



Middleton St George Parish Council

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Darlington,
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1st August, 2018.

David Hand,
Place Policy Manager,
Economic Growth,
Darlington Borough Council.

Email: planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

Dear David,

Re: **DARLINGTON DRAFT LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION**

Middleton St George Parish Council wish to make the following comments on the Draft Local Plan.

This response should be read in conjunction with our response (dated 13th February 2018, attached) to the MSG Draft Spatial Plan Consultation, since the present response to the Draft Local Plan builds on the points made in that document.

MSG Spatial Plan

In 2017, a number of workshops/meetings were held at the Town Hall, involving MSG Parish Council, Planning Officers, and a number of other stakeholders, the aim of which was to reach agreed aims and objectives for looking at the village of Middleton St George more rationally and cohesively in terms of planning and infrastructure, rather than in an ad hoc manner.

The Parish Council consulted with residents, and fed back to these workshops/meetings. A Vision, as well as a number of High Level Objectives, for the village were subsequently agreed at the Workshop on 30th March 2017 (these are listed further on in this document for reference). The Parish Council again consulted with the residents, and fed back to the Planning Department in July, and the result was a Draft Spatial Plan for the village, on which Darlington Borough Council consulted with the village at the beginning of 2018.

All this was to be couched within, and form part of, the Draft Local Plan which Darlington Borough Council was drafting. As such, the Spatial Plan has been included in the Draft Local Plan currently being consulted upon.

To what extent has the MSG Spatial Plan, within the Draft Local Plan, responded to the needs of the village?

Let us look at the agreed "Vision":

"By 2036 Middleton St George will be a sustainable and cohesive community where improvements have been made in terms of enhancing the quality of life and the local environment for residents. The village will offer access to local facilities and will be well connected via sustainable transport routes to Darlington town centre and the wider Tees Valley. The character and heritage of Middleton-One-Row Conservation Area is to be retained and enhance over future years."

There is no evidence in the Draft Local Plan document to demonstrate how this Vision will be achieved.

In regards to "sustainability":

In the Draft Local Plan, Middleton St George is categorised as a "service village". Whilst it is true that the village has a railway station, and is close to the A67 and A66, we must emphasise, yet again, that the village fails two of the Borough Council's own sustainability factor criteria (ref. Darlington Borough Council's 2016 Interim Planning Position Statement); the GP Surgery is no longer located within 1km of the centre of the village, and the bus service, as well as only being an hourly service weekdays until 6pm, does not serve the GP Surgery in its new location (we continually request an improved bus service, but so far in vain). We need, in order of priority (a) an improved route to take in the GP Surgery, (b) restoration of Monday to Saturday evenings, as well as the Sunday service (c) restoration of half-hourly service, and (d) route linking other villages and Yarm. **We would urge the Borough Council to work with the Tees Valley Authority, as a priority, to ensure that we obtain a more viable bus service for the village according to our needs as stated, so that this ensures that the village meets sustainable transport requirements in view of the overwhelming increase in housing that has been approved for the village. An improved bus service was agreed as one of the High Level Objectives.** This has yet to materialise. As it is, the current bus service fails to meet the goal of being *"well connected via sustainable transport routes to Darlington town centre and the wider Tees Valley."* In light of the above, **we consider that the "sustainability" of the village should be reconsidered**, in consultation with the Parish Council and the residents, as we **strongly disagree with the Borough Council's definition of "sustainability."**

If Darlington Borough Council is to ensure that *"By 2036 Middleton St George will be a sustainable and cohesive community where improvements have been made in terms of enhancing the quality of life and the local environment for residents"*, it must actually provide the infrastructure that the residents have continually asked for, and not just leave this to negotiation between the Planning Officers and the Housing Developers. Very little improvement to the narrow village roads, which are totally unsuitable for the planned housing developments, has actually taken place, or is being planned to be carried out. The community **must** be consulted on this. For example, one of results of lack of such consultation with the Parish Council and its residents has been to agree with developers contributions to bus stop improvements where there is no bus service!

With regard to drainage and sewerage, MSG Parish Council has raised repeatedly the fact that the drainage system in the village is Victorian, with existing residents experiencing recurring problems of sewage coming up in their own properties. The Borough Council must take account of the issues that village residents have on this matter. The village system is groaning under the impact of so many houses, and with the added effects on the existing residents of Middleton St George.

The doctor's surgery, as has been mentioned in responses to previous planning applications, has been relocated, and is 25minutes walking distance (more than 1km) of the centre of the village. Neither is there an adequate bus service to the new location.

Housing numbers:

Darlington Borough Council's estimated housing target is 492 per year (ONS baseline figure 422). Middleton St George has already supplied almost two years' worth of the housing supply for the whole of Darlington since, and including "Gladman" (Sadberge Road development). If the all of the housing developments coming through the planning process are granted permission, the village will have supplied well over three years' supply for the whole of Darlington. This, whilst, according to CPRE calculations, only 493 (one year's supply) have been granted permission over the same period in the rest of Darlington.

Development Situation in Middleton St George
(as at April 2018)

Permission Granted (since and including "Gladman"):

- 13/00940/OUT Up to 250 dwellings, Sadberge Road (under construction)
- 16/00578/OUT 350 dwellings and local services at Durham Tees Valley Airport
- 16/00396/OUT – 55 Houses Lancaster House at Durham Tees Valley Airport
- 16/00972/FUL 27 dwellings off Middleton Lane (under construction)
- 17/00847/FUL – 44 houses Yarm Road (under construction)
- 15/00976/OUT / 17/01151/RM1 – 198 dwellings Grendon Gardens
- 17/00911/FUL - 10 houses plus convenience store, Yarm Road

Total 934 houses
+ 1 convenience store

We haven't even added in the potential number of vehicles from the applications that are pending and expected:

Pending:

- 16/00976/OUT - Up to 226 dwellings and primary school, Station Road
- 17/01195/OUT – 430 houses plus school and supermarket
- 17/01175/FUL – 63 houses Yarm Road
- 18/00275/OUT - 280 houses, plus 60 bed care home at Neasham Road

An additional: 999

Other Applications which are expected:

- All the remaining sites on the "Call for Sites" List

Cumulative Total of houses: 1,933
(which would mean at least 3,866 vehicles (an underestimate)
+ 2 convenience stores, and a 60-bed care home (with extra private and commercial vehicles)

The Parish Council consider that it is extremely unjust to expect Middleton St George to supply three times as many houses as the rest of Darlington, especially given the fact that, now that the Council has published its Brown Field Land Register, there is the potential for developing that land prior to doing so on greenfield

sites, as recommended by the Government (given more weight now in the revised NPPF), and also taking account of the fact that Middleton St George now fails two of the “sustainable village” criteria. There is also a case for refurbishing vacant properties within the urban area of Darlington before looking to green field in Middleton St George to contribute further to the housing quota for the whole of Darlington.

We have specific points to make with regard to the MSG Map in the Draft Local Plan:

In general terms, we agree with the proposed new development limit within the Draft Local Plan. However, development should be towards the A67 and **not located in the centre of the village**, where traffic will be forced along, thereby causing congestion and hazards, especially where there are children walking, playing and going to school. In our view, the approval of the development of 198 houses at High Stell/Grendon Gardens (15/00976/OUT and 17/01151/RM1) was a serious mistake. The evidence against this development (material grounds), put forward by the Parish Council and residents, based on many sound reasons including inadequate roads, was overwhelming. Therefore, **we are opposed to the inclusion of site 375, south of High Stell** (field between site 045 – High Stell – and the railway line) being included in the Draft Local Plan. It will only add to the congestion and safety hazards, and severely impact on the environmental amenity of the residents, given that the High Stell development has been granted permission, as there is no other route out of the village for both developments other than via the centre.

Furthermore, no consideration has been given to the problems the village and villagers must endure as a result of the construction of all these housing developments. There appears to be no policy to address the fact that there are ongoing breaches of conditions by developers and contractors, and that this is multiplied throughout the village due to developments being constructed concurrently. Blocking up roads, out of hours working, etc. leads to environmental impact on residents (including stress, noise and dirt), road safety hazards and risks to personal injury. The Parish Council, as well as many village residents, have reported a continuous list of instances of breaches of conditions to the Enforcement Officer. We would urge the Borough Council to scrutinise this documentation, following which we would urge the Borough Council to include a robust, and effectively enforceable policy for dealing with this, which would include the requirement that all builders, contractors and developers are members of the “Considerate Constructors” Scheme, and are members of approved professional and trade associations.

We urge the Borough Council to look again at these points, and to consult with the Parish Council and village residents to ensure that the Vision and High Level Objectives, along with the other issues we have mentioned, receive the attention they deserve so that the village can be regarded as truly “sustainable”.

Setting, Settlements, Green Space

Along with CPRE, we welcome the commitment to Policy SH1 (Settlement Hierarchy), (and in Statement 1.) that development in the “service villages” of Heighington, Hurworth and Middleton St George would be “to meet local needs” only, so will not include commuter housing estates. The village of Middleton St George **should not be permitted to become merely a dormitory village, but should retain its character as a separate village, ensuring that its residents can remain in the village.** However, with regard to the statement in 4.0.11. (*“Given that the Service Villages are shown to contain essential facilities and services, they are considered to be locations where development opportunities may be acceptable. As centres for activity in the rural area, Service Villages can also play a role in providing small-scale employment opportunities outside of the traditional rural industries. Developments that enhance this role should be supported.”*), Middleton St George has been treated extremely unfairly by having large-scale developments approved, instead of more appropriately-sized developments for a village. **We consider that the following**

sentences should be added here: “However, large developments of over 50 houses per development will be discouraged. No developments shall be permitted within Conservation Areas.” In terms of 4.0.10, (“*Service Villages are those that provide a core set of essential services for local communities. They must contain a school, village/community hall, and convenience store. It is also essential that they are well connected to higher service centres (towns) by public transport.*”), **the following should be added: “We will work with the Tees Valley Authority to ensure a viable bus service, in consultation with the local residents, which meets the needs of such connectivity and sustainable transport requirements.”**

We also agree with CPRE: “CPRE feels strongly that the policy intentions expressed here and in Policy ENV3 of maintaining the distinctiveness of villages and the openness of the countryside would be best achieved by creating Green Belt, a designation expressly created to meet these objectives.”

Green Space, Green Spaces, and keeping the boundaries, development limits and green gaps. The Spatial Plan retains the gap between Middleton St George and Middleton One Row. It should also maintain the gap between Middleton St George and Oak Tree/Airport, and the proposed development boundary should be altered to ensure this.

Regarding the **Designated Green Spaces**, in accordance with paragraph 77 of the NPPF, the Parish Council wishes to have a number of green spaces within the village designated as green spaces. **We submitted a list of proposed Designated Green Spaces (list attached for reference), and have been submitting evidence for those.** We are pleased to see that a number of these have been included in the Draft Local Plan (Playing Field at Station Road, Water Park, and Almora Hall field). **However, we have now submitted evidence for more spaces on the list which we expect to also be included in the Local Plan (including: The Front at Middleton One Row, Haxby Road Play Area, the 3 Allotments, Green Gap/Field at Middleton Lane, St George’s Church, The Whinnies, etc.) We will continue with this task.**

Ref. (Para 77). The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for most green areas or open space. The designation should only be used: ● where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; ● where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and ● where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Also vitally important, are the green areas such as The Whinnies Nature Reserve and the Water Park. We would like to see the Water Park also listed as a Nature Reserve.

Building the housing MSG needs, not having the type of housing imposed upon the village

With so many executive houses being granted permission in Middleton St George, the village is at risk of losing its character, merely providing for a commuter economy, and not ensuring that villagers can stay within the village if they wish by not having the availability of the right type of housing (two-bedroom, bungalows, etc.). The Local Plan must be robust in stating that this type of housing (smaller, affordable housing, and bungalows) which the village actually needs, is prioritised over executive housing, and that the local people are listened to regarding this.

MSG Emerging Neighbourhood Plan

The MSG Neighbourhood Plan reached the Second Pre-draft stage before having to be temporarily halted following “Gladman”. We intend to progress with this now, and a certain amount of information can still

be used to inform the present Consultation within the Draft Local Plan. The following sections pick up and expand on some of the points raised above:

Below are 3 of the Objectives, together with some relevant sections of the draft NDP, which we would want to see maintained and considered. We would welcome further consultation with Darlington Borough Council on how these may be implemented (including designating the green areas - NPPF paras 76-78).

Objective 1:

Ensure that new developments are sustainable and make a contribution to the quality of life and quality of local services for the people who live or work in Middleton St George.

Objective 2:

Maintain, protect and enhance green spaces and ensure that these are of a high quality and allow the community to use them for health and well-being. In pursuit of this ensure that the landscape character is maintained and enhanced and that the coalescence of Middleton St George with adjacent settlements is prevented.

Objective 3:

Maintain and enhance local distinctiveness including village character through the protection or restoration of the built and natural heritage of Middleton St George.

The strategic priorities for the Neighbourhood Development Plan set by the community are to (i) retain a village character for Middleton St George, (ii) maintain and where possible improve the quality of life for existing residents and (iii), maintain and where possible improve local services and infrastructure.

Judging by consultation the quality and accessibility of the environment in is an important consideration to the quality of life of residents. Hence environmental protection and improvements are to be sought through the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

All statutorily designated sites, buildings, habitats and features, such as Local Nature Reserves, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings are priorities for protection, in accordance with the relevant legislation. Existing green spaces e.g. the recreation ground, green corridors e.g. the route of the former Stockton Darlington, green features e.g. trees and hedgerows as well as Public Rights of Way and non-designated heritage assets e.g. local archaeology will all be protected and enhanced wherever possible. This will require a concerted effort through grants, funding packages, volunteer action, planning contributions and planning conditions as appropriate.

The physical separation of the sub-settlements of Middleton St George is a policy priority.

Middleton St George Parish Council believes that in order to deliver the requirements of sustainable development, all new development proposals should include a renewable energy component, energy recovery, recycled building materials, the use of SUDS and other sustainable technologies, provided these measures do not unduly compromise the viability of development. In order to ensure the delivery of sustainable development incorporating these technologies, developers may be asked to substantiate their proposals by providing financial justification or open book valuations, as may be necessary, in order to prove the viability of their development proposals.

Community consultation has revealed that Middleton St George has a drainage problem, including foul drainage black spots in locations such as Middleton Lane. Some residents have started to study the issue in detail and have engaged with Northumbrian Water, which considers that the local drainage and sewerage infrastructure to be adequate and fit for purpose. The residents view is that there are regular and repeated

instances of blocked drains, with raw sewage overflowing on to highway, to the detriment of environmental health. Local residents believe therefore, that the system is no longer fit for purpose and requires to be upgraded. They are also very concerned that further developments will be permitted without any improvements to an already unsatisfactory situation. Local attitude towards new development proposals is often openly hostile, in part, because of perceived sewerage capacity problems. Improvements will have to be the subject of negotiation with Northumbrian Water and any new development will be dependent upon the proven capacity of drains and sewers as well as improvements to the system, where required. If practicably possible, new developments will be required to provide independent justification that their proposals will not further compromise an already unsatisfactory situation, because local people are reluctant to believe the advice given by Northumbrian Water.

Evidence will be required from applicants that their development proposals will not adversely impact upon the drainage and sewerage infrastructure of the settlement. When required, creative solutions will be required from developers to avert flood risk from surface water and SUDS systems may be required to address foul sewerage.

Policy Justification: In order to address genuine community concern about the number and frequency of flooding and pollution incidents, residents believe that developers need to provide independent evidence, above that provided by Northumbrian Water, that their proposals will not accentuate existing problems.

Middleton St George - Draft High Level Objectives

As stated at the beginning of this response letter, in the context of the Local Plan, the following Vision and High Level Objectives were agreed at the Workshop on 30th March 2017. (The final bullet point being amended subsequent to a request by the Parish Council and agreement by the Borough Council).

Vision

“By 2036 Middleton St George will be a sustainable and cohesive community where improvements have been made in terms of enhancing the quality of life and the local environment for residents. The village will offer access to local facilities and will be well connected via sustainable transport routes to Darlington town centre and the wider Tees Valley. The character and heritage of Middleton-One-Row Conservation Area is to be retained and enhance over future years.”

Community and Social

- Creation of an improved village centre in terms of local facilities and retail offer at Yarm Road / Station Road / Middleton Lane junction. Explore potential opportunities to expand this offer in the surrounding area.
- Development will be required to make a contribution to new education provision to accommodate the needs of future residents. This may be through a new facility with potential links to St Georges Primary School.
- Where appropriate new development shall assist in improving local facilities such as the community hall.

Transport and Infrastructure

- Development proposals should consider opportunities to improve parking provision in the village centre, particularly to improve access to local shops and the railway station.
- Safe cycle routes and walkways should be incorporated into site layouts including links to adjoining residential areas / bridal ways etc. Existing routes should be enhanced where appropriate.
- Linkages for movement and transport should be pursued to support permeability.

- Improve public bus services in terms of reliability and frequency including links to Yarm.
- Public utilities and digital infrastructure requirements shall be considered holistically and improvements to existing provision encouraged where possible.

Environmental and Place Making

- Protection and enhancement of the village centre.
- Opportunities shall be explored for new hubs for local facilities and areas for recreation.
- Green infrastructure shall be defined and allocated as having both formal and informal functions.
- New green infrastructure shall be integrated into existing provision and other routes. Movement being key.
- Enhancement and potential rationalisation of existing open space provision, to improve the quality of recreational areas and to provide additional biodiversity / landscape value.
- Potential enhancement of allotments and opportunities explored for relocation and/or expansion.
- All development to be of the highest quality in terms of layout, architectural design and materials that will create high value, high quality development.
- Design shall be focused on the village's heritage and original character.
- The density of development shall be appropriate to the location within the village.
- There should be active frontages throughout development.
- Development proposals should protect and enhance the setting of adjacent heritage assets (Middleton-One-Row Conservation Area), as well as preserve and enhance heritage assets relating to the historic Stockton & Darlington Railway and route, as well as any other historical archaeological artefacts within the village and parish boundary. [agreed amendment following Parish Council request – emails of 2nd/3rd August 2017]

Transport and Infrastructure

We would ask that the following be considered in the context of the MSG masterplan, as these points were included in the presentation at the workshop on 20th July 2017, following our public consultation.

Bus route amended within MSG to include loop to the airport (which would also serve the relocated GP Surgery). (5-10 mins max addition to bus schedule)

- Subsidize on a trial basis.
- Alternate the direction to permit in-village travel.
- Improve frequency of service and include evenings and Sundays
- Enhance service to link local villages with connections to Darlington and Yarm

Monitor traffic levels on A67 to Morton Park. Road is already busy at peak times and backing up. Maintain roundabouts on A67. Vision poor for access (Sadberge Rd particularly), becoming dangerous.

Improve footpath network.

- Ensure PROW are registered and maintained
- Ensure that there is footpath provision alongside roads throughout the village
- National Cycle Route 14 (Airport – Darlington Ring Road (old S&DR route) to be resurfaced for foot and cycle use.

Utilities.

- Ensure the quality and capacity of all utilities are sustainable and improved to account for increased volume.

Possibilities.

- Ensure gas, electric, water, sewage and surface water drainage plans are comprehensive.
- All new developments to have fibre optic communication connectivity and extended to the rest of the village.
- Mobile phone coverage. Dead-spots, certainly on Western side, require resolution

Environmental and Place making

We would ask that the following be considered in the context of the MSG masterplan, as these points were included in the presentation at the workshop on 20th July 2017, following our public consultation.

- Ensure a mix of properties for all demographics from starter homes to bungalows for the elderly and/or infirm.
- Improve maintenance of council-managed green areas and paths.
- Provide CCTV monitoring for parks and leisure areas where anti-social behaviour and crime are most likely.
- Density and type of housing to be in keeping with adjacent established developments.
- Preference for no 3-storey housing.
- Avoid narrow hidden pathways and garage block areas where anti-social behaviour and littering may occur.

Further, with regard to conservation, we would like to see the conservation of the former S&D Railway route, and all the heritage artefacts. Therefore, the Parish Council are in agreement with, and support, the representation by the Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway, as follows:

The FSDR welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Spatial Plan. The forthcoming Darlington Local Plan will recognise the heritage value of the S&DR and will put forward policies to protect, enhance and promote its assets.

Within this corridor, the route of the proposed Heritage Trail for pedestrians and cyclists should be shown. This already exists west of Oak Tree roundabout and extends to the main urban area of Darlington. The existing path between Oak Tree roundabout and St George's Way will be upgraded by the s106 agreement for the airport housing development and Network Rail's proposed improvements. A route exists eastwards from St George's Way to the borough boundary on the A67 beyond Goosepool but improvements are needed in places.

The FSDR will be proposing the creation of a Rail Heritage Hub at Fighting Cocks. This will be one of a series along the whole length from Witton Park to Stockton and will provide a focus of items of interest, information and interpretation and other amenities for the public to enjoy, especially during the 200th anniversary celebrations in 2025. The remains of other trackside features in the parish will be investigated, enhanced and publicised. The Hub should be identified on the Spatial Plan.

Finance for the above will be found from a number of sources and funding from the recently announced S&DR Heritage Action Zone will be an important contributor. Contributions from future developers would be appropriate as the enhanced trackbed and Heritage Trail will be enjoyed by residents; for example the proposed housing site at Station Road could contribute towards the Fighting Cocks Hub.

Ross Chisholm

Planning Officer

FSDR

01325461902

In addition, we would stress that the conservation of all heritage artefacts is important. **This includes the Roman Road (Cade's Road).**

Summary

The village of Middleton St George within the context of the Draft Local Plan must be considered with reference to all the points made within this response:

- Agreed Vision and High Level Objectives (as agreed as a result of consultation)
- MSG Spatial Plan (as agreed as a result of consultation)
- The unacceptability of including development for housing located within the centre of the village, with no access and egress other than via the centre of the village
- The more rational basis of housing located close to the A67, and not in the centre of the village
- There should be a robust policy for addressing the consequences of concurrent buildouts
- The number of houses already granted permission, and the unreasonableness of granting permission for more in proportion to other areas of Darlington, especially given the fact that the village fails two sustainability factors criteria, there are brownfield sites within Darlington to develop, and empty properties within Darlington could be refurbished first
- The dire need for an appropriately improved bus service, to ensure the sustainable transport needs of the village throughout the Plan lifetime (along the lines outlined in this letter).
- The urgent need to address infrastructure needs (roads, utilities, broadband, community facilities, etc.), along the lines outlined in this letter
- The need to preserve the green gaps and green environment within and around the village, thus ensuring and preserving its character as a village, and not as a dormitory village
- The great importance of preserving green space in and around the village in order to help preserve its character (hence the Designated Green Spaces, as proposed)
- Building the type of houses that the village needs, not those that developers choose, thus ensuring that villagers are able to stay within the village if they wish throughout their lives, as opposed to just providing commuter housing

The Draft Local Plan does not adequately address any of the above, and we would urge the Borough Council to ensure that it does by incorporating all of the above points, and addressing the issues outlined in this response.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Macnab,
Clerk to the Parish Council

Encs. - MSG Parish Council response letter (dated 13/02/2018) to MSG Spatial Plan Consultation List of Proposed Designated Green Spaces (revised at July 2018)