

Question 5

Policy 3 - Quantity of New Development

1. As stated in our submission on Strategy, the Plan is over-aspirational. We live in uncertain times, and the Plan needs to reflect this. Scenario 4 is, as paragraph 4.27 recognises, ambitious and while no doubt the County Council and its partners will be working to achieve it, what is needed is a strategy that accepts that the outcome will quite probably fall short, and which ensures that the different elements are kept in step with each other.
2. Although paragraph 2.2 of the *Preferred Options* paper says “The main economic challenge over the Plan period is to support private sector job growth and enable people to access jobs that are within the County and in neighbouring areas”, this policy shows no sign of taking any cognisance of what is happening in adjoining authorities, as is required by the duty to co-operate. There will be cross-border travel to work, in both directions, and the policy needs to recognise this. Given the initiatives in Tyneside and Sunderland it seems there will be a net outflow of County Durham residents to those jobs, but the Hitachi development at Amazon Park in Newton Aycliffe seems likely to draw in workers from Darlington. We will go into more detail in considering the next question (Distribution of Development) but the premise of this policy seems to be that x jobs in County Durham will be filled by x people living in County Durham.
3. Paragraph 4.31, says that although bringing empty houses back into use is a “key priority”, no allowance has been made for it because of uncertainty over the funds available to do it. If this is actually a key priority then the funds need to be allocated, otherwise the statement is empty rhetoric. There are 10,110 empty houses in County Durham¹ – one third of the number of new houses said to be required by Scenario 4, and of course a higher ratio for the more realistic scenarios – 42% in the case of the baseline. In addition there are undeveloped sites with planning permission² which have 1301 units yet to start on site and 2064 under construction. To plan to build around 4000 new homes on Green Belt land with this number of empty houses is indefensible.
4. Increasing the supply of houses without a corresponding increase in demand will increase the number of empty houses as new purchasers are more likely to opt for new houses.
5. It seems obvious that if new houses are built before the new jobs materialise, these will not be available to the new workers as they will already be occupied. It is therefore key that the release of housing land goes hand in hand with the arrival of new jobs. If this is not done it will be difficult to resist planning applications from housebuilders. The Monitoring and Implementation Framework shows no linkage between achieving housebuilding targets and achieving job creation targets. This needs to be remedied.

1 *County Durham 2012 Strategic Housing Market Assessment*, table 4.1a

2 <http://www.local.gov.uk/mapping-unimplemented-planning-permissions-by-local-authority-area> and click on County Durham on the map.