

**SPECIAL ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
9 JANUARY 2025**

CALL IN - SKERNINGHAM MASTERPLAN ACCEPTANCE

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Ian Williams, Chief Executive**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To respond to the Quad of Aims detailed by members for call-in of Cabinet decision C76.

Summary

2. At the cabinet meeting held on 3rd December 2024 members agreed that the Skerningham Masterplan Document was consistent with the Darlington Borough Local Plan Policy H 10 and the Skerningham Garden Village Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
3. Policy H 10 of the Local Plan requires a comprehensive Masterplan including an infrastructure phasing plan be prepared in consultation with the community prior to the submission of any planning application relating to the site, that informs the mix of uses, layout, scale, design, provision of local and strategic infrastructure including social and community facilities and phasing of the proposed development. The Masterplan shall be led by the applicant(s) and should be based on the design approach and principles established in the Council's design code, a strong understanding of the characteristics of the site and its surrounds and incorporate the key principles for the development as set out in points a to i of the Policy.
4. A final version of the Masterplan has been prepared by Litchfields on behalf of Theakston's Land and Banks Group, the two companies with the largest amount of land interest in the area.
5. The production of the Masterplan has followed the requirement of community involvement with a consultation exercise running from 30 October to 30 November 2023. This involved a series of public engagement events. Following that consultation the responses received were reviewed and some amendments were made to the Masterplan.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee acknowledges the response to the Quad of Aims.

Reason

7. The recommendation is to note the details of the responses to the Quad of Aims.

Ian Williams
Chief Executive

Background Papers

No background papers were used in producing this report.

Mark Ladyman: Extension 6306

<p>Council Plan</p>	<p>The Local Plan and supporting documents are integral to the delivery of the Council Plan and its priorities (adopted by Council in July 2024). The development of this Masterplan is required by Policy H10 of the Local Plan.</p> <p>The priorities of the Council Plan are:</p> <p>ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.</p> <p>The Local Plan allocates land for employment sufficient to meet the future needs of the borough.</p> <p>HOMES – affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents.</p> <p>Skerningham Garden Village will contribute to meeting the boroughs housing needs, including affordable housing requirements.</p> <p>LIVING WELL – a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most.</p> <p>The existing Local Plan encourages development to consider health and wellbeing with a requirement for larger developments to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). Allowance is also made for older people’s accommodation and sets a requirement for adaptable homes.</p> <p>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations.</p>
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	<p>The Local Plan contains a mechanism to secure contributions to education provision and secure sites for new provision in key locations. The Masterplan includes site(s) reserved for future education provision.</p> <p>COMMUNITIES – working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities.</p> <p>The Masterplan will help to deliver a cohesive development at Skerningham. The development will include a new neighbourhood centre with community facilities, including a health hub. Additional local facilities will be located to support the early phases of the development.</p> <p>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough.</p> <p>The Local Plan contains numerous policies to protect both the natural and built environment. The Masterplan sets out that over 55% of the site will be retained as accessible green infrastructure, managed agricultural land, and the existing Golf Club. The development will also be required to achieve a net gain in biodiversity.</p>
Addressing inequalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the Local Plan adoption process.
Tackling Climate Change	The developer Masterplan has considered climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	The production of this Masterplan is required by Local Plan Policy H10. It has been prepared by Lichfield’s on behalf of Skerningham Estates Ltd and Banks Group.
Health and Wellbeing	Subsequent planning applications based on this Masterplan, and over 150 homes, will be required to undertake a Health Impact Assessment.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The Masterplan promotes good design and location of development, which discourages crime.
Wards Affected	Whinfield, Harrowgate Hill, Sadberge and Middleton St George, Heighington and Coniscliffe.
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This Masterplan has been developed and funded by the site developers.

Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. The Quad of Aims of the call in with the officer response are detailed in the table below:

Reasons for Call-In	Response
<p>1. Page 24 of the Masterplan quotes The Council's assumed pupil yields are 20 primary aged children and 12 secondary school aged children per 100 dwellings. However, Department of Education has this figure higher at 25 primary and 13 secondary pupils per 100 dwellings. They also go on to say that larger homes (such as the ones in Skerningham Garden Village) and newer houses will typically have more school aged children than this. Fact Sheet 5. New homes and school places GOV_UK.</p> <p>The Local Plan also references school yields. However, these yields are different to the yields in the Masterplan which are lower. This suggests that the Skerningham Masterplan is not consistent with the Local Plan Policy.</p> <p>We feel this is evidence that the decision was not taken with the principle of due consultation. Scrutiny would like to look at the data in respect of these assumptions and the discrepancy between the Council's numbers, the Department of Education's numbers and the Local Plan</p>	<p>Homes England - Fact sheet 5: New homes and school places states that 100 homes typically include 25 primary and 13 secondary school pupils. This is based on the DfE's national average pupil yield from 2021/22.</p> <p>The Local Plan at section 10.11.3 references footnote number 92 which states that 'Every 100 new houses is expected, on average, to produce between 18 and 20 primary school age children and 13-15 pupils of secondary age'. This plan was adopted in February 2022.</p> <p>School place planning is undertaken on an annual basis by Edge Analytics, an external company commissioned by TVCA to provide up to date pupil projections for the five Tees Valley local authorities. The current projections for 2024 were based on local data supplied by the council in April 2024 and reflected local housing development pupil yield.</p> <p>The primary and secondary reports from Edge Analytics state:</p> <p>Primary - Pupil yield factors have been calculated specifically for the local authority area. On average, each 100 new family homes are expected to generate approximately 20 additional primary school pupils, 18 non-RC and 2 RC. This is equivalent to 2.8 additional pupils per year group (2.5 non-RC and 0.3 RC).</p> <p>Secondary - Pupil yield factors have been calculated specifically for the local authority area. On average, each 100 new family homes is expected to generate approximately 12 additional</p>

	<p>secondary school aged pupils, 11 non-RC and 2 RC. This is equivalent to 2.5 additional pupils per year group (2.1 non-RC and 0.4 RC).</p> <p>The figures quoted on Page 24 of the Skerningham Masterplan are in line with the more recent, local, information supplied to the council, and subsequently to the developers.</p> <p>Nationally, and locally, birth rates are declining which does mean that data from previous years may have been higher. It must also be remembered that pupil yields are not exact and are averages based on an analysis of pupil data and postcodes from new housing developments.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Primary Yield per 100 dwellings</th> <th>Secondary yield per 100 dwellings</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Homes England / DfE national average 2021/22</td> <td>25</td> <td>13</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Local Plan – February 2022</td> <td>18-20</td> <td>13-15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DBC School place Planning Data – July 2024</td> <td>20</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Skerningham Masterplan</td> <td>20</td> <td>12</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Primary Yield per 100 dwellings	Secondary yield per 100 dwellings	Homes England / DfE national average 2021/22	25	13	Local Plan – February 2022	18-20	13-15	DBC School place Planning Data – July 2024	20	12	Skerningham Masterplan	20	12
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<p>2. According to a submission on 30 August 2024 to Planning Application 24/00772/FULE from Paul Richardson on behalf of the Education Department Consultee Comments for Planning Application 24/00772/FULE, it is stated that there is no spare capacity at Education Village for secondary pupils. This means that pupils will need to go to Longfield School creating a longer journey for residents living east of the East Coast Mainline.</p>	<p>The Systra modelling was developed to assess the impact of development on the highway network and was ultimately used to support delivery of the Local Plan (a statutory requirement). The modelling was based on existing traffic conditions with modelled outputs for future years – 2025, 2030 and 2035 (which more or less coincides with the end of the Plan period). These future year scenarios included housing and employment growth at all of the allocated sites within the Local Plan so did take account of</p>															

<p>Scrutiny would like to review recent traffic modelling in respect of additional car journeys in relation to this and the road capacity to ensure the infrastructure phasing is acceptable. In reviewing the Traffic Modelling info in relation to the Springfield Park Link Road which is very old, it's useful from the point that it has traffic modelling in relation to Skerningham Garden Village Skerningham Garden Village Local Plan (page 9). Without the Local Distributor Road in place and assuming 600 houses have been built at the top of Barmpton Lane, it quotes a 47.6% increase in traffic down Whinbush Way.</p> <p>The Systra traffic modelling done in January 2021 referenced in the Local Plan assumes that part of the Skerningham Link Road (Local Distributor Road) will be built from Barmpton Lane to Bishopton Lane in 2025. It also assumes that the Local Distributor Road would be completed in 2030 which was stated by Andy Casey in the Local Plan hearings. I believe that this modelling, now 5 years out of date, assuming infrastructure in place 5 years early is now of very limited value. There's no clarity on whether this traffic modelling was based on the assumption that Skerningham Garden Village would be a 20 minute neighbourhood and whether they had factored in school trips. The Local Distributor Road is not scheduled to be completed until 2036 by which time there will be 1,450 houses built with no additional schools.</p> <p>We feel that this is evidence that the decision was not taken with the principle of due consultation. Scrutiny would like to review recent traffic modelling which would include:</p> <p>a. Traffic at peak time around school time assuming pupils are using the</p>	<p>other development sites such as Burtree Garden Village. Both the strategic and microsimulation modelling assessed the impact of development of the junctions mentioned.</p> <p>The Local Plan was the subject of significant consultation culminating in an Examination in Public in 2021 where objectors and other interested parties had the opportunity to scrutinise the plan, ask questions and raise concerns. There were around 1800 representations, including attendance from a representative of the Green Party. The inspector found the evidence base of the plan (including the modelling) and the Plan itself to be sound. It was then adopted as Council policy in January 2022. Respectfully the time for scrutinising the modelling was prior to adoption of the Local Plan.</p> <p>The Local Plan adoption is not the end of the planning process. Individual developers coming forward for planning permission for sites, submitting masterplans or design codes need to take account of the policies in the local plan. In the case of the Skerningham Masterplan and specifically relating to highway infrastructure there is a need to satisfy the requirements of Policy H10 – specifically f and g (Skerningham allocation) and Policy IN1 (Delivering a Sustainable Transport Network - Strategic Policy), specifically C vi). The masterplan shows the infrastructure required by these policies and the phasing plan is in compliance with the triggers with the requirements set out in H10 g consequently the masterplan is in keeping with Local Plan and we had no objections to its approval.</p> <p>Skerningham still requires planning permission and is coming forward in phases in line with the Masterplan. The Council constitution requires that these are considered by Planning Committee in line with our statutory planning duty. This process is outside of the scope of scrutiny as it needs to follow a statutory</p>
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<p>existing schools. Assumptions on per number of pupils per 100 houses should also show numbers based on the Department of Education.</p> <p>b. Traffic modelling for general non school traffic</p> <p>c. Traffic modelling should also factor in the additional traffic coming from the Burtree Garden Village</p> <p>d. Traffic modelling should look at how Whinbush Way/ Salters Lane North / Longfield Road / North Road are impacted</p>	<p>process. The latest modelling for this area has been developed by Stantec (previously Fore Consulting) on behalf of the applicant. This is provided to support the submission and is the property of the developer. The modelling report will be available on the planning portal for any members or members of the public to read and make comments. Members would need to make and pass comments on this through the planning portal. Officers will similarly make comments through the portal.</p>
<p>3. The Systra Report entitled Skerningham Railway Crossing - Feasibility Study looks at the various routes for the Local Distributor Road to cross the railway. It considered 4 options, all of which avoided the woods. Point 5.1.5 states 'An area of dense woodland is located to the east of the ECML. For each option, a roundabout has been shown to the east of the ECML to ensure that the proposed link road can divert past and not impact upon the woodland'. However, the Masterplan shows the road going straight through the Skerningham plantation. In the Local Plan, policy H10, item i, vi), it states that wherever possible the Skerningham Garden Village development should retain and enhance hedgerow and trees that contribute to landscape character. We feel that this is evidence that the decision was not taken with the principle of explaining what options were considered and giving reasons for the decision. Scrutiny would like to review any relevant documents that consider these routes and see why the decision was taken to choose an option that goes through Skerningham Woods.</p>	<p>Neither the Local Plan, the Design Code or the Masterplan define the route of the Local Distributor Road. The route of the road as indicated in the Masterplan follows the indicative route shown in Figure 6.2 in the Local Plan with all development to the south of the road. This is therefore not in conflict with the Local Plan.</p> <p>The Local Plan Policy H 10 requires a local distributor road between the A167 and A1150. The Policy goes on to say “Precise details of the road and development access points, together with a timetable for implementation, shall be agreed with the Council as part of the comprehensive masterplan, infrastructure phasing plan and any future planning applications.”</p> <p>The final design and route will be part of planning applications submitted through various phases.</p> <p>Policy H 10 also states in i (ii) that the development should “protects and enhances the River Skerne, its valley setting (See Policy ENV 7), and the green corridors (See Policy ENV 3). Where infrastructure crosses these corridors mitigation measures should be provided:”</p> <p>Mitigation measures will be considered as part of the consideration of any planning application.</p> <p>The masterplan is not therefore in conflict with the Local Plan.</p>

	<p>Local Plan Policy H 10 i (vi) does state “wherever possible retains and enhances hedgerows and trees that contribute to landscape character.”</p> <p>The use of the word wherever recognises that this cannot be possible in all cases but will be mitigated against through this Policy and the statutory requirement for a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain.</p> <p>The Systra report which was commissioned by Darlington Borough Council solely deals with the crossing of the East Coast Main Line and not any detail of the rest of the route. The report was designed to look at the technical design of any crossings and their feasibility. The consultants brief did not include any work involved in the further alignment of the Local Distributor Road. The developers are not governed by anything within the Systra report.</p> <p>There are no further documents regarding the route of the bridge crossing.</p>
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