

Richard Cowen for
Gillan Gibson

Representor number
1164350

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD COWEN TO THE EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC
INTO THE
DARLINGTON LOCAL PLAN**

RELATING TO MATTER 9

Mrs Gibson made a strong representation in respect of the proposed Northern Relief Road, stating that CPRE has persistently argued against this proposed road. I am not sure how long this road has been considered as a potential new road but am aware that this is not the first time it has been considered.

Therefore I welcome the decision to delete reference to this road as mentioned in the response to PQ80 and in the proposed modifications. I presume this will mean all references to this road will be deleted from the Plan. However, that said, concerns remain about this and I believe it is necessary to address question 9.1 of the Matters and Issues.

Mrs Gibson has mentioned that if the road is constructed, it will increase pressure to treat it as the development boundary. While we note the Skerningham Masterplan indicates a large green area between the current proposed housing and the road, it is indicative and there is nothing in Policy H10 or ENV7 to make this a condition of the development. It is understood that there is a view that, if the road is constructed, it would open the Ketton area up for development.

Proposals in the current Plan seem to indicate that the Motorway and A66 are already being considered as development boundaries – see the Conniscliffe, West Park, Greater Faverdale, Great Burdon and Ingenium Park proposals, some already under way. I therefore represent that Mrs Gibson's concerns are well founded and should be taken seriously.

If the road does, notwithstanding these arguments, proceed, protecting the area between development and it needs to be addressed. This cannot be implied and has to be specifically stated. Indeed, without prejudice to all our arguments, if all the housing and employment development proposed in the Plan does proceed along with this road, perhaps serious consideration needs to be given to creating a Green Belt to the north of Darlington Urban Area as extended in accordance with Paragraph 72c of the NPPF.

Q9.1. Is the Council's proposed modification to policy IN1 part C(v) to delete reference to a northern link road necessary to make the Plan sound and, if so, would it be effective in so doing? Do the references in paragraph 10.5.9 to a northern link road need to be modified? Is the designation of a northern relief road on the key diagram (map 1) and the Skertingham masterplan framework (figure 6.1) justified?

CPRE has argued for many years that this road is not justified and would have a severe detrimental impact on the landscape and tranquillity to the north of Darlington. It would significantly affect Ketton country, a remote part of Darlington approached by an unmade road that also provides an attractive walk through this area of the Borough. The character of this area would be changed permanently if the Relief Road is constructed.

While it is noted that the Relief Road may take traffic away from the Whinfield area of Darlington, this is not mentioned as a reason for the road in the Council's response to PQ80. The issue therefore is whether the road is more intended as a route to link Newton Aycliffe to the industry and port at Teesside.

The Council should state clearly what its intention is here. I represent that it is not enough to say that this is a Tees Valley Combined Authority project – the Council has considered this road for many years before the TVCA came into existence and it appears the Council is still working on it now.

There is a risk that the Council is being disingenuous here. They have deleted reference to the Northern Relief Road so that it then ceases to be a matter of discussion for the Examination. But the proposal may well come back into existence within a very short time of the Plan being adopted.

CPRE therefore answers the various questions asked as follows

Is the Council's proposed modification to policy IN1 part C(v) to delete reference to a northern link road necessary to make the Plan sound

Yes, as CPRE represents that the road is not justified, is not necessary and would cause substantial damage to a rural area that would not be possible to mitigate
and, if so, would it be effective in so doing?

This is not clear. It would not be effective if the proposal is resurrected once the Plan is adopted. It could just be a ruse to avoid scrutiny of the proposal at this stage.

Do the references in paragraph 10.5.9 to a northern link road need to be modified?

If Policy IN1Cv is to be deleted, all references to the Northern Relief Road in the Plan, text or otherwise, should be deleted.

Is the designation of a northern relief road on the key diagram (map 1) and the Skerningham masterplan framework (figure 6.1) justified?

Clearly, if Policy IN1Cv is to be deleted, any representation of this route on the diagrams and frameworks must also be removed.

The future

CPRE therefore represents that the Council and TVCA should make it abundantly clear what they are proposing in respect of the Northern Relief Road and whether its construction is intended to be for the purpose mentioned by the Council in response to the PQ80. While I note that access to the A66 from the A1(M) travelling south is not possible and there may be difficulties now in making this a 4 way junction and improving the A66, it should be noted that traffic from Newton Aycliffe could be routed north towards the A689 and then travel south along the A19. This junction on the A1(M) is, after all, signposted for Teesside.

While this may be a longer route than building a new road, the full implications need to be addressed. Large goods vehicles have for some time now been prohibited from travelling along the A685 through Kirby Stephen and have to make a longer diversion along the A66 to the M6 at Penrith. A similar consideration could be applied to protect residents at Whinfield if this is indeed a reason for this Relief Road.

Q9.2. Is the creation of an orbital road and public transport route as indicated on the key diagram justified? If so, to be effective, does policy IN1 part C(vii) need to be modified to clarify that is one of the objectives that the seven schemes listed are expected to achieve?

If the arguments I have made relating to each of these housing and employment developments is successful, there will clearly be no case for this “orbital” road. However, if they fail, the points raised by Mrs Gibson in her representations are again relevant.

I represent that this appears to be the creation of an “orbital road” by stealth. If each scheme is taken on its own, there is nothing to suggest that the roads will link up to form an orbital road. Given that this does amount to an orbital road, the full case, including the public transport one, should be made. Further, it should be clarified how these roads will accommodate sustainable transport, particularly pedestrians and cyclists.

It is noted that the proposed orbital road runs close to the motorway, parts of the proposed Northern Relief Road and the A66. While it may not be appropriate to use these roads as an orbital road, to have a road running so close to them appears excessive. An orbital road is also likely to be a barrier that will reduce connectivity

with wildlife sites inside the orbital road, potentially leading to fragmentation of these sites.

I therefore represent that

- 1) These roads should only be considered for inclusion in the Plan if it is determined that all the proposed housing and employment allocations are found to be sound
- 2) Even if they are, the full case for an orbital road needs to be made out, including how it will be used for public transport and sustainable transport such as walking and cycling
- 3) The visual impact of this orbital road should be assessed in conjunction with its proximity to the A1(M), the proposed Northern Relief Road and the A66.
- 4) Its impact on biodiversity, particularly nature reserves and wildlife sites within its radius, needs to be assessed

But, for the reasons mentioned by Mrs Gibson, I represent that this proposal is on current information not justified and consequently not sound.