

# THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt,LLP  
Aire House  
Mandale Business Park  
Belmont  
Durham, DH1 1TH  
24 February 2021

Dear Ms Jennings,

## **DM/21/00269/FPA Finchale Abbey Farm Brasside Durham DH1 5SH**

*Retrospective planning on the installation of 2 small wooden holiday accommodation structures 'pods'*

The City of Durham Trust wishes to object to this application based on poor and inappropriate design and harm to the Green Belt and setting of a scheduled ancient monument and listed buildings. It is concerning that the pods have been on site since 2015 without planning permission given that the applicants and their advisers should have been fully aware that this is required, especially considering the substantial planning history of the site.

### **1. Context.**

Finchale Abbey is an important historic asset, Grade 1 listed and scheduled ancient monument. Its particular attributes and history rely on its rural, landscape riverside setting. The Abbey Farmhouse is Grade II \* listed. The complex has close connections with the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site and the route back to the City.

It is within the Green Belt area separating Chester le Street and Durham City.

The holiday park adjacent to it has steadily grown and now includes fixed units and pitches for camping and caravans together with support facilities. The tourist use can be seen as beneficial to Durham's tourist economy. Although select views are available that avoid the holiday park, the touring part of the site intrudes with its fixed buildings into the scheduled monument area. In summer caravans and campers sit immediately on the boundary with the Abbey remains. The Trust is unaware of any landscape separation between the Priory remains and Park other than close to the riverbank. Some outlying remains sit within the touring park.

The Trust has previously expressed concerns about the growth of the site and its impact. A substantial part of the Park area is in frequent/permanent residential use billed as a retirement eco-village. It has a substantial impact on part of the setting, especially when fully in use by touring caravans and for camping. The Trust is not aware of plans or implementation of a required landscape plan or buffer zone for a watercourse for the touring site from a previous 2009 planning approval (**see 4\_09\_00124\_FPA-DELEGATED\_REPORT-15139**). Any further extension of the touring area or intensification of use is therefore of great concern.

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## 2. Proposal

The site of the two pods expands the accommodation area beyond that in use for touring caravans and camping. They are beyond the boundary established in the planning application approved in 2009. The full extent of summer use across the Park is difficult to establish but these are permanent structures. They are not in direct view of the Abbey remains and sit close to the boundary of the Scheduled Monument Area within its immediate setting. In the absence of a publicly available landscape scheme it seems that they occupy space that could be usefully planted to screen out the basic brick and tile camping site toilet block. They are also close to the range of farm buildings.

The siting is ad hoc and the design is poor, the top and sides are heavily tile covered. They have no relationship to buildings on site by materials or design.

## 3. Impact

As noted the pods expand the touring camping site over what appeared to be a grass area. They are permanent and are close to the boundary of the Scheduled Monument Area. They also stand as structures in the Green Belt Area.

The Trust's view is that they are not essential to the local economy or the Holiday Park. They do not form appropriate facilities for outdoor 'recreation' and are not on previously developed land. They are a built intrusion onto the openness of the Green Belt and interfere with its purpose of preventing progressive joining up of the built areas between Durham City and Chester le Street and maintaining the countryside against encroachment. They are inappropriate in the setting to listed buildings and the Scheduled Ancient Monument. The Park has been progressively more intensively developed and this is another increase.

There may be pressure for such developments in the Green Belt and this would both act as a very poor precedent generally and in relation to any further proposals for this Park.

The apparent previous failure to submit and implement a landscape plan also should count against approving a further development before being certain what should be included in that plan.

## 4. Policy

The proposal is not in accordance with **County Durham Plan (CDP) Policy 20**. This is because it fails against the test for appropriate exceptions in **Section 13 para. 145 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**. It fails against **NPPF Para 133** in that it will not keep the land permanently open and is counter to the openness of the Green Belt land and purposes in **NPPF 134 b) and c)**.

There is a failure to give due regard to the setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument or the form, setting or materials of the Site's listed buildings. It will fail when determined as required in **County Durham Plan Policy 44 Historic Environment, Designated Assets Paras. a and b**.

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The poor design and ad hoc siting will also fail the proposal against the requirement of **CDP Policy 29 a** to contribute positively to the area's character, identity or heritage significance.

## 5. Summary

The Trust objects to the proposal because of its non essential intensification of the Holiday Park over a previously undeveloped area, its poor design in relation to the Scheduled Ancient Monument and listed buildings settings. It considers that the proposal is non essential and counter to the purposes of the green Belt and will cause cumulative harm when added to previous negative impacts from the Park development and use. It is also of great concern that the Environment Agency objects to the application because there is no flood risk assessment.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe  
Chair, City of Durham Trust