

City of Durham Trust

Bent House Lane Housing Development

Review of Heritage, Green Belt and Landscape Significance

1. Introduction

The Trust wishes to draw attention to a number of factors to be considered alongside other requirements in the evolution of the masterplan for the housing site. There were weaknesses and underestimates of significance within the County Durham Plan's generalised supporting documents assessing the green belt and heritage significance. There are also points of weakness in the initial assessment submitted for this housing site as part of the County Durham Plan (CDP) consultation.

Ultimately, the impact of the Trust's review is to draw greater attention to the impact on significance and the sensitivity of the site and particularly its lead edges.

This review attempts to isolate some of the key points while attempting to avoid duplication of previous work. It will help the Trust form its comments on any subsequent proposals.

2. Visual Setting

Key View Areas

- A. The role of the River Wear and its 'green fingers' as it flows into and out of Durham City is generally understood. For this site, the valley sides are important features and their role in defining the setting of the historic city and the World Heritage Site (WHS) is of relevance.
- B. There is a relatively well defined area surrounding the site enclosed by the valley sides of the Wear and tributaries, stretching as far as Shincliffe Bridge. Beyond a pinch point at Shincliffe it extends westwards towards Sunderland Bridge and eastwards along the River Pitting (Old Durham /Sherburn House Becks) to Sherburn House. This is unnecessarily fragmented into different zones in the CDP Green Belt assessment.
- C. The development site forms part of the broadly defined inner setting boundary as previously indicated. Including and beyond the WHS inner setting, the area is a key part of the Green Belt and Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV).
- D. The rising valley sides and their topography offer occasional views of the WHS and the site. Within the City these also form a sequence of hillsides with viewpoints of the WHS.
- E. Beyond the valley sides there is an intermediate terrace that also offers occasional views of the WHS and site.
- F. In the distance the secondary area of rising ground defines the plateau to west and south.

Additional Views are shown in Appendix 1.

These are:

- A. View to the WHS from the tree belt fringing the site at Bent House Lane – shows the potential for City Centre and WHS views back to site boundary
- B. View to the Sherburn Road Estate and site boundary from the Old Durham Gardens entrance and informal parking area.
- C. View to the Sherburn Road Estate and site boundary from Mill Lane close to Shincliffe Kennels

- D. Glimpse view of the WHS from close by Mill Lane /A1(M) bridge
- E. Panoramic view of the site and WHS from Whitwell Grange
- F. View to the site from the A1(M) approaching from the south
- G. WHS panoramic view from Grand View – detailed view
- H. Panoramic view from site at Bent House Lane – shows the range of potential views into the site
- I. Panoramic view from Observatory Hill – shows the WHS and Sherburn Road estate – edge of the site
- J. Panoramic view from High Shincliffe– shows the WHS and Sherburn Road estate
- K. Distant view from Sunderland Bridge – shows Sherburn Road estate. This is also an important glimpse view from Croxdale railway viaduct

3. View Limitations

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) approach to establishing views, receptors and photographs is very useful, especially when incorporating modelling of new development proposals. However, it has limitations when used in relation to Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). It can fail to capture the way people both see and respond to views and the depth of cultural context. It can also limit the assessment of Green Belt impact assessment and to some extent the AHLV.

It is to be noted that the International Council on Monuments and Site (ICOMOS) advice on assessing WHS impact also draws attention to inherent problems within the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process:

'EIA frequently disaggregates all the possible cultural heritage attributes and assesses impact on them separately, through discrete receptors such as protected buildings, archaeological sites, and specified view-points with their view cones, without applying the lens of OUV to the overall ensemble of attributes.'

And

'Cumulative impacts and incremental changes (adverse) may also more easily pass undetected.'

There are instances where significance is based upon a broader and more dynamic approach:

- A. The static standard viewpoints fail to pick up wider panoramic views, people constantly adjust their view to take in more than a standard camera angle and respond more to detail.
- B. People's experience of views is mostly dynamic as they move around a landscape or heritage area. A complex sequence of static views would reveal this but is very cumbersome. Key approaches to the Cathedral, for instance, have a view to the WHS that comes and goes with the variations in topography, trees and buildings but can be very important in understanding significance. A major detractor will have a bearing on people's perception particularly if it is passed on the approach to an asset.
However, this does not imply that a particular view is dispensable in the context of an approach offering multiple views – this has wrongly been used to help justify loss of views in Durham. It should show the need to raise the importance of the links between viewpoints and not weaken support for views.
- C. For this WHS the first view of the Cathedral and Tower was very significant for pilgrims and those associated with the religious estate. What appears small in a standard photographic view was, and to some extent still is, important to people approaching the WHS.

- D. Major historic assets and the setting to them accumulate a substantial wealth of intangible significance through use and cultural evolution. This adds weight to their appreciation and can flavour current appreciation of assets. This has been drawn into the recent WHS Management Plan.
- E. There are also nighttime views from buildings, roads or paths still in use outside of daylight hours.

4. Negative and Cumulative Impact

There are a number of obvious detractors affecting the area surrounding the site.

The two River Wear green approaches have both suffered from developments impacting negatively on their extent and quality. From Frankland, the Milburngate and Riverwalk developments have both reduced views of the WHS and inner setting. The new DCC headquarters building and car park have obscured a WHS view and extended buildings into the green edge of the city.

From the south running past this site, Maiden Castle Sports Centre has a very substantial negative impact by day and night within the landscape, the setting to Old Durham and Maiden Castle. The A1(M) is also a significant detractor, visually and through noise and light intrusion. The proposed University Business School remains a potential threat.

The Sherburn Road estate (and corner development to Bent House Lane) is very high impact as it sits on the skyline and intrudes into the valley, distant views and the edge of the WHS inner setting. To a minor extent the tree belt to the edge of the estate softens the view of the lead houses but does not obscure it. The estate intrudes into the setting of Old Durham Gardens, Maiden Castle, the Bent House Lane approach down into the valley and can be seen as far away as Sunderland Bridge, especially at night.

More minor but locally noticeable intrusions are the overhead electric supply cables supplying buildings within the valley area.

As mentioned, the A1(M) and Maiden Castle Sports Centre are serious light polluters and the impact of Sherburn Road estate is increased at night by house and street lighting. A previous study indicated the value of the area close to the WHS for its dark setting – helping create the night time character of the WHS and allow increased impact for the WHS floodlighting.

All these can be variously drawn in as cumulative impacts of varying intensity in relation to the site, with special emphasis on the adjacent development.

Attention is drawn to the recent comment by ICOMOS on the University Business School proposal:

‘This proposal (Business School) highlights the high vulnerability of the immediate setting of the property (WHS) and ICOMOS advises that a reappraisal of regulations for the immediate setting of the property should be undertaken urgently to ensure that development is limited and, where appraise (sic), is of a size and form that is compatible with supporting attributes of OUV.’

What constitutes ‘Immediate setting’ has yet to be defined but in the context of the WHS management Plan is likely to mean inner setting.

5. Key Areas of Significance

The River Wear Valley

This is both site and setting of a significant number of historically important built and natural assets. It has its own significance because of the density and number of these – including those close to the Bent House Lane site. Its use from the Norman invasion onwards is clearly demonstrated and the later control by the Cathedral was very extensive, affecting all of Durham City's surrounds. It offers a very rich layering of assets and associated cultural significance.

World Heritage Site

As noted, the lead parts of the site and Sherburn Road estate form the broadly defined boundary to the WHS inner setting. The boundary follows the skyline and defines the approach down to Old Durham and onward to the WHS. The inner setting is the key area containing the WHS and its historic city context – separating the city core from later development and maintaining its small scale emphasising the impact of the WHS. The inner setting is not wholly dependent on direct views from the WHS. However, there will be views to the lead edge of the site from the Castle buildings and cross-city views over the WHS from a range of private buildings in the inner city.

Pilgrimage approaches and Cathedral tower views were and still are significant. Historic routes are not fully identified but there are references to pilgrims approaching for the south, probably through the area surrounding the site. The relationship to the WHS is not only defined by where the Cathedral and tower are visible from. The depiction of the tower intervisibility area shown in the WHS Management Plan is only indicative and is not to be relied upon for analysis of this site.

Old Durham and Old Durham Gardens

These have accumulated historical and cultural significance. The Gardens specifically relate to Cathedral views. Their setting is partly contained within the local topography but Bent House Lane and the approach road are very significant in appreciation of both landscape and WHS. The setting extends out to the edge of Sherburn Road estate and the site.

Maiden Castle

Often missed from appraisals, this is an important Iron Age fort and has its own very extensive landscape setting extending through to the site, the valley and beyond. It is important in cross-city views.

Roman Remains

Little is known of the villa discovered through remains that were removed during gravel workings, there is no visible presence. The potential route of the often mentioned but more elusive Cade's Road is thought to extend across the valley area and had river crossings. There is cumulative cultural significance from these.

Nineteenth Century Industrial Development

Now almost entirely removed with only some railway and wagonway remains, there was a significant area of colliery workings, railways and brick/tile works. This was through the River Pitting area (Shincliffe Bottoms approximately). This development is an important part of County Durham and the City's evolution.

Sherburn House

This was a religious establishment with clear links with the Cathedral. This is now weakened by the severance caused by the A1(M) but still has a footpath link with a significant view of the WHS.

Site of Shincliffe Mill and Shincliffe Historic Bridges

There are no remains of either but there may possibly be remnants of the Mill's water system. They are part of the cultural significance of the area. The remaining parts of the 1826 Bridge are significant and to a limited extent have their own setting.

A1(M)

As well as being a detractor, the motorway offers a view from the south that is the first view of Durham city for a large numbers of vehicle travellers and the site is prominent in that view.

The Green Belt

The area collects together various settings and assets. It has its own criteria for significance but should be scored highly for its prevention of sprawl into Wear Valley edges and skylines, prevention of convergence with surrounding villages, safeguarding the countryside and most of all, the City setting. So far the DCC appraisal and Banks Property CDP landscape submission have undervalued it. The site is more visible than supposed and is more present in historic asset settings and key landscape areas.

Area of High Landscape Value

The surrounding areas and settings are clearly of high value, despite changes caused by the former industrial area, hedgerow loss and A1(M) intrusion. The site has a role in offering views to the higher value areas and new development will cause view loss and reduce the quality of the surrounding landscape.

Biodiversity

Without access to biodiversity audits, this is assumed. There are various ecological impacts possible from extension of development on the valley area. The valley, river and tributaries together with wooded habitats will be significant. The gorge immediately surrounding the WHS is noted for its distinctive biodiversity. There is a relationship to the climate emergency and its impacts and therefore issues relating to the Wear catchment. The site and its drainage will relate to this.

6. Potential Impact on Significance

Part of the capacity of development on the site to impact on the significance the Trust identifies has been acknowledged. This review returns to the same key part of the site. This is its lead edge but with the addition of all of the leading part of the site rather than just its boundary.

The difference is that the Trust identifies a greater extent of WHS inner setting within the site, greater visibility of the development site and increased significance in relation to a number of key assets and areas. It is a very sensitive area in relation to landscape, Green Belt and heritage. It also identifies as a secondary area of sensitivity the remainder of the site for views across the landscape and distant viewpoints and approaches. The way site layout and design relate to this, and how

offsite mitigation can be effective, will determine whether the site development is of high negative and cumulative impact or whether this is minimised.

Lighting will also be capable of being a substantial intrusion due to the raised position of the site. Building and street layout will affect night-time views.

Tree belts as already suggested may not achieve the necessary mitigation due to the topography and relatively slow growth.

This review does not deal with energy sustainability and tree screening may negatively affect solar performance of buildings.

Appendix 1 – Additional Views



A) *Clear and significant view to the WHS from Bent House Lane as it crosses the site tree boundary.*



B) *View to the Sherburn Road Estate and site boundary from Old Durham Gardens entrance and informal parking area.*

(Possibly view 12 missing from Banks Property CDP submitted landscape assessment)



C) *View to the Sherburn Road Estate and site boundary from Mill Lane, Shincliffe Kennels to the right. (Broadly similar to Banks Property CDP Submission View 4)*



D) *Glimpse view of the WHS from close by Mill Lane /A1(M) bridge and Banks Property CDP Submission View 5*



E) *Panoramic view of the site and WHS from Whitwell Grange*



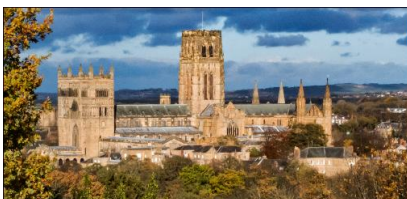
F) Substitute for view from A1(M) into the site approaching from the South



G) WHS panoramic view from Grand View – site is to right of Sherburn Road estate (Approximately as can be seen from Banks property CDP submission View 9)



H) Panoramic view from Bent House Lane – detail reveals potential viewpoints into the site from west and south.



I) Panoramic view from Observatory Hill – shows WHS and Sherburn Road estate – edge of Banks site.



J) Panoramic view from High Shincliffe– shows WHS and Sherburn Road estate



*K) Distant view from
Sunderland Bridge –
shows Sherburn Road
estate*