

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION

The Employment Land Allocation in CS5: Position Statement
December 17th, 2010

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The first part of this Position Statement clarifies the amount of employment land to be provided through CS5 and the second part justifies the apparent over-supply of land compared with the latest forecast of need.

2. How much employment land will be provided through CS5?

- 2.1 The policy quantifies that provision will be made for up to 235ha of additional land for general and mixed use employment and a further 125ha is indicated at the key employment locations of Faverdale and Heighington Lane. This gives an overall total of 360ha. Of the 235ha of land for general and mixed use employment, first and second priority sites total about 128ha. However, up to 107ha will be on suitable previously developed sites in sustainable locations within the urban area. These are referred to as "other sites" in the fourth paragraph of the Policy and will be allocated through the Accommodating Growth DPD.

- 2.2 To add clarity to the employment land provision, the following changes are suggested to the fourth paragraph of CS5:

"The focus of other **general and mixed use sites (up to 107ha)** contributing to the employment land supply, **throughout the plan period**, will be on suitable previously developed sites in sustainable locations within the urban area".

- 2.3 **It is also suggested that this paragraph be inserted before the third paragraph** i.e. the one, which begins: "A further 125ha of employment land....."

- 2.4 The effect of this proposed minor amendment would be to clarify that Policy CS5 makes provision for up to 235ha of land for general and mixed use employment and that figure is made up of first and second priority sites, plus up to 107ha of land on other sites. These sites are expected to be developed throughout the plan period. A further 125ha of employment land (making a total provision of 360ha) will be made available at the key employment locations of Faverdale and Heighington for development complementary to that identified above.

3. Employment land provision compared with forecast need

- 3.1 Having established that CS5 makes provision for up to 360ha of employment land which comprises up to 235ha for general and mixed use employment and 125ha at the key employment locations of Faverdale and Heighington, there would appear to be a substantial overprovision of land compared with the latest forecast need for 101.5ha (para 9.7, ELR, SD017) over the plan period. The justification is as follows.

- 3.2 The key employment location at Faverdale comprises some 120 hectares. The adopted Borough of Darlington Local Plan states that the site will be held in reserve for development by up to two single major industrial users and will not be developed on a piecemeal basis by smaller users. This site in Darlington needs to be seen as an essential element of the employment land portfolio of the Tees Valley, offering unique advantages

that do not occur on other sites. While the Borough Council fully supports the sequential approach, it is also clear (for example in Planning Policy Statement 1) that the planning system needs to ensure that suitable locations are available for industrial developments so that the economy can prosper.

- 3.3 This site offers size and locational advantages that cannot be easily replicated on other sites. The site needs to be retained to provide opportunities for specialist growth sectors, which cannot be accommodated on the bulk of sites that make up the employment land portfolio. In fact, the Council is currently in discussions with a national finance institution, which has identified 120ha of land at Faverdale as only one of four locations in the Country where it is considering developing a secure data storage facility. Should this proposal go ahead, then 120ha of employment land will be removed from the supply at a stroke.
- 3.4 Significant public sector investment has taken place in recent years to serve the adjacent industrial site and new housing development, which has resulted in the construction of new highways with sufficient capacity to provide a link between the site and the A1M.
- 3.5 The key employment location of Heighington, on the Borough boundary, is part of a larger site identified in Durham County for a development of high quality that would accommodate proposals for business, general industry and warehousing. The Darlington part of the site is also identified for new employment purposes and it is intended that it will be developed as an integral part of the larger site in Durham County.
- 3.6 Significant investment has taken place in providing infrastructure to enable the development of the Heighington site. This has resulted in the construction of a roundabout spur to provide access to the site from Heighington Lane, which forms the northern perimeter of the site. Heighington Lane was improved through to its junction with the A6072 Heighington village bypass in the early 1990's including a new roundabout on the A6072. In addition, a bridge has been constructed over the railway line, which forms the eastern perimeter of the site to enable access from the southeast. The total level of public expenditure to provide this infrastructure is approximately £3 million.
- 3.7 From the above justification, the Borough Council submits that the key locations of Faverdale and Heighington are additions to the calculation of need in the Employment Land Review. If the Council is correct, and current negotiations would appear to indicate that it is, then 120ha at Faverdale will be developed by a single operator. This eventuality was clearly not considered by the Consultants who prepared the ELR. The Borough Council also submits that the development of the land at Heighington is firmly linked to the development of the larger site located in Durham County rather than to the land market in Darlington. Therefore, the forecast need for 101.5ha of land should be compared with the 235ha of land provided for general and mixed-use employment.
- 3.8 Despite the apparent oversupply of employment land compared with forecast need, the Employment Land Review 2009 (para 9.2) concluded that:

“The research has indicated that there is currently no justification for removing the majority of the sites from their current status, even those parts that are vacant or remain undeveloped”.
- 3.9 The Borough Council also submits that the ELR is a snapshot in time. The 2009 ELR was undertaken when the economy was at low ebb. While the Council accepts that it may be several years before there is a significant recovery, the forecasts of need could increase in three or four years time. However, to ensure that the Borough can accommodate, and be attractive to, a range of new businesses and expansions, as well as traditional established employment uses, a portfolio of employment land is needed that exceeds this requirement, so that there is a choice of sites, in different locations, whatever the requirements.