

**STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND OF DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL AND THE
HIGHWAYS AGENCY
21st January 2011**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement of common ground sets out the position of Darlington Borough Council and the Highways Agency regarding the soundness of the Core Strategy, in particular those transport infrastructure matters relating to the strategic road network in Chapter 9 of the Core Strategy. The statement also explains how this agreed position has been reached.
- 1.2 Darlington Borough Council is responsible for the preparation of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, and for the preparation of an associated Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 1.3 Darlington Borough Council as Highway Authority is responsible for managing their road network with a view to securing the expeditious movement of traffic on the authority's road network and facilitating the expeditious movement of traffic on road networks for which another authority is the traffic authority. The authority's actions contribute to securing the more efficient use of their road network or the avoidance, elimination or reduction of road congestion or other disruption to the movement of traffic.
- 1.4 The Highways Agency is responsible for managing and operating the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport. This responsibility includes considering the potential impacts on the safe and efficient operation of the SRN that result from development proposals and initiatives.

2. Chronology

- 2.1 In response to consultations on the Revised Preferred Options (CD022) in early 2010, the Highways Agency indicated the need for further evidence collection work if it was to be able to consider the Core Strategy sound. Following this, representatives of the Council and the Highways Agency met to discuss what was needed and when. The Council agreed to provide an up-to-date developments database, including commitments, e.g. schemes that already have planning permission, and information about the scale, location and timing of developments proposed in the Core Strategy. That database was handed over in April. The robustness of the database had been previously tested by consultants working for the Council to prepare the LDF Core Strategy Transport Area Action Plans (SD008).
- 2.2 The Highways Agency inputted the data into their Transport Impact Assessment Tool (TIAT), which distributes and assigns predicted traffic to sections of the road network. A finalised TIAT was shared with the Council in August. The TIAT indicated that the main traffic problems on the SRN arising from the proposed new development would be felt on the A66(T), particularly on the Morton Palms and Great Burdon roundabouts, but also other roundabouts on the A66, such as at Blands Corner.
- 2.3 The Highways Agency indicated that it would need to carry out further work, in the form of VISSIM (micro-simulation) modelling, before it would be able to indicate if it could support the Core Strategy and withdraw its objection. The VISSIM modelling and analysis would identify the nature and costs of the scheme(s) that would be required to mitigate the impact of the planned development in the Core Strategy on the SRN, such that traffic performance would be maintained at the level that would have occurred if the development(s) had not taken place. This work was commissioned from JMP by the Highways Agency in August.

- 2.4 At the end of September, the Highways Agency submitted three representations to the Core Strategy Publication Draft (014/01/CS5/123, 014/02/CS10/123 and 014/03/CS19/123) indicating that it did not consider the Core Strategy sound, as the evidence base was incomplete. Within those representations, the Highways Agency indicated that it considered it could reach an agreed position with the Council provided that an additional assessment (the work referred to in para. 2.3 above) that was currently being undertaken was completed prior to the commencement of the Examination.
- 2.5 That additional assessment was completed in late October, and the VISSIM results and analysis submitted to the Council by the Highways Agency as part of a position statement (014/04/CS19/*). This submission included suggested changes to the reasoned justification in Chapter 6, to Policy CS19 and to the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, and indicated that if those changes were made, then the Highways Agency's objections to Policies CS5, CS10 and CS19 could be withdrawn and that the Highways Agency would then consider the Core Strategy sound.
- 2.6 The VISSIM results and analysis submitted to the Council were reviewed by the Council. The methodology was considered credible and the principle of the mitigations proposed were considered sound. The junction improvements to the A66 now being suggested by the Highways Agency were felt to be more deliverable than the previously proposed A66(T) dualling (included in the Publication Draft Policy CS19).
- 2.7 The Council felt that the Highways Agency suggestion of a wording change to Policy CS19, to indicate that the proposed junction improvements be delivered by 2016, was unrealistic, and not sufficiently flexible. The Council felt that these works could only be carried out progressively as and when developments come forward, not in advance of any meaningful development. It argued that most of the additional development proposed in the Core Strategy giving rise to the requirement for the junction improvement schemes was not planned to come forward by 2016. On 26th October, the Council therefore suggested the following alternative change to the Core Strategy to the Highways Agency:
- replace the (Highways Agency's) suggested '*by 2016*' in CS19 to '*as required to meet the needs of new development*', to clarify the link between new development and the need for the A66 junction improvements, and to provide flexibility.
- 2.8 Regarding the Highways Agency's suggested change that the junction improvement schemes be listed in Policy CS19, the Council responded that this was an inappropriate level of detail for the Core Strategy and that the schemes would be listed and identified in the Accommodating Growth DPD, and also in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 2.9 On 29th October, the Highways Agency indicated it was comfortable with suggested change outlined in paragraph 2.7 above, as it provides flexibility regarding development timing. It also indicated it was happy that the listing of schemes take place in documents other than the Core Strategy.
- 2.10 The Council and the Highways Agency also agreed a minor wording change as a proposed minor amendment, which linked the need for junction improvements in this area back to the Tees Valley Area Action Plan work signed off by Tees Valley Unlimited in November 2009.
- 2.11 The Council included the changes agreed with the Highways Agency in its Proposed Minor Amendments document (CD009), submitted to the Secretary of State on 31st October. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SD002) submitted by the Council as an evidence document at the same time, also included the agreed list of five junction improvement schemes (pp 13 and 52 refer).
- 2.12 The Council is committed to reflecting the schemes in its forthcoming Making Places and Accommodating Growth DPD.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Both the Council and the Highways Agency consider that the proposed junction improvements to the A66(T) are the most appropriate strategy for managing the strategic highways network traffic impact of the development proposed in the Core Strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives. The need for enhanced physical infrastructure is required in addition to the sustainable travel and travel behaviour initiatives that will be an integral part of the Core Strategy development proposals. As such it is considered consistent with national policy.
- 3.2 The proposed schemes are considered deliverable and taking into account the proposed minor wording change, the policy is considered flexible and able to be monitored.
- 3.3 The proposed minor amendments are therefore considered sufficient to ensure the soundness of the Core Strategy

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Dated 21st January 2011.