



Review of the Sunderland Green Belt Part 1: Exceptional Circumstances for Releasing Land from the Green Belt

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June 2018

Document Control Sheet

Project Name: **Review of the Sunderland Green Belt**

Report Title: **Part 1: Exceptional Circumstances for Releasing Land from the Green Belt**

Project Ref: **43376**

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Revision	Date	Description	Prepared	Reviewed	Approved

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1 INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Peter Brett Associates LLP ('PBA') has been instructed by Sunderland City Council¹ to produce an Exceptional Circumstances Paper to inform the emerging Core Strategy and Development Plan ('CSDP'), which will form part of the new Local Plan for Sunderland. The purpose of our instruction is to provide our professional assessment as to whether there are exceptional circumstances which justify amending the currently defined Tyne and Wear Green Belt boundary to accommodate residential growth within SCC's administrative area.
- 1.2 The Green Belt around Sunderland, South Tyneside and Gateshead was originally established in the 1960s and forms part of the wider Tyne and Wear Green Belt and later formalised in the Tyne and Wear County Structure Plan adopted in 1978. The statutory Green Belt formed an integral part of the broad strategy of the County Structure Plan to restrain the further spread of the Tyneside/Wearside conurbation, concentrating investment within the existing built-up area. Sunderland's Green Belt was originally intended to prevent the merging of Sunderland with Washington, Houghton-le-Spring and Tyneside. The Green Belt within Sunderland currently covers an area of approximately 3,500 hectares, equating to 25 per cent of the administrative area of the city.
- 1.3 Sunderland's Green Belt boundary has remained unchanged since 1998 and the preparation of the CSDP is an appropriate juncture at which to consider whether it remains fit for purpose. The Council's latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment ('SHMA') identifies an Objectively Assessed Need ('OAN') for housing over the plan period from 2015 to 2033 of at least 13,410 net additional dwellings, equating to an average of 745 net additional dwellings per annum ('dpa').
- 1.4 The work undertaken by the Council to date has concluded that there is a shortfall in deliverable housing land supply within the existing urban area to accommodate all of Sunderland's identified growth requirements. The release of land from the currently defined Green Belt is considered by the Council to be the only realistic option to accommodate the scale of growth envisaged, given that all other realistic alternatives have been exhausted.
- 1.5 In this paper, we therefore examine the strategic context and existing evidence base insofar as it relates to the possible need to release land from the Green Belt, and we provide our independent assessment as to whether we consider that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the removal of land from the currently defined Green Belt. In the event that we conclude that exceptional circumstances do exist to justify amendments to Sunderland's Green Belt, SCC also requires PBA's advice on defining a robust new Green Belt boundary. Our advice in the latter regard is

¹ Hereafter referred to as 'SCC' or 'the Council'.

contained within our separately bound Part 2 report entitled 'Green Belt Boundary Assessment and Recommendations'.

Structure of Our Report

1.6 The structure of our report is as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the national and local planning policy context insofar as it relates to the Tyne and Wear Green Belt, and the national requirements pertaining to the release of land from the Green Belt;
- Section 3 sets out the strategic context which has prompted the Council to consider amendments to Sunderland's Green Belt boundary, including a summary of key findings from pivotal evidence base documents;
- Section 4 draws together our findings from the evidence base review, and sets out the overall exceptional circumstances case for Green Belt release; and
- Section 5 summarises our overall findings and conclusions in relation to the exceptional circumstances case for the release of land from the Tyne and Wear Green Belt to meet the identified housing needs in Sunderland.

2 NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

National Planning Policy Context

The National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (paragraph 6) and at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan making and decision-taking (paragraph 14).
- 2.2 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF confirms that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts, and that *'The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence.'*
- 2.3 Accordingly, paragraph 80 the NPPF states that Green Belt serves five purposes, as follows:
- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 2.4 Paragraph 83 of the NPPF then goes on to explain that *'local planning authorities with Green Belts in their area should establish Green Belt boundaries in their Local Plans which set the framework for Green Belt and settlement policy'*, and that *'once established Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan'*. The NPPF compels local authorities to *'consider Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period'*.
- 2.5 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF then states that:
- 'When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt Boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt Boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt Boundary or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.'*

- 2.6 When applying Green Belt boundary changes, paragraph 85 of the NPPF recommends that local planning authorities should apply the following criteria:
- ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
 - not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
 - where necessary, identify in their plans areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
 - make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time; planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following a Local Plan review which proposes the development;
 - satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period; and
 - define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.

- 2.7 We note, however, that there is no definitive national guidance on how Green Belt Reviews should be carried out, and the NPPF does not define what constitutes ‘exceptional circumstances’. The Housing White Paper ‘Fixing our broken housing market’ (February 2017) provided some additional detail on this matter as a precursor to the draft revised NPPF (discussed in more detail later in this section), stating that:

‘Our manifesto reiterated our commitment to protecting the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework is already clear the Green Belt boundaries should be amended only ‘in exceptional circumstances’ when plans are being prepared or revised, but does not define what those circumstances are. The Government wants to retain a high bar to ensure the Green Belt remains protected, but we also wish to be transparent about what this means in practice so that local communities can hold their councils to account. Therefore we propose to amend and add to national policy to make clear that:

Authorities should amend Green Belt boundaries only when they can demonstrate that they have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development requirements, including:

- *Making effective use of suitable brownfield sites and the opportunities offered by estate regeneration;*
- *The potential offered by land which is currently underused, including surplus public sector land where appropriate;*
- *Optimising the proposed density of development; and*
- *Exploring whether other authorities can help to meet some of the identified development requirement, and*
- *Where land is removed from the Green Belt, local policies should require the impact to be offset by compensatory improvements to the environment quality or accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. We will also explore*

whether higher contribution can be collected from development as a consequence of land being released from the Green Belt’.

- 2.8 On 21 April 2015, a High Court Judgment was handed down in relation to a challenge by Calverton Parish Council to the adopted Nottingham, Broxtowe and Gedling ‘Aligned Core Strategies’. In his Approved Judgment, Mr Justice Jay provided the following comments regarding the absence of a definition in national policy of ‘exceptional circumstances’:

‘The Department has made a deliberate policy decision to do this, entrusting decision-makers with the obligation of reaching sound planning judgments on whether exceptionality exists in the circumstances of the individual case.’

- 2.9 In paragraph 50 of his Judgment, Mr Justice Jay found that the existence of an objectively assessed need is not sufficient to amount to exceptional circumstances. In paragraph 51, Mr Justice Jay then set out the following five matters for consideration to lead to the planning judgements as to whether there are exceptional circumstances with regard to the release of Green Belt land through the local plan process in a particular case, having determined the objectively assessed need:

- i. the acuteness/intensity of the objectively assessed need;
- ii. the inherent constraints on supply/availability of land *prima facie* suitable for sustainable development;
- iii. the consequent difficulties in achieving sustainable development without impinging on the Green Belt;
- iv. the nature and extent of the harm to the Green Belt (or those parts of it which would be lost if the boundaries were reviewed); and
- v. the extent to which the consequent impacts on the purposes of the Green Belt may be ameliorated or reduced to the lowest reasonably practicable extent.

- 2.10 Accordingly, demonstrating exceptional circumstances requires the presentation of evidence which overrides the normal presumption that Green Belt boundaries should endure.

- 2.11 Notwithstanding the national guidance and considerations raised in the High Court Judgment referred to above, there is no statutory approach or standardised methodology for assessing exceptional circumstances, and so ultimately it is for the Council to determine an appropriate approach and reach a view as to whether it considers that exceptional circumstances exist to justify removing land from the Green Belt. In this paper, we afford due weight to the factors set out by Mr Justice Jay in paragraph 51 of his Judgment, and the existing and emerging national guidance on this matter.

The Draft Revised National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.12 The Government published its draft revised NPPF for consultation in March 2018. The document is subject to change and is not in its final form, and therefore carries limited weight at present. The revised wording nevertheless indicates the general direction of travel for Government policy, and introduces some new requirements pertaining to the amendment of Green Belt boundaries. Therefore, for completeness,

we consider it important to highlight the key messages and changes in the draft revised NPPF insofar as they relate to Green Belt matters.

2.13 Green Belt is covered in Chapter 13 of the draft revised NPPF, and although some of the text remains unaltered from the current version of the NPPF there are some notable differences.

2.14 The text currently at paragraph 83 of the NPPF is proposed to be replaced with the following text at paragraph 135 of the draft revised NPPF:

‘Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic plans should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been demonstrated through a strategic plan, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through local policies, including neighbourhood plans.’

2.15 Crucially, paragraph 136 of the draft revised NPPF introduces an entirely new set of requirements relating to the demonstration of exceptional circumstances necessary to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, as follows:

‘Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic plan-making authority should have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of the plan, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:

a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;

b) optimises the density of development, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres, and other locations well served by public transport; and

c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground.’

2.16 Furthermore, current paragraph 84 of the NPPF is proposed to be amended by new paragraph 137 which includes the following additional text:

‘Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.’

2.17 As mooted in the Housing White Paper, the draft revised NPPF sets out a range of proposed new and additional requirements that need to be satisfied before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt

boundaries. Although this guidance is subject to change following consultation, we consider it pertinent to bear the proposed new and additional requirements in mind as part of this paper as it clearly signifies the general direction of travel on this matter in terms of emerging Government policy at a national level.

Planning Practice Guidance

- 2.18 The Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG') states that local planning authorities should meet objectively assessed needs unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF or specific policies indicate development should be restricted. Such policies include land designated as Green Belt.
- 2.19 The PPG also states that once need has been assessed, the local planning authority should prepare a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to establish realistic assumptions about the availability, suitability and the likely economic viability of land to meet the identified need for housing over the plan period, and in so doing take account of any constraints such as Green Belt, which indicate that development should be restricted and which may restrain the ability of an authority to meet its need.
- 2.20 The PPG makes clear that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan.

Local Planning Policy Context

Sunderland Unitary Development Plan

- 2.21 The Sunderland Unitary Development Plan ('UDP') was adopted in 1998 and remains the statutory development plan for Sunderland until the new CSDP is adopted. The UDP was intended to guide development up to the year 2006, replacing the former Tyne & Wear Structure Plan (1981), the Tyne and Wear Green Belt Local Plan (1985), the Tyne & Wear Minerals Local Plan (1989), various local plans for parts of the city and a number of earlier Town Maps.
- 2.22 When the UDP was adopted, the five main purposes of the Green Belt were set out in national guidance from the then-named Department of Environment ('DoE'), which stressed that the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and that their protection must be maintained. The DoE guidance operational at that time also confirmed that once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should be altered only in exceptional circumstances. The UDP therefore continued to protect the statutory Green Belt defined in the 1985 Tyne and Wear Green Belt Local Plan.
- 2.23 Although the broad extent of the Green Belt was deemed to remain valid and was maintained, some modifications were proposed in the UDP to reflect changing circumstances since the Green Belt boundary was last approved in 1985. Urban development had reduced the separation between the built-up area of the city and neighbouring settlements in County Durham to the west and south, and therefore in

order to prevent the coalescence of the city the UDP sought to designate substantial additional areas of open land (circa 464 hectares) as Green Belt. Conversely, only a relatively small amount of Green Belt was deleted (circa 5 hectares, or 1 per cent) for the purposes of urban regeneration. The small settlements of Burdon and Offerton were included within the Green Belt, although the larger village of Springwell was excluded.

- 2.24 To this end, saved Policy CN2 of the Sunderland UDP states that a Green Belt will be maintained which will check the unrestricted sprawl of the built up area of Sunderland, assist in safeguarding the city's countryside from further encroachment, assist in the regeneration of the urban area of the city, preserve the setting and special character of Springwell Village and prevent the merging of Sunderland with Tyneside, Washington, Houghton-le-Spring and Seaham, and the merging of Shiney Row with Washington, Chester-le-Street and Bournmoor.

Draft Core Strategy and Development Plan

- 2.25 Work commenced on a new Core Strategy for Sunderland during the previous decade, with an Issues and Options document published in 2005 and a Preferred Options Report following in 2007. Two stages of consultation were completed prior to the publication of the Sunderland Core Strategy Preferred Options document in 2013. However, by this point a number of changes had occurred within the SCC area and in the relevant policy context, including proposals to develop an International Advanced Manufacturing Park ('IAMP'). To ensure that the next statutory development plan for Sunderland appropriately responded to these changes, taking account of the updated evidence base and including sufficient detail regarding both development planning and development management issues, a decision was taken by SCC to reset the process and start afresh with preparation of a new Core Strategy. The Core Strategy has evolved into the CSDP.
- 2.26 Once finalised and adopted, the CSDP will provide a coherent and overarching vision, spatial planning strategy, suite of development management policies and set of strategic site allocations for the Sunderland administrative area. The CSDP will replace some of the existing statutory development plan for the city, which presently comprises the adopted 1998 UDP as amended by the adopted UDP Alteration No. 2 (2007). The remaining UDP policies will be replaced in due course (after the adoption of the CSDP) by policies within the emerging Allocations and Designations Plan. The adopted IAMP Area Action Plan ('AAP') also forms part of the statutory development plan for the SCC area and should be read alongside the CSDP.
- 2.27 The CSDP will provide a clear picture of SCC's spatial expectations, ambitions and plan for delivering sustainable development across the SCC area over an 18-year period from 2015 to 2033 and beyond. The document will also interpret national planning policies within the local context and seek to guide future development across the SCC area. To achieve this, the Sunderland CSDP will set out an overarching vision and strategic objectives which will be implemented through a suite of policies and site allocations.

- 2.28 The CSDP will cover the whole of the SCC area, although policies regarding the IAMP are detailed in a separate AAP, and a separate Allocations and Designations Plan will subsequently be produced in line with the CSDP to allocate non-strategic housing and other sites to meet identified needs. A number of Supplementary Planning Documents ('SPDs') will also be produced to provide further detail regarding specific aspects of the Core Strategy, including some of the proposed strategic site allocations.
- 2.29 The emerging CSDP is being prepared in the context of an evidence base that draws together detailed information about the city area and its characteristics, with a particular reference to the housing and regeneration needs of the city and the delivery of development. In terms of employment and housing growth, proposed Policy SP1 ('Spatial Strategy') confirms that the Council intends to facilitate economic growth through the creation of at least 7,200 new jobs, and also strive to deliver least 13,410 net additional dwellings over the plan period.
- 2.30 Proposed Policy SP1 also states that the Council will ensure an attractive and flexible supply of at least 95 hectares of employment land to deliver the strategy for economic prosperity, job growth and investment. Part of the economic strategy involves the development of the IAMP which will be located in the Green Belt north of the existing Nissan site, in partnership with South Tyneside Council.
- 2.31 The AAP for the IAMP – which was adopted in November 2017 and is covered later in this report – anticipates that the IAMP will cover an area of circa 150 hectares and create approximately 7,850 new jobs directly on site with many more in the surrounding area, becoming a significant driver for the regional economy and the automotive sector within the UK.
- 2.32 Strategic priority 4 of the CSDP aims to *'provide a range and choice of accommodation, house types and tenures to meet the diverse needs of current and future residents'*. Policy SP8 ('Housing supply and delivery') confirms that the Council will seek to exceed the minimum target of 745 homes per annum. Part of the strategy to achieve this level of housing growth involves a proposal to amend the Green Belt boundary and allocate 11 'Housing Growth Areas' in Washington, North Sunderland and the Coalfield, which are identified under proposed Policies SS2, SS4 and SS7. The Housing Growth Area sites range in size from approximately 20 dwellings to 400 units, and are collectively expected to deliver a total of 1,330 dwellings within the Plan period. Accordingly, the majority of the housing target is still intended to be met through other strategic allocations not currently within the designated Green Belt, including the South Sunderland Growth Area as detailed under proposed Policy SS6.
- 2.33 The remainder of the Green Belt is expected to remain largely unaltered, and is protected against inappropriate development under proposed Policy NE6 ('Green Belt'). The emerging CSDP notes that the Council has considered whether neighbouring authorities could accommodate Sunderland's housing shortfall. However, this option was not considered to be appropriate given that a strategic priority of the Plan is to reverse the trend of outward migration to surrounding

authorities and retain more of the working age population. In addition, all neighbouring authorities have or are considering amending their Green Belt boundaries to accommodate their own growth.

3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR GREEN BELT RELEASE

Introduction

- 3.1 SCC has undertaken a lot of detailed evidence base work over recent years in terms of identifying the city's growth requirements and assessing how best to accommodate that growth. The Council's evidence base is extensive and so we do not attempt to reproduce it in full here, but it is nevertheless important to review and summarise the evidence base insofar as it relates to the potential need to release land from the Green Belt. This will then frame our assessment as to whether an exceptional circumstances case exists.

Sunderland Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update – Addendum 2018

- 3.2 The SHMA Addendum report (2018) concluded that the OAN for housing in Sunderland over the plan period 2015-2033 is established from a baseline of 570 net additional dwellings per annum ('dpa'), with an upward adjustment to take account of expected employment growth to 745 dpa. Due to the forecast demographic change within the city (as set out within the Edge Analytics Demographic Modelling Report published in October 2016), without providing an upward adjustment for economic growth, employment growth could not be supported due to the shrinking working age population. The only other alternative to support economic growth would be too reliant on extra in-commuting of workers who reside in other areas, which is not considered to be a sustainable option.
- 3.3 The SHMA Addendum 2018 recommended that the housing requirement for Sunderland should match the OAN, indicating a need to deliver an average of 745 dpa, or 13,410 dwellings over the Sunderland CSDP plan period to 2033. This numerical target should be treated as a minimum rather than a cap on site allocations, as the NPPF identifies the need for plans to be responsive to market signals and states that local authorities should identify sufficient housing land to *'provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land'*.
- 3.4 Having established the OAN, the SHMA Addendum report noted that it is necessary to translate this figure into a growth target for the purposes of plan-making, referred to as the 'housing requirement'. The SHMA noted that the housing requirement should under normal circumstances reflect the OAN, but can be adjusted either upwards to support economic or other growth ambitions, or downwards due to development constraints.
- 3.5 Bearing this in mind, the 2018 SHMA Addendum recommended that the housing requirement for Sunderland should match the OAN, indicating a need to deliver an average of 745 dpa, or 13,410 dwellings over the plan period 2015 to 2033.

- 3.6 We consider it worthwhile noting that under the proposed new standardised methodology for calculating OAN published in the Government's consultation document 'Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places', the housing requirement for Sunderland would be lower than the level identified in the 2018 SHMA, at 593 dpa between 2016 and 2026. This methodology has recently been taken forward as part of the draft revised NPPF published in March 2018. We understand that the Council intends to pursue the higher housing requirement established in the 2017 SHMA Update, on the basis that this better reflects the economic growth ambitions of the city. The Council's approach is compliant with the current NPPF and PPG as SCC will submit the Plan during the transitional arrangements (that is, by December 2018).
- 3.7 In the case of the emerging Sunderland CSDP it is imperative that the OAN up to 2033 is treated as a minimum target, as the majority of Sunderland's currently identified housing supply comprises non-strategic sites which are not presently proposed for allocation, have not yet been subject to Sustainability Appraisal and for which there is still a degree of uncertainty regarding their deliverability or programming. Sufficient flexibility therefore needs to be included within the housing land strategy of the Sunderland CSDP to ensure that, as a minimum, the OAN can be met, even if individual non-strategic sites fail to deliver against current expectations.

Sunderland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2018

- 3.8 The 2018 Sunderland Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment ('SHLAA') is an important component of the evidence base that underpins the housing policies contained in the emerging Sunderland Local Plan, which will comprise the CSDP together with an Allocations and Designations Plan and the IAMP AAP. The SHLAA identifies a supply of specific deliverable sites for the first five years of the plan and a supply of specific developable sites for years 6-10 and 11-15 years. Where possible, the SHLAA also identifies supply beyond the 15-year period.
- 3.9 The SHLAA identified sites from a wide range of sources including planning applications, pre-application enquiries, existing allocations, and various local authority records such as the Brownfield Sites Register, land identified as surplus to requirements as part of the Council's Capital Programme, development briefs and disposal strategies. The Council also chose to reconsider the appropriateness of locally significant designations such as open space, employment land and settlement breaks. The 2018 update of the Green Space Audit, the 2016 publication of the Strategic Land Review, the Employment Land Review ('ELR') 2016 and the ELR Addendum 2017, as well as the Settlement Break Review update ('SBR') 2018, reviewed and identified potential sites that could be de-allocated and developed for other uses. Below, we briefly provide detail regarding some of the various reviews undertaken by the Council.

Green Space Audit

- 3.10 The Council undertook a Green Space Audit in 2012, which was updated in 2018 alongside the preparation of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. Where land has been identified as low value to the local area (particularly where overall green space provision is high and the site in question has limited function and variety), the Council has assessed sites as part of the SHLAA process. As a result, a proportion of these sites were classed as being suitable for inclusion in the SHLAA.

Employment Land Review (2016) and Employment Land Review Addendum (2017)

- 3.11 The 2016 ELR was prepared to identify the scope for economic growth within Sunderland and the amount of employment land which would be required within the plan period to facilitate the levels of growth anticipated.
- 3.12 The ELR identified a need for between 95 and 115 hectares of general employment land within the city to meet the anticipated levels of economic growth within the plan period from 2015 to 2033. This was considered to be additional to the IAMP growth, as the impacts of the IAMP were taken into consideration as part of the analysis.
- 3.13 In order to understand the potential impacts of Brexit on future economic growth within the city, the Council prepared an ELR Addendum utilising a post-EU Referendum economic forecast. The addendum recommended that the 95 to 115 hectare land requirement identified in the original ELR remained appropriate, but that there was some downward pressure, which suggested planning for towards the bottom end of the range.
- 3.14 The 2016 ELR recommended the deallocation of 14 sites, which would bring the overall supply of employment land within the city down to 104.48ha. However, since the publication of the ELR, a number of other employment sites have been lost to alternative forms of development, resulting in the supply of employment land becoming particularly tight. The Council therefore needs to safeguard the remaining supply to ensure that it can maintain an adequate supply of employment land throughout the plan period.

Settlement Break Review

- 3.15 The purpose of the Settlement Breaks is to ensure that new development is focused within the existing built-up area. In turn, this has helped to stem encroachment into the Open Countryside and retain the distinctiveness of many communities, and the Settlement Breaks have also helped to preserve vital Green Infrastructure corridors across the city. As part of its approach to identifying additional land supply, the Council reviewed every parcel of land within the Settlement Breaks to determine whether they meet the purposes of the Settlement Break.
- 3.16 As a consequence of SCC's review, it is proposed that the land within the Settlement Breaks designation will be reduced by 35 per cent. A number of these identified areas that were not performing as Settlement Breaks (but were in sustainable locations and deemed suitable for housing) have been included in the SHLAA, and

many of those sites are currently being developed. The remaining parts of the Settlement Breaks are those which are considered to be fundamental to their purpose, and the Council is concerned that further eradication of the Settlement Breaks would render them not fit for purpose.

Open Countryside Review

- 3.17 The Council has identified a small number of sites that are on the urban edge which could come forward for development and are being actively promoted. Overall, the Council does not consider it to be a sustainable approach to have a spatial strategy in its emerging Core Strategy which would direct development to Open Countryside locations as these areas are isolated and not well-connected to necessary infrastructure and employment opportunities. Accordingly, Policy NE8 of the emerging CSDP seeks to resist the release of Open Countryside sites unless they meet the exceptions tests set out in national policy.
- 3.18 The pool of sites identified from the sources outlined above was augmented by any sites and broad locations submitted directly to the Council for consideration through periods of consultation and/or submitted independently from landowners, agents, registered social landlords and developers. Several call for sites exercises have been undertaken over the past five years and additional sites have been submitted to the Council through Local Plan consultations and held on file, and then assessed through subsequent annual updates of the SHLAA.
- 3.19 In summary, the following assumptions were applied in the SHLAA:
- **Site size threshold** – all sites over 0.25 hectares and/or those capable of delivering five or more dwellings have been assessed.
 - **Exclusions (designations)** – those sites which are significantly constrained by at least one of the following designations have been excluded:
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
 - Ramsar Sites
 - Special Protection Areas
 - Special Areas of Conservation
 - National Nature Reserves
 - Scheduled Monuments
 - Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Health and Safety Executive Inner Zones
 - Areas identified as Flood Zone 3
 - **Other exclusions** – greenfield sites in the open countryside, and Council-owned sites without a resolution to dispose, were excluded from the assessment.
 - **Densities** – 30 dwellings per hectare was assumed as the starting point. Officers then took into account the planning application history of a site, on and off site constraints, site viability issues and the types of development likely to be achieved on the site and, where it was deemed appropriate, a higher density of development was applied.

- **Gross and net developable area** – the following ratios were applied:
 - Gross site area less than 0.4 ha – 100 per cent
 - Gross site area of between 0.4 and 2 ha – 75 to 90 per cent
 - Gross site area of over 2 ha – 50 to 75 per cent
- **Suitability criteria** – the following were taken into account:
 - the development plan, emerging plan policy and national policy;
 - market and industry requirements in the particular housing market area;
 - physical limitations or problems such as access, infrastructure, ground conditions, flood risk, hazardous risks, pollution or contamination;
 - potential impacts including the effect upon landscapes including landscape features, nature and heritage conservation;
 - appropriateness and likely market attractiveness for the type of development proposed;
 - contribution to regeneration priority areas; and
 - 'category 2' designations (including Green Belt sites, which were deemed to be 'not currently developable').
- **Availability criteria** – a site was considered available for development, when, on the best information available that land is available for development, there was a degree of confidence that there are no legal or ownership problems, such as unresolved multiple ownerships, ransom strips, tenancies or operational requirements of landowners.
- **Achievability criteria** – a site was considered achievable for development where there was a reasonable prospect that housing could be delivered at the site at a particular point in time taking into account market, cost and delivery factors. This was also informed by the Council's draft Viability Assessment (October 2016).
- **Small sites allowance** – an annual small site contribution of 50 dpa was assumed from year one onwards.
- **Demolitions** – an annual loss of 20 dpa from year six onwards was assumed.
- **Build out rates** – a standard rate of 30 dpa was applied for a single-developer site. The Council acknowledged, however, that delivery rates for single-developer sites may be higher where market demand is stronger for the product on offer, and where developers had indicated that a higher delivery rate was possible for their site this was taken into consideration and reflected in delivery forecasts for the site. Similarly, reduced delivery rates in lower-demand market areas were considered, where appropriate. Where it is known that there are two developers on a site, an assumption was made that housing will be delivered at a rate of 40-50 dpa (20-25 dpa per developer). This assumption has been made as two outlets on one site are likely to deliver units at a higher rate overall than a site with only one outlet. A similar housing offer is likely to be offered at a dual-outlet site and sale and take-up of the units is therefore distributed between the two outlets. Similarly, a delivery rate of 20 dpa, per outlet, has been assumed for multi-developer sites with three or more outlets. Where developers have indicated

higher rates of delivery, this will be reflected in the delivery forecasts for a site. The Council will continue to keep these delivery assumptions under review and seek advice from the development industry to ensure they remain appropriate.

- **Lead in periods** – the starting year for delivery varied depending on the status of the site (i.e. whether it was under construction, had full or outline planning permission, was pending a decision/S106, was a housing allocation, or was anticipated to come forward for some other reason).
- 3.20 In total, the SHLAA concluded that 136 specific sites were theoretically deliverable and developable for housing over the remainder of the emerging Local Plan period (2018-2033), with a total combined indicative capacity of 10,225 dwellings (excluding student accommodation). After applying allowances for small site completions and demolitions, the overall theoretical supply increases to 10,754 dwellings over the remainder of the plan period to 2033.
- 3.21 Taking account of the 2,479 net dwelling completions from the beginning of the plan period 2015/16 to 2017/18 gives a total supply of 13,233 dwellings over the plan period. The total supply of 13,233 dwellings results in a shortfall of 177 dwellings in relation to the 18-year plan period housing requirement of 13,410 units.
- 3.22 Notwithstanding the above, it is considered unrealistic to expect every SHLAA site to develop out according to the 2018 SHLAA assessment. The SHLAA is an assessment at a point in time, based on the best available evidence and information. While we consider that the SHLAA provides a robust assessment regarding deliverability and developability, it is inevitable that difficulties may occur in bringing forward some sites identified through the SHLAA within the plan period, as permissions will lapse, viability will change and detailed site investigations may stall or delay sites. To rely purely on the SHLAA supply coming forward as anticipated without any flexibility may put the deliverability of the plan at risk. As such, building in a flexibility factor which will bolster the supply is considered reasonable and necessary to guard against under-delivery.
- 3.23 Of the identified deliverable and developable supply of 10,225 dwellings (excluding the small sites allowance and demolitions), 44 per cent is derived from brownfield sites and 56 per cent is from greenfield sites. Sites currently under construction account for 16 per cent of the overall deliverable and developable housing land supply, and sites with planning permission account for 32 per cent of the overall supply. It is also pertinent to note that the majority of the identified land supply is located in South Sunderland (47 per cent) and Coalfield (28 per cent).
- 3.24 The supply in North Sunderland accounts for only 11 per cent of the theoretical supply, with a further 7 per cent in Washington and 7 per cent in the Urban Core. The apparent lack of sites in the northern part of the city is likely to be mainly due to the fact that this location is heavily constrained by the Tyne and Wear Green Belt (all sites in the Green Belt were deemed to be 'not currently developable'), whereas this constraint is not present in the southern part of the city, where there is an absence of Green Belt.

- 3.25 In our assessment, the 2018 SHLAA is a robust study that follows well established national guidance. The assumptions and other criteria applied appear to be logical, including anticipated densities which have been optimised to ensure that a realistic potential dwelling yield has been calculated, and there are no obvious errors or omissions that need to be addressed. We therefore consider that the 2018 SHLAA provides a reasonable and realistic estimate of the theoretical housing land supply across the city based on the best information available at the time it was completed.

Sunderland Housing Strategy 2017-2022

- 3.26 The Housing Strategy sets out how the Council will promote more choice in housing over the next five years by developing new homes and improving existing homes and neighbourhoods. The Strategy confirms that there are currently insufficient new homes to meet the housing needs and aspirations of the city, and as such the Council is seeking to increase housing supply. The Strategy notes, however, that Sunderland does not have sufficient available land, in the right places, to build the homes the city needs.
- 3.27 The Strategy goes on to explain the Council has been successful in bringing forward a significant amount of housing at brownfield sites, and that it will now be necessary to explore different opportunities to increase the city's housing land supply including bringing vacant properties back into use, utilising surplus-to-requirement industrial land, considering some open space that no longer performs its original function, and exploring the potential use of Green Belt land.
- 3.28 The Housing Strategy refers to the 2017 SHMA, which identified that Sunderland's housing stock is dominated by terraced and semi-detached properties and that there is a shortage of detached dwellings. Three quarters of all homes fall into the lowest Council Tax bracket (A and B) which indicates a need to diversify the existing housing stock to ensure that sufficient homes are provided of the right type, in the right place and in the right tenure.
- 3.29 The Housing Strategy confirms that the limited choice in the city's housing stock remains an important factor affecting why people, particularly those within economically active age-groups, leave the city for neighbouring areas – a situation that is particularly prevalent when neighbouring authorities are developing new housing. The Strategy notes that this creates problems for the city, as schools, shops and services come under increasing pressure to remain viable, and it makes clear the need to stem outward migration by providing new housing and desirable neighbourhoods which meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents.
- 3.30 Currently, approximately 40,000 people commute into the city on a daily basis for employment purposes, and the Council intends to provide housing that meets their needs. This will promote more sustainable patterns of development that support opportunities to live, work and socialise without the need to travel long distances. The Strategy highlights a particular need to provide executive homes for higher income groups, who aspire to move to larger properties.

International Advanced Manufacturing Park Area Action Plan

- 3.31 The IAMP AAP was adopted in November 2017, and was produced jointly between SCC and South Tyneside Council in support of the Sunderland City Deal (also in partnership with South Tyneside). The AAP is a policy framework to guide the comprehensive development of the IAMP site over the 15-year period to 2032. The AAP sets out planning policies to direct and enable the comprehensive development of a high-quality employment site which is targeted at automotive and advanced manufacturing end users, and their supporting facilities.
- 3.32 The IAMP has been designated by the Secretary of State as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, which must be implemented by a Development Consent Order under the Planning Act 2008. The Government has also announced that 25 hectares of land within the early phases of the IAMP development will benefit from Enterprise Zone status.
- 3.33 The IAMP is located on land to the north of Nissan's existing car manufacturing plant, within the administrative areas of Sunderland and South Tyneside, and represents a unique opportunity for the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors in the UK. Located next to the UK's largest and most productive car manufacturing plant at Nissan, the IAMP will provide a bespoke, world class environment for the automotive supply chain and related advanced manufacturers. The IAMP will contribute significantly to the long-term economic success of the North East of England and the national automotive sector.
- 3.34 Nissan is a major employer in the North East of England and has been the largest car plant in the UK for 14 years and the largest exporter for 12 years. Nissan Manufacturing UK in Sunderland accounts for one third of all UK car production. Production surpassed 500,000 vehicles in 2013 and is set to expand further, with the vast majority of these vehicles manufactured for export. Sunderland's current trajectory will take it beyond 600,000 cars a year and is on track to become one of the world's largest car plant complexes. In addition, in the North East of England region there are 25 tier one automotive suppliers, with over 7,000 people employed in Sunderland's Nissan plant which in turn underpins over 20,000 supplier jobs in the wider region.
- 3.35 The comprehensive development of the IAMP will contribute to achieving key objectives of the Government's Northern Powerhouse agenda. The Northern Powerhouse seeks to rebalance and grow the UK economy by devolving political power and fostering economic activity in the north of England. In particular, innovation clusters such as that proposed for the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors around the IAMP and Nissan will be critical in creating the step-change in economic output envisaged as part of the Northern Powerhouse agenda.
- 3.36 To this end, Policy S1 of the IAMP AAP ('Spatial Strategy for Comprehensive Development') confirms that the comprehensive development of the IAMP for the

principal uses associated with the automotive and advanced manufacturing businesses will be delivered by, inter alia, revising the Green Belt boundary to release 150 hectares of land from the Green Belt, and allocating this land for development associated with the production, supply chain and distribution activities directly related to the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors.

- 3.37 A lot of analysis was undertaken during the preparation stage of the AAP regarding the impact of the development, including work to understand the potential additional housing requirements generated by the additional workforce associated with the development of the IAMP.
- 3.38 The analysis sought to establish the potential range of dwellings required based on the potential number of IAMP employees. Four scenarios were developed, ranging from 50 per cent of the IAMP employees moving to the North East to work and 50 per cent of employees already living in the North East, to 5 per cent of the IAMP employees moving to the North East to work and 95 per cent of employees already living in the North East. The key conclusions from the analysis are as follows:
- It is anticipated that approximately 7,850 new jobs will be created at the IAMP (approximately 60 per cent of which will be within Sunderland), drawn from a wide geographical area but the vast majority (73 per cent) would be expected to live in Sunderland, together with County Durham and South Tyneside.
 - Within Durham, Sunderland and South Tyneside, 69.1 per cent of existing residents live in detached 4-bedroom, semi-detached 1 to 3-bedroom and terraced 1 to 3-bedroom properties. There are some variations to this, with management and professional/technical staff tending to live in detached 4-bedroom and semi-detached 3-bedroom properties.
 - There is a need to increase the proportion of larger detached 4-bedroom and semi-detached 3-bedroom properties to reflect the profile of dwellings required.
- 3.39 The analysis referred to above therefore established a very clear link between the development of the IAMP and the need for additional housing to support the anticipated workforce. A particular need was identified for additional, larger 4- and 5-bedroom homes and so suitable sites near the IAMP site need to be identified which are capable to providing the type of residential development that is required. This will ensure that the housing supply reflects the needs of the workforce, and also support sustainable patterns of development that will avoid the need for long distance commuting from either outside the area or from other parts of the city which are further afield.

Summary

- 3.40 In this section of our report we have reviewed a number of pivotal evidence base documents pertaining to the emerging growth needs and aspirations within Sunderland. These documents have established the housing and economic development requirements within the local authority's area – which have now been enshrined within the draft CSDP and the adopted IAMP AAP, and together with the

forthcoming Allocations and Designations Plan – will collectively make up the new Local Plan for Sunderland.

- 3.41 Through the analysis contained in the 2018 SHMA Addendum, the Council has committed to an ambitious but realistic economic growth and jobs-led housing requirement which also assumes an uplift in housing need linked to the IAMP, an integral feature of the overall economic strategy for the city area and beyond. It is recognised that due to the forecast shrinking of the resident working age population within the city, this uplift is necessary to support economic growth otherwise any growth would only be possible with extra in-commuting of the workforce, which is not considered to be a sustainable strategy.
- 3.42 The 2018 SHLAA demonstrates that although there is capacity to deliver a large proportion of the anticipated dwelling requirement at identified sites that are currently unconstrained in policy terms, there is a sizeable shortfall over the plan period as a whole which needs to be addressed. The SHLAA also highlights a geographical imbalance of available housing land, with the vast majority being located in the southern half of the city with comparatively little opportunity for development in the northern part of the local authority area, mainly due to the presence of the Green Belt.
- 3.43 The Housing Strategy makes clear that the number of new homes being delivered to meet the housing needs and aspirations of the city is insufficient, and that the Council is seeking to increase housing supply. Having exhausted much of the brownfield land supply, other opportunities to increase supply will need to be considered which includes the possible use of land within the currently defined Green Belt. The Strategy also identifies the need to diversify the housing stock in Sunderland and provide more aspirational and executive houses, which will assist to stem outward migration and promote more sustainable patterns of development.
- 3.44 We have also undertaken a review of the adopted IAMP AAP, and the substantial body of evidence supporting this document, which identifies the implications of the IAMP from a residential development perspective.
- 3.45 Collectively, the documents referred to above demonstrate the strategic significance of the IAMP for future economic growth and prosperity in Sunderland, as well as being a key part of the Government's wider Northern Powerhouse agenda. The IAMP AAP confirms that 150 hectares of land north of the existing Nissan factory have been released from the Green Belt and allocated for uses associated with the production, supply chain and distribution activities directly related to the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors. It is anticipated that 7,850 people will work at the IAMP (approximately 60 per cent of which will be within Sunderland), generating a clear need for sufficient housing nearby to ensure sustainable patterns of development and to reduce the propensity of workers to look for accommodation further afield. There is a particular need to increase the proportion of detached and semi-detached 3- and detached 4-bedroom properties to cater for anticipated housing demand arising from the IAMP. In addition to the IAMP, the ELR also identifies a need for between 95 and 115 hectares of employment land to support wider levels of economic growth within the city.

4 THE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES CASE

Requirements for Exceptional Circumstances

- 4.1 To recap, the current version of the NPPF states that once Green Belt boundaries have been established, they should only be altered in ‘exceptional circumstances’ through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. SCC is currently in the process of producing a new Local Plan and therefore this is an appropriate juncture at which to consider amending the currently defined Green Belt boundary.
- 4.2 The NPPF compels local authorities to *‘consider Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period’*, and states that when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt Boundaries, local planning authorities (‘LPAs’) should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. LPAs should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt Boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt Boundary or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.
- 4.3 The draft revised NPPF provides further guidance relating to the demonstration of exceptional circumstances necessary to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, and at proposed paragraph 136 the document explains that before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist the authority should have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This is to be assessed through the examination of the plan, which will take into account whether the strategy:
- makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and under-utilised land;
 - optimises the density of development; and
 - has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development.

In addition to the current and emerging versions of national planning guidance, we are cognisant of the five considerations set out by Mr Justice Jay in paragraph 51 of his instructive Judgment pertaining to this matter. The case for exceptional circumstances therefore draws these threads together around five key headings outlined below.

Housing Need

- 4.4 The NPPF implores local planning authorities to significantly boost the supply of housing. Paragraph 47 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should use the evidence base to ensure that the Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as consistent with the policies set out in the Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the spatial strategy over the plan period. The PPG

confirms that an assessment of housing development needs should be undertaken through a SHMA.

- 4.5 The SHMA has identified that the OAN for housing in Sunderland is 745 dpa, equating to a total housing requirement of at least 13,410 dwellings over the plan period. This is based on a 'jobs-led' scenario, in order to support economic growth, including the IAMP. The OAN figure of 745 dpa therefore takes account of the need to deliver more affordable and market housing for an increasing number of households, and it supports economic growth.
- 4.6 The SHMA also notes that there is a need *'to continue development to satisfy household aspirations, in particular the development of detached houses and a range of property sizes to offset identified market imbalances'*. The SHMA identified that Sunderland's housing stock is dominated by terraced and semi-detached properties, and that there is a shortage of detached dwellings. Three quarters of all homes fall into the lowest Council Tax brackets which indicates a need to diversify the existing housing stock to ensure that sufficient homes are provided of the right type, in the right place and in the right tenure.
- 4.7 The findings from the SHMA have been taken into account within the Housing Strategy, which confirms that there is limited choice in the city's housing stock and that this is an important factor in terms of retaining the economically active population within the local authority area. The strategy makes clear an intention to stem outward migration by providing new housing and desirable neighbourhoods which meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, which will promote more sustainable patterns of development that support wider economic growth objectives. The Strategy also highlights that there is a particular need to provide executive homes for higher income groups, who aspire to move to larger properties.
- 4.8 The IAMP is an important driver for economic growth and this will have a consequential impact on the demand for new housing in the northern part of the city. It is anticipated that approximately 7,850 people will work at the IAMP, and the background reports to the IAMP AAP suggest that there is a particular need to increase the proportion of detached 4-bedroom and semi-detached 3-bedroom properties to reflect the profile of dwellings required to support the anticipated influx of workers. The evidence presented suggests that the strongest aspirations are likely to be for detached properties with 3 or 4 bedrooms, bungalows, and 3-bedroom semi-detached properties.
- 4.9 The evidence associated with the IAMP AAP establishes a very clear link between the development of the IAMP and the need for additional housing to support the anticipated workforce, in particular a need for more, larger homes. This would indicate a need to identify suitable sites near the IAMP site to accommodate additional residential development, to ensure that the housing supply reflects the needs of the workforce, and also support sustainable patterns of development that will avoid the need for long distance commuting from either outside the area or from other parts of the city which are further afield.

- 4.10 The Council considers that the housing requirement put forward in the emerging new Local Plan is ambitious but realistic and necessary to ensure the retention of a sufficiently sized labour force to support the equally ambitious economic growth aspirations of the city. The SHMA has demonstrated that pursuing a housing target based only on DCLG household growth projections will result in a diminishing working age population, which could constrain growth and result in economic decline. The housing requirement has therefore been set at a level that supports the economic growth aspirations set out in the draft CSDP and the adopted IAMP AAP, while remaining realistic in the context of past net additional delivery rates (excluding student accommodation) that have been achieved over recent years (880 dwellings in 2017/18, 710 dwellings in 2016/17, 889 dwellings in 2015/16 and 907 dwellings in 2014/15).
- 4.11 Based on our assessment of the evidence base, we conclude that the growth strategy envisaged in the emerging Local Plan is robust and should be supported. On that basis, it is necessary for the Council to plan for an appropriate level of housing commensurate with the economic strategy, which will require the release of Green Belt land. The alternative would be for the Council to be heavily reliant on in-commuting from neighbouring local authority areas, which is not considered to be a sustainable option.

Housing Land Supply

- 4.12 The Council has examined land across the entire city, via a Strategic Land Review, which involved an assessment of the suitability of all land within the city. The assessments include an Employment Land Review, a Green Space Audit, a Settlement Break Review, a review of UDP designations and a review of Sunderland's open countryside and land allocations. The Council has also considered the contribution that could be made by bringing empty homes back into use. We briefly provided some detail regarding the various reviews undertaken by the Council in Section 3 of this report. Below, we summarise the findings of the 2018 SHLAA, which incorporates sites from the wide range of sources referred to above.
- 4.13 The 2018 SHLAA assessed the sites which are likely to come forward for residential development in the city over the period of the new Local Plan. In total, the SHLAA concluded that 144 specific sites were theoretically deliverable and developable for housing over the remainder of the emerging Local Plan period with a total combined indicative capacity of 10,225 dwellings (excluding student accommodation). After applying allowances for small site windfall completions and demolitions, the overall theoretical supply was found to be 10,754 dwellings over the plan period to 2033.
- 4.14 Taking account of the 2,479 net dwelling completions from the beginning of the plan period 2015/16 to 2017/18 gives a total supply of 13,233 dwellings over the plan period. The total supply of 13,233 dwellings equates to a shortfall of 177 dwellings in relation to the 18-year plan period housing requirement of 13,410 units. This suggests that there is a need to identify additional land, over and above that which has been deemed to be deliverable in the SHLAA, to address the shortfall and ensure that the emerging housing requirement can be met.

- 4.15 The SHLAA has also applied a robust assessment of site capacity, informed where possible by up-to-date information from landowners and housebuilders to provide an accurate reflection of likely delivery rates. If, having considered all sources of land outside the Green Belt and applying a robust assessment of their capacity taking into account the various assumptions and constraints identified, there is still a shortfall of housing land then this suggests a strong need to look elsewhere for additional sites.
- 4.16 At this point we reiterate that the Council has also considered whether neighbouring authorities could accommodate Sunderland's housing shortfall. However, this option was not considered to be appropriate given that a strategic priority of the emerging new Local Plan is to reverse the trend of outward migration to surrounding authorities and retain more of the working age population. In addition, all neighbouring authorities have or are considering amending their Green Belt boundaries to accommodate their own growth. South Tyneside Council and Durham County Council have confirmed that they cannot accommodate any of Sunderland's growth without identifying land in the Green Belt. We therefore consider that the Green Belt within Sunderland's administrative area is the only other available source of land that could realistically address the shortfall while still supporting a sustainable pattern of development.
- 4.17 It is important to note that the extent of the shortfall assumes that all of the identified deliverable land in the SHLAA comes forward within the plan period, and at the rates envisaged. At the very least it is imperative that the Council brings forward, as a minimum, sufficient additional land to meet the shortfall of approximately 177 dwellings. However, there is strong justification to bring forward additional land to ensure sufficient flexibility in relation to the housing targets. We have reached this conclusion for a number of reasons, as outlined below.
- 4.18 Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the fifth bullet under paragraph 85 of the NPPF advises that, when defining boundaries, LPAs should '*satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the development plan period*'. It would not be ideal amending the boundaries of the Green Belt now and then having to undertake a further review in a few years' time. As we explained in Section 2, one of the fundamental characteristics of the Green Belt is its permanence. Where there are compelling reasons to alter the boundaries, which we believe is the case in Sunderland now, the amended boundaries should remain in place for as long as possible.
- 4.19 With the above background in mind, it is worth reiterating that, in order to achieve the target for approximately 13,410 additional high-quality dwellings over the plan period, the identified yields from all of the non-Green Belt sites that were assessed in the SHLAA and assessed as achievable within the 15-year period will be required, in addition to the yields identified from outstanding planning permissions. We know from experience, however, that not all of the aforementioned sites will come forward in practice. For instance, some landowners will ultimately decide not to release their land, for any number of reasons, and some sites that presently appear to be good candidates for housing might actually be brought forward for mixed uses, or for non-residential uses, or not at all.

- 4.20 Even for sites that do come forward for development, previously unforeseen constraints may hinder their progress and they might not deliver units at the rates envisaged in the SHLAA, which is necessarily a high-level study that cannot foresee all scenarios and possible issues. If insufficient land is released from the Green Belt, and some of these sites fail to come forward as expected, this could jeopardise the fulfilment of the Council's ambitious economic objectives for the city by failing to deliver sufficient good quality housing in the right locations at the right time.
- 4.21 Therefore, in our professional judgement, the extent of the shortfall in deliverable housing land may potentially be even greater, and therefore it would be prudent to identify additional land to accommodate not only the identified shortfall based on the potential supply identified in the 2018 SHLAA, but also to ensure there is sufficient flexibility in the supply of potential housing sites to compensate for possible non-delivery and/or non-implementation of the sites identified in the SHLAA.

Spatial Distribution of Housing Land

- 4.22 The SHLAA demonstrates that the majority of the identified land supply is located in South Sunderland (47 per cent) and Coalfield (28 per cent). In contrast, there are parts of the city where identified potential land supply is much lower:
- the identified supply in North Sunderland accounts for only 11 per cent of the overall theoretical supply;
 - the theoretical supply from sites in the Urban Core is 7 per cent; and
 - identified supply in Washington is also low at 7 per cent.
- 4.23 A large proportion of the anticipated housing land supply in Sunderland South arises within the South Sunderland Growth Area ('SSGA'), which is a strategic allocation of approximately 3,000 dwellings over four sites (referenced in draft CSDP Policy SA2).
- 4.24 The clear north-south divide in the spatial distribution of deliverable and developable housing land mirrors recent new build competition trends in Sunderland. Data provided by the Council shows that:
- 33 per cent of net additional dwelling completions (taking account of new builds, demolitions and conversions) delivered across Sunderland between 2008 and 2018 were in the Coalfield sub-area;
 - for the most recent 2017/18 monitoring period, some 43 per cent of net additional dwelling completions were in the Coalfield sub-area; and
 - in contrast, the five wards which make up Washington² accounted for only 9 per cent of net additional dwelling completions in 2017-18 (74 from 880 dwelling completions, compared with 352 in Coalfield).
- 4.25 The lack of available housing sites in the northern part of the city can be largely attributed to the presence of the Tyne and Wear Green Belt, which places a heavy constraint on the supply of suitable development land, and so locations such as

² Washington Central, Washington East, Washington North, Washington South and Washington West.

Washington and Springwell have experienced limited development. Conversely, much of the southern part of the city is not constrained by Green Belt and therefore a significant quantum of housing development has been channelled towards the Coalfield and South Sunderland areas. Given that Sunderland has been unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land in recent years, approvals have increasingly been granted for sites within the Settlement Breaks and the Open Countryside designation.

- 4.26 Further future development within the Settlement Breaks and the Open Countryside in the southern part of the city will have major impacts on both infrastructure and the environment, and so this approach is becoming more and more unsustainable. In contrast, Washington is a large urban area with a resident population of circa 65,000 persons and, as a planned New Town, it accommodates a wide range of shops and services both within the main town centre at The Galleries and also within a number of smaller local centres. Washington has also been a principal location for employment growth within the city and is forecast to continue to be so with the development of the IAMP and the ELR identifying Washington as having the strongest employment market within the city. For those reasons, Washington is an inherently sustainable location, more so than the smaller settlements within the Coalfield area.
- 4.27 Furthermore, Washington is regarded as a more desirable and marketable housing area. Given the emphasis in the NPPF on identifying a supply of deliverable housing land, it is important that allocated housing sites have a strong prospect of coming forward over the plan period. They must therefore be in locations that are likely to be attractive to the market. Given the constraints to housing delivery in Washington created by the Green Belt, it is likely that there is significant pent up demand for housing which has gone unmet due to the lack of available sites.
- 4.28 Allied to the latter point above regarding pent-up demand, despite the fact that the Council has released employment land and greenspace over the past 20 years for housing, further employment land release is no longer viable and further greenspace loss within the urban area would have an increasingly detrimental effect on the New Town environment.
- 4.29 Therefore, while the Council still anticipates further housing development in the south of the city, such as at the SSGA which will also secure sufficient infrastructure enhancements as required by draft CSDP Policy SS6, it is not considered to be sustainable or desirable for all housing growth to take place in this location. Aside from the abovementioned infrastructure constraints, the housing strategy should promote a balanced portfolio of sites across the local authority area to ensure that housing needs are adequately met in all locations, not only in the south of the city. This strategy must also align with the economic growth aspirations set out in the emerging Local Plan and, as we go on to explain below, the primary focus for employment growth over the plan period will be at the IAMP in Washington.

Nature and Extent of the Harm to the Green Belt

- 4.30 The Council has undertaken a three-stage review of the Green Belt across Sunderland, as well as a 2018 Addendum. Those reports have specifically identified and justified 11 sites to come forward for housing. The Council's reports demonstrate that the 11 sites are all in sustainable locations offering least harm to the Green Belt when considered against the first three purposes set out in paragraph 80 of the NPPF and a wide range of other relevant factors, whilst rejecting all other areas because of their impact to Green Belt purpose, environmental sensitivity and lack of sustainable development.
- 4.31 The Council's reports are covered in greater detail in our Part 2 report but, in summary:
- Stage 1 assessed the entire Green Belt against the purposes of the Green Belt. In assessing the city's Green Belt, 13 sub-areas were defined based on permanent and defensible 'strategic' boundaries in accordance with the NPPF. These sub-areas were sub-divided into parcels. The assessment concluded that some 63 per cent of the Green Belt should be retained without further examination at Stage 2, as this land was clearly identified as being fundamental to the purposes of the Tyne and Wear Green Belt. The remaining 37 per cent was considered at Stage 2 of the Green Belt Review.
 - Stage 2 of the review identified whether parcels are constrained by 'Category 1' constraints (nationally protected designations) and are therefore unsuitable for development. The Council also comprehensively assessed parcels of land submitted by developers.
 - Stage 3 took the outcome of Stage 2 and assessed the sites against a range of criteria including sustainability, suitability, achievability and deliverability. The sites identified as causing the least harm to the Green Belt and considered to be the most suitable and sustainable were identified in the draft Local Plan as 'Housing Growth Areas' (previously referred to as 'Housing Release Sites'), and they have been assessed as part of the Sustainability Appraisal of the Plan.
- 4.32 Following the consultation, the Council has proposed to further reduce the number of sites it is proposing to release from the Green Belt for housing from 15 to 11. The process has therefore been comprehensive and rigorous and it ensures that the 11 selected sites will cause the least harm to the five Green Belt purposes.

Amelioration or Reduction of Impacts on the Green Belt Purposes

- 4.33 As well as identifying those sites which can be released in sustainable locations whilst causing least harm to the Green Belt, the Council's comprehensive three-stage review of the Green Belt ensured that any amendments to the boundary would cause the least harm. Very careful attention has been paid to the specific roles performed by the 13 Green Belt sub-areas and where new boundaries have been proposed, consideration has been afforded to the treatment of those boundaries to ensure that

impacts on the Green Belt purposes will be minimised and that the amended boundaries are capable of enduring. Our Part 2 report again provides more detail in this regard.

Supporting Economic Growth

- 4.34 Although not specifically mentioned in national guidance or by Mr Justice Jay, we consider that in the case of Sunderland the need to support economic growth is a vitally important consideration in the overall balance when examining exceptional circumstances for the release of Green Belt land.
- 4.35 As explained earlier, the latest population projections indicate that the size of the working age population within the city is expected to shrink by over 3,000 people over the plan period. As a result, in order to support economic growth within the city, it is necessary for the Council to provide an uplift to its housing requirement ensure that there is an adequate workforce to support jobs growth.
- 4.36 Without providing an uplift to support economic growth, the only way that jobs growth within the city could be supported would be through becoming increasingly reliant on additional in-commuting from workers who are resident in other areas. This is not considered to be a sustainable approach.
- 4.37 The plan seeks to deliver at least 7,200 net additional jobs over the plan period, which is based on a post-EU Referendum jobs forecast. This is considered to be realistic as, over the past 18 years (1997-2015), some 9,630 net additional jobs were created within the city.
- 4.38 As we have explained in the preceding sections of this report, the IAMP to the north of the existing Nissan plant in Washington will be the most significant economic driver for Sunderland over the plan period, and is considered to be critical to economic growth and prosperity in Sunderland and the region as a whole. The IAMP AAP confirms that 150 hectares of land north of the existing Nissan factory have been released from the Green Belt and allocated for principal uses associated with the production, supply chain and distribution activities directly related to the automotive and advanced manufacturing sectors. The Experian jobs growth forecast which underpins the plan includes 3,400 net additional jobs within the Transport Equipment and Machinery & Equipment sectors which are most likely to be represented at the IAMP, and so the majority of the growth anticipated from the IAMP has been accounted for. This generates a very clear need for sufficient housing nearby to ensure sustainable patterns of development and to reduce the propensity of workers to look for accommodation outside the authority area.
- 4.39 The work undertaken during the preparation of the IAMP AAP examined the impact of the development from a housing supply perspective. The analysis demonstrated a need to increase the proportion of semi-detached and detached properties in the vicinity of the IAMP site, to cater for the likely housing needs and aspirations of the incoming workforce. Given that the most significant economic and employment generating development over the plan period is located in the north of the city, it follows that the Council should plan for a commensurate level of housing growth to

meet future demand. Failure to identify sufficient housing land near the IAMP is likely to result in unsustainable travel to work patterns and may impact on the supply of available labour.

- 4.40 Whilst the IAMP will be the most significant driver for economic growth within the city, there are a number of other key employment areas within the city which will support economic growth. The plan identifies the Vaux as a strategic mixed-use site within the Urban Core, which will provide a focus for office-led development within the city, thereby assisting in the revitalisation of the Urban Core. The Port of Sunderland also provides an opportunity for expansion and growth alongside a number of Primary and Key Employment Areas distributed throughout the city.
- 4.41 The Experian jobs growth forecast, which has informed the preparation of the plan, identifies approximately 55 per cent of the anticipated jobs growth over the plan period will be in employment sectors that are unrelated to the IAMP and therefore supporting wider economic growth in these other sectors is a key consideration.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

- 5.1 PBA has been instructed by SCC to produce an Exceptional Circumstances Paper to inform the emerging Local Plan. The purpose of this work is to provide our professional assessment as to whether there are exceptional circumstances which justify amending the currently defined Tyne and Wear Green Belt boundary to accommodate residential and employment growth within SCC's administrative area.
- 5.2 In this report, we have examined the strategic context and existing evidence base insofar as it relates to the possible need to release of land from the Green Belt around Sunderland, which has involved a comprehensive review of relevant national and local policy and evidence base documents. It is clear from our review that Sunderland's approach has been to consider development in the Green Belt as a last resort, with all other sustainable options considered first.
- 5.3 Having carefully considered the current and emerging national guidance relating to Green Belt boundary reviews, we have reached the conclusion that, in our professional judgement, exceptional circumstances do exist that justify the removal of some land from the currently defined Green Belt SCC's administrative area. The exceptional circumstances case revolves around the following important themes:
- **Housing need** – the 2018 SHMA identified that the OAN for housing in Sunderland is 745 dpa, equating to a total housing requirement of at least 13,410 dwellings over the plan period. The OAN is based on a 'jobs-led' scenario in order to support economic growth, including the IAMP, and is therefore an ambitious yet realistic figure that supports economic growth as well as wider housing needs in the city.
 - **Housing land supply** – the 2018 SHLAA identified a theoretical deliverable housing supply of 10,754 dwellings over the total plan period, which represents a shortage in housing land supply relative to the full OAN in the period to 2033. This is considered to be the minimum extent of the projected shortfall, and it is likely that additional flexibility will be required to ensure that sufficient land is available at all times during the plan period. The Council has taken every step to identify additional sustainable development sites, including sites identified through the Strategic Land Review (including the releasing of Council-owned sites and examination of the validity of remaining UDP site allocations), releasing greenspace, Settlement Break land, and sites in the open countryside. SCC has also considered measures including increasing densities, and maximising the reuse of empty homes. All of the alternatives to Green Belt release have therefore been fully exhausted.
 - **Spatial distribution of housing land** – there is an imbalance in the spatial distribution of the identified housing land supply, with the vast majority of sites located in the south of the city which is not currently constrained by the Green Belt. The lack of housing sites in the north is also demonstrated through an

analysis of new build completions over recent years, with almost half of all new homes being delivered in the southern part of the city in the last 12 months alone (the Coalfield area accounting for some 43 per cent of net additional dwelling completions in the last monitoring year). This is leading to an over-concentration of supply in one location, pressure on local infrastructure, and a mismatch between housing delivery and anticipated employment growth.

- **Supporting economic growth** – a focus of economic growth and employment generation over the plan period will be at the IAMP to the north of the existing Nissan plant in Washington. There is clear evidence to suggest that this regionally and nationally important development will create a need for additional housing nearby, in order to promote a sustainable pattern of development and link job opportunities to the availability of suitable housing. There is also forecast to be growth amongst a range of other employment sectors.
- 5.4 Having comprehensively considered all of the options referred to above, it is clear that the identified housing targets and strategic corporate objectives cannot be achieved without the release of greenfield sites in Green Belt locations. The combined evidence has identified all available and viable brownfield land and maximised residential development densities.
- 5.5 Urban greenfield sites have been fully considered, together with identifying suitable sites for development within the city's Settlement Breaks and Open Countryside. The potential contributions from surplus employment sites and low-value green space has also been exhaustively considered. A shortfall in housing supply remains, and neighbouring local authorities have confirmed that they are unable to provide land to meet this shortfall.
- 5.6 All of the above suggests the need to also include a reasonable flexibility factor within the housing land strategy of the emerging Sunderland CSDP to guard against under delivery on non-strategic sites. Such flexibility will be essential to provide a sufficient quantum, range and mix of housing to meet Sunderland's OAN at all times up to 2033, as required by the NPPF. Flexibility is also needed to ensure that Sunderland's housing land strategy supports the delivery of SCC's wider spatial strategy as set out within the Publication Draft Sunderland CSDP, in particular by avoiding over-development where this would result in unacceptable pressure on infrastructure and by supporting proposals to increase economic growth in sustainable locations.
- 5.7 The only remaining option left to meet this shortfall, including an appropriate flexibility factor, is to release land from Green Belt. We therefore consider that, on balance, there are exceptional circumstances which justify the selected release of some land from the Tyne and Wear Green Belt around Sunderland.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- 5.8 We have concluded that exceptional circumstances do exist to justify amendments to Sunderland's Green Belt, and that it would be appropriate to pursue this now as part of the production of the new Local Plan. Accordingly, it is therefore necessary to assess the current Green Belt boundary, identify the most appropriate and

sustainable locations for the release of land, and define a robust new Green Belt boundary.

- 5.9 Our advice regarding the required Green Belt boundary changes is contained within the separately bound Part 2 report entitled 'Green Belt Boundary Assessment and Recommendations'. Our Part 2 report provides an overview of the approach the Council has taken to ensure that the sites which have been selected for release cause the least harm to the Green Belt, with the creation of a new defensible boundary that will endure well into the future.