

North East Derbyshire Local Plan - Issues and Options Consultation on the Strategic Approach to the Location of Development and Refined Sites (March 2026)

P&DG on behalf of Hurst Homes and Wibb Builders Ltd (Land at Stonebroom, Shirland, and Wessington)

29th April 2026

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Proposed Approach to the Location of Development

When examined, Local Plans are assessed against legal and procedural requirements and the tests of soundness. Plans are considered 'sound' where they are: positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

To be positively prepared, a Local Plan must provide a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs. It must also be informed by effective cooperation with neighbouring authorities to ensure that unmet need is accommodated where it is practical to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development.

To be consistent with national policy, a Local Plan must enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other national policy guidance.

Accordingly, and in order to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting housing supply, it is essential that sufficient homes are planned for and that an appropriate range of sites is identified in sustainable locations. Paragraph 61 of the NPPF makes clear that the overarching objective is to meet identified housing need in full, including an appropriate mix of housing types to meet local requirements.

Strategic policies should be informed by a robust local housing need assessment using the standard method. Where needs cannot be met within neighbouring authority areas, this should also be reflected in the overall housing requirement.

It is also important to recognise that the current national policy position, reinforced by recent correspondence between the Secretary of State and Cotswolds District Council, confirms that the standard method figure represents a minimum starting point for plan-making rather than an advisory benchmark.

It is therefore positive that the Council has consulted on meeting its full housing requirement of 12,000 dwellings over the 2024–2044 plan period. However, it is noted with some concern that the 'Development Needs – Context' section records a stated preference from respondents for lower levels of housing delivery. Such an approach would be inconsistent with national policy requirements.

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We strongly support the Council's commitment to meeting its full housing requirement. Any failure to do so would risk the Plan not being positively prepared and would undermine its consistency with national policy.

In addition, we welcome the Council's approach to the spatial distribution of development, which seeks to promote a sustainable pattern of growth across the district. Based on the Settlement Role and Function Study, the Settlement Hierarchy Topic Paper, and the Issues and Options consultation, we concur that the proposed approach broadly reflects the established and 'sound' settlement hierarchy of the adopted Local Plan.

The principle of directing growth towards the most sustainable settlements is clearly appropriate. This is further strengthened by the proposed cascade approach, which prioritises higher-order settlements within the hierarchy for the majority of development.

However, the inclusion of land on the 'edges of Chesterfield and Sheffield' within the Priority 1 tier raises spatial planning concerns. Whilst, in principle, this approach is supported due to the proximity of these locations to major urban areas, in practice the identified land (accommodating approximately 1,600 dwellings) is constrained by its designation within the Green Belt.

A similar issue arises in respect of the Eckington South strategic site, which has an indicative capacity of 1,500–2,500 dwellings and is also located within the Green Belt.

National policy attaches great importance to Green Belt land. Paragraph 145 of the NPPF (2024) makes clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the plan-making process. Such circumstances will generally only arise where identified development needs cannot reasonably be met through alternative, non-Green Belt locations.

Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist, the Council must demonstrate that it has fully examined all reasonable alternatives for meeting its development needs. At present, and pending the outcome of the Council's Green Belt Review, such exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated. In these circumstances, the Council should continue to prioritise and maximise development within and adjacent to sustainable locations that are not constrained by Green Belt designation.

It is noted, and strongly supported, that the Council's spatial strategy seeks to maximise allocations outside the Green Belt, including within Level 1 settlements and sustainable Level 2 and Level 3 settlements such as Stonebroom, Shirland and Wessington, within which our client has land interests. This represents a clear and sound direction of policy travel.

Accordingly, it is essential that the Council fully examines all reasonable alternatives outside the Green Belt before any consideration is given to boundary alteration. Only where this exercise demonstrates a clear shortfall in deliverable supply should Green Belt release be considered.

Failure to properly test and prioritise reasonable alternatives would render the Plan unsound on the basis that it is neither justified nor consistent with national policy.

In this context, the promotion of sites such as those at Stonebroom (c.30 dwellings), Shirland (c.30 dwellings) and Wessington (c.100 dwellings) directly supports the Council's spatial strategy. These sites represent sustainable, deliverable and unconstrained opportunities in highly accessible locations.

Collectively, they would make a meaningful contribution to housing delivery across the plan period, whilst also reducing pressure for unnecessary Green Belt release and ensuring that land designated as Green Belt remains permanently open in accordance with its intended function.