

13 Orchard Drive  
The Sands  
Durham

14 January 2020

Dear Sir or Madam,

### **Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Proposal January 2020**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the latest incarnation of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. While I take no issue with any of your development proposals and congratulate all concerned for producing a comprehensive, inspiring programme to address the strategic, if not existential, challenges our community faces, I would make two observations.

Firstly, while the plan identifies *physical* health as a challenge, citing the impact of obesity, excess weight and lack of exercise (paragraph 2.11), there is no mention of *mental* health. Yet if the suicide rate is any guide, County Durham has a major problem. Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> highest of all local authorities in the region for suicides per 100,000 population in 2016-18 (**12.8** in County Durham, compared to a regional average of **11.3** and national average of **9.6**), more individuals died from suicide in County Durham in that period than in any other local authority area in the North East (**176** people in County Durham out of a regional total of **779** – i.e almost a quarter of all suicides in the region). These statistics come from Public Health England (*Public Health Outcomes Framework*, December 2019). Fortunately there is growing momentum for greater public awareness and speedier access to NHS services, and it is timely that there are initiatives in your plan – for example, more access to green spaces, walking and cycling; cleaner air; safer, family-friendly residential and leisure areas – which are proven to have a positive impact on mental as well as physical health. I am not suggesting any amendment to your text, rather that the problem of mental health is explicit in your implementation phase.

Secondly, an urgency has entered conversations about climate change, habitat destruction and species extinction which, notwithstanding your *golden thread* of sustainability and commendable proposals for nurturing green infrastructure, reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality, is not sufficiently reflected in your plan. If, as some experts say, we are on the cusp of a tipping point, it is surely incumbent on all responsible authorities – whether supranational, national, local or parish – to take immediate, radical and uncompromising steps to claw back from the brink and mitigate any unavoidable environmental crises. Again I am not suggesting you make any amendments to the text of your plan: urgency of action can be reflected in implementation priorities, resource allocation, targets and timescales. The important thing is to get on with it.

I hope you find these comments useful.

Yours faithfully,

Robin Trounson