**Response to Northumberland County Council Core Strategy Preferred Options for Housing, Employment & Green Belt Consultation on behalf of Broomhaugh & Riding Mill Parish Council**

1. **Introduction**

We welcome the chance to respond to the consultation on behalf of Riding Mill. Riding Mill stands on the south bank of the Tyne sixteen miles west of Newcastle and five miles east of Hexham. The village comprises approximately 1,000 people in roughly 400 homes. The village attracts a range of people who are active in their local community and contribute more widely to Northumberland’s social and economic prosperity.

This response has been prepared by a working group for Riding Mill Parish for approval at the Parish Council meeting on 9 December 2013. Following a subsequent meeting by Parish Councillors it has been approved.

Comments on question 1:

We would like to see a proactive approach to support for & completion of Neighbourhood Plans to supplement the Core Strategy at the neighbourhood level

1. **A spatial portrait of Northumberland**

Comments on question 2:

We feel that whilst Scotland and Tyneside are mentioned, there is insufficient emphasis on the future importance of these areas and the need for top level strategy to be considered from a regional and supra-regional level, this cascading down to a Northumberland policy.

In particular we would encourage the Neighbourhood Plan to take into account guidance from Lord Curry of Kirkharle, Chairman of the Royal Veterinary College, member of NELEP and an experienced farmer and businessman who spoke eloquently at the St James’ Forum on how the Northumberland rural economy needed to adapt.

We would also highlight the productivity gap for Northumberland and need to move to higher paid work. Connectivity is key. The two areas with critical mass which can drive this are Newcastle and Edinburgh, hence the need to think strategically in terms of a hub and spoke model with these major centres.

Comments on question 3:

As the draft points out, SE Northumberland suffers from unemployment and poverty. The fundamental question is therefore how to attract employers who can lift GDP to the area. This means providing connectivity to employers’ current bases (which may be elsewhere in the UK or overseas) and also making the area attractive to company executives and their families to thus encourage inward migration. This means creating an environment and infrastructure which is more Silicon Valley or Virginia Water, than ‘mass housing 2014”.

Comments on question 4:

Affordability issues are because wages are low because the sort of economic activity in Northumberland is relatively low value. We think it is important not to ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of affordability, but instead focus on how to raise average wages through a decrease in lower paid and increase in higher paid activities.

Particular note should be made of potential changes with regards to Scottish Independence moves, whether the vote is yes or no. Connectivity is key and given the high possibility over the lifetime of this plan of much better links to Edinburgh (dualling of A1, high speed rail links), the opportunities for growth in Morpeth, Alnwick and Berwick are large.

Comments on question 5:

We have no further comment beyond previous answers.

Comments on question 6:

We have no comment.

Historically the population of the North Pennines has declined by 90% because of outward migration following closure of the mines. Historically we see this as a positive thing. Artificially trying to block rebalancing of economies may be wrong and it may be that encouraging relocation of unemployed to areas of employment, of those needing support to areas where support is more readily provided (e.g. closer to healthcare) is, at society level, the compromise which needs to be made.

Or put another way, living in rural areas has lots of attractions and is a positive move on the part of the individual, but there are inevitable downsides to living in rural areas in terms of economic opportunities and access to services and in terms of ethical principles the benefits of the individual need to be balanced against the broader impact on society in terms of what is affordable and do-able.

A further point is that this area has the greatest opportunity for growth in leisure related activities, serving regional and national.

1. **The Economy of Northumberland**

Comments on question 7:

We would like to see the North East region working very much together rather than in separate factions. We encourage the County to work proactively with Newcastle & Gateshead authorities & to support growth & investment into the region via the LEP. Northumberland will be wasting resource trying to fight alone and the key question which should be asked when making any decision is, how does this attract higher paid jobs. The key factors are:

1. Connectivity

2. Attractiveness of environment

3. Skills of the workforce

Regarding item 1 the broadband programme is partially addressing this, but the key is to operate as a hub and spoke to areas with critical mass of high tech, next generation economy. This essentially means Newcastle, although we think the Council should explore and develop strategic links with Edinburgh.

2. Attractiveness of environment. The question is, how could an executive team of a company based in Surrey be persuaded to relocate to Northumberland, in particular SE Northumberland where needs are greatest. This means fantastic, aspirational housing, forward thinking transport infrastructure (e.g. increased provision of off road cycle paths, excellent public transport), schools with data competing with the best state schools in the Home Counties. The leisure opportunities and general branding of the area also needs to be considered with unfortunately Northumberland being lumped in many people’s eyes with the rest of the North East, including Teesside, and pulled down by negative perceptions (e.g. dependency, obesity, crime).

3. Skills of the workforce. The ability to recruit and retain skilled employees is an issue. The south east has a requirement for unskilled workers (e.g. Cambridge has lots of vacancies for shop workers, porters etc.). Northumberland has a surfeit of unskilled workers. In terms of highly skilled workers the opposite is the case. Therefore policies should encourage outward migration of unskilled workers and inward migration of skilled workers. Furthermore, policies should not encourage any additional inward migration of unskilled workers to compound current problems. We see this as a major potential problem with more ‘affordable’ housing.

Comments on question 8:

The vitality of Northumberland together with the North East region overall is intrinsically linked to effective infrastructure. It is crucial to secure funding to upgrade the A1 south to full motorway standard & the A1 north to Edinburgh to Dual Carriageway as a minimum. The region must campaign to secure the extension of HS2 from Leeds then to Newcastle & Edinburgh

The region has good air & sea provision which must be maintained

The region must keep up to date on IT infrastructure to attract business. Full provision of Superfast Broadband is a must with fibre optic cables to the property

Industry needs Education & Training so provision in the region must be up to date with a focus on vocational provision especially at FE & HE level

1. **The Population of Northumberland**

Comments on question 9:

Account should be taken not just of age of population but also economic contribution / dependency such that Northumberland is sustainable, i.e. not just *working age* people, but they must be *in work* and net contributors.

Comments on Question 10:

We agree with the key issue in this section and overall thrust. How does the County attract the sort of migration which will improve local GDP and discourage migration which will compound it (& conversely encourage/discourage different types of outward migration).

The modern, sophisticated workforce demand different things e.g. a recent OECD study highlighted decision making by high tech companies in the US choosing to locate to those areas connected by segregated cycle routes because this was seen as key to persuading the younger, talented staff to move there [http://www.slideshare.net/newcycling/crist-newcastle-04112013staticfinal; http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\_embedded&v=VQc87QFKeKI].

The standards of housing in terms of light, space, design and technology in value creating areas are completely different to the “Barratt” style boxed housing estates more typical of the North East. We think the primary focus should be on quality rather than volume. Furthermore, all housing provision should have a focus on energy performance.

There must be an effective balanced range of housing provision from Affordable to Executive. We must get away from the “housing estate” mentality of house building in the UK. But Affordable in this context should be to a young, talented worker being recruited to a value creating business rather than affordable to an unskilled worker, or we race to the bottom.

There must be a focus on energy efficiency way above minimum requirements. This should be made a key attribute of the region. Passive House or equivalent should become the norm rather than the odd exception. This strategy would link with the economic focus on the renewable energy sector developing in South East Northumberland

We must ensure that the unique character of the towns & villages in the region is retained.

**5. The preferred strategic development option for Northumberland – planning for economic growth**

Comments on Question 11:

Agreed see comments above

Comments on question 12:

More growth is proposed in the Central section which must be carefully managed

1. **Economy and employment**

Comments on question 13:

The provision of large scale strategic employment sites must be in south east Northumberland because of the topography. We agree that provision is needed in other areas.

It is unclear where the 10 Hectares of land needed in Hexham is to be found. This needs to be clarified (Policy 1 h)

Should be recognised that if there is a new fast rail route from Glasgow-Edinburgh-Newcastle/G’head-M’boro-Leeds-Manchester-L’pool connecting with HS2, that this rail route will provide a major driver for new development which has not been considered currently in these plans (e.g. see <http://www.500kmh.com/UKU_London-North_BizCase2008.pdf>; <http://www.500kmh.com/UKU_Factbook2.pdf>; http://www.500kmh.com/UKU\_M4V/UKU\_Maglev\_in\_Scotland.m4v)

What is missing from the assessment is the sort of people and groups who we want to encourage. The focus currently is about what we have at the moment. The other aspects of the plan acknowledge major problems facing Northumberland with regards to a GDP productivity gap vs other areas of the country. Therefore the key group to get input from are those people who do not currently live or set up businesses in Northumberland but whom you might want to attract.

The SHLAA checklist also misses out the key group – the workforce talent that the County needs to attract inwards and in particular the company creators who are considering setting up business, wherever that might be in the NE. Misses out the NELEP who should be included. The Institute for Economic Affairs & other expert groups on economic regeneration can offer an external and national/international perspective that may be helpful.

There is also a potential trap the Council could fall into by a focus solely on what is desired by all current groups. If at a very basic level there is a desire to match an individual with a job, there are no local jobs but the locality is made too ‘sticky’ for that individual, then this will provide a barrier for relocation to another part of the region or country where there may be a job. Conversely, if the Council provides particularly generous social and welfare provision and cost of living *relative to elsewhere in the country*, then this will encourage inward migration of individuals dependent on the Council.

**7. Housing**

Comments on question 14:

There should be a focus, as far as possible, on re-use of Brownfield land then on land effectively with existing town or village boundaries. As discussed above, Northumberland is inextricably linked to Tyneside where there is a large excess of brownfield sites, e.g. along the banks of the Tyne. Commuting can be both from Northumberland into Tyneside and vice versa, but in general it is better for poorer individuals to be closer to potential employment to decrease travel costs.

The perceived need for additional housing seems high in all regions. It is unclear why population will decrease unless more houses are built. This seems to be a presumption throughout the document

Comments on question 15:

We would encourage a flexible approach to the provision of Affordable housing. Rather than a presumption that it should be within the curtilage of any development provision within that community should be perfectly acceptable. The benefit may be that other infill sites or brown field sites will be brought back into use where they may not be viable as a single scheme. Provision could also be on the upper floors of shops or other buildings where there is unused space.

The provision of Affordable housing should have no greater influence over release of the Green Belt than any other form of housing in the larger centres. Many of the smaller more affluent villages are surrounded or washed over by Green Belt & have a lack of low cost market housing & Affordable housing. The release of Green Belt in this latter situation should take precedence. Higher value housing developed in newer areas should provide potential for cross subsidy to allow more difficult infill sites to be brought back into use

There should be an equal focus on energy efficiency of Affordable Housing in comparison with other provision.

No mention of cycling organisations, Sustrans – to ensure development incorporates the latest recommendations on cycling provision for health and wellbeing and green transport. Other recreational areas also need to be designed into new build to create commonality and community (cf Wayne Hemmingway input into Dunston Staithes).

**8. Green Belt**

Comments on question 16:

The green belt and rural environment is one of the key assets that much of Northumberland has and should be regarded as sacrosanct. Indeed, policy should be towards enhancing the green belt, e.g. in favour of promoting greater environmental and leisure opportunity through tree planting, paths, cycle ways, bridleways etc. Release of Green Belt must be a last resort

Comments on question 17:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 18:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 19:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 20:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 21:

The claim to preserve Hexham & Corbridge seems inconsistent with the proposals to allow the building of a significant number of new homes in both conurbations & significant employment land in Hexham. We support the preservation of both.

**9. Delivery of the preferred strategy**

Comments on question 22:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 23:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 24:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 25:

We fully support the focus on the renewable energy sector

Comments on question 26:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 27:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 28:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 29:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 30:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 31:

The development land identified at the eastern end of Hexham should not be further extended.

Comments on question 32:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 33:

Road access to Prudhoe can be a problem especially along the A695 west through Mickley & Stocksfield. Any further development at Prudhoe should be dependent on a new crossing point of the river Tyne.

Comments on question 34:

There has been a lot of housing development in recent years in Corbridge creating some pressure. We would question whether yet more is appropriate. The housing areas on the north east side of the village have no access from the A69 so must do so via the village centre which is busy. The attractiveness of Corbridge provides a pull to GDP generating households. As there are limited low paid employment vacancies in Corbridge, any further development should be limited and designed to attract high value generating households.

Comments on question 35:

This seems to be a suitable location for a focus on low density Executive housing

Comments on questions 36:

The provision seems relatively high & it is important that the character of the area is not lost.

The figure of 1,720 houses to be found in the “Rest of Delivery Area” is very high at 24.7% of the total & it is unclear where this may be found. Further detail must be provided. We would prefer a focus on pushing development along the main arterial route of the East Coast mainline and A1, in anticipation and encouragement of upgrades.

Comments on questions 37:

We have no comment.

Comments on questions 38:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 39:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 40:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 41:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 42:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 43:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 44:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 45:

We have no comment.

Comments on question 46:

If there is to be further development in the village of Broomhaugh & Riding a potential option would be the land north of the A695, south of the River Tyne & situated between the Cricket Ground & the A68 Bypass.

There is a key need for a ‘separated from road’ walking & cycling route running along the entire Tyne Valley for both utility commuting and tourism.

Comments on question 47:

The same comment as Q36 applies here

**Strategic Housing Market Assessment**

Comments on question 1

Overall we agree with the way the review has been done

Comments on question 2:

We have no issue with the targets proposed however these should be kept under regular review throughout the plan period.

It is not always appropriate to insist that provision be made within the scheme area or even within that community. Where appropriate developers should be able to provide a suitable amount of affordable housing in a different location

The provision of affordable housing is crucial in the smaller villages & communities to make & keep these settlements vibrant where this is appropriate. Younger families help to sustain demand for local services which are important to everyone – schools, shops etc.

Provision should be linked to access to labour markets & public transport however proximity to family connections is also very important to maintain family cohesion, child care etc.

Comments on question 3:

Overall we agree with the proposals. Mixed tenure types need to be flexible to move with economic cycles. Provision should be made to allow those on lower incomes to have the best opportunity to maximise the ownership element of their homes if they wish

There should also be provision for older people to trade down in their property size, & probably value, but be able to stay in the same community with friends & family. More affordable homes are needed for both younger families & older people

There should be a focus on incorporating healthy & safe living in all schemes to include play areas, separation of footpaths & cycle areas (ref Sustrans) from roads, safe access to services facilities within the community etc.

All housing provision, including affordable & lower value, must have a key focus on energy efficiency well above minimum national standards.

**Revised Statement of Community Involvement**

Comments on question 1

Overall this is a helpful document

It is important to consult as widely as possible however many people will not be involved whatever encouragement is offered, this is a fact of life. The opposing side to that argument is the complexity & enormity of some functions & planning is a prime example. The volume of documents & questions simply puts people off. Perhaps there is a need to offer an executive summary and guide people towards key questions, as there is too much to assimilate.

One possible suggestion is a greater involvement of both expert & interested working groups with public involvement although we acknowledge the actions under the heading “Inclusive Planning”. It is accepted that quite a lot of effort has been made in this area.

What is missing is the input from the sort of people and groups who we want to encourage. The focus currently is about what we have at the moment. The other aspects of the plan acknowledge major problems facing Northumberland with regards to a GDP productivity gap vs other areas of the country. Therefore the key group to get input from are those people who do not currently live or set up businesses in Northumberland but whom you might want to attract.

SHLAA checklist misses out the key group – the workforce talent that the County needs to attract inwards and in particular the company creators who are considering setting up business, wherever that might be in the NE.

There is also a potential trap the Council could fall into by a focus solely on what is desired by all current groups. If at a very basic level there is a desire to match an individual with a job, there are no local jobs but the locality is made too ‘sticky’ for that individual, then this will provide a barrier for relocation to another part of the region or country where there may be a job. Conversely, if the Council provides particularly generous social and welfare provision and cost of living in relation to other areas in the country, then this will encourage inward migration of individuals dependent on the Council.

There is a reasonable working relationship between Parish Councils & the County generally facilitated through the County Councillor. This is something that could perhaps be further developed to mutual benefit

Parish Councils are a statutory consultee in respect of planning applications however there is sometimes a feeling that little notice is taken of comments made by a PC nor any feed back on why a different decision was made. This is only in a small number of cases but does cause some concern. A dialogue between the two organisations on this issue would be helpful

Neighbourhood Plans are the first level of the statutory planning process & although some areas in the County are preparing these we would like to see a more proactive approach from the County to encourage their creation. It does seem to be a very protracted & time consuming process to be done by Parish Councillors who are volunteers often working under difficult conditions.

**Delivery Document - Scoping Document**

Comments on question 1

The policy list seems to be reasonably comprehensive however there is no specific policy on Infrastructure – Road, Rail & Public Transport which are key factors in planning. It should be consistent with other planning authorities.

Comments on question 2

We agree with this

Comments on question 3

There is no reference to Bus routes. The creation of an integrated transport system is crucial. There should be a focus on the sustainability; viability & well being of smaller communities to ensure schools & local shops are viable.

Comments on question 4

See response to Question 3. There should be a focus on ensuring the viability of local services.

Comments on question 5

This is likely to be the most contentious aspect of the process as it affects the individual at a local level where they live. The proposed structure seems appropriate. It is important that it is sufficiently detailed so that communities do not feel blighted but it should also be capable of review as circumstances change over time

**Viability Assessment Scoping**

Comments on question 1

Yes

Comments on question 2

Yes. The use of Discounted Cash Flow analysis for the viability of schemes can provide a more detailed & helpful analysis

It is important that realistic appraisals are carried out. The Council should seek appropriate external advice where relevant

Comments on question 3

A developers profit element should relate to the level of risk of each scheme rather than be unrealistically capped

Taking a flexible approach to where the affordable housing provision can be provided, e.g. in other locations, will help to avoid a situation where little or none is provided

Many schemes will have a relatively long life span during which time the economic conditions may change. There should be scope to alter agreements on a pre-agreed basis where appropriate. For example in an improving market it may become viable to provide some or more affordable housing than originally agreed. Of course the converse may also be the case

Comments on question 4

No comment

Comments on question 5

No comment

**Habitats Regulations Assessment**

Comments on questions 1 - 4

We have no specific comment on this document however we are very firm supporters of the need to protect our natural environment & would as a principle support appropriate action.

We would like to see a focus on the opening up of such areas to public access where appropriate

The problem of the spread of Himalayan Balsam is increasing. It affects the Parish along the banks of the river Tyne & the Riding Burn. We would support action to control this invasive plant