

Durham County Council – County Durham Plan Issues and Options

Policy Context

1. Durham County Council is consulting on issues and options for the emerging County Durham Plan. This consultation follows Durham's decision to withdraw an earlier version of the County Durham Plan that had gone through an examination in public in October 2014.
2. Once in place, the County Durham Plan will provide strategic policies on the overall quantity and locations of development in County Durham, along with more detailed policies that Durham will use to determine planning applications, and potential development sites within the County.
3. This issues and options stage of consultation means that preparation of a revised County Durham Plan is at an early stage. The consultation document seeks views on 50 questions relating to the scale, location and type of development, and also seeks views on the potential scope of some policies within the County Durham Plan. The Council shares borders with Durham County Council and as such strategic growth priorities guiding future development have potential to affect Gateshead.
4. However, because of the nature of this consultation, and the wide range of issues addressed within the consultation document, only a relatively small number of issues are raised where it would be appropriate for Gateshead to provide a formal response at this stage. The consultation document presents one specific proposal that is of relevance to Gateshead Council, to extend the green belt north of Consett and Stanley. Our draft consultation response is supportive of this proposal.
5. Issues and options consultation on the County Durham Plan is part of ongoing discussions between local authority areas on Local Plan policy preparation, held under the Duty to Cooperate. Accordingly, our draft consultation response sets out our wish to work closely with County Durham on a range of issues:
 - Exploring the likely impact of potential housing growth on Gateshead's housing market.
 - Understanding the potential impact of increased traffic flows from Durham to and through Gateshead.
 - Exploring the potential for collaborative working between Gateshead Council, Durham County Council, and the Environment Agency on the Team Valley Flood Alleviation Project.

- Continuing to work positively with County Durham on Local Plan policy issues relating to minerals and waste, as part of a regionally collaborative approach.
6. The deadline for consultation responses was 5 August 2016. In order to meet this deadline, our comments have been forwarded to County Durham Council for information as set out in the attached annex, with an accompanying covering letter stating that our formal consultation response is subject to Cabinet approval in September 2016.

Implications of Recommended Option

7. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – No financial implications directly arise from this report
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resources implications.
 - c) **Property Implications** - There are no property implications.
8. **Risk Management Implication** – There are no risks associated with the consultation.
9. **Equality and Diversity Implications** – There are no equality and diversity implications
10. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no crime implications.
11. **Health Implications** – There are no health implications.
12. **Sustainability Implications** – Draft sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessments will be produced as proposals are developed.
13. **Human Rights Implications** – There are no human rights implications.
14. **Area and Ward Implications** – The County Durham Plan could potentially have implications for Gateshead, although close cooperation between Councils and adhering to the duty to co-operate should resolve any issues.

Consultation on the County Durham Plan Issues and Options

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on the County Durham Plan (CDP) Issues and Options. As neighbouring local authorities, cooperation on strategic cross-boundary issues can positively influence sustainable patterns of development in Gateshead and County Durham.

We have sought to structure our responses in relation to the questions asked within the June 2016 issues and options document. At this stage of consultation, we have no specific comments to make in relation to the majority of questions asked within the document. However, as the CDP progresses, we would welcome further engagement with Durham County Council to comment upon emerging policies and evidence that may relate to strategic, cross-boundary issues.

Question 4: Population growth scenarios

In broad terms, the CDP should seek to establish a level of housing and economic growth that is capable of delivering sufficient homes and jobs to meet the needs of residents while also making the most of opportunities to protect and enhance the environment.

In determining an appropriate scale of housing provision, close consideration needs to be given to the potential for household growth to have implications for other areas. Effective consultation activity, including discussions held with local authorities and other public bodies under the duty to cooperate should allow County Durham to highlight where the implications of differing growth assumptions should be considered.

The scenario of population growth for Gateshead set out in the Gateshead and Newcastle Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan (CSUCP) includes an implicit assumption that recent patterns of migration will continue at broadly the same levels over the plan period. In this respect, the approach to determining overall housing need set out within the issues and options document (i.e. planning to accommodate a level of housing growth that broadly reflects past trends in migration into County Durham) appears compatible with the approach used within the CSUCP. Given the relatively large numbers of residents moving between Gateshead and Durham each year, there is considerable potential for patterns of migration to be influenced by changes in policy approach. Accordingly, as preparation of the CDP progresses, Gateshead Council is keen to work with Durham County Council to develop an understanding of the potential cross-boundary implications of growth in each of our areas.

Question 13: Options for housing distribution

In reviewing potential options for housing distribution, we would recommend that Durham gives consideration to the potential cross-boundary impacts of traffic flows that may be associated with each option. Tyne and Wear provides a considerable 'draw' for residents within Durham seeking to access employment opportunities, leisure and retail facilities etc. In consequence,

there is significant potential for housing development located close to Durham's border with Gateshead to increase levels of outward commuting as well as inward travel.

The concern for Gateshead would be the potential impact of increased traffic to and from Gateshead and Newcastle flowing through the Borough, particularly at known congestion hotspots. Sites on the border are the most immediate concerns. While we welcome the ongoing discussions between the Councils regarding the main transport corridors, ultimately developers will need to assess impacts on the transport network in Gateshead and make contributions towards improvements as appropriate. Even if it is felt that, individually, the sites assessed pose no problems, the cumulative effects will still need to be considered.

Question 28: New Green Belt

The issues and options document refers to the possible designation of new Green Belt north of Consett and Stanley. Whilst this is not explicitly stated, it is expected that, in line with the recommendation of the former Regional Spatial Strategy, the previous County Durham Submission Draft Plan and subsequent discussions between Durham County Council, Gateshead Council and Northumberland County Council, any such new Green Belt would be an extension of the Tyne and Wear Green Belt which currently extends within Gateshead and Northumberland to the boundary of County Durham.

Gateshead Council supports the extension of the Green Belt in County Durham to form a continuation of the Tyne and Wear Green Belt, and considers that this would be in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We note that the Issues and Options Paper refers to, and paraphrases, paragraph 82 of the NPPF. We believe this may be based on a misconception, and that this is not the relevant part of the NPPF; if the proposal is along the lines previously considered, it is not a "new" Green Belt but an extension of an existing Green Belt. Paragraphs 83 and 84 of the NPPF, rather than paragraph 82, would therefore apply. Whilst there would still be a need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances, the bullet points set out in paragraph 82 would no longer apply, nor would the description of "exceptional circumstances" as including "planning for larger-scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions".

The issues and options document does not set out in detail the scale and location of growth proposed, under any of the relevant options, for specific settlements or locations in the Consett and Stanley area. Nevertheless each option includes a significant scale of growth within this area as a whole.

Gateshead Council considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the designation of land north of Consett and Stanley and adjoining the Gateshead boundary as Green Belt for the following reasons:

- Development in the area would be unsustainably located and create additional commuting journeys, placing a strain on the already stretched

capacity of road links between this part of County Durham, and Gateshead and the rest of Tyneside;

- The boundary between Gateshead and County Durham in the area north of Stanley does not constitute a clear and suitable outer boundary for the Tyne and Wear Green Belt;
- The landscape character of the Derwent valley between Shotley Bridge and Burnopfield is important to protect both in terms of the intrinsic landscape character and the green infrastructure resources of the area and forms a single visual entity, so that intrusive development on one side of the valley would have a visual impact on the other side; a southern boundary of the Green Belt in the vicinity of Shotley Bridge, Leadgate and Dipton which includes the southern slopes of the valley would accord well with protecting these features and resources;
- The presence of Green Belt in Gateshead and Northumberland and in the former Chester-le-Street District, but its absence in the former Derwentside District, is an anomaly which has come about for historical reasons and has created a gap in a location where Green Belt would logically have been designated if the same considerations had been applied regardless of local authority boundaries.

Question 38: Water management

Gateshead Council welcomes the approach to water management and is keen to work collaboratively with Durham County Council as a Local Planning Authority and a Lead Local Flood Authority to make a positive contribution towards the catchment management of the River Team.

The Environment Agency and Gateshead Council are currently working in partnership on the Team Valley Flood Alleviation Project to consider catchment-wide flood risk management options to reduce the flood risk on Team Valley Trading Estate, as well as improve water quality and enhance local habitats. The feasibility work has considered options for upstream storage on the River Team and its tributaries, including an option at Urpeth Wood for river restoration, wetland creation and natural flood management. In addition, this work highlights the importance of new development incorporating SuDS to reduce and slow runoff rates to manage flood risk within the River Team catchment.

Given that parts of North and North West Durham have hydraulic linkages to the River Team catchment, it is recommended that County Durham's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment reviews the Team Valley Integrated Flood Study and flood management options to consider any cross boundary implications for the Local Plan. In addition, as delivery of the Team Valley Flood Alleviation Project progresses, further partnership working between the Environment Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authorities may be required.

Question 43: Minerals (Sand and Gravel)

Given the current cessation of mineral extraction in Gateshead, an issue which is being addressed in Gateshead's emerging Local Plan, the Council would support an approach for longer term working of sand and gravel in

County Durham which provides flexibility and takes into account accessibility to markets whilst avoiding environmentally important areas.

In relation to the need to address minerals (and waste) within Local Plans, the Council will continue to work positively with Durham County Council as part of a regionally collaborative approach to these issues.

Summary

Gateshead Council is keen to work with other local authorities in the region to explore the cross-boundary implications of development. Through close cooperation, there is potential for our emerging Local Plans, and for development activity in our areas to complement the strategic priorities of both Gateshead and County Durham. We would therefore welcome the opportunity for further engagement as the CDP and its supporting evidence base progresses.