

County Durham Plan Pre-Submission Consultation

Sedgefield Town Council has now discussed the Pre Submission draft plan and has made the following response.

Whilst the County has clearly taken some account of Sedgefield's response of December 2012 to the Preferred Options Report and has made some useful changes, there is much disappointment that DCC have not changed their position on the major housing allocation.

The response of December 2012 was based on substantial public consultation including a questionnaire and several open/ public meetings, thereby reflecting the views of Sedgefield residents. Since then the Town Council has moved forward with the preparation of a Sedgefield Neighbourhood Plan and a Steering Group has been established to lead on this. As you can appreciate this demonstrates the importance that the local community continues to place on ensuring they have a real impact on determining their future.

This response to the Draft Plan is underpinned by the comprehensive consultation of 2012 which ensures the town council's position is fundamentally robust and consistent with the feelings of the local community. I enclose a summary of the responses received from the community consultation exercise. The consultation was well received and almost 10% of households in Sedgefield responded. I also enclose a Detailed Schedule of Responses to the Topics and Policies, prepared by Integer Consulting that sets out the response made on behalf of the Sedgefield community and agreed by the Town Council and Sedgefield Together Community Partnership.

It is recognised that a significant number of the draft policies deserve the support of the Sedgefield community and these are acknowledged in the earlier report. At the same time there are several policies and proposals of major concern, some of fundamental importance to Sedgefield's long term future as a sustainable community.

Housing Allocation and Distribution

Overall the position on housing allocations has not changed following the responses made in December 2012 and April 2012. It is noted that the overall number of new houses proposed in the county has increased to 31,400. The allocation in Sedgefield has now increased to 450 dwellings all to be delivered in the short term. It is also noted that Policy 4 sets out a housing requirement in Sedgefield for 470 houses. There remains overwhelming support for a smaller housing allocation than the 450 units proposed in the plan, with a majority of residents supporting, in principle, no more than 300 units over the plan period, in order to protect the qualities that make Sedgefield special and support its allocation as a secondary settlement. It should be noted that many residents remain reluctant to support even a reduced number of new dwellings but understand that there is a need to build new houses in the county.

There is concern about the impact of any significant number of new dwellings on the existing infrastructure to cope with any anticipated increase, with particular reference to local schools and health services, all of which are already operating almost at full capacity. This view for a smaller allocation is also supported by evidence in the supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan that indicates

that the capacity of sewage treatment works is unable to support more than 300 new dwellings. Northumbria Water has made no commitment in the short term to deal with this shortfall.

The supporting guidance set out in Policy 30 to ensure that the comprehensive development of the Eden Drive site pays attention to the character of Sedgefield is welcomed. This site has much to commend it as a location for a limited amount of new housing but is considered unsuitable for development on the scale proposed. Although the site may have the physical capacity to accommodate 450 units, we strongly question its desirability on village planning, site planning and environmental grounds. The need for this site to be recognised and dealt with as a strategic housing site as set out in our previous comments has still not been recognised in Policy 11.

There is clear support for distributing the housing across several sites in and around Sedgefield that could provide development of a scale and character that would enhance the qualities of Sedgefield.

The debate on housing numbers is likely to intensify following the recent submission of an outline planning application at Wynyard, north of the A689. This proposal, which was submitted after the community consultation exercise was completed, is for almost 1,000 dwellings with ancillary facilities and is in accordance with the agreed Masterplan for Wynyard Park. The proposal may put additional strain on Sedgefield's services and the impact on the local transport infrastructure is a cause for concern. Further, the nature and phasing of the development, with a range of executive, family and retirement homes may result in a reassessment of demand for similar developments in Sedgefield.

Executive Housing

It is noted that the revised Policy 13 on Executive Housing now sets out criteria for the development of executive housing on sites in the county in addition to Lambton Park.

This is not a key issue for Sedgefield at the present time and there is currently no appetite for 'executive housing' on any significant scale in the village. Given the existence of a fairly wide range of private housing within the village, the proximity of Wynyard Park and the confusion that abounds over the definition of 'executive housing', this is understandable.

NetPark

The appropriate development of NetPark as a specialist, high quality 'niche' facility, on a modest scale and strictly restricted to R&D activities can be supported. It is noted that the land allocation set out in policy 24 for NetPark has been reduced but there remain fundamental concerns about the sustainability and long term impact on Sedgefield of the much larger development that may materialise in the longer term and have strong reservations regarding the allocation or reservation of a significantly larger area.

Whilst the scope and ambition embraced by Durham's vision for a new economic future is in large measure to be applauded, there are long-running concerns as to the sustainability credentials of this particular site as a strategic employment location, remote from high quality public transport and physically divorced as it is from the University. These concerns were articulated by the Panel that examined the Regional Spatial Strategy for North East England in 2006 and the Secretary of State restricted the allocation to 25ha accordingly. To this must be added the longer term impact that a much larger development at NetPark would have on

the future character and function of the village. Already, it is noted that the expansion of NetPark is being advanced as a justification for an increased housing allocation in Sedgefield.

The community has welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the development of the County Durham Plan and would ask that both the community feelings and Town Council's views are now taken into account at this final stage of the County Plan.

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