

Statement from David Clark representor ref 1169805.

NPFSQ1. Does the Plan need to be modified, or do any of the Council's proposed main modifications need to be altered, to take account of the revised National Planning Policy Framework published on 20 July 2021?

Revised NPPF:

Para 7. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. At a similarly high level, members of the United Nations – including the United Kingdom – have agreed to pursue the 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development in the period to 2030. These address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.

Para 8. The environmental objective wording has been strengthened with a requirement to '**protect and enhance**' the environment and 'improve biodiversity' rather than 'contribute to' protection and 'helping to improve' biodiversity.

Para 131. Trees make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. Planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards), that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.

Planning and flood risk:

Para 159. Inappropriate development **in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided** by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development **should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.**

Para 161. All plans should apply a **sequential, risk-based approach** to the location of development – taking into account **all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change – so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property.** They should do this, and manage any residual risk, by:

a) b) c) & d)

Para 180. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, **then planning permission should be refused;**

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) **should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons.**

We can relate why many of the above paragraphs that point towards Darlington's Draft Local Plan, being not very compliant with the revised NPPF which is more than ever focusing more on the mitigation of Climate Change, protecting and enhancing the Environment, biodiversity gains and also why Skerningham is not suitable for a large Garden development of some 4,500 new homes, with its new roads and other large development infrastructure. Many of these reasons are not just Skerningham specific:

With all the proposed housing development around Darlington Skerningham community woodland should be protected as a local green space for current and future generations to continue to enjoy, the public have asked for this previously but DBC declined the request even though they have it listed under parks and green spaces as a **large nature reserve** on their own website as :

Skerningham Community Woodland

Many people come to this **large nature reserve** to go on walks. It is situated between Harrowgate Hill and Barmpton. You can park at the top of Glebe Road to reach Skerningham but there is a one mile walk to the woods. There is a pond and amphitheatre to find.

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/parks-and-green-spaces/>

Loss of large swathes of biodiversity habitat, connectivity throughout the landscape of the surrounding greenfield sites, Skerningham being the largest allocated site at nearly 500 hectares. Good safe habitat for a range of mammals and bird species, many on protected and endangered amber and red lists.

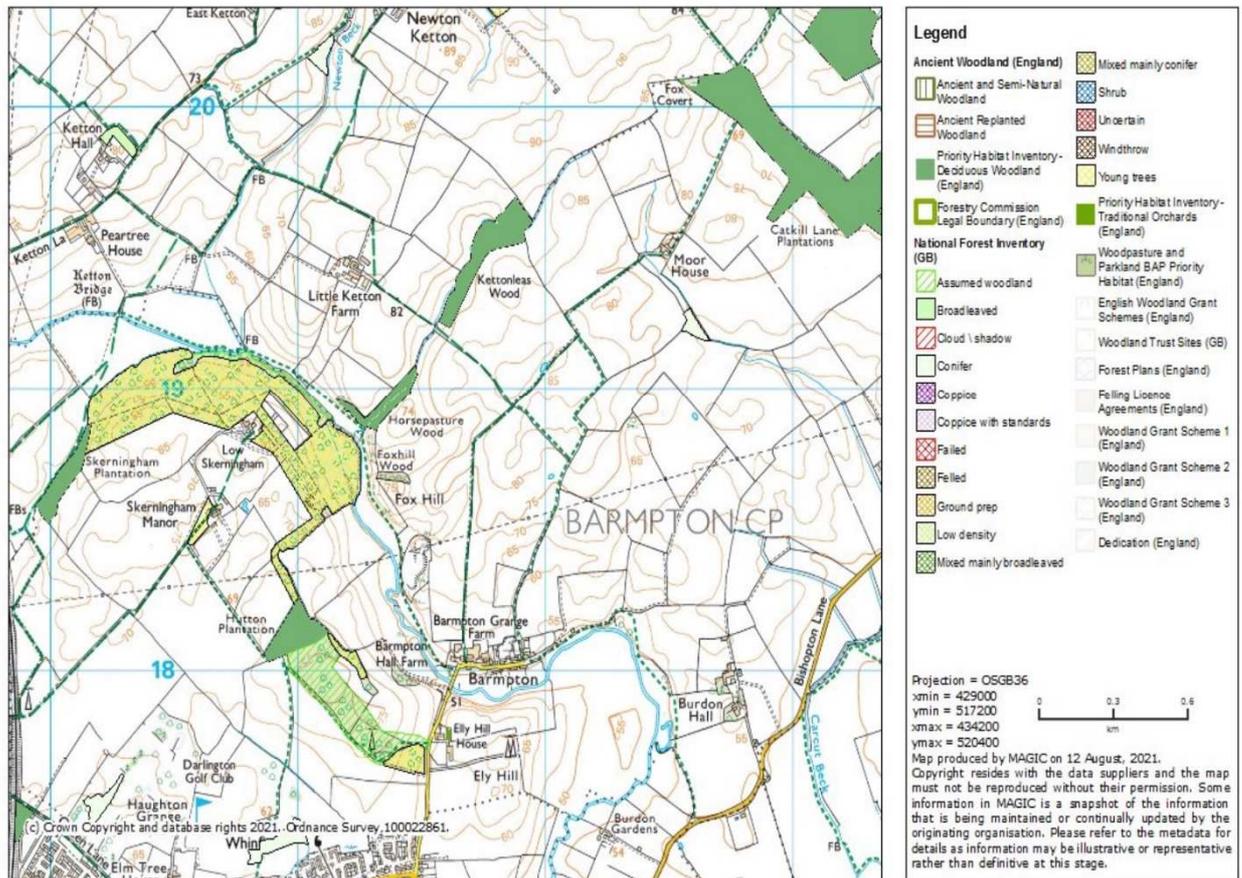
This loss of connectivity, with a new orbital road running through these new surrounding housing developments, will produce isolated oases of habitats for a lot of wildlife and other biodiversity.

Degradation of priority habitats, these include the 2 ancient parts of woodland in Skerningham, listed below:

Skerningham Plantation SNCI (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) falls within the site 251 and 2 parts of the Skerningham plantation, known locally as Skunny Woods and Hutton Plantation, are classified as priority habitats deciduous woodland on DEFRA's Magic Map, please see below:

MAGiC

Magic Map



Many constraints from DBC's original 2015 SHLAA for Skerningham were mentioned on page 7 (this 2015 SHLAA will of complied with the advise input of Phil Roxby who was DBC's environmental officer at that time, the replacement 2017 SHLAA document is now is trying to state there are no constraints to develop Skerningham into a large. Garden Village?)

- Protect riparian habitat.
- **Skerningham Plantation SNCI** (Site of Nature Conservation Interest) falls within site.
- May be great crested newts and bats on site.
- **Archaeological** potential of this site could be classified as **medium-high**.
- Highways: There would be major network implications **that could probably only be resolved by the construction of a northern by-pass, linking the A66(T) or A1150 to the A167.**
- Access from the 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.

- **Amendment to supply of housing policies required.**
- **High risk of contamination of part due to Barmpton landfill.**

The Skerningham-**Barmpton landfill** site contains building waste, which will include plasterboard that contains gypsum. This landfill site was sealed off but there was a large underground fire. The following information has been obtained from the Environment Agency:

*At 22:00 on 30th May 2004 we were alerted by Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) to a fire at the **Barmpton landfill** (operated by W&M Thompson). The fire was located within recently deposited waste at the site. To tackle the fire the site operator gradually dug into and removed burning material so it could be dampened down by the FRS. This process was undertaken slowly and carefully in order to prevent the fire from spreading. **It took several days in total with the fire being fully extinguished by the 5th June.***

Plasterboard containing gypsum was banned from landfill in 2005 to prevent the build up of hydrogen sulphide gases which is both toxic, inflammable and odorous this landfill site that would be become a public accessible community woodland has many metal gas breather pipes some of these have become damaged over the years and there is a strong rotten egg smell when the public walk close to this landfill site.

The above landfill site, which contains gypsum waste with its metal breather pipes to release the gases, would be the new community woodland/biodiversity habitat creation as the developers have labelled it. How can a new community woodland planted on top of a landfill site that releases potentially toxic and inflammable gases offer the public a biodiversity net gain that would satisfy the NPPF?

Potential loss of an established, healthy, carbon-storing community woodland of thousands of trees, including veteran and ancient and rare black poplar trees.

Disturbance to bats from light pollution.

Skerningham contains flood zones 2 and 3. The developers say no housing will be built in these flood zones but the removal of large swathes of farmlands, hedgerows and thousands of trees that are naturally good against flood risks and thousands of new houses, with concrete and tarmac from this large development forming hard surfaces, means more run-off water will get into the River Skerne, causing more flood problems further downstream from Skerningham.

Skerningham's farmlands are natural flood plains. The River Skerne often bursts its banks here. Take away these flood plains and a community woodland and this will result in more flood water making its way downstream.

Currently provides habitats prioritised under the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BDAP).

The River Skerne is Darlington's most important biodiversity green corridor. It is a stepping-stone corridor and buffer zone for wildlife to move freely in and out of neighbouring Ketton farmlands.

APFSQ2. Would the Council's proposed main modifications to policy H10, reasoned justification and masterplan framework (figure 6.1), along with the proposed changes to the policies map, ensure that the Plan is sound with regard to the development of the Skerningham housing allocation? In particular whether:

a) The key principles set out in policy H10 and proposed approach to the preparation of a design code and comprehensive masterplan, along with associated community consultation, would be effective in securing high quality development that reflects local aspirations in accordance with national policy relating to good design.

There has been very little public consultation so far from both DBC and the developers. The local communities have not had any meaningful say in the design of Skerningham Garden Village and have lost all confidence this will change at masterplan and design-code application stage. In fact, I personally feel important information and decisions have been withheld from local residents as to the impact and irreversible damage this large housing development will have on our local accessible environment, which will affect both our mental and physical health.

The developers of Skerningham stated during the planning hearings they have been good " Custodians of the Countryside and the woodlands" well the thousands who cherish and use Skerningham a lot would disagree to that statement with fences fallen apart, benches broken or missing, many of the footpaths becoming over grown and no maintenance we can see to the woodlands just years of neglect sat waiting to make their move to try to develop this site into a large environmental damaging housing development. The trees in the community woodland have mainly been funded by forestry commission and landfill grants which come with rules and conditions such as maintaining the woodlands for the wildlife that call it home and for the public to enjoy and use as it was intended to be used for a community woodland not to be felled and replaced with a water and chemical dependent golf course.

b) Policy H10 (including the requirements relating to an infrastructure phasing plan; review mechanism prior to the occupation of the 1,650th dwelling; schools and other community facilities (parts b and d); offsite highway works (part f); local distributor road (part g); and green infrastructure (part j)) would be effective in securing the provision of all necessary infrastructure in a timely manner that is appropriately coordinated with the housing development up to and after 2036.

It was extremely worrying to learn that the traffic modelling carried out for Skerningham Garden Village was only run to cater for up to 1,800 new homes up to 2036, so no-one knows what affect up to 4,500 new homes will have on the already congested local roads. The Northern Bypass is being sold to the public as being needed to take traffic congestion off the A167 and the A1150 but here we are planning to put thousands of vehicle journeys onto these roads. And what will happen in Northern Darlington if the Northern Bypass does not receive funding and never gets built?

c) The proposal for up to 4,500 dwellings and associated transport, community and green infrastructure could be viably delivered without the relocation of the golf course. If necessary, the viability evidence provided by the Council and Skerningham Estates Limited should be updated to inform consideration of this question.

At the time of writing this statement, DBC have NOT made this amended viability report for Skerningham accessible to the public to allow us to comment on it we wonder why this is, could it be that without the golf course relocation Skerningham Garden Village becomes financially unviable?