

An AI(artificial intelligence) \* analysis of the transcript created at the session:  
Matter 4 - Strategic & General Approach to the Site Selection - Thursday 10th July 2025

## **1. Minutes – Structure and Main Themes**

### **1.1 Opening, introductions and procedure**

- The Inspector (David Spencer) opened Matter 4 of the South Tyneside Local Plan examination, covering the strategic approach to the green belt and site selection.
- Housekeeping, recording, public nature of the hearing, and participation rules (use of microphones, brevity, respect, no simultaneous speaking) were confirmed.
- Attendees introduced themselves: Inspector, Program Officer (Annette Fenny), Council officers and counsel, planning consultants for developers/landowners, community/green belt groups (Felgate, East Boldon, Cleadon), and councillors (Labour, Green, independents).

### **1.2 Scope of Matter 4**

- The Inspector set out that he is examining the plan against the September 2023 NPPF, under transitional arrangements.
- For green belt, he summarised the “stepwise” approach in paragraph 141 NPPF:
  - a. Maximum use of suitable brownfield/under-used land
  - b. Optimising densities in accessible locations
  - c. Discussion with neighbours (statements of common ground) about accommodating need elsewhere, before concluding on exceptional circumstances for changing green belt boundaries.
- He stressed that this session is about the strategic approach and methodology (not individual allocation merits), and that detailed site-by-site green belt changes and specific housing allocations would be dealt with in later sessions.

### **1.3 Evidence on urban/brownfield capacity and site selection**

- Council evidence: 515 sites were assessed as “reasonable options” through the SHLAA (“SHLAA/SHLAR”) and Employment Land Review (ELR), covering greenfield and brownfield, with and without planning permission.
- Around 50 reasonable options were in village built-up areas, over 300 in the main urban area, and 176 sites had no planning permission at the time (new sites promoted through the process).
- Initial call for sites in 2020, plus ongoing promotion via plan consultations; council also proactively identified disused/brownfield land, carried out Land Registry searches, and wrote to owners to test availability. Many owners did not respond or did not promote their land.
- SHLAA is updated annually, with 2023 supporting Regulation 19 and a 2024 update submitted with the plan (also updating commitments/completions); Brownfield Register is maintained in parallel.
- Site thresholds: generally, >0.5ha or capable of at least 5 dwellings, but some smaller council-led regeneration sites were included.
- Windfall allowance: from year 6 of the plan, 10 dwellings/year on small sites and 27 on larger sites are assumed, based on an “efficient use of land” paper.

### **1.4 Constraints in urban areas**

- Council noted that many apparently developable urban/brownfield sites are affected by:
  - Availability (owners unwilling to release or respond)
  - Operational uses (businesses, schools)
  - Flood risk (from the SFRA)
  - Heritage assets
  - Health and Safety Executive (HSE) consultation zones around hazardous installations
  - Physical infrastructure such as the Tyne Tunnel (land above it not buildable)
  - Green and blue infrastructure deficits in deprived neighbourhoods (need to avoid further open space loss).
- Council stated that there has been a long-term trend of reusing brownfield land in South Tyneside, with many former employment sites already redeveloped for housing; remaining brownfield supply is declining and often constrained or already permitted.

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### 1.5 Employment land approach

- Council relied on a 2023 Employment Land Review, starting from:
  - Existing employment sites portfolio
  - Sites promoted for employment by owners/agents.
- Sites were grouped (general employment, specialist/port-related), and assessed for sustainability and market attractiveness.
- Council considers that no further significant employment sites have emerged after the ELR that would alter its conclusions, and it is reasonable to “draw a line” there.

### 1.6 Key site examples discussed at strategic level

The Inspector reiterated that these examples were being used to probe the *process*, not to determine final allocation soundness.

- **“Rohm and Haas” (DAO Chemicals) site, Jarrow (brownfield)**
  - Long-standing employment site with river frontage; last use ceased around 2015–2016.
  - Council evidence:
    - Site is allocated for employment, not housing.
    - Owners have *never* promoted it for housing and have explicitly resisted any housing redevelopment; they are working with the council’s business team to bring it forward for employment and remediating contamination to an employment standard.
    - Previously identified as port/river-related but now allocated more flexibly as “general employment” with potential for port-related use.
  - Objectors (councillors/community):
    - Consider it a prime brownfield housing opportunity close to Jarrow town centre, Metro, bus, tunnel, hospital and schools, in a deprived area where regeneration and new homes are needed.
    - Cited historic council/environmental consultant statements that soil sampling found no exceedance of site-specific criteria and that material was considered unlikely to pose risk to controlled waters or human health (though council later clarified this related to a soil bund, not the whole site).
    - Argue flood risk (limited extent in zones 2/3) and contamination can be engineered out, citing the Holborn Riverside site remediation and Compton & Turnell chemical site redevelopment on the coast as precedent.
    - Question why the site has only recently been strongly promoted for employment; perceive a “rush” after political controversy over the plan, and query why no compulsory purchase or brownfield funding were pursued to enable housing.
  - Inspector pointed out that deliverability is critical: with a private owner strongly opposed to housing, it is hard to treat the site as a realistic housing allocation.
  - Council emphasised that:
    - The site has been identified for employment since the first Regulation 18 in 2019, not “suddenly”;
    - Residential is a highly sensitive end use for contaminated land, requiring a different standard of remediation than employment.

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- **Former MOD “bunkers” site near East Boldon (brownfield within the green belt)**
  - Isolated brownfield site in the green belt, part of the wider wildlife corridor network and identified as a “core site” in a 2020 Burton Reid wildlife corridors study.
  - Council’s Green Belt Study 2023 found release would cause high harm to green belt purposes, including compromising wildlife corridors and green infrastructure, and SFRA identified surface water flood risk.
  - Strong local objections at Regulation 18 stage, including from Labour councillors and East Boldon groups, led to the site being withdrawn from allocation.
  - Some local residents described current anti-social behaviour (motorbikes, drinking, dog fouling) and poor condition, arguing that in practice it is not an “idyllic” historic site, contrasting it with Felgate green belt.
  - East Boldon Neighbourhood Forum supports its retention in the green belt and notes it lies outside the settlement boundary in the neighbourhood plan; they argue housing there would create pressure to release adjoining green belt land and erode separation between East Boldon and other settlements.
- **Cleadon Lane site / Clean Lane (brownfield, not in green belt)**
  - Brownfield site outside green belt whose development (circa 202 dwellings) would meet the East Boldon area’s identified housing need in the neighbourhood plan.
  - Application was refused on drainage grounds but is treated in the plan’s numbers as a “commitment”; developers argued it should be an explicit allocation instead.
- **Other unnamed Brownfield and town centre sites**
  - Various Jarrow, South Shields and Hebburn brownfield/town-centre parcels (e.g. old library, BT building, clinic at Dean Lane, Queen Street/Salisbury Street) were cited as opportunities for higher-density housing in central locations.
  - Council often responded that some such sites were earmarked for other uses (e.g. student housing) and are expected to come forward as windfall rather than allocations, or that availability/ownership was uncertain.

## 2. Key Statements and Actions (with responsibilities)

### 2.1 Inspector (David Spencer)

Key statements:

- Set out three NPPF steps for justifying green belt changes and made clear he must be satisfied the council has:
  - Fully explored brownfield and urban capacity
  - Optimised densities
  - Sought help from neighbouring authorities.
- Clarified that prior political history (plan rejection at Full Council) is background and his remit is to test the soundness of the *submitted* plan and evidence.
- Stressed that he needs to know what changes objectors actually seek (e.g. “slight amendments” vs “fundamentally different plan”).
- Emphasised that availability and deliverability are central tests; landowners cannot be compelled to promote land.
- Indicated he will be making site visits (including Roman House) and may revisit in light of oral evidence.
- Explained that the green belt harm ratings arise from judgments within LUC’s methodology and that he must decide whether methodology and application are robust overall.
- Noted that some concerns about densities and biodiversity net gain (BNG) may be better tested in Stage 2 when looking at specific sites and viability, but he still needs comfort that the overall method is broadly reasonable now.

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Actions:

- To review specific planning application files cited in relation to the Roman House contamination assessment (two application references to be provided by the council). **Responsible: Council to supply links; Inspector to review.**
- To consider whether additional internal evidence on site capacities/densities (e.g. pro formas, internal design work for council-owned sites) can be provided, and how BNG has been factored into capacity assumptions. **Responsible: Council.**
- To revisit housing land tables/trajectory and green belt parcels in Stage 2 in light of capacity/BNG and viability evidence. **Responsible: Inspector with council's further evidence.**

## 2.2 Council (officers and counsel)

Key statements:

- Confident they have undertaken a “comprehensive assessment of reasonable options” (515 sites), and all suitable/available/achievable sites are allocated, committed or in the Brownfield Register.
- SHLAA and Brownfield Register are iterative and updated annually; website form allows site submissions at any time.
- Many brownfield sites are unavailable (no landowner interest), operational, or unsuited due to constraints. Availability is often the key reason for not allocating brownfield sites.
- Significant brownfield land has already been redeveloped for housing; remaining stock is much more limited and often already permitted, so brownfield is not an “endless” reservoir.
- BNG now applies to brownfield as well as greenfield, and can affect viability and developable area, particularly where open mosaic habitats exist.
- Employment land: 2023 ELR provides a robust baseline; no new employment sites have emerged that change the picture.
- Rohm and Haas:
  - Owner strongly opposes any housing; only promotes employment.
  - Site is being remediated for employment, and business development officers are actively working with the owner to bring it forward.
  - Residential is a far more “vulnerable” receptor than employment from a contamination perspective.
- Green belt:
  - LUC's 2023 study was commissioned after a peer review of earlier in-house work, to ensure alignment with current NPPF and case law (including Calverton) and to strengthen robustness.
  - Councils consulted neighbouring authorities on the green belt methodology.
  - The council accepts LUC's parcel-based harm assessment and uses it to steer where green belt release is least harmful.
- Duty to cooperate/paragraph 141(c) NPPF:
  - Letters sent to Sunderland, Gateshead and North Tyneside (later also Newcastle) once it was clear South Tyneside could not meet its need without green belt release.
  - All responded that they could not assist with South Tyneside's housing or employment needs; this is documented in the duty-to-cooperate statement and addendum and in statements of common ground.
- Exceptional circumstances:
  - After exploring urban capacity, densities and cross-boundary options, an unmet residual need of about 2,250 homes remains; combined with social, economic and environmental consequences of under-provision, this justifies green belt release in principle.

Actions:

- Provide the Inspector with the two Rohm and Haas planning application references (and associated documents) used in the topic paper. **Responsible: Council.**
- Explore whether internal capacity work (for 27 urban allocations and other council-owned sites) can be collated/shared to evidence densities and yield ratios, including how policy requirements (BNG, open space, etc.) were considered. **Responsible: Council.**

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### 2.3 LUC consultant (Josh Allen)

#### Key statements:

- Described LUC's approach to the 2023 Green Belt Study:
  - Start from assessing land's function against all five green belt purposes, using various criteria (containment, openness, relationship to settlements, role in separation, etc.).
  - Delineate green belt parcels with a *minimum* size of 10ha to provide a strategic view; parcel boundaries are the *output* of assessment, not an arbitrary input.
  - Rate harm to each purpose, then assign an overall harm rating (low–very high) based on the highest harm to any purpose.
- After the strategic parcel stage, they overlaid all SHLAA sites in the green belt and tested whether releasing each *site* in isolation would result in higher/lower harm than the parcel rating; where necessary they noted differences for parts of parcels and smaller sites.
- Noted that smaller releases are inherently less harmful than large ones, but this does not typically change the harm *category* unless there are distinctive containment features.
- Clarified that they only factored in *committed* development (allocated or permissioned) such as the IAMP/AMP area already taken out of green belt; other aspirations or emerging schemes were not treated as committed.
- On "Boldons as part of the large built-up area": explained that treating East/West Boldon as part of the contiguous urban area *increases* the relevance of purposes 1 and 2 (sprawl and merger), so if anything raises the harm ratings, not lowers them.

#### Actions:

- None explicit beyond earlier commitments to provide clarification through the council. LUC's work is already in the evidence base.

### 3. Topics of Disagreement or Conflict

From the partial transcript, the main areas of disagreement are:

#### 3.1 Whether brownfield/urban capacity has been fully and reasonably exhausted

- Council position:
  - They have comprehensively tested SHLAA and brownfield capacity, proactively contacted owners, and allowed for windfall.
  - Availability and constraints mean many apparent sites cannot realistically be allocated.
- Objectors (various councillors, community reps, some promoters):
  - Argue there are still significant under-used brownfield sites (e.g., Rohm and Haas, other riverfront sites, Jarrow/South Shields town centre land, former library, clinic sites) that could reduce or avoid green belt release.
  - Suggest the council has not been sufficiently proactive in using funding (e.g. brownfield funding, NECA resources) or compulsory purchase to unlock difficult brownfield.
  - Question why certain brownfield sites are now promoted for employment (e.g. Roman House) only after political controversy, and suggest this undermines confidence in the process.

### 3.2 Rohm and Haas: housing vs employment and contamination

- Council/LUC:
  - Treat it as a strategic employment site with river access; owner's opposition to housing means it fails basic availability for residential; residential contamination standards are much stricter.
- Community/councillors:
  - Believe contamination and flood risk are over-stated for housing; cite past "soil is safe" statements and other remediated sites; argue employment end-use is being used to block housing and to reserve land for port-linked uses.
  - Argue that the site's social context (deprivation, central location) makes it ideal for homes, and that refusing to consider it for housing is inconsistent with policy priorities and climate objectives.

### 3.3 Density assumptions, net developable ratios and BNG

- Council:
  - Density study supports higher densities in town centres and near Metro; indicative densities have been used as a *starting point* and then refined using council regeneration work and site-specific information.
  - Net: gross ratios (90% for small sites, 75% for larger sites) are considered reasonable.
- Developers' planning consultants:
  - Argue that the density study relies heavily on 2015–2023 data *before* statutory BNG and the Building Safety Act regime, and is now too optimistic.
  - Say BNG and on-site open space, plus high-spec mitigation (noise, M42/M43 standards), reduce net developable area on many urban sites; typical net: gross ratios now more like 50–60%, not 75–90%.
  - Question whether viability testing has properly reflected costs of taller buildings in town centres (fire safety, structure) and BNG credits.

### 3.4 Exceptional circumstances for green belt release (in principle)

- Council and most developers:
  - Agree that after accounting for urban/brownfield capacity and densities, there remains a residual unmet need (circa 2,250 dwellings) that cannot be accommodated without green belt release; neighbouring authorities cannot help; therefore strategic "exceptional circumstances" exist.
- Some councillors/community groups:
  - Argue exceptional circumstances are *not* demonstrated because:
    - Housing need could and should be reduced by using updated household projections instead of the 2014-based standard method.
    - More brownfield and central capacity exists than the council is assuming, particularly if higher-density apartments are built in town centres.
    - The environmental/climate and social harm of losing green belt (Felgate, wildlife corridors, separation between settlements) outweighs benefits.
    - Earlier green belt assessments for this plan cycle concluded some sites (e.g. Felgate) were not justifiable; they question why a later consultant reached an opposite view.

### 3.5 Green Belt methodology and parcelisation

- Some East Boldon/Cleaton participants:
  - Challenge characterisation of the Boldons as part of the "large built-up area" of Tyneside or as part of Jarrow/outer South Shields, insisting they are distinctive villages separated by meaningful green belt.
  - Argue LUC's assessment underplays the role of certain parcels in preventing settlement coalescence and protecting village character, and that harm should be "significant" or "very high" rather than "moderate" in some parcels (e.g. GA2 North Farm).
- LUC:
  - Maintain that their approach is consistent across the borough and has been used elsewhere; consider that recognising Boldons as functionally part of a large urban area actually *increases* the relevance of certain green belt purposes and associated harm scores.

#### 4. Key Actions and Responsible Parties (Summary List)

From the excerpt:

1. **Provide planning application documents for Roman House contamination/flood risk.**
  - Responsible: Council officers.
2. **Clarify and, if possible, publish internal capacity/density evidence for urban allocations (frameworks, pro formas, internal design work) including BNG and open space assumptions.**
  - Responsible: Council officers (spatial planning and regeneration teams).
3. **Inspector to undertake (and potentially revisit) site visits, including Rohm and Haas and key green belt parcels (e.g. MOD bunkers, Felgate, GA2), in light of oral evidence.**
  - Responsible: Inspector.
4. **Re-examine housing trajectory/urban capacity in Stage 2 in light of BNG, building height constraints, and updated capacity evidence.**
  - Responsible: Inspector, supported by council's updated evidence and viability work.
5. **Council to maintain and update SHLAA and Brownfield Register annually and continue to accept/promote site submissions via the website.**
  - Responsible: Council.

#### 5. Risks, Concerns, and Blockers Raised

##### 5.1 Brownfield and capacity risks

- **Risk that brownfield capacity is underestimated** because:
  - Some key brownfield sites (Roman House, other riverfront land, town-centre plots) are excluded or only treated as employment.
  - Political choices and landowner preferences may be constraining options that could in principle be unlocked via funding or CPO.
- **Risk that brownfield viability is overestimated** (developers' view) due to:
  - BNG costs and on-site open space competing with housing area.
  - Low sales values in some urban areas making marginal brownfield schemes undeliverable even if allocated.
- **Risk that density assumptions are optimistic** leading to:
  - Shortfall if 75–90% net: gross isn't achievable under BNG and design/amenity constraints.
  - Underestimation of need for further green belt release or plan review.

##### 5.2 Contamination and health/safety risks

- **Rohm and Haas:**
  - Uncertainty over full extent and nature of contamination across the entire site (vs tested bund areas).
  - Potential health risk if residential development proceeded without comprehensive remediation to a higher standard than currently contemplated for employment.
- General concern: updated environmental standards may render some historic contamination advice outdated.

##### 5.3 Flood risk and drainage

- **Felgate (SP8) and surrounding area:**
  - Local evidence of repeated surface water flooding and a large number of drainage interventions in a single year despite works; concerns that SP8 lies partly in higher-risk SFRA zones (3A/3B in some evidence) contrary to older council categorisation.
  - Perception that building on Felgate compromises an existing engineered flood alleviation scheme protecting the estate.
- Other parcels: Council acknowledges surface water flood issues at the MOD bunkers and some other green belt parcels.

#### 5.4 Green belt, biodiversity and climate risks

- Loss of:
  - Wildlife corridors (e.g. Burton Reid 2020 identifies MOD bunkers as “core” habitat).
  - Linear hedgerows, mature trees and barn owl habitat (as already seen at the AMP).
- Cumulative green belt erosion on the border with Sunderland (Felgate/AMP), narrowing separation between communities and weakening green belt permanence.
- Conflict with:
  - Declared climate and ecological emergencies.
  - Need for nature-based climate adaptation, carbon sequestration and urban cooling.
- Risk that net gain is treated as a “tick-box” offset while removing irreplaceable or hard-to-replace habitats.

#### 5.5 Cross-boundary and legal/planning-process risks

- **Duty to cooperate:**
  - Risk (from objectors’ perspective) that the council accepted neighbours’ “we cannot assist” at face value without digging into whether *some* limited capacity could be taken, given all are green belt authorities.
  - However, statements of common ground and written responses from neighbours state no assistance is possible, which the council and Inspector treat as clear.
- **Soundness risk from housing numbers:**
  - Some groups argue housing need should be lower using updated data; if Inspector accepted that, exceptional circumstances for current extent of green belt release might fall away.
  - Conversely, some developers argue urban capacity is over-estimated and true need may be higher, requiring more green belt.

#### 5.6 Community and social risks

- **Local trust and legitimacy:**
  - Perception that some sites (e.g. Roman House) have been “re-classified” late in the process undermines trust.
  - Community representatives feel communities are being “pitted against each other” as they fight to protect different green belt areas.
- **Housing mix and affordability:**
  - Concern that green belt allocations will not provide the type of housing most needed locally (social rent, small units, older persons’ housing), but instead high-value family homes.
  - Fear that trade-offs in S106/viability will reduce affordable housing and infrastructure contributions if sites prove more expensive to deliver than assumed.