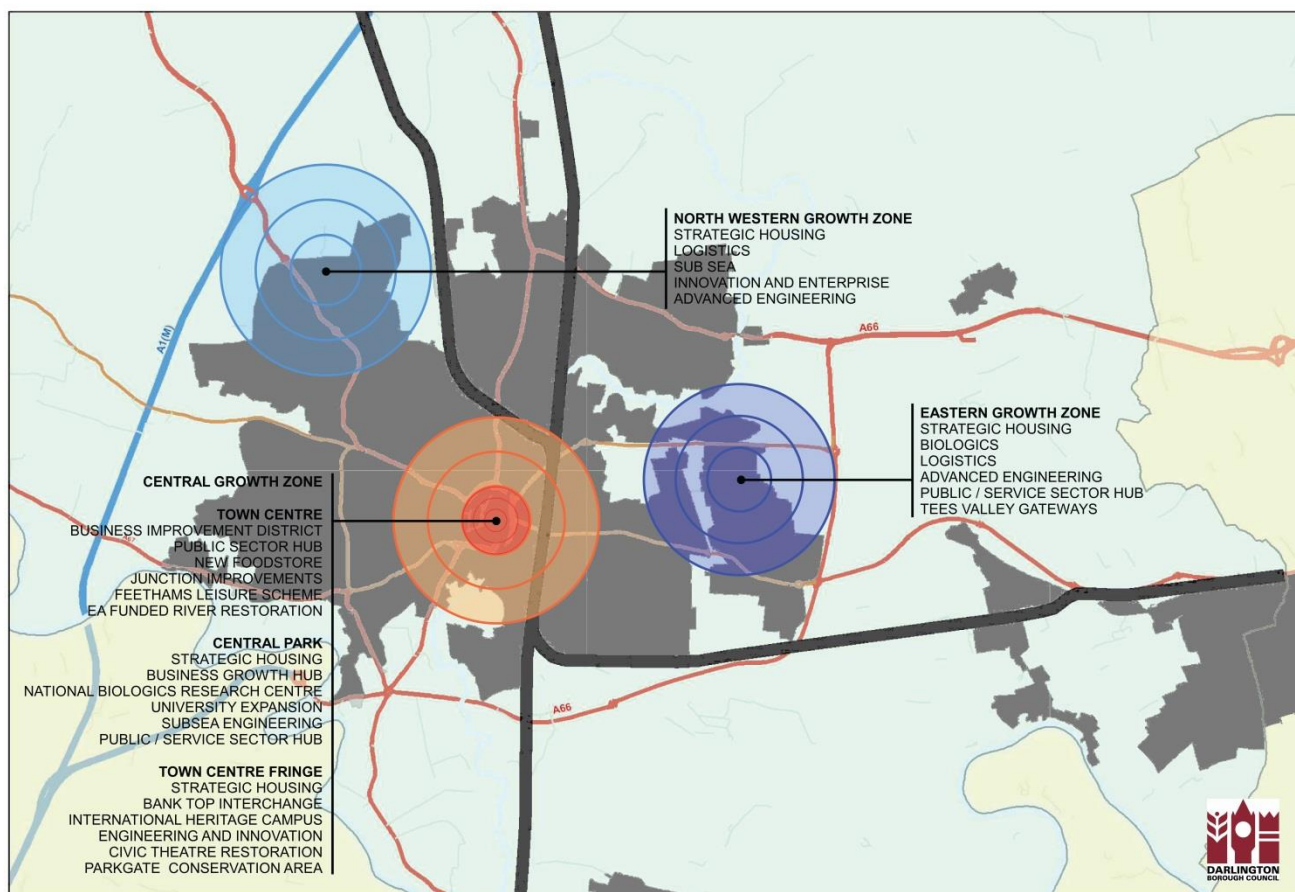
Good design is central to making attractive places. We intend to reflect this strongly in the new Local Plan, making use of the existing policy framework which is still appropriate and in line with national policy, and to improve the associated Design of New Development Supplementary Planning Document, to cover issues like local amenity and access for people with disabilities, to improve the policy's overall effectiveness.

The 200th anniversary of the opening of the Darlington and Stockton Railway in 2025 is an opportunity to highlight the importance and quality of Darlington's rail and other heritage to a wider audience. In addition, a sustained programme of initiatives to improve levels of cycling, walking and public transport use in the Borough, means we are now well positioned to embed and demonstrate exemplar sustainable travel behaviour across the Borough by 2036. The health benefits of this are also being complemented by wider environmental, health and social care service improvements being planned under the Government's 'Healthy New Towns' initiative.

We propose an overarching policy to highlight the Council's commitment to achieving these ambitions through local planning and place making.

Strategic Locations for Growth

It is highly likely that the locations identified for growth and regeneration in the adopted Core Strategy and part of the Growth Zones below are still the most suitable and sustainable for new development. But more land in new locations is needed for more development and to replace developable land used up since 2011.



Darlington Town Centre

The town centre is the main retail, leisure, office and transport hub for the Borough and beyond. Recent office, leisure and car park developments in the Feethams area, and proposals to refresh the Covered Market, are designed to reaffirm and strengthen this role. To sustain and increase Darlington's market share and vibrancy for retail, offices and leisure for the next 20 years, further innovations and improvements to the town centre offer will be needed.

We propose a policy to do this, underpinned by a review of the 2012 Town Centre Strategy, including considering the future of the land identified currently for the stalled 'Oval' shopping development.

Central Growth Zone

This area takes in the town centre but also extends to the east and north to encompass the Bank Top Railway Station area, the area around The Forum and Civic Theatre performance venues and the emerging business and housing area of Central Park beyond that. It also includes vacant and underused land bordering the River Skerne to the east of High Northgate and west of Haughton Road.

We propose a policy to support the continuation and extension of current projects here. Renewed focus is expected to be given to improving Bank Top Station and making the most of opportunities nearby that arise from its accessibility to places further afield and its role in the 'gateway experience' for those arriving in Darlington. The 2013 Town Centre Fringe Masterplan remains in our ambitions, but because land values in the area are so low, and constraints on development so varied and complex, we propose that any housing or commercial schemes coming forward here should be regarded as in addition to anything planned elsewhere.

North West Growth Zone

We envisage that the area taking in Faverdale, West Park and the planned West Park Garden Village will continue to make a significant contribution to meeting the Borough's employment and housing development needs over the next 20 years, and that the local centre at West Park will expand to serve it. There are still local and strategic highway issues to resolve, but these are not expected to be showstoppers.

Eastern Growth Zone

The Eastern Transport Corridor has opened up significant new tracts of land for development and regeneration to its north and south, especially at the urban fringe. Recent investment at Lingfield Point, including the Millfields housing area indicate the potential of this area, and we envisage that development of the wider area for employment and housing uses will accelerate. There are still local and strategic highway issues to resolve, but these are not expected to be show stoppers.

New Growth Zones

This consultation and parallel technical assessment work with key stakeholders will establish the most suitable and deliverable options for new growth zones to accommodate employment and housing beyond that possible in the areas identified above in the timescale required. Some potential zones where new housing could go are shown in the housing land section.

New Development

Employment sites

Darlington has more than enough land and premises for new or expanding businesses in a range of locations across the Borough, but there are likely to be shortages in particular sizes, types and quality for the businesses growing in Darlington now and those likely to be attracted here in the future.

The future demand and availability of business land and premises was last reviewed in 2013. This information needs updating to take account of any new or different requirements of likely end users and gains/losses in the supply, and to roll forward the demand forecasts to 2036. A robust policy position to safeguard valuable employment land from other uses will also be needed, to respond to national planning policy that requires its suitability for housing to be considered.

The approach in the interim planning policy statement will be the starting point for developing a new policy. The priority locations for encouraging new employment development will be reflected in the emerging policies for the growth zones (identified above).

Town Centres and Retailing

The IPPS updates the Darlington town centre boundary and primary and secondary shopping frontages shown on the 1997 Borough of Darlington Local Plan Proposals Map. As this update reflects significant recent research and takes account of feedback from consultations, we propose to take these forward unaltered into the New Local Plan, unless trends in the way town centres are used dictates otherwise.

We propose retaining and protecting the existing hierarchy of district and local centres set out in the IPPS and the Core Strategy, but it may be necessary to identify new/expanded one(s) if significant new housing is planned in an area not already well served by existing shops and services. We also propose to keep the local requirement on

developers to provide retail impact assessments for proposals for out of centre development as long as it continues to accord with national planning policy.

Housing land

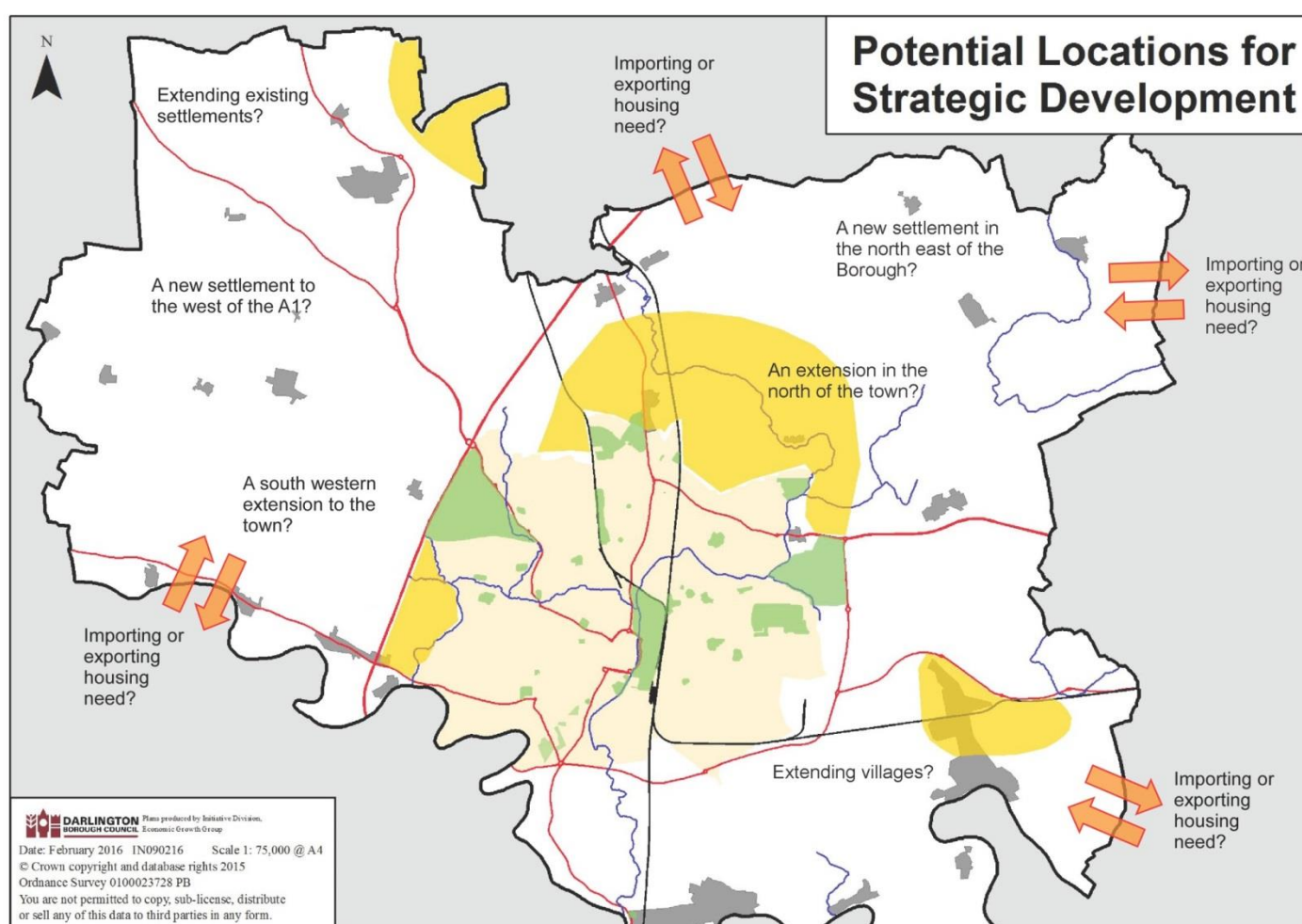
Because much more new housing needs to be planned for than previously, all existing information about potential housing sites will be reviewed and further information collected, to enable us to identify those that are the most suitable, sustainable, available and deliverable. There will need to be a mix of sizes and types of sites capable of delivering new homes throughout the next 20 years. We will also need to allocate more land than is needed, to make sure the housing target is met even if some sites do not progress, or progress is slower than expected.

The starting point will be the 45+ sites already identified in the IPPS. These sites, which have already been the subject of public consultations, are within or on the edge of the main urban area of Darlington and are considered suitable for sustainable new housing developments in the next five years.

We will work with stakeholders and others to draw up the criteria that will be used to decide which additional sites to allocate for housing in the new Local Plan. We will also ask people to tell us about any sites they think could accommodate sustainable new housing development in a 'call for sites'.

We have done some initial thinking on where new housing could go to stimulate your thoughts. Taking into account some key constraints like flood risk, physical barriers, capacity of roads and schools, and the presence of valuable environmental and heritage assets, we have identified some strategic options. These also include areas where the scale of new housing would support the provision of new schools, roads, etc.

These initial options are illustrated on the following diagram.



Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation

A recent (2014) assessment of accommodation needs found that as well as extensions/expansions to Honeypot Lane and Neasham Road sites, further land may be needed in the medium to long term. Additional needs are also likely to arise because we are now planning for 20 years ahead, and not 15 as previously.

We will fully review the evidence of need and bring it up to date. To accord with national policy, we propose a new policy which includes plot and pitch targets for travelling showpeople and Gypsies and Travellers respectively, a five year supply of specific deliverable sites to meet needs, and broad locations for further provision beyond that. The policy is also likely to set out the things that proposals for unplanned sites will be considered against.

Renewable energy and energy efficiency

Recent technological advances, changes to national planning policy and incentive schemes all indicate a full review of the Core Strategy policy approach is needed. The review will also take account of the shift in how energy efficiency improvements in new development will be secured, away from the planning system to the building regulations regime.

Local Place Making

So that the Borough remains an attractive place to live, we will draw up policies and undertaking masterplanning to ensure that new development creates good new places, or enhances existing places. Good local places may include a mix of well designed energy efficient housing with strong local community and recreational facilities, shops and services. These walkable neighbourhoods are likely to be designed to encourage healthy lifestyles, enhance the natural environment, cherish local heritage, and have good access to jobs.

Type of housing

Recent local housing needs research shows that providing more affordable housing and meeting the needs of an ageing population are big local issues. Also, parts of the Borough can meet some of the demand arising across the Tees Valley for top end executive housing, and national policy requires us to help increase the supply of starter homes and encourage more self build housing.

We propose a comprehensive review of the existing Core Strategy policy, so new housing can be matched to identified local needs, and we propose to identify suitable sites and/or parts of larger sites to meet some of the top-end executive and self build housing demand.

Quality of existing housing and residential areas

The quality of some Council owned and older terraced residential environments needs improving to be attractive now and in the future. Concentrations of empty homes, houses in multiple occupation and sub-divided homes, e.g. in the Corporation Road area, can contribute to poor quality living environments. Recent changes to the Council tax regime and the bedroom tax are affecting the prevalence of these types of dwellings, and new national policy and legislation arising from the forthcoming Housing and Planning Act 2016 is also expected to have an effect.

It is proposed to review the evidence on these matters to see what the effects of the matters outlined above is likely to be. If problems remain that can be tackled through the planning system, a new policy will be prepared, using the existing adopted LDF Core Strategy policy CS12 as a starting point.

Heritage Assets

As stated earlier ([hyperlink](#)), because heritage and archaeology are at the heart of what makes Darlington distinctive, we propose a policy to promote, protect and enhance its quality and integrity. Work on this is already well advanced, and is reflected in the interim planning position statement. It covers heritage and archaeology that has already been formally recognised, as well as that which has not. Unless there are changes to national policy, it is proposed to retain the existing policy approach.

Landscape Character

The adopted Core Strategy identifies that the Borough is part of three strategic landscape character areas, whilst more detailed recent landscape character work (2015) identified ten distinctive local landscape character areas, and assessed the capacity of some areas to accommodate new development.

The adopted policy approach identifying and seeking to safeguard the most valued landscapes in the context of the national presumption in favour of sustainable development still remains valid, so we propose to retain it. This means that landscape character is most likely to be a factor in deciding how to design and plan new development (see IPPS), and only in very exceptional cases, is it anticipated that impact on landscape be a show stopping issue.

Green Infrastructure

The Darlington Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013) provides comprehensive information to underpin local planning policy for all green space, except allotments, for which there is a separate strategy. Up to date information and trends will need to be collected to inform the policy approach to the latter.

We propose that the existing policy approach, which protects key components of the identified green infrastructure network from losses, be retained and the approach to providing more green space, as broadly set out in the IPPS, is refined. If possible, we propose to simplify the existing approach to achieve these intentions.

Biodiversity & Geodiversity

Biodiversity is an important indicator of environmental well-being, Whilst we have relatively few nationally designated biodiversity and geodiversity sites, there is about 300 hectares of locally important wildlife friendly green space, including land along the river corridors and becks, Local Nature Reserves (e.g. Geneva Woods) and Local Wildlife Sites. Comprehensive up to date information is reflected in the Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013).

The 'conserve and where possible enhance' policy approach set out in the IPPS, the GIS and the Core Strategy is well developed and takes account of feedback from key stakeholders and sustainability appraisal. Unless any national

policy changes or significant changes to local circumstances warrant it, we propose to reflect the current policy approach in the new Local Plan.

Sport, recreation and open space

Indoor and outdoor sport and recreation facilities, including sports centres, community halls, playing fields and green space for childrens' play and informal recreation are essential to support healthy lifestyles. Compared to other towns, Darlington has a lot of open space for its population, but it is not all attractive to use, and may not all be easy to reach and accessible.

The existing policy approach aims to safeguard and improve sport and recreation facilities from other forms of development in most circumstances, but with flexibility built in, so that the Council and other providers can adapt to new models of delivery. We would seek an appropriate level of new provision with new development, or ask for developer contributions to improve facilities nearby. We propose to retain this approach, as it is based on recent sport and physical activity strategies. Any refinements will be to reflect more up to date evidence, such as for playing pitch needs, or any changes to national policy.

Community facilities

Health: Access to local primary health and hospital facilities are significant local concerns, reflecting a national issue. The Council is not the provider of these services, but through the local plan, we can work with the NHS and the Darlington Clinical Commissioning Group to help make sure that for any new facilities planned, land in appropriate locations, e.g. as part of wider new housing development, is kept free for that purpose.

Schools: There is a strong positive link between education and health. New housing often generates the need for more local primary and secondary school places, and new nursery places. The Local Plan can help make sure that when new housing takes place, the developer contributes to the cost of providing new school places, whether it is with new, altered or extended buildings, and/or by reserving suitable land within large new housing schemes.

Higher education: Darlington is well provided with higher education opportunities now that Teesside University has a successful campus in the town, complementing Darlington College and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College. We want to find out about any future plans these and other establishments may have for development over the next 20 years, to ensure that the Council does all that it can to support it through the planning system.

Pubs and other community venues: these can be valuable local meeting places, enriching sensible users with a sense of well being and community belonging. We are considering including a policy in the new Local Plan that would ensure that any proposals for the loss of the last such facilities in any community are not permitted unless it is clear that efforts have been made to look at alternative ways of retaining it and/or the functions it performs.

Transport, Parking and Utilities

New technical work is needed to understand the highway and other transport impacts of the amount of development being proposed over the next 20 years and the growth in travel that would occur even if no new development was planned. The work is also needed to help identify what new improvements are necessary to the local road network, bus and rail services, and cycling and walking infrastructure to support development, encourage sustainable travel choices and avoid significant road congestion.

The existing Parking Strategy (2014-26) will be the starting point for new policy development. It will be reviewed to take account of changes to existing parking following the completion of new developments in the Feethams area, and to understand and plan for more that is needed by 2036. The general approach to short stay, long stay, contract car parking and residents parking zones set out in the IPPS is likely to be retained, to support town centre vitality and manage demand.

We will work with the major utility providers to make sure that all new development can be readily connected to ICT, gas, electric, water supply and sewerage facilities without delay, and that this can be done without harming the delivery of these utilities to existing homes and businesses already in the Borough. To support local businesses and improve residents' quality of life, it is proposed to ask for superfast broadband capability for all new developments.

All this will be set out in an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, to be prepared alongside the new Local Plan

Managing Development

To help make sure new development is sustainable and contributes to improving quality of life, we are also proposing policies to guide developers about matters like planning obligations, car parking standards, shop fronts, amenity, access to sustainable transport, flood risk and sustainable urban drainage systems.

The starting point will be relevant material in the Interim Planning Policy Statement and the adopted LDF Core Strategy, and the latest national planning policy on these matters.

Making it Happen

We will have to show that any proposals in the new Local Plan are deliverable. Some of our choices about where new development should happen may therefore be affected by whether land that is suitable and could be developed sustainably will actually be available to someone with the ability and enough incentive to develop it.

During this consultation, we will be devising a process and a set of criteria against which we can do this as transparently as possible.

Having your Say

- What are your answers to the key questions **Q1** to **Q10** above?
- What other views do you have on what the new Darlington Local Plan should contain?

You have until **Monday 15th August 2016** to comment.

Please visit www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan to make your comments, or if you are unable to do this, you can write to: Planning Policy Team, Room 401, Town Hall Darlington DL1 5QT.

On the website, you can also

- find out about what will happen next
- find out about related work, such as the sustainability appraisal.
- register to be notified of further opportunities to have your say about the new Local Plan and related work.

For any other queries about responding to this consultation, please call the Planning Policy Team on 01325 406724.
