

RESPONSE TO COUNTY DURHAM PLAN: LOCAL PLAN PREFERRED OPTIONS By the Crossgate Community Partnership, Durham City

HOUSING

We would repeat our original reservations (expressed in 2011 in our response to the core strategy issues document) about the thrust of the County plan which concentrates the lion's share of housing, transport and employment opportunities on Durham City. Durham is a small, historic city which needs very sensitive handling if the goose that lays the golden eggs, the beautiful small city in its bowl of trees and hills that people enjoy working and living in and visiting, is not to be destroyed.

We note the chicken and egg situation re roads and development: development must go ahead for roads to be financed (p78). 'A Northern Relief Road would be required by 2030 should housing growth proceed as planned' (p73) The congestion this new housing generates will then need to be tackled – a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The sheer scale of what is planned is breath-taking. Currently most congestion is on the west side of the city, but this is where the majority of housing (eventually 2,500 houses at Sniperley and 300 at Mount Oswald) is planned, with the proposed Western Relief Road debouching on to the most congested road in the county: the A690, which is currently creating problems as far west as Crook, according to the document (p51).

In addition the very short Western Relief Road, as acknowledged in the document, will destroy beautiful landscape and wildlife habitats as well as an important recreational area for the residents of Nevilles Cross and the west of the city and Bearpark, whose residents use their own research to refute the suggestion that thousands of cars use Tollhouse Road as a rat run. Also, yes, this road would be liable to flooding and expensive mitigation work would be needed, pushing up the already high cost. The N/S A167 is not as congested as the E/W A690.

It's worth pointing out that the new areas of housing would almost equal the size of the current city. Also that the County's population is not expected to rise in the next 20 years. Let's hope that the employment projections in the document are not wildly optimistic, but they would have to be to justify this gigantic expansion of housing. It seems like a good idea to build an extra 900 houses in Newton Aycliffe, where Hitachi are providing an equivalent number of jobs. In the case of Durham this is purely speculative and might just represent a bonanza for developers and owners of development land, and last but not least student landlords.

The Sherburn Road site would have good public transport and connectivity, but there are major problems for both the Sniperley site and the North of Arnison site. The document refers to the 'severance effect' of the A167 on the Sniperley site and of Rotary Way on the North of Arnison site. If children and young people cannot safely walk or cycle to schools that might be on the other side of these roads, this is a real sustainability issue, as the document points out. People will have to get into their cars (if they have them – the document rules out subsidizing bus travel) to do almost anything from these areas.

GREEN BELT

It goes without saying that the County Plan assumes massive incursions into the Green Belt (2004), which is intended to protect the setting and historic character of the city and

prevent it from merging with surrounding settlements. It is usually anticipated that a Green Belt will remain in place for 25-30 years. Since the Town and Country Planning Act was put in place any amendment to the Green Belt must be justified by exceptional circumstances. No planning official has succeeded in demonstrating to us what the 'exceptional circumstance' are in this case. This group takes a dim view of the loosening of planning regulations in the current National Planning Framework and hopes that this authority will stick to the spirit of the TCPA in honouring the Green Belt.

STUDENT HOUSING

Some streets in our area are as much as 80/90% occupied by student HMOs. This has created many problems for residents, from noise and constant refuse, to flouting of planning strictures by student landlords. It has reached the stage that large parts of central Durham are under this blight. The situation is about to get very much worse with planning applications for a) a block housing c.200 students in Waddington St, b)3 houses each housing 9 students in The Avenue. The fact that these houses are then rendered unfit for family habitation by the addition of numerous en suites and the elimination of living rooms, as landlords seek to cram in as many students as possible, mean that families in future will find it more difficult to find suitable accommodation in a part of the city within walking distance of many primary and secondary schools and many other facilities such as library and swimming baths. We hope that the County Council will decide to use planning controls, in the shape of Article 4 Directions to require planning permission and monitoring for HMOs(p79).

The University currently appears unable to give specific future student numbers, but since the withdrawal of teaching grants for many subjects it will come to depend increasingly on student tuition fees and this almost certainly means greater numbers of students.

We local residents rely on the County Council to give us some protection from the situation outlined above.

CONCLUSION

The scale of the planned housing developments for Durham City cannot be justified. With no prospective growth in the County's population and no certainty of jobs arriving, indeed rather less certainty than in the past, developments on this scale, as mentioned above will only benefit developers, landowners and landlords, at a cost to the local environment in all senses: wildlife, recreational space, congestion and pollution, as well as to the long-suffering long-term residents of the city. We must also wonder what the residents of Sacriston and Witton Gilbert will make of this enormous development on their doorstep, which will also be encroaching on their peace and privacy. Bring back the old joined-up thinking!