

# THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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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  
5 August 2022

Dear Ms Hurton,

**DM/22/01940/FPA Ramside Hall Hotel Ramside Durham DH1 1TD**  
*Erection of 2no. woodland lodges*

The City of Durham Trust submits the following objection to this application for development in the Green Belt the based on its cumulative negative impact on the Durham Green Belt.

## **Context**

Contrary to the various submissions for this site, the Green Belt is important to Durham in preventing coalescence between Belmont, West Rainton, High Pittington and Sherburn. It links into the Wear Valley corridor. Ramside Hall and the golf courses occupy a substantial area between the settlements. It is in a strategic landscape location and is edge of settlement (Belmont).

There have been three previous Lodge proposals - for three bothy lodges that is unimplemented, six treehouses with four implemented and the more recent four lodges replacing the two unimplemented tree houses. These were shown on plan as sitting within a tree belt forming part of the structural landscaping around the Hall complex. There have been a substantial number of building additions in and around main listed Hall.

The Trust has been unable to find any comprehensive landscape plans of the full complex or any plans for the areas around the lodges relating to the main buildings and the Hall. There are seemingly no available plans showing the listed building setting. Equally there are no illustrations of the treehouses and new lodges that show whether these have delivered the promised merger into the tree belt. The treehouses are in view in winter from Pittington Lane. There are tree surveys and constraints plans but these fall short of the necessary landscape analysis and do not demonstrate how the structural landscaping is to be managed and intrusions mitigated against.

Substantial concern was documented (City of Durham, Heritage, and Design Section) at the outset for the first bothy application and this emphasised the need to ensure the primacy of the structural tree belt.

Documentation was submitted to demonstrate why the green belt was not going to be negatively impacted upon and how very special circumstances attached to business developments for Ramside Hall. These were without any adequate plan evidence or landscape analysis and were poorly justified in relation to Ramside Hall's business viability and delivery of promised increased tourism.

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## Proposals

The four recent lodges are now proposed to be six, and their design is different from the treehouses in the way they do not merge into the tree belt and are of conventional construction. This application breaks further out of the tree belt and appears to be exposing the two new lodges more to view and this is not adequately shown.

The design bears no relationship to the Hall and its surrounds and is only justified by the applicant as being the same as those previously permitted. The Trust chose not to comment on previous lodges proposal because they were promised as being set in the tree belt and occupying approximately the same footprint as the previously permitted treehouses.

It is very unfortunate that the current application simply refers to the 2017 justifications with no proper evidence. Those were already open to question. How are two lodges fundamental to Ramside Hall's business? There are no documented outcomes. It is similarly unfortunate that the consultant's submission chooses to represent the applicant's view of planning as simply a 'restriction' on business:

*'4.3 Despite the planning restrictions associated with its location within the Green Belt, Ramside Estates Limited will continue to propose improvements and extensions to their facilities in order to stay ahead of a rapidly changing and highly competitive market.'*

*'4.6 ...; it is essential that Durham County Council do not obstruct, and indeed help to facilitate, the future development of this key site.'*

The two lodges are new build and as such fail automatically against green belt policy. No adequate supporting evidence is provided on their impact and how the surrounding landscape is to be managed. Green belt and listed building impacts are obvious and unassessed. Justification of very special circumstances is weak, relying on repeated and questionable previous submissions. The lodges add to the cumulative impact on the green belt from the extensive range of Ramside Hall development. These have not been accompanied by a demonstration of how the structural landscaping is to be used to mitigate against their obvious weakening of the green belt. This seems long overdue.

## Planning Policies

County Durham Plan Policy 20 states that '*development proposals within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national planning policy.*' This means that National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) applies as the statutory development plan policy to this proposal in relation to the Green Belt. As submitted, the proposals fail against the following:

## County Durham Plan

### Policy 10 - Development in the Countryside

#### General Design Principles for all Development in the Countryside

As new development in the countryside the lodges do not accord with all other relevant development plan policies, are not mitigated, or compensated for, and by virtue of their siting and design give rise to:

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*I. Unacceptable harm to the heritage, intrinsic character, beauty, and tranquillity of the countryside individually and cumulatively, which cannot be adequately mitigated or compensated for.*

## **Policy 20 Green Belt**

The proposal fails against policy 20 by not meeting the criteria from the NPPF as follows:

### **NPPF - Proposals affecting the Green Belt**

The proposal is harmful and therefore

**Para.147.** *Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.*

The harm caused by the proposals needs to be given 'substantial weight':

**Para.148.** *When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that **substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt.***

The harm is not outweighed by 'other considerations':

*'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

**Para.149.** The lodges are by definition inappropriate development because, as new buildings, they are not covered by any of the exceptions included in this paragraph.

*A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt.*

**Para.150.** The lodges should not be considered as 'not inappropriate' because they are not covered by any of the listed exemptions.

## **Policy 29 Sustainable Design**

The lodges do not provide a positive contribution to the landscape and heritage significance. There is no demonstration of structural landscaping required of edge of settlement development.

*All development proposals will be required to achieve well designed buildings and places having regard to supplementary planning documents and other local guidance documents where relevant, and:*

*a. contribute positively to an area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape and landscape features, helping to create and reinforce locally distinctive and sustainable communities;*

*Landscape proposals should:*

*k. make appropriate provision for maintenance and long term management; and*

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

## **Policy 44 Historic Environment**

The lodge proposals do not demonstrate respect for the setting of a listed building.

*In determining applications, particular regard will be given to the following:*

**Listed Buildings,** *b. respect for the, setting, which contribute(s) to the significance of the building.*

The Trust therefore objects to the application because of its failures against the policies of the County Durham plan.

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Yours sincerely,

John Lowe,  
Chair, City of Durham Trust