

Green Infrastructure Case Story

Easington Colliery, County Durham



A concept for a place to live, a housing development worth approving

Background

Until 2000 the village of Easington Colliery was the home to a colliery. Extensive land reclamation restored an area of 30ha as open grassland. Durham County Council owns the site. Its Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) identifies a potential for up to 450 houses to be delivered in this priority regeneration coalfield community. Development was scheduled to start in 2012/13 as part of the East Durham Growth Point. However, the area has some significant assets, in particular the unique flora and fauna of the Magnesian Limestone grassland. The site is adjacent to the Durham Heritage Coast. And there are also some significant challenges: The high level of deprivation, 'consultation fatigue' and the perception of the community nothing had changed and the village was on a downward trend.



The Project

Durham County Council in partnership with Natural England felt that a concept statement could lay the foundations for reconciling the need for regeneration and coming forward with a truly sustainable development. The Planning Co-Operative was engaged as the 'enabler' for a series of workshops. The first was held with key local and strategic stakeholders in March 2010. A presentation about the nature and benefits of concept statements and introducing the task in hand was given. An important element of the workshop was that all participants went on site. This resulted in a first draft. The draft was widely consulted with the community via drop in sessions in a community centre and the local library. Residents also had the opportunity to walk over the site. This proved helpful for informal conversations and understanding and addressing individual concerns. Further refinements were made and a final concept statement was presented to all stakeholders in July 2010.



Benefits and impacts

The concept statement changed significantly over the time of its consultation. Both more strategic stakeholders and the local community brought in their views. The housing allocation has been reviewed down from 450 to 100-120 homes after issues with the legal constraints and land reclamation of the majority of the site were discovered.

The **final concept statement** has led to the following site-specific benefits:

Water management and habitat creation - Creation and enhancement of ponds and streams incorporating SUDS.

Sustainable transport, improved health, improved access & climate change adaptation - Better footpath network including access to the coast.

Education and economy - Eco Technology / Visitor Centre linking into the Durham Heritage Coast and the proposed England Coastal Path.

Improved quality of place and community cohesion - A Country Park style quality green space.

Community buy in - Quality housing allowing continued views of the sea for existing residents.

Access to nature, a place for wildlife and people- A multifunctional high quality Country Park (up to 24 ha)



The concept statement has encouraged Durham County Council to engage with residents on a discussion of the overall problems and regeneration issues of the settlement (especially shopping, private landlords and poor environment). Some residents who were initially anti-development can now see how the development of the site can generate income for the regeneration of the wider community and a change in atmosphere. Durham County Council sees potential to use the concept statement approach at an internal level of negotiation and also as a useful 'sounding and scoping tool' for wider consultation on SHLAA sites.



Lessons learned and good practice

The process has been very productive. It has helped to bring the council and residents together. It has exposed a number of 'running sores' that have sometimes distracted work away from the site in question. Overall the lessons learnt are:

the concept statement brought a site to life

using a building for meetings close to the site brings in residents

publicity for the meetings must be good and comprehensive

site visits encouraged discussion and stimulated positive approach and aspirations

engagement of local councillors helped to give the process legitimacy

developing a concept statement has helped towards a more sustainable housing development for Easington Colliery

the concept statement process helped to 'make real' the new localism agenda promoted by the new Coalition government

Funding package from a number of sources and being used flexibly and led by community.

The way forward

Further meetings were held between Durham County Council and residents to address wider regeneration issues. Continued dialogue with the community is now essential to prevent the process being perceived to be abandoned. To take the process in-house and reduce dependency on external consultants and thereby costs in the future a project team with specific responsibilities - especially graphic design would be needed.

The adoption of this specific concept statement into a statutory spatial planning document and a more general adoption of a commitment to producing concept statements for larger development site are being considered as part of the ongoing Local Development Framework consultation.

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Further resources

A full report and the final Easington Colliery concept statement are available on the Natural England North East Green Infrastructure pages
Concept statements - Delivering sustainable development (Planning Co-operative and Natural England, 2007)

Neighbourhood statistics for (Lower Super Output Area) Easington 005B

Green Infrastructure by design –adding value to development

What are concept statements?

Concept Statements are a clear expression of the kind of place that development should be creating, not in technical terms but in simple, everyday language that anyone can understand. They include a map, key principles and objectives, a description of assets and of proposed features. The advantages to a more traditional masterplan are:

Timing (principle "asks" are fixed before land is purchased by developer)

Quick, also saving time in subsequent steps

Cost reduction

Potentially high statutory weight

Less detail, more clarity, focus and consensus on key objectives

Aspirational and focussing on positive assets

Fun and participatory

Foster cooperation and raise ambitions

Concept statements can precede and thereby complement and ease the way for a more detailed masterplan and development briefs. They can be adopted as part of statutory spatial planning documents.