

RESPONSE OF THE CROSSGATE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (DURHAM) TO THE CORE STRATEGY ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER

We are very concerned about the implications of this document for the future of Co Durham. Before looking at details, we'd like to state that we think the whole thrust of the preferred Option A, which concentrates the lion's share of housing, employment opportunities and new transport links on Durham City, is mistaken. Durham is a small historic city, and needs very sensitive handling if the goose that lays the golden eggs, the beautiful small city in its bowl of trees and fields that people come to see and enjoy living in, is not to be destroyed

HOUSING

Option A foresees about 5,050 new houses in Durham (Option B: 1,940). We are not convinced that the need for this housing has been established. Quite a lot of new housing has been built in the city over the last 10-15 years (e.g. Sheraton Court, Farewell Hall, Highgate, Pity Me, the development in the grounds of the old Dryburn Hospital). Some of this housing has taken a long time to sell, particularly flats (even though the predicted growth in households is mainly in pensioner households and you'd expect more interest in flats). The housing market is still not very buoyant. However, more seriously, many of the identified sites for this housing are in or very close to the Green Belt. The preferred strategy for housing land, as stated in the document, 'the outward expansion of development into the countryside around Durham City...the uplift in land values that would result from identifying an extension would enable the funding for necessary infrastructure to be realised'(p.34). However, a large (indeed, sufficient) number of houses could be built using the SHLAA without encroaching on the Green Belt

GREEN BELT

The Green Belt round Durham City was only finalised in 2004 in the City of Durham Local Plan . It was intended to protect the setting and the historic character of the City and to prevent it from merging with surrounding settlements. It is usually anticipated that a Green Belt will remain in place for 25-30 years. Indeed in the document it states that: 'any amendment to the Green Belt must be justified by exceptional circumstances' (p.34) Any exceptional circumstances in this case would be self-inflicted: the perfect storm of new roads, 5,000+ new houses, more employment, all concentrated on the City. One worry in this scenario must be that, on the brink of a double dip recession, the new jobs would not arrive, or the money for relief roads, and we would be left with serious incursions into the Green Belt, worse traffic problems because of the extra residents and an enhancement of Durham's traditional role as a dormitory town: not worth sacrificing the Green Belt for.

OPTION B

Option B presents a balanced approach, where the needs of the whole county are looked at in a more even-handed way. Although Durham City has its areas of deprivation, on the whole City residents are better off and have access to good services and good public transport of all kinds. The approach in the past has been to recognise the lack of facilities and suitable employment in the smaller settlements and to try to do something to alleviate it. Admittedly this might not be as sexy as plans for Durham City, international metropolis,

but it might be a more realistic and useful way of spending scarce resources where they are really needed. It would also be good for the County's carbon footprint.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

Question 1: Far too much emphasis on growth in the city as opposed to throughout the County.

Question 2: See above.

Question 3: Again, all the eggs in one basket approach. What about Durham Green: even nearer the A1M?

Question 4a: We would challenge the basic assumption, that Durham City needs so much housing? If more housing is needed, the better option would be to build on identified SHLAA sites and leave the Green Belt alone.

Question 5a: Option 2 (reduce the housing requirement for Durham City and redistribute it to other areas).

Question 6:

As argued under Option B above, targeted regeneration

Question 12: We would favour Option B. Durham's offer has improved vastly. As stated in the document, 800 extra bed spaces have been added in recent years. Durham is well situated to cash in on the short-break market: it now offers all sorts of festivals (Lumiere, folk, brass, soon to be jazz, the miners' gala) as well as a much improved range of cafes, restaurants, bars, cinema and theatre. Newcastle, the Sage, the Metrocentre are all easy to get to. Without expanding to the size of Newcastle, we're doing pretty well.

Question 14: We would go for Option B as providing a better service to the more deprived areas of the County

Question 16: We would prefer the social housing provision or schemes such as shared ownership. Low cost market housing could be snapped up by by-to-let landlords.

Question 19: Option B is probably the most practical option. Worth remembering that some of the most expensive housing in Durham City is in fact terraced (e.g. South Street) People are willing to pay for the convenience of being able to walk everywhere.

Question 27: Options B and C are both useful: there is a lot to be said for housing students in concentrated blocks, rather than scattering them through the community.