

Contact: Spatial Policy
Direct Tel: 03000 261908
Email: cdpconsultation@durham.gov.uk
Ref:
Your Ref:



26 May 2020

Dear Town / Parish Councillor,

Re: County Durham Plan, Proposed Main Modifications - Consultation

Following the submission of the County Durham Plan for independent Examination to the Secretary of State in June 2019, public hearings were held between 22 October and 4 December 2019 and on 6 February 2020. The Inspector has asked that consultation be carried out on the Main Modifications he considers may be necessary in order for the Plan to be found 'sound'. The Inspector's final conclusions will be set out in his Final Report once he has considered the responses to this consultation.

The council is inviting representations on the proposed Main Modifications and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment for an eight week period from **Tuesday 26 May to 5.00pm on Tuesday 21 July 2020**.

In view of the current Covid19 pandemic and the need for social distancing, in line with recent government guidance we have amended the Statement of Community Involvement to set out measures to enable safe participation in the consultation and to ensure that those who wish to engage in the consultation are not disadvantaged. It is not possible to place hard copies of consultation documents in libraries or Customer Access Points at the current time, however for those who are unable to view them online at www.durham.gov.uk/cdp, please contact us using the telephone hotline numbers below and we will provide hard copies by post (free of charge). These arrangements will be kept under review throughout the consultation in view of any changing external circumstances. Any changes to arrangements will be communicated.

It should be noted that any comments should only relate to the proposed **Main Modifications**. There is no need to repeat any previously submitted comments as these have already been considered by the Inspector, nor to submit comments which do not specifically relate to the proposed Main Modifications.

You can make your comments known to us in a number of ways, but we would encourage you to submit your views online, via the County Durham Plan consultation pages at:

Regeneration, Economy and Growth

Durham County Council, Spatial Policy, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UQ
Main Telephone: 0300 0260000

www.durham.gov.uk

[http:// www.durham.gov.uk/cdp](http://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp). You can also send us your comments by e-mail to: CDPconsultation@durham.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can send us your comments to our freepost address (all you need to do is write this one line on an envelope - no other address details or postage stamp are needed): **FREEPOST Spatial Policy**.

To discuss the Main Modifications and to request copies of the plan, including in an alternative format such as large print, Braille, audio cassette or an alternative language, please call: **03000 261908, 03000 261921 or 03000 263967**.

If you require a meeting to discuss the County Durham Plan or any of the contents within this briefing note, please contact us using the telephone numbers above and a meeting can be arranged via Microsoft Teams.

At the end of the consultation period, the council will forward the comments to the Inspector together with a report listing all of the representations; a summary of the main issues raised; and the council's response to those main issues. The Inspector will then consider all of the representations before finalising his report.

Yours faithfully



Stuart Timmiss
Head of Development and Housing

Cllr Carl Marshall

26 May 2020

**County Durham Plan
Main Modifications Consultation**



Mike Allum, Spatial Policy Manager

Background

The County Durham Plan was consulted on widely from 25 January until 8 March 2019. A total of 2,877 comments, from 1,003 different respondents were received as well as several petitions. The Submission Draft of the County Durham Plan together with the evidence base and all representations made, with a council response to each, was submitted to the Minister of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 28 June 2019 for independent examination. William Fieldhouse was subsequently appointed as Inspector and Annette Feeney as Programme Officer.

Examination in Public Hearings

Hearing sessions were held over four weeks from the 22 October to 4 December 2019. The hearings covered all aspects of the Plan and were grouped under 14 'matters':

- Legal and Procedural Requirements and other General Matters;
- Quantity of Development needed in the County;
- Strategic Approach to Accommodating Development;
- Green Belt;
- Strategic allocations at Durham City;
- Transport proposals for Durham City;
- Durham University;
- Housing Land Supply;
- Meeting Specific Housing Needs;
- Economic Development;
- Environment;
- Minerals and Waste; and
- Other Issues.

One additional hearing day was held on 6 February 2020 which was to revisit Housing Land Supply.

Post Hearings Advice

Following the completion of the hearing sessions, the council received the Inspector's Post Hearings Advice. In it he set out several main modifications he considered necessary to make the Plan sound. These were:

- The Northern and Western relief roads should be removed from Policy 23 of the Plan. His conclusion was that overall, the adverse impact of the relief roads, individually and collectively, would be substantial and would not be outweighed by the limited benefits the roads would bring.
- The reference in Policy 24 to a corridor of interest for a possible future Barnard Castle relief road should be removed from the Plan. His conclusion was that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the relief road will be needed in the future or that any benefits it would bring would outweigh the adverse impacts.

The Post Hearings Advice also refers to a number of main modifications that the council have proposed during and following the hearing sessions (most in response to action points or questions from the Inspector). The Inspector considers that they are all necessary to address soundness issues and will be effective in so doing. There are 194 in total (in addition to the 18 resulting from the removal of the three relief roads), but most are relatively focussed or just ensure the policies are aligned with national policy. Some of the more significant main modifications proposed include:

- The approach to development on unallocated sites (Policy 6) has been made much more flexible which will likely result in more windfalls to come forward than would have with the approach originally set out in the Plan. This is to provide flexibility in case other sites do not come forward and will ensure we meet our housing needs;
- Amendments to the Aykley Heads policy to remove reference to ancillary uses (such as hotels) and the reference to the future development of the police playing fields and to limit car parking to no more than existing; and
- Older persons housing which is increasing the proportion of accessible and adaptable homes from 10% to 66% on future developments.

Consultation Arrangements

In order to ensure that the County Durham Plan can progress in a timely manner taking account of the current COVID19 pandemic, it is necessary to ensure that the flexible approach to consultation required in the current circumstances. The Government has recently updated Planning Practice Guidance ([Paragraph: 077 Reference ID: 61-077-201200513](#)) to encourage local authorities to undertake an immediate review and update policies within their Statement of Community Involvements where necessary so that plan-making can continue. The council's Statement of Community Involvement has therefore been updated to reflect this.

In order to ensure that no one is unfairly disadvantaged, hard copy documents will be posted to anyone who is unable to access the consultation material via electronic means and requests the documents to be sent. This has been informed by an Equalities Impact Assessment. To take account of any delays for postage in the circumstances of the pandemic and allow additional time for people and organisations that may have been impacted by the COVID19 pandemic to respond to the consultation, the statutory 6 week consultation period has been extended to 8 weeks. Other measures that have been put in place are:

- Internet based publicity including press and public relations, the use of social media and the council's consultation page on the website.
- All contacts on the County Durham Plan data base to receive an email or a letter to inform them of the consultation and how to access consultation documents.
- Copies of consultation documents to be sent to anyone requesting copies because they do not have access to them via electronic means. These will be sent via post and free of charge.
- Appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the community, including groups with protected characteristics, can continue to be part of the process. This should include making consultation documents made available in alternative formats if required.
- A telephone hotline to be made available which can be used to ask questions about the consultation process, documents or request paper copies.
- Officers available for telephone conversations with members of the public with no access to a computer or other identified needs. These can be arranged on an appointment basis using the telephone hotline.
- Post will be collected as normal from County Hall and a freepost address to be made available.
- For anyone currently shielding and unable to respond via electronic means, arrangements will be made to collect hard copy responses.
- Formal and informal meetings if required, via Microsoft Teams or other available platforms.

On the basis of the above measures and having regard to the latest guidance from the Government and Planning Inspectorate, the Inspector is satisfied that it is appropriate for the council to carry out public consultation at this time despite the coronavirus emergency.

Main Modifications Consultation

The consultation on the Main Modifications will commence on the **26th May until 5.00pm 21st July 2020.**

You can make your comments known to us in a number of ways, but we would encourage you to submit your views online, via the County Durham Plan consultation pages at: **<http://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp>**.

You can also send us your comments by e-mail to:

CDPconsultation@durham.gov.uk. Alternatively, you can send us your comments to our freepost address (all you need to do is write this one line on an envelope - no other address details or postage stamp are needed): **FREEPOST Spatial Policy**.

For any enquiries and to request copies of the plan, including in an alternative format such as large print, Braille, audio cassette or an alternative language, please call: **03000 261908, 03000 261923 or 03000 261921.**

If you require a meeting to discuss the County Durham Plan or any of the contents within this briefing note, please contact us using the telephone numbers above and a meeting can be arranged via Microsoft Teams.

What happens next?

At the end of the consultation period, the council will forward the comments to the Inspector together with a report listing all of the representations; a summary of the main issues raised; and the council's response to those main issues. The Inspector will then consider all of the representations before finalising his report. The council will then consider the Inspector's final report and look to adopt the Plan later in the year.

Background Documents

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-05-13/HCWS235/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-planning-update>

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/cdp>