

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
11 March 2022

Dear Mr Harding,

DM/21/04262/FPA Mount Oswald Golf Club South Road Durham DH1 3TQ

12 no. dwellings and alterations to existing access road

The Trust wishes to object to this application based on its failure to offer sufficient design quality, meet sustainability requirements, and justify the change from self-build units.

Context

Much of the Mt Oswald site is either developed or being developed for housing. There is also the University's South College development to the North. This site is immediately adjacent to Mt Oswald House and its parkland setting being developed for the County Council's flagship registry office and history centre.

The promise of the original Mt Oswald application and its vision of a central parkland with low density, high value housing to help attract occupants linked to inward investment has steadily been eroded. The original five unit permission (17/02688) was the remnant of this concept – offering innovative design and high sustainability through prefabrication in Sweden by Trivselhus. This too has now proved illusory.

The housing built and underway on the site shows little design distinctiveness yet is now unfortunately quoted as a good example for part of the Sniperley urban extension. It is little different to the approach taken in the same developer's proposals for the Sherburn Road/Bent House Lane urban extension. They are like other basic volume housebuilding projects across England, with almost no demonstration of distinctiveness related to this location and to Durham City. The tree enclave setting reflects the example of the urban expansion green belt deletion site of the former police skid pan, Aykley Heads. That awaits determination and its proposals completely fail so far to work with the setting to create a distinctive and positive new development. In contrast, the proposed history centre, although a large contemporary development, has been specifically evolved to preserve the parkland setting of Mt Oswald House. This has been overlooked in this housing submission.

The requirements and expectations for housing in terms of sustainably energy provision are changing. Gas boilers are to be prohibited for new developments within three years (2025) and banned completely within 13 years (2035). The ban may impact on this development within its build-out period and certainly within the expected lifespan of the housing. Retrofitting of alternative heating is substantially more expensive than incorporating it when built. Heat pumps, for instance, need specific means of heat distribution to be properly effective. County

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Durham Plan (CDP) and Durham City Neighbourhood Plan (DCNP) policies both require energy sustainability.

Proposal

The submitted Design/Access and Planning statements offer no reasons why the original promise of five units was not delivered and how the increase to twelve can preserve any of the innovation and sustainability of the original proposal. There is no explanation for this final abandonment of the original parkland concept which was a material element in the applicant's case for the development of the Mount Oswald site.

The Trust can find no distinctiveness within the design and its relationship to the immediate location and more widely to Durham City. There is nothing to distinguish this proposal from the rest of the site and from other housing developments. The basic elements of the design can be found in volume house building throughout England. There is a reference to 'County Durham aesthetic', but it is difficult to imagine what this might be – Durham City alone has many character areas, as is shown in the County Council's own Conservation Area Appraisals. The County covers a wide variety of building and character types stretching from the Coast to the Dales.

Although not well resolved by the original application, this part of the site has a very clear relationship to the Mt Oswald House parkland – it will be entered through the gatehouses. The new access starts within the defined historic park area, and the development site and its trees can be seen as creating the extended setting to the former park and the principal house.

The sustainability checklist offers very little extra, simply an electric car charger. It is based on conventional gas heating. In the context of losing a highly sustainable Trivselhus product it offers only disappointment and failure.

The application has information failures that need resolving. The biodiversity baseline is presented but the net gain is missing. The sustainability checklist attaches plans for Seaham Garden Village and the Jade Business Park – not this site. The form appears to have been cut and pasted.

In summary;

1. No justification is given for dropping the original proposals and increasing the density from 5 to 12 units.
2. The site character analysis is weak – this area relates to the Mt Oswald House and its setting, offering a substantial opportunity to create a distinctive landscaped housing development. This potential has been ignored.
3. The design is not distinctive and bears no relation to Durham or the intrinsic site character.
4. Sustainability is not achieved, and the proposals are a shift backwards from the previous approval.

The proposal represents a lost opportunity to create a flagship development for Durham City through design and sustainability measures, one that would be in keeping with the present Government's emphasis on quality of design and worthy of appearing in design publications as an example of high quality housing. It is a disappointing outcome that the applicant's original

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development vision has been so badly eroded that it is reduced to lacklustre standard proposals that can be seen in many other places.

Policies

The proposals fail against Planning Policies as follows:

County Durham Plan:

Policy 29 Sustainable Design

Failure generally to ensure that the development proposals will achieve well designed buildings and place.

a. Failure to contribute positively to an area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape, and landscape features, and help to create and reinforce a locally distinctive and sustainable community.

c. Failure to demonstrate minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions, to achieve zero carbon buildings and providing renewable and low carbon energy generation,

Landscape proposals fail to:

g. Respond creatively to topography and to existing features of landscape or heritage interest and wildlife habitats.

h. Respect and where appropriate take opportunities to create attractive views of and from the site.

i. Reflect in the detailed design any features characteristic of the locality such as boundaries, paving materials and plant species.

j. (*To fully*) create opportunities for wildlife including though the use of locally native species.

k. Make appropriate provision for maintenance and long term management; and

l. *Ensure that the edge of settlement development will provide for an appropriate level of structural landscaping to screen or assimilate the development into its surroundings and provide an attractive new settlement boundary.*

Building for Life

There is a failure to demonstrate how the new residential development will meet the Building for Life 12 standards provided for in County Durham Building for Life Supplementary Planning Document (2019).

Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

Policy S1: Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development, Conservation, preservation, and enhancement of Our Neighbourhood:

The development proposals fail to demonstrate the following principles by:

c) Not harmonising with its context in terms of scale, layout, density, massing, height, materials, colour, and hard and soft landscaping.

d) Not conserving the significance of the setting, character, local distinctiveness, important views, tranquillity and the contribution made to the sense of place by Our Neighbourhood's designated and non-designated heritage assets.

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Failure to ensure fully the responsible use of resources and increase in resilience to climate change by not:

- g) Efficiently incorporating use of local and renewable building materials through sensitive design, layout, density, and orientation.
- h) Fully minimising energy consumption and carbon emissions,

Policy H3: Our Neighbourhood Outside the Conservation Areas

The development proposals fail to demonstrate an understanding of the area of the proposed development and its relationship to Our Neighbourhood as a whole.

The development proposals outside of the Conservation Area do not take into account or meet the following requirements, by:

- a) Failing to sustain or make a positive contribution to the character and distinctiveness of the area; and
- c) Failing to use high quality design which contributes to the quality and character of the area.
- d) Failing to have scale, density, massing, form, layout, landscaping appropriate to the context and setting of the area.
- e) using materials and finishes appropriate to the context and setting of the area.

Policy G1: Protecting and Enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure

Enhancing green and blue assets

The development proposals fail to have regard to the local distinctiveness, character, quality and biodiversity of public rights of way and other footpaths.

Enhancing biodiversity

The development proposals fail to adequately demonstrate that they provide net gains for biodiversity by restoring, recreating or creating wildlife habitats, particularly for locally protected and priority species.

Policy D4: Building Housing to the Highest Standards

As new housing proposals they fail to be of high quality design relating to:

- a) the character and appearance of the local area.
- c) external form and layout.
- g) the improvement of energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions.

The Trust urges the County Council to reject this application – there are sound reasons to do so. The developer should be encouraged to use this as an exemplar project, one that can be fully supported and help move the design of Durham City’s new housing areas to meet the Government’s design aspirations.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust