

The County Durham Plan

Examination in Public

Council Statement

MATTER 7

Durham City

August 2014

Durham County Council



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7.1 Does the Plan set out a clear, effective and soundly based economic growth strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable enterprise and economic growth? The Spatial Approach identifies Durham City as a key location for new development and a driver for growth. The Plan identifies approximately 23 hectares of employment land, 5,200 houses and 5,800 square metres of new convenience floor space. Are these policies for economic prosperity appropriate for Durham City, do they respect the special character of the City and are they supported by a robust, credible and up-to-date evidence base and consistent with national policy?

13.1 Durham City (Policy 6)

a. Is the principle of Durham City as a key location for new development effective, positively prepared and soundly based, and consistent with the LEP's economic growth strategy?

1.1 In order to facilitate the step change in economic performance the County needs, it is critical that the development strategy reflects an understanding of the market and directs new development to locations that are attractive to the development industry and will be delivered. In-migration is critical to ensuring that the County's economy is strengthened. A key element to enabling this is through the identification of the three strategic sites which will provide the opportunity to create new communities, building on the existing infrastructure, environment and quality for which Durham City is renowned.

Soundly Based and Consistent with National Policy

1.2 County Durham showed strong growth during the years of economic expansion, however as the County failed to keep pace with regional and national comparators, economic performance has fallen behind the UK and the North East average in terms of employment rates, jobs density ratios and the Gross Value Added. As shown in the Spatial Approach Background Paper (Doc Ref: [R1](#)) and the Integrating Demographic and Economic Forecasts paper (Doc Ref: [R3](#)), in the absence of economic investment, the County will decline in terms of the size of its working age population over the next twenty years. The delivery of economic growth will be dependent upon a level of in-migration to stem the decline of the working age population.

1.3 In order to bring County Durham's economic performance in line with regional and national averages and support cross area ambitions for economic growth, the overarching priority of the Council is to improve the economic performance of County Durham. This priority is reflected in the Sustainable Community Strategy (Doc Ref: [V2](#)), the County Durham Regeneration Statement (Doc Ref: [V1](#)) and is the central theme of the Plan. The Combined Authority and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership is bringing partners together around a bold vision for economic growth and there is determination to deliver against this vision to raise confidence in the area and create an environment for the private sector to prosper which will create more and better jobs.

1.4 The Council's approach within the Plan is to facilitate the step change in economic performance necessary to meet the economic growth ambitions for the County and the wider area. The North East Independent Economic Review (Doc Ref: [V4](#)) and the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) (Doc Ref: [V3](#)) highlight the need to create and add more jobs to the North East economy, in which County Durham plays an important role. The vision is that by 2024 the regional economy will provide over one million jobs, an increase of 100,000 jobs from 2014.

1.5 The approach for Durham City within the local and regional context, is to capitalise on its opportunities to create employment, attract population and visitors which alongside the focus on the A1 and A19 economic corridors will facilitate the growth of a strong integrated economy. The identification of Aykley Heads as a strategic employment site is central to achieving this, however it

is also imperative that a complementary housing stock is delivered alongside the employment strategy to ensure that in-migration can occur and that the existing residents within the City have opportunities available to meet their aspirations as set out within the Independent Marketing Report (Doc Ref: [R14](#)).

1.6 Whilst the Council remains committed to the Green Belt, the Council believes its economic ambitions are sufficient to demonstrate the exceptional circumstances necessary to warrant the review of the Green Belt.

1.7 Whilst NPPF is clear that councils should be significantly boosting the supply of housing, a SHLAA consistent with the principles contained within PPG suggests that there are insufficient suitable, achievable sites outside of the Green Belt to support the Plan's Spatial Approach. Policy 2 (Spatial Approach) promotes Durham City, along with the other main towns, as the principal focus for significant retail, housing and office and employment enabling the increase in economic performance across the County. Enabling Durham City to achieve a step change in its role and function as an economic driver is fundamental to the Plan's strategy.

1.8 The amount of housing suggested as appropriate within Policy 4 would help to deliver the economic growth proposed for the City, through the support of Aykley Heads, and in accordance with the Settlement Study (Doc Ref: [R2](#)) which identifies Durham City as being at the top of the County's settlement hierarchy.

1.9 A three stage assessment process was undertaken to examine the possibility of Green Belt releases around Durham City. As part of the early iterations of the Green Belt Assessments (i.e. Phase I and II (Doc Refs: [R31](#) and [R30](#)), the consideration of any potential for Green Belt releases to accommodate housing development was considered. In accordance with NPPF a full and detailed assessment was also undertaken to consider any potential impact on the World Heritage Site and incorporated into this and the Sustainability Appraisal process.

1.10 Following the third stage of this assessment process, including public consultation and Sustainability Appraisal, it concluded that Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road should be identified as strategic sites and that Merryoaks was too small to be considered strategic and should be included in the housing allocation assessment process. As a result of this comprehensive assessment process, the Council believe that the strategic sites identified will have little or no impact on the special character of Durham City and will also provide the most benefit to the economy and can be developed to the high standard necessary to make them attractive and sustainable places to live in accordance with NPPF.

Consistent with the LEP's Economic Growth Strategy

1.11 In order to enable the accelerated growth in the regional economy envisaged in the SEP, the European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF) ^(a), the forthcoming area wide transport strategy and other local strategies, plans and programmes will focus appropriate investment towards the key employment locations along the A1 (M), the A19, the River Wear and the River Tyne and the coast. Durham City is recognised in the SEP and the ESIF strategy as a significant employment centre with the potential to deliver growth, building on world-class assets. Durham, together with Newcastle-Gateshead and Sunderland, is recognised in the SEP as a powerful location and economic driver. Together they are considered to combine significant employment hubs with world renowned higher education establishments, outstanding cultural and tourism assets, vibrant retailing and a lively evening economy. These Cities are important on a national and international scale for their cultural and academic strengths and innovation assets and provide the opportunities, in collaboration, to drive economic growth forward for the entire area.

a <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-european-funding-work-better-for-the-uk-economy/supporting-pages/european-structural-and-investment-funds-growth-programme>

1.12 Regional and national partners have recognised Durham City as a significant investment location, for example:

- In addition to investment in other key locations in the County, the North East Growth Deal allocates significant amounts of funding for key projects in Durham City:
 - £5m for the Houghall College campus of East Durham College;
 - £7.5m for a local Sustainable Transport Fund programme which includes investment in the Durham City Urban Traffic Management System and Durham City Railway;
 - £6.3m for the Western Relief Road; and
 - £1.5m for A1/A690 junction improvements;
- The North East LEP Investment Panel agreed North East Investment Funds for key projects in the City including Durham University's Centre for Innovation and Growth and also endorsed Durham City Railway Station for the discounted Public Works Loan Board Rate available to the LEPs for projects in 15/16; and
- The HCA has identified Durham City as a location of housing growth in its regional business plan and has also been a key partner in delivering key projects in the City Centre such as Freemans Reach.

1.13 In the 1998-2008 growth cycle 70,000 jobs were created across the Combined Authority area, the expectation for the future is for the economy to increase by 100,000 jobs by 2024 and this will come from a combination of opportunities and strengths. The SEP recognises that the majority of growth will come from sectors such as advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, energy/low carbon and environmental industries, business and professional services, the new economy, healthcare, logistics and tourism and the opportunities relating to the area's universities. Durham City is recognised specifically in the SEP in relation to many of these sectors including Business Services, Professional Services, the new economy, tourism and Durham University.

Justified

1.14 In order to support the redevelopment of Aykley Heads and the other regeneration initiatives proposed for Durham City, it is deemed necessary that a level of growth compatible with the scale and function of Durham City is required. To redistribute the proposed growth as set out within Policy 4 (Distribution of Development), would simply be a reflection of previous planning approaches which have not delivered the economic improvement County Durham needs comparable to the rest of the North East and England.

1.15 The special character and qualities of Durham City are the very key qualities which will attract inward investment. The Council is committed to protecting and enhancing these qualities including environmental improvements by creating a City Park at Aykley Heads and by attracting a level of population which will support the vitality of the City Centre.

1.16 In addition, the Local Plan and CIL Viability Study (Doc Ref: [R10](#)) clearly identifies the Central Durham delivery area as the strongest in market and viability terms. An alternative approach consisting of the redistribution of development to other delivery areas could not deliver the level of growth envisaged.

Effective

1.17 The Council consider that there are exceptional circumstances to justify the allocation of the strategic sites at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road. The strategic sites, including Aykley Heads, will attract in-migration and help retain existing residents by providing a high quality housing stock and high quality job opportunities thereby helping to deliver the step change in economic performance necessary if County Durham is have a comparable performance to the rest of England.

1.18 Sniperley Park will deliver 2,200 homes within the Plan period and a further 300 homes beyond 2030. The houses will be complemented with associated retail, services and facilities including a primary school to ensure a vibrant and self-sustaining community. The strong landscape structure as set out within the draft Sniperley Park Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD2](#)) will ensure that the locally important Sniperley Hall with its walled gardens and parkland will be protected as well as capitalising on the site's natural features and integrating with its surrounding landscape.

1.19 North of Arnison will deliver at least 1,000 homes and a superstore forging strong links with the successful and vibrant Arnison Centre. The A167 and the east Coast Mainline provide strong defensible boundaries to the east and west of the site whilst to the north the draft North of Arnison Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD3](#)) identifies a new and enhanced landscape structure tying it into the broader landscape. The site will also include a primary school as well as other social infrastructure necessary to meet its community's needs.

1.20 Sherburn Road is likely to offer a different choice of housing to both Sniperley Park and North of Arnison because of the lower economic value of the site. It does however offer significant regeneration benefits to this part of the City, providing an opportunity to diversify the existing housing stock. The site affords the opportunity to create a positive gateway into the City whilst accepting that no development shall take place over the 80m contour line in order to protect the character of the surrounding area as set out within the Sherburn Road Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD4](#)).

Appropriate

1.21 The Council is confident that the approach to the identification of land at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road is the most appropriate to deliver the Plan's overall vision and economic growth proposals and to ensure that the level of housing growth identified is deliverable. The Plan will continue to provide the protection for the World Heritage Site and the remaining Green Belt will ensure that the very special quality of the City will be retained and supported through the identified growth.

7.2 Is the approach to providing a Strategic Employment Site predominantly for office development at Aykley Heads, in accordance with the Supplementary Planning Document, appropriate, justified, effective, soundly based and consistent with national policy? Are there exceptional circumstances to remove 7.5 ha from the Green Belt in accordance with the NPPF?

Introduction

2.1 There are a number of opportunities that the Council is seeking to achieve through the Plan which will boost the County's economy and economic prospects including the Strategic Employment Site at Aykley Heads.

Council's Response

2.2 Policy 7 (Aykley Heads) and the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Aykley Heads (Doc Ref: [SPD1](#)) set the context for the redevelopment of Aykley Heads. The need for a high quality office quarter in Durham City was identified in the DTZ Employment Sites and Premises Study 2008 (Doc Ref: [E8](#)) and seen as a deficiency of the Durham City and County Durham economies. The Employment Land Review (Doc Ref: [E1](#)) and Aykley Heads Topic Paper (Doc Ref: [R38](#)) subsequently identified that the site is likely to be attractive to businesses and a long-term solution to addressing the office shortages in the City.

2.3 There are significant obstacles in delivering a large quantum of office accommodation in the city centre due to the lack of available sites, topographical issues, the historic nature of the cityscape and the possible need for compulsory purchase and demolition. The DTZ Study identified the potential redevelopment of the County Hall site as an opportunity. The Employment Land Review (Doc Ref: [E1](#)) highlights that a lack of good quality, available sites has been the principal factor in the low level of development activity within the city, although this has been compounded by the city centre being tightly bounded by the River Wear and the need to preserve the heritage assets of the area. The area contains relatively few large sites available for employment development; with land at Aykley Heads and Meadowfield the only exceptions.

2.4 The ELR shows strong demand for office space along the A1 corridor and especially in Durham City. Belmont Business Park is nearing capacity in less than 10 years following the departure of LG Phillips. The other established business parks and industrial estates in the City (e.g. Belmont, Bowburn / Durham Green, Meadowfield, and Abbeywoods) all have a mix of industrial and office uses and would all be classed as edge of centre locations. These do not have the locational advantages of Aykley Heads, and have largely reached capacity. Durham Science Park is a similar locations to Aykley Heads in some ways, but is at capacity. In the absence of a site within the City centre, and with vacant buildings in the centre being more appropriate for other uses, Aykley Heads is the optimum location for a new business park. The site therefore aligns with the sequential approach to new office location in paragraph 24 of the NPPF.

2.5 Aykley Heads already has a range of business premises, including one of the most environmentally sustainable buildings in the UK. It is home to over 30 businesses in a range of professional and scientific sectors as well as business support organisations such as the North East Chamber of Commerce. It also contains the global headquarters for Sunderland Mutual Marine Insurance and has recently attracted the accounting firm Mazars, the NHS, and Atom Bank which is building bespoke premises here to accommodate approximately 400 jobs. These businesses are part of growing professional services and health sectors which not only feature strongly in the North East Strategic Economic Plan but are also the focus of national policy.

2.6 Recent market testing undertaken by Business Durham (during late 2013/early 2014) revealed a substantial demand for office space in Durham City. From April 2013 until January 2014, 23 direct office enquiries were received. However, demand in Durham City is currently restricted by the lack

of available office space. Agents consulted as part of the market testing reported demand for offices across the board, from recruitment agencies to care sector operators and business service consultancies. Agents and other bodies such as the North East Chamber of Commerce consider the current lack of commercial space to be a key barrier to businesses considering Durham City as a location, as potential investors typically preferred to visit existing sites in order to judge their suitability.

2.7 In addition to the general locational advantages of Durham City, such as access to the A1(M), Aykley Heads offers a range of specific locational benefits. These include close proximity to Durham railway station, connecting the City to major cities and enabling access to a large workforce, direct access to the busiest bus route in the County, and close proximity to Durham University, the University Hospital, and the City centre. The site has a parkland setting and direct access to open space and Wharton Park, Durham Light Infantry Museum, restaurants and cafés, as well as views of the World Heritage Site, and a prominent location adjacent to one of the main roads through the City.

2.8 A private sector perspective on the site (Doc Ref: [R16](#)) suggests that the prime redevelopment site is the current County Hall estate. The appraisal also identifies other parcels of land for development (shown in the SPD) some of which (e.g. The current County Hall car parks) could be developed before County Hall is demolished. The Council will be relocating from this site and, in the short-term, would permit development on the County Hall estate if suitable proposals came forward.

2.9 As a key landowner at Aykley Heads, Durham Constabulary has made clear their support for the allocation of Aykley Heads from the early stages of the Plan and Council officials will continue to work with the Constabulary to realise the redevelopment of Aykley Heads. The development of the Constabulary's new headquarters on the edge of the Aykley Heads site are at an advanced stage so it is anticipated that the current headquarters will be demolished in 2015 and that the new housing development on the old headquarters site will commence soon after.

2.10 In its search for new premises, the Council is exploring the potential to relocate to the site of Milburngate House in Durham City Centre. This building is due to be vacated by National Savings and Investments when they move to their new premises at Freeman's Reach on the opposite side of the River Wear. Her Majesty's Passport Office will also be relocating to phase 2 of the Freeman's Reach development, vacating Milburngate House. The Council is therefore considering how it can play a pro-active role in re-use or redevelopment of Milburngate House in conjunction with Aykley Heads. A Council Cabinet report (Doc Ref: [R20](#)) sets out the current position in more detail, indicating that it is working towards the County Hall site being available for redevelopment in 2019/20, irrespective of where the Council decides to relocate, but indicating that parts of Aykley Heads could be available for redevelopment by 2016/17.

2.11 Paragraph 4.104 of the Plan outlines the proposal to remove 7.5 hectares (see paragraph 4.106) of land from the Green Belt at Aykley Heads to enable the development of the business park. Aykley Heads provides a unique opportunity in County Durham to create a high quality commercial development in an exceptional landscape setting with enhanced opportunities for public access and recreation. The majority of the Green Belt deletion would form part of a landscaped City Park with new planting and open space which will be enhanced and made available for public access and recreation. Enhanced green routes running through the park will provide attractive and safe routes linking this area to the northern entrance of Durham Railway Station and Wharton Park and residential areas to the north of the site. A new crossing of the East Coast Mainline linking to the housing allocation (H5) is also proposed.

2.12 An individual assessment of this area of Green Belt has been undertaken (Doc Ref: [R34](#)) which recognises the economic potential of the strategic employment site and the benefits that this would bring to Durham City and the County and concludes that the site provides a unique opportunity

that cannot be replicated elsewhere in the County and that the minor incursion into the Green Belt would not impact on the functions of Green Belt and would have minimal impact on the World Heritage Site or the City's special character (see Doc Ref: [R34](#)).

2.13 The design of new buildings on Aykley Heads will be in accordance with guidance set out in paragraph 4.49 of the draft SPD. The Rivergreen Centre at Aykley Heads will be promoted as a good example of sustainable design to be followed and new developments should include renewable energy and energy saving solutions where possible.

2.14 The Council has recently submitted an application to Department of Climate and Energy Change for District Heat Network funding. This will allow the Council to explore the opportunity for a district heating/cooling network to provide low carbon, low cost heat provision across Aykley heads and adjacent employment sites at the University Hospital and the Milburngate House. The project is collaborative in approach with significant key stakeholders; Durham Constabulary, University Hospital of North Durham & Aykley Heads Business Centre. Funding and support would enable this project to be explored and would significantly improve the economic viability and attractiveness of the project to commercial investment, minimising the risk to potential investors.

2.15 The NPPF, together with the Government's other growth strategies, sets the context for a strong growth agenda to help take advantage of opportunities and address some of the frailties of the economy. The Council's relocation from the Aykley Heads site will, in part, help rebalance the City and County's economy so that it is less reliant on the public sector and has a stronger, more diverse business base. The County is still suffering from the recent recession and the Plan sets conditions to ensure the County's economy is more robust and resistant to future recessions.

2.16 The Council is satisfied that Policy 7 has been developed in accordance with the NPPF (e.g. paragraphs 7, 23, and 83), that this is the correct time to review historic green belt designations, and that the economic opportunities afforded by Aykley Heads provide the exceptional circumstances to justify the deletion of areas of the green belt. Furthermore, the Council is confident Policy 7 and the Aykley Heads SPD put in place measures to minimise the impact of development on the local environment whilst improving access to it as it sets out a number of measures to improve green infrastructure.

2.17 There are a number of opportunities to promote more sustainable travel to Aykley Heads. As identified in Matter 15, accessibility modelling has shown that 69% of County Durham residents are within 60 minutes door-to-door bus travel of Aykley Heads, which is served by 29 buses per hour, which have priority over cars in many parts of the City. It is also well served by the Durham City Park and Ride, and new housing that is developed during the Plan period will improve the opportunity for more workers to live in the City. As mentioned above, the site is also close to the Main Line Durham Railway station, and well served by footpaths and cycle paths. As Policy 23 sets-out, a transport assessment and travel plan will be developed for the site so that car parking can be balanced with sustainable transport.

2.18 In order to ensure the delivery of Aykley Heads and support its attractiveness as a Strategic Employment Site, the Council has committed £2.5 Million worth of investment for the signalisation of the Leazes Bowl and Gilesgate roundabouts which will be linked to existing traffic light controlled junctions. This work is currently planned to start in Autumn 2015 being completed 18 months later and will provide better management of existing peak hour traffic which will help with short term congestion and allow the timely delivery of Aykley Heads without any negative effects elsewhere on the transport network.

2.19 Historically Aykley Heads has accommodated formal playing pitches together with a range of sporting facilities. The planning applications for the new Policy Headquarters and the redevelopment of the existing Policy headquarters for housing secured a Section 106 Agreement of £150,000 towards replacement pitches and will be invested accordingly following the completion of the Durham Play Pitch Action Plan (PPAP).

Conclusion

2.20 Policy 7 is effective in respect to it enabling development at Aykley Heads whilst minimising negative impacts on key features of the site and Durham City. The area is an established business park that continues to attract investment and has the potential to contribute more to Durham City, County Durham, and the North East. Although the justification for developing the site is predominantly economic, development here could contribute to better use of the site by both businesses and the general public. There is a strong level of market confidence in the site, but its potential cannot be realised until there is certainty it will become available for redevelopment and is complemented by a strong marketing campaign. Securing the site as an allocation in the Plan is the first step in enabling this process.

2.21 The Council is confident that the Plan sets a clear, effective, and sound economic strategy which encourages enterprise and economic growth which respects the special character of Durham City. The development of Aykley Heads can be achieved by 2030, although market conditions will have a major influence on the speed and types of development that are realised. Policy 7 has been developed in line with the NPPF and will have positive economic and social benefits and minimal environmental impacts.

7.3 Durham City Strategic Housing Sites (Policy 8). Is the approach to meeting the development needs of Durham City and encouraging economic growth in County Durham by identifying land at Sniperley Park (2,200 houses), North of Arnison (1,000 houses) and Sherburn Road (475 houses) as Strategic Housing Sites, appropriate, justified. Effective, soundly based and consistent with national policy? Are there exceptional circumstances to remove land from the Green Belt in accordance with the NPPF?

Introduction

The Plan's Spatial Approach (Policy 2) promotes Durham City, along with the other main towns, as the principal focus for significant retail, housing and office and employment enabling the increase in economic performance across the County. Enabling Durham City to achieve a step change in its role and function as an economic driver is fundamental to the Council's economic strategy and is deemed to be in accordance with the sustainable development principles as set out in NPPF^(b). The identification of three Strategic Sites at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road are critical to the Plan's Vision and appropriate given the Plan's economic growth objectives whilst maintaining the very special qualities which will continue to attract and retain businesses and people to the City.

Council's Response

3.1 In order to facilitate the step change in economic performance the County needs, it is critical that the development strategy reflects an understanding of the market and directs new development to locations that are attractive to the development industry and will be delivered. In-migration is critical to ensuring that the County's economy is strengthened. A key element to enabling this is through the identification of the three strategic sites which will provide the opportunity to create new communities, building on the existing infrastructure, environment and quality for which Durham City is renowned. The Strategic Sites have been identified following a comprehensive three stage site selection process, the approach of which is set out in more detail under Matter 10: Green Belt.

3.2 The identification of the Strategic Sites is considered to be the most appropriate approach to delivering the Plan's vision for economic growth and enterprise reflecting the NPPF's commitment to sustainable development. It was evident at an early stage of the Plan preparation process that there were insufficient suitable, achievable sites to meet the development strategy. This remains true as evidenced by the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (Doc Ref [H1](#)). All sites of at least 0.4 hectares (or capable of accommodating at least 12 units), made known to the Council, have been considered in terms of their suitability, availability and achievability within the SHLAA process in accordance with the Guidance^(c).

3.3 This shortfall of suitable, achievable sites has been a longstanding issue and was first evident at the Issues and Options stage of the Plan preparation (Doc Ref [K2](#)) despite several 'calls for sites'. Given the Plan's economic growth strategy and to reflect Durham City's position at the top of the County's settlement hierarchy (Doc Ref [R2](#)) and its strong housing market (Doc Ref [R10](#) and Doc Ref [H1](#)) it is considered that there is clear justification for allocating the Strategic Sites at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road. The Sustainability Appraisal process also concluded that there was a need to release Green Belt land to meet the housing proposed in Durham City

3.4 The Council believes that the Strategic Sites will provide the most benefit to the economy and can be developed to the high standards necessary to make them attractive and sustainable places to live in accordance with NPPF. The sites selected have gone through a rigorous three stage assessment (Doc Refs: [R31](#), [R30](#), [R29](#)) to ensure that the sites selected have the least impact on landscape, ecology and in particular the heritage of the City, including impact on the World Heritage

b https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

c <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>

Site. They were also assessed against the functions of the Green Belt ensuring that the remaining Green Belt would still perform the function it was originally designated for, namely to protect the City's heritage and setting.

3.5 Sniperley Park will deliver 2,200 homes within the Plan period and a further 300 homes beyond 2030. The houses will be complemented with associated retail, services and facilities including a primary school to ensure a vibrant and self-sustaining community. The strong landscape structure as set out within the draft Sniperley Park Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD2](#)) will ensure that the locally important Sniperley Hall with its walled gardens and parkland will be protected as well as capitalising on the site's natural features and integrating with its surrounding landscape.

3.6 North of Arnison will deliver at least 1,000 homes and a superstore forging strong links with the successful and vibrant Arnison Centre. The A167 and the east Coast Mainline provide strong defensible boundaries to the east and west of the site whilst to the north the draft North of Arnison Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD3](#)) identifies a new and enhanced landscape structure tying it into the broader landscape. The site will also include a primary school as well as other social infrastructure necessary to meet its community's needs.

3.7 Sherburn Road is likely to offer a different offer of houses to both Sniperley Park and North of Arnison because of the lower economic value of the site. It does however offer significant regeneration benefits to this part of the City providing a diversification of the existing housing stock. The site affords the opportunity to create a positive gateway into the City whilst accepting that no development shall take place over the 80m contour line in order to protect the character of the surrounding area as set out within the Sherburn Road Supplementary Planning Document (Doc Ref [SPD4](#)).

3.8 The Sustainability Appraisal process identified necessary mitigation which have informed both specific details within the policy and the draft SPDs. The exceptional circumstances to justify the removal of land from the Green Belt are set out within Matter 10: Green Belt.

Conclusion

3.9 The Council is confident that the approach to the identification of land at Sniperley Park, North of Arnison and Sherburn Road is appropriate and justified in terms of the Plan's overall Vision and Spatial Approach, soundly based in terms of the suite of evidence and consistent with the sustainable development principles as set out in national policy.

7.4 Western and Northern Relief Roads. Are these two proposed major highway schemes justified, deliverable and consistent with the Council's Sustainable Transport Strategy as published in its Local Transport Plan, the Durham Integrated Transport Approach and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and with reference to the Strategic transport modelling work undertaken by the Council? Are both of these proposals deliverable, environmentally acceptable and viable?

Introduction

4.1 Unlike most other town and cities in the UK the 1960's solution to dealing with traffic in and around Durham City was to create a 'through road' utilising a disused railway line. This road currently channels over 40,000 vehicles per day across Milburngate Bridge dominating the City Centre. This volume of traffic has a degenerative impact on congestion and quality of life in the City and acts as an obstacle to further development. The gateways to the City are particularly congested in the morning and evening peaks potentially deterring investors and developers.

Council's Response

4.2 Extensive modelling and research over the past 8 years has examined numerous solutions and options. Whilst many of these have been delivered such as the country's first Congestion Charge, 6 months ahead of London, and a uniquely funded Park and Ride service, the remaining volumes of traffic and resultant congestion remain a barrier to future growth.

4.3 The majority of traffic using the City Centre (around two-thirds) is through traffic, for which alternative routes avoiding the City Centre are either not realistically available or are less direct. The private car dominates the City Centre with 60,000 highway trips each day. Evidence from bus occupancy surveys shows that around 9,500 passengers enter the City via buses between 7am and 7pm, compared to 49,000 highway trips during the same period (Doc Ref: [T30](#)). The result is significant congestion in the City centre and on the A167 corridor.

4.4 In addition to these traffic hot spots, congestion across the City means that the network is unstable and one traffic accident on the A167 or the A690 through the City Centre can gridlock the surrounding highway network. Modelling has shown that if the congestion is not addressed then the number of people electing to use public transport will decline compounding current problems.

4.5 Despite these issues Durham City remains our most accessible settlement and provides the best opportunity for modal shift. This is articulated in the Durham City Integrated Transport Approach (DITA) (Doc Ref: [T41](#)). For example accessibility modelling shows 69% of current County Durham households are within 60 minutes door to door bus travel of the main Aykley Heads site, which is currently served by 26 buses per hour with links to the East Coast Mainline.

4.6 The choice of Durham City as our most sustainable location has also been tested following comments derived as part of our public engagement with a suggestion that the housing need should be met through a more dispersed approach. This scenario was modelled in 2013 (Doc Ref: [T27](#)) and distributed the development of the Strategic Housing Sites proposed for Durham City around the surrounding settlements. When compared with the County Durham Plan 'Preferred Approach', the modelling demonstrated that the dispersed development scenario would result in more car trips, higher carbon emissions as well as extended journey times and congestion on the key corridors through the City.

4.7 The proposed Relief Roads have been modelled using DfT fully validated and webtag compliant transport model for the City. The multi-modal model predicts the impact of walking and cycling, public transport and car trips under various development scenarios. The model's findings have been articulated at different stages of the Plan and in various iterations of reports including the:

- Durham Transport Innovation Fund in 2008 (Doc Ref: [T30](#));
- Durham Local Development Framework Option Appraisal 2012 (Doc Ref: [T28](#));
- Durham Local plan Option Appraisal in 2013, Volume 1 and 2 (Doc Ref: [T27](#) and [T27](#));
- County Durham Plan Summary of Transport Evidence Base 2012 (Doc Ref: [T31](#)); and
- Strategic Transport Modelling Summary Document 2014 (Doc Ref: [T29](#)).

4.8 Since the production of the work undertaken as part of the TIF study in 2008, several of the options to better manage traffic demand have been implemented. Being the first city in the country to implement congestion charging, the success of the three park and ride facilities and other implemented measures illustrate the Council's commitment to managing traffic demand within the confines of the existing infrastructure. However, whilst these measures have been a success and well patronised by transport users, to sustain further development and prosperity, additional transportation infrastructure and services will be needed to support and open up opportunities for economic development (Doc Ref: [T29](#)).

4.9 The relief road proposals are consistent with Policy 5 of the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) (Doc Ref: [T2](#)) that states that highway improvements will only be brought forward when suitable alternatives have been considered. Broader congestion charging, work place charging, bus fare subsidies were all considered and modelled and found to be insufficient or ineffective for Durham City as they did not address the congestion issues identified. Demand management measures were found to provide a platform, but not address, the expected increase in traffic (Doc Ref: [T29](#)).

4.10 The main findings of all the strategic modelling reports justify the proposed relief roads and these technical reports have been summarised in the Strategic Transport Modelling Summary Document 2014 (Doc Ref: [T29](#)). The evidence demonstrates that a mixture of demand management measures and the introduction of relief roads would both accommodate expected traffic growth and mitigate the effects of the employment and housing proposed in the Plan. The summary document concludes that both the Western and Northern are worthwhile investments with Western Relief Road required by 2021 and the Northern Relief Road by 2030.

4.11 In the 2013 modelling (Doc Ref: [T27](#)) assumptions on modal shift across the Durham City network were benchmarked between 7% and 10% of future car-borne demands. The variance between 7 and 10% was dependent upon local population characteristics including 'green aware' data. Whilst these levels of change are in line with national guidelines on transport modelling, they also provide an ambitious target for the Council to pursue in terms of encouraging more sustainable forms of travel.

4.12 The ambitious target for modal shift is consistent with LTP3 and the DITA. Sustainable transport measures such as Park and Ride, National Cycle Network improvements and Transit 15 corridor improvements set out in the LTP3 have all been implemented and the current integrated approach focuses on practical measures to improve sustainable modes of transport in the City going forward. Some of these are already being delivered and funded as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) (Doc Ref: [K27](#)) including:

- £5million allocated for a new bus station while detailed design work continues,
- Extensions to Park and Ride Facilities;
- Detailed design work has been procured to tackle pinch points and enabling delivery of Super Cycle Routes to and from Strategic Allocations;
- £100,000 has been allocated in addition to the £300,000 already spent on re-routing the National Cycling Network through Durham City, and another;
- £840,000 has just been awarded in Local Sustainable Transport Funding to continue the Local Motion behaviour change programme.

4.13 Studies have shown that both Relief Roads are deliverable as set out in the Northern Route Consolidated Report 2012 (Doc Ref: [T23](#)) and the Western Route Consolidated Report 2012 (Doc Ref: [T24](#)). These set out detailed design and alignments and demonstrate how the proposed routes can be achieved from a construction point of view. They also provide cost estimates for the proposals that have informed the IDP.

4.14 The alignments and design of the routes (Doc Ref: [T23](#) and [T24](#)) have been determined as a result of an iterative process which has been informed by a working group including the Council's Principal Archaeologist, Principal Landscape and Principal Ecology Officers. This approach ensures that the road alignments avoid the most environmentally sensitive areas and where required, correct mitigation has been put in place at the design stage. The most sensitive alignments have been avoided and alternative routes and junctions have been assessed and informed by the Sustainability Appraisal process.

4.15 Assessments have been carried out of the potential effects of the proposals on archaeology, cultural heritage, landscape and ecology (Doc Refs: T10-20) at a level of detail appropriate to this stage of the planning process. While these reports identified some potential for significant effects, they conclude that the majority could be reduced by appropriate mitigation to levels that would not be significant. Where there is a likelihood that significant residual effects would occur, these would be of local importance and would not affect internationally or nationally designated assets. The assessment of air, noise, and water impacts (Doc Ref: [T21](#)) concluded that the majority of residual impacts on water, air and noise would be minor and that intermediate impacts could be reduced to minor or neutral impacts with mitigation. When taken as a whole any residual impacts of the relief roads would be outweighed by the wider benefits resulting from the reduction in congestion.

4.16 The Council has provided certainty about the delivery of the Western Relief Road through a Cabinet resolution to fund the construction of the road initially (Doc Ref [R20](#)). A Section 106 agreement will ensure the developers repay the Council in accordance with Policy 9 (Doc Ref: [K6](#)). In addition, a contribution of £6.3million has been received as part of the Growth Deal for the Western Relief Road. This in response to the Strategic Economic Plan (Doc Ref: [V3](#)) highlighting the road proposal as a future year priority for the North East Local Enterprise Partnership. Recent site investigations along the route of the Western Relief Road has had positive results giving the Council more certainty around deliverability by 'de-risking' the construction of the road.

4.17 The Northern Relief road is one of three specific items on the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulation 123 list (Doc Ref: [K15](#)) therefore a significant proportion of the funding for the road will be collected over time allowing the Council to use this as a match to attract future European and Regional funding.

4.18 In addition to 'Strategic Modelling', micro-simulation modelling was carried out (Doc Ref: [T25a](#)) as a response to concerns raised at consultation events around specific junctions in North Durham and in the Western Relief Road Study area. The results demonstrate specific areas for congestion and allow the Council to deliver junction improvements proactively when the roads proposals are implemented. The individual junctions required for investment are set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (Doc Ref: [K27](#)).

Conclusion

4.19 For the reasons set out above the Council believes that the Western and Northern Relief Roads are justified, deliverable and consistent with the Council's transport strategies and that both are deliverable, environmentally acceptable and viable.