

**DARLINGTON CORE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (DPD)**  
**EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC**

**SESSION 3 – THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

**HEARING STATEMENT BY ST MODWEN (024)**

1. **Policy CS5 protects existing viable employment sites by safeguarding them for employment uses only or for mixed uses where appropriate unless it can be demonstrated that they are not required. Does this provide an adequate mechanism for the release of such sites for other purposes? Does the Core Strategy adequately reflect how existing employment provision relates to demand?**
  - 1.1 Our response to this question should be read in conjunction with our response to the 'Strategy' questions and particularly where we assert that there is far too much employment land in Darlington (and the Tees Valley). Policy CS5 makes provision, as a second priority, for some 50 hectares of land at Faverdale for business, industrial and logistics (about 60% of which is controlled by St Modwen). It also refers to a further 125 hectares of employment land which will be made available at the key employment locations of Faverdale and Heighington Lane for complementary development at any point during the plan period.
  - 1.2 There are three key issues within this question namely (a) do all of the employment sites need to be safeguarded, (b) are they all in demand / viable and (c) is the mechanism for release of such sites adequate? The specific need for that quantity of land at Faverdale is also of relevance.
  - 1.3 In terms of (a) we believe that the Council should critically re-examine their employment land portfolio and if necessary, update the Employment Land Review (ELR) with input from the relevant professional organisations and landowners / developers. Put simply all of the sites do not need to be safeguarded based upon the ELR, annual take up rates and our own research (DTZ and St Modwen). A range of sites will be needed for the full spectrum of uses and with differing strengths, but the landholding on some of them is simply too large.
  - 1.4 Clearly, in response to (b), they are not all in demand and some are also not viable, not least those relying upon public sector subsidy. Whilst there will be cycles in the economy the level of demand would never match the land supply in our view. If the sites were in demand then they would, of course, be coming forward or showing early signs of activity. This review can

be done without prejudicing the future economy of Darlington and in time for the next stage of the plan making process.

- 1.5 The Faverdale 58 site itself comprises 28 hectares (70 acres) of land under the control of St Modwen, the eastern part of which is brownfield land that was occupied by the former Rise Carr rolling mills (now demolished). The remainder of the site comprises low grade agricultural land separated into a number of fields bounded by hedgerows and trees. Clearly there is other land at Faverdale in other ownership which makes up the balance referred to in the policy.
- 1.6 Our case in respect of Faverdale 58 is put simply that it is a good site but the amount of employment land is clearly not going to be required, even when adopting the most optimistic employment land projections. The site can be made more sustainable than the ELR suggests by integrating employment uses with housing and community facilities, plus improving bus, cycle and footway linkages (plans are available showing this). This is the most appropriate course of action.
- 1.7 Marketing information provided by DTZ (copy of letter attached) demonstrates that the site has been extensively marketed and promoted over a considerable period of time, but there is likely to be demand for perhaps just a quarter of the existing land area for employment uses.
- 1.8 The aspiration is to create a sustainable neighbourhood that integrates housing with employment land, within a well landscaped framework. This would comprise 4 separate cells of development and informed by our market information, 2 cells would be residential and the other 2 primarily employment. The total net developable area is approximately 18 hectares (45 acres). The residential cells could deliver up to 400 units on 12 hectares in a phased manner and relate well to the previously developed part of the site, whilst still leaving 6 hectares for employment uses. By focussing the residential element to the south, access to the town centre by sustainable transport modes is maximised.
- 1.9 That brings us to (c) and the mechanism for release of employment land. Policy CS5 does allow for “mixed uses, where appropriate” and also says sites should be safeguarded “unless it can be demonstrated that they are not required for the purposes of providing a balanced portfolio of land for employment purposes”. The nature of the ‘mechanism’ referred to is unclear in policy terms, but appears to be underpinned by the Annual Monitoring report and land availability by type. Such a ‘Plan, Monitor, Manage’ approach can only be effective if

policy and allocations are reviewed then altered to reflect changing circumstances. Given that employment land availability has been substantial for a number of years, demand remains low and the portfolio has not altered significantly it may be time to introduce more rigorous checks / balances. The likely removal of the RSS target by the end of 2011 allows such a review to proceed.

1.10 Ideally some sites and allocations would be examined and adjusted now, in the light of a robust evidence base, rather than relying upon a mechanism for later release or piecemeal consideration of individual sites. Notwithstanding the above, there is a strong case for releasing some of the land for alternative uses, other than employment, at Faverdale 58 and bringing forward a sustainable mixed use scheme.

**2. The Revised Preferred Options (CD022) includes in Policy CS6 promoting a strategic tourist opportunity adjoining the A68/A1(M) interchange which has been dropped in the Publication Draft. Should the reference be maintained to maximise opportunities for tourism?**

2.1 Our earlier representations did not address this point and we do not wish to comment now.

**3. The town centre will be safeguarded by Policy CS7 by identifying it as the first priority for retail development, and only when it can accommodate no further major non-retail development will it be allowed to extend into the Town Centre Fringe. Is the Policy too inflexible and can it deliver the eastwards extension, including the necessary improvements to infrastructure?**

3.1 St Modwen would provide local services and amenities as required as part of a mixed use redevelopment at Faverdale. This would be complementary to the town centre and the intention is to improve linkages to the town centre by sustainable modes of transport.

**4. Policy CS8 includes references to quantities of additional retail floorspace, including forecasts of need and restrictions on locations. Is the Policy overly restrictive in these matters?**

4.1 St Modwen is keen to see the right level of retail floorspace provision to ensure a vital and viable town centre is maintained. This can continue to serve residents well, including those at Whessoe Road and potentially Faverdale.

**5. Other relevant issues**

- 5.1 St Modwen recognises that the economy of Darlington needs to continue to grow, diversify and flourish coming out of the current recession. Our representations are in no way intended to undermine that aspiration. They reflect a considered review of the needs of the town and economy in terms of employment land provision. Their proposals are phased and incorporate a good degree of flexibility in any event.

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