

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City Of Durham Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan. I write in the capacity of local representative of the National Farmers' Union in the North East Region with a particular interest in planning and economic development. Please find below our response:

UK agriculture is an international and national market, driven by trade and subject to volatile prices. Farmers must juggle necessary food production with public good provision, whilst complying with complex and stringent regulations and competing with the weather. But further to this, as you will be aware, with leaving the European Union, the farming community face even greater challenges over the coming years. With changes to farm support systems, the phase out of direct payments, and uncertain market/trading opportunities – farming businesses need the support of their Neighbourhood Plan more than ever. Farming businesses will need to consider the resources available to them, and look at new ways of developing their businesses so that they can grow and remain competitive. This might include the need to modernise existing agricultural buildings or build new ones for farm productivity, welfare, food security, energy generation or to meet changing regulations, or to change the use of existing buildings in response to changing market demand. Our members within the neighbourhood area are no exception and with some of our members' farmland lying within your plan area, it is clear that your Neighbourhood Plan must adequately address the challenges and opportunities for these farmers. How is Durham planning for the future of farming and the effect forthcoming changes may have on your area's local farmers? Farm business enterprises can underpin and help justify infrastructure development in the countryside, and to help manage health and safety and mitigate against extreme climate change events.

Our vision for Durham is:

A sustainable urban community underpinned by its surrounding thriving farming and food industry. A profitable local agricultural industry supports local livelihoods, underpins sustainable and healthier communities, and enhances the environmental assets that are vital to the county's prosperity.

With your help, Durham's small but important farming community can achieve this vision, by:

1. Strengthening its farming businesses helping to build profitability, adaptability and resilience – especially in a time of such uncertainty and change
2. Creating thriving localities which meet the needs of their communities, businesses and local environment

3. Realising the value of the region's environmental assets

Your plan for Durham covers aspects effecting farmers within the neighbourhood area. We would urge you to consider the implications on the resilience of the farming community of any actions undertaken from this plan. Further to this, farmers, tenants and landowners should always be consulted and listened to with regard to developing the area. And we would ask that early contact be made with tenants/ farmer landowners before planning any actions to be implemented, including identifying land for development or considering alternative uses.

Furthermore, it is of concern to us that agricultural land (and buildings) has been designated as local green space or under other designations within this plan. It is imperative that all land managers and owners are consulted on these and any other potential restrictions put in place on agricultural land and buildings. These designations could have serious implications for farming businesses, causing major limitations to a business' adaptability in this ever-changing climate and economy. The council should not underestimate the effects of this.

In addition to the plan policies highlighted above we would see your plan to include the following key priorities (not in order of priority) for farms:

1. Farming families have to adapt and upgrade their farms and homes; there needs to be suitable and affordable housing for retiring farmers, their successors and farm workers
2. Develop farming enterprises that can meet the challenges of food security through modernising and becoming more efficient
3. Diversifying farming enterprises to meet new opportunities such as, inter alia, business units or tourism
4. Developing renewable energy which meets the needs of the farm and are appropriate to the location and renewable resources available
5. Access to high-speed broadband

Food production is a key priority for economic growth both nationally, but also importantly in such a rural area. In the Government white paper 'Local Growth: realising every place's potential' the Government makes clear that the first priority "is to return the nation's economy to health". This includes creating "the conditions that will help business and gets the economy growing" and includes supporting farming enterprises so vital to the rural economy as well as

enabling them to remain viable through diversified enterprises. We would expect that any proposals for developing farms will take this into account.

Promoting diversification is in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It provides that local authorities should support a prosperous rural economy, enabling farmers to become more competitive and sustainable and diversify into new opportunities. A key message within the NPPF is the need for economic growth. “Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible”.

In the NPPF, the government also makes a number of very important statements relating to the development of renewable energy. Paragraph 147 states that ‘The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate.... and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure’. Renewable energy represents an important opportunity for farms to reduce their energy bills and contribute towards net zero, a national ambition, as well as creating revenue that can help support farming activity.

We have developed some principles which we believe will help Durham shape any activity in the area and to help guide any work. These are:

- Food security is a crucial issue both now and in the future, and any actions must not undermine domestic food production, especially if this may result in exporting our environmental issues and our carbon footprint to other areas of the globe by relying on imported food produced to lower standards than our own.
- We should look to increase farm productivity and decrease impact on the environment.
- The achievement of sustainable development in rural areas through the integration of environmental, social and economic objectives.
- Meet the needs of a diverse rural population and ensure equality of opportunity.
- Farmers need to be able to afford to be custodians of the future environment, and supported in providing public goods specific to their farm.
- Maintain and enhance the areas natural asset base.
- Support sustainable growth in the rural economy.
- Sustainable farming will support the wider community.
- Farmers need to carry out their work with the minimum regulatory burden, the planning system needs to ensure it acts to provide them with an efficient cost effective service.



City Of Durham Parish Council

Neighbourhood Plan Proposal

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- Not one system of farming is the answer and all should be supported for maximum benefit to society and the environment
- Encourage links between rural areas and urban centres.

Many thanks for the opportunity to respond to this consultation and we hope that these comments are helpful and will be taken into account.

The voice of British farming

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