

Darlington Local Plan

Skerningham Estates Limited (ID: 1250841)

Inspector's Note No.14: Response to the Further Supplementary Questions Relating to the Revised National Planning Policy Framework

Issued August 2021

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?

- 1.1 We respond on behalf of our Client (Skerningham Estates Limited) in the context of the Policy H10 (Skerningham Strategic Allocation).
- 1.2 The NPPF was updated on 20 July 2021 and in the main follows the Government's response in January 2021 that it would take forward the recommendations of the *'Building Better, Building Beautiful'* Commission's report. Accordingly, the core changes relate to the national planning policy requirements relating to design.
- 1.3 The Communities Secretary's 20 July Written Ministerial Statement gives a summary of what the changes to the NPPF are intended to achieve in terms of design:
- *"make beauty and place-making a strategic theme in the NPPF*
 - *set out the expectation that Local Authorities produce their own design codes and guides setting out design principles which new development in their areas should reflect*
 - *ask for new streets to be tree-lined*
 - *improve biodiversity and access to nature through design*
 - *put an emphasis on approving good design as well as refusing poor quality schemes"*
- 1.4 A brief response is provided to each point below.

Make beauty and place-making a strategic theme in the NPPF

- 1.5 The Local Plan demonstrates through its allocation of sites such as Skerningham (Policy H10) a strong vision for the creation of genuinely plan led places. By incorporating design initiatives such as the Healthy New Towns approach and specific criteria (such as Garden City Principles) into policy requirements, it is evident that the Plan is consistent with the updates to the NPPF insofar as it aspires to create beautiful and well designed places.

Design codes and guides setting out design principles

- 1.6 Paragraphs 128 and 129 set out how this will be achieved through the preparation of design guides or codes. Coinciding with the update to the NPPF, the government has published a National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code which provides a nationally recognised approach to assist the preparation of the design code.

- 1.7 With specific reference to Skerningham Strategic Allocation (Policy H10), the modifications to the policy requires the applicant(s) to prepare a comprehensive masterplan in consultation with the community which should be based on the design approach and principles established in the a design code (to be led by the Council). The recent updates therefore provide a nationally recognised approach upon which to prepare these documents.
- 1.8 Paragraph 73 of the updated NPPF, relating to the supply of large numbers of new homes, is an amended version of paragraph 72 in the 2019 version. Part c (relating to design expectations) has been amended to “*ensure that appropriate tools such as masterplans and design guides or codes are used to secure a variety of well-designed and beautiful homes to meet the needs of different groups in the community*”. The Policy H10 (subject to its proposed modifications) is therefore also consistent with this revision to the NPPF.
- 1.9 As such it is considered that the Local Plan is alignment with the updates to the NPPF which will have a positive influence on the design of Skerningham Garden Community.

Tree lined streets

- 1.10 NPPF paragraph 131 recognises the important contribution made by trees to both the character and quality of urban environments and also in helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change. It goes on to require policies and decisions to ensure that new streets are tree lined (unless it can be demonstrated that this would be inappropriate) and that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments.
- 1.11 The proposals at Skerningham have also received Government backing through its selection as a Garden Community. As part of this process, it was necessary to demonstrate the quality of the development that could be achieved with a focus on how the designs incorporate the Garden City principles.
- 1.12 A key design aim has consistently been to retain existing features as far as possible and to design new places which incorporate trees, landscaping and social spaces more generally. Whilst the masterplans submitted for the site are indicative, the proposals demonstrate the positive approach which has been taken to including tree-lined streets, which line primary, secondary and tertiary roads. As discussed below, there are also other areas of dedicated tree planting.
- 1.13 It is our client’s intention to ensure that this approach is carried into the detailed design of the development in order to contribute to the sense of place making whilst helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Improve biodiversity and access to nature through design

- 1.14 Through the various written submissions and hearing sessions, it has been demonstrated that a significant part of the site at Skerningham (around 45%) will be retained as landscaped or natural areas. This will include dedicated areas of new tree planting along with other opportunities for habitat creation.
- 1.15 Existing recreational routes will also be retained and designed into the development with the creation of new links which will provide access to the River Skerne corridor and other areas within the development.
- 1.16 Whilst planning at a large scale offers the opportunity to deliver new homes with supporting social infrastructure, in the case of Skerningham, it also means that there is sufficient land available to make a significant and long lasting contribution to the environmental benefits.

Emphasis on approving good design as well as refusing poor quality schemes

1.17 NPPF paragraph 134 states that development which is not well designed should be refused. It also states:

Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

1.18 Whilst this paragraph is more relevant to decision taking, it is considered that the requirements in Policy H10 (including the modifications) will ensure that the development at Skerningham fulfils its potential to be a genuinely beautiful and well designed place.

Summary

1.19 The Local Plan demonstrates through its allocation of sites such as Skerningham (Policy H10) a strong vision for the creation of genuinely plan led places. Policy H10 (including its modifications) will ensure that provisions are in place to achieve a high quality and well-designed place.

1.20 As the development of the site at Skerningham and indeed the policy requirements provide the means of achieving this, it is considered that the Plan is consistent with the updated NPPF in this regard.