

Sunderland City Council Response to Matters, Issues & Questions

Matter 7 - The Strategy and Strategic Policies for the Urban Core

1. Housing

1.1 Do the policies for the Urban Core maximise the opportunities for residential development in a highly accessible location?

The Council consider that the policies for the Urban Core maximise the opportunities for residential development within a highly accessible location.

Policy SP1 emphasises the need to develop in sustainable locations in close proximity to transport hubs and indicates that higher densities close to transport hubs will be encouraged. Policy SP2 identifies Sunnyside as an Area of Change for residential led mixed use development and seeks to diversify the residential offer to create mixed and balanced communities. In addition, Policy SS1 seeks to establish a new sustainable neighbourhood on the Vaux, which would include a minimum of 200 new homes. Policy H1 also seeks to ensure that residential development achieves an appropriate density for its location which takes into account the character of the area, which in the case of the Urban Core would support higher density development.

The SHLAA (SD.22) also identifies a number of sites within the Urban Core which are capable of delivering 713 additional dwellings within the Plan period (including the Vaux).

Notwithstanding the above, the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (SD.60; Section 10; pgs. 115-169) does indicate that there are significant viability issues relating to previously developed sites within the city, particularly those within the Urban Core. At paragraph 12.6 (SD.60; pg. 175), the report specifically indicates that the Council should be cautious about relying on brownfield sites, including those in Central Sunderland. Therefore, in order to ensure that the housing requirement within the Plan is deliverable, the Council has given careful consideration to sites in this area as part of the SHLAA.

Furthermore, when preparing the Plan, the Council has sought to prioritise development within the Existing Urban Area (including the Urban Core) and on previously developed land. Further information on the steps taken in this regard can be found in the Compliance Paper (SD.66; paras. 6.123-6.130; pgs. 66-67).

It is therefore considered that the policies do seek to maximise opportunities for residential development in the Urban Core, where viable. It should also be noted that the Plan sets a minimum housing requirement and this can be exceeded in highly sustainable locations such as the Urban Core.

2. The Vaux (Policy SS1)

2.1 Are the provisions of Policy SS1 reflective of a positively prepared policy which will encourage a sustainable mixed-use development in a highly accessible location?

The Council considers that the provisions of Policy SS1 are reflective of a positively prepared policy which will encourage a sustainable mixed-use development in a highly accessible location. The policy is consistent with the planning permission granted on the site and the development that has come forward to date. The policy contains minimum quantum of development for office floorspace and number of dwellings which can be exceeded.

3. Infrastructure

3.1 Will the infrastructure be provided in the right place at the right time to support regeneration of the city centre, including that related to sustainable travel links and the highway network?

The Council are satisfied that the infrastructure for the Urban Core will be provided in the right place at the right time to support regeneration of the city centre. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SD.59; pgs. 88-98) provides further detail on proposed infrastructure improvements and the timescales identified for their delivery.

Policy ST1 of the Plan highlights a number of priorities which will be delivered to improve accessibility to and movement through the Urban Core. In addition, the Council is in the process of preparing a Transport Plan which will seek to provide greater clarity on transport proposals for the Urban Core.

The Council continue to work closely with Nexus and other key stakeholders to improve sustainable transport links to the Urban Core.

4. Delivery

4.1 Are the assumptions about the rate of delivery of houses from sites in the urban core realistic (anticipated delivery is shown in Appendices A, F and M of the SHLAA)?

The Council considers that the rate of delivery of houses from sites in the Urban Core is realistic.

The sites set out within the SHLAA (SD.22) are all subject to assessment in line with the methodology which was endorsed by the SHLAA Partnership in 2016 to assess their deliverability. Sites are updated on an annual basis and then discussed with the SHLAA panel and suggested changes are incorporated where necessary.

Once suitability, availability and achievability of sites has been assessed, and the constraints identified, the likely timetable and rate of development for each site is then identified. Advice is sought from developers on likely timetables for construction, start up, site preparation, delivery rates and any other constraints that may arise (SD.22, para. 4.55; pg. 22).

A standard rate of 30 dwellings per annum is used for a single developer site. Where developers indicate that a higher delivery rate is possible for their site, this will be taken into consideration and reflected in delivery forecasts for the site. Similarly, lower delivery rates in lower market areas will be considered where indicated (SD.22; para. 4.61; pg. 23).

A cautious approach has been taken regarding the rate of delivery of sites within the Urban Core, due to the uncertainties over viability highlighted within the Whole Plan Viability Assessment (SD.60).