

PROJECT REPORT

DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPT STATEMENT FOR FORMER COLLIERY SITE AT EASINGTON COLLIERY, EAST DURHAM

This report is meant to supplement [Concept statements - Delivering sustainable development in the Sustainable Communities Growth Areas](#) in the Sustainable Communities Growth Areas (Natural England and Planning Co-operative Feb 2007) – a hands-on guide on how to develop concept statements. It is hoped that the experiences made here can help with the development of concept statements elsewhere.

1. INTRODUCTION

The project was launched in November 2009 when Natural England sought expressions of interest from authorities in N E England for a pilot which could demonstrate the benefits of concept statements for a housing scheme of between 50 – 1500 homes; on land in the ownership or under the control of a local authority.

The scheme was expected to provide professional community consultation leading to a published concept statement which could encapsulate the development principles of the site and identify the best way forward for housing and associated development based on a consensus of people's views.

Durham County Council were chosen to take a scheme forward based on a site in their ownership that had previously been the colliery at the village of Easington Colliery on the Durham Heritage Coast between Seaham and Peterlee.

2. THE SITE

The colliery site lies to the east of the village of Easington Colliery, adjacent to the Durham Heritage Coast and bounded by the Durham coast railway line (see attached map -, **Appendix 1**). Until 2000 it was the home of the pithead and associated workings of the former colliery. The site is 30 ha in size. Extensive land reclamation has restored the area as open grassland but it has always been identified as having the potential to fulfil a wider role within the community as a new housing development – and the former District of Easington's adopted Local Plan had recognised this. Its site and situation are valuable partly because it could assist in the regeneration of the village (through potential rehousing from clearance areas and through providing a better and more sustainable mix of housing) and partly because it has the potential to enhance and improve access to the Heritage Coast and link into the unique flora and fauna of the Magnesian Limestone here and develops a landscape scheme that fits in with the associated green infrastructure. A concept statement could lay the foundations for reconciling these two key requirements.

It is a key strategic site in one of the priority regeneration coalfield communities and is identified in the Programme of Development as a Growth Point (South & East Durham Growth Point) housing site. The site is also located in the area of the Limestone Landscapes partnership, which is based on the National Character Area of the Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau. The site is in ownership of Durham County Council and development was currently scheduled to start in 2012/13.

The recently adopted Regeneration Statement for the county sets out the need to facilitate housing growth through the South & East Durham Growth Point while

supporting housing renewal and development across the area.

New housing in this location would support the economically marginal shops and other services situated on the main street of the colliery; provide extra weight to the case for a rail halt on the nearby railway line and strengthen the local community and associated housing market.

3. THE PROCESS

3.1 Project Financing Arrangements

Natural England provided £6,000 towards the scheme (primarily to pay for an 'enabler', who would lead the consultation exercise with stakeholders and the community and develop and design the concept statement in an interactive process. The County Council provided an equivalent sum in kind to cover project management, project administration; communication materials, room hire and associated costs. The Councils funding was primarily taken from its Growth Point revenue budget

Costs spanned two financial years from 2009/10 to 2010/11

A Memorandum of Agreement between Durham County Council and Natural England was agreed and signed on 19th January 2010

3.2 Appointment of an Enabler

A brief was prepared and agreed and issued to consultancies that had expressed an interest. The electronic tendering procedures of the County Council were adopted.

It was expected that companies would be able to demonstrate knowledge and expertise in the theory and practice of concept statements and that companies must be able to demonstrate experience of handling public consultation events and delivering outcomes from these events that reflect (as much as possible) consensus over issues identified.

The evaluation criteria are set out in **Appendix 2**

The request for quotations was sent out on 3rd February with a 7 day turnaround.

Three companies were requested to quote:

Groundwork NE

Planning Cooperative

KSA Partnership

Interviews were scheduled for 11th February. The two remaining companies were both interviewed and a decision made on the strength of the evaluation criteria to choose Planning Cooperative (Richard Silson). The planning Co-operative "invented" concept statements and has since then developed a good number of concept statements, for example in the East of England.

Following negotiation, a consultancy fee of £7,700 was agreed

3.3 Agreed Outputs

The following were agreed as the key outputs by Natural England and DCC

- Liaison with DCC on event preparation x 2 (workshop design & development of

material) and preparation of draft and final concept statement

- Enabling at two consultation events
- A fully designed final Concept Statement for the Easington Colliery Site
- A report with a narrative on how the concept statement was developed including recommendations for policy; adoption of this concept statement as Area Action Plan (AAP) or Development Planning Document (DPD) and a wider policy on concept statements for major developments in County Durham's LDF
- A powerpoint presentation aimed at a policy target audience for awareness raising/advocacy purposes and a powerpoint presentation for the feedback event

3.4 Inception

The first meeting of the project team was held on 3rd March and details of the timetable and contracting arrangements were discussed. It was agreed that the first of the consultation events would be held on Monday 29th March followed by a further one later in the Spring.

The first would be for key stakeholders and would be relatively formal. The second would be a drop in session for all residents.

3.5 Project Team Meetings

Regular team meetings took place over the course of the project and included:

David Siddle - Growth Point Coordinator and project manager

Steve Bhomwick – Environment and Design Manager

Jill Waite - Housing Regeneration Team Leader

Andrew Wood – Planning Policy officer

Gary Shears

Ingo Schüder – Natural England Sustainable Land Use Delivery Leader

4. THE EVENTS

4.1 29TH March Stakeholder Workshop

This took place at the Easington Colliery Social Welfare Club (invitation for the day attached – **Appendix 3**; programme for the day attached – **Appendix 4A**).

It attracted over 30 people representing a variety of organisations (see **Appendix 4B**) and provided opportunities to learn more about the principles behind concept statements; the opportunities and constraints of the site and the ways in which competing land use interests could be reconciled. It included a visit to the site itself.

A presentation about the nature and benefits of concept statements and introducing the task in hand was given. The presentation is available as a separate document.

An important element of the workshop was that all participants went on site. This helped each participant with seeing the “lie of the land” first hand and being inspired by the positive assets of the site to develop their individual ideas for site development.

The key output was a first draft of the concept statement (**Appendix 5** see Concept Statement section below)

4.2 17th May Community Consultation Event

This also took place at the Social Welfare Club and took the form of a 'drop in' exhibition from 10.30am to 4.00pm. It attracted over 60 visitors (see **Appendix 6**). Attendees were asked to complete a questionnaire (see **Appendix 7**).

Attendance levels were sufficiently high to justify transferring the exhibition to the library in Easington Colliery (about 500m up the road) for the remainder of the week where a further 12 questionnaires were completed.

The summary of results from the questionnaire are attached in **Appendix 10**

The event was publicised in the following ways:

- Through posters in shop windows
- Through a poster at the Social Welfare Club
- Through Accent Housing Association (who have many properties in the area)
- Through an advert in the Heritage Coast magazine
- Through the circulation list of email addresses and invitees for the first event

Examples of the flyer/poster are attached (**Appendix 8**)

The event made use of a number of exhibition information boards about aspects of sustainable development (green roofs, zero carbon homes, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems SUDS) (boards are available as a separate document). Residents also had the opportunity to walk over the site. This proved helpful for informal conversations and understanding and addressing individual concerns.

Some issues and concerns about the specific housing development as presented by the draft concept statement were raised. These were from local residents concerned about losing the view onto the sea or who would in the future have houses rather than a greenspace immediately adjacent to their own houses.

Otherwise the outline design, the main objectives and proposed new features were broadly supported.

4.3 20th July - Final Community Consultation

This took place at the Victory Club in Easington Colliery on Tuesday 20th July and was attended by about 35 residents including both local councillors. Publicity had included small posters for shop windows/public buildings and posted notes to residents in Office Street. (it was an oversight but each of the attendees to the drop in session in May should have received an invitation and this was pointed out to us at that meeting and rectified for this meeting).

The venue was a good meeting room but it was hampered by its close proximity to the bar which meant that one or two of the regulars wanted to heckle from the back.

The meeting incorporated an introduction from the Project Manager (David Siddle) followed by a more extensive description of the process from Richard Silson of the Planning Coop.

The presentations are available as a separate document.

There was representation from the local councillors who helped keep the meeting focussed and sought to secure consensus on the way forward. There was a strong

tendency to bring into the discussion the overall problems of the settlement (especially shopping, private landlords and poor environment) rather than focus on the site in question.

It was concluded that

- (i) the issues related to the overall problems of the settlement should be raised at a new officer working group on the Colliery
- (ii) that the recommendations should be put forward to the Directorates management team (the 'RED' management team)
- (iii) that a further meeting should take place in three months time to review progress

5. THE CONCEPT STATEMENT

The first draft was produced after the first stakeholder event and was distributed to councillors, officers and other key stakeholders for comments. After some small revisions the A3 map and associated text became the centrepiece for the subsequent public exhibition (this document is available in high resolution on the [North East Green Infrastructure pages](#)).

Following receipt of questionnaires and comments the second draft was produced in readiness for the final consultation event in July. Some changes were incorporated into the second draft as follows:

1. Amend extent of housing areas by:
 - Creating a green and light pink cross hatched area (diagonal stripes) to denote 'either/or' in the area north of Office Street through to access road (emphasise the need for housing to incorporate good design and green spaces within it)
 - Retain housing adjacent to Tower Street
 - Suggest possible housing as an alternative to community garden (use cross hatching again) in the 'sunken' area to west of railway line
2. Identify site of pit wheel/garden and existing childrens playground on the plan
3. Suggest possible new/alternative location for playground adjacent to proposed visitor centre
4. Emphasise in the new concept statement the need to offer better access to the beach (through the 'underbridge' especially)
5. provide an annotated note adjacent to car park to suggest its relocation to a more appropriate site (though cannot prescribe where this will be at present)

Overall the concept statement has produced proposals that significantly curtail the extent of housing development on the site to key fringe areas close to the existing settlement whilst allowing for the remainder of the area to have the potential to develop as a recreational area of green space.

A key message back to the Council was a need to look at the wider environment in the village to assess how the area as a whole can be regenerated. Particular concerns were raised about the quality of the existing private sector housing stock; the absence of development on in-fill sites; the fate of the derelict school site and the

poor provision of shops and other amenities along the main street.

6. THE RESOURCES EMPLOYED

The Council established a multi-disciplinary team that worked with Natural England for the duration of the project. It consisted of:

1. A project manager from the Housing Service
2. Administrative support from Planning (in the first instance) and then from the housing service
3. General support from key members of the Environment and Sustainability section of Planning.

Originally the Council's costs were estimated to be around £5292 and given the hours committed to the scheme as well as resource materials and room hire etc this would seem a fair reflection of outturn costs.

7. THE LESSONS LEARNT

The process has been a very productive one that has helped to bring the council and residents together. It has exposed a number of 'running sores' that have sometimes distracted work away from the site in question. Overall the lessons learnt are

- (i) that community consultation is an invigorating means to understand needs and aspirations
- (ii) that using the concept statement process helps to focus on a site that requires local engagement, insights and support in order to progress its development
- (iii) the concept statement brought a site to life that had previously been a rather general housing allocation without any reference to local feelings and perceptions
- (iv) using a building for meetings close to the site brings in residents and easily accommodates for a site visit
- (v) publicity for the meetings must be good and comprehensive
- (vi) the site visits helped to encourage discussion, especially for stakeholders not so familiar with the site
- (vii) the engagement of local councillors helps to give the process legitimacy
- (viii) there is a need to distinguish between site specific issues and those relating to the community as a whole
- (ix) when dealing with a community such as Easington Colliery; one of the most deprived in the North East; there is a strong tendency to be drawn into ancillary issues – not necessarily a bad thing but one that can mean extra discussion and debate
- (x) the concept statement had to find a balanced route between harnessing the sense of ambition for the community and responding to a sense of

- disillusion that was also apparent
- (xi) continued dialogue with the community is now essential to prevent the process being perceived to be abandoned
 - (xii) links between this 'one off' process and the ongoing LDF consultation is essential
 - (xiii) developing a concept statement has helped towards a more sustainable housing development for Easington Colliery
 - (xiv) the concept statement process helped to 'make real' the new localism agenda promoted by the new Coalition government

Key lessons learnt

- *how to improve development of concept statements in the future and the way forward*
 - link development of concept statement more closely to existing community groups - and ensure they are included in first stakeholder meeting
 - Could use electronic communication including emails and a web link to publicise our approach. Use of IT for feedback as well.
 - To take the process in-house and reduce dependency on external consultants and thereby costs in the future a project team with specific responsibilities - especially graphic design would be needed. Plus corporate commitment to the process.
 - The key challenge will be to how to keep this 'live' into the future. Need to keep in touch with Area Action Partnerships

8. FUTURE ACTION

The following steps will be taken:

1. Amendment of housing provision for the next iteration of the Strategic Land Availability Assessment
2. Incorporation of allocated land for housing in the County Durham plan (due for publication in late 2011)
3. The promotion of the concept statement process as a useful way for establishing the scope for development with the community at an early stage in the development process
4. Explore the idea of a Community Land Trust that could engage the community on a long term basis