

## Response to Inspector's, Matters, Issues & Questions

### Statement Question 4.5 a,b,c,d - Skerningham 'Garden Village' - Skerningham Strategic Allocation

#### Lack of Public / Community Engagement

Firstly, I would like to highlight both the lack of communication, transparency, and engagement with the communities from Darlington Borough Council (DBC). As a resident of Barmpton, like many in the Barmpton & Skerningham area, we were alerted to this development, which at the time was called 'Skerningham Garden Village' via Social Media, then through a local Newspaper, The Northern Echo in September 2017. Not one resident in Barmpton Parish received any communication whatsoever from DBC. Barmpton Parish includes Barmpton, Skerningham, Elm Tree Farm, Darlington Golf Club, and some properties in Great Burdon.

Having formed our own group, the Barmpton & Skerningham Preservation Group (BPSG), and pressurising DBC for information we were informed that consultations regarding the 'Skerningham Garden Village' would be conducted by the developers Theakston Estates, to be held at Harrowgate Club, Salters Lane North, DL1 3DT on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

Several members were then invited to attend a meeting in the Town Hall, hosted by Councillor Chris McEwan & David Hand from the Planning Policy, Economic Strategy and Environment department on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Both hosts refused to talk about the proposed 'Skerningham Garden Village', instead their presentation was all about how the ONS figures were flawed and that Darlington needed 492 dwellings per annum and not 177 dwellings.

DBC commissioned their own report from Opinion Research Services (ORS), based in Swansea, in which they argue if the town generates 7000 new jobs, then 10,000 new homes will need to be built to house the new employees. Even if this prediction were to materialise, how does 7,000 new jobs equate to the need of 10,000 plus new dwellings? The maths simply does not add up. In today's climate, people will be struggling to hang onto the jobs they have got, never mind all this 'predicted' new employment. DBC were reluctant to use the ONS methodology, hence commissioning ORS to come up with an 'exceptional circumstance' so as not to use the government housing figures.

Throughout the last 3 years, members of BPSG and other groups have attended various meetings at DBC, and I have personally raised the question directly to the leader of the council on two of those occasions. Yet they still refuse to talk openly and transparently and engage with the public about the Local Plan, not just this development. Members have frequently had to submit Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to get information on important documents, such as traffic modelling reports. In some cases, having to go directly to the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) for their assistance in

getting information released that should already be available to the general public, so that they can make formed decisions when responding to DBC.

Bid to join Garden Communities programme

---

**Bid to join Garden Communities programme**

---

Bid to join Garden Communities programme

---

All questions must be addressed, apart from those specifically designated for transformational community proposals and garden villages proposing fewer than 5,000 homes (Q 2, 4). If you have questions, or would like to discuss an proposal ahead of submission, please contact [gardencommunities@communities.gov.uk](mailto:gardencommunities@communities.gov.uk)

Bids should be submitted by **09/11/2018**

Please click here to open the [prospectus](#)

---

Name of local authorities and promoters/landowners/developers involved (clearly identifying lead authority):

Tees Valley Mayor - [REDACTED] Darlington Borough Council Managing Director - [REDACTED] and Skerningham Estates Limited Director - [REDACTED]

---

Main Contact	Telephone Number
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Email Address	Organisation
[REDACTED]	Skerningham Estates Limited

---

**Headline Information**

---

1. Provide a description of the proposed garden community including proposed number of homes, including types and tenures, number of jobs it hopes to create, employment space, schools and other community facilities, green space provision, number of district and local centres, amount of retail and other commercial space proposed; key items of infrastructure needed to support delivery of the garden community. Please itemise these below.

---

**Housing**

---

Number of homes	Delivered by
4,500	First completions in 2021 with 2,400 homes to be delivered by 2036 with the remaining 2,100 homes to be delivered by 2050. Potential for future expansion hereafter also identified.

---

Types of homes and tenures

A range of housing typologies and tenures will be incorporated at North Darlington, Skerningham Garden Community, including 20% affordable housing (900 homes) to be split equally between affordable rent and intermediate product. Provision will also be made for a full range of house types from starter homes through to family and executive homes alongside accommodation for older persons.

---

**Employment**

---

Number of jobs created	Approx. area of employment space (ha)
2,800	35
Key types of jobs created	Approx. area of retail / commercial space (ha)
Forecasts indicate 1,429 FTE jobs as B1 business uses, 816 FTE jobs within B1(c) and B2 industrial uses and 571 jobs as B8 storage and distribution sector.	2.5
Additionally, during the construction phase of the development nearly 1,400 FTE jobs are anticipated with a further 1,055 FTE jobs being supported once the development is complete through ongoing resident expenditure.	

---

**Community Infrastructure**

---

Bid to join Garden Communities programme 1 / 13

Once again, looking at the subject of community and engagement, a member of the BSPG only managed to get a copy of the above document after reporting the MHCLG to the ICO, as initially they were refusing to release this document as requested in a FIO-EIR. The Tees Valley Mayor has openly stated very recently during a Q&A session, that he ‘feels sad and that he would NOT be looking at doing development in Skerningham, as he has no control

over the Local Plan, which I agree, however he alongside the Skerningham Estates Director submitted the bid, as can be seen above.

What was also shocking was during an online council meeting, when it came to the vote, there was a ‘Victory’ vote video produced for the approval of the local plan. When pushing DBC for an answer on this, they said that yes it was pre-recorded, but would neither confirm nor show evidence, after that meeting that they had produced another video in case the vote went against the plan. This raised great public concern regarding lack of trust and transparency, as the decision to approve the plan was actually predetermined prior to the vote taking place. The Councillor leader Heather Scott then admitted to the Northern Echo after public concern, that indeed only one video had been produced.

5th March 2020

### ‘Victory video’ was only one produced

By Stuart Minting  
Local Democracy Reporter

Councillor Heather Scott  
Leader of the Council

Very delighted that the Local Plan has been approved.

Cllr Heather Scott on the Local Plan video

22 comments

ADVERTISMENT  
Sky TV and Netflix  
Get more drama and your favourite apps for less than you'd think on Sky Q...What are you waitin...  
Find out more.  
Promoted by Sky

A COUNCIL leader who produced a so-called “victory video” ahead of a debate and decision on a borough-wide development blueprint has confirmed that no alternative version was made.

Darlington Borough Council leader Councillor Heather Scott said

<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/18284849.victory-video-one-produced/>

Sadly, a lot of the community have lost trust in our Councillors due to their lack of transparency about the production of the Local Plan.

### Suitability of Skerningham (Site 251)

DBC should follow national guidelines, where development should only happen in countryside as a last resort, not as a first resort as can be seen here, when looking at this site. It also confusing when reading DBC documents, as initially they state this development as being Skerningham Garden Village, then change the name to Skerningham Strategic Allocation.

Skerningham Woodland Community is seen as the gateway into beautiful countryside, filled with wildlife and fauna, including species on the endangered ‘Red List’. When

reading DBC's Darlington's Rights of Way Improvement Plan, on page 73, it describes it as being.

*“this area has the potential to be the **jewel in the crown** of Darlington's countryside provision, having most of the elements necessary to fulfil a majority of the aims central to the vision of this ROWIP”.*

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/2386/rowip-v14-with-charts.pdf>

In the document '**Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment**' (SHLAA) dated 2015, it clearly states that Skerningham is **not** suitable for housing development. They mention in the above report that it is not suitable for development for a host of reasons, significantly due to the **risk of flooding** and the potential high risk of contamination from the Barmpton Quarry landfill site. So how can a site that is referred to as the 'Jewel In The Crown' due to its beauty and wildlife and mentioned in their own SHLAA as not be suitable for housing development, 6 years later is now considered for such a huge housing development? It appears that they are now strongly ignoring their own advice.

Within the Skerningham Allocation, DBC has quoted that 45% of the site will be retained as green infrastructure, therefore this would suggest 55% of the land will be used for development. If this is the case, it would imply that a colossal amount of concrete will be poured over that area, which is already acting as a soakaway. Any further development can only further heighten the water levels higher on an area which is already prone to flooding. As a resident of Barmpton for over 14 years, I personally witness the level of flooding that already happens every year in this area, not just during the winter months, but throughout the year, when we get heavy rainfall. At the top of Barmpton Lane, even today (3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021), the 'flood risk' warning triangles are still there, after our recent flood. H10 does not address the risk of flooding. The attached photographs, which were taken recently, highlight how serious flooding can get both in the Barmpton / Skerningham area as well as Haughton and the main road leading into Darlington town centre.



Barmpton – River Skerne, showing level of flooding.



Houghton Road. No. 10 Bus – Main transport link from Barmpton/Skerningham & Whinfield into Darlington. Recent flooding caused by surface water and nowhere to go.

In Appendix 6 to the SHLAA, site number 40, lists all the constraints as to why Skerningham is **not** suitable for development.

Although, I appreciate that we are not discussing the Northern Link Road / Bypass during this consultation, I do believe it is worth highlighting the constraints for this site as mentioned by the Highways Department.

Highways: “There would be **major network implications that could probably only be resolved by construction of a northern bypass**, linking the A66(T) or A1150 to the A167. Access from existing local road network (Glebe Road) would not be acceptable. There is an 18T weight limit on the existing single lane rail bridge. No sewage or water infrastructure in the vicinity”.

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/1891/appendix-6-possible-and-potential-housing-sites-summary-of-the-suitability-availability-achievability-and-constraints.pdf>

Attached to this document is a copy of the suitability, availability, and constraints for site number 40 – Skerningham.

To the community, it will also mean the loss of a very accessible area, with a huge change to the beautiful landscape, which is used by many across the whole of the Darlington area for walking, dog-walkers, horse riders and cyclists alike. This 'Jewel in The Crown' has proved invaluable, none so than now for both people's physical and mental health. It will also have a devastating effect with the loss of wildlife including birds on the 'Red List' and flora and fauna including rare Black Poplar trees, all of which seriously contradicts with the Plan's aim of enhancing the green infrastructure and protecting wildlife. It also has historic value with a deserted medieval village, where it

shows the remains of at least one settlement, probably of Iron Age (800BC to AD43) or even earlier to Roman times (AD43 to 410) date.

The attached link to the recently commissioned Ecology Report for Skerningham Area dated April 2021, highlights how important the landscape is for providing habitat and connectivity habitat to mammal and birds species, and its ancient trees and hedgerows. It also lists what species of birds are on the 'Red List'. Likewise, it also emphasises how important the River Skerne is to alleviate flooding into Darlington urban areas.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/14c9xWGN9FlvbCeixD7wjdyHCEB1-R7P6/view>

Part of this proposal is the movement of Darlington Golf Course. Why? The current golf course is well established and well used. To move the Golf Course, would mean having to cut down swathes of mature woodland and plant a new woodland which could take 20 years plus to establish. Over 12,000 trees have been planted in Skerningham woodland, most of which having been funded by the forestry commission and landfill tax grants. It therefore would be both unrealistic and unachievable during the life of the Plan, and also negates DBC's own policies on protection of trees and green spaces.

### Housing Numbers & Suitability

As mentioned above the number of houses proposed by DBC does not tally with the potential of new jobs likely to be created during this period. The population of Darlington is only increasing minimally, projected at 2% over the next 20 years and as we can all appreciate our population is increasing in age. Therefore, we require houses that are more suitable for an aging population and close to amenities, so that they are easily accessible either by foot or local transport. A huge development like Skerningham will not cater for this and will be well and truly outside of a lot of people's price range. Supply must meet demand and not aspirations, what we do not want to see is half-built estates. On his Facebook page dated 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019, to quote Ben Houchen the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) Mayor:

*"If there's more supply than demand, you end up with half-built estates like this one in Nunthorpe/Ormesby. Residents are now in negative equity."*

*"Wade Tovey from OurGreenways makes an interesting point about 'council tax farming'. If that is the approach councils are taking, then we'll see much more of this."*

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/TeesValleyMayor/posts/between-2007-17-redcar-and-cleveland-saw-257-houses-built-each-year-181-of-the-g/2310368815866836/>



If there are exceptional circumstances, which I doubt, the type of houses required, and location must be in the right area. For example, the TVCA Mayor is to be congratulated for securing thousands of jobs in the NE area. However, the majority of these jobs are in Teesside (Tees Port) etc and not in Darlington. The treasury has promised 700 new jobs, not thousands. Therefore, if most of the new employment is in Teesside, then logic should say to look for sites closer to where people are going to work, so they can walk, cycle or do shorter car journeys to cut down on pollution.

### **Noise, Pollution, Congestion & Climate Change**

Driving along Barmpton Lane, Whinbush Way, Whinfield Road, especially at peak times will not be able to cope with any huge increase of traffic as a consequence of any large development. Residents especially who live along Whinfield road already suffer greatly with air pollution and noise from today's traffic. The infrastructure in this area is already inadequate, never mind having to deal with such a huge increase of traffic with people driving to / from work and school runs etc.

Neither DBC nor the Developers have confirmed exactly where the access roads leading out of Skerningham will be to get onto the A167 or A1150, then onto the A1 (M) or A66 (M). If the majority of the new employment is in Teesside, then the existing infrastructure will suffer badly and have huge congestion issues, not just at peak times. This will be coupled with the fact that some of the access roads will have to run then join local roads already on developments that will envelope the Skerningham development, through other housing estates.

This question about access points has been raised several times with DBC, to be informed that it will be discussed only when the full planning application has been submitted by the developers. Surely the access points and infrastructure of a proposed development of 4,500 houses has already been given great consideration, as with such an increase in traffic it will heavily impact on the local communities and the surrounding environment.

What we cannot afford is another 'Ingleby Barwick' in Stockton, where they got the access routes to such a large development wrong. It took years to sort out the infrastructure due to an awfully bad housing development plan, where houses were getting built, but the access in / out had not been properly thought through. I know from personal experience of getting lost on that monstrosity of an estate, when visiting my Brother-in-Law who lives there. Every time I visited, there were major roadworks and diversions going in all directions.

The following document appeared on the DBC Planning portal in late April 2021.

Skerningham Strategic Allocation from Skerningham Estates Limited (Lambert Smith Hampton) dated April 2021.

<https://microsites.darlington.gov.uk/media/1683/skerningham-estates-m1-appendix.pdf>

Under Paragraph 7.13 Abnormals, it is quite alarming to read some of bullet points relating to infrastructure in particular within paragraph 7.14.1:

- Primary access road..... The appraisal assumes that **600 dwellings could be delivered before construction of the road with these early phases taking access from Barmpton Lane** and that completion of the road would coincide with completion of the crossing over the ECML railway (i.e. before occupation of 1,350th dwelling). The appraisal therefore assumes the construction of the road during Phase 2.
- Bridge over mainline railway. We understand that discussions with Network Rail are continuing but that a provisional cost of £20 million for the bridge and ransom access payment is proposed. The appraisal assumes that this cost would be incurred during Phase 2 and would coincide with the completion of the primary access route.
- Relocation of Golf Course. Skerningham Estates advise that the receipt from the sale of the site of Darlington Golf Course would be used to fund the relocation of the golf course and its long-term running costs. For the purposes of our financial viability assessment the golf course relocation is treated as cost neutral.

Leaving the hamlet of Barmpton, that section of Barmpton Lane is purely a metalled tracked lane until it meets up at the 'T' junction, which is on a sharp 'S' bend at Whinbush Way. It is literally wide enough for two cars to pass, never mind the huge influx of traffic that would happen if the development was approved. If residents at the top of the lane, legally park outside their own houses, then only one car at a time can pass. This part of the lane is also prone to flooding during heavy rainfall, as witnessed on many occasions throughout the years that I have lived here, including very recently.



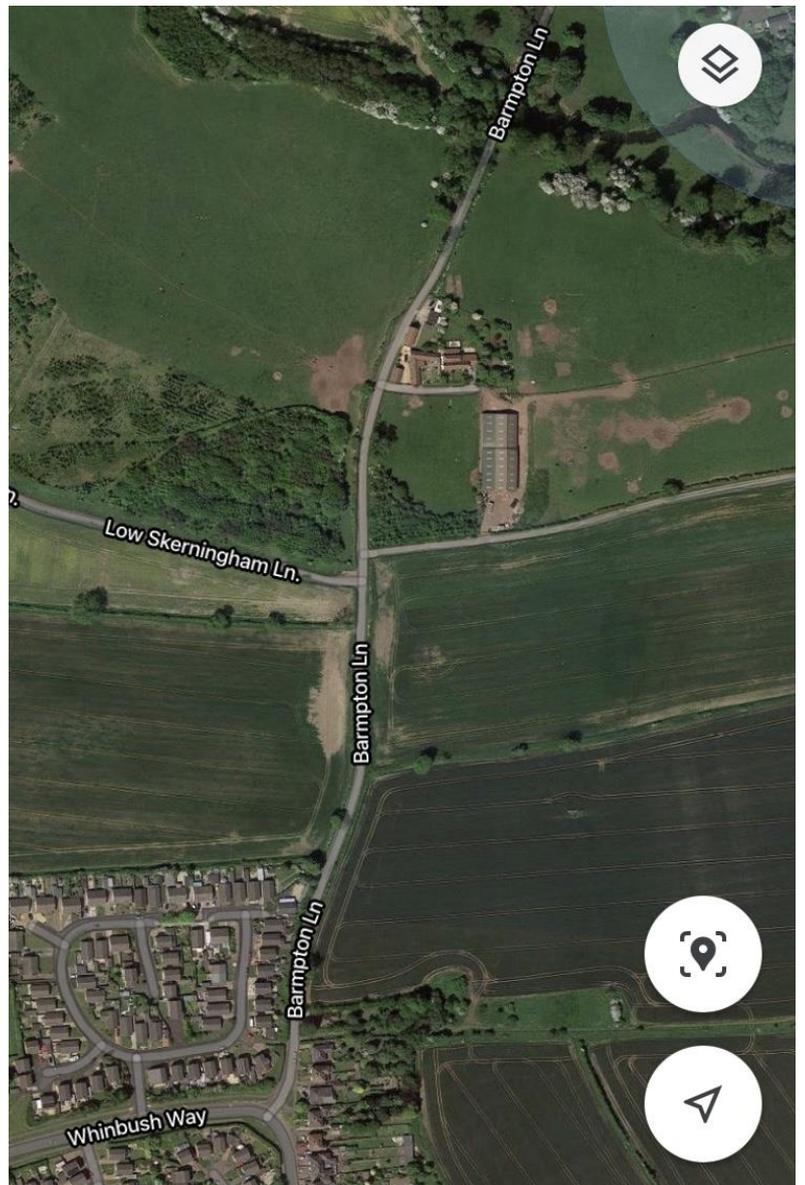
Top of Barmpton Lane. Barely 2 x cars can pass and there are residential houses on both sides, so residents park outside their houses as can be clearly seen here. Therefore, allowing only one car to pass, this is already a bottleneck.

**Frederick Greenhow – (ID: 1164361)**



Top of Barmpton Lane, where it meets Whinbush Way. The lane joins the road on a very large 'S' bend. Traffic entering the lane to drive towards Barmpton, has to wait in the centre of the road on the 'S' bend.

Overview showing the top of Barmpton Lane as it joins Whinbush Way. As can be clearly seen in the photo, the junction is a very large 'S' junction, with residential properties either side. This will prove to be a huge bottle neck for any increase to traffic entering / leaving the proposed development.



There is also a lot of assumption by Skertingham Estates, that Darlington Golf Course, which they do not own will relocate. There is nothing to prove that this is the case, in contrary the Golf Club wish to remain in their current well-established location. They are willing to sell a pocket of land near Elm Tree Farm (Site 392), but no more. Therefore, what has not been seen is how the Golf Club remaining in their current location will affect the Skertingham Estates infrastructure plan.

The current Prime Minister has stated that 2021 is the year to tackle climate change. So how will such a large development with a potential of 4500 houses and therefore at least another 4500 cars (economical estimate, could be a lot more) on the road achieve the government's policy within the Climate Change Act dictating that the UK achieves an 80% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050.

In conclusion, there is already enough real estate allocated to meet the actual housing requirements of Darlington and not the over inflated figures, during the lifetime of this plan without the needs of a huge development, especially being built in the wrong area with a high risk of flooding. The Local Plan is not sound for the above reasons and certainly there is no requirement for any development on Site 251.

*FW Greenhow (electronically signed)*

F.W. Greenhow MBE  
Major (ret'd)  
Barmpton Parish Spokesperson

Barmpton Gardens  
Barmpton  
Darlington  
DL1 3JG

Enclosure 1 - Appendix 6: Possible and Potential Housing Sites: Summary of the suitability, availability, achievability, and constraints