

Darlington Local Plan

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions for Examination

Response on behalf of Taylor Wimpey (UK) Ltd

Matter 9 – Transport and other infrastructure

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?

A key highway benefit of Coniscliffe Park (sites 41 and 249) is enabling the delivery of part of the north western link road which is identified in Submission Local Plan (Policy IN 1 -Delivering a Sustainable Transport Network) as a key route for new road and public transport links to support specific developments included in the Local Plan. Delivery of the link road will improve route choice and in turn help relieve existing traffic congestion to the west of Darlington.

A joint highways model was commissioned by Taylor Wimpey and Gladman prior to the submission of the outline planning applications on the above-mentioned sites to assess the implications of the schemes on the surrounding highway network. It has been determined that the schemes cumulatively have an impact on the Blands Corner roundabout and the three roundabouts in Cockerton. Capacity improvements to three roundabouts at Cockerton and the Blands Corner roundabout have been agreed with Darlington Borough Council and Highways England in order to improve the performance of key junctions within the development study area. As outlined in Taylor Wimpey's Matter 4 Statement, both applications were recommended for approval and the committee report (5th June) concluded:

"The planning applications have been considered both individually but also cumulatively in terms of their location and connectivity with the western edge of the urban area and their impact on matters such as residential amenity, flood risk, ecology, trees, noise, air quality, Public Rights of Way and the local and strategic highway network.

It is considered that with the imposition of appropriate planning conditions and the offsite highway mitigation measures that have been agreed with the Council and Highways England the planning application site and also the adjacent site to the north can be redeveloped for residential purposes (and the associated uses in the 17/00636/OUTE proposal) without causing significant harm to the surrounding area, local residents and the highway networks".

In addition, the effect of the above highway infrastructure improvements has been tested with the Aimsun model in order to highlight journey time benefits on three key routes within Darlington (A67, A68 and Carmel Road). These improvement schemes will provide material journey time reductions to peak hour journey times on key routes within Darlington i.e. average journey times with the developments and associated improvements in place will be lower than 2032 baseline levels.

It is clear the Coniscliffe Park development will deliver a significant part of the north western link road and other highway improvements and is therefore an important part of the Local Plan.

Q9.5. Subject to the Council's proposed modifications, is policy IN2 sound?

Taylor Wimpey maintain their objection to criteria d. of policy IN2 as there is nothing in national planning policy to support this requirement and, as such, the policy is not sound.

It is envisaged that the suggested 400m requirement has been obtained from the document entitled 'Guidelines for Planning for Public Transport in Developments' published in 1999 by the Institute of Highways and Transportation (IHT) where paragraph 6.20 states:

"the maximum walking distance to a bus stop should not exceed 400m and preferably be no more than 300m"

However, it should be noted that the document also makes it clear that these walk distances are not fixed stating that:

"These distances are quoted for guidance and should not be followed slavishly if that would lead to complex or indirect bus routes". (paragraph 6.20, my underlining). "Bus stops should, ideally, be located to minimise walking distances, yet maximise the potential catchment areas" (paragraph 6.26).

Furthermore, there appears to be no reference to any research or empirical evidence within 'Planning for Public Transport in Developments' to back up the suggestion that the maximum walk distance to a bus stop should be 400m and TW are not aware of any other document that does this.

By contrast, another report published by the IHT in 2000, 'Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot', does provide some empirical evidence stating that on average people are prepared to walk 1.0km (paragraph 3.30) and that this figure differs little by age or sex, remaining constant since 1975. In the same section of the document Table 3.2 goes on to suggest that the same 1.0km distance is an acceptable walking distance for commuters.

In summary, the two IHT documents do not appear to 'marry up'. The more recent document suggests 1km, not 400m. In comparing the two, the 400m maximum walking distance in 'Planning for Public Transport in Developments' is introduced with no apparent research/evidence and in any event the document describes that it "should not be followed slavishly".

In contrast 'Providing for Journeys on Foot' does provide evidence to suggest that people, on average, are prepared to walk much further than 400m, indeed up to 1,000m. Additionally by providing a range of distances in Table 3.2, this IHT document implies that people are prepared to walk greater distances to different land uses and their associated 'attractiveness'. On this basis, Taylor Wimpey consider that the Council's approach is overly onerous, and the draft policy does not accord with NPPF.

Q9.9. Subject to the Council's proposed modification, is policy IN9 consistent with national policy relating to renewable energy infrastructure? In particular:

- a) the criteria for wind energy development in part (a).

Taylor Wimpey do not wish to comment on this element of the policy.

- b) the criteria for solar power development in part (b).

Taylor Wimpey do not wish to comment on this element of the policy.

- c) the requirement for developments of over 300 houses to be enabled for district energy connection unless demonstrated not to be feasible or viable.

Taylor Wimpey do not consider that this part of the policy is justified as there are no proposals within the Borough to promote district heating. Moreover, the financial implications of enabling development for district energy connection have not been considered in the Local Plan Viability Assessment (Document ref: CD08). It is therefore considered this part of the policy is not justified and therefore not sound.