

**Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum**  
**Working Group Meeting, 24 March 2017, Miners' Hall**

**Present:** John Ashby, Sue Childs, Roger Cornwell (Chair), Mike Costello, Carole Dillon, Ann Evans, John Lowe, David Miller, Ros Ward.

**Apologies:** Adam Deathe, Pippa Bell, Karen Elliott, Peter Jackson, Matthew Phillips, Angela Tracy, Kirsty Thomas.

The purpose of this special meeting was to meet representatives from **Historic England** to discuss their letters sent to us via DCC dated 16 and 26 January. Unfortunately one of them was sick and they were unable to attend. Arrangements will be made to meet as soon as possible.

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

We took the opportunity, especially given that Carole was with us, to make an initial consideration of the feedback sent by Claire Hattam on 23 March on behalf of DCC, and to try to clarify exactly what we needed to do to satisfy the legal requirements of the SEA. There was still considerable confusion among us, but we did manage to clarify the following:

1. The SEA lays considerable emphasis on **evaluating alternatives** while developing the plan. It was recognised that sometimes there were no reasonable alternatives and it would be acceptable to state that. It is not necessary to construct artificial alternatives (straw men) simply in order to demonstrate that we have considered them.
2. Carole explained that there are **two types of alternatives**: first, when scoping the plan the range of themes to be included has to be decided; second, when drafting policies, detailed choices have to be made.
3. Particular confusion had arisen over our **choice of template**. Two main ones were on offer: Levett-Therivel's DIY Sustainability Appraisal and DCC's own guide for groups drawing up neighbourhood plans. In her feedback Claire had referenced the L-T document, but our preference was to follow DCC's own guide. **Carole** would check with Claire that this was acceptable and that the version we had was the most recent one.
4. The notion of **proportionality** was emphasised. We are developing a neighbourhood plan, not a county-wide local plan, and the accompanying SEA needs to be proportionate.
5. To assess the sustainability our draft policies we **agreed** to use the **sustainability objectives** that John L had derived from the NPPF. **John L** would provide a grid for this exercise. We considered who should be involved in this (all Forum members, independent experts?) but **decided** that since the policies were about to be subjected to public scrutiny and liable to change, the working group should tackle it at their meeting on Tuesday 4 April. A further assessment of their sustainability involving a wider range of people could be carried out once the policies were in a more developed state.
6. We also discussed the **arrangements for our consultation**. We **decided** that we would be able to start soon after the local elections on 4 May. The university term runs from 24 April to 23 June and this timing would offer students ample opportunity to take part in the consultation. The final SEA cannot be completed until after the consultations as it has to

take them into account. By the time of the consultation we would have a draft SEA (progress on the plan so far) on the website and available at consultation venues.

## Future Meetings

The next ordinary meeting will be on **Tuesday 28 March at 9.00 – 12.00 at the Miners' Hall**.

The **agenda** for this will include:

1. Consideration whether the above notes reflect an agreed understanding of our way forward.
2. Detailed consideration of Claire's feedback in preparation for a meeting with her. **Carole** will arrange this meeting as soon as possible.
3. Presentation of the grid to be used for the sustainability assessment.

There will be a further meeting on **Tuesday 4 April at 9.00 – 12.00 at the Miners' Hall**. This will be devoted to the **sustainability assessment**.

There will be a special meeting re-arranged as soon as possible to meet Jules Brown and Barbara Hooper from **Historic England**.