

Written Statement in response to the following:

*Skerningham strategic site allocation (policy H10)*

Q4.5. Is the proposal in policy H10 for the development of up to 4,500 dwellings; a neighbourhood centre; two primary schools, a secondary school, and other community facilities; roads and other transport infrastructure; and a network of green and blue infrastructure on 487 hectares at Skerningham justified? In particular:

- a) Would the development be suitably located in the context of policy SH1?
- b) Is there a reasonable prospect that the site will be available and could be viably developed at the point envisaged?
- c) Subject to the modifications proposed by the Council, would the requirements of policy H10, along with other relevant policies in the Plan, be effective in achieving sustainable development on the site having regard to NPPF 72?
- d) Does paragraph 6.10.10 need to be modified with regard to reference to a northern link road? Is the designation of a northern link road on the key diagram (map 1) and the Skerningham masterplan framework (figure 6.1) justified?

4.5 a)

- The development would not be suitably located in the context of policy SH1. I specifically refer to para 4.0.7 which states that the Town Centre fringe is key to delivering the vision for Darlington and provides for housing in a highly accessible location. The same cannot be said for Skerningham which, with no transport infrastructure in place, is not highly accessible and is remote from the railway station and the town centre.
- We are told by the government that brownfield site regeneration is of the utmost importance and should take precedence over greenfield developments – yet this plan proposes 4,500 houses, which, in all fairness have not been demonstrated as necessary to meet housing needs, on a site which is greenfield. The plan itself is severely lacking in brownfield sites for development but seems to have an abundance of sites on greenfield land, including this one.
- In terms of appropriate infrastructure we have very little detail on what road infrastructure will be in place to mitigate the effects on the local road network and are consistently told this will form part of the planning process. Policy SH1 states that sites have been selected based upon sustainability and appropriate sustainable transport provision is made. The plan does not detail what appropriate sustainable transport provision is to be made for Skerningham.

4.5 b)

- With reference to the M1 submission from Skerningham Estates Ltd I am deeply concerned with regards to the viability of the scheme, in particular with regards to what the developer will agree to do in relation to both the community and

transport infrastructure. Profitability levels are sensitive, and I particularly note the cost of the primary access road with a bridge over the ECML, which is designed to relieve the impact of traffic from the development on Barmpton Lane/Whinbush Way. Should profits fall, there is a real risk that the developers may seek to withdraw from their obligation to build this road, and, as has been seen with several developments over recent years, are highly likely to be able to do so should profit levels fall below 15%. A recent housing development at Feethams saw the developer Persimmon unable to provide 12 social housing units as was intended within the development because they were unable to find a social housing provider to maintain these units. The developer had their plans modified so that the affordable housing element of their agreed planning permission be removed. This modification was accepted and the 12 2-bedroom apartments were sold on the open market. This was at a time when residents were advised by the authority that we needed more affordable housing in Darlington.

- If this development has to rely solely on access from Barmpton Lane/Whinbush way then it would most certainly not be viable.
- Again to reference the submission from Skerningham Estates Lts in relation to Barmpton Lane needing to be the primary access route for the first 600 houses of the development. This in fact does not need to be the case. When the quarry was in operation in Skerningham (off Barmpton Lane) a road was constructed (which included the erection of a bridge over the River Skerne) to enable the HGV's to access the A66 without using Barmpton Lane. This is no longer in use as the quarry closed many years ago – however, if the Council could do this then, there is no reason why, in discussions with the developer, they could not do this again, hence relieving the traffic impact on Barmpton Lane.
- I would also question the fact that the viability assessment undertaken by Skerningham Estates only makes provision during the plan period for one primary school, not 2 primary schools and a secondary school, suggesting that these will not be delivered during the plan period and therefore putting additional strain on the already overstretched education resources within Whinfield. It is highly likely that to access educational facilities car travel will be necessary, hence increasing congestion on local roads and increasing pollution in the Whinfield area.

#### 4.5 c)

- Policy H10 is reliant upon a Masterplan, the contents of which are vague and do not specify proposed transport infrastructure routes, public transport access and generally show indicative locations for the schools and community centres. There appears to be a lack of requirement for the site to be accessed by foot or public transport and I fear that this will lead to car dependency and increased pollution at a time when this country is talking about tackling climate change and turning our heating down by 10c!
- No feasibility studies seem to have been provided in relation how the location of the schools and community centres has been arrived at or how they will be accessed.
- The NPPF suggests that housing developments of this size need to be supported by the necessary infrastructure. This has not been demonstrated to me in the

Masterplan or indeed the Local Plan itself, with again, everything seeming to be hinged upon the planning application itself.

- In 2014 I was a resident involved in the allocation of Muscar House Farm in the then Making and Growing Places Plan which was ultimately scrapped by the Council. Muscar House Farm is now part of the Skerningham site in the Plan. The site assessment concluded that Muscar House Farm should have an allocation of 150 houses only due to the potential traffic impacts on Barmpton Lane. It would seem now though that at least 600 houses can be built, without the necessary infrastructure in place.

#### 4.4 d)

- There has been much debate in recent years regarding the proposed Northern Link Road and whether it was needed in relation to the Skerningham Garden Village being built. The council have been adamant that there was no link to the 2 projects although reports have indicated that funding for the road could be accessed if the Skerningham Garden Village were to be built through the Housing Infrastructure Fund. TVCA have been more open & transparent with regards to this and have indicated that this is indeed the case. One could also argue that the route chosen for the Link Road (Route A) has opened up a significant amount of land for housing development than if the authorities had chosen Route B, which would have sat right through the proposed Skerningham Garden Village development. Reference to the Link road is referred to in this proposed Local Plan and I would argue that it should be removed if the Link Road is a transport project which stands alone from other projects such as the proposed Skerningham Development. The DLNR Event 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020 also stated that the current proposals do not include a connection out of the proposed Skerningham Garden Village on to the proposed Northern Link Road.

Q4.6. Are the assumptions in the housing trajectory (appendix A) about the Skerningham strategic site justified, including that 1,650 dwellings will be completed by 2036? Has the Council provided clear evidence that development will begin in 2024 and that 90 dwellings will be completed by 2025

- Given the complexities surrounding this site, the fact that the masterplan is vague and everything will need to rely upon what is submitted in the planning application process I find it hard to believe that development will begin in 2024.
- Site assessments were supposed to be published in the week commencing 19<sup>th</sup> April but are still outstanding, perhaps evidencing the difficulties surrounding this site. I would therefore conclude that at present no clear evidence has been provided by the Council that development will begin in 2024.
- Other housing developments in Darlington such as the Central Park Homes commenced in 2012 in a view to build 327, 2, 3 & 4 bedroom homes. This development has still to be completed with homes being built as they have been sold. I therefore have serious concerns as to whether the developer & the council would indeed build the numbers of dwellings it states within the 12 month period to 2025 on the basis of this development and other existing developments in

Darlington. I also feel both Brexit and the Covid Pandemic as well as low birth rate forecasts may have a significant impact on our housing requirement needs. Even the Bank of England latest models forecast GDP falling 3.25% by 2024 and I see no reason why Darlington will be shielded from this fall. The North East as a region is predicted to see a rise in unemployment and a drop in GVA growth. It is also predicted that by 2025 the North East in general will see a drop in population growth, while the region struggles to move away from a high dependency on manufacturing and the public sector and will continue to see a relative weak base in terms of small entrepreneurial businesses (ICEAW's Partner Oxford Economics). I even have serious doubts in the long term that the 1,650 dwellings that is projected to be completed by 2036 is purely an aspiration and will certainly not materialise in that time frame.