

Darlington Borough Council Strategic Issues and Scoping Paper for the New Local Plan (draft) Observations on behalf of Neasham Parish Council

Introduction

The Civil Parish of Neasham has (since 1 April 2016) comprised the areas of:

- Neasham Village, being a small village on the north bank of the River Tees, now protected from historic flooding by a large flood bank and other flood protection works (“Neasham Village”)
- The former Sockburn Civil Parish, covering a sparsely populated agricultural area within a large meander of the River Tees (“Sockburn”)
- Low Dinsdale, a very small historic settlement with a parish church to the east of Neasham Village, comprising a few residential houses, and a number of farming properties (“Low Dinsdale”)
- Brasscastle and Dinsdale Hall, being a small residential development of the former Dinsdale Hall, some scattered residential and agricultural properties nearby, some woodlands, and a golf course (“Brasscastle”)

Table 3 (“Summary Of Key Sustainability Factors For Darlington Borough”) in DBC’s “Interim Planning Position Statement” identifies that Neasham possesses no Key Sustainability Factors. Subject to any specific comments below, the Parish Council believe this analysis applies to each of the four areas of Neasham Civil Parish summarised above, whether looked at individually or cumulatively

General observations

1. There are areas within the Civil Parish which could be suitable for infill development, provided it was sensitive in both design and density to the immediate surroundings. There has been a recent example in Neasham Village (Bishopsgarth). The Parish Council would support cases which it considered to be appropriate, and which did not create sustainability issues.
2. There are areas of farm-land to the north of Brasscastle and to the west of the “Black Path”/Roman Road (which forms the western boundary of Middleton-St-George Parish Council) which may be regarded by some as suitable for larger scale residential development. Neasham Parish Council has no view about this, other than to say that such areas would need to be supported as regards facilities, infrastructure, and access from Middleton St. George. It is thought that that may present significant issues because of the geographical barrier of the railway line, and the increasing pressure on the only practical access route down Station Road, across a narrow railway bridge which cannot be widened, and then passing an overcrowded primary school. We have noted that in the 6 September 2015 update of the SHLAA site numbers 73 and 74 (which are immediately to the east of the Brasscastle farmland) were classified as “not suitable”, as was site 018, which also lies just outside the present Neasham Civil Parish area

Neasham Village has no scope for employment creation, highways improvement, or the creation of facilities or services. Such facilities as once existed dwindled and finally disappeared around 30 years ago. Infrastructure capacity is limited. The only commercial social facility is the Fox and Hounds Public House. The Reading Rooms offer community facilities, scaled to the size of the village. The other constituent parts are even less well-provided for, and have greater limitations on any potential.

Without being negative, Neasham Parish Council does not believe that its Civil Parish has any material contribution which it is able or is economically viable to make to satisfying the Borough’s housing needs.

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That said, it does maintain an interest in proposals for the Borough as a whole as villagers are part of the Borough-wide population, and wish to enjoy the quality of life which the town offers. We therefore address the specific consultation questions in that context.

No	Question	Comment
1	Is 2036 the right period for the new Local Plan?	Yes, given the “gestation” time for any new proposal, the delivery time thereafter, and the volume of new homes required.
2	Range of matters to be covered by the Plan	Darlington has targeted economic growth with strategies for employment sites, retailing etc. and associated infrastructures. The housing target has been assessed in order to “service” housing requirements of families coming into the area. It is important that close monitoring takes place to ensure that housing increases do not exceed the economic targets, which would then reflect upon the sustainability of the additional housing. It is also important that improved “age-proofed” housing is available to existing – and long-standing – Darlington residents, and that every effort is made to develop the “inner city as well as the environs, and maintain a vibrant core to the Town
3	Vision	In these difficult financial times, the “Vision” needs to be realistic. As a small Authority, Darlington is less able to sustain its services, and thus quality of life, than the larger Tees Valley Authorities. The rescoping of the Local Plan should temper enthusiasm with reality, and where necessary adjust growth targets appropriately, otherwise there is a risk of regression such has been seen in emergent economies in some other parts of the world
4	Aims and objectives; appropriateness and priorities	The Core Strategy discusses and identifies issues concerning housing needs and aspirations and policy CS11 identifies needs for affordable housing, housing for people with disabilities, and age-proofing. Conversely, younger families may have significant aspirations for “modern” living, and developers inevitably target that market as being more saleable and profitable. It is therefore important that policies are firmly and fairly applied in order to ensure that the town maintains its homogenous character and respects the needs of its indigenous population. The rural character of much of the Borough – which is one of its considerable attraction – could easily be undermined by allowing villages to develop as “dormitory” provision for some of the more industrial areas of the Tees Valley.

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5	Are the highlighted issues “right”?	The Borough is constrained by the River Tees and further significant development “extending the villages” to the south of the Town will intensify their urbanisation to the detriment both of existing residents and the Borough in general. Conversely, proposals for one or more new settlements to the east, north and west of the Town will enable a more sensitive approach to planning the right housing mix.
6	Are there any others?	Access to the Town Centre becomes increasingly difficult, despite recent road improvement schemes, parking schemes, etc. and a fundamental review of road and transport infrastructure should be an integral part of the strategy development. Presently, the economies of running a fragmented public transport service seems to be “driving” the access requirement in the wrong direction, reducing rural and edge-of-town services and increasing the congestion created by too many private vehicles. A thorough consideration of the development of the northern areas of the Borough cannot be undertaken without solving the “North Road problem”.
7	Has the right “starting point” been identified?	Assumptions have been made in the past that extending the existing villages will improve village economies. Observation indicates that the contrary is the case – for example Morrisons is more likely to be the “local shop” for parts of Middleton St. George than the two stores in the village centre. A thorough study of the correlation of housing and services needs to be undertaken as a prerequisite to the planning of any new or significantly extended settlements, so that a far greater degree of integration can be attained than “reactive development” can achieve. Similar comments apply to a review of strategies for the provision of education (secondary as well as primary), health services, care services and advice services.
8	Is any further prior research required?	On the assumption – discussed in the “General Observations” above, that development is unlikely to affect Neasham directly, the specific comments made in qq. 1 – 8 try to address Neasham residents’ observations as potential users of Town Centre facilities, concerned with preserving the character and quality of our Town, including its village and rural areas.
9	Reaction to potential strategic new housing option identified	
10	Any additional options, or reasons?	