

County Durham Plan - Scope

Scoping Consultation

June 2026

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Purpose of the Local Plan

- 1 In March 2025, the council's Cabinet approved work to begin preparing a new County Durham Plan. For simplicity, this is referred to throughout this document as **the Local Plan**. Following the local elections in May 2025, the newly elected administration confirmed its support for continuing this work.
- 2 A Local Plan is a statutory document prepared by local planning authorities such as Durham County Council. It sets out policies and proposals for the development and use of land in their area. Its primary purpose is to guide decisions on planning applications and ensure that development is sustainable, coordinated, and aligned with national policy objectives as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 3 The Local Plan identifies where new homes, jobs, infrastructure, and services will be located, and how the natural and built environment will be protected and enhanced. It includes site allocations for housing and employment, design standards, environmental protections, and policies on transport, climate change, and heritage. Once adopted, it forms part of the development plan, meaning it carries full legal weight in planning decisions. Local Plans are also subject to public consultation and independent examination to ensure they are sound, justified, and deliverable.

County Durham Context

- 4 The Local Plan for County Durham, known as the County Durham Plan, was adopted in October 2020. Since then, national planning policy has changed, and Durham's annual housing requirement has increased. As a result, the council considered the need for a new Plan
- 5 A formal review of the existing Plan was completed in Autumn 2025. Although most policies were still broadly consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the review identified a clear need to move forward with producing a new Plan given the significant changes in County Durham's housing need. This need has become even more relevant following the publication of new plan-making guidance and the draft NPPF in December 2025.

Scoping the County Durham Plan

- 6 The scoping stage is the first formal step in preparing a new Local Plan under the updated plan-making system. Its role is to identify the strategic priorities, key issues, and overall direction that the new Local Plan will need to address.
- 7 The Scoping Report explains the proposed scope and focus of the new Local Plan and invites your views. It outlines:
 - the broad themes and policy areas the new Plan is expected to cover
 - early thinking on how and where future development should be directed

- locally specific issues that will need to be explored in more detail as the Plan progresses
- 8 The document is structured to follow as near as possible the chapters within the draft NPPF, this allows the document to carefully align with the requirements of national policy. The questions included throughout the document are designed to gather insight from residents, businesses, and stakeholders. These responses will allow us to gather feedback and align the new plan to reflect the aspirations of our communities, the opportunities of our diverse landscapes, and the challenges we must address together.
 - 9 Following the scoping consultation under the new plan-making system, the local planning authority is required to formally progress the plan through a more structured and tightly managed process. The next stage involves refining the plan's scope, strategy, and evidence base in light of comments received, before preparing the proposed plan and supporting evidence for publication. This published version must be accompanied by a self-assessment demonstrating how the plan meets national policy requirements and the prescribed tests, and it is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate at Gateway 1, which marks the formal start of the 30-month plan preparation period. Subsequent stages include consultation on the proposed plan and evidence, further gateway checks to address soundness and legal compliance, and then submission for independent examination. The process is intended to front-load engagement, issues resolution, and evidence gathering, reducing the scope for late changes and ensuring the plan can proceed efficiently to adoption within the prescribed timescales.

National Policy Context

- 10 The Government is introducing a new plan-making system under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA). Guidance published in November 2025 explained that the new regulations replace the 2012 Local Planning Regulations and set out a revised process. The regulations came into force on March 25th, 2026. The new Local Plan will therefore be prepared in accordance with this new plan making system.
- 11 As well as the new plan making system, the government has also set about making significant changes to other areas of national policy. In December 2025, the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was issued. This introduces a clearer separation between plan-making policies and national decision-making policies, with the latter intended to guide planning decisions consistently across England. The draft specifically states that local plans should not replicate or restate these national decision-making policies unless explicitly required by other parts of the Framework, aiming to reduce duplication and streamline decision-making.
- 12 This means that in preparing the new Local Plan, the council will need to ensure that local policies add locally specific detail rather than repeat national policy, focusing on matters where local interpretation, evidence or place-based

priorities genuinely require additional guidance. By avoiding repetition and aligning closely with the national decision-making policies, the plan can remain focused, effective and compliant with the emerging national framework.

- 13 A further important point to note is the under the new plan-making system, traditional topic-based Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) will no longer form part of the formal development plan framework. The government has confirmed that the legal powers to prepare topic based SPDs will be removed, and local planning authorities are expected to review existing SPDs, retaining useful material either as local guidance or by incorporating it into new-style local plans. This will have implications for how we draft policies in our new Local Plan.

Regional Policy Context

- 14 Under the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (NEMSA) Establishment and Functions Order 2024, NEMSA is formally empowered to take on full regional planning functions, including Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) production. Durham County Council will play an active role in its development and once adopted, an SDS becomes part of the statutory development plan, carrying the same legal weight as local plans and neighbourhood plans. Under the Government's new approach, SDSs will address cross-boundary issues such as housing need, economic growth, and strategic infrastructure and the new Local Plan will need to be in accordance and align with the strategic policies in the North East SDS.

Neighbourhood Plans

- 15 Neighbourhood plans give local communities in County Durham a direct say in shaping development in their area, forming part of the statutory development plan once adopted and sitting alongside the new Local Plan. They allow parish councils and neighbourhood forums to set non strategic planning policies, such as site allocations, Local Green Space designations, design principles and local infrastructure priorities, which must then be taken into account in planning decisions. Neighbourhood plans cannot block strategic development required through the Local Plan, but they can influence how and where that development is delivered, ensuring it reflects local character and community aspirations. As the council prepares the new Local Plan, existing and emerging neighbourhood plans will play an important role in shaping place based outcomes, provided they remain aligned with wider strategic needs and priorities.

Planning Level	Document	Prepared By	Primary Role
National	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	UK Government	Sets national planning principles and policy tests
Regional / Strategic	North East Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)	North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (NEMSA)	Coordinates strategic growth and cross-boundary issues
Local Authority	Local Plan (County Durham Plan)	Durham County Council	Allocates sites and sets detailed local planning policies
Neighbourhood	Neighbourhood Plan	Parish Council / Neighbourhood Forum	Provides community-level policy and site detail

Call for sites

- 16 Durham County Council carried out a Call for Sites exercise last summer as part of preparing the new Local Plan, inviting landowners, developers and local communities to suggest land that could be considered for future development. The response was significant, with more than 800 sites submitted for a range of potential uses, including housing, employment, renewable energy, community facilities and other forms of development. All submitted sites are now being assessed through a detailed process to understand their opportunities, constraints and suitability, helping to inform future choices about where development may be directed across the county. This will then inform the next stage of the Local Plan.

Evidence

- 17 The new Local Plan will be underpinned by a number of different evidence studies. This includes studies that assess housing needs, employment land requirements, infrastructure capacity, environmental constraints, and demographic trends.
- 18 Each of these studies will play a key role in the formulation of Policy, ensuring they are justified, deliverable and aligned with national planning objectives.
- 19 In some cases, the council have undertaken joint studies with neighbouring authorities, this enables a joined-up approach where there are common issues and value to working together.

Consultation

- 20 The new Local Plan will be informed by three stages of consultation. These are:
- Scoping consultation (this current stage of consultation)

- Consultation on proposed local plan content and evidence
 - Consultation on the proposed local plan
- 21 A range of methods will be used at each stage of consultation to maximise opportunities for involvement. Methods could include, but are not limited to, public exhibitions, online and in person meetings and workshops, a dedicated website and survey, and awareness raising through social media, press release and direct email.

Question 1 Would you like to join our Local Plan email list to be kept up to date directly on the development of the new Local Plan?

Yes/No

Question 2 How would you like to be engaged in the preparation of the Local Plan?

Options: email, survey, social media, public exhibitions, workshops, meetings, online consultation form, other

Assessing the Plan

- 22 Although the draft NPPF does not introduce new Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) requirements, it reinforces the principle that local plans must comply with all existing legal duties without repeating them, as part of its wider effort to avoid duplication between national policy and statutory processes. SEA therefore remains a statutory requirement under the SEA Regulations, which continue to operate alongside the plan-making system. Government guidance confirms that SEA is a legal, structured process that assesses the likely significant environmental effects of a plan, including reasonable alternatives, and ensures these are taken into account in decision making through public consultation and the preparation of an environmental report. For County Durham, this means the new Local Plan, prepared under the reformed plan-making system introduced through LURA, must still be informed by a robust SEA that evaluates different spatial strategy options, identifies environmental impacts, and shapes policy choices. Even though the draft NPPF itself does not expand on SEA, the assessment remains central to demonstrating that the emerging plan is evidence-based, legally compliant, and aligned with sustainable development principles.
- 23 A Strategic Environmental Assessment screening document has been prepared as additional information. This document plays a critical role in identifying, predicting, and addressing the potential environmental implications of the emerging CDP at this early stage. The document can be viewed in the Environment Section of the Let's Talk County Durham Scoping Consultation page.

Strategic Environmental Assessment Question 1 Do you have any comments to make on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report and/or its appendices

Strategic Environmental Assessment Question 2 Do you agree or disagree with the conclusion of the Strategic Environmental Assessment screening opinion in Appendix D?

(This question is intended for Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England response only)

Strategic Environmental Assessment Question 3 Do you have any comments to make on the Strategic Environmental Assessment Report screening opinion in Appendix D?

(This question is intended for Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England response only)

Vision and priorities

- 24 The new Local Plan will include a vision which sets out key aims and objectives for County Durham over the next 15 years. It will also include 10 measurable outcomes to help us monitor progress towards the vision. The questions in this section are to help us develop the vision and measurable outcomes.
- 25 An initial SWOT Analysis has been undertaken to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within County Durham, which will be considered to help inform the new Local Plan. This analysis is split into key strategic themes including housing, economy and growth, communities and health, transport and environment.

Housing

Strengths

- Attractive, well-located settlements with good access to facilities, countryside and coast.
- Housing is generally more affordable than elsewhere in the UK.

Weaknesses

- County Durham is seen as less desirable for developers, limiting viability, especially in rural locations.
- Rural areas often lack infrastructure to support new housing.
- Higher vacancy rate than the national average.
- Limited small or medium developer activity in rural areas.

Opportunities

- Increase specialist and elderly accommodation.
- Secure infrastructure (roads, schools, healthcare) through new development.
- Broaden housing mix and bring empty homes back into use.

Threats

- Growing numbers of HMOs can affect community cohesion and stability.
- Low viability risks reduced infrastructure contributions from developers.
- Poorly planned development may be harder to resist while the local plan is being prepared.
- Aging, inefficient housing stock increases fuel poverty, while funding for improvements is limited.

Economy and Growth

Strengths

- Strong visitor economy with major historic, cultural and natural attractions, such as, Beamish, Kynren, Durham Heritage Coast and the North Pennines National Landscape.
- Durham University has a global reputation and provides excellent skills and research and development opportunities.
- Durham City attracts visitors with a strong heritage and cultural offer, including the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage site and a vibrant retail and hospitality sector.
- Good supply of existing and potential employment land.

Weaknesses

- High town-centre vacancy rates.
- Restricted town-centre use classes limit flexibility for vacant town-centre properties.
- High vacancy rates for office spaces on employment sites due to low demand.

Opportunities

- Expand logistics and distribution development along A19/A1 corridors.
- Increase support for apprenticeships to boost local skills and growth.
- Develop stronger tourism policies to protect visitor accommodation and promote sustainable tourism development.
- Grow the visitor economy in Durham Dales and North Pennines.
- Diversify the uses which would be supported on employment land.
- Minerals, land and wind resources have the potential to support a strong Net Zero economy, providing new jobs and cleaner air.

Threats

- Reliance on the University within Durham City leads to seasonal economic dips.
- Limited local job opportunities push residents and graduates elsewhere, reducing local skills.

Communities and Health

Strengths

- Strong sense of community identity and local pride.
- Good access to accessible open green spaces in most settlements.

Weaknesses

- County Durham has an aging population, which raises the demand for health and social care.
- There is a significant life-expectancy gap (c.10.2 years for males and 8.8 for females) between those living in areas of high deprivation and low deprivation.
- High childhood obesity rates.
- Some communities face physical and digital isolation due to a lack of connectivity.
- There is a perceived lack of opportunity for children and young people.

Opportunities

- Placemaking and public-realm improvements to support physical and mental health and well-being, and community cohesion.
- More coordinated approach to care facilities and children's homes.

Threats

- Aging population and poor population health increases pressures on health and social care and emergency services.
- Deprivation contributes to crime, anti-social behaviour and poor wellbeing.
- High unemployment and low income rates harm physical and mental health and well-being.
- National policy definition of "Hot Food Takeaway" is unclear, for example it doesn't include fast food outlets (e.g. McDonalds) which limits control.
- Further decline of rural communities through facility and service closures (schools, shops, pubs) and housing loss to rental/tourism markets.

Transport

Strengths

- Strong north-south infrastructure via A19, A1 and East Coast Main Line.
- Two stations on the East Coast Main Line linking Durham to York, London, Newcastle and Edinburgh.

Weaknesses

- Inconsistent transport provision across the County, where some areas benefit from much better services than others, resulting in underutilised bus and rail services.
- Limited east-west infrastructure across the county.
- Rural transport is often unreliable.

Opportunities

- The Leamside Line could improve regional connectivity and access to jobs.
- Improved and reliable transport services could reduce car dependency and traffic.
- Improved road infrastructure could increase safety for walking and cycling.

Threats

- Dispersed settlement pattern makes equal service provision challenging.

Environment

Strengths

- Rich historic, natural and cultural assets including the Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site, North Pennines National Landscape, Durham Heritage Coast, as well as Local Nature Reserves and wildlife sites.
- Strong mineral resources to support construction.

Weaknesses

- Declining species and habitats, reflecting national trends.
- The natural environment is under pressure from pollution, recreation and development, which can have negative impacts on habitats, biodiversity and coastal or landscape features.
- Increasing visitor numbers to the Durham Heritage Coast and the North Pennines National Landscape may increase pressures on existing accesses and recreational infrastructure, adding strain to these sensitive landscapes.

Opportunities

- Support the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, ensuring development supports opportunities for nature recovery.
- Support the conservation and enhancement aims of the North Pennines Management Plan and the Durham Heritage Coast and Coastal Management Plan; with specific policies to protect and enhance these areas.
- Improve air quality in and around Durham City.

Threats

- Lower national Biodiversity Net Gain thresholds risk cumulative losses for biodiversity.
- Increased tourism to natural attractions may damage habitats if unmanaged.
- The undulating topography of the county may intensify visual impacts of development resulting in more prominent impacts on landscape character.

- Non-minerals development can have an impact on finite minerals resources if it is in the wrong place, or encroaches on mineral sites and allocations.

Question 3. Are there any further strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats that should be considered in developing the new Local Plan?

Draft Priorities

- 26 The following draft priorities have been developed based on emerging evidence and the above analysis. Feedback is sought to help us to refine priorities.

Housing

1. Secure new, high-quality housing in a range of house types and tenures, that is accessible to and meets the needs and aspirations of County Durham's residents - including affordable housing, homes for families, older people, specialist provision for vulnerable groups (such as children, care leavers, veterans and those at risk of homelessness), and accommodation for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople - while complementing and making effective use of the existing stock.

Healthy and Resilient Communities

2. Support resilient and healthy communities by ensuring development contributes towards creating places that are safe, attractive, well connected (both digitally and physically) with access to high quality greenspace, infrastructure and community facilities.

Thriving Town Centres

3. Enhance the vitality and attractiveness of town centres by promoting a diverse mix of uses, including retail, commercial, leisure, cultural and community facilities, and strengthening their role as the focus of community life.

Transport and Connectivity

4. Create well-connected places that offer genuine transport choice including opportunities to walk, cycle and use public transport, reducing transport related social exclusion and the impact of traffic and congestion on air quality.

Economy and Employment

5. Promote innovation, inward investment, and high-quality job creation by growing the local economy through the creation of new employment space across the county, including for small businesses and start-ups, and support the delivery of strategic employment sites, including Durham Innovation District and NETPark.

Tourism

6. Strengthen County Durham's position as a visitor destination based on its heritage and natural beauty by supporting the enhancement of our tourism offer, including the range and quality of visitor accommodation and attractions.

Rural Economy

7. Promote a resilient rural economy by enabling sensitive and sustainable diversification, protecting and enhancing key rural facilities, infrastructure and services, and supporting appropriate development within rural settlements.

Natural Environment

8. Conserve, enhance and restore the county's locally, nationally and internationally important natural environment and landscape, including the North Pennines National Landscape and the Durham Heritage Coast, while promoting habitat resilience and connectivity.

Historic Environment

9. Conserve and enhance the significance of County Durham's locally, nationally and internationally important built and historic environment, including its wide range of buildings, sites, archaeology, parks and gardens and other heritage assets.

Design Quality

10. Ensure that new development achieves high standards of design which responds to and enhances local character.

Waste Management

11. Support the development of a modern, sustainable network of waste management facilities that enables waste to be managed in line with the waste hierarchy—prioritising re-use, recycling, composting and recovery, with disposal as a last resort.

Minerals

12. Meet society's needs by ensuring a steady and adequate supply of minerals, while protecting the environment, amenity and health of local communities and securing the early, high-quality restoration and aftercare of mineral sites.

Question 4: Are these the right priorities for the new Local Plan? Agree/Disagree.

Question 4a: If you disagree, please explain why and suggest any changes you believe are needed.

Achieving Sustainable Development

- 27 The draft NPPF identifies that the Local Plan should plan positively for future growth and change. The Local Plan will be required to meet the development needs for County Durham. The draft NPPF requires it to set out a spatial strategy setting clear expectations for the location of development and where land should be protected or enhanced for specific purpose. The Local Plan will therefore need to consider how we meet future housing and wider development needs across the county for the new Plan period.
- 28 The current Local Plan was adopted in October 2020. At its core, Durham City is identified as the primary focus for growth, particularly through sustainable urban extensions and regeneration around Aykley Heads, reinforcing its role as the county's strategic economic and cultural hub. This was central to meeting housing needs.
- 29 Since adoption, the spatial strategy is being delivered around Durham City. The two largest housing allocations in Durham City have made progress, with an outline approval of 1,918 at Sniperley Park which includes a detailed approval for 368 dwellings. Work has now started on site but there have been no completions to date. The site at Sherburn Road has progressed further with a detailed approval for 470 dwellings which is also currently under construction.
- 30 In terms of Aykley Heads, the site has an outline permission in place for 38,468sqm. Of that, 2,985sqm has been built out with the development of Corten House and a data centre recently been granted approval on Plot D of the masterplan for the site. The site as a whole will form part of an Innovation District for the City and will be delivered in partnership with Durham University.
- 31 As we prepare the new Local Plan, we are exploring different ways to guide where new homes, jobs and services should go in the future. This includes focusing most growth in the main towns, spreading development more widely across many settlements, concentrating new development along key transport corridors, creating a new settlement or major urban extension, or prioritising areas most in need of regeneration. Each option has different strengths and challenges, and it is possible that the final plan may take a hybrid approach, combining the strongest elements of several options to best meet the needs of communities across County Durham. The following provides some headlines to consider which can inform any future decision on a proposed strategy. It should be noted that at this stage the SEA and its processes have not fed into any of these early thoughts.

Focus Growth on Main Towns

- 32 Direct most new development to the county's major towns where services, jobs, and infrastructure already exist.

Strengths

- **Maximises existing infrastructure capacity** (transport, schools, utilities).

- **Reduces car dependency**, supporting national and regional sustainability objectives.
- **Supports town centre regeneration**, complementing Strategic Place Plans (SPP) that guide how County Durham's towns can develop in the future.

Challenges

- **Limited land availability** within urban boundaries may restrict large-scale allocations.
- **Limits development** within some of our smaller settlements and also to meet development needs on more rural areas of the County.
- **Some towns are constrained by Green Belt** (Durham City notably but also Chester-le-Street and Seaham).

Dispersed Development Across Smaller Towns and Villages

- 33 Spread development across a wider network of local settlements, particularly sustainable villages with good access to services.

Strengths

- **Supports rural vitality and regeneration**, allows for new housing to be provided within settlements that have traditionally seen limited development to help support local services.
- **Lower infrastructure pressures** per settlement compared with intense growth in main towns.
- **Potential for small to medium sites**, which can deliver housing without long lead in time and attractive to house builders.

Challenges

- **Less sustainable travel patterns**, increasing car dependency if public transport is limited.
- **Difficulty achieving economies of scale** for infrastructure investment and viability challenges may impact on delivery.
- **Risk of incremental loss of countryside** and pressure on the character of some our settlements.

Corridor Based Growth (A1(M), A19, East Coast Mainline, Leamside Line Opportunity)

- 34 Locate new development along strategic transport corridors to support economic growth and logistics, employment sites, and connected settlements.

Strengths

- **Strong alignment with employment land needs.** Our stronger market areas have historically been based along our transport corridors
- **Maximises accessibility** to regional centres (Newcastle, Teesside) and national transport networks.

- **Supports strategic inward investment**, particularly for advanced manufacturing and logistics.
- **Potential to consider growth** along the proposed extension to the Leamside Line to take advantage of the new rail transport options.

Challenges

- **Potential environmental constraints**, including landscape and ecological sensitivity near strategic corridors.
- **High infrastructure costs** if upgrades to junctions or utilities are required.
- **Could divert growth** away from more deprived communities needing regeneration.
- **Timing and certainty** over the delivery of the Leamside Line is currently unclear.

New Settlement or Major Urban Extension

- 35 Plan a self-contained new community/communities or a large strategic extension that delivers housing, employment, community facilities, and green infrastructure in one location.

Strengths

- **Ability to plan comprehensively**, ensuring schools, road links, and green space are integrated.
- **Can meet long-term housing need** over a sustained period.
- **Potential to supports modern, sustainable design** (net-zero homes, heat networks, active travel).

Challenges

- **Very high upfront infrastructure costs**, requiring phased delivery and strong market demand. Lack of commitment from developers to deliver infrastructure.
- **Long lead-in times**, potentially missing short-term housing delivery targets.
- **Risk of concentrating too much growth** in one area at the expense of existing towns.

Regeneration Led Development (Focusing on Existing Underused or Brownfield Land)

- 36 Prioritise redevelopment of brownfield sites, former industrial land, and struggling town centres, aligned with County Durham's regeneration frameworks.

Strengths

- **Supports sustainable development** and reduces pressure on greenfield land, aligning with national planning preference for brownfield-first approaches.
- **Enhances town centre vitality**, supported by existing and future Strategic Place Plans.
- **Often well-connected** to existing transport and services.

Challenges

- **Viability challenges**, particularly where contamination or remediation is required.
- **Fragmented land ownership** can slow progress.
- **May not deliver enough land** to meet full housing and employment needs alone.

37 These approaches are further summarised below, highlighting key strength and weaknesses to each development theme.

Spatial Option	Key Strengths	Key Challenges
Main Town Focus	Efficient use of infrastructure; supports regeneration; sustainable transport	Limited capacity; potential congestion; viability issues
Dispersed Growth	Supports rural vitality; flexible site delivery; community influence	Car dependency; infrastructure inefficiencies; rural character impacts
Corridor Based Growth	Attracts investment; strong connectivity; aligned with employment land needs. Link with potential regional opportunities and investment.	Environmental constraints; costly upgrades; may bypass deprived areas
New Settlement / Major Extension	Comprehensive planning; long-term supply; sustainable design	High costs; long timescales; risk of over concentration. Potential implications on strategic road network.
Regeneration Led	Brownfield-first; improves towns; well-connected	Viability challenges; slow assembly; insufficient land alone

Question 5: We are exploring different ways County Durham could plan for future development. Each possible approach has potential benefits and challenges. What do you think are the main advantages and disadvantages of:

- **focusing growth in the main towns,**
- **dispersed development across smaller towns and villages,**
- **corridor based growth**
- **creating a new settlement or major extensions,**

- regeneration led development
- combining several of these approaches.
- Other (please specify)

Question 5a: We'd like to hear your thoughts on the strengths and drawbacks of these options, and any considerations you feel are important when thinking about the future of the county

Question 6: Are there any other spatial approaches which could be considered?

Principles for Guiding Sustainable Growth Across the County

38 These development themes will also require a clear understanding of the opportunities and constraints that will influence where future development should be directed. Several strands of work are being brought together at this early stage, including emerging evidence, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and detailed site assessments. These will help the Local Plan consider:

- **Environmental constraints**, such as biodiversity value, landscape sensitivity, heritage assets, flood risk, and wider climate-resilience considerations.
- **Sustainable transport and active travel networks**, including the ability of new development to support and benefit from low-carbon travel choices.
- **The relationship between housing, employment, services, and infrastructure**, ensuring that growth is located where it can best support access to jobs, facilities, and essential utilities.
- **The capacity of different settlements**, recognising that each place has a distinct character, role, and level of existing provision. Understanding this capacity is central to shaping a sound and deliverable strategy. It involves assessing how much housing, employment land, infrastructure, or community facilities each settlement can sustainably accommodate, based on its services, transport links, environmental context, and recent levels of growth.

39 Evaluating these factors helps ensure that development is guided to locations that are appropriate and sustainable in light of their individual characteristics. It supports a balanced approach by recognising the differing roles, opportunities, and constraints across the county's settlements, allowing decisions to reflect local context.

40 The following questions invite views on how these considerations should influence the distribution of growth across County Durham. They explore the principles that should guide future development, the relative importance of different planning factors, and the local priorities that should shape the emerging strategy. Responses from residents, businesses, and stakeholders will play a vital role in ensuring the new Local Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of communities across the county.

Question 7: How should the Local Plan assess the capacity of different settlements to accommodate additional development? (For example, considering size, services, infrastructure, or existing growth.)

Question 8: Which settlements or areas do you believe are particularly well-placed to accommodate further growth such as new housing, and why?

Question 9: How important or unimportant is it that new housing is located where there is good access to employment opportunities, services, and key infrastructure?

Question 10: How important or unimportant is it that the Local Plan focus development in areas where it can help support regeneration?

**Question 11: What environmental constraints do you think should have the greatest influence on where new development is located?
(e.g., biodiversity, landscape sensitivity, heritage assets, flood risk)**

Question 12: How important or unimportant is it that growth is focused on locations with good access to sustainable transport and a choice of travel networks?

Developer Contributions

- 41 Development in County Durham must mitigate its impacts and contribute to the delivery of the spatial strategy, including affordable housing and the timely provision of infrastructure. In line with the draft NPPF's plan-making approach, the new Local Plan will focus on clear, locally specific requirements and evidence-based parameters, while avoiding duplication of national decision-making policies or Building Regulations. The following set out what the new Local Plan will need to cover and what will fall out of its remit.

Affordable Housing Requirements

- 42 The Local Plan will introduce clear and consistent affordable housing requirements for different value areas and site types. These requirements will set out the minimum proportion of Social Rent and the expected tenure mix on sites, informed by the Local Housing Needs Assessment and whole-plan viability evidence. For land released from the Green Belt, the Local Plan will apply higher affordable housing requirements in line with national policy "Golden Rules", with an ambition for around 50% affordable housing unless this can be shown to be unviable.

Infrastructure to Support Growth

- 43 To ensure new development is supported by the right infrastructure, the Local Plan will identify the locally critical items needed to accompany allocations and

growth options. This will include primary and secondary education provision, healthcare capacity, active travel links, utilities reinforcement, and open space, play and sports facilities. These requirements will be based on an updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan and topic-specific studies so that expectations for contributions are clear from the outset.

Approach to Commuted Sums

- 44 The Local Plan will set out the county’s approach to commuted sums, including when off-site delivery of affordable housing may be appropriate. Subject to the outcome of national consultation, this may also include the use of cash-in-lieu contributions on medium-sized sites. The Local Plan will establish principles for valuation, timing, ring-fencing and spending to ensure that contributions support delivery in the most appropriate locations. The final approach will reflect the national position once confirmed.

Viability and Transparency

- 45 The Local Plan will commit to proportionate and transparent viability evidence at plan making stage, using standardised national viability inputs once these are finalised. At decision-making stage, site-specific viability assessments will only be required where clearly justified, and any such assessments will need to be publicly available

What the Local Plan Will Not Cover

- 46 The Local Plan will not repeat National Decision Making Policies (NDMPs) on the use of planning conditions or planning obligations, nor will it restate the statutory tests that apply to section 106 agreements. These matters are already set out in national policy and legislation and apply at the decision-making stage, so they do not need to be duplicated in the Local Plan.
- 47 The Local Plan will also not introduce local standards that simply replicate Building Regulations. The only exceptions will be nationally enabled options, such as the M4(2) and M4(3) accessible housing standards, where local application is permitted. It will not create generic lists of requirements that could conflict with forthcoming national model conditions or obligations, ensuring that local policy remains aligned with the national framework.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

- 48 An updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will be prepared to bring together the education, health, transport, active travel, utilities, and green and blue infrastructure needed to support the growth options and site allocations in the Local Plan. This will ensure that the scale and location of new development are matched with the right supporting infrastructure.
- 49 A Whole Plan Viability Assessment will be undertaken using nationally standardised inputs once these are confirmed. This assessment will test a realistic range of development typologies across the county—including city, town, village and rural locations, as well as brownfield and greenfield sites of

different sizes—and will take account of phasing. This will help ensure that the policies in the Local Plan are deliverable.

- 50 A series of topic studies will also be updated or prepared, such as assessments of open space and playing pitches, built leisure facilities, and primary care capacity. These studies will quantify the infrastructure needs arising from new development and help to shape clear expectations for contributions linked to site allocations.
- 51 The Local Plan will play an important role in shaping how new homes, infrastructure and community facilities are delivered across County Durham. As part of this, we are seeking views on several key elements of the proposed approach to planning for affordable housing, infrastructure, commuted sums and viability. Your feedback will help us ensure that the Local Plan is clear, deliverable and aligned with national policy while responding to local needs and priorities. The following questions invite your views on these aspects of the emerging approach.

Question 13: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach of setting clear, affordable housing requirements, including a minimum proportion of Social Rent, as part of the Local Plan?

Question 14: The Local Plan will set higher affordable housing requirements for major development on land released from the Green Belt (including Grey Belt), in line with national policy and the “Golden Rules”. What should the approach be?

Question 14a: Please provide reasons for your answer (including any evidence on viability and deliverability).

Question 15: Which types of infrastructure do you think the Local Plan should prioritise through developer contributions? (e.g. education, healthcare, active travel, utilities, green/blue infrastructure)?

Question 16: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should set out a clear approach to commuted sums, including when off-site affordable housing or (subject to national policy) cash-in-lieu on medium sites may be appropriate?

Question 17: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should use standard national viability assumptions (when available), and only allow site-specific viability assessments in exceptional cases?

Question 17a: Please explain your answer (optional)

Meeting the challenge of climate change

- 52 The draft NPPF and the proposed NDMPs sets out detailed requirements for both the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. These cover matters such as locating development in sustainable locations with good access to facilities and a choice of transport modes, minimising flood and overheating risks, reducing energy demand through design, encouraging the re-use of existing materials, and supporting habitat restoration. The government has also made clear that local plans should not introduce higher energy-efficiency standards for buildings, as these will be set through Building Regulations.
- 53 Although overarching climate change policy is established through the draft NDMPs, it is a topic which cuts across policy areas within the new Local Plan, for example sustainable transport, flood risk and coastal change, clean energy and water, and conserving and enhancing the natural environment. The Local Plan also has a role in directing development to sustainable locations. This will be informed by an assessment of the carbon impacts of development and the vulnerability of sites to climate risks—for example, flood risk.

Question 18: Do you think any further policies are needed to address climate change beyond what is included in national policy or to be addressed elsewhere in the Local Plan?

Question 18a: If yes, which policies do you consider are needed?

Delivering a sufficient supply of homes

- 54 A core objective of the new Local Plan will be to ensure that the area delivers a sufficient supply of homes to meet identified needs over the plan period. National policy requires local planning authorities to significantly boost the supply of housing by ensuring that Local Plans meet the full assessed needs for market and affordable housing, as well as the needs of specific groups within the community. This includes older people, families, children, young people, students, people with disabilities, self-builders, and those requiring affordable or specialist accommodation.
- 55 The scoping stage will therefore consider how the Local Plan should address the following key issues:

Identifying and Meeting Housing Need

- 56 The Local Plan will be informed by up-to-date and proportionate evidence, including the Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) and any more detailed local studies. Together, this evidence base will establish the overall minimum number of homes required across the plan area, as well as the specific types, sizes, and tenures of homes needed to meet local demand. It will also identify the scale of affordable housing need and the most effective mechanisms for delivering it.
- 57 In addition, the evidence will assess the needs of particular groups within the community, including older and disabled people and those who require specialist accommodation, including children who need to go into care. Understanding these needs will ensure that the Local Plan supports a diverse and inclusive housing offer.
- 58 Based on this evidence, the Local Plan will set clear requirements for new development. This will include the type and mix of affordable housing to be provided, including the tenure split and the proportion expected on new sites. It will also specify the proportion of homes that must be accessible and built to M4(2) and M4(3) standards of the Building Regulations. Finally, the Local Plan will outline expectations for the delivery of specialist housing to meet identified needs.
- 59 To ensure the Local Plan identifies and meets housing need, we invite your comments on the following questions.

Question 19: Which housing issues affect you are most (for example affordability of buying or renting, availability of suitable homes)?

Question 19a: How do you think the Local Plan should respond to these issues?

Question 20: How should the Local Plan respond to the need for specialist housing, such as supported accommodation, extra care housing, accessible homes, or children's homes?

Question 21: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should identify sites, or include specific requirements within sites, to deliver particular types of housing (such as housing for older people or self-build homes)?

Question 21a: Please explain your answer (optional).

Ensuring a Deliverable and Developable Supply of Land

- 60 The Local Plan will need to identify sufficient land to meet housing needs throughout the plan period, which will require allocating suitable sites for future development. To achieve this, the Local Plan will draw on a wide range of evidence, including the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), discussions with landowners, developers, and infrastructure providers, and assessments of whether potential sites are suitable, available, and achievable. It will also consider opportunities for brownfield redevelopment, infill development, and wider regeneration, as well as the potential need for larger strategic or mixed-use sites. In addition, the Local Plan will examine how to maintain a rolling five-year supply of deliverable housing land after adoption, ensuring flexibility to respond to changes in delivery rates over time.
- 61 The table below summarises the broad spatial strategy options available for accommodating future housing growth. Each option varies in its capacity to deliver homes in the short and long term, as well as the constraints that may influence viability, infrastructure needs, and sustainability. This high-level comparison is intended to support early discussion on the relative strengths and challenges of different growth patterns.

Option	Strong Capacity for Housing Delivery?	Short-Term Delivery	Long-Term Delivery	Key Constraints
Main Town Focus	High – good urban capacity, large brownfield sites	Strong	Moderate–Strong	Infrastructure pinch points; townscape impact
Dispersed Growth	Moderate	Strong (small sites deliver faster)	Weak–Moderate	Sustainability; public transport

Option	Strong Capacity for Housing Delivery?	Short-Term Delivery	Long-Term Delivery	Key Constraints
Corridor-Based Growth	High (esp. A1/A19 nodes)	Moderate	Strong	Landscape; potential junction upgrades needed
New Settlement / Extension	High	Weak	Strong	Long lead-in; costly infrastructure
Regeneration-Led	Moderate	Moderate (viability dependent)	Weak - Moderate	Brownfield costs; fragmented land

- 62 National planning policy encourages local authorities to support a diverse range of housing sites, recognising that smaller sites can play an important role in maintaining a flexible and responsive supply of land. Sites under one hectare, and those between one and two and a half hectares, often come forward more quickly because they typically require less complex infrastructure, have shorter lead-in times, and are more likely to be delivered by small and medium-sized builders.
- 63 Having outlined the importance of ensuring a deliverable and developable supply of land for housing, we are now seeking your views on how best to achieve this. The following questions invite feedback on the approaches, assumptions, and criteria that should guide decisions about which sites are most suitable for future development.

Question 22: The draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages local plans to consider whether larger strategic or mixed-use sites can play an important role in meeting housing needs across an area.

Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should identify larger strategic or mixed-use sites to help meet housing needs across the plan area?

Question 22a: Please tell us why you feel this way, including any opportunities or challenges you think there may be in delivering housing as part of larger developments.

Question 23: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should allocate land so that at least 10% of the housing requirement is delivered on sites of no more than one hectare, and a further 10% on sites between one and two and a half hectares?

Question 23a: Please explain your answer.

Question 24: How should the Local Plan work with landowners, developers, and infrastructure providers to ensure that allocated sites can be delivered in a timely and coordinated way?

Question 25: What issues should the Local Plan address to meet different housing needs across the county?

Question 25a: Please tell us more about your views, including which issues you think are most important and why.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

- 64 A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is defined as a building or flat occupied by three or more people forming two or more households who share basic amenities such as a bathroom, toilet or kitchen. HMOs provide a more affordable form of accommodation, but high concentrations can negatively affect the character of an area, reduce family housing, and impact community cohesion.
- 65 A dwellinghouse occupied by a single household (Use Class C3) can change to a small HMO with between three and six residents (Use Class C4) without requiring planning permission, unless permitted development rights are removed through a planning measure called an Article 4 Direction. Article 4 Directions are in place in Durham City and the surrounding areas to manage concentrations of HMOs predominantly occupied by students, and the council has confirmed a new Article 4 Direction covering the remainder of the county, which will come into effect on 17 August 2026.
- 66 The new Local Plan will need to establish a policy approach that ensures HMOs do not concentrate to a level that undermines mixed and balanced communities. Current Local Plan Policy 16 caps student HMOs (identified through Class N student exemptions from council tax) at 10% of residential properties within a 100-metre radius and restricts them on primary pedestrian routes between Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and the town centre or university campus.
- 67 Because this approach does not manage non-student HMOs, the council is introducing an interim policy for areas outside the Durham City Article 4 boundary. This states development should not result in:
- The proportion of HMOs would exceed 10% of the total number of residential units within a 100 metre radius of the application site.
 - Any of the ten nearest properties to the application site are HMOs.
 - A property being ‘sandwiched’ between two HMOs or between an HMO and a non-residential use.

- 68 Applications must also show good living conditions and include a management plan demonstrating acceptable impacts on neighbours.

Question 26: What policy approach should the Local Plan take to Houses in Multiple Occupation?

Question 26a: Please tell us more about your views on HMO policy, including any parts of current policies that should be kept or changed.

Purpose Built Student Accommodation

- 69 Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is accommodation built, or converted, with the specific intent of being occupied by students, either with individual en-suite units or sharing facilities. PBSA is a building which is not classified as Use Class C4 or anything licensable as an HMO.
- 70 Policy 16 of the current Local Plan has allocated 6 sites for PBSA, one is no longer going forward, two are in the planning stages with scoping documents submitted, and two are still in the planning stages. Seven applications for PBSA on unallocated sites have been approved during the plan period, equating to 1797 bed spaces. The Housing Needs Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been designed to aid application for development of housing products including PBSA setting out the consultation, quantitative and qualitative considerations that developers need to consider when bringing application forward.
- 71 PBSA is an alternative to a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and so can increase choice for the student population, they can also reduce the need for HMOs and free up housing stock. However, PBSA products are generally more expensive to rent.
- 72 The Durham University Student Accommodation Annual Marketing Report shows that, quantitatively there are enough bed spaces for the current student population that are living away from home in student accommodation at Durham University, across the various student housing products. However, this does not account for the location, type, quality and cost of these bedspaces and if these meet the qualitative needs for students to ensure a mixed and balanced supply of products.
- 73 Under the draft NPPF we need to plan to meet the housing needs of students. Whilst quantitatively current need can be met there is an issue of qualitative need. The Local Plan could continue to allow for PBSA where it is demonstrated it will meet a qualitative need.

Question 27: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should allow more Purpose Built Student Accommodation where it will meet an identified need?

Question 27a: What factors should be considered when deciding of new student accommodation is suitable?

Sites for Gypsies, Roma Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

- 74 County Durham has significant numbers of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers (GRT). Most live in housing but a sizeable population live on 126 pitches over six council sites, and 5 authorised private sites containing 35 pitches, and 3 Travelling Showpeople's sites across the county.
- 75 The council also provides eight temporary 'stop-over' areas in the county which are made available for 28 days or less each year for seasonal use, also enabling Gypsies, Roma and and Travellers to travel to popular events like Appleby Fair.
- 76 The council have commissioned a Gypsy, Roma and Travller site needs assessments to assess the need for further GRT pitches, sites and Travelling Showpeople's yards across the County.
- 77 Planning policies for Gypsies, Roma and Travellers play a critical role in ensuring fair and inclusive access to accommodation while balancing environmental and community considerations. National Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, now included as part of the draft NPPF, requires local authorities to assess need through robust evidence, allocate sufficient land, and maintain a five-year supply of deliverable pitches. Early evidence indicates we are likely to need to plan for more sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

Question 28: How can the Local Plan ensure the provision of sufficient and suitable pitches to meet the needs for travellers and travelling show people?

Building a strong, effective economy

- 78 County Durham's economy is a substantial and diverse engine within the North East, valued at approximately £8.8 billion and supported by around 14,000 businesses. The county benefits from well-established sectors such as advanced manufacturing, health and life sciences, as well as a strong education base. Simultaneously, its rural character brings challenges related to connectivity and access to opportunities. In response, the County Durham Economic Strategy (2022–2035) sets a clear vision for economic growth, focusing on five key pillars; people, productivity, place, promotion, and planet, with a view to delivering more and better jobs, supporting innovation and enhancing infrastructure. This economic context provides the foundation for policies in the current Local Plan which are designed to allocate employment land strategically, foster sustainable growth, and address both urban and rural development needs across the county.
- 79 The current Local Plan established a strategic framework to support its vision for “more and better jobs” by allocating over 300 hectares of land for business and industrial use, based on a comprehensive Employment Land Review (ELR) which was completed in 2018. This identified that our stronger market areas are located on the key transport corridors within the county:
- A1(M) corridor, including Durham City
 - A19 corridor
- 80 These are locations that have historically been attractive to large multinational companies and have good links with markets in Tyne and Wear, Tees Valley and beyond. Elsewhere more local markets are established in:
- Consett and its surrounds (including Stanley/Annfield Plain and
 - Bishop Auckland and its nearby settlements such as Shildon and Crook.
 - Rural locations in West Durham
- 81 Whilst these have an important role to play in meeting local market needs, the levels of land allocated within these locations was much less than those within proximity of the A1(M) and the A19.
- 82 As a result, the current Local Plan includes key sites at Aykley Heads in Durham City as well as locations such as Newton Aycliffe (Forrest Park and Merchant Park) and Integra61 focused along the A1 Corridor and Jade Park on the A19 Corridor. In addition, NETPark, located immediately north of Sedgfield was identified as the county's key site for Research and Development and the current Local Plan allocates land for further growth.
- 83 The vision for Aykley Heads is starting to materialise, and there has been considerable progress at other large employment sites, including Integra61 which has seen the majority of the allocation now developed out, NETPark which has seen the development of Phase 3 and Jade Park Phase 1.

Providing the conditions for long term economic growth

- 84 Our new employment land policies in the new Local Plan will be shaped by a combination of national guidance, local evidence, and strategic planning objectives. At the national level, the draft NPPF requires local authorities to support sustainable economic growth and productivity. It emphasises the need for plans to allocate sufficient land to meet anticipated employment needs, ensuring that economic development is aligned with housing and infrastructure provision. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) complements this by offering detailed methodologies for assessing employment land requirements.
- 85 The council alongside NEMSA and other North East authorities are undertaking an Employment Land Review (ELR) to form the evidence base for policy. This will update the work done on the existing County Durham ELR in 2018 and will forecast future demand for employment land based on economic trends as well as different forecasting techniques.
- 86 Alongside this we are reviewing and assessing our current employment land supply, evaluating the quality and the suitability of existing sites as well as the quantum, noting the considerable progress on the site allocations in the current Local Plan. Further to this we are also considering sites that have come forward through the call for sites process. The new Local Plan will use all this information to allocate a suite of employment sites to implement the economic vision and strategy and meet existing and anticipated needs over the plan period, paying particular regard to facilitating development to meet the needs of a modern economy.

Question 29: Which types of locations should be prioritised for new employment sites in County Durham to support economic growth and access to jobs?

Question 29a: Please tell us where and why.

- 87 Our allocated employment sites in County Durham are primarily intended to support B class uses, including offices, research and development, general industrial activity and storage or distribution. These sites play an important strategic role in maintaining a supply of land for industrial, manufacturing, logistics and wider economic activities that are essential to the county's long-term growth. Allowing non B-class uses, such as retail, leisure, residential or other forms of commercial development, can, in some circumstances, help bring forward underused sites, contribute to regeneration objectives, or support complementary services for nearby businesses. However, such uses can also erode the availability of suitable land for core employment sectors, undermine the functioning of established industrial areas, or introduce sensitive uses that conflict with existing operations. We are therefore keen to explore the extent to which flexibility should be built into future policies, while ensuring that the county retains a robust portfolio of employment land that can meet identified needs. This may include considering criteria based approaches to assess proposals for non-B uses, ensuring any exceptions are justified, support wider plan objectives, and do

not compromise the strategic role of employment allocations across County Durham.

Question 30: To what extent should the Local Plan allow other types of development on employment land (for example, to support regeneration or bring forward unused sites)?

Question 30a: What safeguards are needed to make sure enough land is kept for jobs and businesses?

Modern economy

88 As County Durham plans for long-term economic growth, an important consideration is the role and purpose of allocated employment sites, this is also highlighted within the draft NPPF which recognises that particular regards should be paid to the needs of the modern economy. The current Local Plan identifies future land requirements for key employment sectors, such as offices, industrial operations and logistics and highlights the need to provide sites that can attract new employers, allow existing businesses to expand and respond to the evolving needs of the economy. At the same time, the council's wider economic strategy emphasises the creation of "new and expanded employment sites across the county" that are accessible and capable of supporting changing business requirements over time, rather than being limited to a single type of use. In this context, the new Local Plan could consider whether certain sites should be safeguarded for specific strategic uses, such as advanced manufacturing or large-footprint industries like gigafactories, or whether a more flexible approach would better support investment by allowing sites to adapt to market conditions. This balance between specialisation and flexibility is central to shaping a resilient portfolio of employment land that meets both current needs and future economic opportunities.

Question 31: Do you think the Local Plan should allocate some employment sites for specific uses (for example advanced manufacturing or large-scale facilities), or take a more flexible approach so sites can adapt to different types of jobs?

Question 31a: Please tell us more about your views.

89 County Durham is well-placed to support a broad range of modern and emerging economic sectors that align with national policy direction, regional strengths and future growth opportunities. Of particular note is the competitive advantage that County Durham has in terms of advanced logistics and supply chain operations, with strategic connectivity to the A1(M), rail, and ports. Other potential sectors include advanced manufacturing and engineering, Space and satellite applications and life sciences, bioscience & health innovation which are particularly evident at NETPark.

Question 32: Which types of jobs and industries should County Durham plan for in the future?

Question 32a: How should the Local Plan support these industries when allocating employment land?

Visitor Economy

- 90 The revised draft NPPF does not address tourism, whether attractions or accommodation, and thus it is vital that we develop locally specific policies to include within the Local Plan on visitor attractions and visitor accommodation.
- 91 County Durham's visitor economy is one of the county's strongest and fastest-growing sectors, driven by a mix of heritage, culture, landscape and major attractions. At its core is a diverse offer: Durham City's UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Durham Dales and North Pennines AONB, the revitalised coast, and nationally significant attractions like Beamish Museum, Locomotion, Raby Castle and The Auckland Project.
- 92 Recent data shows the sector has rebounded strongly from the pandemic, reaching record levels of visitor spend and employment. In 2024, Durham welcomed over 21 million visitors, generating around £1.38 billion in economic impact and supporting nearly 14,000 jobs. Growth has been fuelled by sustained investment in attractions, accommodation, and marketing, alongside the work of Visit County Durham as an accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnership.
- 93 It is therefore apparent that the visitor sector is an important contributor to the economy of County Durham and has a significant impact the sector has on jobs, investment and opportunities available to both residents and visitors alike.

Question 33: What opportunities and challenges should the Local Plan consider for the future of the visitor economy?

Question 33a: Please tell us more about the opportunities or challenges you think are most important.

Question 34: How can the Local Plan support high-quality visitor accommodation and sustainable tourism while protecting the countryside and sensitive locations?

Visitor accommodation:

- 94 Day visitors make up the majority of trips but staying visitors though a smaller proportion account for a disproportionately high share of spending, highlighting the importance of expanding accommodation and encouraging longer stays.
- 95 The county has 780 accommodation providers, with the majority of these located in the Durham Dales. 650 of these are self-catering, short term lets.
- 96 A recent emerging local issue is the gradual shift of some properties from holiday accommodation into permanent residential use, which is beginning to raise concerns about its wider implications. While the scale of change is still developing, early patterns suggest potential impacts on the availability of tourist lodging that supports local businesses, as well as the suitability of certain, often remote or less accessible, locations for full-time occupation. Even at this early

stage, the same core concerns remain relevant: the risk of weakening the visitor economy, increased pressure on infrastructure in unsustainable areas, and a growing mismatch between where permanent homes are created and where long-term growth is intended to be directed.

Question 35: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should include a policy to prevent the loss of housing to tourist accommodation where this would affect local housing needs?

Question 36: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should include a policy to prevent tourist accommodation from being changed into permanent housing where this would lead to a loss of viable tourist accommodation?

Ensuring the vitality of town centres

- 97 Town centres across the UK are experiencing significant change. Once focused on retail and civic activity, they now face pressures from online shopping, out-of-town retail parks and changing work patterns, all of which have reduced footfall and increased vacancy levels. These trends were accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening the challenges many centres face.
- 98 County Durham reflects this national picture. Many of its town centres have seen rising vacancy rates, the loss of major retailers and banks, and long-term empty units. In several places, this has been compounded by lower incomes, limited job opportunities and reduced spending power, which have weakened the traditional retail offer and contributed to an over-reliance on lower-value uses.
- 99 Some centres, however, have adapted more successfully. Those with strong cultural and environmental appeal, a mix of retail and hospitality, and a high proportion of independent businesses have remained more resilient. Their multifunctional spaces support leisure, culture and social interaction, helping them continue to attract visitors.
- 100 The move away from retail-dominated high streets towards more inclusive, flexible and sustainable places provides an opportunity for County Durham's town centres to evolve. By responding to the needs and aspirations of their communities, they can develop into vibrant, multifunctional hubs that support economic, social and cultural life.

Town Centre Strategies

- 101 The council are currently replacing its traditional town Masterplans with Strategic Place Plans (SPPs) to shape long-term visions tailored to each community. SPPs are designed through extensive public engagement, including street outreach, workshops, drop-in sessions, and online surveys, to build shared spatial, economic, and investment strategies shaped by residents, businesses, and stakeholders. These plans aim to catalyse regeneration by securing new jobs, infrastructure improvements, and public realm enhancements that address local strengths, challenges, and ambitions. Work is already underway in towns such as Durham City, Spennymoor, Newton Aycliffe, Shildon, with further rollouts planned across other areas through 2026, all aligned with the council's Economic Strategy to foster vibrant, accessible, and economically resilient town centres. The draft NPPF identifies that future policies should be informed by a strategy for town centres and the SPPs create a potential to link these strategies to the policies within the new Plan.

Question 37: Do you agree or disagree that the Durham Strategic Place Plans provide the right foundation for shaping town centre policies in the new Local Plan?

Retail Hierarchy

102 The current Local Plan (Policy 9) sets out a structured hierarchy of centres to guide retail, commercial and town-centre uses to the most sustainable locations. It identifies:

- Durham City and Bishop Auckland as the Sub-Regional Centres
- A tier of larger town centres Barnard Castle, Chester-le-Street, Consett, Crook, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Stanley
- Smaller town centres Ferryhill, Shildon
- District centres Arncliffe Centre, (Durham City), Sherburn Road/Dragonville, Durham City
- Local centres at the lowest tier Annfield Plain, Bearpark, Blackhall, Bowburn, Brandon, Burnopfield, Chilton, Coundon, Coxhoe, Dipton, Easington Colliery, Esh Winning, Fencehouses, Fishburn, Framwellgate Moor, Great Lumley, Horden, Lanchester, Langley Moor, Langley Park, Leadgate, Middleton-in-Teesdale, Murton, Pelton, Sacriston, Sedgefield, Sherburn Village, Shotley Bridge, Shotton, South Moor, Stanhope, Tow Law, Trimdon Grange, Trimdon Village, Ushaw Moor, West Auckland, West Cornforth, Wheatley Hill, Willington, Wingate, Wolsingham

103 This hierarchy supports vitality and viability, directs growth to accessible locations, and helps resist out-of-centre proposals that could undermine established centres. The draft NPPF confirms that Local Plans should continue to define such hierarchies.

Question 38: Do you think the current town centre hierarchy should be changed?

Question 38a: If yes, what changes are needed to better reflect shopping patterns, town-centre roles and future development priorities?

Meeting needs

104 The draft NPPF identifies the need to allocate a range of suitable sites in town centres to meet the scale and type of main town centre uses needed over the plan period. The council are currently carrying out a Retail and Town Centre Study which will provide detailed assessments of shopping patterns, retail capacity, and the performance of individual centres across the county. Alongside this the council surveys all individual centres on an annual basis to understand vacancy rates and the type of businesses occupying space within our town centres. This will provide an essential part of the evidence base for determining where new retail development may be needed or justified.

Question 39: What do you see as the key retail and town centre needs in County Durham? (for example a wider range of shops and services, improved public spaces, better transport access, support for independent businesses, or reducing vacancies)

Question 39a: How should the new Local Plan respond to these needs?

Town centre boundaries

- 105 Defining town centre boundaries in the Local Plan is essential to ensuring that planning policies are applied consistently and support the vitality and viability of each centre. A clearly defined boundary helps identify the area where retail, commercial, leisure, and community uses are concentrated, and where town-centre-first policies should apply. It also distinguishes the core trading area from surrounding neighbourhoods, providing clarity for decision-making on issues such as change of use, new development, public realm improvements, and investment priorities. Setting appropriate boundaries allows the Local Plan to reflect how people actually use the centre, respond to changes in shopping and leisure patterns, and ensure that future development supports a coherent, attractive and sustainable town centre environment.

Question 40: Do the current town centre boundaries match how people actually use each centre today, and if not, what changes would should be made?

Retail impact threshold

- 106 Retail impact thresholds can play an important role in managing where new retail development should occur in County Durham, particularly as part of preparing a new Local Plan. National planning guidance requires impact assessments for out-of-centre retail proposals above 2,500 sq m unless local policy sets a lower. It therefore recognises that a Local Plan can, where appropriate set a locally defined floorspace threshold for development proposals outside town centres, above which an impact assessment would be required, Within County Durham the current Local Plan sets a range of thresholds ranging from 1,500sqm to 400sqm dependent on the nature and type of retailing and also the type and size of centre.

Question 41: Do you think the Local Plan should set a local retail impact threshold below the national default of 2,500 sq m?

Question 41a: If yes, what threshold would be appropriate?

Balanced Town Centres

- 107 A balanced mix of uses is essential to a successful town centre. Within some of our centres we have seen a heavy concentration of certain types of uses. Unhealthy uses on high streets refer to clusters of businesses and amenities that negatively impact public health and well-being.
- 108 The draft NPPF provides a policy approach to restricting hot food takeaways within proximity of a school. This reflects a similar approach to the within the current Local Plan, however this policy also seeks to minimise the impacts of an over-concentration of takeaways within town centres, recognising evidence of hot food takeaways and the impact on the overall mix of uses, particularly where they displace a broader retail offer needed to support a vibrant daytime and evening economy. An excessive number of takeaways may also reduce footfall

diversity, as these premises typically generate activity at limited times of day, often skewed toward the evening, rather than supporting consistent, all day use patterns that strengthen vitality. All of this can have a negative impact on the vitality of our town centres as well as obesity levels of the local population.

Question 42: Do you think the Local Plan should include a policy to limit the number or concentration of hot food takeaways in town centres?

Question 42a: If yes, what types of restrictions should be considered?

Supporting high quality communications

- 109 The draft NPPF provides clear and comprehensive national guidance on supporting the expansion and upgrading of high-quality digital communications infrastructure, including next-generation mobile technology and full-fibre broadband. It sets out expectations for how such infrastructure should be delivered, upgraded over time, and sensitively integrated into the built and natural environment. Given this strong national framework, and the Government's stated intention to secure nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and widespread standalone 5G coverage, it is therefore proposed that the new Local Plan will rely on these national policies rather than duplicate them.

Question 43: How should the Local Plan approach policies on communications infrastructure (such as broadband and mobile networks)?

Question 43a: If you think local policies are needed, what should they cover?

Securing clean energy and water

- 110 New development increases demand on electricity networks, water supply, drainage and wastewater systems. As part of preparing the new Local Plan, the council will work closely with utility providers, including Northumbrian Water and Northern Powergrid, to assess the capacity of existing infrastructure to accommodate planned growth. Where necessary, the Local Plan will identify, safeguard or make provision for the infrastructure required to support growth. The Local Plan will also need to consider whether to introduce local water-efficiency standards to help reduce pressure on water resources and associated infrastructure.

Question 44: How should the Local Plan help make sure key infrastructure (such as electricity, water, and drainage) can support new development?

- 111 The Government's Clean Power Action Plan 2030 now sees both wind and solar as the key pillars of the UK's electricity system and sets an ambition nationally by 2030 for:
- 43-50 Gigawatt (GW) of offshore wind;
 - 27-29 GW of onshore wind;
 - 45-47 GW of solar capacity which could be potentially supplemented by 9-10 GW of rooftop solar to further boost deployment; and
 - flexible capacity, including 23-27 GW of battery capacity and 4-6 GW of long-duration energy storage.
- 112 The National Energy Supply Organisation (NESO) are coordinating the transformation of the UK electricity system and developing Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP). All RESPs will include a regional vision and pathways for future energy systems. A Transitional RESP for the North East and Yorkshire was published in early 2026 with the final RESP expected in late 2027. The council will need to take into account the RESP in developing the new Local Plan.
- 113 The draft NPPF requires local plans to identify areas which are suitable for renewable and low carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure, including for future re-powering and life extension. The current Local Plan identifies suitable areas for wind, subject to consideration of detailed matters. This was informed by an assessment of landscape sensitivity and consideration of a range of other environmental constraints. Since the current Local Plan was adopted, Durham has seen an increase in proposals for solar farms and Battery Energy Storage Systems. There is also future potential to utilise geothermal energy in parts of the County.

Question 45: What factors should be considered when identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy?

Question 45a: If your comments relate to a specific type of technology (e.g. solar, wind), please tell us more

Question 46: Do you agree or disagree that the new Local Plan include a policy on community led renewable and low carbon energy projects? (for example, local solar or wind schemes)

Question 46a: What should this policy include?

- 114 Heat networks supply heat from a central source and deliver it to a variety of different customers, using underground pipes, to public buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, universities and homes. A variety of technologies can generate the central source of heat, such as heat from rivers, reservoirs, deep geothermal heat and energy from waste plants. Heat networks can also harvest waste heat from sources such as power stations or industrial processes like data centres.
- 115 The Energy Act 2023 provides powers to introduce heat network zoning in England. All new buildings within a Heat Network Zone, unless granted an exemption, will be required to connect to a heat network if available, or be 'Heat Network ready', which means they must be designed in so that they can connect to a future heat network. The development of any Heat Networks in the County could take several years before becoming operational. However, given the plan period there is potential for heat networks to be developed across many of County Durham's major towns, and this could be facilitated and encouraged through the Local Plan. There are also opportunities for heat networks using geothermal heat from mine water at Horden and Seaham Garden Village which are being progressed.
- 116 The draft NPPF requires plans to consider identifying opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for co-locating potential heat customers and suppliers. Encouraging developments to meet their own energy needs will also reduce demand on the electricity grid.

Question 47: Do you agree or disagree that large scale developments be required to meet some of their own energy needs (for example through heat networks or on-site renewable energy)?

Question 47a: At what scale of development should this requirement apply?

Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

- 117 Minerals are essential raw materials for construction and industry, underpinning the delivery and maintenance of homes, infrastructure, public buildings, and commercial development. Mineral extraction also supports the local economy through employment and once restored, former workings can provide environmental and community benefits, including opportunities for nature recovery and biodiversity net gain.
- 118 County Durham contains a diverse range of minerals of both local and national importance, including several identified in the Government's Critical Minerals Strategy. The County supplies a significant share of the mineral products used across the North East and contributes to demand in neighbouring regions. It is a key regional source of aggregate minerals such as crushed rock and sand and gravel, as well as non-aggregate minerals including brick clay, supporting two of the three remaining brickworks in the North East, natural building stone, roofing stone, and agricultural lime. The County also holds nationally important reserves of industrial limestone, a scarce resource historically used in industries such as steel and glass production and contains nationally significant lithium resources used in battery manufacture.
- 119 Other minerals, including barytes, fluorspar, and silica sand, have been worked in the recent past. Surface-mined coal was formerly extracted for electricity generation, but this ceased in 2020. While the presence of commercially viable oil and gas reserves is uncertain, future exploration is increasingly unlikely given the Government's decision to stop issuing new onshore licences.
- 120 Further detail is available in the County Durham Minerals Technical Paper (December 2025) and the Local Aggregate Assessment (2024 Reserves and Sales Data) (January 2026).
- 121 The new Local Plan will focus only on strategic mineral policy matters and selected mineral resources. This is because the Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document (adopted July 2024) already contain detailed policies for specific mineral types including oil and gas, vein minerals, and lithium, alongside a full suite of development management policies. This is discussed further below.

Minerals to Be Planned For

- 122 National policy requires Local Plans to make provision for a sufficient supply of minerals of both national and local importance. Based on County Durham's geology, the history of mineral extraction, and foreseeable opportunities for future working, the minerals that need to be addressed through the new Local Plan are:

Minerals within the scope of the review

- Aggregates: magnesian limestone, carboniferous limestone, dolerite, and sand and gravel.

- Non-aggregate minerals: natural building and roofing stone, and agricultural lime (a by-product of magnesian and carboniferous limestone extraction).
- Industrial minerals: brick-making raw materials and industrial dolomite.

123 These minerals are central to construction, infrastructure delivery, and local industry, and the County remains a significant regional supplier.

Minerals outside the scope of the review

124 Several other minerals will not be addressed through the new Local Plan because they are already covered by the Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document (M&WDPD) or because there is no realistic prospect of future extraction.

- Minerals covered by existing M&WDPD policies
- Vein minerals (fluorspar, barytes)
- Metalliferous minerals (such as zinc)
- Critical and growth minerals (including lithium)
- Silica sand
- Oil and gas (no licensed areas exist in County Durham)

125 These are addressed through Policies M12–M14 of the M&WDPD and therefore fall outside the scope of the new Local Plan.

Minerals no longer of commercial relevance

- Lead and iron ores: historically worked in the North Pennines but extraction ended in the 1930s; remaining deposits are unlikely to be commercially viable.
- Ganister: formerly used for silica refractories; extraction has largely ceased nationally and is now limited to one quarry for building stone.
- Rare earth elements: British Geological Survey research indicates that known occurrences in the North Pennine Orefield are sub-economic.
- Coal (surface or deep mined): no longer considered a mineral of national or local importance, and national policy advises that Local Plans should not identify new sites for coal extraction.

126 Fireclay will not be addressed because it is geologically associated with surface-mined coal. National policy still encourages its recovery only where it arises incidentally as part of land stability works.

Question 48: Do you agree or disagree that these are the mineral types of national and local importance which are identified to be scoped in?

Question 49: Are there any other mineral types which are not listed or addressed and discounted above which should be considered?

Maintaining a Steady and Adequate Supply of Aggregates

- 127 National policy requires Local Plans to identify the level of aggregate provision needed in their area, drawing on the Local Aggregate Assessment (LAA). Plans must also ensure that minimum landbanks are maintained—at least 7 years for sand and gravel and 10 years for crushed rock, with longer periods where needed to reflect the range of aggregate types, market locations, and productive capacity. The council's LAA recommends planning for approximately:
- 5.3 million tonnes of carboniferous limestone
 - 54.5 million tonnes of magnesian limestone (including the amount needed to maintain a 10-year landbank at 2038)
 - 8.88 million tonnes of sand and gravel (including the amount needed to maintain a 7-year landbank at 2038)
- 128 These figures are based on a ten-year Plan period to 2038. If the new Local Plan extends beyond 2038, the scale of need will have to be updated in the next LAA, including whether landbanks should be maintained to the end of the extended Plan period. Some longer-term allocations and additional permissions on non-allocated sites are likely to be required.
- 129 The Local Plan will seek to identify and allocate sites and/or preferred areas to ensure a steady and adequate supply of aggregates and to maintain landbanks above the minimum levels set by national policy. Allocated sites will be safeguarded from non-minerals development.
- 130 Future provision will need to be met through extensions to existing quarries and, where necessary, new quarries. Decisions on allocations and planning applications will take account of:
- the level of need identified in the LAA
 - the LAA provision rate and the need to maintain productive capacity
 - the importance of avoiding over-reliance on a small number of sites, which could limit competition and threaten supply resilience
- 131 This approach aims to ensure that County Durham can continue to meet its share of regional and national aggregate demand in a sustainable and well planned way.

Question 50: Do you think maintaining a steady supply of aggregates will require allocating new sites or allowing extensions to existing quarries?

Question 51: Alongside meeting identified need and avoiding over-concentration of reserves, are there any other factors you think should be considered when planning for future aggregate supply?

Maintaining a steady and adequate supply of industrial minerals

- 132 National policy requires Local Plans to make provision for industrial minerals and to identify the level of supply needed to support manufacturing and other industrial processes. This includes working with neighbouring authorities where necessary, allocating sites or preferred areas, and ensuring that reserves, particularly brick clay from different sources, are maintained.
- 133 Using the council's Minerals Technical Paper and any further information from brick manufacturers, the Local Plan will aim to ensure that sufficient brick-making raw materials remain available to supply County Durham's brickworks. There may also be a need to consider provision for brickworks outside the County, subject to cooperation with other authorities and appropriate policy wording, consistent with the approach in Policy 52 of the current Plan.
- 134 The Local Plan will also seek to safeguard scarce reserves of high-grade industrial dolomite. Previous policy (Policy 57) protected areas at Thrislington and Hawthorn from sterilisation or lower-grade uses, reflecting their long-recognised national importance. Thrislington and the land to its east contain some of the few high-quality magnesian limestone (high-grade dolomite) deposits in Britain, historically used in the steel and chemical industries. Hawthorn Quarry also contains high-grade material suitable for colourless glass manufacture, although these deposits have been protected through legal agreement rather than policy.
- 135 Future demand for high-grade dolomite may change in the early 2030s, particularly if supplies at Whitwell Quarry in Derbyshire become exhausted and depending on the future configuration of the UK steel industry. Given this uncertainty, continued protection of the Thrislington deposits is considered essential to ensure they remain available for the uses to which they are best suited.
- 136 The justification for continued protection of the high-grade deposits at Hawthorn Quarry is less clear. These reserves were previously used for coloured glass manufacture at the Hartlepool Magnesia Plant, which closed in 2005. Views are therefore invited on whether safeguarding these deposits remains necessary.

Question 52: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should ensure sufficient brickmaking raw materials for County Durham's brickworks and safeguard scarce industrial mineral resources?

Question 53: Are there any other industrial minerals that you believe the new Local Plan should also address?

Question 54: Is there still a need to afford specific protection to the high-grade dolomite which is safeguarded at Hawthorn Quarry?

Where could new mineral working occur in the future?

- 137 National policy requires that, where further extraction is needed, landbanks for non-energy minerals should be maintained as far as practicable outside sensitive areas such as National Landscapes and designated heritage assets. At the same time, minerals can only be worked where they naturally occur, so any approach must balance protection with geological reality. The current County Durham Plan already provides locational guidance for different mineral types:
- Aggregates (Policy 50)
 - Brick-making raw materials (Policy 52)
 - Natural building and roofing stone (Policy 54)
 - Reopening relic stone quarries for heritage projects (Policy 55)
- 138 It remains important for the new Local Plan to give clear guidance on where future mineral working could take place, offering certainty for both the industry and local communities. This will include identifying areas where extraction may be acceptable in principle, while recognising that opportunities are shaped by the distribution of mineral resources.
- 139 The council is also assessing site proposals submitted through the 2025 call for sites. Most relate to extensions of existing quarries, although several new sites have also been put forward.

Question 55: How do you think the new Local Plan should balance resource availability with environmental and community considerations?

Question 56: The existing Policies 54 & 55 set out the current approach to maintaining a steady and adequate supply of natural building and roofing stone, including from relic quarries. Are any changes needed to how the new Local Plan should provide for future supply of these materials?

Secondary and Recycled Aggregates

- 140 The draft NPPF requires us to take account of the contribution that substitute or secondary and recycled materials and minerals waste can make to supply, in preference to the extraction of primary materials, whilst aiming to source minerals supplies indigenously.
- 141 No secondary aggregates are produced in County Durham but there are several fixed sites which recycle aggregates located at active mineral and waste sites including landfills.

Question 57: We plan to support recycled aggregate production at suitable places, such as active mineral sites, landfills, and permanent waste management facilities. Are there other locations we should consider, and is there anything else the Local Plan should take into account when planning for recycled aggregate production?

Safeguarding Mineral Resources

- 142 National policy requires the Local Plan to identify Mineral Safeguarding Areas (MSAs) on the Policies Map and to ensure that, where practical and environmentally feasible, minerals are extracted prior to non-mineral development taking place. It also makes clear that non-minerals development should not unnecessarily constrain the future working of minerals within an MSA.
- 143 Mineral Safeguarding Areas were first defined in the current Local Plan, using British Geological Survey guidance and resource information from both the BGS and the Mining Remediation Authority. The Policies Map also identifies many relic quarries recorded through Historic England's Strategic Stone Study, reflecting their past role in supplying natural building and roofing stone.
- 144 For the new Local Plan, the intention is to continue safeguarding areas underlain by magnesian limestone, carboniferous limestone, dolerite, all types of sand and gravel (including glacial, fluvial and basal Permian sand), silica sand, barytes, fluorspar, and relic building-stone sites. Surface-mined coal will no longer be safeguarded, as it is no longer a mineral of national or local importance and is not required in a decarbonising energy system.
- 145 The council is seeking views on how best to promote prior extraction on both allocated and non-allocated development sites. One option is to continue the current approach, which requires a Mineral Assessment to accompany relevant planning applications. Feedback is invited on whether this remains appropriate and on the types of non-minerals development that could reasonably be exempt from such an assessment.

Question 58: Should MSAs broadly follow existing boundaries, excluding coal?

Question 59: Should safeguarding be removed beneath built up areas?

Question 60: How should the Local Plan best encourage prior extraction on both allocated and non-allocated development sites, and should the requirement for a Mineral Assessment be retained as part of this approach?

Safeguarding Mineral and Related Infrastructure

- 146 National policy requires the Local Plan to identify existing, planned and potential sites that need safeguarding for the transport, handling and processing of minerals, the manufacture of concrete and concrete products, and the handling, processing and distribution of recycled, secondary and substitute aggregates. It also expects non-minerals development not to constrain the operation or future use of these sites.

- 147 The current Local Plan already safeguards active, inactive and dormant mineral sites, as well as mineral allocations, from encroachment by sensitive development. This is achieved through Minerals and Waste Safeguarding Zones, which help prevent incompatible uses from being approved close to mineral and waste infrastructure. Within these zones, most forms of non-exempt development must be supported by a Minerals and/or Waste Infrastructure Assessment (Appendix C3 of the current Plan) to demonstrate that the proposal would not compromise existing or future operations.
- 148 The intention is to continue this approach in the Local Plan, ensuring that key mineral-related infrastructure remains protected so that the County can maintain a resilient and efficient supply chain for both primary and recycled materials.

Question 61: Do you agree or disagree that, in addition to safeguarding sites used for the transport, handling and processing of minerals and recycled aggregates, the new Local Plan should also continue to safeguard existing active, inactive and dormant mineral sites, and mineral allocations, from encroachment by non-minerals development through the use of Minerals and Waste Safeguarding Zones and supporting Waste Infrastructure Assessments?

Question 61a: Which of the following should be safeguarded?

Question 61b: Please provide any further comments.

Other matters

- 149 The new Local Plan does not currently propose additional minerals development-management policies. National policy already provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the benefits and impacts of mineral development, including proposals involving peat, coal and onshore oil and gas, and for safeguarding mineral resources and related infrastructure. Alongside this, the County Durham Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document contains detailed development-management policies and site allocations that the council can continue to rely on, provided they remain consistent with the updated national policy once published.

Question 62: Are there any other key issues relating to planning for minerals that the Local Plan should address?

Waste Management

- 150 Waste is defined as any substance or object that the holder discards, intends to discard, or is required to discard. County Durham produces significant quantities of waste each year, and the Local Plan must ensure that sufficient capacity and suitable locations exist for new and enhanced waste management facilities. These facilities range from small-scale operations, such as pet crematoria, to major infrastructure such as energy-from-waste plants and landfill sites. Although often controversial, modern waste facilities are tightly regulated and can be successfully located on employment land or, where appropriate, on farms.
- 151 National policy is set out in the National Planning Policy for Waste (NPPW) and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance. These documents emphasise the need to move towards a circular economy, drive waste up the waste hierarchy, and ensure adequate provision for all waste streams. Other key national documents include the Waste Management Plan for England (2021) and the Resources and Waste Strategy (2018).
- 152 The County Durham Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document (M&WDPD) (2024) already contain detailed development management policies for waste. The Local Plan review will therefore focus on strategic waste planning matters, supported by the Waste Technical Paper (2026) and the forthcoming County Durham, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear Waste Needs Assessment (WNA).

Identifying Waste Needs

- 153 The NPPW requires plans to identify the need for facilities to manage all major waste streams, including:
- Municipal/household waste
 - Commercial and industrial waste
 - Construction, demolition and excavation waste
 - Agricultural waste
 - Hazardous waste
 - Low-level radioactive waste
 - Wastewater
- 154 Using the WNA, the Local Plan will:
- Identify how much waste is currently managed in County Durham
 - Assess existing waste management capacity
 - Forecast future waste arisings for each waste stream
 - Identify any capacity gaps requiring new or expanded facilities
- 155 The WNA may confirm the need for additional recovery and disposal capacity across the region. The Local Plan must also consider needs of more-than-local

significance and ensure that new facilities that support the waste hierarchy are not unnecessarily restricted.

Question 63: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should make provision for new waste management facilities where the WNA identifies a need, while ensuring that facilities which move waste up the hierarchy are not unduly constrained?

Question 63a: Please provide any further comments.

Policy Approach in the Current Local Plan

156 Existing policies (47, 48, 60 and 61) set out the current approach to sustainable waste management, safeguarding of sites, and the location of new facilities. The Local Plan review will consider how these policies can be strengthened while remaining consistent with national policy. Key elements expected to continue include:

- **Driving waste up the hierarchy** by supporting reuse, recycling and recovery, and resisting disposal unless a clear need is demonstrated.
- **Supporting net self-sufficiency**, recognising the integrated nature of the North East waste market and the role of private operators.
- **Responding to national reforms**, including Simpler Recycling, which may require additional local capacity.
- **Ensuring design policies require adequate bin storage, waste segregation and on-site reuse of materials.**

Question 64: Do you agree or disagree with this overall approach?

Question 64a: Are there additional considerations the Local Plan should address?

Locational Approach for New Waste Facilities

157 The NPPW requires local plans to identify suitable sites and areas for new or enhanced waste facilities, taking account of:

- The waste hierarchy
- Proximity to waste arisings
- Opportunities for co-location with complementary uses
- Use of previously developed land and employment sites
- The specific locational needs of certain waste technologies
- Opportunities to utilise heat from energy recovery facilities

158 The council has received site proposals through the 2025 Call for Sites, but these alone will not meet future needs. A combined approach is therefore required, involving:

- Allocating specific sites for new waste facilities
- Providing clear locational guidance on areas where waste uses are acceptable in principle

159 Policy 61 of the current Local Plan guides most new waste facilities to employment land and previously developed land in larger towns and villages, while allowing certain farm-based facilities where justified. Some refinements are proposed, including:

- Allowing incineration and chemical treatment on B2 employment land
- Removing unclear references to “small-scale” farm buildings
- Allowing alternative farm locations where justified and consistent with other policies

Question 65: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should allocate sites for new waste facilities and provide clear locational guidance for additional suitable areas?

Question 66: Do you agree or disagree that existing M&WDPD policies (W16–W18) remain sufficient for inert waste recovery and disposal, and do not need to be duplicated in new Local Plan?

Question 67: If a revised Policy 61 is retained, what should its scope include?

Safeguarding Waste Sites

160 The PPG requires waste planning authorities to safeguard important waste management sites and prevent incompatible development from compromising their operation. Policy 48 currently safeguards major sites such as landfill sites, HWRCs and large transfer stations, supported by Minerals and Waste Safeguarding Zones and Infrastructure Assessments.

Question 68: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should continue to safeguard key waste sites and prevent encroachment using Safeguarding Zones and Infrastructure Assessments?

Integrating Waste Management into New Development

161 To support sustainable waste management, the Local Plan will require:

- Greater use of recycled and secondary aggregates in construction
- Maximising on-site reuse of soils and materials
- Waste audits for developments generating significant waste
- Adequate bin storage and segregation facilities
- Layouts that allow access for waste collection vehicles

- Compliance with Simpler Recycling requirements

Question 69: Do you agree or disagree that new development should be required to incorporate sustainable waste design measures, including recycled materials, on-site reuse, waste audits and appropriate bin storage?

Question 69a: What further measures should be considered?

Development Management Policies

162 The Local Plan does not currently propose new waste development management policies, as these are already provided in the M&WDPD (Policies W16–W19). National policy (NPPW) will also continue to be a key material consideration.

Question 70 Do you agree or disagree with this approach?

Question 70a: Are there additional development management issues that should be addressed in the Local Plan?

Creating high quality, sustainable places

Making effective use of land

- 163 National policy now places stronger emphasis on making the most efficient use of land. Local plans must prioritise previously developed land, set minimum residential densities, and proactively identify land, particularly brownfield and publicly owned sites, that can help meet development needs. Local authorities are also expected to use tools such as land assembly and, where necessary, compulsory purchase to bring sites forward.
- 164 Draft national policy requires local plans to allocate small, medium and large redevelopment sites and to use design guides and design codes to show how land can be used more effectively. Minimum density standards must be set for town centres and highly connected locations. Where homes are within reasonable walking distance of a railway station, densities of at least 40 dwellings per hectare or 50 where the station is classed as “well-connected” should be achieved. Local plans may also set minimum densities elsewhere, reflecting local housing needs, market conditions, infrastructure capacity, design quality and local character.
- 165 The draft NPPF also requires local plans to optimise the use of allocated sites by ensuring appropriate densities and encouraging mixed-use development that delivers multiple benefits, including reduced need to travel and environmental gains. Land should not be reallocated for uses that have no reasonable prospect of coming forward within the plan period.
- 166 The existing Local Plan currently includes minimum density requirements within Policy 29, but these are lower than those now expected and include caveats relating to character, design and infrastructure. This policy will need updating to reflect new national standards and to consider where higher densities are appropriate, particularly in well-connected areas such as Durham City and Bishop Auckland, while balancing this with the sensitivity of historic environments.
- 167 The draft NPPF and the existing guidance on residential extensions, including the Residential Amenity Standards SPD and the County Durham Design Code SPD, remain important for managing day-to-day development and are expected to be retained in some form.
- 168 The following questions explore how the new Local Plan can make the most efficient and sustainable use of land across the area. They invite views on potential redevelopment opportunities, options for intensifying existing neighbourhoods, and whether higher or minimum density standards should be applied in well-connected locations or areas with capacity for growth. They also seek suggestions for sites that could deliver multiple benefits or may be better suited to alternative uses, as well as feedback on the role of local guidance for residential extensions.

Question 71: Do you know of any suitable small, medium and large sites for allocating which have the potential for redevelopment to secure a more effective use, such as through the re-use of service yards, car parks and other transport infrastructure, under-utilised retail sites and estate regeneration schemes?

Question 71a: If yes, what type of sites do these include?

Question 71b: Please provide details of any sites you are aware of (including location and any relevant information).

Question 72: Do you know of any opportunities to make more effective use of land in your area, including on small sites (for example infill development, redevelopment of low-density sites, or increasing building heights in appropriate locations)?

Question 72a: If yes, what types of opportunities are these?

Question 72b: Please provide details of any sites or opportunities you are aware of (including location and any relevant information).

Question 73: Should the new Local Plan set higher density standards for town centres and for locations that have a high level of connectivity, and if so, what locations would they apply to?

Question 74: Should minimum density standards be set for other parts of the local plan area, especially where there are opportunities for intensification?

Question 74a: If yes, what densities should be used and what locations would they apply to?

Question 75: Do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to retain local guidance that covers residential extensions?

Question 75a: If you agree, how should this guidance be included?

Protecting Green Belt land

- 169 Green Belt land within County Durham covers an area of approximately 8,726 hectares in the north and east of the County. The key aim of the County Durham Green Belt is to protect the historic setting of Durham City, manage the urban growth pressure from the north, and to help maintain separation between distinct towns and villages. Boundaries were drawn to help restrict further urban sprawl from Chester le-Street, Birtley, and other settlements close to the Tyne and Wear border.
- 170 The draft NPPF keeps the five core Green Belt purposes and requires Local Authorities to define and review Green Belt boundaries through their Local Plans, including assessing whether changes are needed to meet development needs and identifying possible “Grey Belt” areas. Changes to the Green Belt should only happen in exceptional circumstances, and only after all other options to meet development needs—like using brownfield land, increasing density, or finding sites outside the Green Belt—have been fully explored. If changes are needed, councils should first release previously developed land in the Green Belt, then Grey Belt, and only consider other Green Belt land as a last resort.
- 171 The draft NDMPs provide clear assessment criteria for both Green and Grey Belt proposals to be used in local decision making. The current Local Plan Policy 20 (Green Belt) states that proposals within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national policy. On this basis, while a Green Belt review is required, it is not considered that a dedicated Green Belt policy in the new Local Plan is necessary.
- 172 The draft NPPF does require Local Plans to set specific affordable housing requirements for major residential development either released from, or permitted within, the Green Belt. However, it is considered that this requirement would be addressed more effectively within an affordable housing policy, rather than a standalone Green Belt policy.

Question 76: Do you think the Local Plan should include a policy on Green Belt?

Question 76a: If yes, what should the policy include that is not included at a national level?

Achieving well-designed places

- 173 The council is committed to securing high-quality development that reflects strong architecture, urban design, sustainability and innovation. New proposals should positively respond to local character, enhance their surroundings and help raise design quality across the County. The proposed NPPF revisions reinforce this approach by requiring plans to set out a clear design and placemaking vision based on an understanding of local character. They also expect plans to identify where design guides, codes and masterplans are needed, including town centres, regeneration areas, key development sites and locations with potential for intensification
- 174 Two new national policies in the draft NPPF strengthen the role of design in planning. Draft Policy DP3 of the draft framework sets out the core principles for well-designed places, while draft Policy DP4 focuses on the design process expected of local planning authorities. The revised NPPF also requires councils to produce locally specific design policies or standards where more detail is needed beyond DP3, and to embed design review and other processes outlined in the Design and Placemaking PPG. This draft PPG emphasises that effective planning and placemaking rely on a strong understanding of local character and a clear, distinctive vision. To create a robust design framework, local planning authorities should:
- Evidence: Undertake spatial analysis of design issues
 - Vision and scope: Develop a locally distinctive vision and spatial strategy that is visual, place based and informed by evidence
 - Test and develop: Prepare design policies and apply them across authority-wide, area specific and site-specific scales These actions will ensure design quality is embedded in planning decisions from the outset.
- 175 Policy 29 of the current Local Plan provides a comprehensive framework for sustainable design, covering general design principles, landscape and public realm considerations, and building-related standards such as energy performance, internal space and density. It also includes requirements for extensions, alterations, signage, advertisements, street furniture and public art.
- 176 These requirements are supported by the Residential Amenity Standards SPD, the County Durham Design Code SPD (adopted in 2024), Settlement Character Studies, and the Shopfront Design Guide SPD, all of which provide detailed guidance on local character and design expectations.
- 177 The council operates an internal design review process, reinforced in Policy 29 through a traffic-light scoring system and supported by the County Durham Building for Life SPD. Major developments must also submit sustainability assessments and health impact assessments to demonstrate compliance.
- 178 Neighbourhood Plans across the County include locally specific design policies, with several supported by bespoke design guides. The Durham City

Neighbourhood Plan contains more detailed requirements, including masterplanning and a lower threshold for design review, reflecting the sensitivity of the World Heritage Site and Conservation Area.

- 179 Extensive masterplanning work has also been undertaken for larger settlements and strategic sites. Strategic Place Plans (SPPs) are being developed to update and extend this work, with a long-term focus on regenerating town centres, supporting sustainable local economies and enhancing public spaces.
- 180 The council already has a comprehensive set of policies, guidance and processes to secure high quality, sustainable design. However, the new Local Plan must align these with the revised national framework, which introduces a more standardised, rules-based approach. The draft NDMPs propose to replace many of the design requirements currently contained in Policy 29, although there is strong overlap between national and local expectations, particularly around context, character, distinctiveness, climate resilience, health and creating safe, accessible places.
- 181 Some elements of existing Policy 29 are not covered in the draft NDMPs and will need to be carried forward. These include the council's adoption of Nationally Described Space Standards, which remain necessary as some schemes still fall short of minimum bedroom and floor-area requirements. Policy 29 also contains valuable landscape design criteria that have helped raise the quality of new development and should be retained.
- 182 The design review process, supported by the County Durham Building for Life SPD, continues to be an effective tool for improving design quality. Although initial scores are often low, revised schemes typically improve, and very few developments with red scores are approved. The transition from Building for Life 12 to Building for a Healthy Life will need to be reflected in the new Local Plan. Retaining the existing threshold for design review (50+ dwellings or 1.5ha+) remains appropriate to focus resources on larger or sensitive schemes.
- 183 Health Impact Assessments, required for major developments under Policy 29, remain valuable for assessing how proposals support healthier communities and are likely to be retained, potentially within a broader "Promoting Healthy Communities" section.
- 184 Since adoption of the current Local Plan, energy related elements of Policy 29 have been overtaken by national changes. The Future Homes and Future Buildings Standards will set consistent national requirements for carbon reduction and energy performance, and government policy discourages local authorities from setting higher local energy efficiency standards. As a result, the new Plan will need to adjust its approach.
- 185 The Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) requirements in the current Local Plan for major non-residential development have proved challenging to implement. The certification process

does not align well with planning, and key credits must be secured at very early project stages, which are often missed. While some developments have achieved high BREEAM ratings, monitoring shows that chasing credits does not necessarily lead to better design or significantly improved energy performance. In practice, the “Very Good” rating overlaps with existing Building Regulations and other Local Plan policies (e.g., biodiversity, active travel), creating duplication. With the Future Buildings Standard expected to deliver zero-carbon-ready non-domestic buildings, the new Local Plan may refine or reduce reliance on BREEAM, potentially making it optional, adjusting thresholds, or targeting specific development types.

- 186 Major schemes are currently required to submit a Sustainability Checklist, which remains a useful tool for demonstrating compliance with sustainable design principles and supporting constructive dialogue during the planning process.
- 187 The sections of the existing Policy 29 relating to extensions, alterations, signage, advertisements, street furniture and public art remain relevant and effective. While no major changes are proposed, they may be reorganised depending on the structure of the new Local Plan and the draft NDMPS.
- 188 A key gap in national policy is the absence of explicit reference to residential amenity in the draft NDMPs. Given its importance for most planning applications, and the intention to revoke SPDs, the Local Plan will need to incorporate amenity guidance currently contained in the Residential Amenity Standards SPD, the Design Code and Building for Life SPDs. This will require careful drafting to ensure the guidance remains accessible, proportionate and effective within the new national framework
- 189 To help shape the approach to detailed design policy in the new Local Plan, we would welcome your views on whether certain elements of the current Policy 29 should continue to be included alongside the broader national design requirements.

Question 77: Do you agree or disagree that some detailed design requirements from existing Policy 29 should be retained in the new Local Plan, where these are not covered by the draft NPPF?

Question 77a: If you agree, which elements of Policy 29 should be retained or changed?

Promoting sustainable transport

- 190 The county has a variety of transport networks for different modes. Key vehicular transport corridors include the A1(M) for north to south travel; the A19 for east of the county travel; the A690 and A167 for east to west access across the county; and the A66 for journeys to Teesside and the Lake District. Rail corridors include the East Coast Main Line (ECML), the Stillington Line and the Durham Coast Line, as well as the historic Leamside Line. The County also has good links to Newcastle and Teesside Airport.
- 191 In addition to road and rail, the county has a wide network of active travel routes formed by the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). There are 11 plans for the county located in strategic locations: Bishop Auckland, Chester-Le-Street, Consett, Crook, Durham City, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Seaham, Spennymoor, Shildon and Stanley. The county also benefits from the Sustrans' National Cycle Network (NCN) and Public Rights of Way (PROW), with 2,200 miles of PROW managed by the council.
- 192 Bus corridors in the county include the A690, providing connections to Sunderland, and other key routes through to Durham City, such as the A167, A181 and B6288. There are 475 public transport suppliers in the county: 4,500 bus stops and one bus station, namely Durham City, with Bishop Auckland's currently being built.
- 193 Freight plays a pivotal role in the transportation of goods to the county, for businesses and residents alike. Freight transportation typically utilises the road and rail corridors, with some of the goods transported using the ports (Sunderland, Tyne and Blyth) dotted around the region.
- 194 County Durham also has parking and accessibility standards, which manage the demand for different types of transport, including cycle parking, and support development to make informed decisions regarding parking provision.
- 195 The draft NPPF and the proposed NDMPs set out policies that require development to be located where it is or can be sustainable and to use the DfT Connectivity Tool to determine the sustainability of a site. Street design, access and parking is another key aspect which aims to create well-designed places where transport is an integral consideration in the design of development. The draft NDMPs state that roadside facilities should be located where there is a need. Transport impacts, which generate a significant amount of movement, should be supported by key documents, such as transport statements, assessments and travel plans; and that marine ports, airports and other aviation facilities should include innovative methods to modernise, diversify and improve facilities, meet freight and logistics needs and have acceptable environmental impacts. Finally, public rights of way should be maintained and enhanced where available.
- 196 The Local Plan is therefore required by the draft NPPF to incorporate a vision-led approach to transport planning, aligning with national and regional policy and

creating better integration of travel modes, to support the objective of creating healthy, connected and inclusive places. The Local Plan is additionally required to set local parking standards for residential and non-residential development, which align with the transport vision and promote sustainable transport.

Question 78: Do you consider the current parking standards set out in the Parking and Accessibility SPD provide useful guidance that is applicable and relevant to County Durham?

Question 79: if no, what changes are required to the parking standards?

- 197 The current Local Plan safeguards the Leamside Line and the Bowburn Industrial Estate Access Road. The existing Local Plan does not permit development that would prevent the future development of the allocated and safeguarded transport routes and facilities.
- 198 The Local Plan will continue to safeguard the Leamside Line, due to its local, regional and national significance. The Leamside Line is a disused, 21-mile railway line which runs from Gateshead to County Durham, connecting with the ECML. Re-opening the Leamside Line would provide critical connections for both passenger and freight services, helping to drive the economy and connect residents to the region for employment, education and socialising. Potential stations in County Durham include West Rainton/Leamside, Belmont, a station to serve Shincliffe and Bowburn, before connecting to Ferryhill. It is a key priority for the North East Combined Authority, with funding secured from national government.

Question 80: Are there any transport routes that should be allocated or safeguarded in the Local Plan?

Question 80a: Please provide details of any routes (including location and any relevant information).

- 199 The draft NPPF identifies the opportunity for Local Plans to set thresholds for what constitutes a significant amount of movement arising from new development. This is to assist in locating development in sustainable locations (or locations that can be made sustainable) and to ensure that such development can be supported by relevant transport documents such as transport statements, transport assessments and travel plans, which can assess the sustainability of the location.

Question 81: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should define what level of development would create a 'significant' amount of movement?

Question 81a: What should be considered when setting this threshold?

Promoting healthy communities

- 200 Supporting healthy communities is a central priority for the new Local Plan. It will continue to address local health and wellbeing needs and help reduce health inequalities by shaping the wider determinants of health, including the quality of housing, access to sustainable transport, availability of healthy food, and the condition of the built and natural environment.
- 201 A key aim is to embed health and wellbeing considerations throughout the Local Plan so that places are designed to support healthier and safer lifestyles. This includes ensuring that communities are well connected to the infrastructure, facilities and services needed for active living, and that residents have access to high quality green spaces and natural environments that promote both physical and mental wellbeing.

Community Facilities

- 202 Community facilities and public service infrastructure are vital to the health, wellbeing, and social and economic life of County Durham's communities. Local amenities, such as shops, post offices, pubs, libraries, healthcare, schools, and community spaces, help sustain neighbourhoods, particularly in rural areas where provision is limited and the loss of a single facility can have a significant impact.
- 203 National planning policy places strong emphasis on ensuring development is supported by appropriate community and public service infrastructure. The draft NPPF requires proposals that bring significant numbers of new residents, workers, or visitors to be informed by an understanding of local needs and to secure the necessary infrastructure. It also defines 'community facilities' and 'public service infrastructure' and gives substantial weight to proposals that deliver or improve them. New expectations are also introduced for engaging communities in the design of play spaces.
- 204 The draft NPPF seeks to protect key community facilities, especially where they are the last of their type, by preventing their loss unless they are proven unviable or replaced with high-quality, accessible alternatives. This is intended to ensure continued access to essential local services.
- 205 The draft NPPF also directs local plans to identify opportunities to promote good health, prevent ill-health, and support social interaction, including through walkable neighbourhoods and mixed-use development. Local plans must be informed by an understanding of existing deficits in community facilities and public service infrastructure, as well as future needs arising from development and demographic change. Where appropriate, the new Local Plan will need to allocate land for new or improved facilities, drawing on evidence such as the County Durham Built Facilities Strategy.

Question 82 Are there any specific opportunities you would highlight for the development of community facilities and public service infrastructure?

Question 82a Please provide details of any opportunities (including location and any relevant information).

Outdoor Recreational Land and Green Space Provision

- 206 Green infrastructure is a critical component of sustainable place-making in County Durham, supporting a wide range of environmental, social, and economic functions. From parks and woodlands to green corridors and sports pitches, these assets contribute to biodiversity, climate resilience, active lifestyles, and community wellbeing.
- 207 The draft NPPF requires development plans to set local standards for the provision of different types of outdoor recreational land, including for play, sport, informal recreation and allotments, drawing upon relevant national standards, tailoring these as necessary to local circumstances. These standards help ensure new development is supported by appropriate, accessible and high-quality green spaces that meet the needs of local communities.
- 208 The draft NDMPs seek to protect existing open spaces, sports facilities, play areas and allotments by preventing their loss unless it can be clearly demonstrated that they are surplus to requirements, or where replacement provision of equal or better quality and accessibility is secured. They also support proposals that deliver alternative recreational or sports facilities where the overall benefits to the community outweigh the loss of the existing use.
- 209 Draft NDMPs set out that where the development plan does not set out locally-specific standards for green space provision all proposals should use relevant national standards and best practice to identify improvements which should be provided or contributed towards. This highlights the importance of maintaining an up-to-date and locally tailored evidence base for the new Local Plan.
- 210 The existing Open Space Needs Assessment (OSNA) provides a robust evidence base for understanding the quantity, quality, and accessibility of open space across the county. It identifies deficiencies in provision and sets local standards to guide future investment and planning decisions. A new OSNA is in preparation and will provide an updated assessment of open space needs across County Durham (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision.
- 211 An updated Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) has also been commissioned and will provide a clear, evidence-based framework for assessing current and future needs for sports pitches, guiding investment, protection, and enhancement of facilities to support community participation and sporting development.

- 212 Both of these pieces of evidence will ensure that planning policies continue to be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities.

Question 83: Do you consider the policies, which requires new development to contribute to provision of open space should be carried forward within the new Local Plan?

Question 83a: Please tell us more about your views:

Question 84: Do you have any further views on how the new Plan should plan for, protect, or enhance recreational land, open space, sports provision, and green infrastructure across the County?

Hot food takeaways and access to healthy food

- 213 Enabling healthy weight for all is a key priority within the council's Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JLHWS) 2023–28. The new Local Plan will continue to support this ambition by shaping environments that promote healthier lifestyles and help reduce health inequalities across County Durham.
- 214 Reducing levels of obesity remains a significant challenge. Local data shows that the proportion of Reception and Year 6 children living with overweight (including obesity) has increased over the last five years (Durham Insight), reflecting wider national trends. Childhood obesity is recognised as a major public health issue, influenced not only by individual behaviour but also by the environments in which children live, learn and socialise.
- 215 Research consistently shows that the availability and concentration of hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets can influence dietary choices, particularly for children and young people. Easy access to calorie dense, nutrient poor foods, especially near schools or in areas with existing poor health outcomes, can contribute to unhealthy eating patterns and limit opportunities for healthier choices. This highlights the importance of considering how planning policy can help shape healthier food environments.
- 216 The current Local Plan (Policy 30) restricts new hot food takeaways within 400m of schools and colleges outside designated centres, helping to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food options during the school day. It also includes measures to manage concentrations of takeaways where these may be contributing to poor health outcomes.
- 217 The draft NPPF and NDMPs reinforce this approach by requiring refusal of hot food takeaway proposals within reasonable walking distance of schools and other places where children and young people congregate, unless located within a designated town centre. The draft NDMPs also allow restrictions where there is evidence that concentrations of takeaways are contributing to adverse health impacts.

- 218 While the new Local Plan cannot repeat national policy, it can consider whether additional local measures are needed to address specific health issues in County Durham. Matters relating to the mix of uses and the role of hot food takeaways within town centres are addressed in the previous chapter, Ensuring the vitality of town centres. This section focuses specifically on the health implications of takeaway provision and access to healthy food.

Question 85: Do you think the Local Plan should include additional or stronger local policies on the location of hot food takeaways and fast food outlets, beyond national policy?

Question 85a: If yes, what specific issues or approaches should be considered?

Ensuring people can easily access healthy food, while limiting exposure to unhealthy options, supports healthier food choices and helps reduce inequalities linked to food provision. Introducing community growing spaces can offer wider health and wellbeing benefits and can strengthen community cohesion by creating shared spaces for social interaction.

Question 86: Do you think the Local Plan should include policy to encourage community growing spaces (such as allotments or community gardens) as part of larger housing developments?

Question 86a: If yes, what measures should be included?

Question 87: What other planning measures should the new Local Plan consider to help create healthier food environments?

Health Impact Assessments

- 219 Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) are required under Policy 29 (Sustainable Design) of the current Local Plan for large-scale developments (100+ dwellings or employment sites over 10ha), to ensure planning applications and decisions consider both direct and indirect health impacts. A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a structured, solution-focused and action-orientated approach to maximising the positive and minimising the negative impacts of development. A Developer Guidance Document supports HIA submissions. HIAs are also used to facilitate and promote further collaboration between planning and public health teams. The new Plan will look to retain this approach to HIA requirements.
- 220 As part of preparing the new Local Plan, the council will consider whether the HIA requirement should continue to sit within design policy or whether it would be more appropriately located within any other health-focused policy chapter.

Pollution, public protection and security

- 221 The draft NPPF requires Local Plans to ensure that new development is appropriate for its location, that risks from pollution and other hazards are properly considered, and that sufficient provision is made for development needed to maintain public safety and security. The overall aim is for the planning system to help avoid and mitigate risks from natural and man-made hazards, minimise pollution, and support the creation of clean, safe and healthy places.
- 222 Certain areas of the County are affected by natural and man-made constraints that may influence how land is allocated and developed. New development should take opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land, while ensuring that future occupiers are not exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution, either individually or cumulatively. It will also be important to consider the needs of more vulnerable groups, such as children and older people, and to ensure that new development does not place unreasonable restrictions on existing businesses, community facilities, public services or defence and security operations.
- 223 Ground conditions will be a key consideration. Large parts of the County fall within the Coalfield Development High Risk Area, where land stability issues and mine gas require a Coal Mining Risk Assessment. Other areas fall within the Low Risk Area, where the Mining Remediation Authority's standing advice applies. Potential contamination arising from historic industrial activity will also need to be addressed through planning applications and appropriate assessments.
- 224 Natural hazards must also be taken into account. Areas at risk of fluvial or surface-water flooding will need to be considered carefully through site allocations and planning applications, applying the sequential and exception tests where required. Climate change is expected to increase winter rainfall, surface-water flooding and periods of drought, which may interact with existing mine water and contaminated land, including the mobilisation of pollutants.
- 225 The Local Plan must also consider wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil, noise and light pollution and support compliance with national and local environmental objectives. This may include ensuring that new development:
- Contributes to the County Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
 - Addresses nutrient neutrality requirements in the River Tees catchment, where the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast SPA/Ramsar site is in unfavourable condition due to nutrient enrichment.
 - Supports Water Framework Directive objectives for surface and groundwater bodies, including in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones.
 - Improves, or does not worsen, air quality. Parts of Durham City exceed national nitrogen dioxide limits and are designated as an Air Quality Management Area.

- Prevents unnecessary light pollution, which can affect amenity, heritage settings, dark skies (including in the North Pennines National Landscape) and wildlife.
- 226 There are also areas where man-made constraints restrict development. These include Major Hazard Sites and Pipelines, which have consultation zones requiring engagement with the Health and Safety Executive. The County contains two airfields—Fishburn Airfield and Shotton Airfield (home to the Peterlee Parachute Club)—where safeguarded areas protect flight paths and landing zones. Safeguarded areas associated with Newcastle and Durham Tees Valley Airports and the High Moorsley Meteorological Radar Station also extend into the County. One Ministry of Defence site is present, surrounded by a 40-metre buffer zone.
- 227 Finally, the Local Plan will need to consider whether land should be allocated for development required to maintain public safety and security. Ensuring that new development helps to design out crime and terrorism will remain an important consideration.

Question 88 Have we identified above, all the natural and man-made hazards and other land use constraints that could affect development in County Durham?

Question 88a: If no, please provide details of any additional hazards, constraints, or evidence on climate change impacts.

Question 89: Which local environmental targets and objectives do we need to address through the new Local Plan?

Question 90: What do you consider we should do to maintain public safety and security?

Conserving and enhancing the environment

Managing flood risk and coastal change

- 228 The new Local Plan will steer development away from areas of flood risk, ensuring development is safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere in accordance with the national policy.
- 229 The draft NPPF and NDMPs set out detailed policies on managing flood risk, including requirements for assessing flood risk and applying the sequential test, which prioritises directing development to areas of lowest risk, and for when the Exception Test isn't needed. They also introduce new National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems, requiring developments to manage surface water runoff through naturalistic, multifunctional drainage solutions that reduce flood risk, enhance water quality, and support biodiversity. It is therefore considered a general flood risk policy may no longer be needed in the new Local Plan. Any requirements for specific sites would still be addressed in site allocations policy.

Question: 91 Do you consider the Local Plan should include a local policy on flood risk?

Question 91a: If yes, what should it contain?

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

- 230 County Durham's natural environment is one of its most important assets. It encompasses the North Pennines National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), the Durham Heritage Coast, and locally designated Areas of Higher Landscape Value (AHLV). The county's ecological resource includes not only internationally designated sites, but also a rich network of national and local sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Nature Reserves, Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites, alongside numerous other features of nature conservation value.
- 231 The draft NDMPs set out policies to conserve and enhance the natural environment. Development is required to follow the mitigation hierarchy, meaning that harm to biodiversity should first be avoided—through selecting sites with the least environmental impact—then mitigated, and only as a last resort compensated for. Developments are also to incorporate green infrastructure and nature-based solutions to deliver multiple benefits.
- 232 The draft NPPF requires local plans to identify opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, and habitats and species of principal importance. In doing so, the new Local Plan will need to draw on evidence from the County Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy—which identifies priorities and measures for nature recovery, the County Durham Landscape Character Assessment, County Durham Landscape Strategy and the North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan. In addition, the council may prepare green infrastructure strategies for areas experiencing growth, setting

out how development can contribute to creating well connected green infrastructure that delivers multiple benefits.

Question 92: Is there any additional evidence that should be considered in identifying opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of County Durham's natural environment?

Question 93: Are there any specific opportunities you would highlight for development to support the conservation, enhancement and recovery of County Durham's natural environment?

Landscape

- 233 The County Durham landscape is one of enormous contrast and diversity, and is valued for its variety, complexity and its intrinsic character and natural beauty. In addition, the coastline of County Durham is a unique area which is significant due to its landscape, biodiversity, historic and cultural identity, and its geological and archaeological value.
- 234 The draft NPPF sets out policies which aim to safeguard the most important landscapes, including Protected Landscapes (such as the North Pennines National Landscape), and places substantial weight on the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of these areas. In addition, the draft NDMP state that development proposals in defined Heritage Coast areas should be consistent with the special character of the area and the importance of its conservation. However, national policy is silent on locally designated Areas of High Landscape Value (AHLV) and Wider Coastal Zones.
- 235 Locally designated AHLVs within County Durham cover approximately 31.9% of the county, and there is an existing identified Wider Coastal Zone defined around the County's coastline, which extends beyond the defined boundary of the Heritage Coast. The wider Coastal Zone has been defined as the area of land between the mean low water mark on the seaward side and the coastal railway line, from the county boundary with Hartlepool to Hawthorn Junction south of Dawdon. The existing Local Plan currently gives the same level of policy protection to the Heritage Coast and the Wider Coastal Zone; and also includes a policy criteria specifically in relation to AHLVs.
- 236 As the new draft NPPF focusses more specially on Heritage Coasts and Protected Landscapes, specific policies on locally designated AHLVs and the Wider Coastal Zone may therefore still be required in the new Local Plan.

Question 94: Do you think the Local Plan should include a policy on Areas of Higher Landscape Value (AHLVs) and/or the Wider Coastal Zone?

Question 94a: If yes, what should these policies include?

Question 95: Do you think any additional local policy is needed in the Local Plan to support national policies (NDMPs) for National Landscapes?

Question 95a: If yes, what should this additional local policy cover?

Biodiversity net gain

- 237 Through the Environment Act the government introduced a legal requirement for biodiversity net gain (BNG) in England. This requires new developments, unless exempt, to leave habitat for wildlife in a better state than it was before development. Whether a BNG has been delivered is calculated by the 'statutory biodiversity metric', which measures wildlife habitats as 'biodiversity units'. A developer must demonstrate that they have delivered a minimum 10% BNG by creating more biodiversity units than existed before the development, either on the site of development or at an off-site location.
- 238 The draft NPPF sets out that local plans should only set local standards for BNG which are in excess of the statutory net gain requirement where this is for specific site allocations, and is fully justified and deliverable. The potential for sites to deliver more than the minimum 10% would therefore need to be assessed at a site specific level.
- 239 The government has recently consulted on introducing additional exemptions to mandatory BNG. These proposals, together with revised wording in the draft NPPF, mean that in the absence of a local policy requirement, many developments may no longer be required to deliver net gains for biodiversity—or even achieve no net loss. Taken together, these changes could result in cumulative adverse impacts on biodiversity across the county.

Question 96: Do you agree or disagree that a policy is needed to ensure developments deliver no net loss in biodiversity?

Question 96a: Please tell us why you feel this way.

Trees and hedgerows

- 240 The draft NDMPs include policies to protect ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees, require tree planting as part of new development, and seek the conservation and enhancement of established trees and hedgerows. However, there are detailed matters that the draft NDMPs do not address—for example, ensuring appropriate replacement planting where trees are lost. In addition, the council's Trees, Woodlands and Hedges SPD, which includes detailed guidance to ensure that trees, woodlands and hedges are fully considered as part of the planning process, will cease to apply once the new Local Plan is adopted.

Question 97: Do you agree or disagree that a policy on trees and hedgerows?

Question 97a: If yes, what should this policy include?

Soil conservation and management

- 241 Soil is a fundamental and finite resource that performs many important functions, including providing the essential foundation for sustainable food production and supporting biodiversity. Given the rural character of much of the county and the importance of the agricultural sector, it is particularly important that soil resources are managed and conserved in a viable condition. Whilst the draft NDMP includes policy on the protection of agricultural land it does not specifically address soil.

Question 98: Do you agree or disagree that a policy on soil conservation and management is needed in the new Local Plan?

Question 98a: If yes, what should this policy include?

Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

- 242 County Durham has an exceptional historic legacy, ranging from the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site to a wide variety of heritage assets of international, national and local significance. These assets are recorded within the Historic Environment Record, which captures all elements of the historic environment shaped by human activity, including archaeology.
- 243 The current Local Plan has guided change in the historic environment through three dedicated policies covering the historic environment, the World Heritage Site, and the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Seven neighbourhood plans also identify locally important heritage assets, recognised as non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs). NDHAs include buildings, sites, places, areas or landscapes of local historic, architectural or cultural value that do not meet national listing criteria but are still material to planning decisions.
- 244 The council maintains a Local List of the most significant NDHAs, although this currently covers only some settlements. Assets are added through a consistent process set out in supplementary planning guidance. Settlement Character Studies further support understanding of local distinctiveness by analysing settlement form, evolution and character.
- 245 There are 93 conservation areas across the county, 36 of which have adopted character appraisals. Three have management plans in place, with further plans under preparation. A review of the Durham City Conservation Area is underway, supported by a new Management Plan. The World Heritage Site will also benefit from a new Setting Study, complementing the updated Management Plan (to 2035) and helping to sustain and enhance its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and setting.
- 246 The draft NPPF recognises heritage assets as an irreplaceable resource and requires their conservation in a manner proportionate to their significance. Under the draft NDMPs, Local Plans must set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including assets most at risk. The NDMPs also require policies to preserve and enhance the OUV of World Heritage Sites and to identify opportunities for enhancement within allocations. The NDMPs addresses archaeology but does not include thresholds or standards for survey work, which are currently provided in local policy
- 247 The current Policy 44 of the Local Plan aligns closely with the draft NPPF but includes detailed archaeological survey requirements that remain valuable for development management and are not replicated in national policy. The existing Local Plan Policy 46, relating to the Stockton and Darlington Railway, is now less essential as the cross-authority project work it supported is nearing completion, and national policy—alongside the proposed conservation area designation—should provide sufficient coverage.

- 248 Current Policy 45 of the Local Plan has been effective in sustaining the World Heritage Site, and new evidence, including the Setting Study, provides an opportunity to refine the policy to focus more explicitly on OUV.
- 249 With the proposed removal of SPDs from the planning system, decisions will be needed on how best to incorporate or re-present existing guidance on the historic environment within the new Local Plan.

Question 99: Do you agree or disagree that some detailed design requirements from existing Policy 44, for example in relation to archaeological surveys, should be retained in the new Local Plan, where these are not covered by the draft NPPF?

Question 99a: Please provide details of any requirements you think should or should not be carried forward:

Question 100: Do you agree or disagree that the Local Plan should take a positive approach to conserving and enhancing the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Site, in line with national policy?

Question 100a: Please tell us more about your views, including any elements that should or should not be included.

Glossary of Terms

Affordable housing: Refers to housing provided at a cost below full market value to meet the needs of people whose incomes are insufficient to access market housing. It typically includes social rent, affordable rent and intermediate tenures, and is secured through planning policies to ensure a mix of homes and support inclusive, sustainable communities.

Aggregate: Sand, gravel, crushed rock and other bulk materials, used by the construction industry.

Air Quality Management Areas: Areas designated by local authorities because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives by the relevant deadlines.

Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV): These are locally designated area recognised for its distinctive landscape character and visual quality. While not carrying the same national status as designations such as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, AHLVs are afforded protection through local planning policies to conserve and enhance their landscape significance.

Article 4 Direction: A planning tool used by local authorities to remove certain permitted development rights, requiring planning permission for developments that would otherwise not need it.

Ancient or veteran tree: A tree which, because of its great age, size or condition is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage.

Ancient woodland: An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): This is an approach to development that requires habitats for wildlife to be left in a measurably better state than before development took place. It is typically secured through the planning process, requiring developers to achieve a minimum increase in biodiversity value, either on-site, off-site or through biodiversity credits, to support the enhancement of the natural environment.

Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM): A sustainability assessment method that rates the environmental performance of buildings from design through operation.

Brownfield Site/Land: Previously developed land that has been used in the past, often for industrial or commercial purposes. Such sites may be vacant or derelict and can require remediation before being suitable for redevelopment.

Conservation Areas: Areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character, appearance or setting of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Crushed rock: Hard types of rock, which have been quarried, fragmented and graded for use as aggregate.

Designated heritage asset: A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation.

Development management: The process whereby a local planning authority manages, shapes, and considers the merits of a planning application and whether it should be given permission with regard to the local plan.

Employment Land Review (ELR): The study will review current employment land supply and look to identify the appropriate type, quantity and location of employment land which will be capable of accommodating the economic growth trajectories.

Evidence base: The information and data gathered by local authorities to justify the “soundness” of the policy approach set out in Local Plans, including physical, economic, and social characteristics of an area.

Green Belt: refers to areas of land designated to remain largely open and undeveloped in order to prevent urban sprawl, safeguard the countryside, preserve the setting of towns and cities, and promote sustainable patterns of development. Development within the Green Belt is strictly controlled, with a presumption against inappropriate development except in very special circumstances.

Greenfield Site/Land: Undeveloped land that has not been built on, typically used for agriculture, forestry, or open space.

Grey Belt: refers to previously developed or lower-quality land within the Green Belt that may have potential for redevelopment while still maintaining overall Green Belt purposes. It is often used to describe sites that are less environmentally or visually sensitive and therefore may be considered more suitable for carefully managed development in the context of meeting housing and infrastructure needs.

Hazardous waste: Material or substances potentially harmful to health or the environment, including oils and asbestos, batteries, and fluorescent lighting.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE): This is the UK’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. It is responsible for enforcing relevant legislation, providing guidance, and ensuring that risks to workers and the public are properly managed across a wide range of industries, including in the construction and development sectors.

Heritage Coast: This is a nationally recognised stretch of coastline defined for its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational value. Although not a statutory planning designation, Heritage Coasts are protected through planning policies to

conserve their landscape, wildlife, and historic features while supporting sustainable tourism and access to the coast.

House in Multiple Occupation (HMO): A House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is defined as a building or flat occupied by three or more people forming two or more households who share basic amenities such as a bathroom, toilet or kitchen.

Inert waste: Waste that does not cause contamination or danger to human health by decomposing or reacting physically, chemically or biologically (e.g. Rubble, glass, concrete).

Listed building: A building of special architectural or historic interest. Graded I (highest quality), II* or II. Listing includes the interior as well as the exterior of the building and includes any buildings or permanent structures within its curtilage which have formed part of the land since before 1 July 1948. Historic England is responsible for designating buildings for listing in England.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS): This is a plan prepared at a local level to identify priorities and opportunities for conserving and enhancing biodiversity. It maps important habitats and proposes actions to support nature recovery, helping to guide planning decisions, including the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain and wider environmental improvements.

Local Aggregate Assessment: An annual assessment of the demand for and supply of aggregates in a mineral planning authority's area. A mineral planning authority must either prepare a Local Aggregate Assessment on its own or jointly with one or more other minerals planning authority if it wishes.

Low Level Radioactive Waste: Waste produced by activities such as clinical and laboratory testing.

M4(2) – Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings: M4(2) is a Building Regulations standard requiring new homes to be designed to be accessible and adaptable for a wide range of occupants, including older people and those with mobility impairments. Homes must include features that support easier access and future adaptation.

M4(3) – Wheelchair User Dwellings: M4(3) is a higher Building Regulations standard for homes that are fully wheelchair accessible or easily adaptable for wheelchair users. It ensures sufficient space, layout, and design features to enable independent living for occupants who use wheelchairs.

Mineral resource: A potential mineral deposit where the quality and quantity of material present has not been tested.

Mineral Safeguarding Area (MSA): Is a designated area identified to protect known mineral resources from being unnecessarily sterilised by non-mineral development. Planning authorities must consider the presence of safeguarded minerals when determining applications, ensuring that valuable resources remain available for future extraction where appropriate.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) The NPPF sets out the UK Government's planning policies for England and provides a framework to guide local authorities in preparing local plans and making planning decisions. It emphasises sustainable development, balancing economic, social and environmental objectives, and promotes a plan-led system with a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

National Decision Making Policies (NDMP) National decision-making policies set out the key principles and considerations that planning authorities must apply when determining planning applications. They are primarily contained within the NPPF and provide consistent guidance to ensure decisions support sustainable development and align with national priorities on matters such as housing, infrastructure, environmental protection, and design quality.

Neighbourhood plans: A plan prepared by a parish council or a neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Non-Designated Heritage Assets: Buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which are not formally designated heritage assets.

Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) is accommodation built, or converted, with the specific intent of being occupied by students, either with individual en-suite units or sharing facilities.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Supplementary Planning Documents: Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They have been used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design.

Town centre: A town centre is the main commercial, cultural and service hub of a town, typically characterised by a concentration of shops, services, offices, leisure uses and community facilities. Planning policies support town centres as the focus for retail and economic activity, promoting their vitality and viability.

Waste hierarchy: A framework for securing a sustainable approach to waste management. Wherever possible, waste should be minimised. If waste cannot be avoided, then it should be: re-used; recycled or composting; or converted to energy; and finally landfill disposal.

World Heritage Site: A cultural or natural site of outstanding universal value which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations, as determined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).