

Cabinet

23 October 2008



The North East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021

**Report of John Richardson, Corporate Director, Environment
(Cabinet Portfolio Member for Environment - Councillor Bob Young
and Cabinet Portfolio Member for Economic Regeneration –
Councillor Neil Foster)**

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To report to Members on the outcome of the County Council's representations to the Secretary of State on her Further Proposed Changes (February 2008) to the draft revision of the North East of England Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The Secretary of State published the finalised RSS in July. A copy of the document and the accompanying Statement of Reasons has been placed in the Members' Resource Centre.

Background

- 2 The RSS seeks to provide a sustainable long-term vision for the delivery of jobs, homes and infrastructure in the region. The Strategy is part of the statutory Development Plan and replaces the previous Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (RPG1) and all of the policies in the County Durham Structure Plan, in accordance with the new Planning system, brought in by the 2004 Act. This revised RSS provides the strategic policies, up to 2021, for deciding on major planning applications. The county-wide Local Development Framework prepared by the new Unitary Authority (to replace existing Local Plans) will be tested by the Planning Inspectorate for general conformity with the RSS. Local Transport Plans should also reflect the Regional Transport Strategy which is integrated within the RSS.
- 3 The report to Cabinet in March 2008 highlighted that the Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes to the RSS had reinstated many of the original proposals, crucial to the interests of County Durham, and reversed the relevant recommendations of the Panel of inspectors which conducted the Examination in Public in 2006. The housing allocation for County Durham was also increased based on updated projections. These changes followed a concerted campaign in County Durham and the wider region by the County Durham local authorities, MPs, business leaders and the press to lobby against the amendments suggested by the Panel to delete a number of key employment proposals and water down other development opportunities. Cabinet agreed a response to the final consultation stage supporting the changes made in accordance with the County Council's wishes and to submit further representations on matters which remained of concern.

Key Outcomes for County Durham

- 4 All of the matters which the County Council agreed to support in March have been retained in the published document and some additional amendments have been made in line with the County Council's further representations. Whilst there remain some details the Government has chosen not to amend, the County Council's key matters of concern have been resolved, or are being implemented by other means as explained below. The results of the County Council's representations are detailed in Appendix 2.
- The revised higher housing figures included in the February 2008 Changes are retained, giving County Durham 1,385 net additional houses per annum. The RSS housing figures are now "guidelines" not "ceilings" and local authorities may make the case for higher figures if they can be justified through their Local Development Frameworks.
 - Restrictions on the development of NETPark at Sedgfield, Heighington Lane West at Newton Aycliffe and the South of Seaham site were lifted in the February changes and this is reflected in the final document. Much of phase 1 of NETPark is already developed or committed for a technology incubator, research institute, PETec Centre (centre of excellence for plastics electronic technology) and business village. Heighington Lane West already had planning consent for distribution and logistics. The Centre of Creative Excellence, including film studios, which is a unique and regionally significant development with particular locational requirements, has now been approved south of the Dawdon Link Road, Seaham.
 - The potential development of a regional rail freight interchange at Tursdale was revived in the February changes by a new paragraph preceding Policy 57, allowing a case to be made in the long term.
 - The requirement for major new developments to meet at least 10% of their energy supply from renewable sources has been reinstated, in accordance with the representations made by the County Council and the North East Assembly.
 - The request to give greater prominence to the Eastgate Renewable Energy Village in Weardale as a regionally significant mixed-use regeneration project has not been accepted. However, the RSS continues to refer to the proposal as an "exemplar" scheme with potential to generate and utilise a range of types of renewable energy on site. The planning application for the development is now with Wear Valley District Council for decision.
 - An addition has been made to Policy 10 on the Tees Valley City Region, to recognise the regeneration of the Durham Coalfield Communities in Sedgfield and Wear Valley, as requested by the County Council. This achieves consistency with the Tyne and Wear City Region (Policy 9) which already made reference to coalfield regeneration.

Integrated Regional Strategy

- 5 One of the Government's key proposals in the Review of Sub National Economic Development and Regeneration is to streamline regional

governance, integrate Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and make Regional Development Agencies statutory regional planning bodies instead of the Regional Assemblies. This means One NorthEast will become responsible for preparation of the new Single Regional Strategy.

- 6 Before the legislation is enacted, there was a prospect of the North East Assembly being asked to undertake a partial review of RSS, based on the advice of the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit, to ensure that by 2011, plans reflect the Government's national target of 240,000 new homes per year. However, the upper level targets produced by the Unit in June, accord with the net completion figures in the finalised RSS for the North East issued in July. Instead of a partial review of housing figures, the NEA and One NorthEast have committed to the early commencement of work on the new Integrated Regional Strategy, which will include the allocation of housing figures by regionally defined housing market areas.
- 7 It is essential that County Durham plays into this process effectively, and has sound evidence to underpin its arguments, through its Strategic Housing Market Assessment, to ensure the needs of residents are met. The South and East Durham Growth Point programme also needs to be reflected in regional strategy. Existing national and regional policy priorities focus on the two conurbations. However, the new Unitary Authority will be the largest single authority, in terms of population, in the region and should provide County Durham with a stronger platform for influencing the Integrated Regional Strategy. The new Authority needs to be able to articulate a clear role for County Durham in the region and set out in spatial terms how this can be delivered through the county-wide Local Development Framework.

Conclusion

- 8 The finalised RSS provides a much more positive outlook for County Durham than the draft published last summer, based on the Panel's recommendations. The fact that the Government has recognised and responded to many of the concerns the County Durham Authorities raised during the several periods of public consultation is welcomed. The document's publication now provides the starting point, in terms of strategic spatial policy, for work on the new county-wide Local Development Framework.

Recommendations and Reasons

- 9 You are recommended to note the changes made in the finalised RSS. However, in the light of the Government's proposed changes to regional governance, it is further recommended that the new Authority takes every opportunity to effectively engage in the development of the Integrated Regional Strategy and ensures that the Regional Planning Body makes use of the local knowledge and spatial, economic, housing and transport policy expertise of the Unitary Authority.

Background Papers

The North East of England Plan Regional Spatial Strategy to 2021 and Secretary of State's Statement of Reasons, July 2008

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Appendix 1: Implications

Local Government Reorganisation

Does the decision impact upon a future Unitary Council?

The RSS provides the strategic spatial planning framework for the county-wide Local Development Framework and future Local Transport Plans prepared by the Unitary Council.

Finance

RSS will be influential in prioritising and directing investment for projects of regional significance.

Staffing

None

Equality and Diversity

Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs are being assessed on a countywide basis as mentioned in Appendix 2.

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Sustainability

The RSS was subject to Sustainability Appraisal at each draft stage.

Human Rights

None

Localities and Rurality

The RSS affects localities in all parts of the Region and includes specific policies on rural areas.

Young People

Policies on supporting further and higher education, local employment and housing opportunities will impact on young people.

Consultation

The draft RSS and the Secretary of State's two sets of changes were subject to public consultation before the final document was issued. The County Council has submitted formal representations at each stage as well as taking part in the Examination in Public.

Health

One of the social objectives of the RSS is to improve health and well-being while reducing inequalities in health (Policy 2.2 f).

Appendix 2: Outcome of County Council's representations on Secretary of State's Further Proposed Changes to RSS

Amendments made at Further Proposed Changes stage which the County Council Supported

FPC 78: Higher housing allocation of 23,540 net provision for County Durham (2004-21) **retained in final RSS.**

FPC 77: statement that RSS housing figures now guidelines not ceilings **retained.**

FPC 32 & 41: policy wording on regeneration towns to allow their regeneration and development "for sustainable growth" **retained.**

FPC 60 & 61: NETPark & Heighington Lane West recognised as Key Employment Locations **retained.**

FPC 118: policy amended to roll forward sub-regional apportionment for aggregates to 2021 (from 2016) providing improved guidance **retained.**

FPC 120: policy wording on opencast coal amended to align with national guidance allowing alternative approaches to assessing potential for extraction **retained.**

FPC 123: text amended to allow all waste planning authorities, not just Tyne and Wear to revisit the projections and waste apportionment in the light of more recent work **retained.**

Matters on which the County Council sought further clarification or submitted objections to at Further Proposed Changes stage

FPC 58: Lack of named reference to South of Seaham site. **No further change in final RSS.** An additional 40 hectares of general employment land had already been allowed for in the Further Proposed Changes in view of the deletion of the Reserve site policy. The "Centre of Creative Excellence" proposals for the site received approval from Easington District Council on 4 September 2008 following Government Office's decision not to "call in" the application.

FPC 143: Lack of reference in policy to potential development at TurSDale. **No further change.** New text preceding the policy on freight distribution had already been inserted at the Further Proposed Changes stage which allows a case for a regional rail freight depot to be made in the long term.

FPC 116: Further revisions needed to policy on wind energy development to improve clarity and take account of the results of the NEA's landscape capacity studies. **No further change.**

FPC 52: Failure to recognise Eastgate Renewable Energy Village in policy as a regionally significant regeneration and investment opportunity. **No further change.** Textual reference in renewable energy section is retained. A planning application is under consideration by Wear Valley District Council. The proposals have been assessed positively, by the NEA, as being in general conformity with the RSS.

FPC 41: Failure to recognise the regeneration of the Durham Coalfield Communities in Sedgfield and Wear Valley in policy on the Tees Valley City Region. **Policy 10 in the final RSS amended.**

FPC 147: Phasing element removed from table of transport priorities. **No further change.** RSS states that progress on individual projects will be subject to availability of finance, successful progression through the normal statutory procedures and continued support from the Region.

FPC 110: Removal of requirement for major new developments to meet at least 10% of their energy supply from renewable sources. **Minimum regional target reinstated in Policy 38 on sustainable construction** “in advance of local targets being set in Development Plan Documents”.

FPC 82 & 83: Concerns raised about inserting the findings of a regional study of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs which do not provide a sound basis for future planning. **No further change.** A County Durham assessment of accommodation and support needs arranged by the Durham Housing and Neighbourhoods Partnership will be used to inform the evidence base for the new Local Development Framework.