

Professor P W Roberts OBE

Kirklees Local Plan Examination -- Stage 1 Hearings.

Matter 2 – Spatial Development Strategy.

Statement by Professor P W Roberts MRTPI, OBE on behalf of Kirkheaton Future – the Steering Group for the Kirkheaton Neighbourhood Plan.

I am a Chartered Member of the RTPI and have held the Chair of Planning at various UK universities, including Liverpool, Leeds and Dundee. I have 46 years' experience, chiefly as a strategic planner, in policy and practice, including roles with UK central and local government, specialist agencies (such as the Homes and Communities Agency and the Academy for Sustainable Development) and professional organisations.

With regard to the Kirklees Local Plan and matters of spatial development strategy, I wish to make four observations. These observations reflect my professional views and also represent the view of the Neighbourhood Plan for Kirkheaton, which is now in the final stages of preparation.

1. In general terms the Plan conforms with most of the requirements of sustainable development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and other documents. However, given the emphasis rightly placed on place shaping in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and elsewhere, there should be a link between this general discussion of sustainable development and the spatial expression of such concerns through a more detailed examination of place shaping in relation to the characteristics and drivers of change in individual communities. This should be framed by a consideration of the principles contained in the Bristol Accord, an EU –wide agreement on what should be done to secure sustainable development in communities.
2. While the strategic vision and objectives set out in Chapter 4 are supported, it is difficult to see how the Plan carries through its concern to retain the “local character and distinctiveness of Kirklees and its places”. This is especially true in the area around Huddersfield, which is distinguished by a settlement pattern dominated by villages that are physically separate from each other.
3. The above issues are of particular concern with regard to Chapters 5 and 6, which seek to set out the principles of place shaping and spatial development strategy. For the majority of settlements the principles outlined in Chapter 5 are largely ignored in the remainder of the Plan. While it is appreciated that this absence of the principle of place shaping with regard to individual places reflects the inadequacy of the resources available to the plan team, it is important to note that the majority of settlements are not treated as places in accord with the statement in Policy PLP2.

This undermines the vision and objectives enunciated in Chapter 4 and means that insufficient attention is paid to the delivery of sustainable spatial development in individual communities. Such a gap between vision and delivery can best be filled by Neighbourhood Plans and other detailed plans. However, the fear is that in the absence of strong and explicit place shaping statements for individual communities, the Plan's own objectives cannot be delivered.

4. In relation to Kirkheaton, the Plan is silent regarding spatial strategy and place shaping. As one of the principal authors of sustainable development thinking and policy in the UK spatial planning arena over the past 30 years, it is a matter of considerable concern that matters of place shaping and spatial strategy for settlements such as Kirkheaton have been ignored by the Plan. Most of the required 'topics' (employment; housing; recreation; transport, etc.) are contained in the Plan, but they are not brought together and applied to individual settlements in order to shape places. This is a matter of concern for Kirkheaton (and many other places) because of the incomplete and unsatisfactory way in which housing land allocations have been superimposed on the fundamental spatial character of the village. The resulting proposed pattern of future land use ignores the Plan's own objectives and principles of 'place shaping'. This issue is considered further in our submission on Matter 4.