

Core Strategy Policy Directions Consultation Paper

Response to Question 3

Do you agree that 38200 new houses is the correct Housing Requirement for County Durham to 2030 and that the County Durham Plan should identify specific sites for 29000 of these? If not can you put forward a more suitable alternative?

I do not agree with this statement. A more appropriate figure for the number of new houses is 30,000 fewer at 8,200.

The County Council's website has a report on **Population Trends in County Durham** from the Head of Policy, Planning and Performance, in the Regeneration and Economic Development Service Grouping. This may be viewed at

http://content.durham.gov.uk/PDFRepository/Population_Trends_in_County_Durham_2010_Report.pdf

These bullet points from the executive summary go to the heart of it:

- Current population estimate (2008): 498,706, comprising 243,946 males and 254,760 females
- If past trends continue, the population of the County is set to see a 0.9% increase by 2026 giving an end of period population of 501,600. By 2031 the population will have grown further to 510,814 compared to the corresponding projection by ONS of 552,900 by 2026 and 563,600 by 2031.

As you can see, the Council's own professional is predicting that the 2031 population will be 52,800 fewer than the ONS prediction. Paragraph 4.9 of the Core Strategy Policy Directions Consultation Paper uses the prediction "that by 2030, County Durham's population will have increased by 56,700 and the number of households by 38,200."

From this I infer that the average household size that is being used is around 1.48. As the 2008 base population figure is 498,706 the increase predicted in this report is 12,108 which would carry through to a household increase of 8,157. This is 30,000 fewer than the figure used in the County Durham Plan and would require absolutely no building on the Green Belt, indeed looking at table 1 in paragraph 4.17 the increase could all be accommodated in small and unallocated sites plus the reuse of vacant dwellings.

The report devotes an entire chapter to setting out why the ONS predictions are so much higher: basically they have inferred that the high level of immigration into the UK from the new accession states of the EU in recent years will continue ("In addition, the level of migration required to produce the ONS projections would require a virtual 'open door' migration policy on the part of the Government – again this is unlikely to happen in the current political climate.") and "Also, the ONS projections handles the university population differently to the County Council estimates and appears to age a proportion of the annual student intake into the local population i.e. ONS takes fewer migrant students out than it brings in within the usual three year HE cycle. This accumulates over time and leads to a far higher predicted level of net inward migration when compared to the County Council's estimates."

It is inconceivable that the County Council Planning Department would be unaware of this recent, cogently argued, report from a senior colleague in the Assistant Chief Executive's Office. Indeed it was plain that Stuart Timmiss was aware of it from the way he replied to a question at the Durham AAP Meeting on 6 July 2011. The absence of any reference to this alternative scenario is a serious and apparently deliberate omission from the Consultation Paper. In my view the Consultation paper needs to be reworked to take on board the arguments presented in the Council's own report on population trends, which has been recently prepared by a senior officer with a long experience of the local conditions in County Durham.