

## **Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum Working Group Meeting, 31st March 2017, Miners' Hall**

**Present:** John Ashby, Jules Brown (HE), Sue Childs, Roger Cornwell (Chair), Carole Dillon, Ann Evans, Barbara Hooper (HE), Peter Jackson, Ros Ward.

**Apologies:** Pippa Bell, Mike Costello, Adam Deathe, John Lowe, Matthew Phillips, Kirsty Thomas, Angela Tracy-Smith.

### **1. Historic England's letter of 26th January 2017**

Barbara and Jules were welcomed to the working group of Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum to discuss Historic England's letter of 26th January 2017 which advised that Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) are triggered.

Roger summarised the position of the group following the initial shock and immediate halt to the planned imminent launch of public consultations on the draft Plan. The intention is to carry out a full Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating an SEA.

Barbara explained the different purposes of HE's letters of 16th January and 26th January; the former was concerned with the draft Neighbourhood Plan's draft heritage policies whereas the latter concerned the need for an SEA. Essentially, the need arises from 3 particular circumstances: the huge number of heritage assets; the absence of a Local Plan; and the welcome fact that we are allocating sites for development. It essential that an Inspector and potential challengers have documented evidence that we have carefully considered all the potential adverse impacts and mitigations introduced in relation to each of our proposed development sites. Barbara and Jules recommended HE's publications assisting in this process.

In relation to specific points in HE's letter of 26th January, Jules confirmed that an over-arching statement at the front of the Plan to the effect that the Plan must be read as a whole, that all policies must be taken into account for any proposal, and that heritage protection, conservation and enhancement is the paramount consideration above all others would be far better than repetitious cross-referencing. He also agreed with Sue's point that green spaces and green infrastructure are integral to the special heritage qualities of Durham city.

### **2. Timetable**

The group hope to complete the Scoping Report within 3 weeks (i.e. by 21st April) - sooner if possible. It then needs to be sent to the County Council for consultation with Historic England, Environment Agency and Natural England. They need to be given at least 5 weeks to comment. Barbara and Jules hope that they will be able to comment on general acceptability within 3 weeks.

Jules will also provide as soon as possible any suggestions for further improvements to the re-drafted heritage policies.

The Screening Report needs only minor change to reflect that as a result of consultations an SEA requirement is triggered. This does not need re-consultation with the 3 Statutory Bodies.

We then have to prepare the Sustainability Appraisal Report. A start on writing the narratives has already been made, and on 4th April the group will be checking how well our draft sustainability

objectives that have been drawn from **national** (NPPF) and **county** objectives apply to our Durham **City** area.

Carole offered that Claire will comment on our emerging SA work if we wish.

There is significant work involved in producing the SA. The group resolved to continue to plan on the basis of being able to start public consultations before the University term ends in July, accepting that on-line consultation will be in place. For the non-student residents of Durham the consultation period may very well stretch into the school summer holiday period. Accordingly, we could extend the consultation period to, say, 8 weeks.

### **3. Future Meetings**

- The next meeting will be on Tuesday 4th April, 09.00 – 12.00, at the Miners' Hall to scrutinise and refine the sustainability objectives as a group.
- Continue with Tuesday 9-11 meetings: 11th, 18th, and 25th April.