

THE COUNTY DURHAM PLAN, LOCAL PLAN PREFERRED OPTIONS**REPORT BY THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE****1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The Council has been consulted by Durham County Council regarding its emerging Local Plan (The County Durham Plan). This report highlights specific issues arising from The County Durham Plan that will be of significance to the future development of the city. Endorsement is sought for the response.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THE COUNTY DURHAM PLAN,

- 2.1 To date the preparation of The County Durham Plan has focused on the development of a 'Core Strategy', working to the requirements of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Act. With the introduction of the Localism Act and the National Planning Policy Framework, Durham County Council have chosen to develop a Local Plan, which combines strategic policies and sets out detailed allocations for development. In due course The County Durham Plan will be the statutory development plan for the County and will replace the 7 Local Plans adopted by the district councils pre-reorganisation April 2009.
- 2.2 Previously, Sunderland City Council has responded to the Issues and Options draft of the Durham County (Planning the Future of County Durham) published in June 2010 and the Core Strategy Policy Directions Paper (June 2011).
- 2.3 The Local Plan currently being consulted upon sets out the preferred spatial strategy for the county and will guide future development and growth up to 2030.

3.0 SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROPOSALS**Green Belt**

- 3.1 The Green Belt in North Durham is a relatively recent adoption, identified for the first time in the County Durham Structure Plan Review (adopted in 1999); following the Regional Planning Guidance Note 7 for the Northern Region that recommended the Tyne and Wear Green Belt extend into North Durham.
- 3.2 An essential characteristic of the Green Belt, reflected in both PPS2 (policy document at the time of adoption) and the more recent National Planning Policy Framework, is its permanence. Green Belt protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead, and would be expected to last beyond the immediate time scale of existing structure plans and local plans.

- 3.3 The Spatial Vision within the Local Plan identifies Durham City as a distinctive driving force for economic growth for the County. Durham City is tightly bound by Green Belt and as such in satisfying the Spatial Vision, deletions to the Green Belt have been proposed. Several Green Belt deletions are proposed on sites in relatively close proximity to the Sunderland border.

Table 1- Proposed Green Belt Deletions

Site	District	Proposal	Site Size
Sniperly Park	Durham City	2220 dwellings, and a new district centre.	84.2 ha
North of Arnison	Durham City	1225 dwellings	72.9 ha
Picktree Lane	Chester-le-Street	200 dwellings	9.3 ha
Lambton Park	Chester-le-Street	400 dwellings	72.5 ha
Aykley Heads	Durham City	B1 uses (70,000sqm) (Offices)	95 ha
Drum Industrial Estate	Chester-le-Street	B8 uses (Storage & Distribution)	11.5 ha
Lambton Park	Chester-le-Street	B1 uses (Offices)	10.87 ha

- 3.4 These Green Belt sites are considered by Durham to have the least environmental impact, are practically feasible for development, and where development would be most likely to lead to the creation of sustainable communities.
- 3.5 A series of consultations on both strategic growth options for Durham City and Green Belt Assessments have been undertaken to date. Durham consider that the evidence base work and consultation responses support the release of the above sites from the Green Belt, to deliver the strategic growth required in Durham City. Draft Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) have been produced for Sniperly Park, North of Arnison, Aykley Heads and Lambton Park to guide future development.

Employment Land

- 3.6 The County Durham Employment Land Review (ELR) (2012) states that there are 815 hectares of employment land presently available in the County. The ELR recommends that Durham County Council plan for between 200 and 325 hectares (this is a reduction from the 2011 ELR which recommended that the County plan for between 350- 400 hectares).
- 3.7 The Local Plan states it is allocating 300 hectares of land. Therefore there is an oversupply of 515 hectares of employment land in the County.

- 3.8 In addition to the above, a further 344 hectares of land is to be 'reserved' as Specific Use Sites on industrial estates throughout the County, with a further 26 hectares safeguarded:
- **Amazon Park (Heighington Lane), Newton Aycliffe-** A 52 hectare site is allocated for the manufacture and assembly of trains and their supply chain
 - **NetPark, Sedgefield-** an extension of 35 hectares is proposed to enable NETPark achieve its full employment potential. The site would be reserved solely for the science technology and engineering sectors
 - **Tursdale, Bowburn-** A 123 hectare site is allocated for rail freight and related activity
 - **Newton Park, Newton Aycliffe-** A 53 hectare site is allocated for rail freight and related activity
 - **South of Drum, Chester-le-Street-** A 11.5 hectare Green Belt extension is allocated for storage and distribution uses only
 - **South of Seaham-** A 58.5 hectare site is allocated for the development of a film studio and associated uses.
 - **Lambton Park Estate, Chester-le-Street-** This 11 hectare Green Belt site is allocated for light industrial and office uses.
- 3.9 Aykley Heads (6.8 ha) is identified for the development of a strategic employment site for (B1) office uses. It is stated in the Plan that the creation of such a site in Durham City is fundamental to realising the City's economic growth potential and achieving the Plan's wider economic ambitions for the County over the next 15 years and beyond.
- 3.10 The Plan states that both the Council and the business community consider that Durham City - and the Aykley Heads site in particular - is the best location for office development in the County. Aykley Heads is considered to have the potential to become a flagship employment site in the region, attracting world-leading businesses to the city which will drive the step-change envisaged for the economy of County Durham.
- 3.11 Development of the site should aim to meet the following objectives:-
- Deliver 70,000 sqm (750,000 sq ft) of new, high quality, flexible office floorspace to attract new national and international employers and accommodate approximately 6,000 jobs;
 - Set new office development within a strong landscape framework which capitalises on the sites natural landscape features;
- 3.12 The site is divided into six areas, each providing a different quantum, density and form of development. A (draft) SPD has been produced to guide development. The existing County Hall would be redeveloped as part of this proposal. One-third of the overall provision of office

floorspace will be for the public sector, the remaining two-thirds being occupied by the private sector.

Housing

- 3.13 The Local Plan identifies a net dwelling requirement of approximately 30,000 dwellings 2010-30, a reduction on the previous Core Strategy Policy Directions paper. The table below sets out the proposed housing numbers and previously proposed figures.

Table 2- Proposed Housing Allocations

	Proposed Housing Allocation (2010-30)	Per Annum	Methodology
Issues & Options (June 2010)	29,000 dwellings	1,385	RSS Target
Core Strategy Policy Directions (June 2011)	38,200 dwellings	2,010	2008 ONS Population/ Household Projections
Local Plan (September 2012)	30,000 dwellings	1,500	Durham County Scenario 4 Model, incorporating 2010 ONS Population Projections

- 3.14 The reduction in the overall housing target is a result of discrepancies being identified between ONS Population Projections and local data prepared by the County Council. The latter housing targets are considered more robust.
- 3.15 The number of dwellings proposed in the three settlements most likely to have an impact on the housing market in Sunderland, Durham City, Chester-le-Street, Seaham and Murton has increased (7920) from those set out in the Core Strategy Policy Directions paper (6900).

Table 3- Proposed Housing Allocations by District

	Local Plan Proposed Housing Allocation (2012)	Core Strategy Policy Directions (2011)	+/-
Durham City	5120 dwellings	4750 dwellings	+ 370
Chester- le-Street	1300 dwellings	850 dwellings	+ 450
Seaham	1150 dwellings	700 dwellings	+ 450
Murton	350 dwellings	600 dwellings	- 250
Total	7920 dwellings	6900 dwellings	

- 3.16 Only 11 sites within the four settlements identified above, allocated within the Local Plan are in relatively close proximity to Sunderland's City Boundary. These 11 sites equate to approximately 5280 dwellings. It should be noted that the Local Plan only identifies sites over 1.5 ha.

- 3.17 400 (8%) of the 5280 are on the border of the city boundary at Lambton Park, where 400 executive dwellings are proposed to be built. The site is Green Belt and was not previously identified within the Core Strategy Policy Directions.
- 3.18 Of the 5280 dwellings proposed, 76% will be developed on Green Belt land, 96% on greenfield land, such sites are likely to be attractive to developers, especially those sites in close proximity to Durham City.

Implications for Sunderland

Green Belt

- 3.19 Approximately 360ha of Green Belt is proposed to be deleted on sites in relatively close proximity to the Sunderland's border. There is concern that the County Council are reversing the Green Belt allocation, so soon after its adoption. The implications for Sunderland are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Employment Land

- 3.20 The amount of general employment land in the County is set to reduce from the County's existing supply of 815 hectares to 300 hectares (a decrease of approximately 63%). However, when including the seven Specific Use Employment Sites (totalling some 344 hectares), the overall amount of land allocated for employment purposes would have decreased by 171 hectares or 20%.
- 3.21 The County's ELR (2012) identifies a need for a maximum 325 hectares of employment land in Durham. The provision of 300 hectares would provide for choice and flexibility in the market and will ensure that businesses wanting to locate to the area have a selection of alternative sites to choose from in varying locations.
- 3.22 In terms of the additional 344 hectares of employment land allocated across the seven Specific Use Employment Sites, several of the sites have unimplemented or lapsed planning permissions:
- South of Seaham- planning permission was granted in 2008. This application was unimplemented and lapsed in 2011. However, another application has been submitted to re-new the permission and this is still to be determined.
 - Tursdale- outline planning permission was granted in 2009 but remains unimplemented.
 - Amazon Park- planning permission was renewed in 2010 along with permission for road improvements essential to the site being developed.
- 3.23 The continued allocation of these sites calls into question the actual viability and deliverability of these sites.

- 3.24 However, the development of the Specific Use Sites is likely to have minimal impact on the Sunderland and the city's supply of employment land.
- 3.25 The Sunderland Economic Masterplan outlines key growth sectors for the city including software, low carbon industries including vehicles and creative industries. Three of County Durham's Specific Use Employment Sites are being allocated for rail related activity, whilst South of Seaham is allocated for a film studio and NetPark for science and technology uses.
- 3.26 The 11.5 hectare extension to Drum Industrial Estate is to be used for storage and distribution. A site of this size for these uses is not significant and will have minimal impact on Sunderland.
- 3.27 It is envisaged that the development of Lambton Park would specifically be for light industrial and office uses for a business park type development within an attractive setting reflecting the sites historic park and its settings. This allocation is intended to attract entrepreneurs who may wish to relocate their businesses close to the potential new executive homes that make up the proposal. Occupancy conditions will therefore be applied to new premises within the site accordingly.
- 3.28 This proposal will have minimal impact on Sunderland. Its location means that it will complement estates in Sunderland (such as Sedgeleth and Dubmire) rather than compete with them, and the small scale business park type offices, in a historic setting, seeking to attract entrepreneurs rather than large organisations is unlikely to have any real impact on key development sites in the City Centre.
- 3.29 Comparisons could be drawn between the Aykley Heads site and that proposed for the Vaux site in Sunderland City Centre; both are aiming to attract large numbers of B1 office jobs to the respective city centres.

Table 4- Development Proposals at Aykley Head

Aykley Heads		Vaux
95ha	Gross area	19ha
70,000sqm	Office floorspace	53,000sqm
6,000	Number of jobs	3,500
	Phasing?	

- 3.30 The main difference is that Aykley Heads is to be developed as an office centre in a high quality parkland setting; Vaux will be a high-density City Centre development. It is likely that each scheme is aiming for a different sector of the office market.
- 3.31 No detail is provided on when the development will commence at Aykley Heads but this is likely to comprise the relocation and

redevelopment of the current Council offices at County Hall; no date is given for this.

- 3.32 An evidence paper was prepared to support the process of identifying the strategic employment sites. A number of alternative sites in and around Durham City were suggested through the consultation process as potential strategic employment sites (Mount Oswald, Meadowfield, Durham Science Park, Milburngate House, former Ice Rink, Sherburn Grange). In many instances these were not of a size to be considered strategic and none had the locational advantages of Aykley Heads.
- 3.33 As such, there are no objections to the proposed development at Aykley Heads. However it should be noted, that in recent Core Strategy examinations authorities that have over provided employment land to allow for choice and flexibility in the market and as a result have proposed Green Belt deletions, have been criticised and Green Belt deletions have not been accepted.

Housing

- 3.34 Durham County Council have used a similar methodology for calculating future housing need to Sunderland. Proposed housing numbers appear sound and correspond with the County's proposed growth scenarios.
- 3.35 However, there is a lack of clarity around how the plan will meet its housing requirement. Policy 4 details the supply of housing land (30,000), Policy 30 allocates sites (20,562), thus 9,438 dwellings not identified in the plan. From the supporting text it would appear that the 9,438 dwellings are either committed sites including those under construction or with planning permission. However, these sites are not allocated on the Proposals Map and there is no detail in the Local Plan on the sites.
- 3.36 It is also unclear whether there is a reliance on windfall sites that fall below 1.5ha and are therefore not on the radar of the Local Plan. With such a lack of clarity around housing sites it is difficult to understand the full housing picture and comprehend what the implications of unknown sites and allocated sites coming forward together might be.
- 3.37 For example, the Core Strategy Policy Directions paper proposed the development of 600 dwellings in Murton. This has been reduced to 350 in the Local Plan, however Policy 30 does not identify where these sites are in Murton, and therefore it must be assumed that the sites are either already committed/ developed or fall below 1.5ha and with the SHLAA last updated in January 2011 it is difficult to understand where development is planned in Murton and as such what the implications might be for Sunderland. There are similar concerns for the other neighbouring settlements too.

- 3.38 There also appear to be discrepancies between Durham County's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and the Local Plan. A number of sites considered 'suitable' in the SHLAA have *not* been carried forward to the Local Plan and vice versa; sites that were *not* considered appropriate in the SHLAA have been allocated in the Local Plan. For example, Lambton Park (400 dwellings) was considered unsuitable in the SHLAA but allocated in the Local Plan and yet a site at Woodstone Village was considered suitable in the SHLAA but is not allocated in the Local Plan. There appears to be no justification for such decision making.
- 3.39 As such, sites not allocated in the Local Plan but identified as suitable in the SHLAA could come forward as windfall sites. There are some fairly substantive sites on the city's border, totalling over 3000 additional dwellings.
- 3.40 Although the lack of inclusion of these particular sites in the Local Plan reduces pressures on the City's boundary/ housing sites there is some concern that these sites, once considered sustainable by Durham and consequently considered 'suitable' in the SHLAA may still come forward through the planning process should Durham not meet its targets or sites allocated in the Local Plan do not come forward.
- 3.41 It is therefore unclear at present as to whether there will be an acceptance that such suitable SHLAA sites will be permitted through the development management process or are to be resisted by Durham County Council. This lack of clarity does not afford any degree of certainty to interested parties and as such does not provide a basis for a reasoned opinion to be made. However, we have been informed that Durham do intend to draft an additional paper to discuss the relationship between the SHLAA and the Local Plan.
- 3.42 Sunderland along with most of the other South of the Tyne authorities continues to see population loss to Durham- due to its rural setting and ease for commuting into Tyne & Wear. Population loss is notable amongst families and those with higher incomes.
- 3.43 Of the 5280 dwellings proposed in close proximity to the city boundary and allocated in the Local Plan, 76% will be developed on Green Belt land, 96% on greenfield land, such sites are likely to be attractive to developers, especially those sites in close proximity to Durham City. Sites of particular concern include Sniperley Park, North of Arnison, both within commuting distance to Sunderland City Centre. The development of family dwellings on these sites could potentially result in further out migration of Sunderland residents, divert prospective residents back to the City and result in further unsustainable travel patterns as people commute back into Tyne and Wear to work.
- 3.44 There are significant concerns with the proposed development at Picktree Lane. As discussed the Green Belt at Chester-le-Street is a

recent adoption. One of the aims of the Green Belt in the Chester-le-District Plan was to prevent the merging of Chester-le-Street with the Wearside Conurbation. The Council do not believe the situation has changed and are concerned that development at Picktree Lane would see the merging of two authorities and change the nature of the area. It is also unclear whether the traffic implications of development of this site have been considered, it is understood there are already existing highway issues at Picktree Lane.

- 3.45 Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMA) have identified a need for executive dwellings in the majority of the neighbouring authorities, but it is questionable how many exactly are required in the area. Given it's proximity to Sunderland's border and it's own market area the site at Lambton Park (400 executive dwellings) could in part fulfil Sunderland's executive requirement without effecting projected investment in the city for employment. 400 dwellings on a 72.5ha site equates to approximately 5 dwellings per hectare- far lower densities than the executive dwellings proposed at Chapelgarth. Phasing and delivery time frames will be key to the success of such sites coming forward.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Overall Sunderland welcomes the values underpinning the vision of County Durham's emerging Core Strategy to establish prosperous and sustainable communities many of which lie within Sunderland's hinterland.

- 4.2 Notwithstanding this, the council do have a number of concerns as detailed below:

- The council objects to the lack of clarity around future housing sites (Policy 30). This lack of clarity makes it difficult to comprehend what the implications of unknown sites and allocated sites coming forward together might be and as such does not afford any degree of certainty to interested parties.

Identifying all housing sites required to meet the housing requirement, including those under construction or with planning permission would guarantee the transparency of the Plan and allow for reasoned opinions to be made.

- There continues to be concerns regarding the release of large amounts of Green Belt, in particular around Durham City, and greenfield land in the remainder of the County, which could result in the continued diversion of development interest away from the conurbations major regeneration areas and brownfield sites.

- Some of the unallocated but suitable SHLAA sites are of a considerable scale. These sites have the potential to deliver 3000 dwellings and could result in even further out migration of Sunderland residents. It is unclear at present as to whether there will be an acceptance that such suitable SHLAA sites will be permitted through the development management process or are to be resisted by Durham County Council.
- The council objects to the proposed development of Picktree Lane. Development would see the merging of two authorities, change the nature of the area, and further add to the highway problems along Picktree Lane.
- More clarity is required on the case for the allocation of Green Belt employment sites over and above the existing forecast levels of need.

4.3 Under the Duty to Co-operate officers will continue to liaise with Durham to gain an understanding of why particular sites housing sites have been carried forward into the Local Plan and others have not.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

5.1 Subject to Committee approval, this report will be forwarded to Durham County Council as constituting the formal response of the City Council as a statutory consultee.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 Committee is requested to:
- i) Endorse the comments as detailed within this report and make any additional comments considered appropriate;
 - ii) Authorise officers to forward a copy of this report to Durham County Council as the City Council's formal response to the Core Strategy.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 The County Durham Plan; Local Plan Preferred Options.

Contact Officer: L. Milley 0191 561 2431