

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Question 11

*Do you agree that it is appropriate to focus on the most attractive economic market areas?
Are there any alternative approaches that could be used?*

The City of Durham Trust considers that an alternative approach should be used, for the reasons set out below.

Subject to the comments below, we do not fundamentally disagree with the typology of market areas set out in Paragraph 3.28 of the document. We would wish, though, to see the Durham Gate/Spennymoor area added as a Regional/Local Market Area. The Spennymoor industrial estates have attracted many thousands of 'international' jobs and nearby Durham Gate is developing into a regionally-significant prestige location for commercial offices.

However, noting the comment at the end of Paragraph 3.29 about ensuring the needs of other areas, and also the comments in the next paragraph about bringing forward other sites for consideration, we are unclear about the underlying purpose and intended application of the proposed policy approach described in the "Distribution of Employment" heading, and would be extremely concerned if it was translated into development control policies which inhibited employment development in other appropriate locations. There are parts of the County which do not have all the attributes needed to be a most attractive market area and yet have a pressing need for more employment opportunities. Past initiatives such as public sector provision of nursery units, prepared sites and hubs such as The Durham Dales Centre may no longer be feasible, but it is possible (even without European Commission funding in future) that a differential financial aid scheme could provide loans and grants that gave greater assistance in such areas.

In addition, if (as this section appears to imply) the Council's draft policy is intended primarily to be led by market signals, it is questionable what extra value the Council (or other development agencies) could realistically add by intervening positively in locations which are already attractive to commercial investors. Rather, the role of effective strategic planning should be to ensure that planning applications for developing such prime sites realise their optimum value for the local economy and provide for access by sustainable means of transport, as the NPPF advises. Instead, the Council should concentrate its scarce promotional and other resources on more marginal locations, where, by addressing dereliction or other market failures, its efforts are more likely to achieve the regeneration of run down areas and a net addition to the total productive capacity and capability of the land resources in the county that are available for employment uses.