

Durham County Local Plan Preferred Options report Submission by City of Durham City Trust

Policy 21 - Green Belt

Question 29 - this is our preferred policy, do you have any comments?

The Trust supports this policy; the Durham Green Belt has proved to be a very effective mechanism in denying developers the easiest and cheapest sites in the Green Belt around the city and instead having to tackle the more difficult and costlier ‘brownfield’ sites within the city and also driving new housing development into surrounding villages and thereby bringing regeneration benefits.

Policy 22 - Non-Strategic Green Belt Amendments

Question 30 - this is our preferred policy, do you have any comments?

General

We note that this policy is listed in Appendix A as a strategic policy. Surely a list of non-strategic amendments cannot amount to something that is strategic?

Former Skid Pan, Durham City

There is an error in the Green Belt Assessment, which says “The General Area is considered to contain no notable heritage assets and therefore makes a **weak** contribution to the setting of Durham City.” The Grade II listed telecommunications mast was previously located on the site of the Police HQ and is being moved to the new Police HQ which is about 400m from the skid pan.

The justification for removing this site from the Green Belt is that “if left [it] would be an unsightly area of derelict land which could attract antisocial behaviour”. The way to address this issue has been pointed to in paragraph 141 of the NPPF (2018): “*Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.*”

Former Lumley Boys’ School, Great Lumley

We are not commenting here because this is outside our area of interest. No inferences should be drawn from this.

Fernhill, Durham City

This site is being assessed as if it were a newly proposed addition to the Green Belt whereas it is, of course, already included in the Green Belt. As such the presumption has to be that it remains. We reproduce below the relevant part of the Inspector's report into the City of Durham Local Plan, issued in 2002:

Under Policy H1 I consider how future housing needs could be provided for. The redevelopment of previously developed land within the existing built-up area will in general be the most satisfactory choice in terms of national and regional strategic guidance. In terms of sustainability the next best alternative is likely to be urban extensions, as by making use of existing facilities, including public transport, these can help to minimise travel, especially by car. The merits of this site as put forward by the objectors to a large extent derive from this. These must however be seen in the context of the identification of the GB in Policy 5 of the SP which sets out particular strategic approach for Durham. There are many sites on the edge of the City, including this one, which might otherwise be capable of making some provision for possible longer term housing development, but my primary concern is with the importance of the site to the GB. Only if that were to be very low might it be appropriate to remove it from the GB.

In fact in this instance I consider the GB value of the site to be very high. It lies on the western side of the A167 and although there is certainly already development on substantial lengths of this part of the road, where there are gaps they do serve to make it a firm, visually apparent and well established boundary to the main built-up area. In addition, the objection site lies between the open countryside to the west of Durham and Flass Vale, a wedge of open land projecting in towards the city centre of considerable importance to the visual character of the City. I regard the openness of the site as a connection between these areas as being of particular value in preserving the setting and character of Durham City. It certainly has some locational advantages in terms of possible residential development, but that is far outweighed by its importance to the GB, in which it should remain.

Nothing has changed between this 2002 assessment and today, and consequently Fernhill should remain in the Green Belt. It is puzzling that this particular parcel of land is being considered for deletion from the Green Belt at a time when it is being publicly advertised for the development of four luxury houses.