

# **Note of Meeting between Durham County Council and the Planning Inspectorate 02/04/15**

In attendance:

## **Durham County Council (DCC)**

George Garlick, Ian Thompson, Stuart Timmiss, Mike Allum, Neil Carter, Councillor Neil Foster

## **Planning Inspectorate (PINS)**

Mary Travers, Ben Linscott

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

The County Durham Plan was considered at Examination hearing sessions last autumn. On 18 February the Inspector released an interim report. It raised a number of fundamental issues with the plan and gave three options as ways forward. The Council requested a meeting with PINS to discuss the implications of the report.

**The Council** welcomed the Inspectorate and thanked them for taking the time to discuss what to the Council, is a very important issue. The Council stressed it was keen to find a way to get the Plan back on track.

**PINS** set out their remit for the meeting, emphasising the distinction that must be made between the Inspectorate and the Inspector (appointed by the Secretary of State), the latter being solely responsible for the examination of the Plan.. PINS senior managers have agreed to meet with the Council in order to listen to its concerns and provide any advice within their limited remit about potential options for moving the plan forward in the light of those offered by the Inspector and of any others that the Council may promote. It was re-iterated that the examination remains open and therefore the discussion at the meeting must not prejudice the Inspector's role or the fair and open conduct of the examination.

In terms of background **PINS** asked the Council to set out their issues with the Inspector's report. **The Council** were surprised and disappointed by the Interim Report. The inspector had given no indication that he has such fundamental concerns with the Plan. The publication of the Inspector's Interim Report without a full discussion of these issues has made it difficult to see a way forward.

The Council also believe the Inspector is mistaken in some of his conclusions. The approach he has taken to economic ambition and the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) is an example of where the Council believe he is wrong. The Council has taken Leading Counsel's advice, and that advice is clear that there are major issues with the Inspector's approach on OAN. An independent assessment of the Inspector's Report has also been commissioned by the Council to further review the approach to the key areas of policy and assist the examination process.

As a possible way to move the Plan forward, in addition to the three options set out in the Inspector's conclusions, **PINS** wondered whether there might be a

possible 'hybrid' option which could involve a further EIP hearing session(s) to discuss the Council's concerns around OAN in the light of any supplementary evidence/clarification that the Council might seek to provide. Any such session would be open to the public and interested parties. It could also be in advance of any 6 month suspension if it were agreed with the Inspector that the suspension option (option b) is an appropriate way forward.. The Officers present saw merit in such a possibility and PINS agreed to initially float this hybrid potential option with the Inspector.

The Council confirmed that it will consider this option before deciding on its next steps. It also reiterated that it wanted to get the Plan back on track as it is of fundamental importance for County Durham, but also has wider implications for the North East.