

## **Local Plans: a North East region view:**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local planning authorities to prepare local plans without which they may not be able to enforce their policies when considering planning applications. There are fears that this may result in developers putting in rapid planning applications in the expectation either that councils will not be able to reject them or that the Planning Inspectorate will uphold their appeals because no Local Plan is yet in place to control them. Furthermore, the extent to which councils can carry over policies set out in earlier plans or in the revoked Regional Spatial Strategy is very limited.

In consequence, the local authorities in our region are busily trying to complete their Local Plans, or at least agree the central document - the Core Strategy. As a result, our officers and our consultant, Dr Nic Best, are having to spend lots of time developing CPRE responses to draft plans that are appearing in increasing numbers over a short time. I have myself been involved in three such submissions in the northern half of the region.

Before discussing individual Local Plans or Core Strategies, a general problem must be exposed concerning population projections and statements of housing need. Our cities, especially Newcastle and Gateshead, are assuming that their populations will grow over the next 20 years, as their regeneration efforts make them increasingly attractive places to live and work in. On the other hand, Northumberland and Durham County Councils are expecting increased populations in their counties because the long standing outward migration of better off city dwellers to their countryside and market towns will continue, so they are also projecting population growth and the associated extra housing need. Nic has done a lot of work on this and is convinced that as a result, the planning authorities are double counting the likely population growth in their areas and are therefore producing exaggerated statements of housing need. One result is significant proposals to free up Green Belt land for new housing which may well not prove to be necessary.

So where are the individual authorities with these plans at present?

### **Newcastle/Gateshead**

Newcastle and Gateshead are nearing the end of their local consultations on their joint "One Core Strategy", which is likely to be submitted to the Secretary of State shortly. There will then be an Examination in Public before the Strategy is finally approved by the Secretary of State.

CPRE has been extensively involved in making submissions in response to successive Core Strategy drafts. Over time, the councils have modified their plans significantly: they have reduced their housing need projections by around half; and reduced their proposals for development in the Green Belt quite considerably.

They now claim that 70 per cent of their proposed housing developments will be on previously developed or "brownfield" sites. However, there are still significant proposals for development in the Green Belt and on other "greenfield" sites, which are being contested by a number of local protest groups. Last August these groups came together under CPRE chairmanship and formed "Cities4People" to co-ordinate their activities.

We continue to advise and be involved with this grouping. We have urged the councils to adopt the strictest possible sequential development policy, requiring developers to develop "brownfield" sites and those sites where they already have planning permission for development before considering invasions of the Green Belt or use of other greenfield sites.

#### **Newcastle - Policy webpage**

[www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning\\_index.asp?id=SXC6FB-A780BDA3&cat=1138](http://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/planning_index.asp?id=SXC6FB-A780BDA3&cat=1138)

#### **Gateshead - Policy webpage**

[www.gateshead.gov.uk/Building%20and%20Development/PlanningpolicyandLDF/Home.asp](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Building%20and%20Development/PlanningpolicyandLDF/Home.asp)

## Northumberland

Northumberland County Council are not as far down this road. They recently produced draft policies for housing, employment and the Green Belt. CPRE Northumberland has commissioned Nic to prepare our response to this document. He has already produced impressive work on the population and housing projections, as well as the proposals for the four Delivery Areas into which the County is to be divided.

There are good policies on affordable housing and the rural economy which we welcome. We also support a restrictive approach to out of town shopping centres and the need to regenerate and develop existing town and village centres, but in other areas we will urge reconsideration of policies which we consider to be ineffective or harmful. Nic is also proposing that we should recommend that the Council should stiffen its defences of Green Belts. The increasing number of wind turbines in the County is another major cause for concern.

Policy webpage [www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=8247](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=8247)

## North Tyneside

North Tyneside Borough Council have published a consultation draft of their Local Plan and a CPRE submission has just been sent in to them. There is much in this Plan that we can welcome, including a particularly strong commitment to affordable housing and its decision not to join in the “Dutch auction” for additional population and housing numbers.

They also have strong proposals for the regeneration of their town centres, especially Whitley Bay. We have again urged the adoption of the strongest possible sequential development policy, under which “brownfield” sites and sites with extant planning permission must be developed before “greenfield” sites or Green Belt invasions are considered. We have encouraged the Council to strengthen already strong policies for sustainable transport. We have urged stronger protection for the natural environment, including important sites like St Mary’s Island.

Policy webpage [http://www.northtyneside.gov.uk/browse.shtml?p\\_subjectCategory=32](http://www.northtyneside.gov.uk/browse.shtml?p_subjectCategory=32)

## General

One last general comment, reading these documents makes you realise that problems and issues do not respect local authority boundaries and that in consequence the absence of any regional or sub-regional strategy may result in the unnecessary duplication of developments, proposals detrimental to sites in a neighbouring authority’s area, and harmful competition among councils for research and development and other beneficial developments.

The “Duty to-Co-operate” prescribed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is not sufficient to prevent these problems occurring. However, the decision by the seven authorities in Northumberland, Tyne & Wear and County Durham to create a combined authority later this year is welcome and is likely to become increasingly important as a source of strategic thinking in the fullness of time.

## South Tyneside

The “South Tyneside Local Development Framework” (LDF) is the current [Local Plan](#) and guides the future development and use of land in the borough over the next 10-15 years, having replaced the previous “Unitary Development Plan” (UDP).

The LDF comprises a portfolio of statutory [Development Plan Documents \(DPD\)](#) plus supporting [Supplementary Planning Documents \(SPD\)](#). Along with national policy and guidance, its policies set the basis for assessing all planning applications and development proposals.

South Tyneside Council was the first local authority in the North East, and one of the first in the country, to complete its full suite of LDF development plan documents.

However, they are not resting on their laurels. They have already begin to consult on reviewing the LDF in the form of a new-style Local Plan, consulting on the “Strategic Development Plan Document: Issues and Options” in early 2013

Policy webpage <http://www.southtyneside.info/article/14842/>

### **Sunderland**

Sunderland is not as advanced as some authorities but has published two documents recently for consultation. One was its own Preferred Options for the City and CPRE Durham has made a number of representations to the proposed policies in this document.

The other is a review of “Settlement Breaks” in the City. These “Breaks” are not part of the Green Belt but many perform important roles for keeping settlements separate and some are also important for wildlife. Again, CPRE Durham has made representations in respect of this Document. Policy webpage <http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=8397>

### **County Durham**

The Council has now produced its Pre Submission Draft of the proposed Local Plan. This is the final document before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration with a view to it being adopted as the Local Plan for the County. CPRE Durham, who made many representations at the Preferred Options stage, has made numerous representations to many of the proposed policies in the Pre submission Draft.

We are aware that many other organisations have also made numerous representations to various policies, especially with regard to deletions from the Green Belt. There will inevitably be an Examination in Public held before the plan is either adopted or not. This is likely to be some time later in 2014

County Durham Policy webpage <http://www.durham.gov.uk/Pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=856>

### **Darlington**

The planning policy documents for Darlington currently are the “Darlington Core Strategy Development Plan Document “ (DPD) which was adopted May 2011 and a set of “saved” policies from the “Borough of Darlington Local Plan” (adopted 1997, with alterations 2001), plus Development and Supplementary Planning Documents.

As part of the continuing evolution of the Plan the “Making and Growing Places DPD” was consulted on mid 2013 and following its Publication and Submission stage in Spring 2014 is currently scheduled for adoption in December 2014.

Policy webpage  
<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Living/Planning/Planning+Policy/LocalDevelopmentFramework.htm>

## **Stockton**

The Stockton Local Plan is in a no-action hiatus at the moment. It is in between their Preferred Options stage and their Pre-submission stage. Speaking to a Stockton Planning officer recently they are apprehensively watching all the other failed Local Plans at Examinations in Public (EIPs) across the country, plus the threat of most of them losing their jobs in March that I believe they are in a difficult position at the moment.

Policy webpage

<http://www.stockton.gov.uk/regenerationandtransport/planning/spatialplanning/>

## **Middlesbrough**

Middlesbrough Council have recently closed their public consultation on their Pre-submission publication Local Plan prior to submitting it to a Planning Inspector who will consider its soundness at an Examination in Public early 2014.

Policy webpage <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1641>

## **Hartlepool**

In October 2013 Hartlepool Council withdrew their draft Local Plan from the Examination in Public process. The Local Plan had been suspended by the Planning Inspector in February 2013 and it was his intention to return in September with recommendations to ensure the Plan was sound. This involved allocating new Gypsy and Traveller sites and amending the proposed dwelling numbers over the Plan period.

The withdrawal of the draft Local Plan has left Hartlepool in a fraught situation with developers now capable of submitting their proposals with very few policies that Hartlepool Council can weigh against “the presumption in favour... of development”.

Some Councillors who opposed the withdrawal say a new Local Plan could take up to 3 years to prepare at a possible cost of £1 million.

Policy webpage [http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/downloads/1004/planning\\_policy](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/downloads/1004/planning_policy)