

Letter of Objection to the Durham Plan from Councillor Owen Temple (Consett)

Dear Sirs

Please treat this as my formal response to the County Durham Plan. It is in part commentary, but in particular an objection to the Durham-centric nature of the **Core policies 3, 4, 5 (with much of the CIL committed to Durham City Relief Roads), 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10** which primarily concern themselves with Durham City and the Development of Aykley Heads – with policies on Highways, transport and housing development all clustered round the assumption that Aykley Heads is the key to economic prosperity for the county.

Most of the “beef” in the document is addressed towards Durham City. Most of the “flannel” to the rest.

I believe that plan’s underlying assumption about Aykley Heads is fundamentally flawed. The vision is that *“If developed successfully, Aykley Heads has the potential to become a flagship employment site in the North East Region, attracting world-leading businesses to the city which will drive the step-change envisaged for the economy of County Durham.”* My own view is that Durham and Aykley Heads are not uniquely, or even significantly, well situated for business, regardless of the enormous tourist potential of the World Heritage site. Durham is a bottleneck, created by the river and its crossing, and the bottleneck effect is inherent in a tourist centre and sub-regional shopping centre with a single through road. That is not attractive to business which is not particularly interested in, or attracted to, a World Heritage site (unless its business is directly linked to it), nor 15 minute walking access to it. Most businesses are much more interested in a free and easy vehicular movement in all directions, evidenced by the growth of Business Parks on the motorway perimeters of our cities. Aykley Heads is on the wrong side of Durham for that.

World Heritage and commerce are not naturally symbiotic. They can exist alongside each other as a historical product as in London, but tend to co-exist despite their conflicting priorities rather than because of them. The needs of business can also easily be inimical to those of tourism. This policy completely ignores that possibility, that the attempt to turn Durham City into a commercial centre may damage the quality of its relatively newly emerging economic existence as tourist centre.

In my view, too, it is illogical to seek to site the major intended magnet for new business in the area which currently has the highest employment levels in the county (not least as a result of having imported public sector jobs in local government into Durham City after Local Government Review following the closure of major public sector buildings across the county). Nor is it a sensible target to *“rebalance public and private sector employment”* in Durham City following that importing of public sector jobs. That balance needs to be achieved

across the county. Simply seeking to site more and more jobs in Durham City will add to existing highway and transport issues within the county, making outlying communities ever more dependent on jobs that have major travel requirements. It is not difficult to see this policy as a response to the increasingly crowded County Hall which has resulted from closing so many public service buildings across the county. The desire of some people to develop a new "County Hall" is not a good reason to gamble on this Aykley Heads development as the economic salvation of the county.

Policy 4 – Distribution of Development

There is an unacceptable unevenness between the ratio of employment land to Housing development land/numbers of proposed new houses across the county, with less than 1 hectare of new employment land per 1,000 new houses in the North of the county, and more than 2 hectares of new employment land per 1,000 new houses in the South of the county. Nowhere is that imbalance recognised or justified within the plan.

This a tacit acceptance that the future the North of the County is as a commuter area, and amounts to a willingness to receive council tax from its inhabitants but not to invest in their economic infra-structure, expecting them to have to travel to work in Tyne & Wear or Durham.

Policy 30 - Housing allocation in the North Consett area

I welcome the exclusion of the originally included HA60 site (Berry Edge Farm) from the draft plan. It represented an unwelcome and unnecessary urban sprawl into the surrounding countryside.

I am pleased that the density of housing at H26 has been reduced, but believe that the area remains a problem because of the floodpaths which already trouble the existing residents of Muirfield Close and Turnberry Close below it. I am not convinced that it is a suitable site for development whilst that position remains.

Whilst I accept the proper use of the former Blackfyne School footprint for new housing at H21, the size of the allocation is too great because it will build over a football field, when we have already lost a number of football fields through the Academy/Sports Centre development. The land area for housing should be limited to the footprint of the former school buildings and yards.

Yours sincerely,

Owen Temple