Density Report (2024)

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   This paper is an update of the South Tyneside Density Study (2018) which considered evidence to support the optimisation of land use in order to meet housing needs by testing density setting. The aim of this update is to review the densities of developments delivered since 2018 and to understand the variation of densities delivered including new developments around villages in the borough and which density zones are relevant across South Tyneside for considering density levels. This will inform the overall approach to densities to be set out in policy through the emerging Local Plan.

1.2   In order to confidently allocate future residential development sites and apply a potential capacity to those sites, an evidence-based review of sites developed within South Tyneside including those in recent years was required.

1.3   This report will inform the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and evidence policies on appropriate and achievable densities in the emerging Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with the SHLAA, Green Belt Review and the Efficient Use of Land paper.

1.4   The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (July 2021) states that plans and decisions should support development that makes efficient use of land. Plans should contain policies to optimise the use of land in the area, including the use of minimum density standards. The revised NPPF also introduced a new standard methodology for determining housing need in each authority. The standard method draws on the 2014 based Household Projections and median workplace-based affordability ratios, both published by the ONS. For the purposes of our emerging Local Plan, we have used the standard method to determine the minimum number of new homes. The minimum number of homes the Plan proposes to deliver over the period 2023-2040 is **5253**.

1.5   Through evidence gathered in the SHLAA we know there will be a need to utilise land currently in the Green Belt to meet our housing need therefore optimising the use of land to meet the housing needs through density setting will be tested at the emerging Plan's inspection.

2.   NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

2.1   The density of a development should respond to the local context and character and reflect the accessibility of the site by public transport, cycling and walking, and to public services, community facilities, and amenity and recreation provision.

2.2   Paragraph 124 of the NPPF states that Development should make efficient use of land by taking into account considering the need for different house types, market conditions, the availability and capacity of infrastructure, the area's character and setting, and the importance of well-designed places.

2.3   Paragraph 125 of the NPPF highlights the importance of avoiding homes being built at low densities, where there is an anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs. Planning policies should avoid homes being built at low densities and ensure optimal use of land by using minimum density standards. These standards aim to uplift the average density of residential development and the use of these standards should be used in other parts of the plan area. Minimum density standards should also be used in a way which ensures that applications which fail to make efficient use of land be refused.

3.   ASESSMENT OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS

3.1   In order to establish an up to date understanding of densities which are currently being built in the borough a desk study was conducted which relies on GIS mapping, planning application files and monitoring data using a sample of 24 sites which received planning permission between 2015 – 2023. The 26 sites cover approximately 55 hectares of land and would deliver 1695 dwellings. The sites considered have planning permission and have progressed to various stages of development.

3.2   Whilst permission was given to 26 sites during this period only 24 sites will be used in this study. The sites at Leslie Hawthorn and Holborn have been omitted from this study as due to the nature of those sites they present an anomaly in the densities. These sites have a much higher density as to be viable sites for the developers more dwellings on site were required. These sites have a much higher proportion of flats and apartments than others of this size and location. Therefore, to be able to analyse patterns and trends in the data these 2 sites have been treated as anomalies.

ASSESSMENT BY SITE SIZE (BY GROSS SITE AREA)

3.3   The gross site area is defined as the total land area as part of a development. The net site area is defined as the land that is the area of developable land. For larger sites the net area of housing will be smaller than the gross area, allowing for provision of greenspace, infrastructure, and other community facilities such as schools.

Table 1: Gross to net ratio

Site Size	Assumed Net Ratio
<0.4 Hectare	100% gross to net ratio
0.4 – 2 Hectares	90% gross to net ratio
>2 Hectares	75% gross to net ratio

3.4   The sites assessed fall into one of the following site area categories:

- Sites of less than 1 hectare;
- Sites between 1 and 1.99 hectares;
- Sites between 2 and 3.99 hectares;

- Sites between 4 and 6.99 hectares; and
- Sites in excess of 7 hectares

3.5   The assessment showed that the smallest sites, those measuring less than 1 hectare, were more likely to have a higher density based on the net site area with an average density of 82 dwellings per hectare. This decreases significantly on sites larger than 1 hectare. A clear pattern was established between the site size and density with density decreasing as the site size increases as Table 2 demonstrates.

Table 2: Assessment based on site size

Category	Number of sites assessed	Average Density per Hectare (Net Site Area)
<1 ha	15	82
1 – 1.99 ha	2	43
2 – 3.99 ha	3	41
4 – 6.99 ha	1	40
>7 ha	3	34
Overall average density	24	66

3.6   In order to better understand how the density of new developments has changed table 3 compares the density per hectare in the 2018 and the 2023 study.

3.7   A clear trend is present that the new developments in the borough have a higher average density than those in 2018, particularly in the sites measuring less than 1 hectare. On average these sites in 2023 have 24 more dwellings per hectare than in the previous study.

Table 3: Assessment based on site size comparison

Category	2018 Average Density per Hectare (Net site area)	2023 Average Density per Hectare (Net Site Area)
<1 ha	58	82
1 – 1.99 ha	39	43
2 – 3.99 ha	38	41
4 – 6.99 ha	35	40
>7 ha	33	34
Overall average density	40	66

3.8 Most schemes will deliver a mix of dwellings types and sizes which have an impact on the amount of land required and, therefore, the density of the scheme. The sites were also grouped into five categories having regard to their yield. These were:

- Sites with fewer than 50 dwellings
- Sites between 50 and 99 dwellings
- Sites between 100 and 149 dwellings
- Sites between 150 and 249 dwellings
- Sites in excess of 250 dwellings

3.9 Densities by site yield show a similar trend to densities by site area. Generally, as site yield increases, the density per hectare decreases. Site with a yield of less than 50 dwellings have an average density of 50 dwellings per hectare whereas sites with a yield exceeding 250 dwellings have an average density of 28 dwellings per hectare. Table 4 demonstrates this.

3.10 Larger sites require more infrastructure, open space and land for other requirements such as community facilities. Therefore, for larger sites, a smaller percentage of the site is used for housing than on smaller sites. Smaller sites can then usually achieve a higher density per hectare.

3.11 Of the 24 sites being assessed, none had between 150 and 249 dwellings approved in their planning permission.

Table 4: Assessment by site yield

| Category	Number of sites assessed	Average Site yield	Average Density per Hectare (Net Site Area)
<50 dwellings	15	15	50
50 – 99 dwellings	4	55	39
100 – 149 dwellings	2	114	43
150 – 249 dwellings	0	N/A	N/A
>250 dwellings	3	318	28

3.12 The sites assessed were categorised by sub-areas (as shown in Figure 1):

- Hebburn
- Jarrow
- Inner South Shields
- Outer South Shields
- Fellgate and Hedworth
- Boldon and Cleadon
- Whitburn

Figure 1: Assessment based on site location
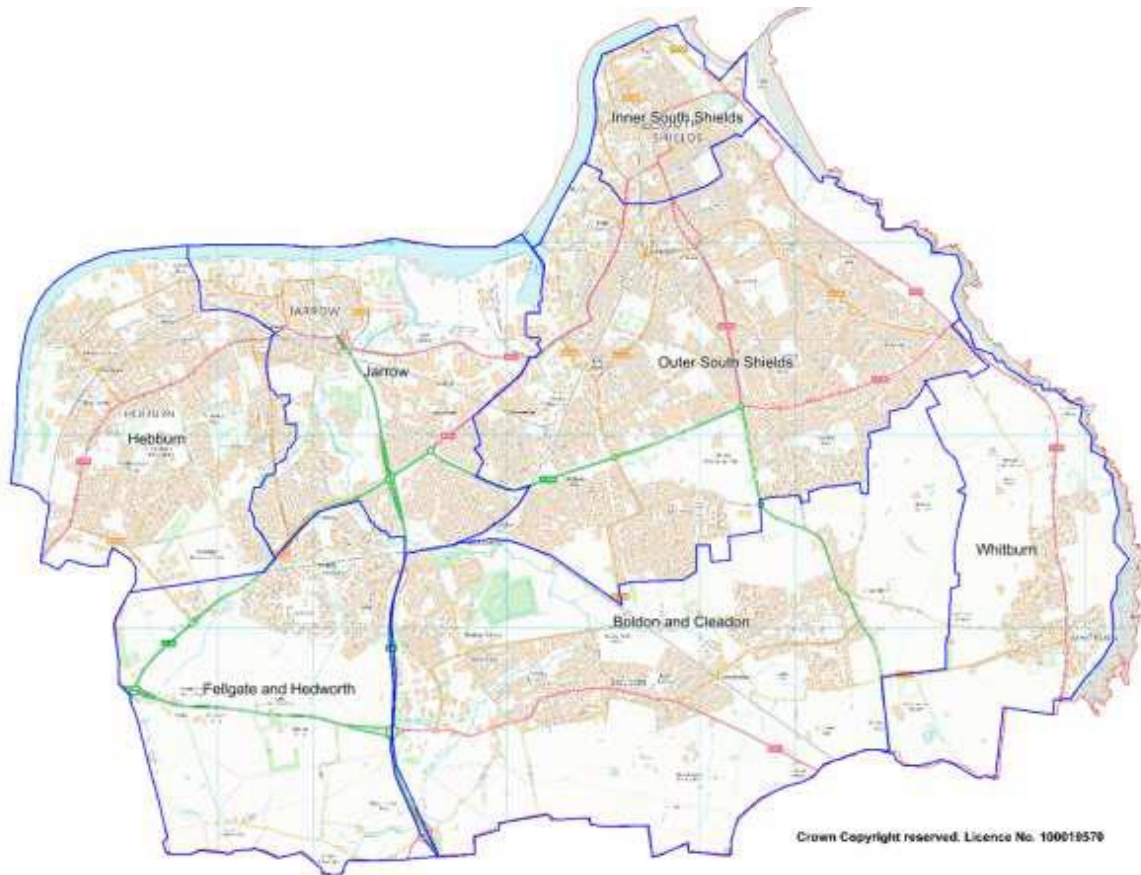
3.13 Of the 24 sites assessed, no sites were identified in the Whitburn area.

3.14 Densities are significantly higher in the South Shields areas than in the rest of the borough likely due to the urban nature of the area and a high proportion of smaller sites.

Table 5: Assessment based on site location

Category	Number of sites assessed	Average Density per Hectare (Net Site Area)
Boldon and Cleadon	4	47
Hebburn	7	33
Inner South Shields	3	82
Outer South Shields	3	61
Jarrow	5	34
Fellgate and Hedworth	2	38

ASSESSMENT BY PROXIMITY TO TRANSPORT HUBS / TOWN AND DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRES

3.15 The sites were also assessed against the adopted Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy density buffers in accordance with the following distances from town or other main shopping centres or metro stations:

- Average 50 dwellings per hectare on sites within 400m;
- Average 40 dwellings per hectare on sites between 400 - 800m; and
- Average 30 dwellings per hectare on sites beyond 800m

3.16 This assessment showed that on average higher densities were achieved across all three categories. The largest difference was on sites within 400m of a transport hub or town/district shopping centre. Densities were, on average, 108% higher than the adopted LDF density buffers.

3.17 Sites between 400m – 800m from a transport hub or town/district centre achieved, on average, 30% higher densities and sites beyond 800m achieved, on average, 43% higher densities than the adopted density buffers.

Table 6: Assessment based on site size comparison

Category	Number of Sites Assessed	Average Density per Hectare (Net Site Area)
50 dwellings per hectare on sites within 400m of town / district centres and metro stations	8	104
40 dwellings per hectare on sites between 400 – 800m of town / district centres and metro stations	7	52
30 dwellings per hectare on sites beyond 800m of town / district centres and metro stations	9	43

Figure 2: 400 and 800m buffers around Metro Stations/ Town and District Centre
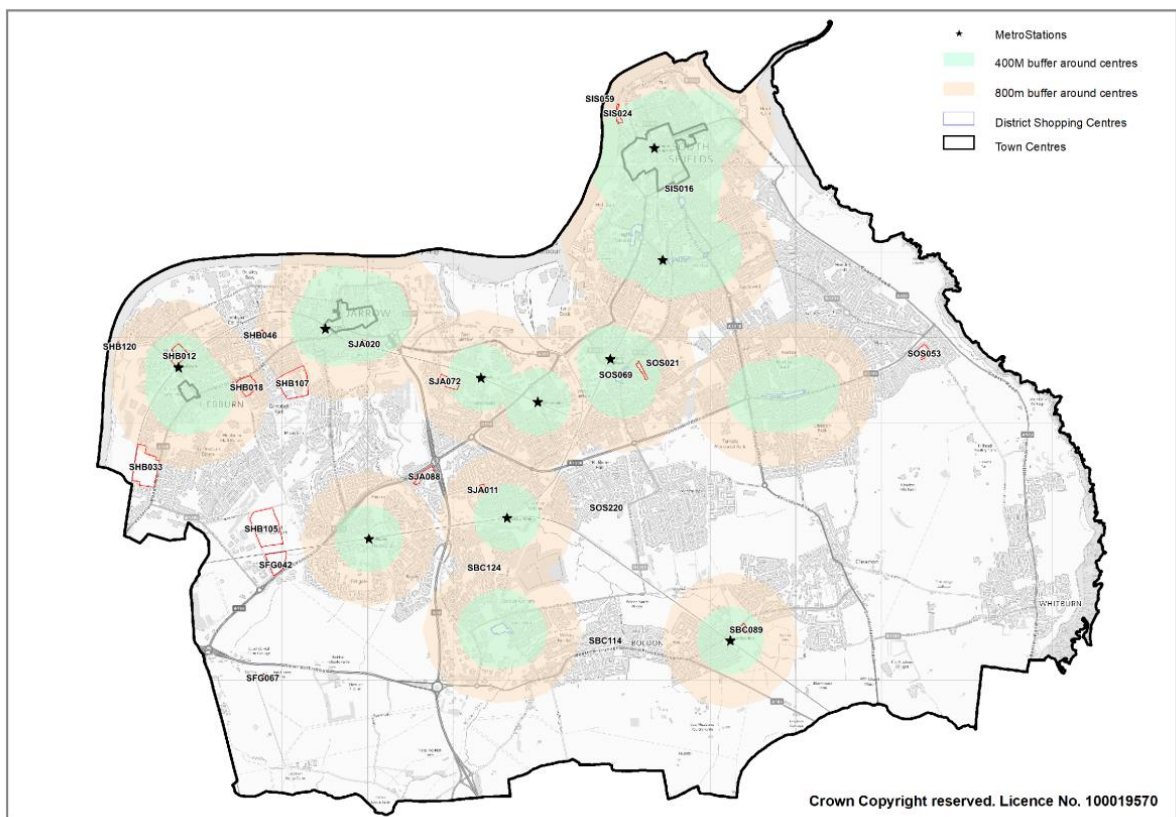
4. SUMMARY

4.1   Following the four assessments several conclusions can be drawn with regards to density patterns throughout South Tyneside. Since the previous Density study in 2018:

- The average density of sites assessed was 66 dwellings per hectare based on net site area. This is an increase of 16 dwellings per hectare since the previous study.
- The assessments showed that density declined as site area increased and that sites less than 1 hectare had a density significantly higher than those over 1 hectare. Sites less than 1 hectare had and average density of 82 dwellings per hectare. Sites over 1 hectare had a density of 40 dwellings per hectare.
- In general sites with a higher yield had typically lower densities. Sites with less than 50 dwellings had an average density of 50 dwellings per hectare whereas sited with more than 250 dwellings had an average density of 28 dwellings per hectare.
- Sites in the urban area of South Shields had the highest densities with an average of 72 dwellings per hectare. This is likely due to the nature of the area and the large proportion of smaller sites.
- Compared to the standard density buffers in Policy SC3 of the adopted LDF and the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment higher densities were achieved across all three categories.

5. MOVING FORWARD

5.1   The NPPF encourages efficient use of land and building at higher densities. However, it is important to note that this should not be at the expense of good design. Policies should seek an uplift in densities whilst still maintaining the character and setting of an area or promoting regeneration. Paragraph 124 of the NPPF highlights the need for well designed, attractive, and healthy places for people to live.

5.2   As shown in the study, higher densities than those set out in the Local Development Framework can be achieved. However, there must also be a balance against a range of competing concerns such as developing sustainable communities, good design, diversification of housing stock and constraints such as biodiversity and flooding.

5.3   In some cases, lower density development may be appropriate and necessary to ensure the development sits well within its surroundings and is compatible with the local area. This may also be necessary to provide sufficient infrastructure and mitigation against any potential negative impacts of the development or to ensure particular house types are delivered to meet the needs of the borough.

6.   RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1   Housing yield must ultimately be determined by design. However, for the purposes of estimating housing yield as part of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Local Plan site selection process the following density calculations are recommended:

- Average 60 dwellings per hectare on sites within 400m in the Jarrow and Inner South Shields character areas (higher densities may also be appropriate on a site by site basis e.g. by the riverside on sites such as Holborn and Hawthorn Leslie);
- Average 55 dwellings per hectare on sites within 400m in the rest of the borough;
- Average 45 dwellings per hectare on sites between 400m – 800m in the rest of the borough; and
- Average 35 dwellings per hectare on sites beyond 800m in the rest of the borough.

6.2   These densities will be used to estimate site capacities in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment where other information (e.g. planning applications, information from developers etc.) is not available. Should this information be available It will be used.