

Development

Housing

Industry

Transport

Minerals

Waste

Renewable Energy

Recreation & Tourism



Housing

The population of County Durham is relatively stable although there are some areas with declining populations, principally in the east and west, and areas where population growth is projected. Demographic changes and changing patterns of occupancy create pressure for new housing development in most parts of the county, but generally at relatively modest levels. Some of this new development will be accommodated on 'brownfield' or redundant sites within towns and villages but some will take place on 'greenfield' sites on the edges of existing towns and villages.

New housing development can bring changes – positive or negative - to the rural and urban landscape in a number of ways.

- Rural or urban fringe countryside – often of value to local residents – may be lost to permanent development.
- Mature landscapes and landscape features like hedgerows and hedgerow trees may be lost directly, or indirectly in the widening of roads and junctions.
- The character of the wider landscape may be affected by the visual intrusion of new urban areas or settlement edges and its tranquillity eroded by increased noise levels and lighting.
- Local distinctiveness may be weakened by the introduction of 'generic' housing styles or alien building materials.
- The physical separation between settlements and sense of separate identity may be eroded.
- The physical form of settlements may be changed by infill development with the loss of open green spaces, mature gardens and trees.
- Pedestrian circulation within settlements can be obstructed by 'introspective' housing layouts.
- Large scale developments can shift established neighbourhood centres.
- The rural character of the surrounding countryside may be weakened by new recreational activities and increased traffic levels on quiet country roads.
- The structure and appearance of towns and villages – particularly former mining settlements - can be improved by filling gaps in the urban fabric and creating new attractive green spaces and settlement edges.

It is important that the form, pattern and detailing of new residential development respects the character of local landscapes and the vernacular of local townscapes and makes a positive contribution to the sustainability of settlements and communities.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for new development

The Regional Spatial Strategy sets the strategic framework for the provision of land to meet housing needs. District Wide Local Development Plans and emerging Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) allocate specific sites for new housing and contained more detailed policies. The overall objective of local planning policies is to accommodate new housing on land within or well related to the main towns, or in other towns and larger villages

where it is consistent with their scale and function. Priority is given to the redevelopment of derelict or redundant sites. The Landscape Assessment and Strategy are contributing to the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, informing the identification of allocations for housing and providing guidance on landscape issues.

Objectives

- To inform LDF policies and housing allocations.

Guiding new development

The impacts of new development on the urban and rural landscape are heavily influenced by the details of site selection and design. The Landscape Character Assessment provides baseline information on landscape character which can be used to inform these processes, but further detailed guidance is needed on residential design in different landscapes. Building-in Sustainability, the regional guide to sustainable building and development, provides guidance on how to adopt sustainability principles in building works. Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are being proposed as part of Local Development Frameworks to give further guidance on design issues. In some circumstances Village Design Statements produced by local people may be a useful tool for guiding development in settlements where there is significant development pressure.

Objectives

- To inform and support the development of a Supplementary Planning Documents dealing with design issues.
- To encourage the preparation of 'Village Design Statements' by local communities.

Mature landscape features

New development in the countryside, or within settlements on sites like old gardens, often brings buildings close to mature trees and hedges. Incorporating existing features into a housing layout can give it maturity and character but they can be damaged by building works, and can be lost in the future if their proximity to buildings wasn't fully catered for at the design stage. Where the loss of mature features, and particularly hedges, cannot be avoided, alternatives like translocation, or planting or managing features in the surrounding area can be undertaken to offset unavoidable impacts.

Objectives

- To encourage the retention and safeguarding on mature landscape features – and particularly mature trees and hedges – on development sites
- To encourage off-site mitigation of impacts on local landscape character

Sustainable communities

New development can make a positive contribution to the structure, pattern and functioning of existing settlements and their relationship to the surrounding countryside. New urban green spaces can be created within the settlement and new community woodlands in the urban fringe. Connections within and between settlements in the form of new footpaths and cycle ways can be created. New wildlife habitats can be developed, for example as part of Sustainable Urban Drainage schemes. Good design and high quality detailing in the landscaping of spaces between new buildings can make a valuable contribution to the quality of the urban environment.

Objectives

- To encourage positive contributions to the sustainability and quality of life of local communities from new development.
- To encourage high standards of design and detailing in the landscaping of new development.



Industry

The past dependence of the region on the declining industries of coal, steel and heavy engineering has led to a major restructuring of the economy in the industrial landscapes of the coalfield. Many large new industrial estates have been developed around larger settlements and close to the strategic highway network. Future development is likely to take place on existing allocated and serviced (though as yet undeveloped) land and on New Prestige Employment Sites or Strategic Reserve Sites, some of which are in rural situations.

New industrial or commercial development can bring changes to the rural landscape in a number of ways.

- Rural or urban fringe countryside – often of value to local residents – may be lost to permanent development
- Mature landscapes and landscape features like hedgerows and hedgerow trees may be lost directly, or indirectly in the development of new roads and infrastructure.
- The character of the wider landscape may be affected by the visual intrusion of new industrial scale buildings.
- Local distinctiveness may be weakened by the introduction of ‘universal’ industrial buildings and building materials.
- The rural character of the countryside between settlements, and particularly along main transport corridors, may be eroded.
- The tranquillity of the surrounding countryside may be weakened by noise and light pollution and by increased traffic levels on local roads.
- The appearance of derelict or underused sites can be improved by high quality development.

There will be a continued need for new industrial development to meet the demands of a changing economy and the employment needs of local communities. It is important that such development does not detract from the character and quality of the countryside, which is important to both the quality of life of local people and to the marketing of County Durham as a high quality location for business.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for new development

The Regional Spatial Strategy sets the strategic framework for the provision of land to meet employment needs. District Wide Local Plans and emerging Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) allocate specific sites for new development and contained more detailed policies. The overall objective of local planning policies is to accommodate new development on allocated sites well related to the main settlements and transport networks. Priority is given to the redevelopment of derelict or redundant sites. The Landscape Assessment and Strategy are contributing to the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, informing the identification of allocations for industry and providing guidance on landscape issues.

Objectives

- To inform LDF policies and allocations.

Guiding new development

The impacts of new development are heavily influenced by the details of site selection and design. The County Durham Landscape Character Assessment provides baseline information on landscape character which can be used to inform these processes. Building-in Sustainability, the regional guide to sustainable building and development, provides guidance on how to adopt sustainability principles in building works. Further detailed guidance is needed on design principles and issues in different landscapes. A number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) are being proposed as part of Local Development Frameworks to give further guidance on design issues.

Objectives

- To inform and support the development of a Supplementary Planning Documents dealing with design issues.

Existing industrial Sites

Some existing industrial sites have a high standard of external screening and interior landscaping. Others – and particularly those that have developed in a piecemeal fashion – have a poor appearance in views from surrounding areas and lack an integrated approach to the management of elements like structure planting. Existing sites can be made more attractive to local people and businesses alike by environmental improvement works and offsite screening.

Objectives

- To encourage improvements to the environment of industrial sites.

Vacant industrial land

Vacant industrial land can have a run down and neglected appearance. There is little incentive to manage positively or create permanent landscape features where uncertainties exist over the form of future development. In some case permanent structure planting can be developed in advance of development, which will gain maturity and screening value in the interim. Some short-term uses of industrial land – for example as hay meadows – can have considerable biodiversity value.

Objectives

- To encourage positive management of vacant industrial land to improve its appearance and wildlife value.
- To encourage early structure planting on vacant and reserve sites.



Transport

In recent decades social and economic changes have led to mass car ownership, increases in road freight and changing patterns of travel for work, business and leisure. This has led to both higher levels of traffic and the development of new infrastructure to cope with demand. There is growing recognition of the detrimental effects of transport on the environment, the economy and quality of life. This requires a new approach to ensure that future needs are provided for in a way that reduces the impact of transport on people and their environment.

Increased traffic levels and new transport infrastructure can bring changes to the landscape in a number of ways.

- Road verges and roadside vegetation can be affected by pollution, salt spray and physical damage.
- Roadside walls and buildings may be affected by physical damage or vibration.
- Minor road works can erode the distinctive character and rural quality of minor roads.
- The use and enjoyment of country roads by walkers, cyclists and horse riders may be impaired.
- The rural character of the landscape may be affected by the introduction of new development – new landforms, bridges, surfaces, lighting, signage, landscaping and moving traffic.
- The tranquillity of the countryside may be weakened by noise and light pollution.
- Landscape features like natural landforms, hedgerows and mature trees may be lost.
- The structure of the landscape and the connectivity of habitats may be disrupted.

Transport Planning

The Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 (LTP) outlines the approach towards the development of all forms of transport in the county and a programme of capital works for the plan period. In towns and villages it places an emphasis on the development of places for people to walk and cycle safely, and the improvement of public transport. In the countryside the main focus for action is sustaining the accessibility of jobs and services for the many people living in the countryside without access to a car and alleviating the impacts of private car use. The plan recognises the need to limit future traffic growth and the need to look for other solutions before new road construction is considered. Improvements to the highway network are proposed in some locations, including the provision of bypasses to remove traffic from towns.

Issues and Objectives

New transport infrastructure

The impacts of new infrastructure on the character of the landscape can be substantial. These can be reduced in some degree by careful route selection and engineering design, by retaining or translocating mature landscape features, by minimising lighting, by selecting materials and plant species for landscaping works which reflect the character of the local landscape, and by on and off-site planting. Most new development requires planning consent and in many cases the preparation of an Environmental Statement. The Landscape Assessment provides baseline information on landscape character which can inform these processes.

Objectives

- To ensure that new transport infrastructure is designed to minimise its impact on the character of the local landscape.

Minor road works

The character of minor rural roads and lanes, from sunken hollow-ways and narrow winding lanes in the lowlands to straight enclosure roads in the upland fringes, is often an important component of local distinctiveness. Minor engineering improvements like junction improvements, traffic calming, road widening, and the easing of bends, kerbing, lighting and signage, can weaken their character as well as having a generally urbanising effect on the rural landscape. This can often be minimised by careful planning and design. The recent [Guidelines for the Management of Roads in the North Pennines AONB](#) provides a useful model for developing character area based guidelines elsewhere in the county.

Objectives

- To ensure that highway improvement works respect the rural and historic character of minor roads and lanes.
- To support the preparation of area based guidelines for the management of roads.

Traffic management

High levels of traffic on rural roads affect both their physical fabric and their use and enjoyment by other groups – cyclists, horse riders and walkers. In some places this can be addressed by traffic management measures. Road networks can be designated as 'Quiet Lanes' or as access only routes where motorised traffic is discouraged. Weight restrictions and signage can reduce through traffic. The removal of road markings can reduce the speed of traffic. Under the Transport Act 2000 local authorities were given powers to designate Quiet Lanes and their development is being promoted through the Natural England's Quiet Lanes initiative. The Local Transport plan provides for the identification of quiet routes and traffic calming measures in the countryside.

Objectives

- To support measures which reduce or manage traffic on rural roads.
- To support and promote the development of Quiet Lanes.

Cycling, walking and horse riding

Cycling, walking and horse riding, whether for utility or recreation, can reduce motorised traffic and its impacts on the environment. The county is well provided with cycle ways and bridleways, many on old railway lines, but connections between many towns and villages remain on busy roads. The Local Transport Plan contains policies on the creation of cycle routes, including inter-urban utility and recreational routes. The County Durham Cycling Strategy and County Durham Walking Strategy promote cycling and walking and inform the Local Transport Plan. The Safer Routes to School project seeks to develop safe routes for schoolchildren. Natural England is promoting the development of 'Greenways' – multi-user car-free networks- providing people with the option of making journeys for work or leisure on foot, cycle or horseback.

Objectives

- To support and encourage initiatives which promote cycling and walking.
- To support the creation of Greenways between towns and villages.

Road verges

Road verges are an attractive part of the highway landscape and an important habitat for wildlife. They often contain remnants of species rich grasslands that are declining in the wider countryside. These verges need to be managed to maintain their attractiveness and species diversity. Existing records of important roadside verges

are held on a GIS database by the County Council, including records from recent surveys in the North Pennines by the Durham BAP partnership. Further work is needed to complete this process to ensure the protection and conservation of important verges across the county. Roadside hedges, trees, woodlands and scrub also make an important contribution to the character and scenic quality of the landscape. They are vulnerable to physical damage, minor road improvements and routine maintenance works.

Objectives

- To support further surveys of roadside vegetation.
- To encourage the conservation and appropriate management of roadside verges



Minerals

County Durham is rich in mineral resources, and mineral extraction and processing has had a considerable impact on the character of the landscape. The industry's legacy runs deep in the landscapes of the coalfield and the North Pennines, where in addition to the more obvious physical features – old abandoned quarries and mines and restored opencast workings – the settlement, and even enclosure patterns, have evolved under the influence of the mining economy.

Mineral extraction can bring changes to the rural landscape in a number of ways.

- Natural topography may be damaged temporarily or permanently.
- Mature landscapes and landscape features like hedgerows and hedgerow trees may be lost.
- The rural character of the landscape may be eroded by the presence of industrial features - extraction faces, stockpiles and screening mounds, buildings and processing plant.
- The tranquillity of the surrounding countryside may be weakened by noise and light pollution and by increased levels of lorry traffic on local roads.
- Local distinctiveness may be weakened by insensitive restoration.
- Derelict or contaminated land may be reclaimed efficiently by recovering minerals.
- New landscape features can be created on restoration which contribute to the local landscape – ponds and wetlands, native woodlands, species rich grasslands, heathland, hedges and walls.
- There will be a continued need for new mineral workings or extensions to existing workings in the future. It is important that these do not adversely affect valued attributes of the landscape, and where possible contribute to wider goals like restoring biodiversity.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for new development

The adopted [County Durham Minerals Local Plan 2000](#) sets out the detailed local planning policies and proposals that guide mineral working. It will be replaced by the emerging [County Durham Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework](#). This will contain policies concerning the general needs for new mineral working, the efficient use of resources, and the protection of the environment and amenity of those affected by it. It will also contain specific proposals for future working of particular minerals. The County Durham Landscape Assessment and Strategy will contribute to this process, informing landscape policies and the identification of allocated sites or areas of search.

Objectives

- To inform Local Development Framework policies and allocations.

Guiding new development

Mineral working inevitably involves change in the landscape. The extent to which this is positive or negative depends on how sites are selected, designed, and restored. The County Durham Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy provides baseline information on landscape character and broad objectives for county character areas which can be used to inform these processes. Building-in Sustainability, the regional guide to sustainable building and development, provides guidance on how to adopt sustainability principles in mineral workings. A Supplementary Planning Document is currently being prepared as part of the Minerals & Waste LDF which will give further guidance on landscape issues.

Objectives

- To inform and support the development of a Supplementary Planning Document on Minerals & Waste.

Existing mineral sites

Mineral workings can be long lived and many existing sites date from planning permissions granted some time ago when standards were lower. The operation and restoration of sites granted permission between 1948 and 1982 is now subject of a review process under the Environment Act 1995. Despite this process there are often residual impacts – particularly visual impacts - that are difficult to mitigate. In some areas – and particularly on the limestone escarpment – the cumulative impact of existing sites is significant and likely to increase in the coming decades. Action plans for areas such as these which provided for off site structure planting and hedgerow planting, together with improvements to disrupted footpath networks, could address some of these issues.

Objectives

- To encourage improvements to the appearance of active and dormant mineral workings.
- To promote and support area based initiatives that address the impacts of mineral workings.

Creative Restoration

The restoration of mineral workings can offer significant opportunities to meet wider goals like enhancing landscape character and biodiversity, increasing access to the countryside, or contributing to the expansion of woodland. This Strategy identifies broad objectives for local landscapes which should be used, together with the Landscape Guidelines and other strategies like the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan, to inform the after-use and detailed design of restored sites.

Objectives

- To encourage the creative restoration of mineral workings to restore or enhance landscape character and biodiversity and bring benefits to local communities.

Legacies from the past

Mineral working has had an enduring impact on much of the Durham landscape. Some features like old quarries and lead mining remains are important components of local landscape character. Other mining legacies - dereliction, the contamination of watercourses and beaches, the poor restoration design of early opencast workings and reclamation schemes - are problematic. Some derelict sites have a nature conservation or heritage value which needs to be balanced against their environmental problems. The reclamation programme, together with initiatives like the Turning The Tide project on the coast, has accomplished a great deal in recent decades. Further work is required to deal with residual issues like contamination and pollution, and to improve the character and conservation value of restored land.

Objectives:

- To promote an understanding of the importance of mining heritage to the character of local landscapes and to secure the conservation of key features.
- To promote and support landscape renewal initiatives which seek to improve the character and biodiversity of areas affected in the past by mineral working.



Waste

The disposal of waste in County Durham in the past has been largely to landfill due to the abundance of capacity in abandoned quarries and clay pits. This has discouraged the development of more sustainable methods of waste management and encouraged large quantities of waste to be imported from nearby conurbations. The increasing emphasis placed on recycling and recovery of waste and the requirement to reduce waste going to landfill under the EC Landfill Directive are bringing about a significant change in the way waste is managed.

Waste management and disposal facilities can bring changes to the rural landscape in a number of ways.

- Natural topography may be permanently damaged by land-filling or land-raising
- Geological exposures in old quarries may be concealed.
- Mature landscapes and landscape features like hedgerows and hedgerow trees may be lost.
- The rural character of the landscape may be eroded by the presence of industrial features - operational and tipping areas, litter-trap fencing, stockpiles and screening mounds, processing plant and buildings
- The tranquillity of the surrounding countryside may be weakened by noise and light pollution and by increased levels of lorry traffic on local roads.
- Local distinctiveness may be weakened by insensitive restoration.
- Old mineral workings, derelict or contaminated land may be restored by landfilling.
- Organic wastes may be returned to land to restore or increase soil fertility.
- New landscape features can be created on restoration that contribute to the local landscape – ponds and wetlands, native woodlands, species rich grasslands, heathland, hedges and walls.

There will be a continued need for new waste management and disposal facilities ranging from landfill sites to waste digesters. It is important that these developments do not adversely affect valued attributes of the landscape, and where possible contribute to wider goals like restoring biodiversity.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for new development

The adopted [County Durham Waste Local Plan](#) sets out the detailed local planning policies and proposals that guide the management of waste. It will be replaced by the emerging [County Durham Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework](#). Its informing principles will be to minimise the amount of waste produced and to view waste as a resource from which value can be extracted through recycling or recovery, before disposal of the residues. The Landscape Assessment and Strategy will be used to inform both the selection and design requirements of sites that come forward through the Waste Local Plan process.

Objectives

- To inform Local Development Framework policies and allocations.

Guiding new development

The impacts of new waste facilities will be strongly influenced by the way sites are selected, designed, managed and restored. The Landscape Character Assessment and Strategy provides baseline information on landscape character, and broad objectives which can inform those processes. New technologies bring new challenges, both in terms of accommodating new types of development, and in integrating waste and land management objectives – for example in returning organic wastes or residues to land. There is a need for further design guidance on waste development and particularly for these newer technologies. A Supplementary Planning Document is currently being prepared (2007) as part of the Minerals & Waste LDF which will give further guidance on landscape issues.

Objectives

- To inform and support the development of a Supplementary Planning Document on Minerals & Waste.

Landfill

Approved landfill capacity in the County has been declining and is currently low in some areas and for particular types of waste. The emphasis placed on protecting water resources by the Environment Agency in the recent The Location and Impact Assessment of Landfill Sites may result in new sites being required off the Permian limestone aquifer which in the past has presented most opportunities in abandoned quarries. New landfill or land-raise sites may therefore be proposed on greenfield sites. Some existing landfill sites are visually intrusive and unsightly. Their effects on the locality could be improved in places by on-site improvements and off-site planting.

Objectives:

- To ensure that new landfill or land-raise proposals are in keeping with the character of the landscape and contribute to the landscape strategy for the area.
- To encourage improvements to the appearance of active landfill sites.

Restoration and aftercare

Restoration can offer opportunities to meet wider goals like enhancing landscape character and biodiversity or increasing woodland cover. Restoration design is often constrained by the need to accommodate settlement, leachate and gas control, or energy recovery. Restoration and aftercare works may need to be phased over a long period to achieve satisfactory results. This Strategy identifies broad objectives for local landscapes which should be used, together with the Landscape Guidelines and other strategies like the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan, to inform the after-use and detailed design of restored sites.

Objectives

- To encourage the creative restoration of waste disposal sites to restore or enhance landscape character and biodiversity and bring benefits to local communities.

Legacies from the past

Reclamation practices on many former waste disposal sites in the County were significantly below modern standards and some sites were restored with little regard to landscape character. Opportunities to improve the landscape quality of former waste disposal sites may be constrained by the lack of adequate capping materials or ongoing operational and monitoring requirements.

Objectives

- To secure improvements to the restoration of old waste disposal sites where technically feasible.

Specification of recycled materials

There are many opportunities for using recycled materials in landscaping works. The use of reclaimed stone or brick, secondary aggregates, recovered soils and organic composts or street furniture manufactured from recycled materials can help reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Objectives

- To promote the use of re-used or recycled material in landscaping works.



Renewable energy

In response to the threats posed by climate change the Government has set a target for reducing CO2 emissions by 60% by 2050. As one of the measures to meet that objective it is proposing to achieve 10% of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2010, and 20% by 2020. This requires a radical change in the way energy is generated and one that is likely to bring new forms of development and new crops to the rural landscape.

New renewable energy development can bring changes to the landscape in a number of ways.

- New development of an industrial nature in the countryside may be visually intrusive and may weaken its rural character.
- Large wind turbines may dominate the local landscape and be visible over extensive areas.
- New infrastructure in the form of access roads, power lines and substations may be damaging to landscape features or be visually intrusive.
- New energy crops may introduce novel features, textures or colours to farmland landscapes.
- New energy efficient buildings, or energy installations on existing buildings, may conflict with traditional architectural styles.

The North East renewable Energy Strategy (March 2005) published by the North East Assembly describes the renewable energy resources in the region and sets targets for energy generation to 2020.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for renewable energy

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) provides the strategic planning policy framework for renewable energy development in the region. It sets sub-regional targets for energy generation, including a target of 82MW for County Durham. Local Plans contain more detailed policies, as will the Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) that replace them. The Landscape Assessment and Strategy will contribute to the preparation of LDFs, informing the formulation of policies and providing guidance on landscape issues.

Objectives

- To inform Local Development Framework policies.

Wind Energy

It is likely that wind energy will make the largest contribution to new renewable energy generation in the county in the coming decade. RSS identifies a number of 'broad areas of least constraint' for wind energy generation, which include the northern and southern uplands of the West Durham Coalfield, the East Durham Plateau and the Tees Plain. Modern wind turbines are uniquely large structures that occupy prominent locations and are generally highly visible. Their development always involves an impact on the character of the landscape. For some landscapes the consequences are greater than others. For example in the wild moorland landscapes of the North Pennines the introduction of large man made elements would entail more of a 'step change' in character than in settled landscapes which already contain man-made features like pylons, telecommunications and TV masts. In all landscapes there are local sensitivities. Small-scale topography, field and vegetation patterns may be dwarfed

by tall structures. Turbines may interfere visually, or detract from the setting of, notable buildings, designed parks and gardens, or historic monuments. The tranquillity of the countryside may be disturbed by the presence of moving turbines. The movement or noise of turbines in close proximity may affect the amenity of local residents.

Physical, economic and environmental constraints are likely to make large parts of the county unsuited to development, and pressure is likely to be concentrated in certain areas. The pattern of constraints in County Durham is such that there are few opportunities for large or medium scale wind farms. Development is likely to take place largely in the form of smaller scale groups (up to five or six turbines). It is important that the cumulative impact of individual sites is taken into account and the right balance is struck between the concentration of development in some landscapes and the consequences to the wider landscape of a more dispersed pattern of development. It is important that local communities are involved at an early stage in the planning process and particularly in making judgements about the capacity of the local landscape to accommodate new development.

Objectives

- To ensure that wind energy development does not detract from the special qualities of designated landscapes and in particular the North Pennines AONB, the Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Historic Parks and Gardens.
- To ensure that the scale and form of wind farms is compatible with the character of the local landscape and the wider landscapes in which they are visible.
- To ensure that the cumulative impact of wind farms in any one locality is not excessive.
- To promote the involvement of local communities at an early stage in the planning process.

Biomass

Energy or heat can be produced in a number of ways from biomass - whether woody material from forest products, waste wood and energy crops like willow or poplar, or non-woody material such as biodegradable wastes and high energy crops. New facilities such as anaerobic digesters, power stations, and pyrolysis plants are likely to be proposed, some in rural locations close to their sources of materials. The introduction of unfamiliar crops may also have an impact on the landscape. Short rotation coppice in particular is likely to become more commonly planted. This can make a positive contribution to the character of some landscapes, as well as to their biodiversity, but will need careful site selection and design.

Objectives:

- To ensure that new energy development respects the character of the local landscape and contributes to the strategy for the area.
- To encourage sensitive site selection and design in the planting of energy crops.

Other technologies

Other renewables technologies – principally hydroelectric, solar and geo-energy – are likely to have relatively small-scale applications in the county in the immediate future. Impacts on the landscape are likely to be localised, but many suitable locations (for example the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of High Landscape Value) are likely to be sensitive. Care will need to be taken to ensure that development respects the character of the local landscape, buildings and townscapes.

Objectives:

- To ensure that new energy development respects the character of the local landscape and built environment.



Recreation and Tourism

The rural landscapes of County Durham are attractive to both residents and visitors. Tourism is important to the economy, and particularly in rural areas like the North Pennines, and there is considerable demand for recreational and sporting activities in the countryside around towns and villages. Environmentally sustainable tourism and recreation can encourage appreciation of the landscape, wildlife, culture and history of the countryside while providing new opportunities for diversification and employment.

New recreational or tourist development and associated activities can also bring changes to the rural landscape in a number of ways.

- Development may have an ‘urbanising’ effect on the rural landscape through the introduction of new buildings and land uses.
- The tranquillity of the countryside may be affected by noisy activities, increased traffic levels and lighting.
- Mature landscapes and landscape features may be damaged or lost.
- Land may be managed without the expertise or resources of farmers and foresters.
- The conversion of traditional buildings and the scale or design of new buildings may be out of keeping with the vernacular character of the locality.
- Pressures of visitor numbers can lead to damage to footpaths and fragile habitats.
- Recreational developments may bring opportunities to re-use and maintain traditional buildings, or to support traditional forms of land management.

Tourism and recreational activities play an increasingly important role in the rural economy. It is essential that they don’t detract from the very qualities that make the countryside attractive to visitors and residents.

Issues and Objectives

Planning for new development in the countryside

Most new development requires planning permission and District Wide Local Plans contain policies for recreational development in the countryside, as will the Local Development Frameworks that are to replace them. The Landscape Assessment and Strategy will contribute to the preparation or review of development plans, informing policy making, and will assist in evaluating proposals that come forward.

Objectives

- To inform Local Development Framework policies.

Guiding new development

The impacts of new development are heavily influenced by the details of site selection and design. The County Durham Landscape Character Assessment provides baseline information on landscape character which can be used to inform these processes. [Building-in Sustainability](#), the regional guide to sustainable building and development, provides guidance on how to adopt sustainability principles in building works. Further detailed guidance is needed on design principles and issues in different landscapes. A number of Supplementary

Planning Documents (SPD) are being proposed as part of Local Development Frameworks to give further guidance on design issues.

Objectives

- To inform and support the development of a Supplementary Planning Documents dealing with design issues.

Urbanisation

Changes from agriculture or forestry to recreation based land uses can erode the specifically rural character of the countryside, introducing features more characteristic of urban or suburban landscapes. This ranges from the development of new roads and buildings to the creation of formal or exotic landscaping such as that found on golf courses. The extent to which this happens depends partly on the location of new development and partly on the way it is designed and managed.

Objectives

- To minimise urbanising effects on the rural landscape by ensuring that new development respects the character of the local landscape and contributes to the landscape strategy for the area.
- To encourage the use of species and materials native to, or characteristic of, the local landscape in landscaping proposals.

Tranquillity

New development can erode the tranquillity of the countryside. Noisy activities like motor sports can be particularly intrusive as can the high levels of lighting required for activities like golf driving ranges. Increased numbers of visitors can lead to higher levels of traffic on rural roads, which makes them less attractive to other users. Noise from traffic can disturb the tranquillity of the wider landscape.

Objectives

- To encourage the selection of suitable locations for noisy activities and particularly areas close to existing noise sources like busy roads.
- To minimise the effects of lighting by encouraging the selection of suitable locations for developments like driving ranges and by promoting good practice in lighting design.
- To encourage sustainable transport solutions in planning for new recreational development.

Conservation of landscape features

Development or changes in land use can result in the loss of mature landscape features and habitats either directly, by their removal, or indirectly through changes in management. Some forms of development, like golf courses or fishing lakes, may involve changes to the landform affecting either natural topography or historic features like rigg and furrow. Retaining existing features can bring maturity, quality and a sense of identity to new development. Opportunities may also arise to restore or create features and habitats that are declining in the wider landscape.

Objectives

- To encourage the protection and conservation of existing landscape features in new development.
- To encourage the restoration or creation of locally distinctive landscape features and habitats.

Equestrian activities

Features associated with horse riding - stables and buildings, ranch fencing and horse jumps – can bring a domestic scale and suburban character to working agricultural landscapes.

Pony paddocks are sometimes poorly managed; hedgerows may be browsed or unmanaged and the ground may be heavily poached or weed infested. There is a general lack of guidance and advice for small-scale land managers who often lack the expertise of traditional land managers.

Objectives

- To encourage good management of land used for equestrian activities.

Buildings

The reuse of older buildings can be an important way of retaining them as features of the landscape. Their conversion to new uses can often be done in a way that respects their character. New buildings can be out of scale or character with their surroundings unless located and designed with care. In some cases specialised uses may preclude the use of traditional designs or materials in buildings, and robust screening in the form of woodland planting may be required if they are to be assimilated into the surrounding countryside.

Objectives

- To encourage the re-use or sensitive conversion of existing buildings in the countryside.
- To ensure that new buildings respect the scale and architectural character of the locality or are adequately screened by vegetation.