

Dear Ms Morina

**DM/21/01789/FPA Land at St Johns Road Nevilles Cross**

*Construction of 12 townhouse dwellings with associated works.*

*11/02/22 Amended Drawings*

The City of Durham Trust notes the welcome omission of the vehicle access from the A167 that would also have created a vehicle through-route. It notes the change to incorporate sunken gardens, terraces and a small, landscaped area in the access and parking courtyard. It does not find that these are sufficient to demonstrate that the proposals conform to the requirements of the County Durham Plan (CDP) and Durham City Neighbourhood Plan (DCNP). The reference to DCNP Policy T1 in the original objection is no longer relevant as the A167 access is omitted.

The Trust makes the following comments:

**Landscaping**

The St Johns Road frontage hedge is impossible as shown because there is no space at street level on top of the sunken garden retaining wall. The planting shown under the new terraces is not achievable due to lack of light and natural irrigation. The central landscape space remains rather optimistically shown as a small green in an illustration in the Design and Access Statement as opposed to the surround to two parking spaces shown on the plans. This is too small to achieve any softening of the central area and proximity to manoeuvring cars in this tight courtyard is likely to cause problems. The sunken gardens will create an unnecessary 'hard' frontage to St Johns Road – creating a very discordant intrusion in the street character. These gardens are both narrow and deep set. They will need protection at footpath level with fencing or walling due to their depth, the hedge shown being impractical. The combination of these will lead to them receiving less direct sunshine. The A167 (Newcastle Road) front gardens are close to the busy road and will be vulnerable to nuisance from passers-by. The terraces create a large and uniform undercroft that adds to the bleakness of the central access court. In combination they will not achieve much softening of the development or properly usable space for the residents. They illustrate the lack of space caused by increasing the number of units on the site.

**Design and the Conservation Area**

There is a conspicuous failure to show the relationship with the St Johns Road buildings. This is telling because the overdevelopment of the plot is discordant with the street character. The site sits at the meeting of the terraces with the lower density house and bungalows at the cul de sac head. The solution needs to respect the character of the street and it fails to do so. The illustrations of other examples mostly show high density terraced settings into which new terraces are inserted. This part of the conservation area has neither townhouses nor the very intensive terrace development found closer into the city centre. The sunken garden examples

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relate more to highly urban high property value areas. Green walls are expensive to create and difficult to maintain. The design aspires through examples to a high quality of design but fails to achieve this through flaws in the basic concept and will create an inappropriate solution to this site in the conservation area.

## **Transport**

It remains unclear whether the amended proposal has adequate numbers of parking spaces for the size of the units proposed. This is particularly an issue if bin, household, and bike storage are also considered. At 1.5m width, the A167/St John's Road pedestrian access is inadequate and should be 3.0m to properly allow for combined cycle and pedestrian use

## **Viability**

The information presented does not review the cost of alternative forms of development and what impact they might have on viability. The design solution presented is a very intensive development with high build costs due to its extent of construction. The land purchase costs are the buyer's risk and the high land remediation costs are a known consequence of tackling former filling station sites. The Trust therefore considers that the viability report should not be considered as a determining factor in relation to the development as proposed, a Section 106 agreement or contribution to affordable housing.

The Trust would very much like to see an appropriate housing development on this redundant site, but the amended proposal remains unfit for purpose and should be rejected completely.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe  
Chair, City of Durham Trust