

English Partnerships
Durham Coalfield Communities Partnership
Key Findings and Executive Summary

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1.0 Key Findings and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report provides an Executive Summary of the findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Durham Coalfields Community Partnerships Coalfield Settlement Study.

Background

- 1.2 The Durham Coalfields Partnership is seeking to progress a programme of interventions to address failing housing markets in former coalfield communities.
- 1.3 The Partnership recognises that housing market renewal must not be considered in isolation and should be aligned with wider regeneration, sustainability and planning strategy. They also acknowledge that future intervention should contribute towards a clear settlement role and function and tackle the underlying causes of housing market failure such as physical isolation, access to employment and services and net out migration. Intervention should also be aligned with the main Durham towns and the broader spatial principles of the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 1.4 Jacobs Babbie was commissioned by the Durham Coalfields Partnership in November 2004 to undertake the following three phase study:
- **Phase 1:** Establish the planning, sustainability, housing, economic and regeneration context of the former coalfield communities with an emphasis on emerging spatial policy and existing and emerging intervention strategy;
 - **Phase 2:** Assess the functional relationship between coalfield settlements, main towns, the city regions and key economic areas. Review the coalfield settlement prioritisation and set out a rationale for intervention 'beyond housing needs' in spatial development terms; and
 - **Phase 3:** Recommend the broad range and type of strategic interventions which will help to create more sustainable communities and identify the aspects of change which would have the greatest impact on housing markets. This will provide a platform for developing more local and community based intervention, including housing intervention.

Key Recommendations from Phase 1

- 1.5 **The Phase 1 report** set out the overall planning, sustainability, housing, economic and regeneration context for the Durham Coalfield Communities. Key conclusions from this report are:
- The problems faced by former coalfield communities include population decline and changing age profiles, poor economic performance, lower educational attainment, poorer health, low housing demand in some settlements and poorer transport accessibility and availability of services in some areas;
 - Existing strategic interventions are seeking to tackle some of the fundamental causes of housing market failure such as poor accessibility and poor economic performance;
 - Local interventions are seeking to renew communities and improve them as places to live;
 - The Consultation Draft RSS intends to pursue a stock reduction programme as a mechanism to reduce vacancy rates in the region in line with ODPM targets. Stock reduction is a short to medium term solution to manage housing supply and demand but needs to be supported by other measures to create communities which have a long term role and function;
 - The key challenge is to address this housing imbalance in a way that meets social need and provides the right type of stock for retaining and attracting new people to the sub-region. Housing renewal activity must be aligned with other initiatives which tackle the underlying causes of settlement failure. Replacement and new stock must meet the future needs of the region and complement economic strategies and meet long term need. To this end, the type and location of new housing will be a critical issue as, not only should it facilitate more sustainable and vibrant communities, it should provide for changing aspirations and support economic growth;

- The David Cumberland report, completed in May 2004, recommended a strategy of stock reduction in the Coastal Strip and to increase the number of dwellings in the Net Park Villages, Wider Ferryhill and Southern Arc. DTZ identified 11 priority settlements based on housing policy and need. The OPDM has also identified housing market renewal 'hot spots' within the Durham Coalfield Communities;
- The regeneration of East, North West and South Durham is a core principle of the overall policy strategy of the Adopted Structure Plan. These locations are also identified as regeneration areas in emerging RSS with the main towns identified for regeneration. **The emerging RSS provides a policy framework for intervention in the Durham Coalfield Communities in that the main towns are identified for regeneration and principal service centres and the surrounding areas are identified for regeneration. However, it is considered that the spatial strategy would benefit from a clearer presentation of the objectives for the coalfield communities in terms of how they can support the main towns and the city region.**
- The review of spatial policies identified a clear need to establish the role and relationships between settlements. Planning policy provides the mechanism to develop Coalfield Communities, which have the greatest potential to support the main towns, major centres and economic areas and to provide sustainable patterns of development. An assessment of the potential to enhance the role of the main towns is also necessary given that they are identified as principal functional centres and areas of opportunity;
- Funds and strategies aimed at tackling low demand in areas outside the Pathfinder are at an early stage of development given that the majority of activity has, so far, been focused on the Pathfinder. **It is important that the causes of low demand are understood and that a strategic framework for further intervention in the Durham Coalfield Communities is provided.** This will provide the strategic evidence base to support further appraisal of specific interventions within the Durham Coalfield Communities; and
- The creation of sustainable communities requires a holistic and co-ordinated approach to housing, transport, education and health, jobs, social opportunities, services and the physical environment.

Key Recommendations from Phase 2

- 1.6 The settlements of the County Durham exhibit a range of positive opportunities. There is a reasonable level of accessibility for all settlements, with some ideally located on major transport routes i.e. A1 (M) and A19. There are a number of attractive areas within settlements and significant signs of investment within the communities, which is producing a change in settlement image, improving the quality and range of services and resulting in revitalisation of the centres.
- 1.7 Whilst there is general alignment between the potential for sustainable change and housing renewal, it is a clear finding of this study that housing renewal will only be successful if the strategic framework for overall regeneration and new opportunities is in place. Without this strategic framework, many communities will witness further decline with limited opportunities for stabilisation and/or reversal.
- 1.8 **The key findings and main recommendations from phase 2 of the study are:**
- Easington District and Derwentside have the strongest employment relationships with the Tyne and Wear City Region;
 - The Tees Valley City Region is also a significant employment destination for the residents of Easington, Sedgfield and Wear Valley with the strongest employment links from Sedgfield Borough;
 - Durham City has high inflows from all the other Durham Districts. This comprises of Derwentside (4717), Sedgfield (3427), Wear Valley (2386) Easington (2298) and Chester le Street (3649);
 - Sedgfield Borough is also a key employment destination with high flows from Wear Valley (3141), Durham City (1849) and Tees Valley (2328);
 - Wear Valley has the strongest links with Teesdale District and Sedgfield Borough (outflows of 3141) and inflows (2518). Wear Valley has the least strong employment

relationships with either the Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley City Region;

- With the exception of Durham City, all the districts are net exporters of labour to other areas. The main conurbations (with perhaps the exception of high flows between Sedgefield Borough and Wear Valley) and Durham City are the main recipients of these outflows. Therefore, the further development of strategic employment opportunities will help to increase self sufficiency and boost economic performance is also consistent with the objectives of the Northern Way. Strategic economic development should therefore remain as a key focus for regeneration activity;
- Durham, Peterlee and Bishop Auckland represent the principal retail and service centres within the study area based on multiple floorspace (source Experian Major Centres Study-May 2004). On-site assessments carried out as part of this study confirm that these centres provide a principal service function. This principal role should continue to be maintained and where appropriate, enhanced;
- Newton Aycliffe, Seaham and Stanley are smaller centres but are subject to major town centre regeneration schemes which improve and increase their function. Onsite assessments carried out as part of this study have confirmed the need for both qualitative and quantitative improvements to diversify existing uses and improve existing activity in these town centres. This would provide a stronger functional focus to their main town role and provide a stimulus for other wider regeneration;
- Crook town centre provides a mainly local retail function which supports this settlement and the surrounding communities. Although it will continue to benefit from qualitative intervention and diversification, comprehensive functional improvement is unlikely to be viable given its limited population base, catchment and location. Similarly, although Shildon is a main town the town centre has a limited retail function which mainly meets local needs. Given that the restructuring of Newton Aycliffe town centre is proposed and the proximity to Bishop Auckland, significant functional change of Shildon Town Centre is not considered to be appropriate. Spennymoor town centre provides a reasonable range of provision but would benefit from improved vitality and quality.
- Consett town centre has already benefited from significant qualitative and quantitative intervention with an increase in retail provision in the town;
- The main towns of Seaham, Peterlee, Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe and Stanley should provide the principal focus for new strategic activity. This should be supported by investment and renewal in the neighbourhoods and surrounding communities which have the potential to support their main town role and which have the potential to provide sustainable regeneration.
- Ferryhill should also be planned for as a main town. There is significant potential for regeneration in Dean Bank, FerryHill Station and to a lesser extent Chilton to support this role.
- As Shildon is a smaller town located between Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe, it is considered that this should principally be a focus for local activity and self sustainability rather than strategic change. It should provide a supporting role to strategic functions located in Bishop Auckland and Newton Aycliffe. There is potential for Newton Aycliffe, Shildon and Bishop Auckland to be developed as a main town corridor
- Whilst Willington is a joint main town for structure plan purposes, it has a small population base and is unlikely to fulfil a main town role. Therefore, it should be a focus for local intervention and further regeneration rather than significant functional change.
- Crook, Consett and Spennymoor will continue to benefit from the implementation of further regeneration initiatives. Their roles as main towns are important in the district context but less so in a sub-regional or regional context. Therefore, they should continue to be a focus for self-sustainability rather than strategic change and growth.
- A number of coalfield communities have the physical potential to support growth and

are capable of providing sustainable regeneration which will compliment and support the main towns and major centres. These should be the principal focus for strategic interventions both in terms of housing, services, retail improvement and accessibility. The communities which have significant potential to benefit from regeneration and provide sustainable growth are identified as Easington Colliery, Tow Law and the surrounding communities, Bowburn, Coundon and Chilton West.

- Focusing strategic opportunities and restructuring in the main towns and facilitating regeneration and growth opportunities in the most sustainable surrounding settlements is consistent with planning policy. This study has identified the main towns which should be a focus for strategic change and the neighbourhoods and communities which are considered to be the most sustainable places for regeneration and growth to support this change. The future role of settlements has been considered in the wider spatial and functional objectives for the main towns and city regions.
- Not all of the settlements identified as a housing priority by DTZ and David Cumberland are identified for strategic change within this study. By definition, strategic change cannot be applied to all settlements given that resources and capacity are not infinite. Many of the former coalfield settlements included in the study area would benefit from qualitative improvement and local based intervention but are not necessarily sustainable locations to focus strategic change or additional housing. Where growth in smaller coalfield settlements is likely to be less sustainable, these should be a focus for local and community based intervention to improve their quality. These settlements have been identified for significant local intervention. Stock reduction may also be appropriate in some of these settlements.
- Some settlements contain pockets of failing areas but by and large perform reasonably well. These will require locally based area regeneration rather than significant strategic change. They are identified for local and more limited regeneration only.
- Other communities have a small population base and do not require significant intervention. They have been identified as having limited potential for intervention.
- The principal focus for strategic employment opportunities should be Seaham, Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland and Durham City. These should act as major employment centres for the sub region and provide opportunities which support the surrounding communities.
- As new towns, policy options for accommodating growth in Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe are restructuring of the existing fabric, urban extension or through encouraging growth in surrounding settlements which have urban capacity and the potential for sustainable regeneration.

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 Many of the sub-regionally important sites are located close to the main strategic road corridors (A19 and A1) and are concentrated in Sedgefield Borough, Duham City and Easington District. Proposed sub-regionally important strategic employment sites include Heighington Lane West, Net Park, the road rail interchange facility and the South of Seaham reserve site.
- 2.2 The study has reviewed and validated the role of each of the main towns. This has included a detailed analysis of service provision, housing, transport accessibility and economic activity and relationships. The function of each main town is summarised below:
 - **Durham, Peterlee and Bishop Auckland** are considered to provide a primary retail role and have good accessibility. These towns are also a focus for district-wide activity in terms of the catchments and communities which they support. Although providing a significant service role, Peterlee and Bishop Auckland do not currently provide a particularly strong employment base whereas Durham City provides a major sub-regional employment focus;

- **Seaham** and **Newton Aycliffe** currently provide a more limited retail role but are subject to town centre regeneration schemes. Neither of these settlements is likely to support a particularly wide retail catchment beyond the major centre boundary. However, both provide an existing strategic employment role and planned activity will strengthen their future importance as key sub-regional and regional employment destination;

- **Consett** has benefited from significant intervention to its retail, employment and service base. It supports a number of rural settlements and is an important service hub and a key focus for strategic activity for Derwentside District;

- **Stanley** has a limited employment and retail role and probably supports fewer surrounding communities than Consett. Its proximity to the Tyne and Wear City Region, the Metro Centre and Chester-le-Street also mean that it competes with other centres in terms of service provision;

- **Crook** and **Spennymoor** provide a reasonable level of service and retail provision and both are fairly self sustaining and less reliant on other areas. Crook has a small population base and the level and choice of retail activity reflects this. Crook benefits from the fact that the main Wear Valley District Council offices are located in the town. Spennymoor is a fairly large town centre providing a reasonable range of retail provision;

- **Willington**: Although considered to be a joint Main Town with Crook for Structure Plan purposes, on its own Willington has very limited retail provision and has a small population base. As Willington is physically separated from Crook and retail provision in this settlement is fairly limited, the residents of Willington may travel to Bishop Auckland or Durham rather than to Crook;

- **Ferryhill** is identified in the Structure Plan Review as a single main town with Spennymoor. Ferryhill exhibits many of the characteristics of a Main Town and is considered to be fairly self sustaining. It also supports the surrounding neighbourhood of Dean Bank and Ferryhill Station. Therefore, it is considered that Ferryhill should be considered as a main town but further strategic change may be required to support this role;

- **Shildon**: Whilst it is a fairly self sustaining settlement its service role is primarily locally focused. It is also located between Newton Aycliffe and Bishop Auckland, both of which currently have a wider functional role and offer significant future opportunities for town centre development. Therefore, Shildon is considered to provide a more limited functional role particularly when compared to the other main towns.

Potential Type and Level of Intervention in the Main Towns and Durham Coalfield Communities

2.3 The reason for the type of change and potential level of intervention in each settlement is summarised below.

2.4 **Bishop Auckland** is identified as a strategic focus for intervention and functional improvement to enhance its role as a main town and to support local regeneration activity. It has the capacity to accept change and its good accessibility also means that it is a sustainable place to focus activity, which will attract people from a wider catchment. An enhanced role would provide a stronger service and economic base for the Wear Valley settlements and provide a strategic focus for activity and opportunities which the regeneration of surrounding communities can support and benefit from.

2.5 **Bishop Auckland Neighbourhoods**: There is significant opportunity to renew and regenerate neighbourhoods such as Woodhouse Close and St Helens, both of which are identified as low demand hot spots by ODPM. This represents a significant opportunity in terms of maintaining and supporting the role of Bishop Auckland as a main town and providing sustainable regeneration.

- 2.6 **Stanley** is identified as a focus for intervention to enhance its role as a main town and to support regeneration. This would provide more opportunities for people living within the settlement and surrounding communities and improve the physical environment. As there are strong functional links with the Tyne and Wear City Region, there is the potential for increased self containment in terms of improving the economic and retail base, whilst also recognising that Stanley acts as a commuter town for the City Region and that this is a potential opportunity. Stanley is identified by OPDM as a potential 'low demand' hot spot.
- 2.7 **Peterlee** should be a focus for future intervention strategy to support its role as a main town and to provide more strategic opportunities. This will not only support the viability of Peterlee as a major centre but also provide opportunities, which can maintain and improve the long-term viability of the surrounding coalfield communities. The type of activity should include an enhanced employment role and the maintenance and enhancement of its existing service base. There are also likely to be opportunities for qualitative intervention and restructuring to the existing stock particularly in terms of neighbourhood regeneration in areas such as Eden Hill. There is also significant potential for the restructuring of Peterlee to be supported by housing potential new housing opportunities in other nearby settlements.
- 2.8 **Horden** is well located in terms of strategic transport provision and has good links to Peterlee and other major centres. Although it is a separate settlement, its proximity to Peterlee means it also acts as a neighbourhood of this main town. It already has a reasonable range of service provision and has high potential to be a reasonably self sustaining neighbourhood which supports and benefits from the main town status of Peterlee.
- 2.9 **Seaham** has close links to Sunderland. It is already subject to significant intervention action with more planned or in the pipeline. The combination of both strategic and more local intervention is already beginning to realise significant change and further planned improvements in its employment and retail function will further enhance its role as a main town. The town also has significant potential to provide housing growth which will also support its strategic role as a main town. As the implementation of regeneration strategy is already at an advanced stage, significant further intervention may not be required once existing proposals are progressed although further local intervention, such as improving links between the train station and the town centre may be appropriate.
- 2.10 **Dawdon:** Seaham has close links to Sunderland but as a main town supports fewer settlements. From this perspective, it is important that it has attractive neighbourhoods, which support the maintenance of the existing population base and where new people are attracted to it. Dawdon (with Parkside) is therefore identified as a strategic focus for intervention as it has the potential to support the main town role of Seaham and would be a sustainable location to focus regeneration activity. It is already subject to masterplan activity and has been identified by Easington for an Area Action Area in the LDF. This neighbourhood has also been identified as a low demand hot spot by ODPM.
- 2.11 **Newton Aycliffe** should be the focus of a future intervention strategy to strengthen its role as a main town. The town centre does not currently act as a key focus for activity and has significant potential to support an increased functional role within the District. Its town center should be the focus of intervention to enhance the existing retail and service base. The regeneration of its town centre is identified as a key priority by Sedgefield Borough Council, which should be progressed via an action plan and more detailed proposals. Improved links and integration with its rail station would improve accessibility to other settlements in the County. There is opportunity for housing intervention in a number of its existing estates west of the town centre and the focus for new opportunity should be to restructure existing urban areas and to intensify and diversity activity where this is possible. Its good accessibility to the strategic transport network also means that the settlement has significant potential to provide an enhanced employment role which provides both local and sub-regional opportunity.

Strategic Coalfield Settlements to Support the Role of Main Towns

- 2.12 **Coundon:** There are significant opportunities for sustainable regeneration through creating a more diverse and attractive settlement which provides for the day to day needs of residents. There is significant potential for the settlement to support the main town role of Bishop

Auckland due to its good public transport links to this town. Intervention in Coundon could include continuing to invest in the local retail and service role and qualitative intervention and restructuring of the existing housing stock where this is appropriate.

- 2.13 **Tow Law:** It is more isolated than other communities and would benefit from qualitative and small scale functional intervention. It has the potential to support Crook and Durham and possibly new activity in Wear Dale if accessibility was improved. Crook/Stanley is identified as a housing market renewal hot spot by ODPM and this may include Tow Law. A next step may be to investigate the potential for intervention in Tow Law and the surrounding communities as significant intervention is not planned at present.
- 2.14 **Easington Colliery:** An increase in the population, through further additional housing development, has the potential to enhance local retail and service provision. Further qualitative intervention would also support the continued regeneration of the settlement. The justification for intervention can be aligned to a clear functional role to support the main town role of Peterlee (and potentially other destinations due to its proximity to the A19 Corridor) although public transport access would need to be improved. The settlement is identified as a low demand hot spot by English Partnerships/ODPM.
- 2.15 **Ferryhill Station and Dean Bank:** These two communities are considered to be neighbourhoods of the Ferryhill settlement. Intervention within these areas has the potential to provide sustainable regeneration as it will support the wider role of Ferryhill and help to support the viability of this settlement. They also have good transport accessibility and have the potential to support and benefit from new economic opportunities located along the main transport corridors. Masterplan activity is already well advanced in these settlements.
- 2.16 **Chilton West:** Proposals for Chilton West should be considered within the wider context of Chilton and the potential to provide housing support to the main towns of Newton Aycliffe and Bishop Auckland. Intervention should concentrate on qualitative intervention and neighbourhood restructuring. The construction of the A167 (T) Chilton Bypass will also mean that there is the potential for environmental enhancement within the town.
- 2.17 **Bowburn:** There is potential to create a village centre. This should be focused within the existing residential areas to ensure it is accessible by a variety of modes of transport. The justification for intervention can be aligned to its proximity to the A1 (M) and good public transport links to other major centres. The designation in the City of Durham Local Plan for a Prestige Industrial Estate and the potential construction of the inter-modal freight interchange on the south western periphery of the current urban area would increase the profile and potential role that Bowburn would have within the County. There is also currently a lack of housing choice within Bowburn with limited availability of modern housing. Overall, there is significant potential to provide sustainable regeneration and enhance the functional role of this settlement.

Validation against Planning Strategy

- 2.18 The policy review undertaken in the phase 1 report identifies a clear need to establish the role and relationships between settlements. Planning policy provides the mechanism to develop Coalfield Communities, which have the greatest potential to support the main towns, major centres and economic areas and to provide sustainable regeneration and development.
- 2.19 To promote sustainable patterns of development in the North East Region Draft RSS 1 has focused on conurbations in the Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley City Regions for major development, regeneration and investment. The County Durham Structure Plan provides a development focus based on the 12 main towns. Emerging RSS identifies these towns as regeneration towns and a focus for economic and service activity to complement the city regions. Therefore, focusing strategic opportunities on the main towns (both in functional terms and for regeneration) is a core principle of emerging spatial strategy.
- 2.20 The County Durham Structure Plan identified that it may be appropriate to focus new development in smaller coalfield settlements which have good access to the main towns and a reasonable level of service provision. The communities which have the most potential to provide sustainable growth through maintaining and enhancing local service provision,

enabling community based regeneration and taking advantage of good accessibility are considered to be sustainable places for development.

- 2.21 Many of the areas considered in this study are neighbourhoods or nearby communities of the main towns. As the regeneration of main towns will only be viable if it is supported by vibrant neighbourhoods and supporting communities, the continued restructuring of supporting communities is consistent with the role of the main towns.
- 2.22 Focusing strategic opportunities and restructuring in the main towns and facilitating regeneration and growth opportunities in the most sustainable surrounding settlements is therefore consistent with planning policy. This study has identified the main towns which should be a focus for strategic change and the neighbourhoods and communities which are considered to be the most sustainable places for regeneration and to support this change. They are also considered to be locations which meet the wider spatial and functional objectives of the main towns and city regions.
- 2.23 New industrial development would enhance the sub-regional employment role and increase the self-sufficiency of the County Durham sub-region. This would contribute towards the regional objective of boosting economic performance and creating a stronger economic base. **The study had identified significant potential for the main towns and supporting communities to compliment and support strategic economic growth.**