

Questions submitted on Notice for the Ordinary Meeting of the Council – Thursday, 30 January 2025

Question No.	Question received from	Respondent	Question
1.	Mr. Michael WALKER	Councillor McEWAN	<p>‘According to section F04 of the climate change action plan, Darlington Borough Council, a council described by Cllr Harker as having a "financial black hole", are planning to "Have a pool of low emission/hybrid/electric cars for staff to use for work related travel to try and encourage staff members to travel to and from work more sustainably." I notice that in the most recent report the timescale for this is "ongoing" and "limited/no progress" has been made. Please can you tell me what progress has been made, how many electric cars will be purchased by the council and the total cost of this initiative?’</p>
2.	Mr. Kevin BRACK	Councillor McEWAN	<p>‘Regarding the licence granted on 17 December 2024 by the Executive Director - Environment, Highways and Community Services,</p> <p>See the attached decision details Decision - Grant of Licence to install column mounted MultiTech Series 200 LoRaWAN gateway antenna and power supply units to circa 200 Lighting Columns across the Borough (to be identified in a schedule) for the purpose of monitoring water smart meters for Nort Darlington Borough Council</p> <p>Given that Darlington's street lights were changed to save energy, can you specify the electricity consumption used by the column-mounted antennas in the following states: standby, receiving, and transmission? Additionally, is the company responsible for the billing of this electricity usage, or are taxpayers expected to bear this cost through council tax?</p> <p>The council granted a licence to install column-mounted MultiTech Series 200 LoRaWAN gateway antennas and power supply units to approximately 200 lighting columns across the Borough, as identified in a schedule, for the purpose of monitoring water smart meters for Northumbrian Water.’</p>
3.	Mr. Alan MACNAB	Councillor McEWAN	<p>‘I know the Skerningham Master Plan is not a Council document but nevertheless the Cabinet and a Scrutiny Committee considered it and found it to be sound. You said at Cabinet that the Master Plan was imperfect but it would be improved over time. There were clear contradictions in the Master Plan with the Local Plan and the</p>

			<p>Skerningham Design Code. You have been given the contradictions which were pointed out by Whinfield Residents Association and by residents.</p> <p>I have a number of years' experience of policy development and report writing for consideration by senior officers and elected members. I would have been rightly criticised if I put an unsound document to senior officers and elected members; the document would have been deferred to ensure that there were no contradictions. The Master Plan comes into the category of an unsound document.</p> <p>My question is why did you allow such an imperfect document to be presented to Cabinet when you knew there were contradictions in it and not sent back to the authors of the Master Plan for the contradictions to be eliminated. What were your reasons for taking this action?</p> <p>Supplementary: Residents found contradictions between the Skerningham Master Plan and the Local Plan and Design Code which were pointed out. If residents found there were contradictions why didn't the officers or if they did find them, why did they not take the necessary action to get them corrected?' </p>
4.	Leigh TAYLOR	Councillor GARNER	<p>'Our council took part in last year's <i>16 Days</i> campaign to highlight Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). It is especially pertinent to our area when the ONS Crime Survey shows <i>'The highest rate of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded by the police was in the North East (19 incidents per 1,000 population) in YE March 2024.'</i></p> <p>I followed one of the council's Facebook post links to the domestic abuse page. When I clicked on the <i>'Support for Women'</i> page the text read: <i>"The council is aware of the importance of understanding there are more genders than male and female."</i> It was the same on the <i>'Support for Men'</i> page.</p> <p>I looked for a <i>'Support for People whose Genders aren't Male or Female'</i> section but there isn't one. I couldn't find any further references to the other <i>'genders'</i> on any of the domestic abuse pages.</p> <p>Therefore, the relevance of the statement is puzzling.</p>

			<p>Publicly available data shows that perpetrators of domestic abuse are overwhelmingly male, and the victims or survivors are overwhelmingly female.</p> <p>The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates <i>‘approximately 7 in 100 women and 3 in 100 men’</i> experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2024 [1].</p> <p>The Home Office’s Homicide Index data show that <i>‘65.4% of the victims of domestic homicide were female’. ‘Of the 231 female domestic homicide victims, the suspect was male in the majority of cases (224). For male domestic homicide victims, the suspect was female in 39 cases out of 122. (YE March 2021 to YE March 2023).</i></p> <p>Cllr Garner, please could you explain</p> <p>When and how the council arrived at its statement, <i>‘The council is aware of the importance of understanding there are more genders than male and female.’</i> Eg who advised it</p> <p>What does ‘understanding’ mean in terms of policy and provision</p> <p>What objective, stable & measurable criteria does the council use to categorise residents who are <i>‘more genders than male and female</i></p> <p>What is the data for those categorised as <i>‘more genders than male and female’</i></p> <p>And, in Darlington, what is the support offered and the resulting outcomes for those categorised as <i>‘more genders than male and female’</i> in comparison to those who are categorised as male or female?’</p>
5.	Suzanne WOOD	Councillor GARNER	<p>The infrastructure have predicted the occurrence of blackouts in the UK caused by the shortage of electricity.</p> <p>What plans have been prepared by Darlington Council to help the people of Darlington through these problems.</p>

6.	Jack JAMES	Councillor McEWAN	<p>"Just over 200 days ago, the British people elected a Labour Government. A super majority in the House of Commons which can pass legislation at the drop of a hat."</p> <p>"Since the 5th July 2024 there has been little hope for small businesses up and down this country, not just in Darlington."</p> <p>"Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer have backtracked on their election promises. Our economy is in decline. Our pensioners, our children, our small business owners, our NHS workers and many more face one of the most uncertain times."</p> <p>"Labour are out of touch with the working people of our country. As demonstrated yesterday at PMQs when Labour MPs cheered to the idea that the Employment Bill introduced by the Government would be the biggest expansion of trade union power ever."</p> <p>"Not helped of course by the Labour, Liberal and Green Councillors who blocked the motion to provide vital support needed to our local business over the Christmas Period despite being labelled as a lifeline for our local businesses."</p> <p>"But what makes this even more unbelievable is that you promised if elected as Mayor of the Tees Valley that you would and I quote "Bring back free parking to breathe life into our struggling town centres."</p> <p>"Isn't it strange that when elections come round Labour promises the world, yet deliver so little. Much like our Labour MP who has only just opened a constituency office. The people of Darlington deserve much, much better."</p> <p>"Children in this town need to feel proud of the place they live They need role models to look up to and the comfort that they can open a small business in this town and be supported by the local authority, something which is clearly lacking under this Labour administration."</p> <p>"So Councillor McEwan, please justify to the people of Darlington why you made this commitment whilst</p>
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			<p>seeking higher office yet fail to deliver on it now."</p> <p>"Could you please also provide further justification as to why this administration decided to fail our business owners despite knowing that our local area was failing and continues too."</p> <p>"And perhaps you could provide me with some real data and information which shows that by implementing this decision you would not be improving our town centre because voting it down clearly shows you feel this way."</p> <p>"I do hope you can answer my questions rather than differing as so many Labour Party officials do to a hysterical £22 billion black hole and 14-years of a Conservative Government."</p>
7.	Leanne CARROLL	Councillor McEWAN	<p>'The landfill at Skerningham closed in 2004/2005 and was capped, however it is still actively and strongly venting gas all these years on. There is video evidence of this. The gas can be both odourless or eggy and seems to intensify during wet weather. Recently when it snowed, one of the vent stacks releasing gas was so loud it almost sounded like a boiling kettle. These loud hissing pipes have been reported to the Environment Agency on their incident hotline. The Environment Agency suggest a stand-off zone of 250m for any new housing. When Skerningham was deemed unsuitable for development in 2015, one constraint was high risk of contamination from the landfill. With responsibility for monitoring the site for gas emissions at the surface and for sub-surface migration lying with the operator, Thompsons of Prudhoe, who are required to submit six monthly reports, an Environmental Information Request submitted to the Environment Agency by a fellow resident revealed there are no Compliance Assessment Reports available for the period from the site's closure in 2004/2005 until 2019, when the reports are resumed noting the lack of compliance. It would be interesting to know if the Council requested to see compliance reports before including Skerningham for housing in the Local Plan in 2017, however my question is does the Council accept the recommendation of the Environment Agency that no houses should be built within 250m of the landfill and if the Council disagrees with this 250m buffer, how do they intend to evidence that decision in the light of the new information about off-gassing that Thompsons have never reported? Please do not answer this by saying this will be dealt with at planning-application stage, I would like an answer at this meeting, please.'</p>