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14 June 2023

Mr Graham Blakey
Planning Development Central/East
Room 4/86-102
County Hall
Durham City
DH1 5UL

Dear Mr Blakey,

DM/22/03778/FPA: development of 368 dwellings, associated access and works, and demolition of former farm buildings (resubmission) (further information).

The City of Durham Trust welcomes the opportunity to comment on the package of documents recently submitted as "further information" for the above application.

We have already commented upon walking and cycling aspects of the latest proposals (our letter dated 11 June 2023). That letter suggested some modest improvements that we hope the applicant would be willing to accommodate, but also detailed a significant deficiency in the walking and cycling provision relating to a key spine route envisaged in the County Council's adopted masterplan.

As you know, the Trust welcomed the County Council's forthright refusal on multiple grounds of the preceding application DM/21/02360/FPA for its failures against CDP policies and the County Council's approved Masterplan for the Sniperley site H5.

The Trust acknowledges that the applicant has made several improvements arising from discussions with County Council officers and in response to the concerns of external consultees but considers that the following matters that we have raised previously continue to constitute grounds for refusal of this application as failing specific requirements laid down in CDP Policies, notably Policy 5. Many of the issues arise from disconnects between the Bellway part of site H5 and the much larger County Durham Land LLP part.

Number of dwellings

CDP Policy 5 states unequivocally that "***Development will comprise 1,700 houses at Sniperley Park***". This is not a range of numbers or a whimsical indicative figure, it is a firmly prescribed quantity relating to all of the factors

in play, including the capacity of the surrounding infrastructure. Yet the combined number being proposed by Bellway and County Durham Land LLP is 1,918 houses - 13% over the Policy 5 figure. This has consequences for traffic generation and has contributed to various design issues which we detail later.

Access and site for local centre

Whilst the site for the local centre is on the County Durham Land-controlled part of the H5 allocation, the placing of the local centre has a strong bearing on the design and layout of the Bellway part of the allocation. If the local centre is placed on the Sacriston side of the electricity transmission line, in accord with the DCC Adopted Masterplan, then the northern-most connection from the Bellway site to the County Durham Land site assumes a much greater importance. The Trust welcomes the latest revision, upgrading this to a cycling and walking link, but objects to the indirectness of this link. The DCC Masterplan envisaged two links, one of them passing through green space framing Sniperley Hall. The Bellway proposals do not provide a convenient, direct and legible network for this part of the site: the proposed routes are disrupted by the locations of the SUDS ponds and do not align well with the proposed County Durham Land layout. The Trust would like to see Bellway's full compliance with the DCC Masterplan layout because doing so would ensure that the development has good connections to the County Durham Land part of the allocation no matter which location is final chosen for the local centre. This must be resolved prior to any granting of full planning permission.

Policy 5 Requirement (a) Sustainable urban extension

Principle 10 of the DCC Adopted Masterplan is:

> *"Design a sensitive movement network that promotes active travel over the use of cars and fits with the landscape."*

As we said in our objection of 11 February 2023, the unexceptional suburban layout proposed by Bellway does not comply with this principle. Note that the County Council's Adopted Masterplan does not just require promotion of active travel, but promotion of active travel **over the use of cars**. This is of critical importance. DCC's Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 identifies an interim target for the end of 2023 of reducing fossil fuel vehicles on the road by 35,000 or a 25% reduction in vehicle miles[1]. A recent academic report[2] opens its summary with the following words:

> *"Reducing car use and ownership is necessary for decarbonising the UK economy. There are no plausible pathways to get to net-zero by 2050 unless the number of cars reduces."*

1Climate Change Strategy & Climate Emergency Response Plan, 2022-2024, Durham County Council. p.6

2Morgan, M., Morton, C., Monsuur, F., Lovelace, R. & Heinen, E. 2022. Understanding Change in Car Use over Time (UnCCUT): End of Project Report. Leeds: DecarboN8.

Considerable weight, therefore, must be given to whether the application will succeed in promoting active travel over the use of cars.

There remain issues with the further amended cycling and pedestrian paths which need to be addressed if active travel is to be truly prioritised, as detailed in the Trust's letter of 11th June and below.

Within the site, Bellway's path network is not legible or coherent, but incomplete and in places quite indirect. Note particularly in the Adopted Masterplan the generally straight link from the A691 through to the linear park and the primary school (points 5, 6, 13 and 14 on the Masterplan diagram, p. 32-33) compared with the Bellway proposal which twists and turns alongside the main access road. This does not deliver features 6, “mature and welcoming green gateway to west” or 5 “main western connection … facilitating connections for pedestrians”.

The A691 bus stops will be separated from each other by about 140m but as is clear from the following excerpt from the Bellway plans, paths do not connect direct from the development and all pedestrian access is via the road:

While the Trust welcomes the latest revision to the application which has introduced additional paths and upgraded others, the network overall is still poorly designed for everyday journeys (e.g. routes are not direct and connections are lacking from some streets) and simply does not give priority over motor vehicle access in any way.

<u>Requirement (d) SUDS scheme</u>

The submitted plans and information show substantial areas of SUDS drainage basins, including within the linear park. Detail of their actual performance in relation to persisting ground conditions or periods of anticipated water retention is not available. A SUDS scheme has to have

deep enough ponds to hold the water and avoid the surroundings getting too wet. The landscape plan assumes they will be wet grassland. They are unusable parts of the landscaping and great care will be required in their management to fulfil their potential.

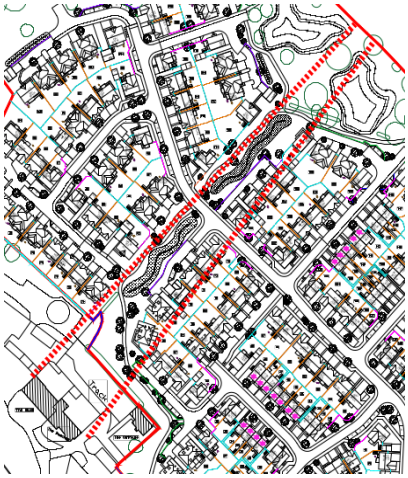
Requirement (e) design of development in the vicinity of Sniperley Hall and Farm will have regard to their character and setting

The way in which the farm conversion (the subject of a separate application) is designed needs to achieve full integration with the neighbouring character area in this main Bellway Homes Ltd application. This must ensure that the design of the houses in the vicinity of the farm is appropriate and that they form a suitable character area. The Trust will be pleased to see the farm buildings appropriately restored and modernised to provide good quality residential accommodation, but this redevelopment must be coherent with the main housing provision in keeping with the DCC Masterplan.

The layout of the housing immediately to the north of the Hall, where eight houses back onto the historic parkland with 1.8m close boarded fences, does not seem to have regard to the character or setting of the Hall. The housing density may be reduced slightly compared to the rest of the development, but only by providing more substantial private gardens. This falls substantially below the design quality expectedby the policy.

Requirement (g) – linear park … maintaining the relationship of the Hall with land to the north and with Sniperley Farm ...

The DCC Adopted Masterplan p. 34-35 (Landscape and Green Infrastructure) includes a broad and straight section of linear park labelled “The Avenue” providing a vista north-east from the Hall as far as the B6532. On p.37 the DCC Masterplan shows an aerial image outlining the scope of the vista, which extends the full width of the Hall. The joint Submitted Masterplan by the applicants shows a much narrower strip of parkland which is not in alignment across the site boundaries, with a somewhat indirect path layout. The following image demonstrates the extent to which Bellway's proposal impinges on the vista envisaged in the DCC Masterplan, with a row of houses blocking a substantial part of the view.



Requirement (h) compensatory Green Belt improvements

The policy requires “new public rights of way linking to the wider footpath network in the Browney Valley to the south” but the applicant's proposals do not include any. The Trust notes the comments from the Rights of Way Officer (20 January 2023) that there is no suitable connection to the wider footpath network at present. In the view of the Trust, there should be at least one footpath from the development, crossing the A691 and connecting through the compensatory improvement land to Witton Gilbert Footpath 12.

Requirement (j) connected … to the east of the A167 through suitable, convenient, safe and attractive cycleways and footpaths

The Design and Access Statement p. 90 assesses Policy 5(j) as “not applicable” to the Bellway application. This is clearly not correct, as even though the Bellway site does not border on the A167, there are on and off-site provisions which will need to be made.

The Trust welcomes the funding of cycling and walking improvements at the Sniperley roundabout, but objects to there being no proposal to improve cycling and walking crossings at the A691 Park and Ride roundabout, despite this being on the route from the development to the communities east of the A167.

The Trust is disappointed to see no requirement for improving the cycling and walking provision on the A167 to Durham Johnston School. Even if the majority of young people will be attending Framwellgate Moor School, enhancing the A167 route has the potential to enable a modal shift from car to active travel on this route, and thereby reduce the impact of additional vehicular traffic generated by the Sniperley development.

Requirement (k) links between the housing and the Park and Ride

The DCC adopted Masterplan envisaged a clear and direct cycle and pedestrian link along the boundary between the Bellway and County Durham Land sites. The amended path network does not provide a clear and direct link to the Park & Ride and will not adequately serve the County Durham Land LLP part of the site. See the Trust's letter of 11 June for more detail.

Requirement (l) impacts on highway and the wider road network

> *“(l). To ensure that there are no unacceptable impacts on highway safety or severe residual cumulative impacts on the wider road network (in terms of capacity and congestion), details of all necessary on- and off-site highway works and improvements, together with a timetable for their implementation, shall be agreed with the Council as part of the comprehensive masterplan and any future planning applications for the Sniperley Park site. These works and improvements shall include, but not be limited to:*
>
> - *improvements at the junctions of Trout’s Lane, Potterhouse Lane and the B6532;*

- *a new link between the B6532 and the A167 park and ride roundabout; and*
- *capacity improvements along the A167 corridor from Neville's Cross to Sniperley, including improvements to Sniperley Roundabout.*

A contribution to delivering sustainable transport in accordance with policies 21 (Delivering Sustainable Travel) and 22 (Durham City Transport) will also be required."

The two developers together propose 1,918 houses. To repeat our previous comments, much focus was placed in the Examination in Public on the capacity of the road network to cope with the 1,700 houses proposed by the County Council; indeed, the position taken by the County Council was that a Western Relief Road was needed if more than 350 houses were built at Sniperley. The Inspector in his Final Report dismissed this proposition, deleted reference to the relief roads, and instead included "*other requirements that are necessary to ensure safe and suitable access to the Sniperley Park site and that the residual cumulative impacts on the wider road network are not severe*." He carried this through into Policy 5 requirement (l).

It falls to the County Council to finalise whatever set of measures will be needed to ensure that 1,700 houses at Sniperley Park will not cause severe cumulative impacts on the wider road network. Such measures should include up-to-date travel plans for the Johnston School and the other schools that cause vehicular traffic on the A167 and could entail measures such as access restrictions on Redhills Lane and a safe walking/cycling route from Bearpark.. The risk of severe impacts would be made all the worse if the two current planning applications were to succeed and 1,918 houses were built at Sniperley.

Policy 21 Sustainable transport

We provide here a summary of the Trust's objections. Detailed analysis and justification with respect to local and national policy and guidance is attached in the appendix to this letter.

- 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). Pedestrian and cycle routes are mainly round the periphery, are more suitable for leisure use than for travel, and do not have priority at crossings.
- 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).
- The arrangements for car parking are inflexible 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).

- 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. Only a single car club space is envisaged. Reducing the in-curtilage provision of car parking and greater encouragement of shared ownership would help support the requirements of the Building for Life SPD paragraphs 4.1-4.5 and 11.5.
- There is no proposal for a safe crossing of the A691 to access the westbound bus stop.
- The developer's proposals for cycling/walking links to Framwellgate Moor School are welcomed, but without addressing the crossing of the Blackie Boy roundabout they will have limited impact. Various design details could be improved.
- 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 66% reducing to 63% over five years.

Policy 29 Design

The newly submitted plans remain firmly rooted in standard volume house-builders' layouts and house types.

The DCC Adopted Masterplan envisages a wider range of layouts and house types, with more use of denser forms such as terraces and apartments allowing greater freedom in disposition of green space, car parking and the path network. Exceeding the Policy 5 figure of 1,700 homes has also affected the design quality. This has led to some of the failures in policy compliance already mentioned, including:

- orientation of houses to optimise thermal comfort and solar PV;
- lack of legibility, priority and directness for the path network;
- car parking provision which is inefficient in land take and "locks in" parking use when a move to lower car ownership is required;
- poor handling of the setting for Sniperley Hall, and the narrowness of the linear park provision.

When other built forms have been deployed, these have not been to best advantage. The apartment blocks, with no private green space, are clustered together overlooking the Park and Ride car park. While proximity to the Park and Ride may advantage households without a car, a better balance could have been achieved by siting the apartments adjacent to the parkland and with better access to the on-site amenities such as the future school and local centre.

The 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.

There is no credible 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 three 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.
2. The site vision offered 'verdant tree-lined 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. Despite some amendments, 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 house-owner. The reality is far from the 'verdant' vision shown in the Design and Access statement incorporating the Design Code.
3. The setting to Sniperley Hall is basic in concept and fails to positively enhance either the Hall or the new development. The partial open space buffer is minimal with no screening other than a new hedgerow, and the remainder of the boundary area is formed from relatively small rear gardens.

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. As an example, this would have offered opportunities for creating distinctiveness and unique site character.

Conclusions

The revised application does not offer sufficient improvements compared to the original submission which the Council was minded to reject. Basic design and sustainability failures remain embedded in the approach chosen. For all the reasons set out above, the Trust considers that this application must be refused.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust

APPENDIX ON THE TRANSPORT ASPECTS OF THE BELLWAY 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.

Pedestrian and cycle network within the site

General layout and priority

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”. The Masterplan principle 10 requires “a sensitive movement network that promotes active travel over the use of cars”. The Sniperley Health Active Travel Connectivity Plan lists a number of Key Design Principles (KDP) which should be observed by the application.

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, even when the route links to connections to the external path network. The adoptable cyclepath 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.

By contrast the Council's adopted Masterplan shows a more comprehensive and coherent cycle and walking network. The B6532, coloured red and yellow, runs NW to S through this excerpt. A direct path to the Park and Ride / A167 roundabout is shown running along the boundary between the Bellway and CDL sections of the site. It is not clear from the Bellway application whether either developer proposes to provide this path.

A direct route all the way from the A691 access roundabout to the primary school and onwards to the A167 is indicated, along with two more direct links between the two sites. While the Bellway application proposes part of the route to the school, it does not continue direct to the roundabout. Only one other link is proposed, and access to it is not direct: it lacks the “legibility” one would expect from an important route to the local centre.

The layout is what you would expect to get by designing the road access first, fitting in the houses, and then adding the path network last. The reverse should have been attempted, to ensure that the path network achieves primacy and priority throughout the “sustainable urban extension”, as required by NPPF paragraph 112, CDP Policy 5, and Masterplan principle 10.

Design quality

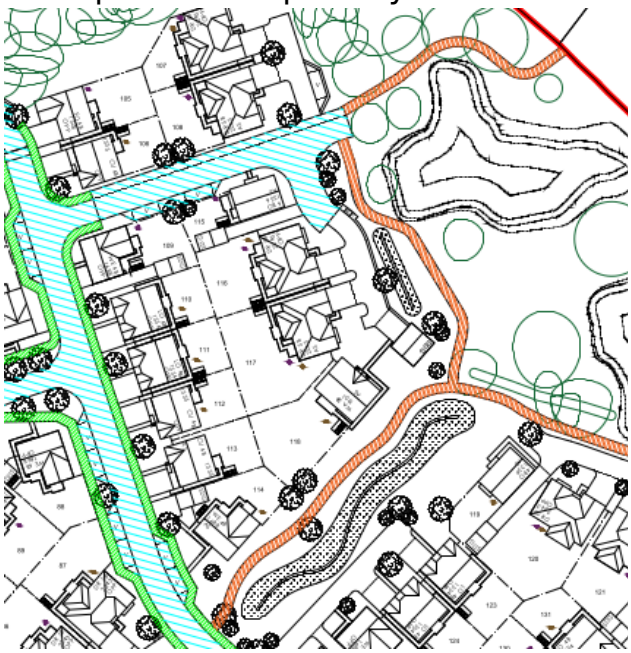
The Transport Assessment para. 5.22 states that the footway widths throughout the site will be 2.0m “exceeding DCC standards” but meeting the recommendations of *Manual for Streets*. The Trust was critical of the continued adherence to 1.8m in the Council's guidance, and welcomes this increase. However, the submitted Adoptable Highways Plan shows the widths are still 1.8m. The Trust would like to see revised plans submitted, or the 2.0m width secured via a condition.

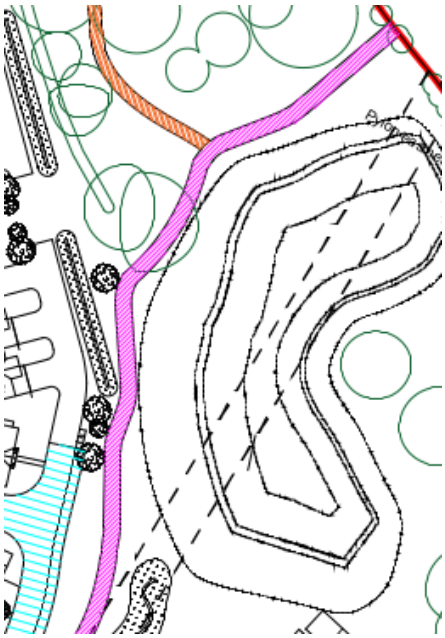
For cycle routes, high quality would now entail compliance with LTN 1/20, the current national guidance for cycling design, as stipulated in the policies of the County Durham Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan which, according to Policy 21, “all development should have regard to”. This is confirmed 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.

Although the applicant mentions LTN 1/20 in the documentation, various features of the proposed path network do not comply. There are many examples where compliance could be achieved without major rearrangement of the layout of the development.

The indirectness of the path network across the wider housing allocation has been described, but at the micro level the paths seem to be unnecessarily

indirect. Two examples, showing the main path to the local centre and the main path to the primary school:

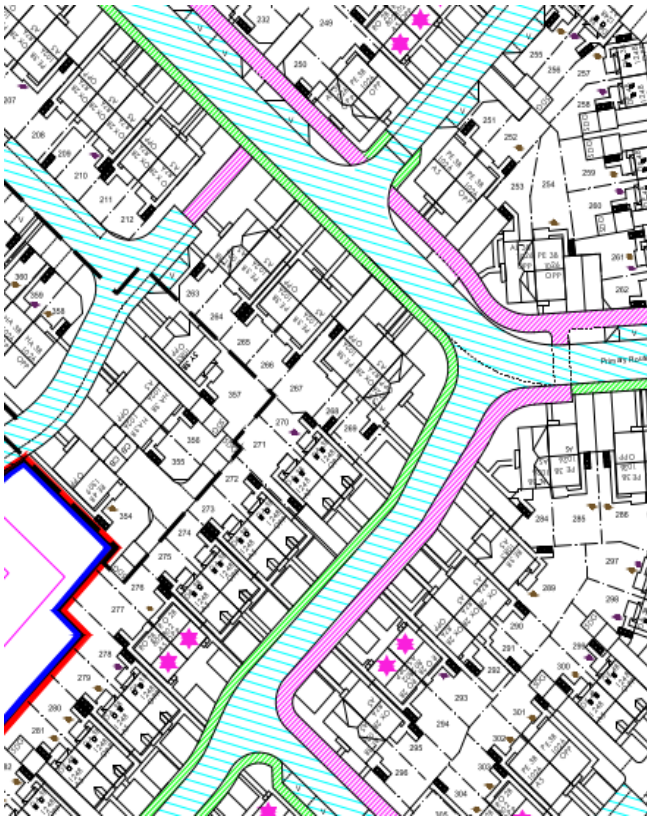




The Key Design Principles recommend the use of “horizontal deflection, such as intermittent road narrowing and chicaning to reduce speeds” but this was supposed to be applied to the road network, not the paths!

Examples of detailed design issues

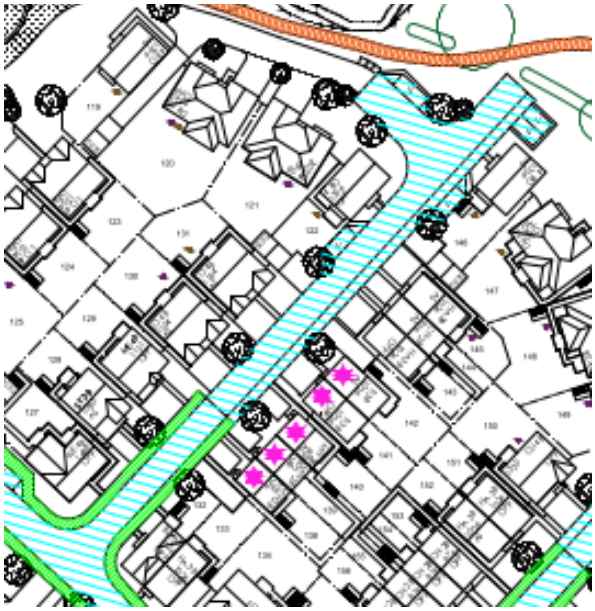
The following excerpt from the Adoptable Highways Plan illustrates a number of design deficiencies:



1. The short cycleway (shown in pink) near the top of the excerpt links the housing which is accessed from the Fire Station turning on the A691 to the rest of the site. The verge and visitor parking space prevent users joining the main cycleway on the other side of the road.
2. Where the main cycleway crosses the cul-de-sac the cycleway surface ends. The latest edition of the Highway Code advises that vehicles should give way to pedestrians and cyclists crossing side roads. Among the KDPs are recommendations for raised entry treatments and continuous footways. Such treatments would help to "give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements" in accordance with NPPF paragraph 112 and reinforce observance of the Highway Code.
3. The KDPs recommend tightening side road radii in order to reduce entry/exit speeds. The radius shown here appears to be 6.0m which comes from guidance which is now outdated. *Manual for Streets 2*, para. 9.4.10 states that "advice contained in TD 42/95, that minimum corner radii should be 6m in urban areas, should therefore not be taken as best practice when the needs of vulnerable road users are to be prioritised". Tight corner radii are recommended by LTN 1/20 in paras. 7.6.10 and 10.5.4. Paragraph 10.5.16 suggests corner radii of preferably no more than 4.0m.
4. The excerpt shows both the cycleway and the footway (shown in green) on the opposite side passing a large number of driveways. Both abut 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 on foot in icy conditions. The DCC Residential Design Guide asks for a minimum width of 800mm at the back of the footway with crossfall of no more than 1:40. There is no DCC guidance given for cycleways. As the cycleway is 3.0m wide, the Trust suggests that at least 2.0m of the width should have the crossfall limited to 1:40. This could be secured by applying a condition.
5. Where the cycleway abuts the carriageway, if the kerb is the normal height then Table 5-3 of LTN 1/20 would require an additional 200mm width to maintain the effective width of the cycleway. This has not been provided.

Similar issues can be found elsewhere on the Adoptable Highways Plan. In two or three places, a double line is shown across the carriageway, but these may only indicate a change of surface (e.g. a band of setts) rather than raised tables which would actually deliver priority for pedestrian and cycle movements. There is no clear 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 because of the poor side-road crossing treatments.

The following excerpt shows one of a number of examples where the adoptable footway ceases soon after turning into the cul-de-sac. No formal connections are shown to the path that skirts the edge of the site. People will



inevitably create a path by walking across the grass, but there should be a properly designed connection to ensure wheelchair accessibility.
Finally, how are pedestrians using the footway on the left supposed to cross the side road? (No information on dropped kerbs has been provided to allow wheelchair access to be assessed.)

Cycle parking

Apartment blocks

The plans for the Beekeeper and Honeyman apartment blocks do not show any cycle parking on the ground floor of the block. Without proper provision residents may be tempted to use some of the stairwell space on each floor to store bicycles, and this could be a risk during a fire evacuation. On the Proposed Layout drawings there are some rectangles close to the buildings but it is not clear if these are secure cycle parking (e.g. lockable hangars).

It is not clear whether the intention is for residents of the apartments to use the public “cycle hub” or whether private cycle parking is provided for their use. If the cycle hub is publicly accessible, what will the security arrangements be? The location of the cycle hub is not clear on the plans.

Best practice for apartment residents would be to provide storage for cycles and other mobility equipment in a secure area easily accessible within the ground floor of the apartment building. External cycle storage is more at risk from theft, and needs to be properly overlooked.

The design of the cycle parking is not shown. A condition should be applied to ensure that the cycle parking does not just cater for standard cycles but also for equipment which may be used by families or disabled people, e.g. child/cargo trailers, adapted cycles.

Houses

Most of the house designs have no internal space available for cycle storage. The applicant proposes to provide secure garden sheds, but these are inevitably less secure than storage within the house.

The present application shows bin storage on the Adoptable Highways Plan, but not on the Proposed Layout sheets. The shed locations are not shown even though para. 5.81 of the Design and Access Statement says that the “location and treatment of services including bin stores and cycle storage has been considered within the design proposal”.

Access to back gardens is difficult with mid-terrace properties. Plots 48, 32 and 33 in this excerpt from the Adoptable Highways Plan have access routes which go round the back of another property. It is regretable that these affordable homes, where the occupants might particularly benefit from cheaper transport, will have difficulty accessing their cycle storage. Locations to store the dustbins and cycles at the front of the property would be much more convenient for the householders.

Car parking

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 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 5.21 of the Design and Access Statement acknowledges this issue, and says that on-street parking “will be carefully designed to be typically no more than 4 spaces appear [sic] in a row, and areas of landscaping and/or planting should be used to break up the appearance”, but does not offer any solution for the on-plot parking.

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, as demonstrated by the devloper's commitment to passive charging provision at all visitor parking spaces. 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. A higher proportion of unallocated parking would also deal with the uneven distribution of visitor spaces noted above. The Building for Life assessment by Pegasus Urban Design (Design and Access Statement part 2 PDF p. 51) notes room for improvement on car parking.

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 and the DCC Climate Emergency Response Plan 2. These measures could be combined with more car club provision, as encouraged by Paragraph 4.4 of the council's Building for Life SPD. The

applicant currently proposes a single car club space for the whole site, but has not justified this level of provision with any evidence or strategy. 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. It is a standard volume housebuilder's proposal rather than a “high quality, zero carbon, well-designed community that will stand the test of time and leave a legacy which Durham will be proud of” – an excerpt from the Masterplan quoted on the second page of the Design and Access Statement.

Bus stops and services

The Trust very much welcomes the provision of the link road to allow a bus service to penetrate the site, but considers it unwise to allow general motor traffic access along the length of this route. A bus gate would help encourage sustainable transport, particularly for access to the primary school.

Access to A691 bus stops

Formal bus stops 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. The geometry of the roundabout would allow for quite high speeds.

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, which is clearly not the case here. For the A691 a zebra or 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 would be no less necessary for a pedestrian-only crossing to be light controlled.

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 and back.

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 adopted Masterplan states (p. 41) that “all parts of the site should be within 400m walk of a bus stop”. 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).

In paragraph 5.38 of the Transport Assessment the applicant notes DCC's planning application for the Park and Ride extension where it is stated that “walk distances of up to 1km are acceptable to P&R sites”. The applicant uses this to demonstrate that the whole of the site is within the required distance. Checking the AECOM Transport Assessment for the DCC application it is clear that the CIHT guidance quoted there has been misinterpreted. The 1km figure shown in table 2, para. 4.2.1, is the “acceptable” limit for “Commuting / School” (the “desirable” limit is 500m). The fact is that the distances given by CIHT are not to be applied to multi-mode journeys. The commuting/school distance is the figure appropriate for a journey entirely on foot. It is clear that a 1km journey on foot followed by a bus journey on congested roads and then potentially a further walk to reach the destination is not competitive with the private car. A 1km journey by foot to the Park and Ride would only be regarded as acceptable if the pedestrian is employed at the Park and Ride site. This casuistry has no place in a planning application.

Table 3.1 of the Transport Assessment claims to show the number of buses per hour from the A691 bus stops and the Park and Ride at different times of day and on Sundays. It states that there are 34 buses per hour Monday to Saturday daytime from the Park and Ride, and 12 per hour in the evenings. The Park and Ride service ceases at 18:36 in the evening and is only four buses per hour. The figures for the A691 are also totally inaccurate. The combined X5 and X15 give a half-hourly services Monday to Saturday, and hourly in the evenings, rather than 12 per hour daytime and 8 per hour in the evening as given in the Transport Assessment.

It is clear that each bus stop has a service frequency less than every 12 minutes, therefore the CIHT's applicable maximum distance for walking to the bus stop is 300m.

Assuming that a bus service is provided passing through the development, with suitably located bus stops, many of the houses will be within 300m of a bus stop and almost all will be within the 400m required by the DCC adopted Masterplan. Figure 14 on p. 44 of the Transport Assessment confirms this: it shows distances assuming the creation of the through bus route and access to the B6532 from the north-west of the site. Both of these depend on the County Durham land development coming forward. Figure 12 on p. 42 shows the position without access to the B6532. 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.

The Trust considers that for the development to provide acceptable bus access, the link road to the B6532 and through bus service must be available to enable the build-out of the whole site. The northern parts of the Bellway site, which are beyond 400m of the existing P+R and A691 bus stops, should not be occupied until better bus access is in place. The Trust asks that a condition be applied such that each tranche of housing cannot be occupied unless a regular bus service to Durham city centre is accessible within 500m. If the applicant wishes to develop the whole site before the B6532 links are available, it would be possible to satisfy this condition through the applicant subsidising a temporary service.

Quality of services

The Transport Assessment makes little comment on the evening bus services, which are hourly on the A691 only. 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. 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. This will very much reduce the take-up of sustainable transport from the site. The Trust is of the view that financial support for more frequent evening bus services in order to establish bus use by new residents would be appropriate.

Assessment of site accessibility: pedestrians and cyclists

The penultimate paragraph of CDP Policy 5 requires “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”. 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 signalising 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.

Appendix 19 of the Transport Assessment (p. 254 onwards of the second PDF) gives notes of a meeting between both applicants and DCC in November 2022 at which the sustainable travel interventions in the Health Active Travel Connectivity Plan were discussed. Section 10 of the Transport Assessment lists those interventions which the applicant is prepared to fund or contribute to:

- part of an on-site route from Pity Me to the Park and Ride
- pedestrian and cycle facilities at the Sniperley roundabout
- a route upgrade from the Park and Ride to Framwellgate School
- vegetation clearance along the A691 to Witton Gilbert

The Trust very much welcomes the commitment to creating a largely off-road walking and cycling route to Framwellgate School, and would be keen to provide practical input to the refinement of this scheme, which relies rather heavily on shared-use pavements when some sections could enable separation of cycling and walking. The main weakness in the proposal, however, is the failure to tackle the Blackie Boy roundabout. Without safe crossings there, it is likely that many parents will not be prepared to let their children travel unaccompanied to the school.

The Trust would like clarity on the delivery of the Sniperley roundabout improvements. One drawing submitted shows the widening of the entry to the roundabout from Dryburn Park as the sole intervention. It is said that the additional traffic generated by the development will make it harder for drivers to gain access to the roundabout from Dryburn Park and the widening

will reduce the impact. Widening may make it harder for pedestrians and cyclists to cross this arm of the junction.

The drawings submitted by Bellway for the proposed cycle/walking route from the Park and Ride to Framwellgate School includes a zebra crossing of the northern (A167) arm of the roundabout.

The Trust has also seen plans for signalising the whole roundabout. These plans create much better cycling routes, but still fail to assist vulnerable road users at the Dryburn Park arm.

The Trust is of the view that signalising the roundabout should be completed before the occupation of any of the Sniperley Park site, as the current roundabout is very discouraging for active travel.

The Trust objects to the fact that widening of the A167 cycle route to Durham Johnston School have been dropped. Policy 5(l) explicitly requires contribution to A167 capacity enhancement between the Sniperley roundabout and Neville's Cross. The Trust would prefer to see this carried out by eliminating some of the central hatching in order to accommodate a two-way cycle track, protected by kerbs, along the eastern side of the A167. This would enable modal shift on this corridor and thereby increase capacity, and would reduce conflict between people walking and cycling.

The A691 Park and Ride roundabout must not be forgotten: it also currently has pedestrian/cycle crossings which are not compliant with the current guidance.

Travel Plan

Travel Plan targets

The 73% initial car/van trip share proposed in Table 6.2 of the travel plan (contained within the Transport Assessment) 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 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.

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 as a baseline, which is a compromise between the Witton Gilbert / Bearpark 73% and the Framwellgate Moor 63%. Front-loading half of the 5% reduction suggested by the developer would give a starting point of 66% with a 3 percentage point reduction to be delivered over five years. Even this is probably less ambitious than is required: the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan 2 requires a reduction in fossil fuel car use equivalent to a 25% reduction in vehicle miles by the end of 2023.

The Technical Memorandum submitted on behalf of National Highways in relation to the previous withdrawn application 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.

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

Overall the Travel Plan promises an information pack, vouchers – the value of which is not stated, discounted cycle equipment, some surveys, and setting up a Bicycle User Group, which, by the estimates of trip generation, would contain about three members! There is no offer for more costly interventions should the travel survey results demonstrate they are needed.

The Travel Plan cannot make up for the poor design decisions which repeat the mistakes made at countless suburban estates built over the last few decades. The Travel Plan appears to have had no impact on design decisions such as car parking provision. 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.

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 the potential for further 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 (66% initially, with a reduction to 63% over 5 years)
- will need more ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions in line with DCC's CERP2
- 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

Phasing and conditions

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 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.

As an illustration of the difficulties which residents might experience if conditions are not carefully applied, the Trust offers the example of the Mount Oswald estate which was masterplanned with a good network of recreational paths, connections to the surrounding path network, and a cycle route alongside the main access road.

- Some of the key links were still not open several years after the first houses were occupied.
- The cycle route and footway by the new colleges at Mount Oswald was only properly surfaced two years after the colleges opened.
- Where dropped kerbs have been provided, some of them are unusable by wheelchairs because of delay in bringing the carriageway 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.

Refusal of planning permission on transport grounds

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 modfications to the design by attaching planning conditions, because improving the walking and cycling access and adding bus stops would require alteration to the street layout, as would a sustainable car parking strategy.

An earlier version of the NPPF included a paragraph which stated that “development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety”. Developers were fond of quoting this paragraph in order to argue that whatever transport deficiencies there might be with their designs, they were not sufficient to justify refusal of planning permission. It was clearly not the government's intention to forbid refusal of applications which failed to support sustainable transport. More recently what is now paragraph 111 of the NPPF was amended to refer to refusal “on highways grounds” making it clear that it is appropriate to refuse applications if a development proposal fails to identify and pursue opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport, even if the impacts on highway safety are minimal. In this way the NPPF supports the urgent need to improve and 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.
