

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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27 March 2015

The Planning Inspectorate, Plans Team
3/12 Kite Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol BS1 6PN

Dear Sir/Madam

The County Durham Plan

I write on behalf of the City of Durham Trust, the local Civic Amenity Society which I chair, and also on behalf of the other principal amenity organisations which submitted objections to the draft County Durham Local Plan, namely the Friends of the Durham Green Belt, the Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Durham Branch).

We note from a press statement issued by Durham County Council on 24 March (<http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/5833/Support-mounts-for-rethink-on-report-into-County-Plan>) that the Council will be meeting the Planning Inspectorate early next week to discuss the Inquiry Inspector's criticisms of the Plan. We and other objectors are extremely concerned at the implications of such a meeting during an Examination in Public that is still formally in progress. In the interests of transparency and due process, we ask that objectors should also be afforded the opportunity to meet with the Inspectorate, either as part of the meeting that is planned for next week or as soon as possible thereafter.

Our concerns are amplified by the fact that, since the publication of the Inspector's Interim Report on 18 February, Durham County Council has repeatedly refused requests by objectors for a meeting to discuss ways of taking the draft Plan forward on the basis suggested in Paragraph 113 of Mr Stephens' report. Instead, the Council has selectively sought support from the development and business community, including some individuals and organisations that were not party to the Examination in Public or the preceding consultation stage, and invoked this support in a high-profile advocacy campaign which it is conducting at the expense of council-tax payers in Durham. As part of this campaign the Council has wilfully continued to misuse the evidence on which it claims to have based its core strategy, and to misrepresent both the Inspector's interim findings and his reasoned criticism of the serious evidential failings within key sections of the draft Plan.

Since the Interim Report was issued, the latest DCLG Household Projections have been published as part of the National Statistics. The DCLG data for Durham County provides strong and impartial support for the position that Mr Stephens had himself independently reached after hearing the Council's and objectors' evidence. The DCLG data also appears, worryingly, to provide further confirmation that (as we and other objectors argued) the Council's base data was seriously inaccurate, and that Mr Stephens' own assessment of likely future housing need in the county in fact provides more than ample headroom for the most aspirational of the Council's growth targets.

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I trust that the Inspectorate will take these factors into account when preparing for its meeting with Durham County Council, and will respond as a matter of urgency to the objectors' request either to attend that meeting or to be offered a similar bi-lateral meeting with your officials.

I am also copying this letter to Penny Mordaunt, the parliamentary under-secretary at DCLG, and to Roberta Blackman-Woods MP.

Yours faithfully,



Roger Cornwell