

Statement re. Questions NPFSQ1 & APFSQ2 - Representer No: 1174541

Sir

In the light of the changes to the NPPF, and the suggestion that the Skerningham Woodland could possibly be removed from the Skerningham Strategic Allocation with regard to development, I submit evidence below and also attached as to how and why the woodland could and should be protected.

The relevant parts of the new NPPF state, in summary:

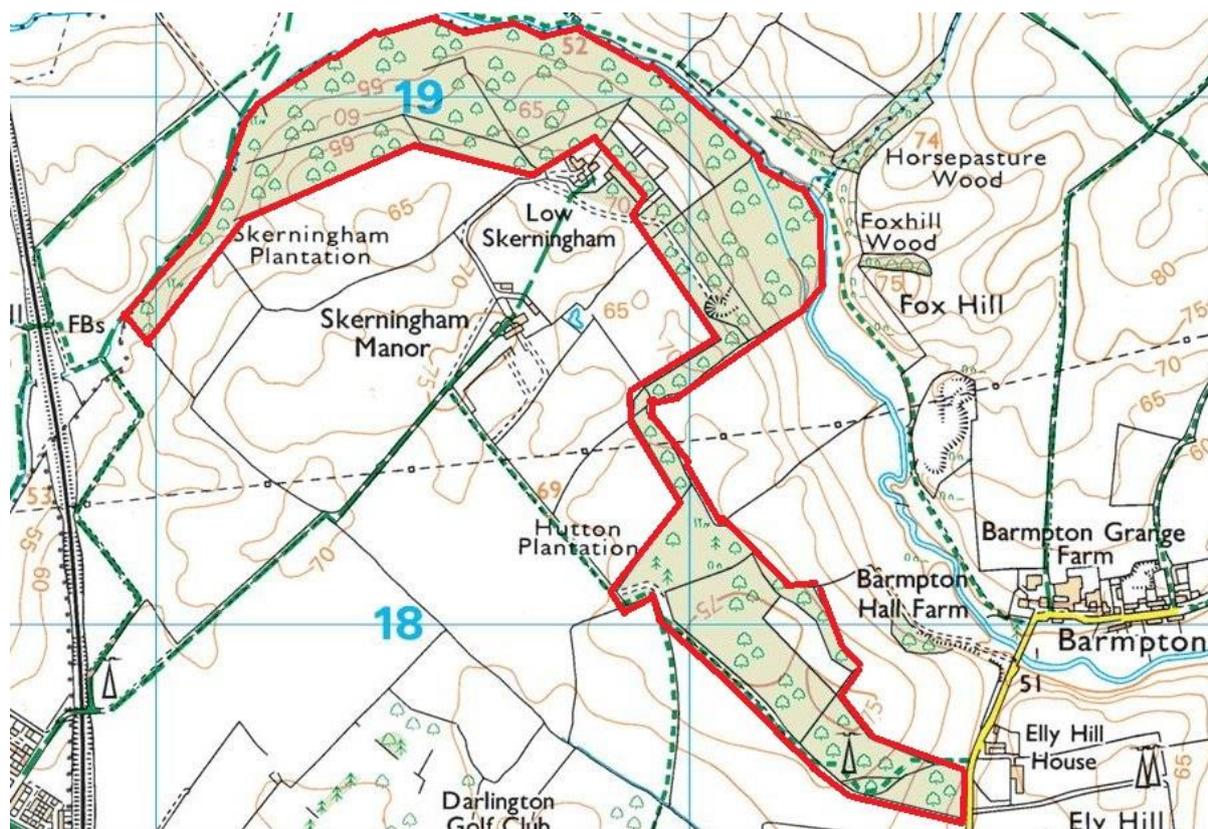
- * "promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: improve the environment; mitigate climate change; and adapt to its effects"
- * "planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments (such as parks and community orchards)"
- * "existing trees should be maintained wherever possible and that planners should ensure measures are in place for the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees"
- * "all guides and codes should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area"

During an informal public consultation on the DLP carried out by DBC, in March 2018 I proposed in writing on behalf of Whinfield Residents Association (as Secretary of WRA at that time, but I am no longer a representative today) that Skerningham Countryside Park be designated as a Local Green Space. DBC rejected that proposal, but I suggest that in the light of the NPPF changes and evidence presented at the Hearings so far that this is worthy of reappraisal, with the aim of protecting the woodland from future development, including a new golf course and link roads.

I submit, therefore, that Skerningham Countryside Park should be included in Policy ENV6 of the DLP as a Local Green Space in table 9.1.

Rather than repeat all of the arguments here as to why Skerningham Countryside Park is eminently suitable for inclusion as a Local Green Space and meets all of the criteria, I have attached a copy of my original complete application to DBC, in WORD format, including copies of 12 other pieces of supporting evidence, such as a map delineating the extent of the site, an aerial view, photographs, and other documents. Please accept these as the details of my evidence in support of Local Green Space designation here.

I would also like to address the issue of trust in relation to the soundness of the Plan re. Skerningham. I refer in particular to Chris Harrison's "Custodians of the Countryside" address during the Tuesday afternoon Hearing session about Policy H10 and the Skerningham woodland. The impression was given that Theakstons had planted it for altruistic reasons and had maintained it in good order for public use over the years.



Proposed Skerningham Countryside Park Local Green Space

In fact, my understanding is that the planting of the Skerningham Community Woodland was financed using grants in connection with the Tees Forest project and was originally intended to be part of a much wider planting programme. Also, following the Hearing session, one of our campaigners immediately went over to Skerningham Woods with a camera but regrettably ended up documenting a litany of neglect and disrepair. Examples are: one of the main gates to the site and adjacent fence has collapsed and is obstructing the path, a simple bench near David Green's grave is missing, many path marker posts have fallen down or are obscured, there is a lot of overgrowth and undergrowth across some of the paths, and there is considerable mud on paths in places after wet weather. It is not known whether there is supposed to be a maintenance schedule in place for the community woodland, and who the public can report problems to, both of which seem to be sadly lacking currently. It is very significant that it is a local resident who voluntarily mows the paths in the Community Woodland as best they can for the benefit of the public, a measure of the commitment of local people to the area, not the landowner. It is also telling that despite all of these problems the public are still prepared to flock in large numbers to Skerningham to enjoy what it has to offer as an important local amenity.

Bearing in mind this background, it is a question of trust as to whether the public can be confident that the developer/site promoter would implement the green policies associated with their controversial proposals for Skerningham, such as a new biodiversity area as a substitute for the lost Community Woodland if the golf course were relocated. I submit that we can not and that this is further evidence that legal protection afforded via Local Green Space designation is the sensible way forward.

I ask that you take these comments into account during your deliberations. Please acknowledge receipt. Thank you.

Alan Hutchinson