



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
Durham

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Working for a beautiful and
living countryside

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Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum
The Miners' Hall
Redhills,
DURHAM
DH1 4BD

Dear Sir,

DURHAM CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

We have briefly considered your proposed Plan and hope the following comments will be helpful

Theme 1 - Sustainable Development

CPRE supports the principles of this Section and certainly promotes the redevelopment of suitable brownfield sites over greenfield (or even green space within the Neighbourhood Plan area) sites. Good design in this location is also very important – while the Gala Theatre may be a well-used and important facility, it is questionable whether its design fits in with the historic setting of Durham City Centre.

Theme 2 – Heritage

CPRE fully appreciates the importance of the World Heritage Site and supports any proposals to extend its area. As you will be aware, while we do not often comment on applications that affect the City Centre and built area itself, we have been very concerned about the proposals at Maiden Castle and the impact they may have on heritage assets as well as the Green Belt.

While we support the principles of these proposed policies, we question why there is no reference to the statutory duty to protect them under Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. There is one reference to this Act in this section, but not to these Sections of the Act. There is no reference to the case law that has been developed recently to help interpret these provisions in relation to the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF.

Our main concern is whether the proposed policies may not wholly conform to the statutory duties under the 1990 Act. However, the policies could be expressed to be ways in which the statutory duty will be followed. We are concerned that many applications for planning permission make no reference to the statutory duty under Sections 66 and 72 and we believe that this Plan should direct developers' attention to that.

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Theme 3 – Green Infrastructure

Generally, CPRE fully supports these proposals. Green Infrastructure has been identified in the Reports of the Natural Capital Committee as a way to help improve the economic performance of a workforce and enhance well-being, which in turn has benefits for the NHS. We wonder whether there should be a reference to the latest Report in the text.

We believe that saving important green space as is identified in Policy G1.3 is important. Although CPRE did not comment on a recent application in Bowburn where this was a factor, we are aware that planning permission has been given this month for housing on just such a site while an adjacent brownfield site remains undeveloped (planning permission for that site having lapsed).

There are two issues in the Theme which cause us a little concern

- 1) We are concerned at the extent of proposed Policy G1.9 – new or major developments adjacent to the River Wear. Given the sensitivity of this area, we wonder what is potentially being permitted here. Is there a plan of suggested sites?
- 2) The final bullet point of Policy G4 (development proposals in the Green Belt), which would permit “improvements to damaged and derelict land” causes us concern. While this appears laudable, will it encourage landowners to let their land become “damaged or derelict” to improve their chances of winning planning approval?

Theme 3 – a diverse and resilient economy

CPRE supports proposals which will help to save greenfield sites outside the City from being developed. We welcome these proposals and note that Policy E1 in respect of Aykley Heads specifically supports the development of non-Green Belt land.

We believe however that the design of these developments should include provision for sustainable transport – see further below.

Theme 4 – attractive and affordable places to live

CPRE notes the first objective in the Theme referring to the imbalance between student and other residential accommodation in the City Centre. We fully support this objective as we believe this has led to “ordinary” residential accommodation in the

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City Centre becoming unattractive and so has placed a greater burden than may be necessary on the surrounding Green Belt and greenfield sites beyond it.

CPRE supports in particular Policy D5.1 in relation to affordable housing as this, in our opinion, helps a community to thrive. We do however question what happens in, say, a development of 10 houses when 15% must be affordable – will that result in 1 or 2 affordable houses?

Theme 5 – modern and sustainable transport

We note the issues raised in this section and appreciate that the Neighbourhood Plan can only address issues within its own area. CPRE is concerned about sustainable transport generally and efforts to improve this within this Plan's area should be supported. We suggest however that they are designed in a way which will enable walking and cycling routes to connect smoothly to the wider sustainable transport network throughout the County.

We note Policy T4 in relation to storage of cycles at residential developments. We represent that there should be a similar policy (together, where appropriate, for changing facilities) at employment sites, particularly large ones such as at Aykley Heads. There is provision for this in the now expired Cycling Strategy and it is likely to be included in the new strategy when published. Should the Plan not address this now?

It is also important to note that there are “hubs” which attract people, such as those mentioned in the next Theme. Many people will only walk or cycle to such places if there is a safe, continuous route to enable them to do this. Where there is no such route from a new development, then perhaps the Plan should look to the developer providing, or at least contributing to, such off site routes.

Theme 6 – Community facilities

CPRE supports proposals for the increase of leisure, cultural and other community facilities provided they are not (in the main) in the Green Belt.

We do however note Policy C5 (loss of urban open spaces) which appears to be identical to Policy G1.3 (loss of green assets). Is there any real difference between these proposed Policies? Are both really needed?

Yours faithfully

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