

### THEME 3: A CITY WITH A DIVERSE AND RESILIENT ECONOMY



#### Vision

4.114 Durham City will have a sustainable and vibrant local economy supporting a wide range of employment in large and small businesses in all sectors including retail and tourism.

#### Objectives

4.115 The objectives of this theme are:

1. To increase employment opportunities through the establishment and support of large and small enterprises;
2. To support the development of strategic and local sites ranging from prestige developments for businesses, university research-based and high technology industries to business incubators and local start-ups;
3. To secure the vitality and competitiveness of the City centre through balanced retail development including responding to the development of e-commerce;
4. To build on and enhance the tourism and leisure experience in the City.

## Context

4.116 Durham City extends beyond Our Neighbourhood to include large residential, industrial and retail estates at Belmont, Framwellgate Moor, Meadowfield and Newton Hall. Taken together, the built-up area of Durham City has a residential population of about 46,000 and is the biggest town in County Durham. It is the 'County town' and provides the administrative headquarters of the County Council, the main hospital, the magnificent Norman cathedral and a fine University, as well as business services, retailing, culture, leisure and recreation - the majority of which are located within the City centre, the heart of Our Neighbourhood. Durham City is also an important destination for tourists from home and abroad.

4.117 The large and important employers in Our Neighbourhood are Durham University with over 4,000 jobs, Durham County Council with 2,000 jobs, the University Hospital of North Durham (where the major part of the jobs in the Foundation Trust's area are located) with 7,000 jobs, and Government offices which contribute over 700 jobs. A job market based on four major public sector employers is too narrow and needs to be widened. As the county town, the City is home to 80 offices comprising estate agents, solicitors, accountants and related professional services. Office space is limited in the City centre, and most of it is in Georgian and Victorian buildings. The retail sector amounts to some 1,000 full-time equivalent jobs and provides vibrancy and a relatively good retail offering, but with few independent retailers. The lunchtime economy (concentrated in the immediate City centre, with more minimal provision in the outer areas of the City centre) is supported by the presence of office workers and of students, and is more limited than the evening economy. The evening economy draws people into Durham City from other parts of County Durham and beyond. However, with the redevelopment of The Gates (now The Riverwalk) and the Milburngate sites there should be a greater variety of entertainment attractions for families and children.

4.118 The City's economy is significantly influenced by the large student population and its part-time presence, and to a lesser extent by the high proportion of resident retired people. Education, health, social services, retail and wholesale sectors provide most of the employment for local residents. A large number of the employees working in Our Neighbourhood commute from the rest of Durham City and beyond. (see para. 4.134)

4.119 The three state primary schools, two state secondary schools, the special school, and Sixth Form Centre in Our Neighbourhood, have good or outstanding ratings by Ofsted. Lack of capacity affects several of the primary schools, and at least one of the secondary schools is over-subscribed. There are also four private schools, offering education from nursery to secondary level.

4.120 The University, the third oldest university in England, is a member of the Russell Group and is recognised for world-class scholarship and research. High quality vocational skills are provided by New College Durham (just outside Our Neighbourhood) and East Durham College, Houghall Campus (offering agriculture, arboriculture and forestry, horticulture and animal care courses). The University's contribution to the economy and

cultural life of Durham City and County Durham is of great importance. It is essential, however, that the drive for growth (Durham University, 2016, 2016a) is associated with fairness and engagement with the local community, and is proportionate and demonstrates a clear understanding and respect for the capacity and infrastructure and special character of Our Neighbourhood to host such developments.

4.121 Details of economic activity and educational attainment are given in the population section of Appendix C. In Appendix D, Table D3 lists public and community services and facilities in Our Neighbourhood and Table D4 lists employers and educational establishments.

### **Justification**

4.122 This justification refers to the Economy theme as a whole. Additional, specific justification for an individual policy is given with the policy itself.

4.123 The Forum's priority survey (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2015) identified that local people valued the friendly, lively, vibrant, multi-cultural feel of the City and the shops (particularly the Market Place and indoor market), coffee shops, pubs and restaurants. However, problems were identified, e.g.: a poor retail offer; poor appearance / maintenance of premises and streetscape; poor pedestrian experience; an evening economy too geared to drinking; poor parking provision; the lack of a Tourist Information Centre. What was needed included: an increased diversity of retail outlets; reduced business rates/rents; upgrading of areas in the City (particularly North Road, Bus Station, Lower Claypath, Market Place, Riverside); improved provision for pedestrians; improved parking provision; promotion of and support for tourism (e.g. a Tourist Information Centre); more entertainment, community, leisure, and cultural facilities.

4.124 In the Forum's study of the views of young people (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2016a), their suggestions for action included: improve the Bus Station; improve the streetscape of North Road, particularly shop fronts; more parking and increase the Park & Ride spaces and operating hours; more events, indoor activities and community facilities for young people; shops more attractive to young people. The older respondents who were school leavers were concerned by the lack of employment opportunities in Durham City. They also felt that the choice of jobs in the City is limited. They would like a wider choice of permanent jobs to choose from and more part-time jobs to be made available to young people, particularly in the proposed new entertainment venues in the City.

4.125 The questionnaire study of businesses (Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum, 2016b) identified the following that would improve the development of their business: improved parking (free or cheaper; extension of Park & Ride days and hours); better information and signposting; lower rents and rates; fast broadband fibre connectivity.

4.126 The NPPF supports economic growth through the planning system. Chapter 6, Building a strong, competitive economy, (para. 81) states that planning policies should:

*set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth ... set criteria, or identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment ... and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period ... seek to address potential barriers to investment, such as inadequate infrastructure, services or housing, or a poor environment ... be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices*

4.127 Our Neighbourhood is an important provider of jobs for the wider County and beyond, as well as for local residents. In a sensitive setting such as exists in Durham City, it is vital that the level of economic growth aspiration is compatible with the needs and expectations of local people in providing jobs and protecting, enhancing and improving the heritage for now and future generations.

4.128 Chapter 7 of the NPPF 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres' states that planning policies should support the viability and vitality of town centres which are the heart of local communities. Policies should allow the growth and diversification of town centres by allocating a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of economic development needed now and in the future: retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development. Durham City centre is a significant retail and service centre for a wide catchment area and gives economic support for the heritage assets in Our Neighbourhood; its future economic success is vital. The emerging County Durham Local Plan notes the economic challenges facing town centres, e.g. a change in



consumer behaviour and the rise in e-commerce, mobile technology and Internet shopping; out of town retail centres (although more recently there has been a growth in smaller and more local convenience and discount stores). Town centres need to reflect the needs and opportunities of the communities that they serve.

4.129 The Green Paper 'Building our industrial strategy' (UK Government, 2017) proposes a range of interventions which the evidence shows drive growth. Places with higher rates of investment in research and development, more highly skilled people, better infrastructure, more affordable energy and higher rates of capital investment are places which, the Green Paper asserts, grow faster and have higher levels of productivity. Policies on trade, procurement and sectors are tools to drive growth by increasing competition and encouraging innovation and investment. Through central government actions and by strengthening the local institutions that support a more productive economy it is hoped to ensure that growth is driven across the whole country. In Our Neighbourhood, provision for research and technology development by harnessing the strengths of Durham University and New College Durham is essential. It will also be important to cater for innovation through incubator facilities so that ideas can be transformed into advanced processes and products and the creation of businesses offering employment opportunities to graduates who might otherwise be lost to the region.

4.130 The North East Strategic Economic Plan (North East Local Enterprise Partnership, 2014) builds on the strategic location of the North East, between Scotland and the wider north of England economy: it is well connected to the rest of the UK, Europe and the rest of the world by rail, sea, road and air. The strategic plan is to deliver 100,000 more and better jobs by 2024. The growth opportunities are: Tech North East - driving a digital surge; making the North East's future in advanced manufacturing in the automotive and medicines sectors; Health Quest North East - innovation in health and life sciences; and Energy North East- excellence in sub-sea, offshore and energy technology. The Strategy recognises the three areas of the service economy for growth are: financial, professional and business services; transport logistics; and education. This is a high level strategy which applies to the entire North East region. In Our Neighbourhood there are opportunities for these distinctive streams of new employment, ranging from confirmation of the prestige strategic employment site at Aykley Heads through various kinds of bespoke units to innovation spin-out incubators, and of the particular requirements of the health and academic sectors.

4.131 The Sustainable Communities Strategy for County Durham 2014-2030 (County Durham Partnership, 2014) has a theme 'Altogether wealthier', with the aims of a thriving Durham City, vibrant and successful towns, sustainable neighbourhoods and rural communities, competitive and successful people, and a top location for business.

4.132 Green infrastructure can be beneficial for the economy of Our Neighbourhood, particularly as a tourist attraction related to the City's heritage.

4.133 The Durham City Regeneration Masterplan (Durham County Council, 2014) and its update (Durham County Council, 2016c) have a number of implementation projects and

actions relevant to the economy of Our Neighbourhood. Business growth and greater employment opportunities will be driven by the regeneration of sites across the City at Aykley Heads, Freemans Reach, North Road including the upgrading of the bus station. The Gates, Milburngate and Lower Claypath. The updated Masterplan focuses on what has been delivered and outlines key future activities. It highlights completed projects including new developments in the City centre and the successful organisation of major events and entertainments. For Our Neighbourhood it is important that sustainable economic growth utilises, supports and enhances the unique historic environment of Durham City.

4.134 Townsend (2017) provides a summary of employment data for Our Neighbourhood, based on the 2011 Census and 2016 employment data. The main points are:

- an 'out-of-term-time' economically active population (aged 16 to 74) of 4,800 (50% of the total)
  - 47% of these work in Our Neighbourhood, the rest commute outside
- 21,000 employee jobs in our Neighbourhood
  - 38% of these are part-time (less than 30 hours per week)
  - 66% of these are in public services
  - more 'white collar' jobs than the national average
  - a loss of 12.5% of jobs between 2007 and 2016

4.135 Townsend (2017) concludes that: "the Constituency/former City as a whole is a natural 'growth point' of the County relative to the surrounding areas as a whole, but this description does not apply to the NPA area [Our Neighbourhood]."

4.136 The saved policies from the Durham City Local Plan include references to a Science Park at Mountjoy, a Business Park at Aykley Heads and office and retail development in the City centre (EMP2, EMP4, EMP12, S2A).

### **Planning Policies and Proposals for Land Use**

4.137 The policies related to this theme are:

- Policy E1: The Aykley Heads Business Park
- Policy E2: Other Employment Sites
- Policy E3: Retail Development
- Policy E4: Evening Economy
- Policy E5: Visitor Attractions
- Policy E6: Visitor Accommodation



**Policy E1: The Aykley Heads Business Park**

Employment will be created at the largest available site on 8.8 hectares of non-Green Belt land at Aykley Heads (including Durham County Council's County Hall site), where full compliance will be required with high sustainability standards set out in a masterplan for this prime location.

- 1. The Aykley Heads Business Park:** Prestige offices, business incubators and start-up businesses that fall within use classes B1a (Business - Offices) and B1b (Business - Research & Development) will be supported if proposals meet the masterplan standards of sustainability, as required by Policies S1 and S2.

4.138 Details of this site (shown in Proposals Map 5) are as follows.

- **Site E1.1: The Aykley Heads Business Park**

Aykley Heads is the largest and most important employment site and critical to the future attractiveness of the City to the location of future businesses. The land allocated for it is on the non-Green Belt part of this area. It will be an exemplar of sustainable development, as set out in sustainability Policy S1, and for which a masterplan and design brief will be prepared, see Policy S2. This land is scarce and valuable and can only be released for development that meets the highest standards which will be set out in the masterplan and design brief and in overall accordance with guidance set out in the NPPF Chapter 12: Achieving well-designed places (para. 124 and 127). Ancillary uses such as a café, a crèche, a gym and business support serving the principal high quality occupiers of Aykley Heads can be considered, but must pass a strict test of meeting the needs of those working on the site and thereby avoid the unnecessary loss of valuable and scarce land for prestige uses. Design must be appropriate to the settings of the World Heritage Site and the Durham City Conservation Area (particularly heritage Policies H1 and H2). Development of Aykley Heads should encourage associated improvement, management and recreational use of the Local Green Space within the site and other green spaces, including the retention of woodland and veteran trees and heritage assets.

4.139 In the Pre-submission Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan 5.5 hectares of non-Green Belt land at the Durham Science Park at Mountjoy was allocated as a site in Policy E1. Durham Science Park is owned by Durham University and is situated next to the Mountjoy Research Centre. However, the new Mathematical Sciences and Computing Science building now largely occupies the site and an area has also been set aside for an approved car park. As very little land therefore remains undeveloped it has been removed as an allocation in the Submitted Draft of the Neighbourhood Plan. However, the site is in close proximity to ancient woodland which is well-used by local residents and contains assets of wildlife value including a pond. It is therefore still important to protect this existing environmental setting, e.g. by providing a buffer of native tree planting or green open space against the woodland and wetland.

4.140 A comprehensive Environmental Assessment will need to be undertaken to show the effect that new development will have upon any site and in particular Aykley Heads and the present Durham County Council Headquarters area. This site provides an exceptional opportunity to attract and generate high quality jobs to Durham. This Environmental Assessment will include traffic generation, the penetration of public transport into the site, visual impact, and loss of open space and protection of nature conservation interests, as set out in the green infrastructure Policy G1. It will include an assessment of the mitigation measures appropriate to the development in a mature parkland landscape. The Environmental Assessment will form the basis upon which individual planning applications will be brought forward for the development of the land at these sites. Developments should favour sustainable transport to minimise any adverse effect created by the development on the environment (see transport Policy T1).

4.141 The provision of safe and well-connected pedestrian and cycle paths from the Aykley Heads site will allow employees to easily travel to and from transport hubs, residences and the City centre. This will have two specific benefits; by increasing footfall within the retail area and thereby boosting the economy; and helping to reduce a reliance on motor vehicles. The Durham Science Park would also benefit from such sustainable transport infrastructure.

4.142 New commercial development should incorporate a communal open area, outdoor where possible, to enhance the well-being of their employees and benefits to the public.

### **Policy E2: Other Employment Sites**

Support will be given to the development of Fowler's Yard (Durham's Arts Quarter) including craft workshops, creative spaces and associated sales and services, to ensure the fullest utilisation of existing buildings and unused space and land.

Support will be given to the development of windfall brownfield sites in Our Neighbourhood for mixed use office and business enterprises and residential, including units for older people, young professionals and families with children.

4.143 Details of the site (shown in Proposals Map 5) is as follows:

- **Site E2.1: Fowler's Yard**

This is an area already thriving as independent craft workshops, creative spaces and associated retail sales and services. It is greatly appreciated as such and worthy of safeguarding against uses that would reduce its unique appeal as a creative space for local artists and practitioners.



4.144 In respect of a further site shown on Proposals Map 5:

- **Site E2.2: Blagdon Depot**

The Neighbourhood Plan recognises that this site is in the Green Belt and in Flood Risk Zone 2 and as such may not be available for development. However should the issues identified be resolved and an opportunity arise to improve the existing provision, or develop the site further, this would be welcomed subject to conformity with the relevant policies within the Plan

4.145 Any brownfield windfall site that offers the opportunity for regeneration through redevelopment and refurbishment will be considered. Development of such sites will provide a wide range of mixed-use office space in terms of size, quality and cost and the prospect for affordable lower-cost business space. This will provide an entry level for start-ups and small enterprises and more and equal employment opportunities for a broader range of employees and employers. The potential development site must be easily accessible to the City centre and transport hubs for pedestrians and cyclists.

### **Justification for Policies E1 and E2**

4.146 Businesses and residents have requested more land for commercial use: the sites allocated in Policies E1 and E2 are the only suitable land available in Our Neighbourhood which could be used for this purpose. To improve the economy of Durham City it is important to encourage new employment opportunities and to safeguard and assist expansion of existing businesses within the area. A good variety of serviced employment sites will help to attract new businesses, and making available underused space as offices for established businesses will increase the employment opportunities for local people, attract new employees from outside the area, and encourage the retention of graduates from Durham University. New employment opportunities within the City will increase the numbers of people who use the City, and will also strengthen the relationship between local business and Durham University.

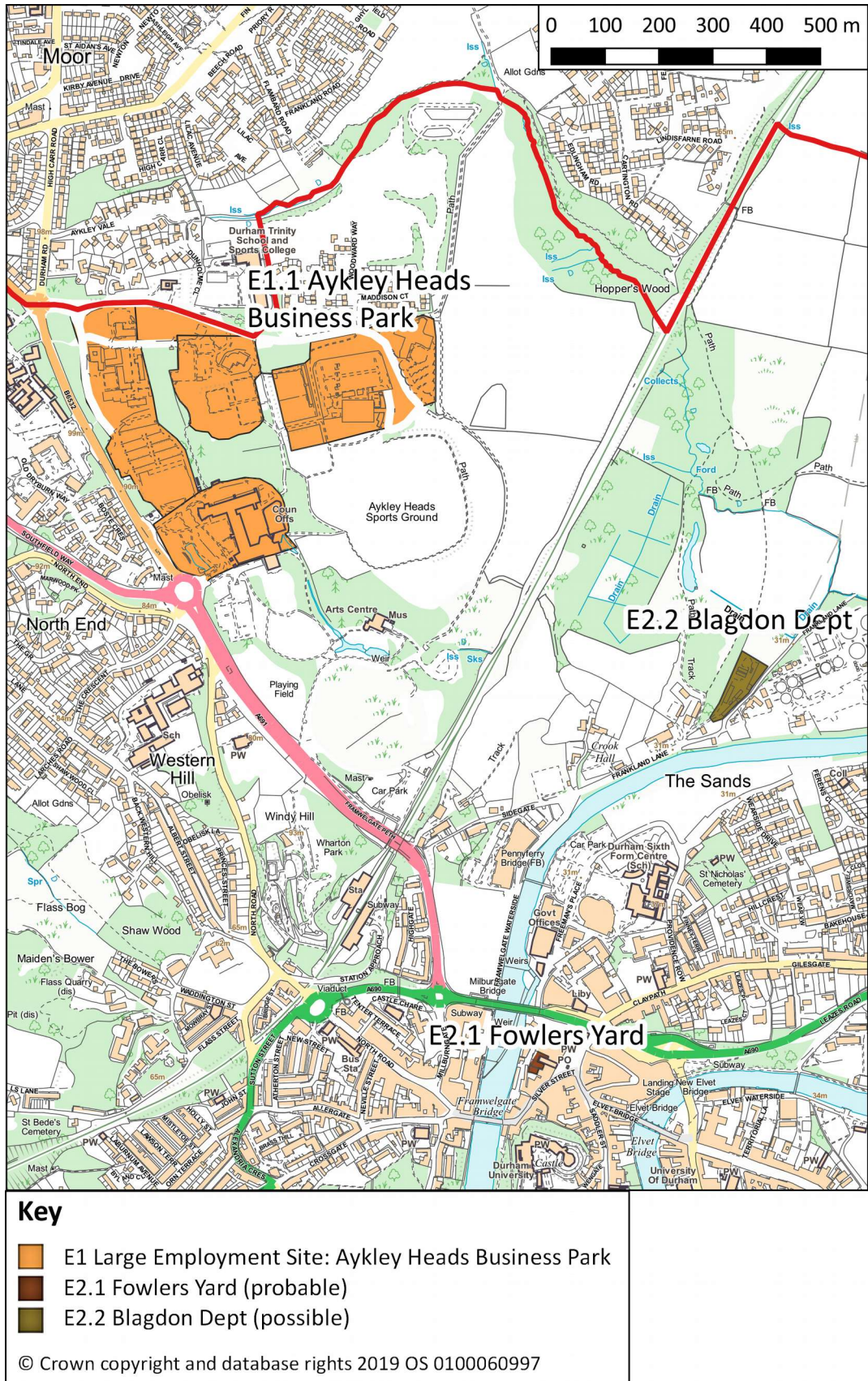
4.147 In accordance with guidance in the NPPF Chapter 11: Making effective use of land (para. 117) commercial development will be directed to brownfield sites. In satisfying the sustainable design principles of Our Neighbourhood Plan, new development will avoid unacceptable impacts on local, national and international designations and physical constraints such as flood risk and topography. These



considerations are also included within the emerging County Durham Local Plan. So far as flood risk is concerned, it would be highly desirable to have all brownfield employment sites located in Zone 1 (low probability of flooding).

4.148 Windfall brownfield sites which become available should be used to improve the economy in Our Neighbourhood by providing office space for A2 Professional Services and B1 Business as there is a shortage of office space as evidenced by the business professionals who were interviewed during the initial consultation for Our Neighbourhood Plan. Accommodation on these sites will be considered in Our Neighbourhood for local housing needs where there is a shortage and particularly for those in need as defined by the NPPF Chapter 5: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes (para. 61); the elderly, those with disabilities, families and young professionals as there is evidence of a shortfall of this type of housing in Theme 4: A City with attractive and affordable places to live.

Proposals Map 5: Economic Designated Sites





### **Policy E3: Retail Development**

Within the Durham City centre core retail area, as defined in Proposals Map 6, support will be given to proposals that:

Contribute to the creation of a lively and vibrant City centre by development of Primary Frontage for:

- a) A1 (retail) as the predominant use; or
- b) A2 (financial and professional services ), A3 (restaurants and cafes), A4 (drinking establishments), A5 (hot food takeaways), and other appropriate town centre uses (defined as retail, leisure, entertainment, sport and recreation, offices, and arts, culture and tourism); or
- c) change of use of ground floor premises to the following non-A1 uses as the predominant use:
  - 1) entertainment
  - 2) arts, culture and tourism
  - 3) leisure, sport and recreation; or
- d) A2 (financial and professional services ), A3 (restaurants and cafes), A4 (drinking establishments), A5 (hot food takeaways); or
- e) use of the upper floors of Primary Frontage for retail (A1), financial and professional services (A2), restaurants and cafes (A3), drinking establishments (A4), hot food takeaways (A5), and other appropriate town centre uses (defined as retail, leisure, entertainment, sport and recreation, offices, and arts, culture and tourism).

And enhance the character and attractiveness of the City centre by:

- f) ensuring that developments are compatible with the requirements of Policy S1 particularly in respect of their impact on the setting, character, local distinctiveness, views, tranquillity, and the contribution to the sense of place of the World Heritage Site and the Durham City Conservation Area; and
- g) ensuring that new development is of a scale, design and character appropriate to the City Centre and avoids loss of important views of the City: and
- h) improving the public realm including streets, back lanes, vennels and urban open space for all users; and
- i) improving the City centre environment and access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users including more parking for people with a disability.

Development proposals that provide residential accommodation in upper floors of commercial properties will be supported, as long as they do not have a negative impact on retail, commercial and tourism activities and the general amenity of neighbouring properties and residential amenity including noise impact.

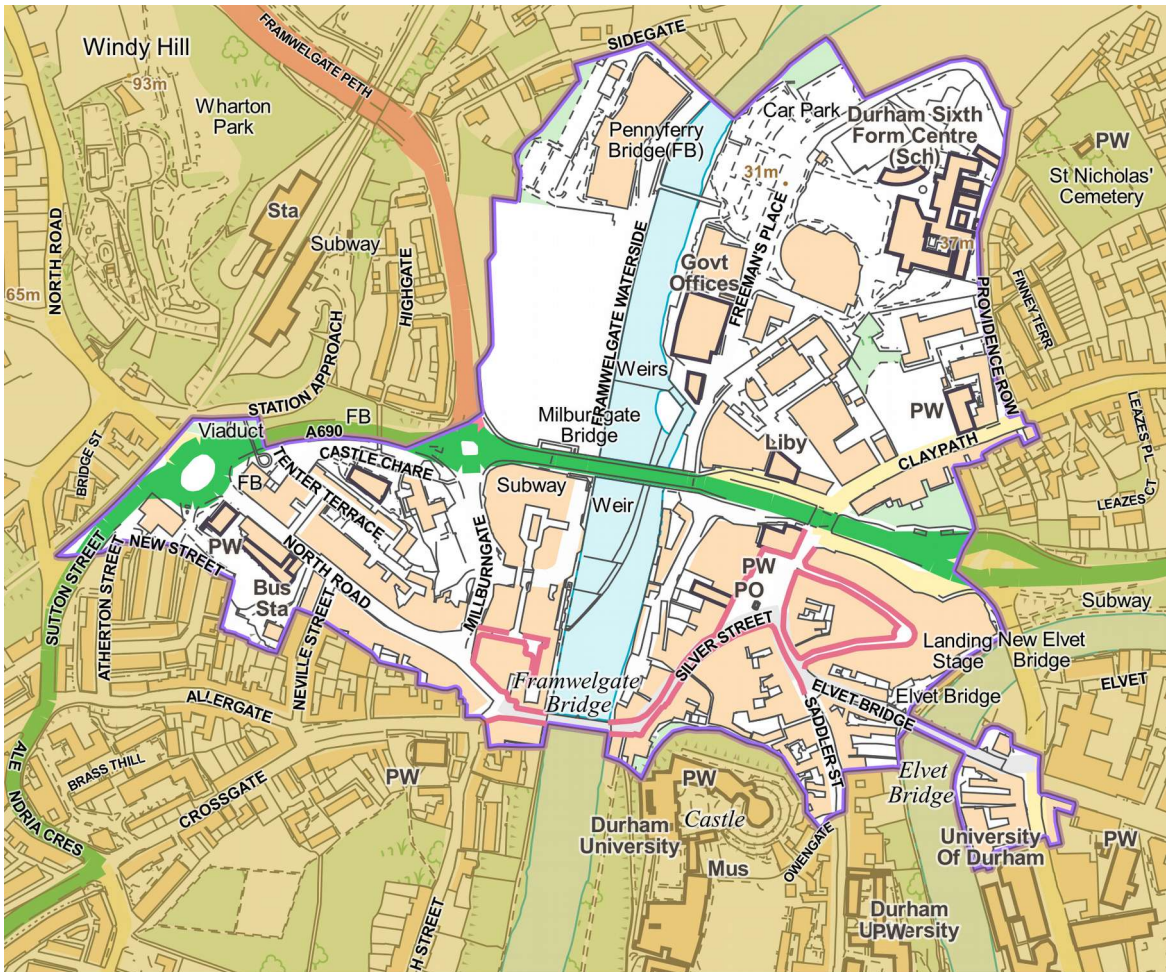
**Policy E4: Evening Economy**

All development proposals, including those for a change of use, that would promote and/or support the early evening and night-time economy activity related to food and drink, arts and cultural uses, including later trading, will be supported provided that they contribute to the vitality and viability of the City centre and add to, and improve, the cultural and diversity offer.

Proposals should include a strategy regarding public safety and prove that the development will have no significant adverse effect upon local amenity, including the amenity of local residents.

4.149 The extent of the shopping area, where new development may be approved, is expected to remain broadly as it is now. However the need to sustain and enhance Durham City centre means that opportunities to improve its retail provision should be taken when they arise through redevelopment and changes of use. Development that increases the range and diversity of retail ownerships, and quality of shops and shopping experience for residents, visitors and those working in the City will be supported. The policies reflect the quickly changing retail environment and a need for flexible commercial space to maintain the vitality and viability of the City centre as set out in NPPF Chapter 7: Ensuring the vitality of town centres (para. 85). The Grimsey Review 2 (Grimsey et al, 2018), a review of retail in Britain, states in the Foreword “The fundamental structure of Britain’s town centres has changed from goods transactions to one of consumption of food and experiential services including health and beauty”.

**Proposals Map 6: City Centre Boundary and Frontages**



- Core Retail Area
- Primary Frontage



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4.150 Within the core retail area as defined in Proposals Map 6 there are a number of sites outside the core retail area where planned development will result in an increase of people living or working in the centre. These new developments must ensure that the needs of those living, working or visiting the centre are accommodated: this includes mitigation measures for the generation of additional traffic as stated in transport Policies T1 and T2.

4.151 New developments must be designed to the highest standards and respect and enhance the Durham City Conservation Area and the historic City centre (see also Policies H2 and H4). The NPPF (para. 124, 125) states the importance of good design in planning. Careful consideration should be given to the access requirements of pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, cars and emergency vehicles in the design and layout of new development. Advice should be available on the design of shop fronts including security blinds for doors and windows.

4.152 There is a deficit of suitable accommodation in the City for young professionals, young couples starting out, people leaving home for the first time and older people. These categories of need are recognised in the NPPF (para. 61). Residential development in Durham City has in recent years been focused on the student market and so-called 'executive' housing making it increasingly difficult for residents who fall into one of the categories of need to find suitable accommodation in Our Neighbourhood. The NPPF (para. 118d, 121a) underlines the need to re-purpose existing buildings for use as residential accommodation. Our Neighbourhood Plan seeks to help make Durham City a more balanced community and one in which all residents can benefit. One way in which to do this is to allow the upper floors of Primary Frontage to be used for residential accommodation, as long as such development does not have a detrimental effect on local and residential amenity. Proposals must include mitigation for the impact of noise on residents.

4.153 Support will be given to any development that positively contributes to the evening economy, particularly a more diverse cultural offer to redress the over-reliance on restaurants and licensed establishments. Proposals which broaden the range of evening and night-time activities should be explored including the



extension of opening hours for existing daytime facilities such as shops, cafes and Durham Clayport Library to create bridges between the day and night-time economy. In turn this would attract a wider range of visitors including families with children. Park and Ride opening hours should be extended to make the City more accessible in the evening.



Proposals for development of the early evening and night-time economy will require a supporting statement to be submitted with the planning application to address the issues of public safety concerns and the negative impact on local and residential amenity including mitigation for noise. Development should be designed to be accessible for all users, including access to public toilets.

#### **Justification for Policies E3 and E4**

4.154 The NPPF (para. 85) and the emerging County Durham Local Plan recognise the importance of ensuring the viability and vitality of town centres. The threat to loss of trade in Durham City centre to large retail proposals in nearby centres including out-of-town or edge-of-town centres cannot be resisted through policy in the Neighbourhood Plan as all these rivals are outside its influence. The Retail and Town Centre Study (CBRE, 2018; Durham County Council, 2017a) highlights the threat from out-of-town sites to the retail offer in the City centre. Paragraph 10.3 states that the County Council has been obliged to issue “lawful development certificates” enabling change of use from traditional retail park businesses such as DIY companies to high street fashion chains. Paragraph 10.46 states the negative impact of this course of action on the retail offer in the city; “this could have implications for the future retail strategy of the city as operator demand could be absorbed in out-of-centre locations”. In accordance with the NPPF (para. 86) it is essential that Durham County Council apply a sequential test when considering out-of-town retail proposals across the County so that they do not have an adverse impact on the viability of Durham City centre. The emerging County Durham Plan includes sequential assessment for the protection of the vitality and viability of the City centre and this coupled with policies and proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan will be crucial in determining such applications and maintaining the retail offer in the City.

4.155 The Primary Frontages are the core retail area of the City centre and where shoppers, visitors and tourists should experience the liveliest and most attractive environment, which will encourage return visits and maintain Durham City's role in the County's hierarchy of town centres. The retail sector in Durham City centre is a key driver of the local economy, although it is subject to major seasonal fluctuations because of the impact of Durham University terms and vacations. Durham City has a good mix of shops, including independents and the well-loved market, but the recent closure of BHS and of Marks and Spencer, the anchor stores of the City centre, and a number of other vacant shop units means that it is important that a range of both independent and national retailers are represented to include a balanced mix of consumer goods, food and services within the Primary Frontage. There is growing public concern at the rapid and continuing growth of food shops and in particular cafes, drinking establishments and takeaways which are considered to have a detrimental effect on the overall retail attractiveness of the City. Nevertheless, the food and drink sector plays an important role in the viability and vitality of the City centre which is increasingly apparent following the loss of major stores. There is now a gap in the retail provision in the City centre, which will need an innovative solution to mitigate the challenges currently facing the high street. Enabling more ‘click and collect’, online shopping delivery facilities within City centre shops will help to increase footfall through the City.

4.156 Consumers are now looking for a wider experience when visiting shopping centres. Retail development is now 'leisure-led development', that is development which includes cafés, restaurants, cinemas and entertainment facilities such as a bowling alley. A more diverse retail offering in Durham City and entertainment events throughout the year will encourage shoppers to visit and revisit the City centre. Currently Durham City centre "is undergoing transition towards a more mixed retail and leisure development" (CBRE, 2017, para. 10.9; Durham County Council, 2017a) with the transformation of The Gates shopping centre into The Riverwalk, which it is hoped will encourage visitors to stay longer in the City. Good public transport links are needed between out-of-town shopping areas and the City centre to enable shoppers to access the full range of services, facilities and attractions. The need to upgrade the existing bus station and bus stops serving the City centre is a high priority in improving the attractiveness of the City to shoppers and other visitors. Extending the Park and Ride operating hours would also encourage visitors to stay longer in the City centre.

4.157 There is a lack of affordable retail space in Durham City centre for small start-up businesses and creative businesses. One solution is to use the underused and empty buildings and shops in the City centre. These can be used temporarily for new businesses as they become established. The Government, in a written ministerial statement from the Department of Communities and Local Government on 24th January 2013, highlighted the use of empty shops as a vehicle to maintain the vitality and viability of town centres.

*Getting empty town centre buildings back into use:*

*To create opportunities for new and start-up businesses and help retain the viability and vitality of our town centres, we will allow a range of buildings to convert temporarily to a set of alternative uses including shops (A1), financial and professional services (A2), restaurants and cafes (A3) and offices (B1) for up to two years. (UK Parliament, 2013).*

4.158 The County Council is addressing the decline in North Road, which has recently suffered from a lack of investment and a deterioration of the retail offer, with improvements to roads and pavements. The Retail and Town Centre Study (CBRE, 2018, para. 10.48; Durham county Council, 2017a) identifies North Road as a regeneration site; "which should be subject to a positive policy framework (not specific retail allocations but more supportive for town centre uses)" This also supports the need for a more flexible approach to town centre uses.

4.159 The retail offer outside the core retail area of Primary Frontage comprises a greater mix of uses including non-retail such as letting agents, cafes and charity shops and these are necessary in order to provide a range of services expected in a town centre. In the case of Durham City the area outside the core retail area has suffered much change over the past 5 to 10 years; and the greater flexibility afforded to commercial premises outwith the core retail area will allow opportunities for smaller retailers, including craft outlets, to add to the character and individuality of the City and contribute to a diverse retail offer.

### **Policy E5: Visitor Attractions**

The special characteristics of the World Heritage Site and existing visitor attractions should be sustained and conserved, and where possible enhanced and promoted.

Development proposals for existing and extended or refurbished visitor attractions will be supported where the visitor experience is enhanced:

- a) through the provision of improved facilities and interpretation at an existing attraction; and
- b) through better access to a site for all visitors with good links to public transport; and
- c) by location, use and design suited to the character of the area, and which does not have a negative impact on nearby properties and local residents' amenity with regard to noise and traffic.

Development proposals for new visitor attractions will be supported where:

- d) the type of experience is demonstrated to meet an acknowledged need such as heritage interpretation, an art gallery, conference venue, or family attractions; and
- e) a significant contribution to the quality of the City's environment is made, in respect of location, scale, design sympathetic to, and in harmony with, the Durham vernacular architecture, and potential for use of vacant buildings; and
- f) the site is accessible to visitors and is well related and located to other attractions and facilities.

### **Policy E6: Visitor accommodation**

Existing visitor accommodation should contribute positively to the evening and weekend economy and complement business and services in the City.

Development proposals for new, extended or refurbished visitor accommodation will be supported where:

- a) the accommodation to be provided would improve the range and quality available; and
- b) the location, scale and character of the development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the natural or historic environment; and
- c) in all cases a condition of consent is imposed to the provision of such accommodation to restrict continuous occupation so that it does not become a permanent residence.

## **Justification for Policies E5 and E6**

4.160 The NPPF (Chapters 6 and 7) emphasises building a strong and competitive economy and ensuring the vitality of town centres. Planning policies should take "a positive approach to their [town centres] growth, management and adaptation" (NPPF para. 85) a particularly important requirement for town centres which are in decline, as in Durham City in recent years. Tourism is a major source of income for Durham City, which has a World Heritage Site and other attractions. Through the policies the intention is to support Durham City as a centre for tourist development and as a year round tourist destination. Further there is potential to improve the quality of the visitor experience and to extend the time visitors stay in the City while strengthening the economy and creating jobs.

4.161 Visit County Durham (2016) Durham Tourism Management Plan 2016- 2020 identifies the immediate action needed to deliver the tourism strategy for the County and City. Of particular importance to the economy is the need to improve facilities to lengthen the amount of time that visitors spend in the area. In terms of new development, the Management Plan identifies the main gap in the tourism experience to be the lack of a cluster of attractions in Durham City that clearly benefit other historic cities. Other facilities needed within the County, and therefore possibly to be considered within Our Neighbourhood, are conference venues, art galleries and family attractions. A City with a World Heritage Site is expected by visitors to have a gallery of some sort, but Our Neighbourhood lacks a regionally or nationally significant art space. Policy E5 seeks to achieve the balance between meeting acknowledged needs and protecting the environment of the City and its residents. Although the NPPF (para. 85) recommends the allocation of a range of sites, any such allocation in the Neighbourhood Plan would risk the loss of a potential development opportunity for another suitable use.

4.162 Comments received during the consultations have been assessed for potential improvements of the policies. There is general support for the provision of new and better attractions for the benefit of both residents and visitors.

4.163 There is a need for more and better visitor accommodation in the City, which is identified in the Durham Tourism Management Plan to be "boutique hotels – particularly in Durham City, quality bed and breakfast accommodation, inns with rooms, good quality 3 star properties" (Visit County Durham, 2016, p. 20). Policy E6 seeks to achieve a balance between meeting acknowledged needs and protecting the environment of the City and its residents.

4.164 Planning consent for all new visitor accommodation must include a condition of consent to ensure that the accommodation cannot be used as a permanent residence, in particular a House of Multiple Occupation. A recent planning application in Durham City attempted to get around the restrictions on HMOs by applying for planning permission as a Guest House.

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