

ECONOMY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 9 January 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Baker (Chair), Coe, Dillon, Durham, Haszeldine, Henderson, Marshall, McGill, Ray and Mrs Scott

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor McEwan (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy) and Councillor Porter (Cabinet Member for Resources)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Mark Ladyman (Assistant Director Economic Growth), Anthony Hewitt (Assistant Director Highways and Capital Projects), Andrew Casey (Head of Highway Network Management), David Hand (Head of Service for Planning Policy, Economic Strategy and Environment), Paul Richardson (Head of Skills and Employability), David Nelson (Planning Officer), James Hewitt (Planning Officer) and Olivia Hugill (Democratic Officer)

ER128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ian Haszeldine declared he had confirmed with the Assistant Director of Law and Governance that it would not be a conflict of Interest to attend the Special Meeting of Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee as the Chair of the Planning Committee.

ER129 SKERNINGHAM MASTERPLAN

A report (previously circulated) was submitted following the receipt of a 'call-in' from Cabinet held on 3 December 2024 (Minute C76) in relation to its decision in respect of the Skerningham Masterplan. The 'call-in' was taken in accordance with the Council's Constitution and had been submitted by four Members of this Scrutiny Committee.

In opening the meeting, the Chair advised Members as to the background to the call in and how she intended to manage the meeting in terms of time allocation, Members and public questions and formulating a view, if needed, to Cabinet.

The Chair invited those Members who had signed the documentation and who had requested that the decision be 'called-in' to outline their reasons for that decision and, in doing so, the Members raised questions and sought clarification to understand the School Yields data in respect of these assumptions and the discrepancy between the Council's numbers, the Department of Education's numbers and the Local Plan, and to review recent traffic modelling in respect of additional car journeys and the road capacity to ensure the infrastructure phasing is acceptable, and to review relevant documents that considered the routes of the Skerningham Masterplan and to see why the decision was taken to choose an option that goes through Skerningham Woods.

The Chair opened the meeting up to questions in the order of the documentation given by the 4 Members of the Committee. Members asked if there is a legal duty for Council's numbers and DFE's numbers to be matched, officers explained that the Council's numbers are based on the national average across England and that the latest July numbers had been given to the developers. Members asked for a breakdown on how the Council will obtain these numbers based on Darlington's school for this development.

Further clarification was sought on how many secondary school children will be able to attend the Education Village during Phase 1 of the development or if they would have to attend Longfield Academy. Officers explained that due to the new Ofsted Inspection carried out at Longfield Academy it is expected for numbers to become available at the Education Village.

Members scrutinised whether the number of spaces available at Longfield Academy had also included the consideration of the Burtree Garden Village Development, Officers explained that all housing developments are included in the pupil projections.

Members asked how the layout of the Skerningham Masterplan would affect Longfield Academy and the Education Village based on what part of the development people would reside in. Officers advised that each development is assigned a school, but also parental preference will be factored in too.

Questions then moved on to the second part of the document submitted by the 4 members of the Scrutiny Committee, Members stated that they would find an updated Traffic Modelling useful. Officers advised that the Traffic Model is reliable and valid for 5 years. Members feel that Bishopton Lane should be reserved for residents, cyclists etc.

Members referred to paragraph 15 of the Cabinet Report and asked for clarity with regards to how the Masterplan Document sits underneath the Local Plan and Design code. Conversation then ensued onto the Distributor Road and the bridge scheduled in the final Phase. Members scrutinised whether there would be issues with the initiation of the distributor road until the Little Burden Roundabout improvements had been completed. Other attendees of the meeting wanted clarification on how the traffic around the Whinfield area would be able to cope with the Development.

Questions opened for the final part of the document signed by Members of the Committee. Members went on to discuss how the Masterplan should have included precise details of the Distributor Road that would go through Skerningham Woods.

RESOLVED - That, In relation to all three of the areas specified in the Call in , having considered and heard all the information presented to and at this meeting, this Scrutiny Committee is satisfied with the decision of Cabinet at Minute C76, and that no further action in relation to the call-in is required.