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Web site: <http://www.DurhamCity.org>

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

Dear Mr Jones,

DM/21/02360/FPA: Sniperley Park

The City of Durham Trust is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the revisions to this application, made available on 27 January. This letter also responds to the Transport Assessment (made public on 3 December 2020) and replaces the Trust's letter of 10 October relating to the transport aspects of the application.

Design

The amended plans remain firmly rooted in standard volume housebuilders layouts and house types. The now submitted design code is little more than a delineation of 'character' areas and associated finishes. There is no analysis of how those areas and finishes have evolved. It reads as a retrospective description and not an active design document. The findings of the Design Review are not available on the portal and therefore the adequacy of any response to those remains unproven.

There is no attempt to show in what way the proposed units are related to Durham City and its setting and in what way they are distinctive in design. Identifying local later 20th-century houses offers no guide to local distinctiveness. The tight packing of units, and predominantly built and paved street frontages are going to be very similar to many other County developments and those found throughout England.

As an example, there are two specific areas of design.

1. Sniperley Farm remains omitted from this application and is covered by an isolated and separate application. The amended plans offer no clear and positive design relationship to the farm and could have generated an obviously distinctive character area. That shown only offers some materials changes on the standard house types. The "Sniperley Hall Landscape Strategy", dated 18 February on the planning portal, consists merely of excerpts of other drawings and aerial views and is devoid of strategic thinking.
2. The site vision offered 'verdant treelined avenues'. While there is some street tree planting, this is weakened by the number and clustering of the off street parking bays – resulting in long stretches of hard landscape and car parked frontage. Most street planting is in private front garden areas and its success and retention will be completely dependent on the care and attitude of the houseowner. The reality is far from the 'verdant' vision.

The open spaces clustered round the access road from the A691 remain unattractive for use due to proximity to the roads and isolation at the edge of the site. It would have been possible to increase the size of the central green corridor that is otherwise simply an allowance for the electric pylon route. As an example, this would have offered opportunities for creating distinctiveness and unique site character.

Sustainability

The sustainability strategy offers very little above the standard offer. Electric vehicle charging points are only to be offered 'if feasible' – offering great latitude for not installing them. Gas boilers are proposed with alternatives relegated to an unclear number of designated Future Homes. Alternative provision remains in the realm of research and consultation when the need is much more immediate. 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

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distribution to be properly effective. Future proofing is absent. County Durham Plan (CDP) policies require energy sustainability.

Nationally Described Space Standard

The applicant's covering letter of 27 January claims that all house designs are compliant with the NDSS. While the Gross Internal Area requirements are met, two house designs fail to comply in the size of bedrooms. Double bedrooms must be at least 11.5m² and a single at least 7.5m².

Some house designs have bedrooms shown in the drawings with double or twin beds that do not meet the required standard for double bedrooms. In all but one case, there is another double bedroom meeting the standard, so if the non-compliant rooms are treated as single bedrooms the house itself is compliant. In one case there is a single bedroom which does not meet the minimum area requirement.

On that basis, these are the houses that fail the standard:

- Bed 3 in The Draftsman is too small (6.4m²)
- The largest room in The Chandler is 10.27m² which is too small for a double.

Transport

The Trust has examined the Transport Assessment (December 2021), the revised drawings from January, the Bus Service Strategy Technical Note of 22 February, and the recent response from the applicant to the National Highways comments. Our consolidated transport objections are summarised below, replacing the Trust's previous letter of 10 October. Detailed analysis and justification with respect to local and national policy and guidance is attached in the appendix.

A recent report from Transport for New Homes has highlighted that nationwide the transport outcomes for most major housing developments are very poor.¹ The application makes many of the same mistakes, and shows little sign of living up to the County Durham Plan vision of a “sustainable urban extension”:

- The applicant's Transport Assessment contains many incorrect or misleading statements in relation to the sustainable transport accessibility of the site and should be afforded no weight in assessing compliance with planning policies.
- The application does not “give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements” (NPPF para. 112) or incorporate “convenient, safe and high quality ... pedestrian and cycle routes” (CDP Policy 5).
- In the design of pedestrian and cycle access within the site, several aspects of the application do not have regard to the policies of the County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan (CDP Policy 21) nor does the design reflect current national guidance (NPPF para. 110c).
- It is not clear which routes will be accessible to cyclists. Separation of cyclists and pedestrians should be considered on key routes, in accordance with national guidance LTN 1/20.
- The arrangements for car parking are unimaginative and wasteful of land, and thereby do not reflect current national guidance including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code (NPPF para. 110c) or realise opportunities for net environmental gains (NPPF para. 104). Some garage designs do not comply with the Parking and Accessibility Standards 2019, and most of the house types without garages have no suitable cycle storage.
- The development misses an opportunity to provide no-car or low-car housing coupled with overnight use of the Park and Ride car park for residential use. No car club provision is envisaged. These measures would help support the requirements of the Building for Life SPD paragraphs 4.1-4.5 and 11.5.
- The layouts do not “maximise the catchment area for bus ... services” (NPPF para. 112a) or provide “appropriate, well designed, permeable and direct routes for ... bus access” (CDP Policy 21). Almost half the site is beyond the desirable 400m maximum from a bus stop, and perhaps as much as 70% of dwellings are more than 300m from a bus stop (the distance applicable in CIHT guidance based on the service frequency).
- While a corridor for a link road to the B6532 has been reserved, which could enable better bus access, space for internal bus stops has not been allocated.
- No safe crossing of the A691 is proposed to access the westbound bus stop.

¹ *Building car dependency: the tarmac suburbs of the future.* (Transport for new Homes, 2022). <https://www.transportfornewhomes.org.uk/the-project/building-car-dependency/>

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- The development is not “connected to the existing development to the east of the A167 through suitable, convenient, safe and attractive cycleways and footpaths” (CDP Policy 5i). The developer has not demonstrated “safe access to and from the site by all modes of transport including pedestrian and cycle routes” (Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Policy 2e). This means that “opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport” have not been “identified and pursued” (NPPF para. 104) and “safe and suitable access to the site” has not been achieved for all users (NPPF para. 100b).
- The Travel Plan target for car trip reduction is not ambitious enough, with the initial target substantially exceeding the car trip rates for neighbouring Framwellgate Moor. The measures proposed for encouraging sustainable travel are inadequate. The Trust's evidence in the appendix suggests an initial car driver target of 63% reducing to 58% over five years.

The Trust was dismayed that in the case of the Bent House Lane application, DM/20/03558/OUT (which is the other site covered by County Durham Plan Policy 5), the planning officer's report to the committee did not adequately cover the Trust's objections. The very brief summary of the Trust's objection gave no indication of the detailed evidence which backed up the submission. Sustainable transport issues barely featured in the committee report, and were only partially addressed by the Highways and Sustainable Transport internal consultees. Compliance with the sustainable transport policies of the County Durham Plan was not actually demonstrated.

The Trust wrote to the County Council on 3 December detailing these concerns, and expects that the committee report for the current application will give full weight to sustainable transport.

Summary

The amendments offer no substantive change against the original submission and basic design and sustainability failures remain embedded in the approach chosen. The submission continues to fail against the planning policies the Trust provided with its previous objection.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust

Appendix on transport aspects of the application

The following sections substantiate the Trust's objection with detailed examples from the various application documents and references to local and national planning policy and design guidance.

Transport Assessment

The Transport Assessment for the development was made available on the planning portal only on 3 December and the Trust did therefore not make comment on it in our previous submissions.

The assessment makes the usual glib statements regarding sustainable transport access. Examples of a few will serve to demonstrate the superficiality of the assessment:

Para. 3.17: *“Several uncontrolled crossings, including dropped kerbs and refuge islands are present at the western and eastern ends of the P&R Link Road, which provide safe and convenient walk and cycle access ...”*

For a pedestrian or cyclist, crossing two-lane entries or exits of roundabouts with high traffic flow is not “convenient”. The only evidence the applicant offers for the crossings being safe is the analysis of collisions. The fact there are few collisions involving pedestrians reflects the small number of people living to the west of the A167, most of whom will prefer to drive rather than cross busy roads unassisted. This evidence therefore does not provide any confidence that people living in the new housing development will be enabled to make journeys by foot in safety. The same applies for cycling. Employing the LTN 1/20 junction assessment methodology shows that these crossings currently have the lowest possible score, described as “suitable for only confident existing cyclists and may be avoided by some experienced cyclists”.

Para. 3.20: *“National Cycle Route (NCR) 14 passes to the south-west of the site and on a local level connects Lanchester to Durham city centre via Langley Park and Neville’s Cross.”*

The nearest connection to NCR14 is over 2km from the site. How can this be considered relevant?

Para. 3.23: *“As shown in Figure 4, it is evident that the entire urban area of Durham City including the established residential areas of Durham Moor and Framwellgate Moor and Aykley Heads are accessible on-foot, within the preferred maximum distance of 2km.”*

In fact Figure 4 shows clearly that most of Durham City is not within 2km of the site. The “entire urban area” is a gross exaggeration. The southern extent of the 2km catchment reaches to Durham Johnston School and approximately the County Hall roundabout.

Para. 3.24: *“In addition, Durham city centre, rail station and several other major employment opportunities (e.g. University Hospital of North Durham, Durham University, HM Passport Office, HM Land Registry, and Durham County Council) as well as other regional and local destinations including Chester-le-Street, Sacriston, Witton Gilbert, Langley Moor and Carrville are accessible by cycle.”*

Chester-le-Street and Carrville lie outside the 5km catchment illustrated in Figure 4. There is no evidence presented that suitable connected cycle routes are available to make the other destinations accessible. Indeed Figure 3 shows that there is no direct recognised cycle route to any of the destinations. It would not be considered acceptable to state that a location was wheelchair accessible just because it was close enough, so why is distance the only criterion used for cycling?

Para. 3.25: *“The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation’s (CIHT’s) ‘Buses in Urban Environments’ (January 2018) recommends a number of maximum walking distances to bus stops based a range of varying situations. Most notably, Table 4 recommends a maximum walking distance of 500m for core bus corridors with two or more high-frequency services; 400m for single high-frequency routes (every 12 minutes or better); and 300m for less frequent routes. DCC guidance cites a desirable maximum walk distance to a bus stop of 400m and an absolute maximum walk distance of 800m.”*

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It is good to see the applicant citing the CIHT's well-researched recommendations. Unfortunately the subsequent paragraphs gloss over the fact that the local bus stops are not served by high-frequency routes, and that perhaps 70% of the site lies beyond the CIHT-recommended 300m maximum distance applicable in this situation. Since the production of the Transport Assessment, a "Bus Service Strategy" by Fore Consulting has been submitted, and further examination of bus access is given in a later section.

The Trust has not been able to find the "absolute maximum" distance of 800m in any DCC guidance. Such a distance may be a suitable criterion to use for isolated rural dwellings, but must not be relied upon by developers of the "sustainable urban extensions" envisaged in County Durham Plan Policy 5.

The assessment concludes in paragraph 3.37 that "the residential development proposals would provide numerous opportunities for future households to adopt long-term sustainable travel patterns and behaviour for various journey purposes". This has simply not been demonstrated.

The Trust considers that the applicant's Transport Assessment should therefore be given no weight in determining compliance with local and national policy regarding sustainable transport, in particular County Durham Plan Policies 5 (point i and penultimate paragraph), 21 and 22, and Witton Gilbert Neighbourhood Plan Policy 2(e).

Pedestrian and cycle network within the site

NPPF paragraph 112 requires that developments "give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas". CDP Policy 5 requires the incorporation of "convenient, safe and high quality bus, pedestrian and cycle routes within, and also connecting to adjoining facilities".

Priority

Giving priority to pedestrian and cycle movements should entail:

- designing the development around a core active travel network which is attractive and direct;
- where possible giving pedestrians and cyclists priority over motor vehicles, e.g. at crossings.

The impression given by the Adoptable Highways Layout, which includes details of the path network, is that the design prioritises motor traffic access to the site. This is contrary to NPPF paragraph 112. Footways are provided along access roads, but are not continuous across side roads (which could have provided "priority first to pedestrian movements"), and often cease partway along each cul-de-sac. The adoptable cyclepath only reaches half the site and is indirect. It also has no priority at the many places where it crosses side roads, meaning that cycling might actually be safer and more convenient on the access road itself. There is a path network round most of the edge of the site, but its meandering design suggests its main function is for leisure and exercise. It also inexplicably fails to link to many of the cul-de-sacs, making its use for daily travel unnecessarily inconvenient.

Design quality

For cycle routes, high quality would now entail compliance with LTN 1/20, the current national guidance for cycling design, as stipulated in the policies of the County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan which, according to Policy 21, "all development should have regard to". This is confirmed by NPPF paragraph 110c which requires the design of transport elements to reflect current national guidance. The Trust considers that to comply with Policy 21 applications must take into account such design guidance and that any departure from the guidance must be justified by the applicant.

The Trust is not aware of any documentation indicating that the applicant has had regard to these policies and design guidance, and various features of the path network do not comply. There are several examples where compliance could easily be achieved without major rearrangement of the layout of the development. The Trust therefore concludes that the developer is unaware of the appropriate national guidance.

Connections with neighbouring areas

The path network is supposed to connect to the local centre by the B6532, therefore the footways on the main access roads should be connected through the cul-de-sacs via continuous separated footways, rather

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than a space shared with parking and motor vehicles. This would help promote the use of the network to residents.

It is not clear which of the paths round the edge of the site will be for cycling as well as walking. Figure 5 in the Residential Travel Plan seems to distinguish an internal path network (round the northern edge of the site) and an internal cycle path network (starting at the end of the Fire Station access road and running along the south-western edge of the housing), but no rationale is given for this design. Only at the northern corner of the site is a cycling link towards the B6532 shown: the other links are shown as pedestrian only. The design should be encouraging cycling as well as walking from all parts of the development. Consideration should be given to paths which separate the two modes on the most important axes. This is encouraged in LTN 1/20.

Examples of detailed design issues

The January 2022 revisions show enlarged attenuation ponds for the sustainable urban drainage system along the eastern edge of the site from the Park and Ride car park towards the overhead power lines. The off-road path connecting the ends of the cul-de-sacs in this part of the site has now been omitted. The Trust would like to see a path reinstated here, linking each street to the residential area beyond the power lines as before.

Cycleways are shown in pink. This short cycleway link meets the main access road but does not connect across the verge to allow people to join the cycleway on the other side.



Pavements are shown in green (see excerpt below). Each cul-de-sac has the pavement stopping well before the end of the road. It is likely that it is the type of design where the carriageway comes up to the same level as the footway to provide a shared space at the end of the road. A change of surface would be preferable so that drivers have a clear signal that the space is different.



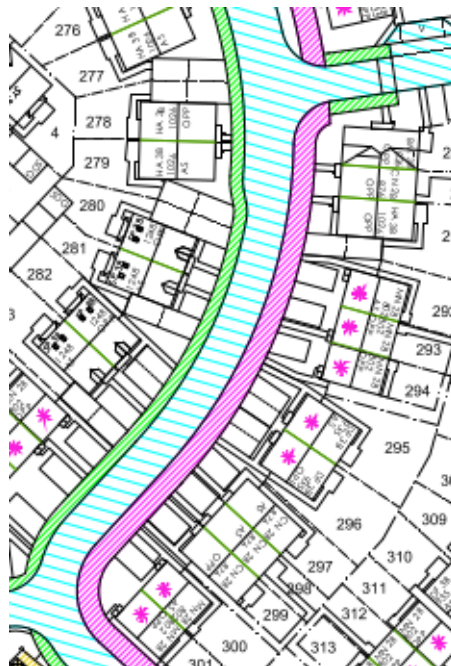
Note the sinuous footpath that skirts the site. From many cul-de-sacs there is no formal connection to the footpath shown. People will inevitably create a path by walking across the grass, but there should be a properly designed connection to ensure wheelchair accessibility.

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Another example: a path passing between two areas of housing (starting in the middle at the bottom of the excerpt and proceeding north-east), without links to the ends of the roads on either side:



The next excerpt shows a cycle path in pink passing a large number of driveways. The pavement on the other side also passes many driveways. Both about the carriageway. Typical street construction over the last few decades has the footway sloping towards the carriageway whenever a drive is crossed. This creates an undulating surface which is harder to use with wheeled equipment such as buggies, wheelchairs and cycles, and can be dangerous in icy conditions. The foot and cycleways should maintain a level surface with a steady crossfall sufficient only for drainage, using suitable sloping kerbs to provide access for cars. Careful attention to the provision of dropped kerbs for wheelchair access will then be needed at junctions. Alternatively the paths could be set further back, so that the slope of any driveway access is between the cycle path and the carriageway.



The following excerpt shows another example where the adoptable footway ceases soon after turning into the cul-de-sac, and again, no formal connections are shown to the path that skirts the edge of the site. Properly-designed formal access, with a continuous footway along the cul-de-sac, should be provided. The shared surface style of provision is more likely to result in cars being parked obstructing pedestrians.



The design shown above where the cycleway meets the side turning is unsuitable because cyclists will be at risk from turning vehicles while negotiating a kerbed transition which is angled rather than end-on. The cycleway should be set back from the main road sufficiently that an end-on crossing of the side road can be provided. If the footway or cycleway has a continuous surface and maintains the same level across the side road opening this will help to “give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements” in accordance with NPPF paragraph 112. There is no evidence of priority being given to pedestrian and cycle movements anywhere in the scheme. The cycleway as currently proposed will be unattractive and potentially less safe than using the carriageway.

If traffic levels are considered to be high enough to warrant providing a cycleway, it should be properly designed in accordance with LTN 1/20. Rather than a cycleway along the access road, separate foot and cycle paths directly through the heart of the site would be a far better way to provide the prioritised and high quality network required by NPPF paragraph 112 and CDP Policy 5. Leisure paths round the edge, while very welcome, do not fulfil these policy requirements.

Cycle parking

The Council's new Parking and Accessibility SPD is still in preparation: there was an Issues and Options consultation in early 2021. The applicant's Transport Assessment, paras. 5.28-5.32, follows the County Durham Parking and Accessibility Guidelines 2019.

Para. 5.32 says:

When applying these standards to this use, all dwellings within the site would be provided with either a garage or a secure area designated for cycle storage. The apartment dwellings would be provided with shared, secure cycle shelters in communal areas for cycle storage.

The “Bateman Apartment Block Floor Plans” and the “Hepworth Apartment Block Floor Plans” drawings do not show any cycle parking on the ground floor of the block. From the Proposed Layout drawings it appears that bin compounds are provided, but no external cycle parking.

Best practice would be to provide storage for cycles and other mobility equipment in a secure area easily accessible within the ground floor of the building. External cycle storage is more at risk from theft, and needs to be properly overlooked. Achieving a suitable design may have an impact on the layout, so the Trust would prefer to see the plans revised rather than securing the cycle parking via a planning condition.

The following house designs also appear to have no space identified for cycle storage:

- Blemmere
- Bowyer*

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- Chandler
- Coiner
- Manciple
- Tillman
- Watchmaker*

Those which have been asterisked also have a utility room accessible via a door to the side or back, but the equipment in the utility room would not leave sufficient space for cycle storage. Again, the plans show bin storage areas in back gardens, but no secure cycle storage appears on the submitted plans.

The following designs might have space in the hallway for a narrow bicycle, but this is not ideal, and would certainly be unsuitable for mobility equipment:

- Draftsman
- Harper
- Reedmaker
- Spinner
- Weaver*
- Wheelwright

Car parking

Garage and storage provision

If the applicant is following the Council's 2019 guidelines, it should be noted that single garages are required to be a minimum of 3m width by 6m in length. Most of the house designs narrowly comply with this requirement, but the “Forester” single garage is only 2.7m wide and 4.9m long.

If the applicant wishes to rely on the emerging Parking and Accessibility SPD, which does not stipulate a minimum size of garage, it should be noted that the SPD requires houses without garages to include a minimum 2m by 2m multi-purpose storage area suitable for bicycles and other mobility equipment. Most of the house designs do not meet this requirement.

Visitor parking spaces

The distribution of visitor parking spaces across the site is uneven. Some cul-de-sacs have been provided with several, others with very few. Those along the main access routes are not frequent enough to discourage people from parking closer to their destination, and so there will likely be visitors obstructing the main carriageway or parking their vehicles partly on the footway.

Examples of specific design issues

The Trust supports the design of car parking for plots 197-202 referred to in the 26 January covering letter as a “rear parking court”. As this is the only road access to the properties, the Trust agrees this is an appropriate solution.

The 26 January covering letter states

Private drives have been shortened where possible, although some still measure approximately 40m. To reduce these driveways to 25m or less would result in more one-sided road and a worse frontage onto open space in some locations.

Having examined the revised plans, the very long driveways sequentially serve groups of three or four adjacent properties which look onto the open space, and seem unproblematic.

On the other hand, the driveways accessing single garages in the interior of the site feature many strange design decisions. See plots 56 and 57, for example. The garages are marked “SDG”.

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What is the point of having a single garage taking up a high proportion of the back garden, with a driveway long enough to park three vehicles on?

An even worse example is found in plots 165 to 168, where the garages for plots 167 and 168 are set so far back that plot 168 ends up with a very irregular back garden, much of which will be out of view from the house! The driveway for plot 168 will be 17.3m long, and that for plot 165 would be approximately 16m long. Each could accommodate three cars outside.



This amply illustrates the National Model Design Code's observation that

The arrangements for car parking can have a major impact on the quality of place. They should aim to minimise the impact of the car and solutions will vary depending on context.

General design issues

The general layout, with car parking mostly in front of houses, will make streets unattractive and dominated by parked cars. This is particularly the case with smaller semi-detached houses like those in the above excerpt where most of the street frontage is taken up with parking spaces. The council's Building for Life SPD paragraph 11.5 recommends at least half of the street frontage to be landscaped to reduce vehicle domination and suggests alternative car parking solutions for higher density situations. Paragraph 4.31 of the Design and Access Statement acknowledges this issue, and says that parking "should be carefully designed to be typically no more than 4 spaces appear [sic] in a row, and areas of

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landscaping and/or planting should be used to break up the appearance”. This stated intention does not seem to have been successfully carried through in the actual plans.

The Guidance Notes for Design Codes section M.3.i favours unallocated parking as an efficient use of land, and also suggests options such as parking courts and car barns to concentrate allocated parking provision. While locating residential car parking in front of each house does simplify the provision of electric car charging points, this is by no means the only possible solution to encourage the use of electric vehicles. The council's Building for Life SPD paragraph 11.2 recommends on-street parking for its potential to be more space efficient and to encourage social contact.

The Transport for the North Decarbonisation Plan recommends actions which local authorities can take to help decarbonise transport. These include car-free zones and streets, and unbundling the cost of parking from new housing prices to incentivise take-up of car-free or car-lite development.

There is an excellent opportunity for Sniperley Park to make more efficient use of the land available taking advantage of the proximity of the Park and Ride site to satisfy part of the residential parking requirement. Residential parking will be used predominantly when the Park and Ride car park is relatively empty, and vice versa. Streets within a suitable distance of the Park and Ride car park could be designed car-free, with no or minimal parking available outside the houses, and narrower access roads primarily for refuse collection, deliveries and cycling or walking. Householders would rent a space in the Park and Ride, decoupling the cost of the parking from the house ownership. This would provide an incentive for people to limit and reduce their car ownership, in line with the demand reduction targets of the TfN Decarbonisation Plan. These measures could be combined with car club provision, as encouraged by Paragraph 4.4 of the council's Building for Life SPD. With less need to provide residential parking spaces and access road capacity, land could be reallocated to green space without reducing the density of the development or the yield for the developer.

By proposing an unimaginative street plan the developer has failed to address various requirements of NPPF. For example paragraph 104 requires development proposals to realise the “opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure” (e.g. proximity of the Park and Ride site) and “changing transport technology and usage” (e.g. transport decarbonisation entailing demand reduction and a move away from the private car) and to assess the “environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure” (e.g. the land requirement for access roads and parking) “including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects” (e.g. by not providing parking allocated to every plot) with the aim that “patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes, and contribute to making high quality places” (rather than streets dominated by car parking).

There is no evidence that the developer has seriously considered any of these fundamental requirements.

Bus stops and services

Access to A691 bus stops

Formal bus laybys on the A691 are proposed, and this is welcome. Unfortunately no crossings are shown to access the west-bound bus stop, aside from the uncontrolled crossings at the roundabout. The road currently has a 60mph limit but the developers propose that it be lowered to 40mph.

Table 3 of the CIHT publication Planning for Walking (March 2015) suggests that for 40mph roads uncontrolled crossings or central refuges are only appropriate in low flow environments. For the A691 a signal controlled crossing would be recommended.

This is backed up by Table E/4.1 of CD195 Designing for cycle traffic (Highways England, September 2019). For a cycle route crossing a two-lane roundabout entry as shown in the proposals, a parallel light-controlled pedestrian/cycle crossing would be required. It follows that a pedestrian-only crossing should also be light controlled.

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Without proper crossings of A691, the access to the bus stops cannot be considered safe. The X5 and X15 buses on this road would provide useful access to St Leonard's School, for example, but without safe crossings parents would be more likely to drive their children there.

Distance to bus stops

Various documents submitted with the application (e.g. the Residential Travel Plan and the Bus Service Strategy) state that the council has set a desirable maximum distance to a bus stop of 400m, and an absolute maximum distance of 800m. The 400m requirement is found in successive iterations of the council's Parking and Accessibility Standards, the council's Building for Life SPD, as well as the DfT's December 2021 edition of *Inclusive mobility* which states (p. 84) that "in residential areas, bus stops should ideally be located so that nobody in the neighbourhood is required to walk more than 400 metres from their home". The 800m figure is not given in any of these documents, yet the applicant relies on it heavily.

Paragraph 5.223 of the County Durham Plan supports Policy 21 and notes that the "**proximity and frequency** of bus services is a key consideration". Each has a bearing on the other. The CIHT document *Buses in Urban Environments* (January 2018), which is quoted in the applicant's Transport Assessment, advises that where frequencies are less than every 12 minutes the maximum walking distance to stops should be 300m, whereas up to 500m could be acceptable where bus stops are on core bus corridors with two or more high-frequency services (equating to 10 or more buses per hour).

The Bus Service Strategy makes it clear that on all of the roads examined, the A691, B6532, the proposed East-West link road, and the Park and Ride services, the frequency is less than every 12 minutes. Therefore the applicable maximum distance should be 300m.

The applicant's Residential Travel Plan includes a diagram which shows that a large proportion of the properties fall beyond the 400m limit, with the furthest properties being over 900m from the Park and Ride bus stop, and almost 800m from the A691 stops. It is a little hard to tell, but it appears that the measuring point is from the middle of the Park and Ride car park, rather than the actual bus stop, and so the actual distances might be about 40m longer.

There is a further diagram provided in the Bus Service Strategy, which shows that a small number of houses on the edge of the development will be within 400m of bus services on the B6532.

Nevertheless a significant proportion of the houses, perhaps as much as 40%, will be beyond the 400m distance, and maybe 60-70% of the houses will be beyond the CIHT's recommended 300m limit for bus stops on low frequency routes.

Quality of services

The Bus Service Strategy and the Residential Travel Plan each detail the destinations and frequency of daytime services. A significant omission is any analysis of the evening and weekend provision. It is a simple fact that those who own cars are very much less likely to use bus services, even when the services are frequent. Yet without good evening bus services anyone living in the proposed housing would be stranded and unable to access social and leisure activities unless they have access to a car.

The Park & Ride buses do not operate in the evenings. The last X5 is currently 1740 from Durham. The last 16 is at 1950, and the 16A is hourly not half-hourly after 1900. In reality every resident will be dependent on private transport in the evenings.

Reducing distances to bus stops

CDP Policy 5 requires the incorporation of "convenient, safe and high quality bus ... routes within, and also connecting to adjoining facilities". The Residential Travel Plan diagram appears to be working on the assumption that there will be no bus routes within the site. Confusingly a separate file attachment, which appears from the file name to be Environmental Statement Figure 7.10 "Development Land Use Plan" shows a purple dashed line labelled "indicative location of proposed bus route through site". This enters the site via the new roundabout off the A691, but where it exits is not clear, as the purple line follows the alignment of the main access road (with cycleway) and bends round towards the Park and Ride car park but does not actually connect.

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The County Council's proposed masterplan incorporates a through road from the A691 to the B6532. This could be used by bus services, including the extensions to existing services identified in the submitted Bus Service Strategy. The applicant's January 2022 drawings see a slightly revised the layout to allow a connection to be made. The covering letter of 26 January 2022, however, expresses doubts about the proposed link road saying that it will add little highway capacity and that it would create a rat-run for vehicles avoiding the Sniperley roundabout. The applicant points to the availability of bus services on the A691 and B6532, implying that further routes penetrating the site are not necessary.

The Trust stands by its previous objection to the present application, because of the poor access to bus stops on the A691 and the lack of bus penetration of the site. The Trust identified, in its response to the Council's masterplan consultation, the risk of creating rat-runs, and suggested that a modal filter should apply to restrict through traffic to public transport and cycles.

The Trust regards bus access to the interior of the site as essential. The present design has far too many houses beyond an acceptable walking distance from any bus stop, and the arrangements for accessing the bus stop on the far side of the A691 are also unsuitable. The opportunity to open up a wider range of bus service destinations, by providing the extra road links, would make the public transport option much more attractive. Even if introducing new bus services is not considered viable at the present time, the necessary road links for buses should be provided, as all realistic transport decarbonisation plans entail significant modal shift towards public transport in the course of the next decade.

The applicant's design, which was only modified in a minimal way to safeguard a new link, will need further revision to provide space for bus stops on the internal road network. The alignment of the A691-B6532 link and the internal path and road network must be designed to minimise the walking distance from houses to the bus stops.

Other options

Another way to shorten the distance to bus services would be to provide a footpath connection from the northern end of the development linking with Witton Gilbert footpath 8, allowing access to the A691 about 500m north-west of the proposed bus stops. Further stops and a crossing could be provided there. This might require the acquisition of land which the developer does not currently control.

Cycling via the adoptable cycleway, which connects to the Park and Ride car park, could give residents a means of shortening the journey time to reach the bus stops. Secure cycle parking should be provided both there, and at the A691 bus stop.

Assessment of site accessibility: pedestrians and cyclists

Section 10 of the Environmental Statement covers transport and access. The document quotes various parts of County Plan policies and the NPPF. For example, paragraph 10.18 quotes the requirement for the development to be “connected to the existing development to the east of the A167 through sustainable, convenient, safe and attractive cycleways and footpaths”.

Paragraph 10.27 lists some of the improvements identified in the Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan, including the need to “ensure that adequate cycle priority (and protection for cyclists) is provided at the Sniperley roundabout at the junction of the A691 and A167” and the need to widen off-road footpaths.

Paragraphs 10.48 to 10.58 list a number of types of potential impact from transport, including:

- severance
- accidents and safety
- pedestrian and cyclist delay
- pedestrian and cyclist amenity
- pedestrian and cyclist fear and intimidation

Despite this awareness of the adverse effects that traffic levels can have on pedestrians and cyclists using the highway, and the improvements which are needed, paragraph 10.74 states that the uncontrolled crossings in the area “provide safe and convenient walk and cycle access to the established residential

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areas of Durham Moor, Framwellgate Moor, and Durham city centre”. Paragraph 10.76 says that the cycleway on the A691 “connects with existing traffic-free infrastructure along the eastern side of the A167 and on-carriageway sections to facilitate direct and safe cycle access to a wide range of amenities”. Paragraphs 10.80 and 10.81 claim that wide areas of the city are accessible on foot or by cycling. These assertions are repeated with almost identical wording at paragraphs 10.114 and 10.116.

The consideration of the impacts on pedestrians and cyclists has been limited to the additional impact caused by the additional motor traffic generated by the development. The report does not consider whether the existing conditions are suitable. It is plain that they are not. Several studies have identified the Sniperley roundabout as currently unsafe and inconvenient for people walking or cycling, including:

- Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan (Durham County Council / Systra, December 2018)
- Walking and Cycling Evidence Paper (Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Working Party, March 2019)
- Durham City Strategic Cycle Routes (Transport Initiatives for Durham County Council, October 2014)

If you apply the LTN 1/20 junction assessment tool to the junctions in the area, and to the new roundabout junction proposed for access to the site from the A691, all of the potential cycle movements that cross arms of the roundabouts would achieve a score of zero. CD195 Designing for Cycling Traffic, which is part of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges, requires grade separation or signal-controlled crossings where cycle routes cross high flow 40mph roads or 2-lane roundabout entries within a 30mph limit.

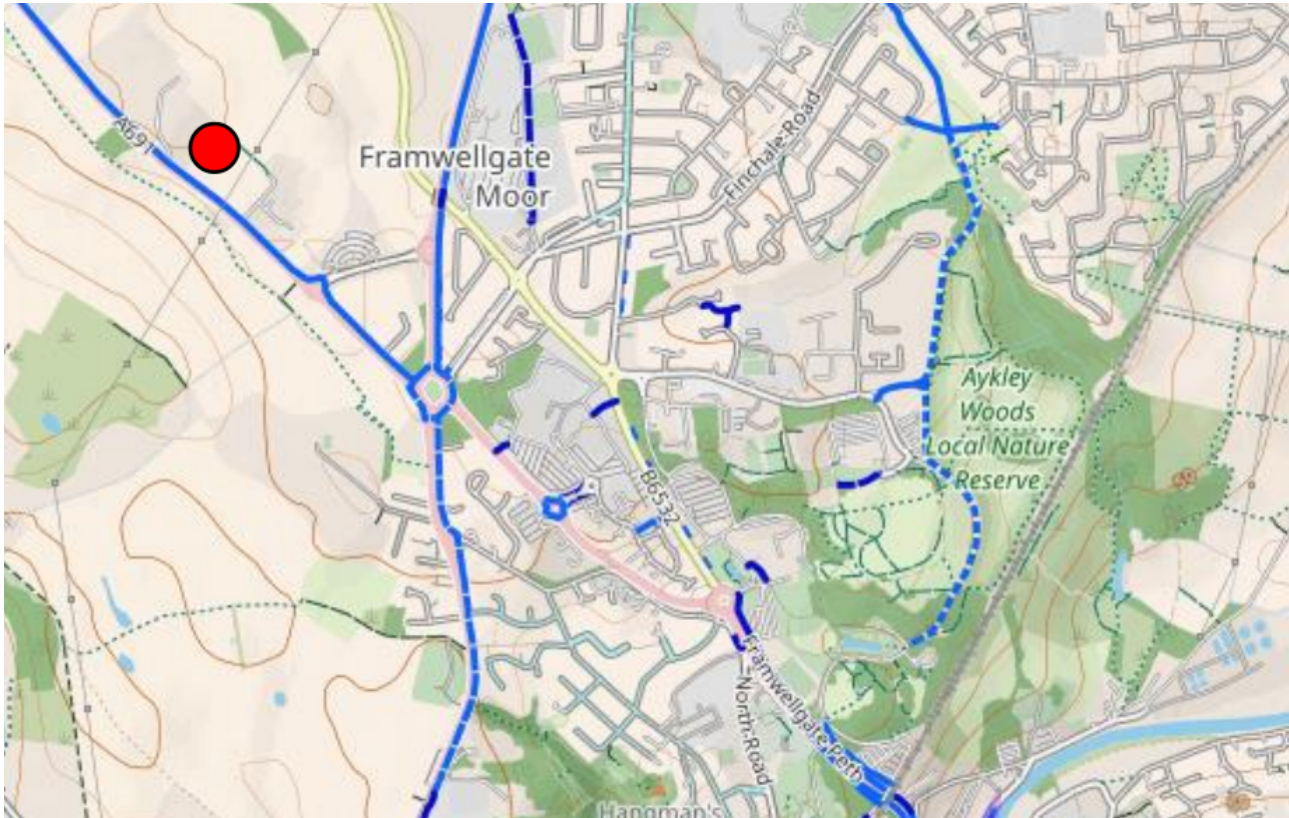
As noted in LTN 1/20 paragraph 4.2.4:

Abrupt reductions in the quality of provision for cyclists – such as a busy high-speed roundabout without facilities – will mean that an otherwise serviceable route becomes unusable by most potential users.

While the developers may try to argue (contrary to the clear intention of CDP Policy 5) that improving the existing conditions is not their responsibility, there can be no such justification for the design of the new roundabout. The existing path along the A691 to Witton Gilbert is of adequate quality for cycling and walking, apart from at the junctions. The new roundabout adds a further junction without the appropriate crossing assistance, and will make existing journeys longer and less safe.

Conditions on the “on-carriageway sections” beyond the A167 mentioned in paragraph 10.76 are not compliant with the LTN 1/20 guidance either. The plan of local cycle routes at Figure 2 in the Residential Travel plan and Figure 10.2 of the Environmental Statement makes it obvious that there are no connections to any sort of coherent network to the east of the site at present.

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The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Durham City identifies the need for cycle routes from the Sniperley roundabout south-east along the A691 to County Hall roundabout to link to the city centre and north-east along Dryburn Park, Front Street and Finchale Road to link to local amenities such as the Framwellgate Moor shops and schools.

The assertion in paragraph 10.74 that there already exists “safe and convenient walk and cycle access” to the areas east of the A167 is completely baseless and false.

The subsequent paragraphs 10.109 to 10.122 are concerned with access to local amenities. Again, the conclusion in paragraph 10.122 that overall the site “has good pedestrian links to all local amenities. Cycling is also a viable option for local journeys” is unsubstantiated. The only evidence given is the distance to the amenities. The document does not take account of the fact that pedestrians and cyclists may have to wait several minutes for a gap in the traffic when crossing the two-lane entry and exit arms of the roundabout. Nor does it consider what proportion of parents would be happy to let their children negotiate these junctions unaccompanied on the way to secondary school.

CDP Policy 5i states “the development must be connected to the existing development to the east of the A167 through suitable, convenient, safe and attractive cycleways and footpaths”. The Trust would argue that making a pedestrian or cycle link to the existing paths on the west of the A167 is not sufficient to comply with this policy. The applicant must demonstrate the existence, or propose the provision, of “suitable, convenient, safe and attractive cycleways and footpaths” that connect not just to the other side of the A167, but into the existing development on the east side. That means, in the view of the Trust, links that extend as far as a range of local amenities such as those the developer has given in Table 10.16.

This view is backed up by the penultimate paragraph of CDP Policy 5, requiring “convenient, safe and high quality bus, pedestrian and cycle routes within, and connecting to, adjoining facilities”, and for the movement frameworks of each site to “incorporate any relevant schemes within the Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan”. This part of the policy has not been addressed in the applicant's Planning and Affordable Housing Statement: in paragraph 4.34 this part of the policy is not quoted, and on page 25 the responses to the policy also stop short at the response to Policy 5k. CDP Policy 21b requires links “to existing services and facilities”. Policy 21 is not addressed anywhere in the Planning and Affordable Housing Statement, being merely summarised (omitting this aspect of the policy) in paragraph 4.39.

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Paragraph 3.15 of the Planning and Affordable Housing Statement states that the linear park, required by CDP Policy 5, will enable the provision of a network of footpaths and cycleways “ensuring access to the proposed local centre, school, the wider countryside and existing development to the east of the site”. Is the applicant suggesting that the requirement for links to the existing development to the east will only be met via routes that first pass north-east through the linear park? It appears to be so: in the response to CDP Policy 5i, found on page 24 of the Planning Statement the applicant states that “the site does not have a boundary with the A167” and then goes on to say that cycleways and footpaths will allow linkages to be created via future phases of the housing allocation.

If the applicant is suggesting that the existing underpass where Framwellgate Moor Bridleway 4 passes under the A167 will be sufficient to provide the connections to the east, that is simply not good enough. There need to be multiple safe connections across the A167 spaced at reasonably frequent intervals along the 2km stretch from the Sniperley to the Pity Me roundabouts in order to counter the severance effect of the A167 and ensure “sustainable and cohesive communities” to use the policy wording. If a first phase is built out and occupied without such connections being established at the outset, the occupants will certainly get into the habit of driving everywhere.

The stance taken in CDP Policy 5 has backing in NPPF paragraph 112a which requires developments “give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme **and with neighbouring areas**” (emphasis added).

In conjunction with this proposed first phase of development, the Trust would expect to see, as a minimum, enhancements to the pedestrian and cycling environment to provide safe crossings of existing roads, including at all the roundabouts, and high quality continuous links to the Framwellgate Moor shops and schools, to the County Hall roundabout (linking to existing routes to the city centre), and to Durham Johnston School. Plans for signalling the Sniperley roundabout, which include signalised routes for pedestrians and cyclists, were recently released via a Freedom of Information request. Implementation of these plans would go part way towards meeting the active travel connectivity needs.

Section 6 of the Planning and Affordable Housing Statement gives draft heads of terms for a Section 106 agreement “based on pre-application discussions with the Council”. This includes land for the Park and Ride extension, a public transport contribution, and an off-site highways works contribution. A highways contribution is alluded to in paragraph 4.26 of the Residential Travel Plan, for an improvement scheme to reduce peak-hour queuing on the A167. The developer's Transport Assessment, paragraphs 5.26-5.27 commits to a “proportionate contribution to the A167 improvement scheme, led by Jacobs” which “would result in the Sniperley Roundabout being converted to signals, with extra lanes being introduced between the roundabout and the Neville's Cross crossroads”.

Because the pre-application discussions are not published, and there is no detail on what the Section 106 contributions would cover, the public cannot scrutinise or comment on whether the highways works and public transport contribution are sufficient and appropriate to deal with the many sustainable transport deficiencies of the site location identified above. These matters are of the utmost important in avoiding a car-dependent development, and they must not be left to a planning condition for future agreement between the developer and the local authority. The Trust would prefer to see plans for the A167 prioritising the improvement of the pedestrian environment by reallocating road space to provide separate cycle tracks, rather than increasing peak motor traffic capacity.

Travel Plan

Travel Plan targets

In the Trust's letter of 10 October 2021 which concentrated on transport aspects of the application, we made some incorrect statements about the travel to work patterns. We stated that the applicant's draft travel plan proposed a higher proportion of people travelling to work by car than pertained at the 2011 census. The error came about because the census figures include people who are not in work, and those who work from home, whereas the travel plan targets were measuring the percentages travelling by car out of the smaller total of those who actually travel to work.

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The 73% initial car/van trip share proposed in Table 7.1 of the travel plan is based on the 2011 census figures for E02004310, the middle-layer super output area (MSOA) within which the site falls. This is quite a wide area, and includes Witton Gilbert, Bearpark, parts of Ushaw Moor and Broom Park, all of which lie firmly outside the core Durham urban area. The reduction target is 5 percentage points, giving a Car Driver target of 68%.

By comparison, the 2011 census figure for Car Drivers in the MSOA covering Framwellgate Moor and Pity Me was 63%. The new “sustainable urban extension” would be expected to have different travel to work patterns from the existing villages which make up the bulk of the E02004310 census area. Indeed, this was part of the argument for making the green belt release in the first place. However, without much more frequent bus services, it would not be possible to attain the lower car driver figures of Framwellgate Moor.

Census results are also available for smaller areas. Area E00105090 mainly consists of the housing at Witton Grove, between Sniperley roundabout and the site, and Westcott Drive, just east of the A167. It had a car share of 68.1%, and a pedestrian share of 13.4%, over double the target figure for walking proposed in the travel plan.

This suggests that, based on the location and the policy context, the modal share targets need to be substantially strengthened if the site is to match and improve upon the sustainability of neighbouring areas.

According to the Transport for the North Decarbonisation Plan a reduction of 3% per year is required in car miles for the next decade, which would equate to a reduction from 69.2% to 59.4% of journeys over five years, that is, a cut of around 10 percentage points. In reality the reduction in the number of journeys would need to be more severe in order to achieve the car miles reductions required, because longer journeys are harder to switch to sustainable modes.

The Trust considers that the Travel Plan should be front-loaded, to aim for a much lower starting target, reflecting the urgency of the climate emergency and the fact that the best time to get people to change their travel habits is when they move house. With the correct approach, this is achievable. For example, the DfT's Propensity to Cycle Tool suggests that the area could generate a travel to work share of 11% by bike (an increase from 1% at the 2011 census) if good cycleways are provided to key destinations. Increased bus service frequencies, initially supported through developer contributions, would also have an impact. Policy 5 requires that the Travel Plan reduce reliance on the private car, yet the proposed targets would simply entrench it. Every effort should be made to realise CDP Policy 5's vision of a Sustainable Urban Extension.

To arrive at a reasonable set of targets, we could take the 68% figure for the Witton Grove area, which is a reasonable compromise between the Witton Gilbert / Bearpark 73% and the Framwellgate Moor 63%. Front-loading half of the 10% reduction required by the TfN Decarbonisation Plan suggests a starting point of 63% with a 5 percentage point reduction to be delivered over five years. Even this is probably less ambitious than is required, because of the difficulties noted in reducing car miles for longer journeys.

The Technical Memorandum submitted on behalf of National Highways expressed concern about the Travel Plan targets:

We would also suggest that a targeted 5% reduction in the proportion of future households travelling by car in peak periods is not ambitious enough, especially considering the opportunities to link to the proposed development to an existing, and possibly expanding, P&R.

In the applicant's response to the memorandum, the applicant states that the 5% figure was agreed with the County Council in order to provide a robust assessment of the potential impact of traffic generated by the site.

It is perhaps prudent to downplay the effectiveness of a Travel Plan and the sustainable transport potential of the site in order to arrive at a robust worst case assessment of the likely impact of traffic if

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the aim is to secure funding for road widening and junction capacity enhancement. But that should be no reason for the actual Travel Plan to be less ambitious.

If the council's aim is to maximise the sustainable transport potential of the site, as might be expected from policies 5 and 21 of the County Durham Plan, then not only should the Travel Plan targets be more ambitious, as suggested above, but the council should also require more robust assessments of the active travel and public transport accessibility of the site, in order to identify and secure funding for infrastructure and service improvements.

Proposed Travel Plan measures

For promoting use of public transport, it is proposed that copies of bus timetables would be provided, along with a £100 voucher for each household. A longer-term subsidised bus fare scheme would be a more effective incentive, especially if coupled with personalised travel planning for each household which is only mentioned as a possible remedial measure in paragraph 8.3.

Overall the Travel Plan promises no more than an information pack, vouchers, some surveys, and setting up a Bicycle User Group, which, by the estimates of trip generation, would contain about three members!

Even if this were a good Travel Plan, it could not make up for the poor design decisions which repeat the mistakes made at countless suburban estates built over the last few decades. A Travel Plan is no substitute for actually designing developments which promote sustainable transport through their layout, density, connections, and quality of environment, as is required by the NPPF.

The Travel Plan appears to have had no impact on design decisions such as car parking provision. No mention is made of promotion of a car club even though this is encouraged in paragraph 4.4 of the council's Building for Life SPD and section 5.5.2 of the Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan.

Summary

There is a real risk that a new development, well-connected to the A167 and A691, will be more car-dependent than the existing communities in Framwellgate Moor. The Trust considers that the Travel Plan needs to be backed by a comprehensive masterplan which includes off-site improvements to radically improve active travel and public transport connectivity, supported bus services, and a car parking and car-share strategy which is effective in reducing car ownership and shifting the balance towards sustainable transport.

In summary, the Travel Plan:

- should have a lower starting target for car/van use (63% initially, with a reduction to 58% over 5 years)
- will need more ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions in line with the Transport for the North Decarbonisation Plan
- should incorporate working from home as a mitigation, including hybrid working
- will require annual travel plan surveys and targets which assess the distance travelled, not just the mode, and which are sophisticated enough to track a changing mixture of on-site and at-home working in a hybrid working environment
- will only succeed in the context of a comprehensive masterplan with transport planning at its heart.

Phasing and conditions

The Trust is of the view that the transport deficiencies of the application are sufficient for refusal to be justified on those grounds alone. It will not be possible to secure sufficient modifications to the design by attaching planning conditions, because improving the public transport and walking/cycling access would require alteration to the street layout, as would a sustainable car parking strategy.

Once the application has been refined to the extent that it is possible to recommend approval, it will be important to attach appropriate conditions to secure the sustainable transport improvements in a timely manner. Walking and cycling routes should be completed before the first occupiers move in, along with

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the new bus stops, as the best time for people to form new travel habits is when they move house. As the build-out progresses the most direct paths giving access to amenities must be opened before the houses are occupied.

The Mount Oswald estate was masterplanned with a good network of recreational paths, connections to the surrounding path network, and a cycle route alongside the main access road, but some of the key links are not yet open, even though houses have been occupied for several years.



Path leading to A167 at NW corner of Mount Oswald

The cycle route and footway by the new colleges at Mount Oswald has not yet been properly surfaced, over a year after the colleges opened. Where dropped kerbs have been provided, some of them are unusable by wheelchairs because the carriageway has not yet been brought up to the finished level.

A planning condition could be applied along these lines:

‘No part of the development shall be occupied until

- a) the pedestrian and cycle route to the Park and Ride bus stop has been finished and opened;
- b) the new A691 bus stops have been provided, including a suitable crossing to the west-bound stop, and linked to the development via direct pedestrian path connections;

These facilities shall thereafter be kept open while any further construction work proceeds. No plot shall be occupied until the main pedestrian and cycle routes connecting that plot to the surrounding network are available for use, including by wheelchair users, and these routes, or reasonably convenient alternatives, shall be kept open while any further construction work proceeds.’

Reason: to give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements, to address the needs of people with disabilities, and to promote sustainable transport methods in accordance with Policy 21 of the County Durham Plan and Part 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

A condition to ensure the timely provision of bus services penetrating the site should also be applied.

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Refusal of planning permission on transport grounds

Developers are fond of quoting paragraph 109 of the NPPF which states that “development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety”. An earlier version of the NPPF referred to refusal “on transport grounds”. That set such a high bar that it was very difficult to refuse applications that failed to address sustainable transport, unless there was also a severe impact on the highway. The change of wording in 2018 was to clarify that it is appropriate to refuse applications on transport grounds beyond the impact on highway safety. For example, if a development proposal fails to identify and pursue opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport, it is appropriate to refuse the application even if highway safety has not been significantly affected. In this way the NPPF supports the urgent need to promote sustainable transport as part of the nation's response to the climate crisis.

The Trust considers that this application has failed to comply with local and national planning policies relating to transport to such an extent that it would be right to refuse it on those grounds alone.