

# 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



# The Planning Inspectorate

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Our Ref: PINS/X1355/429/1

Date: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015

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Dear Mr Cornwell,

Re: The County Durham Plan

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March on behalf of the City of Durham Trust and other amenity groups.

I can confirm that Ben Linscott and I as representatives of the Planning Inspectorate will meet with officers from Durham County Council on 2 April at the Council's request. Your letter sets out a number of reservations about the meeting but I wish to assure you that PINS is fully conscious of these matters and indeed has given very careful consideration to them throughout. As to the scope of the meeting, PINS has reached the view that it is appropriate for us as senior representatives to listen to the Council's concerns and to provide any advice that we can within our limited remit about potential ways forward for the examination. Nonetheless, we have emphasised to the Council that the examination is on-going and that Mr Stephens is the appointed Inspector, and therefore any discussion at the meeting will not be permitted to prejudice his impartial role or the fair and open conduct of the examination. It would be neither appropriate nor reasonable for us to comment on the merits of the Council's case or that of any other participant in the examination and we will not do so. The Council has confirmed that it understands and agrees with these limitations and that a note of the meeting will be published so that everyone can be kept informed.

Given the limited time available before the meeting, it would not be possible unfortunately to broaden its scope to include representation from the City of Durham Trust and allied groups. In any event, I hope that this letter assures you that the interests of the Trust and others who have raised objections to the County Durham Plan and wish to continue playing a full part in planning for the future of Durham will not be compromised in any way by PINS agreeing to meet the Council on the terms that we have set out. I would like to emphasise that PINS stands by its fundamental core values of fairness, openness and impartiality and is vigilant in maintaining these standards in the conduct of all our business.

Thank you again for your letter and I hope that my reply provides you with the reassurance that you have sought.

I am copying this reply to Stuart Timmiss, Durham County Council as well as to Penny Mordaunt and Roberta Blackman-Woods.

Kind regards

Mary Travers

Group Manager - Plans