

Skerningham Garden Village Statement of Community Involvement

**Report Following Consultation on the Draft
Comprehensive Masterplan**

Skerningham Estates Ltd and Banks Property

22 October 2024

LICHFIELDS

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (‘SCI’) has been prepared by Lichfields on behalf of our client, Skerningham Estates Ltd, and Banks Property (‘the lead developers’), following the consultation to assist the preparation of the Comprehensive Masterplan for Skerningham Garden Village (also referred to as Skerningham).

Background

- 1.2 The Skerningham allocation is a 487 hectare site located to the north of Darlington. It will adjoin the existing communities at Beaumont Hill, Whinfield and Great Burdon. Barmpton Village is also located close to the north eastern edge of the site. The East Coast Mainline also runs through the western part of the site.
- 1.3 Banks Property is the lead developer for the land on the western part of the allocation, which includes land adjacent to the A167 and west of the East Coast Mainline. Skerningham Estates Ltd is the lead developer for the land to the east of the East Coast Mainline.
- 1.4 Policy H 10 Skerningham – Site Allocation (Strategic Policy), the policy most relevant to the allocation of the site, makes clear that a Comprehensive Masterplan including an Infrastructure Phasing Plan should be prepared by the applicant(s) prior to the submission of any planning application relating to the site. It also states that the Comprehensive Masterplan should be based on the design approach and principles established in the Design Code (which is prepared or led by the Darlington Borough Council (‘the Council’)).
- 1.5 The Design Code was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document by the Council on 28 September 2023. Its preparation was informed through various workshops with the local community and stakeholders and was subject to consultation between 9 September 2022 to 17 October 2022; and 9 December 2022 to 13 January 2023. This report concentrates on the consultation associated with the Comprehensive Masterplan.

Purpose of the Report

- 1.6 Following the introduction of the Government’s Localism Act in 2011, greater emphasis has been placed upon increased community involvement throughout the planning process.
- 1.7 Furthermore, the updated National Planning Policy Framework (‘NPPF’), most recently in December 2023, promotes sustainable development through the creation of a high-quality built environment which reflects the community’s needs and wellbeing. The Framework states that early engagement in the planning process has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties.
- 1.8 Paragraph 137 confirms that:
- 1.9 *“Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. **Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by***

their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

1.10 In consideration of the above, this SCI therefore sets out the consultation that has been undertaken in relation to the Comprehensive Masterplan, together with the feedback received and the response to the feedback.

Structure of the Report

1.11 The SCI is structured as follows:

- Section 2.0: outlines the consultation process and exercises which have been undertaken to ensure that the local community have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals;
- Section 3.0: presents the findings from the consultation exercise;
- Section 4.0: provides a response to the feedback received from the local community; and
- Section 5.0: summarises the findings and concludes the Statement.

2.0 The Process of Engagement

- 2.1 The lead developers have had regard to both the NPPF and the Council's own Statement of Community Involvement, which sets out how Darlington Borough Council will involve the local community in the assessment of planning applications.

Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2023

- 2.2 The NPPF identifies the role of local planning authorities in encouraging parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. Paragraph 39 states:
- 2.3 *Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality preapplication discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.*

Community Engagement

- 2.4 Approximately 5,200 leaflets were distributed to the homes and businesses near the site between 25th and 30th October 2023. The leaflets advertised the online consultation website and the scheduled consultation events, held at the Dolphin Centre and Asda. A copy of the leaflet is included at Appendix 1.
- 2.5 The leaflets signposted respondents to a consultation website (www.skerningham.co.uk). This comprised a dedicated website for Skerningham Garden Village, providing general background information about the site and the proposals along with a copy of the document which could be downloaded. It also included an inbuilt questionnaire/feedback form. Screenshots from the website are included at Appendix 2.
- 2.6 The website which received 1,735 unique visitors. 215 no. of responses to the online survey were received. Analysis found that the majority of visitors arrived at the website either via social media (such as Facebook) or via the direct website address. Other visitors arrived at the website via Google and Darlington Borough Council's website.
- 2.7 The leaflet advertised a series of drop in consultation events at the Dolphin Centre (in the town centre) and Asda (located on Whinbush Way), providing a varied mix of locations around the Town.



Dolphin Centre, Horse Market, Darlington DL1 5RP, on:

Wednesday 1st November 2023 (9am until 1pm)
Thursday 2nd November 2023 (12pm until 4pm)



ASDA, Whinbush Way, Darlington DL1 3RB, on:

Monday 6th November 2023 (1pm until 5pm)
Tuesday 7th November 2023 (9am until 1pm)

- 2.8 Given the significance of Skerningham to the wider town, it was considered that the consultation events should include events held in an accessible venue within the town centre. Dolphin Centre was secured as a venue with events taking place during the Autumn school half term week in order to maximise the population demographic. The venue at Asda was selected as an accessible location closer to the Skerningham site.
- 2.9 The format of the events comprised a ‘drop-in’ style of consultation with display boards containing information on the proposals, which generally followed the structure of information on the consultation website. Paper copies of the questionnaire form, consistent with the survey questionnaire on the website, were available at the events, along with return boxes. Where space allowed, tables and chairs were also available to allow respondents an opportunity to complete paper copies of the questionnaire forms.

Figure 2.1 Photograph of the consultation event set up at Whessoe Parish Hall



- 2.10 In response to initial feedback received during the first week of events, two additional consultation events were arranged at Whessoe Parish Hall, on Monday 13th November 2023 (5pm until 8pm) and Wednesday 15th November 2023 (5pm until 8pm). The lead developers listened to the concerns raised in relation to the timing of the drop in sessions and offered the two final sessions during evening hours. Whessoe Parish Hall also provided an additional venue that was located close to the site.
- 2.11 The lead developers also extended the consultation period until 30th November 2023 in response to other concerns received. The additional events, and the extension to the

consultation period, were advertised via the consultation website and via posters at the remaining events.

2.12 Over the course of the consultation events, over 300 people attended the drop-in sessions. Attendance levels varied among the events with the majority of visitors attending the events held at Asda. By comparison, a relatively low number of people attended the events held at Whessoe Parish Hall.

2.13 In addition to the 215 questionnaire responses received via the website, questionnaire forms were also available to complete at each of the drop-in events. 27 completed response forms were received at the Asda events; 19 at the Dolphin Centre events; and 5 at the Whessoe Parish Hall events. It is noted that attendees at the drop-in events had the ability to complete the response form at an alternative time via the website.

2.14 Cognisant of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the project team took a decision to minimise the requested amount of personal data on the questionnaire forms (and website survey). Therefore, the responses were submitted anomalously.

Consultation Survey

2.15 The online survey, which was also available in paper format at the consultation events, included 5 closed questions and 2 open answer questions for respondents to expand on their views.

2.16 The structured questions were as follows:

- 1 **The Local Plan policy for the Skerningham (Policy H 10) states that the Comprehensive Masterplan should inform the mix of uses, layout, scale, design of the development at Skerningham. Do you generally agree that the draft Comprehensive Masterplan does this?** Strongly Agree/ Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
- 2 **Policy H 10 also states that the Comprehensive Masterplan should inform the phasing of the development and the delivery of infrastructure. Do you generally agree that the draft Comprehensive Masterplan does this?** Strongly Agree/ Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
- 3 **The Council adopted the Design Code as a Supplementary Planning Document on 28 September 2023, and held various workshops to inform its preparation in 2022. Were you aware of and/or did you participate in the preparation of the Design Code?** Yes/No
- 4 **Policy H 10 States that the Comprehensive Masterplan should be based on the design approach and principles established in the Council's Design Code. Do you generally agree that the draft Comprehensive Masterplan does this?** Strongly Agree/ Agree/ Neutral/ Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
- 5 **Do you consider that any further changes are needed before the Comprehensive Masterplan is finalised? If you select yes, you will be asked to describe your suggested changes.** Yes/No

2.17 The open answer questions were as follows:

- 1 **You answered Yes to the previous question (Question 5). Please describe your suggested changes in the space below.**
- 2 **If you have any further comments in relation to the draft Comprehensive Masterplan, please provide them in the space below.**

2.18 Analysis of the comment forms has been provided in the following sections. All comments returned by 30 November 2023 have been taken into account in this report.

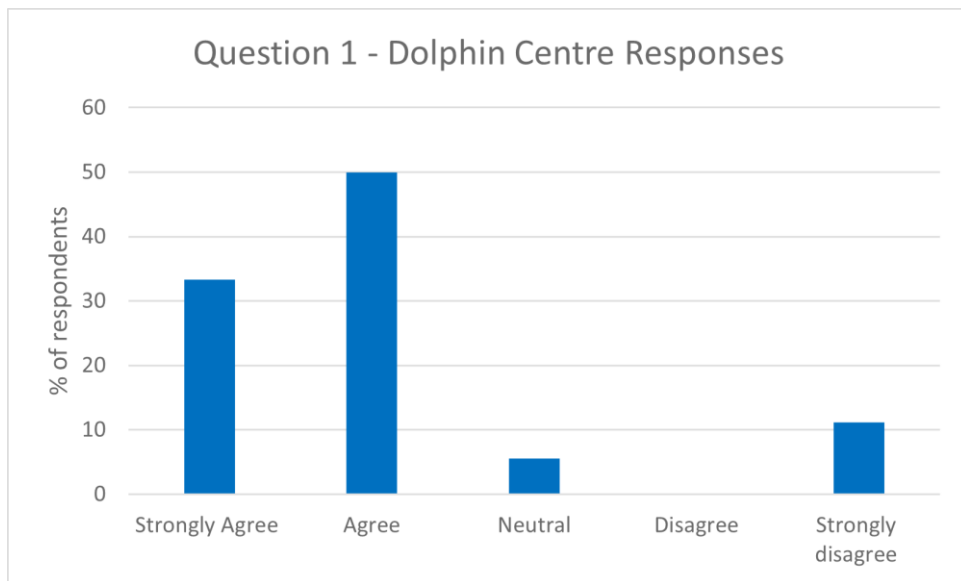
3.0 Findings from Consultation

- 3.1 The consultation comprised both an in person and online-based consultation event advertised via the leaflet drop as discussed earlier. The consultation website included an online survey to allow visitors an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals. The in-person events had physical copies of this questionnaire which could be returned to us via the comments box at the events.
- 3.2 The following completed responses were received:
- 215 via the consultation website
 - 19 in the comments return box at the two events held at the Dolphin Centre
 - 27 in the comments return box at the two events held at Asda
 - 5 in the comments return box at the two events held at Whessoe Parish Hall
- 3.3 A further 6 responses were received through other means, including responses sent directly to the Lichfields office, and correspondence sent to the Council (and subsequently then shared with Lichfields). It is noted that some of these responses duplicated responses received via the website. Correspondence has also been received from other site promoters/agents which has been considered in advance of the preparation of the updated Comprehensive Masterplan.
- 3.4 Around 12.4% of website visitors translated into survey responses which is a good proportion based on our experience. This said, the consultation has generated interest around the proposals in its responses. Other website visitors may have instead completed their responses in person at one of the 6 consultation events.
- 3.5 It should also be noted that no personal information was requested as part of the questionnaire response. Therefore, in theory, it would have been possible for respondents to submit more than one response to the consultation through the website and/or drop in events.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding this, the total 272 received responses to the consultation, when compared with the 5,200 leaflets that were distributed, equates to an overall response rate of 5.2% which reflects an overall modest level of interest from the local community.

Informs the mix of uses, layout, scale and design of development at Skerningham

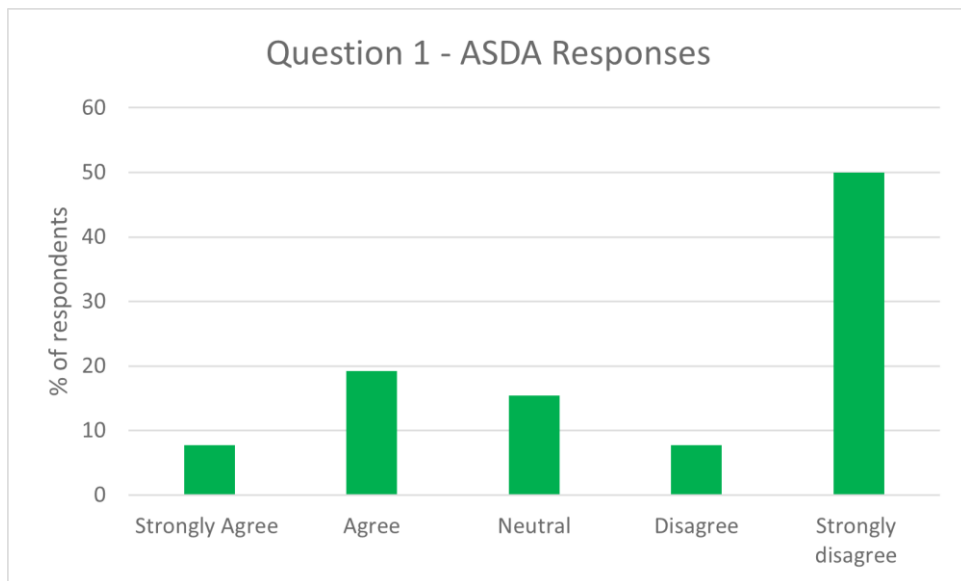
- 3.7 The respondents in Question 1 were asked their opinion on whether the Comprehensive Masterplan informs the mix of uses, layout, scale and design of the development at Skerningham.
- 3.8 The overall response to Question 1 is presented in Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 below:

Figure 3.1



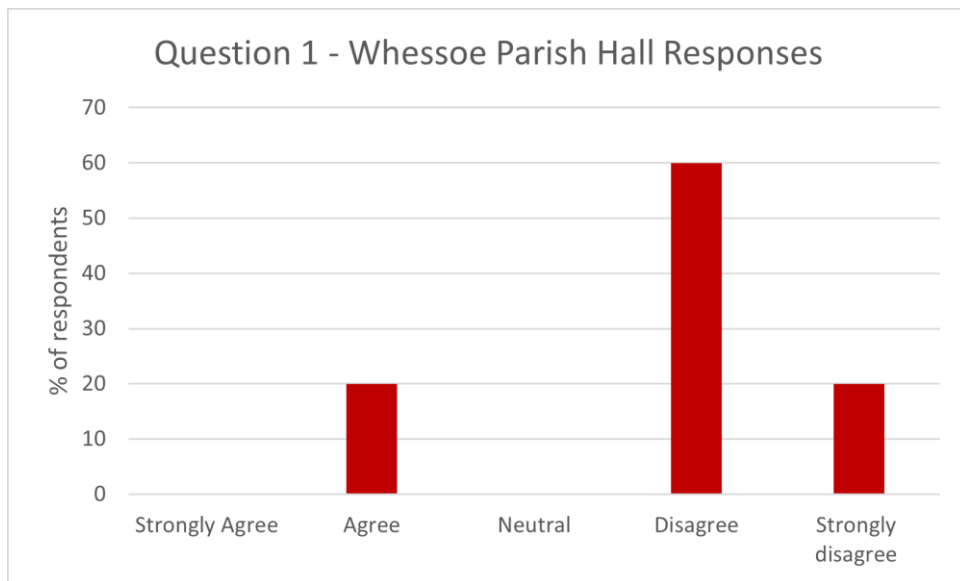
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.2



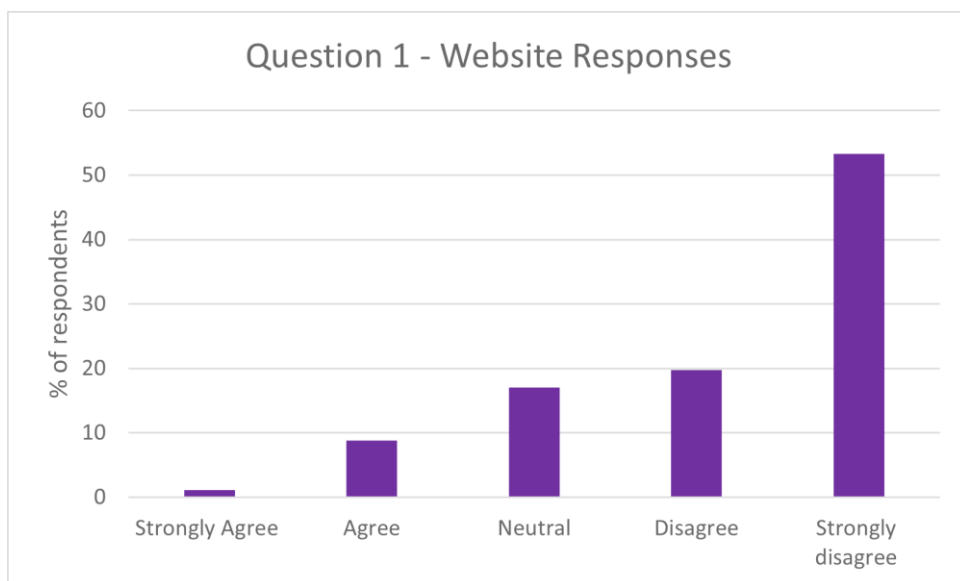
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.3



Source: Lichields Analysis

Figure 3.4



Source: Lichfields Analysis

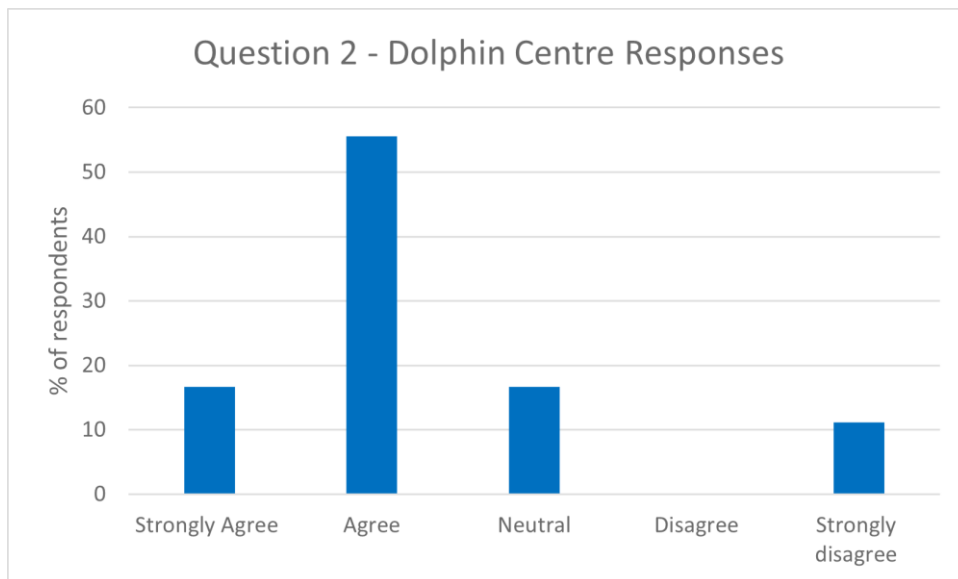
- 3.9 From the responses to Question 1, it is clear that there has been a mixed view from the respondents at different locations as to whether the Masterplan informs the mix of uses, layout, scale and design of the development.
- 3.10 For those at the Dolphin Centre, over 80% of respondents felt that the draft Masterplan informed these characteristics of the developments, compared to the other three consultation events where over 50% of those who completed the form either strongly disagreed or disagreed that the Masterplan does this.

Phasing of the development and the delivery of infrastructure

3.11 The respondents in Question 2 were asked whether they agree that the draft Comprehensive Masterplan informs them of the phasing of the development and the delivery of infrastructure onsite.

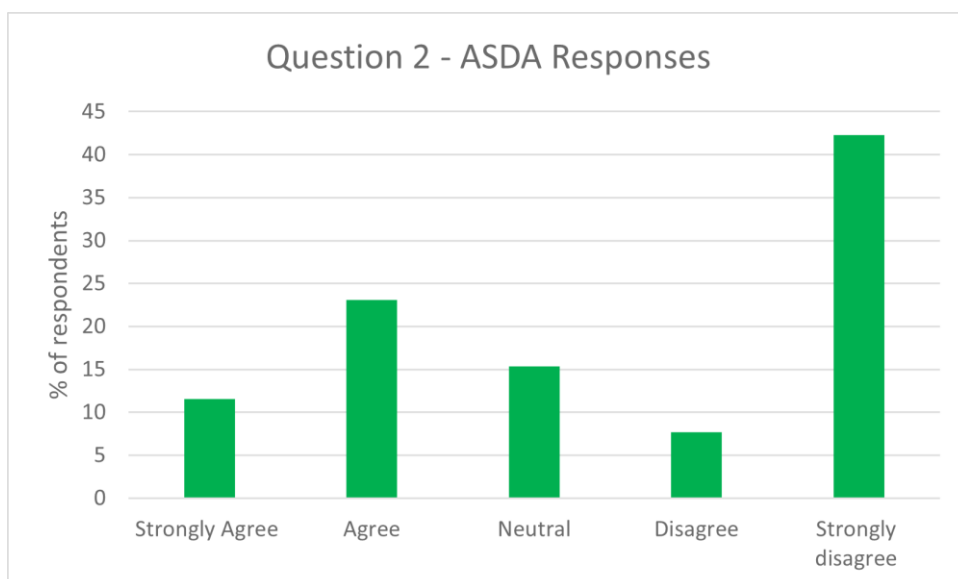
3.12 The overall response to Question 2 from each of the consultation events are in Figures 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 below:

Figure 3.5



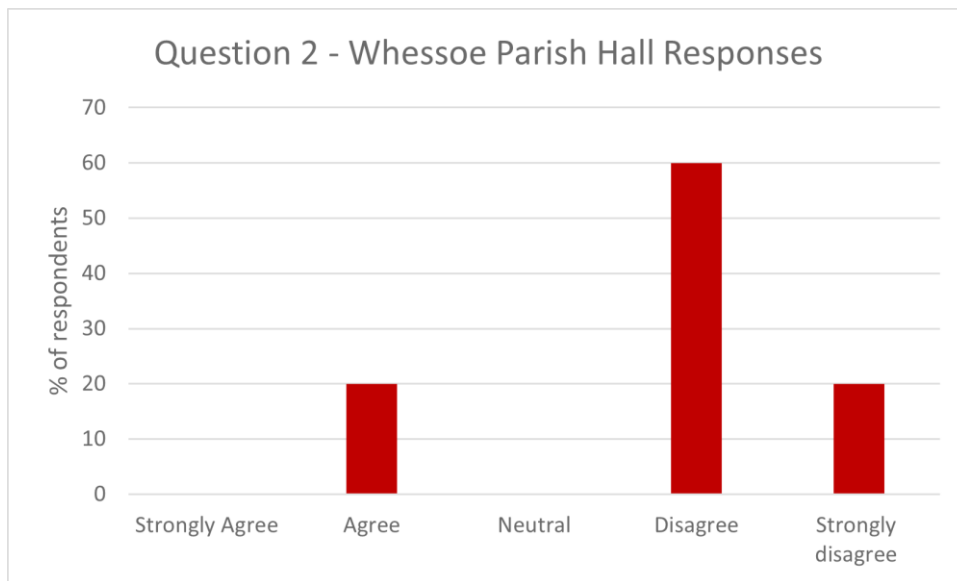
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.6



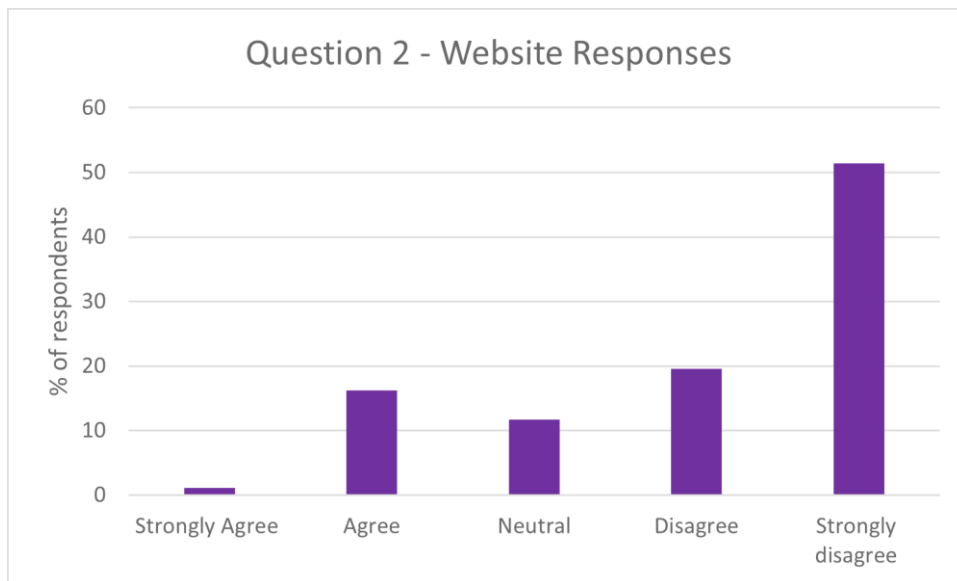
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.7



Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.8



Source: Lichfields Analysis

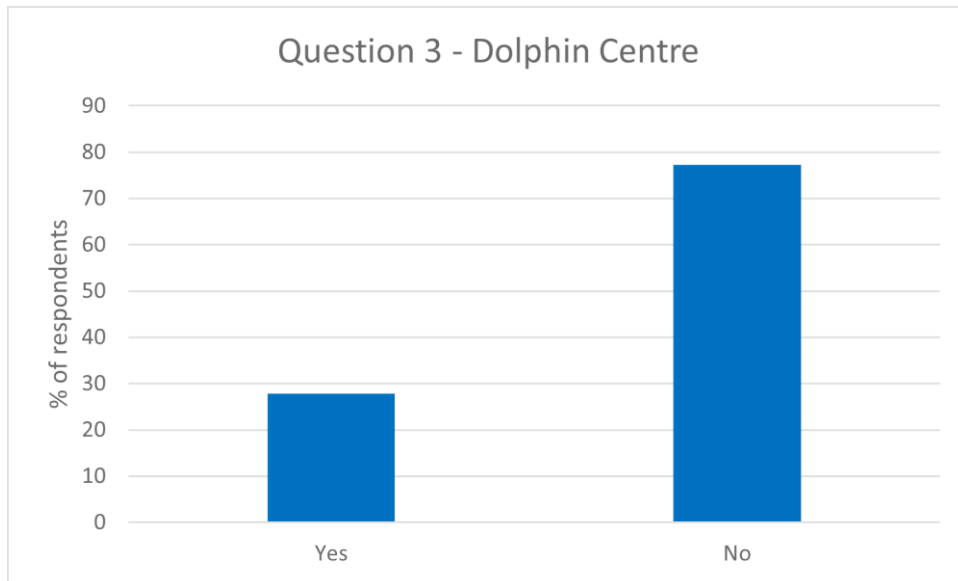
3.13 The outcome for Question 2 shows a mix of responses on how the public felt the Masterplan informed them on the phasing of infrastructure. At the Dolphin Centre, almost 90% of responses indicated that the Masterplan did this. At Asda, the responses were more even, with around half of responses strongly agreeing, agreeing or neutral on whether the Masterplan informed them on the phasing of infrastructure.

3.14 However, the responses received from the Whessoe Parish Hall events and through the consultation website show different opinions on how the Masterplan informed them on the delivery of infrastructure, as these both show over 70% of responses either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the Masterplan does this.

Design Code Workshops

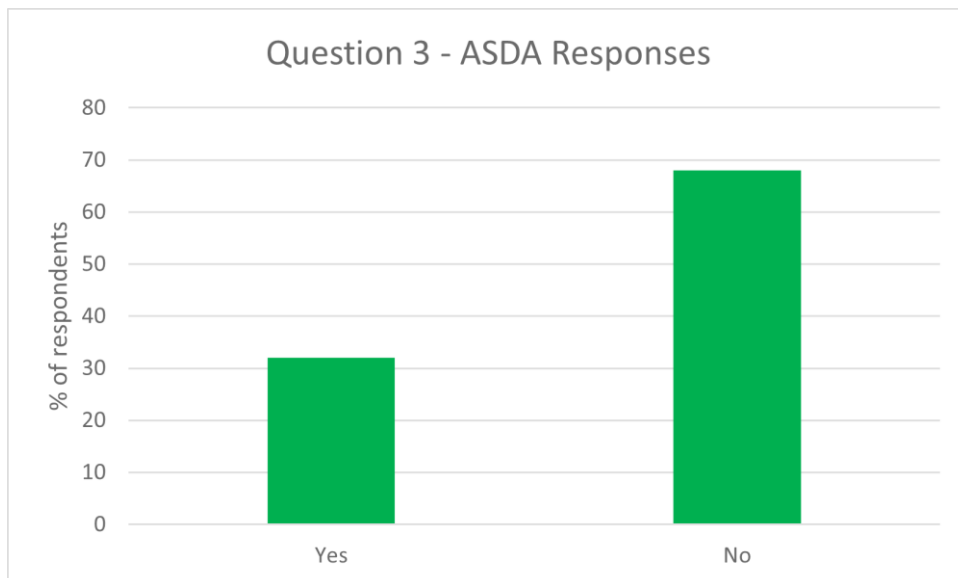
- 3.15 In Question 3 the respondents were asked whether they were aware of, or had participated in, the Design Code workshops, which were held between April 2022 and June 2002.
- 3.16 The overall responses to Question 3 from each of the events are in Figures 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12 below:

Figure 3.9



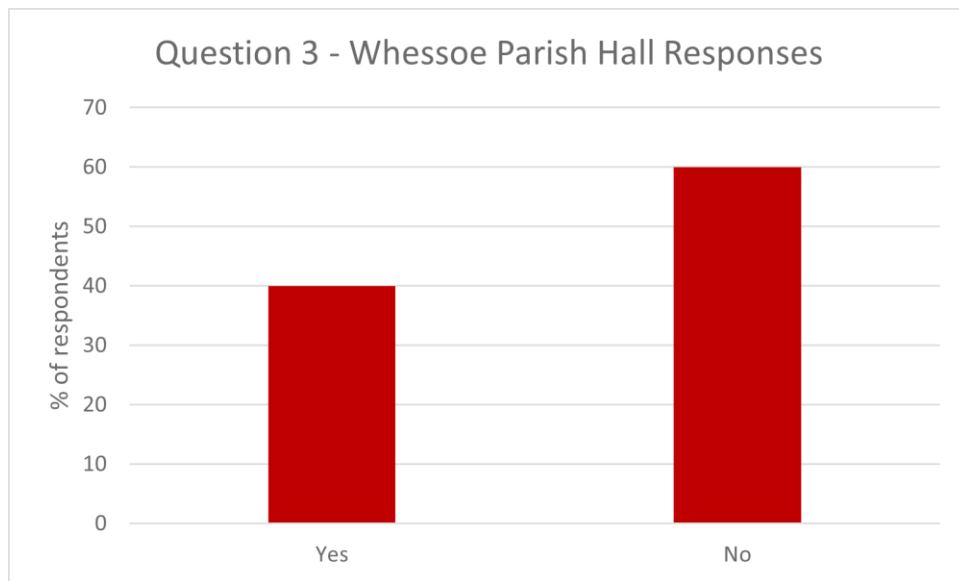
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.10



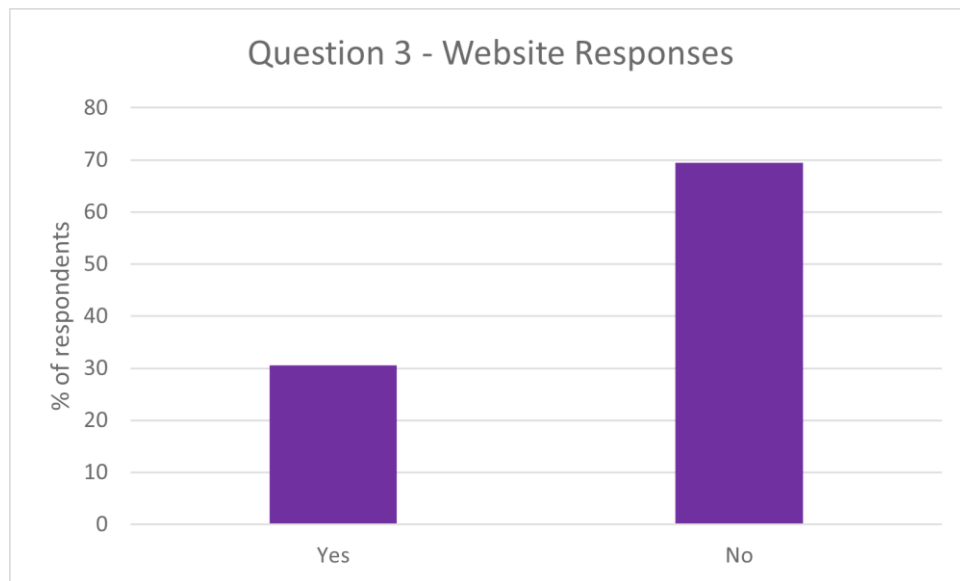
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.11



Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.12



Source: Lichfields Analysis

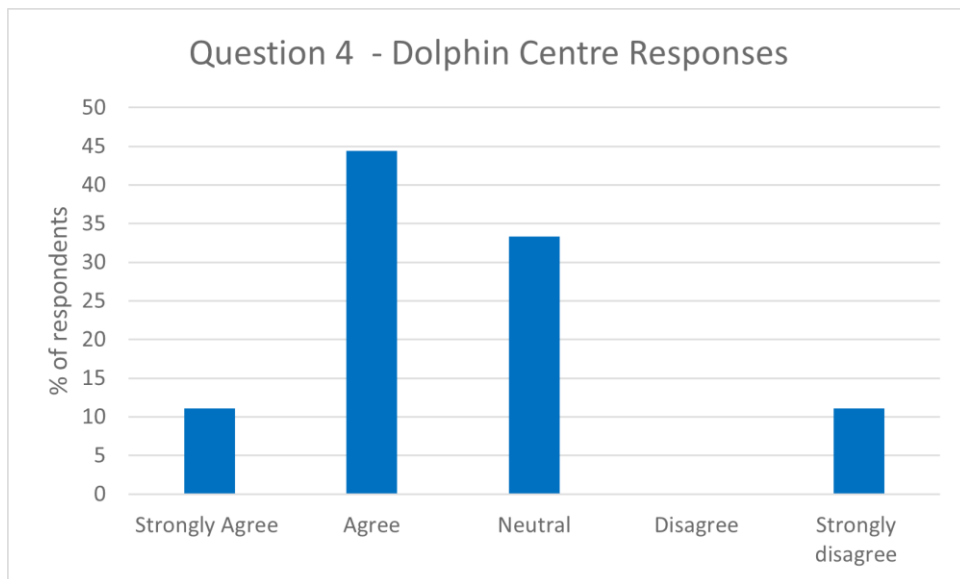
3.17 From each of the consultation events, it is clear that most of the people who responded did not attend the Design Code workshop events. However, for each event, a minimum of 30% of participants stated that they were either aware of, or had participated in, the Design Code workshops.

Is the Masterplan based on the Design Code?

3.18 In Question 4, respondents were asked whether they felt that the Comprehensive Masterplan was based on the design approach and principles established in the Design Code, as required by Policy H 10.

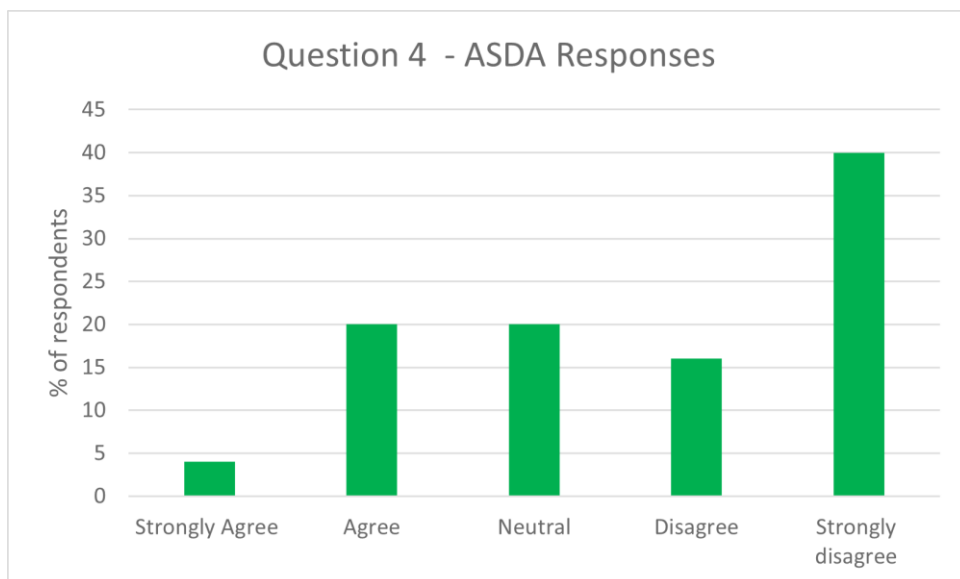
3.19 The findings from Question 4 are in Figures 3.13 – 3.16 below:

Figure 3.13



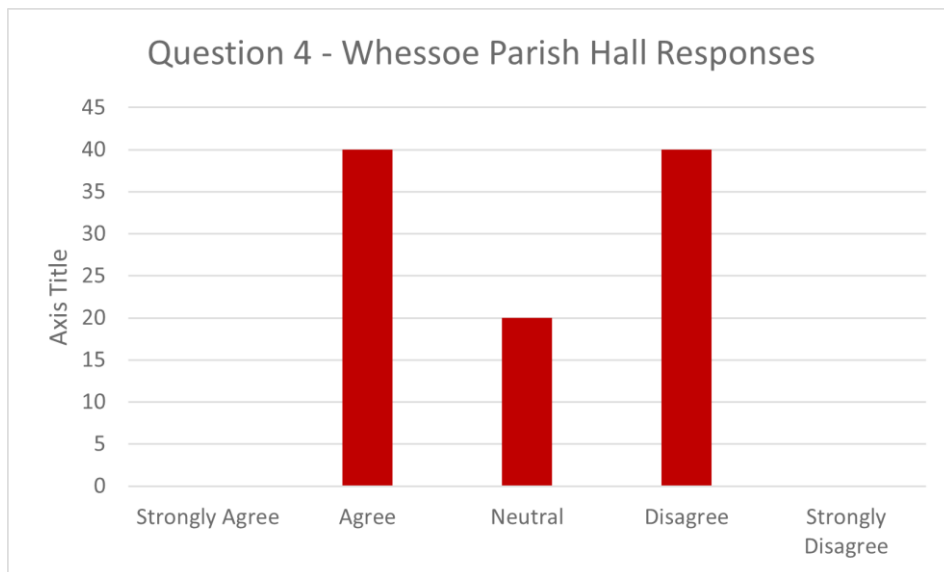
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.14



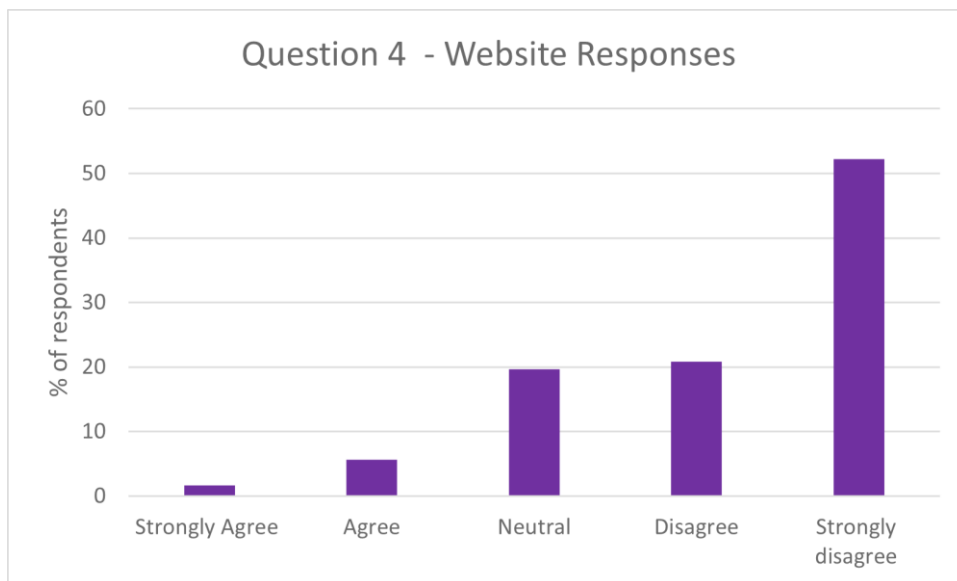
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.15



Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.16



Source: Lichfields Analysis

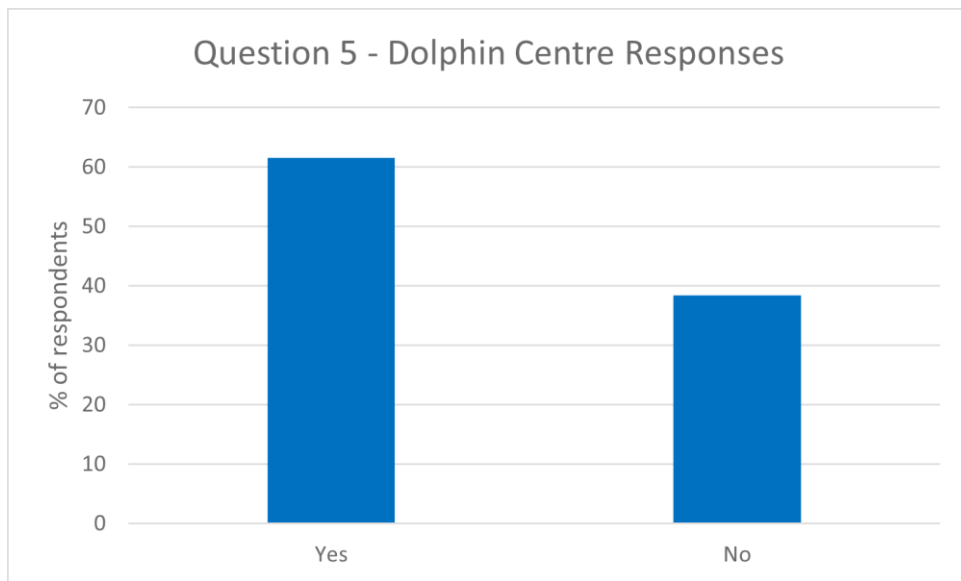
3.21 From the feedback for Question 4, the results demonstrate an overall neutral opinion on whether the Masterplan is based on the design approach and principles established in the Design Code. The only event which was mostly negative on this matter was the Website Responses in Figure 3.16, which show over 70% of respondents felt that the Masterplan did not reflect the Design Code.

Any further changes

3.22 Question 5 asked a structured question on whether respondents felt any further changes to the Masterplan were needed. If they selected ‘Yes’ they were given the opportunity to expand of this. The comments from this are analysed later on in this report.

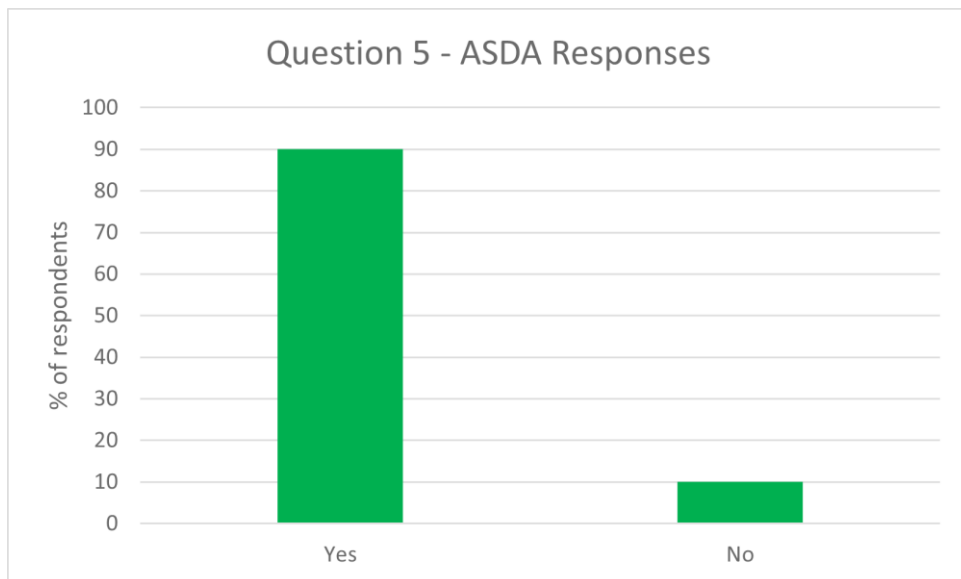
3.23 The findings from Question 5 are shown in Figures 3.17-3.20:

Figure 3.17



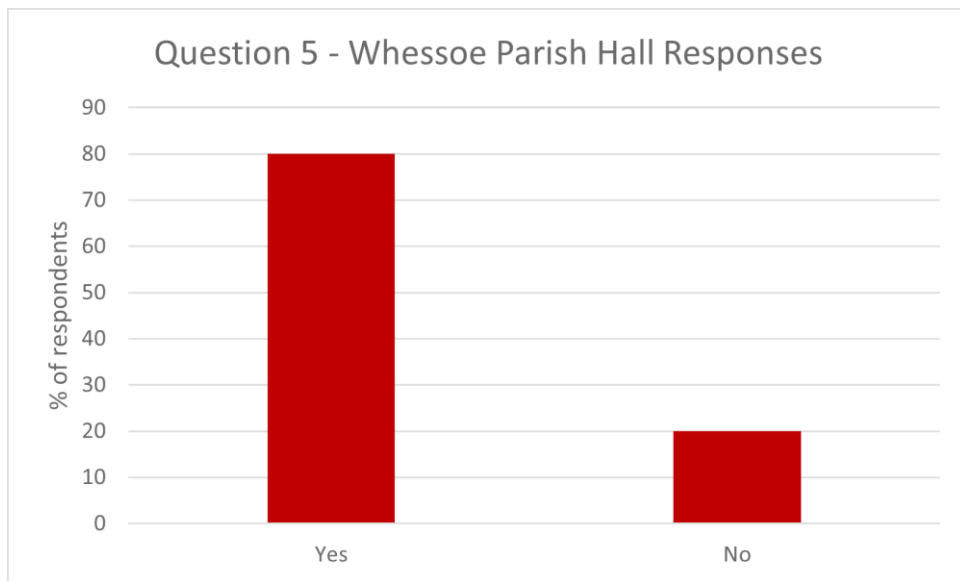
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.18



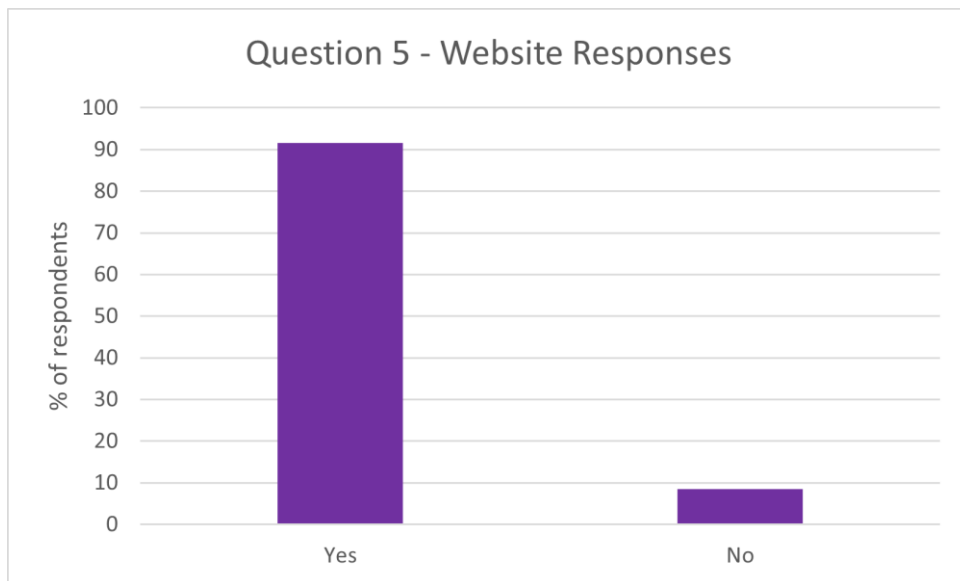
Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.19



Source: Lichfields Analysis

Figure 3.20



Source: Lichfields Analysis

3.24 At each event it is clear that the majority of participants felt that there were further points to be considered for the Masterplan. Those who responded 'Yes' to this question have left comments and these will be analysed below.

Comments – Question 6: Proposed Further Changes

3.25 Suggestions for further changes from the Dolphin Centre events included:

“Need to build flood defences downstream on the river Skerne. Currently (1st November 2023) we are flooded around Springfield area and others”.

“Ensure that more affordable homes are in the plan”.

“Areas of space for people to self-build more unique designs”.

“This scheme needs to have CLEAR and DELIVERABLE solution to drainage and Water management to reduce the risk of flooding existing residential and town centre areas”.

3.26 Other suggestions were proposed from the ASDA events:

“We need to know the infrastructure outline to understand how the development affects existing residents and their existing roads etc will be affected”.

“There is a need for 1/2-bedroom homes and adaptable homes more than the mix of homes in the plan”.

“Access to development is too restricted and will have a devastating effect on surrounding residential areas i.e Brampton Lane”.

3.27 At the Whessoe Parish Hall event, further changes were also proposed, including:

“There is no consideration for the amount of traffic already using Brampton lane, Whinbush Way & Whinfield Rd. The New estates will only compound the existing problem”.

“The plan should not allow for 2 to 3 storey buildings behind the existing bungalows in Galloway”.

“A new access road from Great Burdon roundabout should be provided before any development of the Skerningham area is even considered”.

3.28 The website consultation also generated a range of responses to this question:

“Where are the GP surgeries and dentists to support your health hub? There is not enough provision already for Darlington residents without adding extra pressure. Surely you cannot state this is a health hub without adding these services?”

“Ensure there are plenty of green areas are left. Traffic is elsewhere than barmpton Lane. Safety for children and people with animals with traffic. Conserve skerningham woods for the public.”

“The link road and bridge across the ECML should be completed at an earlier phase to alleviate traffic congestion.”

“There is no obvious consideration as to health care provision. There is mention of a health hub supported by existing providers.”

“The school should be the first building followed by the health hub and community building.”

“Whinfield is known for its 2-bedroom homes so this should be a priority. Too many 3 and 4 bedroom houses are being built which neglects to recognise the first time buyers forced into private rented properties which are not fit for purpose.”

“There is Inadequate information available on how traffic and road noise will be controlled. The new road supplying the garden village will pass through an area of local beauty favoured by walkers. The planners should consider a 20-mph limit through the fields/woodland as well as planting trees either side of the road to suppress the noise.”

“The woodland should not be destroyed.”

“Barmpton Lane alterations – need to have a cycle lane on at least one side, preferably both, to encourage sustainable travel and minimise increased traffic.”

Comments – Question 7: Any further comments

3.29 A summary of further comments from the events include:

“the roundabout proposed to the north of Galloway should be removed as this will only lead to further congestion on Barmpton Lane”

“Do we require this amount of housing? “

“Think overall this is a good idea for the area as long as it keeps some natural space for wildlife etc also to support play etc with children an accessible footpaths.”

“I am all for any Development that improves the North End of Darlington.”

“Very worried about the impact of this on flooding especially in the Red Hall / Haughton area.”

“Well thought out., consideration given to green, space environment and traffic flow, a community rather than an estate.”

“Any new build has specifications of sustainable transport legislation must force local councils to retain bus services.”

“Government guidelines state 'a garden village' will need is own access without impact to other roads and infrastructure. Most houses will have two-three cars adding to pollution and health risks.”

“flooding will increase and emergency services will be under further pressure.”

“Wildlife will be pushed out of there natural habitat. Terrible, completely disagree with plans.”

“Why build lots of high value houses when in Darlington ,it's social housing that is needed and affordable housing.”

“The new development already being built at Beaumont hill is already causing considerable disruption and congestion.”

3.30 These comments and concerns have been analysed to identify any commonly cited topics and/or areas of concern. Section 4.0 provides a comprehensive response by the project team to these.

4.0 Responding to the Feedback

4.1 The unstructured comments have been analysed and, whilst there were comments of support for the proposal, key topics of interest and concerns have been grouped together into the following themes:

- 1 Principle of Development
- 2 Highways
- 3 Flooding and Ecological Concerns
- 4 Pressures on Social Infrastructure
- 5 Land east of the River Skerne
- 6 Phasing of Development

4.2 Each of the topics have been considered by the project team. They are addressed in sequence below and where possible, the project team has sought to provide further clarity.

The Principle of Development

4.3 A common theme in the comments was question for the need for the number of houses being built in the area. Comments included:

“Do we require this amount of housing?”

“Why build lots of high value houses when in Darlington, it’s social housing that is needed and affordable housing.”

“Whinfield is known for its 2-bedroom homes so this should be a priority. Too many 3- and 4-bedroom houses are being built which neglects to recognise the first-time buyers forced into private rented properties which are not fit for purpose.”

4.4 Policy H2 of the Darlington Local Plan provides details of sites and numbers of houses which are deliverable for the Council to meet its rolling 5-year housing land supply. These allocations use a variety of brownfield and greenfield sites and will provide an appropriate mix of residential developments. As part of these allocations, Policy H 2 includes Skerningham, allocated for 1650 houses by 2036 and another 2850 houses post-2036.

4.5 The Comprehensive Masterplan includes a Delivery Trajectory (Figure 8.1) on page 33, which was based on achieving the assumptions in the Local Plan that 1,650 dwellings would be delivered by the end of the plan period (2036). The Design Code and Comprehensive Masterplan have taken longer than anticipated to prepare, and it has been necessary to review the Delivery Trajectory (now on page 37) in the updated Comprehensive Masterplan. As a result of the slippage in timescales, the development is now anticipated to deliver 1,450 dwellings within the plan period, although this is not regarded as a cap. This update also has implications for the phasing of the development, as explained later in this section of the report.

4.6 Policy H 10 is the strategic site policy for Skerningham and details the requirements that need to be considered in order to bring the site forward. This includes the preparation of a Design Code and Masterplan to inform the development.

- 4.7 Although there were several comments which questioned the need for the number and types of housing in Darlington, the principle of development on the site has already been established and assessed by the Council, as it is allocated in Policy H 2. Furthermore, Policy H 10 details the way the Masterplan needed to be set out and influenced by the Design Code and therefore the proposed number and type of dwellings are considered acceptable under these policies.
- 4.8 Part of the objection to the principle of development was ‘building on the green belt’, which was mentioned in a few instances in the comments page section. However, it is necessary to clarify that no land within Darlington, or indeed the Tees Valley, is designated as Green Belt. Furthermore, the site is allocated for development under Policies H 2 and H 10.
- 4.9 Overall, the principle of development onsite is within the scope of these policies and therefore acceptable for the site to progress to a planning application.

Highways

- 4.10 From the consultation events, a number of comments received were based on concerns on the impact the development will have on the current highway infrastructure.
- 4.11 Comments included:
- “We need to know the infrastructure outline to understand how the development affects existing residents and their existing roads etc will be affected”.*
- “Access to development is too restricted and will have a devastating effect on surrounding residential areas i.e Barmpton Lane”.*
- “Government guidelines state 'a garden village' will need its own access without impact to other roads and infrastructure. Most houses will have two-three cars adding to pollution and health risks.”*
- “Any new build has specifications of sustainable transport legislation must force local councils to retain bus services.”*
- 4.12 A large proportion of concerns on transport matters related to the use of Barmpton Lane for access to the site. These concerns generally related to whether Barmpton Lane would have suitable capacity for HGVs and traffic for the development. The comments suggested that other access options for the development.
- 4.13 Policy H 10 (g iii) states:
- Development of the initial phases of development on the eastern part of the allocation will be accessed via Barmpton Lane and/or Bishopton Lane. Prior to the occupation of between the 200th and 450th dwelling on the eastern part of the allocation the section of the local distributor road between Barmpton Lane and Bishopton Lane shall be delivered.*
- 4.14 The Masterplan identifies that Phase 1, on land in the eastern part of the allocation, would be accessed off Barmpton Lane. This is consistent with the above extract from Policy H 10.
- 4.15 Other highways concerns queried when the full length of the Local Distributor Road would be completed, to help alleviate what respondents felt was already high levels of congestion. The Masterplan (at Section 7) clearly identifies the phased delivery of the Local Distributor

Road in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of Policy H 10 (g). A response to this query is also included in Appendix 3 to this report.

- 4.16 Comments were also noted on the importance of suitable public transport services. In relation to the concerns raised around public transport, Policy H 10 (e) emphasises how the development should include sustainable transport modes. The Masterplan proposes a public transport route to serve the development, with multiple stops to help residents and the wider community access different parts of the site. The Masterplan also establishes the provision of active travel routes which seek to maximise the opportunities for walking and cycling through the development, to connections and destinations off site. This is also consistent with an objective in the Design Code, including the ambition to achieve 20 minute neighbourhoods.
- 4.17 Since the consultation on the Masterplan ended, the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) announced proposals and funding for the Darlington Northern Relief Road (DNRR). The Masterplan has been updated to acknowledge this update and to state that progress associated with the DNRR project will be kept under review to ensure that the delivery of Skerningham would not prejudice the delivery of the DNRR and vice versa.
- 4.18 In line with these points and how the Masterplan has been designed to meet the transport requirements as set out in Policy H 10, it is considered that the proposal meets this policy and the highways concerns of residents can be mitigated.

Flooding and Ecological Concerns

- 4.19 Ecological and drainage concerns were also a concern in the comments from participants. Comments included:

“The woodland should not be destroyed.”

“Wildlife will be pushed out of there natural habitat”

“flooding will increase and emergency services will be under further pressure.”

- 4.20 The majority of concerns raised for ecology and drainage issues related to the loss of green space and how this could increase the risk of flooding. Consistent with both local and national planning policy, any planning application for development at the site will be accompanied by a flood risk assessment, which will fully assess the suitability of the site and the risk of flooding from all potential sources. As a general principle, the area to the north and east of the site, adjacent to the River Skerne will be not form part of the developed area of the site. Furthermore, in line with Policy H 10, the site will need to provide sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) to help mitigate any potential for the site to flood.
- 4.21 Furthermore, with the addition of SUDS on the site, as well as the requirement to deliver a net gain in accessible woodland for the local community, it is considered that the Masterplan is in accordance with Policy H 10 and will help protect the development from the impacts of heavy rainfall.
- 4.22 In terms of the wider ecological impacts of developing the site, there is a requirement to deliver a net gain in biodiversity and therefore it will boost the ecological value of the area.

Features such as SUDS will help to deliver areas where a range of species can thrive, and this will help meet the net gain statistics as well as defend against flooding.

Pressures on Social Infrastructure

4.23 There were a range of comments that were focused on the delivery of services and facilities as required by the Garden Village status of the project. These included:

“The school should be the first building followed by the health hub and community building.”

“There is no obvious consideration as to health care provision. There is mention of a health hub supported by existing providers.”

4.24 As the comments above show, the timely delivery of services and facilities for Skerningham is another theme which arose during the consultation events. As part of the allocation policy for Skerningham (H 10), numerous facilities have to be delivered in accordance with an Infrastructure Delivery Phasing Plan. The Masterplan, which includes a phasing plan, demonstrates the range of facilities which would come forward as part of the Garden Village.

4.25 The Masterplan demonstrates the timely delivery of the local community facilities to support the initial phase of development in Phase 1, in locations that are generally consistent with those shown in the adopted Local Plan. It also explains the context relating to the timescales associated with the provision of primary and secondary schools, as well as the location and proposed time frame of the neighbourhood centre/health hub. Although respondents felt like these should be delivered earlier than when the phasing plan suggests, there is a need to consider a longer term view on the delivery of the site and to ensure that the development will meet the requirements of Policy H10 (b), which requires a *centrally* located Neighbourhood Centre. The approach taken is also consistent with where the supporting services and facilities are indicated to be located in Figure 6.2 of the Local Plan.

Land east of the River Skerne

4.26 Some of the comments received included queries in relation to the land to the eastern area of the allocation, located between the River Skerne and the A1150. This area of the site is identified in the Masterplan as a later phase of the development. The comments received made reference to the uncertainty regarding its proposed land use, and also the proposed section of the Local Distributor Road through this part of the site.

4.27 Dealing with the land use matter first, the adopted Local Plan (paragraph 6.10.9) states:

“The site promoters have indicated that the site has the potential to provide between 15-30 hectares of employment land on the south eastern corner of the site close to the A66 Little Burdon roundabout. However, this land was not assessed as part of the most recent Employment Land Review process and the Plan already makes sufficient provision for the employment needs of the borough over the Plan period on existing employment sites and new allocations, such as Central Park, Ingenium Parc and Greater Faverdale. The need to release this part of the Skerningham site for employment uses will be considered when the Local Plan is next reviewed, and as part of any future update/review of the Council’s employment land evidence base.”

4.28 Page 111 of the Design Code states:

“Business uses may be suitable, subject to employment land needs and take up during the lifespan of the development, to be assessed as part of a review of the Local Plan.

Supporting local facilities are to be provided in support of either employment or residential uses given the relative distance from the existing Whinfield neighbourhood, depending what facilities are provided in the adjacent Barmpton Lane character area’.

4.29 It is a requirement of the Comprehensive Masterplan to be consistent with Policy H 10 and the principles established in the Design Code. In light of this, the presentation of this area of the allocation has been amended on the Masterplan (Figure 4.3) and on the Land Use Plan (Figure 4.8). The phasing plans in Section 7.0 have also been amended to show the potential delivery of this land from Phase 4 onwards. The Comprehensive Masterplan does not prejudice the final decision on the land use for this area of the allocation, which will be assessed during the review of the Local Plan.

4.30 There is also text in the Comprehensive Masterplan which makes clear that the document will need to be reviewed from time to time, in the context that the development will take several decades to complete. As such, this allows time to consider the appropriate land use for the area of the site to the east of the River Skerne.

Phasing of Development

4.31 The comments received on this matter generally relate to the phasing of the development on the eastern part of the allocation. Policy H 10 is very clear in describing the initial phases of the development will be located on land adjoining Barmpton Lane. It is also important to recognise that, alongside the allocation of the Skerningham in the Darlington Local Plan, Skerningham is also a designated Garden Village, which further emphasises the need to deliver a new community and sense of place. The need to deliver a sustainable new community has strongly influenced the phasing which works towards the delivery of the centrally located Neighbourhood Centre (as required by Policy H 10 (b)) as soon as practically possible within the development. This has also been informed through discussions with the local bus operators, who have confirmed that it is possible to extend the No. 10 service to serve Phase 1 (on Barmpton Lane), and then extend again in subsequent phases to serve the Neighbourhood Centre. This is viewed as being important to instil sustainable travel choices at an early stage of the development.

4.32 It is recognised that Policy H 10 (g) requires the completion of the Local Distributor Road (between the A167 and A1150) prior to the occupation of between the 900th and 1500th dwelling. The modelling work undertaken indicates that this requirement will be at the upper end of the range.

4.33 As explained in paragraph 4.5, it has been appropriate to review the assumptions relating to the quantum of development in light of the time it has taken to prepare the Design Code and the Comprehensive Masterplan. The reduction from 1,650 to 1,450 dwellings within the plan period results in a small change to the phasing of infrastructure. Based on this trajectory, the need for the completion of the Local Distributor Road would fall within Phase 4, rather than Phase 3. This also coincides with the potential timescale for delivery of development on land east of the River Skerne.

- 4.34 In response to the feedback received, additional text has been included at the start of Section 7 (Infrastructure Phasing Plan) of the Masterplan, to explain the approach taken to the phasing of the development. It is considered that this additional provides a helpful introduction to this part of the document.

Changes to the Masterplan

- 4.35 Changes to the Comprehensive Masterplan have been made in response to the comments received. These are summarised at Appendix 3 in more detail, along with the theme of the comments in which they response too.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

- 5.1 This report has summarised the consultation undertaken by Skerningham Estates Ltd and Banks Property (the Lead Developers), in relation to the preparation of the Comprehensive Masterplan for Skerningham Garden Village.
- 5.2 The consultation has been carried out in accordance with the revised NPPF (2023) and the Darlington Borough Council Local Plan.
- 5.3 To engage with the community, around 5,200 number of leaflets were distributed to the local area, directing to a website with an online survey. The website received 1,735 unique visitors and the online survey received 215 responses by 30 November 2023. There were also 6 consultation events, held at 3 different venues across Darlington, where there were over 200 participants who attended. From these events, 51 questionnaires were completed. As explained in Section 3, a further 6 responses were received via other routes resulting in a total of 272 responses to the consultation.
- 5.4 When compared with the 5,200 leaflets that were distributed equates to an overall response rate of 5.2% which reflects an overall modest level of interest from the local community.
- 5.5 A summary of the findings are as follows:
- The completed responses were submitted anonymously, although the data gained from the events held at the Dolphin Centre, in the town centre, demonstrate a stronger positive reaction to the draft Masterplan when compared to the responses received at the 2 venues which are closer to the site.
 - There was a mix of responses from the different venues in relation to whether the Masterplan successfully shows a mix of uses, layout, scale and design of the development, with the feedback generally more positive at the Dolphin Centre events, than the other two events and the website survey.
 - Respondents were also asked whether the Masterplan explained the infrastructure delivery and phasing for the site. The responses received through the Dolphin Centre and Asda events showed a balance of opinions on this topic. However, at Whessoe Parish Hall and on the website consultation, over 70% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. In response to this feedback, additional text has been added to the start of Section 7 to explain the approach that has been taken to the phasing and infrastructure delivery.
 - The three in person events were more balanced on whether the Masterplan reflected the principles within the Design Code. However, findings from the website survey showed that over 70% of respondents felt the Masterplan did not reflect the Design Code.
 - Whilst the overall response from the events were critical of the Masterplan, the feedback gained at some venues were more positive than others and raised different points for consideration. The majority of concerns related to whether there was a need for more housing in the area; how the development will impact the road network of Darlington; the potential ecological and flooding threats due to building on the greenfield land; and the concerns over the timing of the delivery of the services.

- A few suggestions from the consultation included altering the route of the road network to ease pressure on smaller roads and the A1150, bringing forward the delivery of schools and healthcare facilities and ensuring that there are suitable drainage facilities to limit flooding.

5.6 The next stage of the process is to submit an amended Masterplan which has been revised where necessary in relation to the comments and submit this to the Council for agreement. There will be further opportunities to comment on the proposed development at the application stage(s) of the development. The developers remain committed to working with the local community and Council throughout the planning and construction process.

Appendix 1 Consultation Leaflet

Skerningham



Site Location - Aerial Photograph

We invite your feedback on the Draft Comprehensive Masterplan for Skerningham - which is an allocation in the Darlington Local Plan on the northern side of the town now comprising a development of approximately 3,700 dwellings, including a neighbourhood centre, health hub, school(s) and other supporting infrastructure.

Darlington Borough Council recently adopted a Design Code for Skerningham. The next stage is the preparation of a Comprehensive Masterplan, which should be based on the design approach and principles established in the Design Code.

BANKSProperty
development with care
Skerningham
ESTATES Ltd



The input of local residents is key in helping us finalise the Comprehensive Masterplan.

We encourage you to visit our website www.skerningham.co.uk to find out more and submit your feedback.

Please note that the website will go live from **Monday 30th October 2023**.

We are also hosting a series of drop in consultation events at the following venues:



Dolphin Centre, Horse Market, Darlington DL1 5RP, on:

Wednesday 1st November 2023 (9am until 1pm)
Thursday 2nd November 2023 (12pm until 4pm)



ASDA, Whinbush Way, Darlington DL1 3RB, on:

Monday 6th November 2023 (1pm until 5pm)
Tuesday 7th November 2023 (9am until 1pm)

Members of the team from Banks Property and Skerningham Estates Ltd will be available to discuss the Comprehensive Masterplan and answer your questions.

Feedback received by **Sunday 19th November 2023** will be considered as part of any further changes to the Comprehensive Masterplan.

Any further updates in relation to this consultation will be published on the website.


Appendix 2 Consultation Website

Skerningham

Welcome Background Vision for Skerningham Illustrative Masterplan Phasing Plans Comprehensive Masterplan

Welcome

This website relates to proposals at Skerningham Garden Village. The consultation on the draft Comprehensive Masterplan has now ended and we are processing the comments.



What is Skerningham?

Skerningham is an allocation in the Darlington Local Plan, on the northern side of the town, now comprising a development of approximately 3,700 dwellings, including a neighbourhood centre, health hub, school(s) and other supporting infrastructure.

Skerningham is also a designated Garden Village following the announcement by the Government on 27 June 2019.

What is the purpose of this consultation?

Policy H 10 (Skerningham – Site Allocation (Strategic Policy), the Local Plan policy most relevant to the allocation of the site, states that a Comprehensive Masterplan including an Infrastructure Phasing Plan should be prepared by the applicant(s) prior to the submission of any planning application relating to the site. It also states that the Comprehensive Masterplan should be based on the design approach and principles established in Darlington Borough Council's Design Code.

The Council recently adopted a Design Code on 28 September 2023, which follows the community consultation workshops that took place in 2022.

The adoption of the [Design Code](#) has allowed progress and consultation on the Draft Comprehensive Masterplan to follow. This consultation is an opportunity to view and provide comments on the draft document, ahead of it being finalised.

Skerningham

Welcome	Background	Vision for Skerningham	Illustrative Masterplan	Phasing Plans	Comprehensive Masterplan
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Background

The Skerningham allocation is a 487 hectare site located to the north of Darlington. It will adjoin the existing communities at Beaumont Hill, Winfield and Great Burdon. Barmpton Village is also located close to the north eastern edge of the site. The East Coast Mainline also runs through the western part of the site.

The site is allocated for the delivery of up to 4,500 dwellings to be delivered with supporting infrastructure and facilities (as detailed in Policy H 10 a to i). However, as a result of the Golf Club's decision to remain, the capacity of Skerningham is around 3,700 new homes.

Banks Property is the lead developer for the land on the western part of the allocation, which includes land adjacent to the A167 and west of the East Coast Mainline. Policy H 10 identifies the delivery of 600 dwellings on this part of the allocation during the plan period.

Skerningham Estates Ltd is the lead developer for the land on the east of the East Coast Mainline. Policy H 10 identifies 1,050 dwellings to be delivered during the plan period with initial phases located on land adjoining Barmpton Lane.

The remaining dwellings are expected to be delivered post 2036, beyond the current Local Plan period.



Site Location Plan
[Click on the above image to view a larger version](#)

Skerningham

Welcome

Background

Vision for Skerningham

Illustrative Masterplan

Phasing Plans

Comprehensive Masterplan

Vision

"To create a highly liveable and sustainable community that prioritises the people that live there; their health and well-being and overall quality of life."

This vision is established in the Design Code which also sets out the three key objectives to achieve this vision for Skerningham. [The Comprehensive Masterplan](#) has also set out to follow these guiding principles.

Objectives

Healthy Living:

A strong health and well-being focus, secured by nature led design, and a 20 minute walkable neighbourhood design philosophy in order to encourage walking and cycling.

This objective follows Darlington's selection as an NHS England Healthy New Town – one of 10 sites in the country chosen to take forward principles to improve health and wellbeing.

Innovation:

Development will embrace the latest technologies in relation to energy, climate change objectives and digital communication. As the build out of the development will take place over an extended period of time, it will continue to adapt to the rapidly changing technology to meet this objective.

Sense of Place:

Skerningham will have a strong identity and sense of place. Architecturally, the layout and appearance of development should be distinctive to Darlington.

It is also recognised from the consultation process that the local communities place high value on access to nature and wildlife and spaces for social interaction. Existing Public Rights of Way will be retained and enhanced along with the provision of new routes towards Community Woodland to the north of the site.

Skerningham

Welcome

Background

Vision for Skerningham

Illustrative Masterplan

Phasing Plans

Comprehensive Masterplan

Illustrative Masterplan

This plan presents an illustrative masterplan for Skerningham.



Illustrative Masterplan
Click on the above image to view a larger version

Following Darlington Golf Club's decision to remain in its current location, this follows Figure 4.2 in the Local Plan. This has an impact on the capacity of the site which would mean a total development in the region of 3,700 dwellings.

The Draft Comprehensive Masterplan includes a suite of parameter plans in Section 4 of the document which provide guiding principles in relation to:

- Green and Blue Infrastructure (along with the management and maintenance of these spaces)
- Access and Movement (including sustainable travel principles)
- Land Uses
- Density and Building Heights

Sections 5 and 6 of the [masterplan document](#) provide further detail in relation to the Design and Character of the development and Infrastructure Requirements associated with the development at Skerningham.

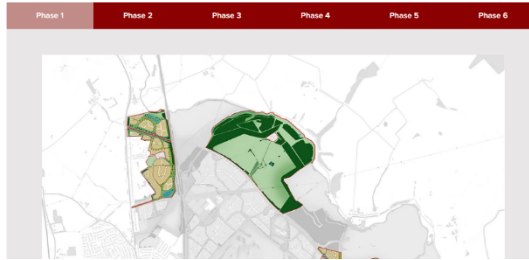
Skerningham

Welcome Background Vision for Skerningham Illustrative Masterplan Phasing Plans Comprehensive Masterplan

Phasing Plans

The development has been identified to come forward in six phases, indicated by the sequencing shown on plans below. Phases 1, 2 and 3 show the development anticipated within the Local Plan period (before 2036). Phases 4, 5 and 6 illustrate the phases of the development beyond this period.

The phasing plans are shown in Section 7 of the Draft Comprehensive Masterplan which also include a detailed breakdown of the supporting infrastructure that will be delivered in each phase of development.



Skerningham

Welcome Background Vision for Skerningham Illustrative Masterplan Phasing Plans Comprehensive Masterplan

Comprehensive Masterplan

A copy of the Draft Comprehensive Masterplan is available to download here.



Comprehensive Masterplan
Click on the above image to download the document

Appendix 3 Summary of Changes

The table below provides a summary of the changes to the Comprehensive Masterplan in response to the comments received.

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Change Made to the Masterplan
The name 'Skerningham' sounds too similar to 'Skerne Park'. Other concerns in relation to no mention of Garden Village in the document title.	The Darlington Local Plan refers to the site as "Skerningham", however it is also known as "Skerningham Garden Village". It is recognised that the adopted Design Code refers to the site as "Skerningham Garden Village" so the title of the Comprehensive Masterplan has been updated to ensure a consistent approach.	The front page of the document (along with other relevant parts) has been updated to name the site as 'Skerningham Garden Village'.
No mention of the country park as stated in the Design Code.	The area which contains the woods would be designed to have features which depict a Country Park, and the document has been updated to reflect this.	Section 6 (Page 27), includes new content to make clear the Country Park features that will be taken forward at Skerningham.
Why is development north of the road when the Design Code states that it should all be south of the road.	The route of the local distributor road has been amended through the eastern part of the site in order to be consistent with the Design Code.	On Page 13 of the Masterplan, Figure 4.7 has been updated in the area around Barmpton Lane. In this part of the site, development is shown to be south of the road. This update is also reflected on all relevant plans.
No information is provided in relation to graves onsite.	The document has been updated to acknowledge the presence of human graves within Skerningham Woods, though it is not considered to be appropriate or necessary to plot their locations.	On Page 11 reference to the human graves in Skerningham Woods has been added along with the commitment that this will continue to be respected.
The houses are not required. References also to the 3,700 houses being less than the allocated amount of 4,500 dwellings.	The site has been allocated by the Council for up to 4,500 dwellings, although the Local Plan afforded flexibility about whether Darlington Golf Club relocated or not. The Masterplan is based on the Golf Club's decision to remain in its current location, which has a subsequent impact on the quantum of development.	Page 8 in the Masterplan has been updated to include reference to the Inspector's Report (which refers to 3,700) to demonstrate consistency in terms of the proposed quantum of development in this scenario.
Is the Delivery Trajectory in Figure 8.1 achievable?	The Delivery Trajectory was based on the assumptions in the Local Plan, with an expectation that there would be completed	This update results in an amendment to the Delivery Trajectory in Figure 8.1 and

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Change Made to the Masterplan
	dwellings in 2024. These assumptions have been reviewed, and it is considered that there will be a reduction (from 1,650) 1,450 dwellings within the plan period.	the phasing details in Section 7 of the Masterplan.
It is important that the woodland paths are connected to the development once the Local Distributor Road is built.	There will be a number of crossing points for pedestrians to cross the proposed local distributor road. These will aim to bring pedestrians to road level to be able to cross.	On Page 19 of the Masterplan, new information has been added to show the preferred approach for how pedestrians and cyclists will cross the local distributor road.
There is no mention of the Northern Relief Road. Is this still proposed?	Since the consultation on the draft Masterplan ended, Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) has approved £250 million in funding to deliver the Darlington Northern Relief Road (DNRR). This is a separate project to Skerningham Garden Village, although the Masterplan has been updated to acknowledge this update.	The Masterplan has been updated to acknowledge the DNRR update. References have been added to Pages 13 and 21.
Will the development be served by public transport?	The Design Code requires 80% of households to be within 400m walking distance to a bus stop that is served by a regular day service. The Masterplan includes details of the public transport strategy, although this has been reviewed to ensure the early phases of the development will be served by a regular bus service.	Pages 13 and 18 have been updated following further consideration of the access to bus services in the early phases of the development.
The Comprehensive Masterplan does not explain the infrastructure delivery and phasing for the allocation.	Section 6 details the infrastructure requirements for the allocation and Section 7 includes the phasing of the development. The information has been presented in a way with the aim being that it is simple for readers to understand. That said, the document has been amended in response to this feedback.	Additional detail has been added to Section 6 (Infrastructure Requirements) of the Masterplan to provide further information on the infrastructure requirements for the site. This includes text on page 20 (of the updated document) relating to the delivery of the Local Distributor Road. References have been added throughout to make clear the need for each planning application to demonstrate that it will not prejudice the wider delivery of the allocation, and for the requirement for proportionate contributions to common infrastructure.

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Change Made to the Masterplan
		Additional text has also been added at the start of Section 7 (Infrastructure Phasing Plan) to explain the approach that has been taken to the phasing of the development, which is then presented on the subsequent pages.
The Comprehensive Masterplan does not provide any details for the land to the eastern side of the allocation.	The document has been amended to ensure consistency with the Local Plan and Design Code. Therefore, the Comprehensive Masterplan does not prejudice the final decision on the land use for this area of the allocation, which will be assessed during the review of the Local Plan.	The presentation of this area of the allocation has been amended on the Masterplan (Figure 4.3) and on the Land Use Plan (Figure 4.8). The phasing plans in Section 7.0 have also been amended to show the potential delivery of this land from Phase 4 onwards.
When will the Local Distributor Road be completed?	Policy H 10 (g) requires the completion of the Local Distributor Road (between the A167 and A1150) prior to the occupation of between the 900th and 1,500th dwelling. The modelling work undertaken indicates that this requirement will be at the upper end of the range. As explained in Section 4 of the report, it is expected that the completion of the road will now be delivered in Phase 4, to coincide with this quantum of the development on the site.	The Phasing Plans in Figures 7.3 and 7.4 have been amended to reflect this update.

The following table provides a response to other comments where it is not considered that a change to the Comprehensive Masterplan is required.

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Suggested Change
The Local Distributor Road should be completed at an earlier stage to relieve traffic congestion.	Whilst this comment is noted, this topic was considered in detail during the examination of the Local Plan. This subsequently resulted in Policy H 10 including part g which contains significant detail in relation to the requirements associated with the phased delivery of the Local Distributor Road.	No

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Suggested Change
	The Infrastructure Phasing Plan (in Section 7 of the Masterplan) details the timescales for when each part of the road will be brought forward, and is consistent with the sequence of stages set out in Policy H 10 (g)	
The Masterplan does not mention or identify a location for a stadium for the Darlington Football Club.	We are aware of the relevant press articles, however there are no confirmed plans for where the Football Club will relocate to.	No
No obvious consideration for health care provision	The Masterplan details the location of a health hub which will contain services like a GP and Dentist. These will be reviewed and phased as appropriate with demand.	No
No road should be allowed through the woodland	The road broadly follows the alignment shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2 of the Local Plan. This alignment is also shown in the Design Code. It is noted that the Design Code encourages the road to “avoid existing wooded areas as much as possible”. This approach has been followed and it has not been possible to find an appropriate option which avoids the woodland.	no
Want to see a greater mix of densities added, with apartments of up to 4-5 storeys and mix uses below	The proposed density and building heights is consistent with the relevant detail in the adopted Design Code.	No
The school should be delivered at the outset of the development followed by the health hub and community centre	As detailed in the Masterplan, discussions have been held with the Council to understand the demand for school places. It is understood that there is enough capacity in existing schools to meet the need generated by the development until the end of the Local Plan period (2036). The primary school and secondary school are identified for delivery in Phase 4, subject to further assessment nearer the time. The wider local centre is located centrally within the development which will be delivered in Phase 3. This will include a health hub and community centre. Phase 1 includes the provision of local	No

Summary of Comment Received	Response	Suggested Change
	community / convenience provision to the west and east of the allocation.	
The road in from Barmpton Lane is not suitable for the construction access or number of cars and access should be changed	The development team acknowledges concerns over the access from Barmpton Lane. This will be addressed at the planning application stage. As part of any planning permission for the site, a Construction and Management Plan will be conditioned. This will require information on construction and operational traffic to be submitted and approved in writing by the Council.	No
No formal agreement in place with Network Rail regarding where the road will cross	The location of the bridge has been agreed in principle with Network Rail. The next stage in the process is to obtain technical approval which will comprise full details of the bridge design. Discussions on this remain ongoing, although it is not considered that this will affect the level of information shown in the Masterplan.	No
What flooding infrastructure will there be and who will pay for it?	The Masterplan shows details of the drainage strategy for the site, with the creation of run offs into Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) Ponds to allow for the capture of rainwater and help protect land around the site from being flooded. These SUDS ponds will also create areas for biodiversity.	No
The development would impact biodiversity onsite.	The Masterplan details mitigation measures for wildlife and details of planting and green corridors to allow biodiversity to flourish. The development will also be required to deliver at minimum of 10% Net Gain policy for Biodiversity.	No