

**Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 26 September 2024**

| Question No. | Questioner        | Respondent           | Question   |
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| 1.           | Elizabeth HODGSON | Councillor HARKER    | "Why is the Skerningham Development being decided by delegated officers and not to the Cabinet and Full Council Members?"  |
| 2.           | Michael WALKER    | Councillor Dr. RILEY | <p>'On the 10th September, Darlington's Labour MP voted to ensure many pensioners lose their winter fuel allowance, an act the Labour MP, Jon Trickett described "as a matter of life and death" and a policy Labour's own research claimed could kill 4,000 pensioners. This cruel policy will harm 16,341 pensioners in Darlington</p> <p>At the 2023 local election, you and your fellow candidates promised to "cut the cost of living" and in your local manifesto, entitled "Build a Better Darlington: Fairer, Safer, Greener" the introduction by Cllr Harker states; "Our priorities reflect the issues that residents are talking about: the cost of living crisis, health, community safety, transport and housing." Cllr Harker goes on to state; "We want to deliver the best local services. Supporting residents who need the most help. Providing opportunities for all." The first promise in the manifesto was "Ensure no one needs to go cold next winter by creating Warm Hubs across the Borough"</p> <p>During July's General Election, the Labour Leader, Sir Keir Starmer told an emotional story about an 84-year old woman. He said "she had worked all her life obviously now a pensioner and she told me that she doesn't get out of bed till midday because she didn't want to turn the heating on. That's an awful position to put a pensioner in." Furthermore, the Labour chancellor, Rachel Reeves tweeted during the election campaign; "I'll never forget a woman in Leeds West I spoke to, who had purple fingers because her pension wasn't enough to pay for the heating." And a party political broadcast from the Labour party featured Gary, a pensioner who said "I have lived in this house all my life, and I have never struggled so much to keep this house warm. I got my pension coming in, and I just can't manage. I've just been heating this one room. I just can't afford to heat anywhere else."</p> <p>I have received numerous emails from residents absolutely terrified that they won't be able to survive this winter because of your party's decision to get rid of their winter fuel allowance.</p> |

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|    |              |                      | Do you still stand by your local election promise that you will "ensure no one needs to go cold this winter" and can you tell me what financial support the council will provide for the elderly across the town who will have to choose between "heating and eating" this winter due to Labour's cruel policy to remove the winter fuel allowance lifeline?'  |
| 3. | Alan MACNAB  | Councillor McEWAN    | <p>'The Skerningham development will profoundly affect the lives and well-being of residents in north and north east Darlington and residents who live in the Skerningham and Ketton countryside who must be satisfied that their views and concerns have been respected and taken into consideration. There is deep opposition to the decision on the Skerningham Master Plan being taken by officers and the view is that on such an important issue the decision must be taken by Cabinet and Full Council.</p> <p>Will Councillor McEwan in the spirit of open government and as the listening Council please refer the Master Plan to Cabinet and Council for a decision? If not, why not?</p> <p>Darlington Borough Council own land in Skerningham. If the Council is intending to sell this land for development will he please assure me that the provisions of Section 123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972 will be fully complied with and the supplementary Section 111 of the same Act will not be used?</p> <p>Section 123(2A) states that intended sale of public land must be advertised in a local newspaper for two consecutive weeks and the Council must consider any objections that are made before taking a decision to proceed.'</p> |
| 4. | Angela ALLAN | Councillor Dr. RILEY | <p>"This is not the statement I wanted to give today and these are not the decisions I wanted to make. But they are the right decisions in difficult circumstances. Around £1.5Bn will be saved per year by targeting the Winter Fuel Payments.</p> <p>This was Labour Chancellor Rachel Reeves' announcement on 29th July 2024 after only 25 days in government.</p> <p>On the 25th March 2014, over ten years ago in a parliamentary debate the same Rachel Reeves made the following statement</p> <p>"We are the party who have said that we will cut the winter fuel allowance for the richest pensioners and</p>   |

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|           |                    |                          | <p>means-test that benefit to save money,” (source Hansard 25th March 2014)</p> <p>It seems the means testing of the Winter Fuel Allowance (WFA) has been on the agenda for over ten years by Rachel Reeves. This fact was omitted from the Labour Party manifesto prior to the 2024 General Election. It is therefore not surprising that Labour ministers also failed to publish an impact statement prior to the vote on the WFA. Perhaps the newly elected Labour MP for Darlington could have requested this prior to her voting in favour of condemning Darlington pensioners to a miserable and cold winter.</p> <p>It is a shameful policy and creates fear and anxiety amongst some of the most vulnerable within our society. It would seem the very people that should be offering protection are leading the attack. There is no sliding scale on the entitlement to WFA. If your pension income is £218.15 you qualify if it is £219 you don't.</p> <p>The very first pledge in Darlington Labour's 2023 local manifesto promised that "Labour will ensure no one needs to go cold next winter by creating Warm Hubs across the Borough".</p> <p>I wrote to the Leader of the Council recently on this subject as there will be extra demand for warm hubs this year owing to Labour Party policy to means test the winter fuel allowance. I also asked whether the warm hubs would be extended to the villages. The response relating to the warm hubs was that there were three warm hubs in the town centre.</p> <p>Can the Council confirm their commitment that no one will “go cold” this winter and outline their plan to keep all pensioners in Darlington and the villages warm in three warm hubs?”</p> |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>David CLARK</p> | <p>Councillor McEWAN</p> | <p>Regarding Skerningham garden village phase 1 hybrid full planning application.</p> <p>William Fieldhouse the government planning inspector who examined the draft local plan.</p> <p>In his final report which includes his recommendations to allow the local plan to be classed as sound in principle and be allowed to be adopted stated:</p> <p>'A comprehensive master plan would then be prepared by the developers, with community engagement, in the context of the Council's design code. Any planning applications would be required to adhere to the masterplan</p>  |

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|  |  | <p>and design code.'</p> <p>Our adopted local plan on page 58 states:</p> <p>'A comprehensive master plan including an infrastructure phasing plan shall be prepared in consultation with the community PRIOR to the submission of any planning application relating to this site'</p> <p>In the Skerningham design code it states :</p> <p>The finalised comprehensive master plan including infrastructure phasing plan is to be prepared by the applicant(s) in consultation with the community and is to be agreed with the Council in advance of any planning application being submitted for the Skerningham allocation site, either as a whole or in part.</p> <p>The developer of the site has decided not to adhere to these recommendations/ requirements and submit their hybrid planning application before the public consultation on the masterplan has concluded and the masterplan has been agreed by the council .</p> <p>Officially Local Planning Authorities do not have to validate and accept a Hybrid planning application's as are not defined in statute and as such LPA's can use their discretion whether to accept such an application</p> <p>In our case this should not have happened, until the public had access to the revised masterplan to allow them to make properly informed comments about the developers application against their revised masterplan.</p> <p>So my question is:-</p> <p>Members of the public have so far not been given access to the amended master plan but are being asked to submit their comments without the full facts on this full planning application within a deadline that has now expired.</p> <p>Why is this and will the deadline be extended or better still ,restarted once the revised master plan is in the public domain and they have been given the time to read through it to then check to see whether the masterplan adheres to both the adopted local plan and Skerningham design code, If not, why not?</p> |
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