

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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

c/o Blakett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
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Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH

5th January 2026

Barry Cansfield,
Durham County Council Planning Development
PO BOX 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Mr Cansfield,

DM/25/03389/OUT Fernhill Newcastle Road Crossgate Moor Durham DH1 4JZ

Outline planning permission for access and all other matters reserved for the construction of 2no. dwellings with attached garages, demolition of the stable block, conservatory extension on Fernhill and erection of a garage.

The Trust objects to these proposals on the basis of negative impact on the Green Belt and character of the landscape setting to Fernhill and the City of Durham.

Context

The site is Green Belt and outside of the built up area as defined in the County Durham Plan (CDP). The Green Belt extends over the A167 and adjoins Flass Vale and the Local Nature Reserve. The site forms part of the green 'wedge' that links Flass Vale to the countryside setting of the city. In relation to strategic green infrastructure, Fernhill sits in the neck of the wedge in an important position for retaining the integrity of the landscape. The wedge prevents the coalescence of development around North End/Whitesmocks and to the south, Crossgate Moor/Nevilles Cross. Both these areas expand over the A167. It is also designated as part of an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV). The CDP Policies map and AHLV map clearly demonstrate the extent and significance of the wedge.

Fernhill is a small 19thC estate with a main house and adjoining lodge conversion plus gate lodge and ancillary buildings. It is set in its own extensive landscaped grounds. The view of the Lodge, drive, and landscaped area from the A167 is a visual demonstration of the estate. The landscape area also contributes significantly to the small informal route along Club Lane (a historic green lane), particularly on entering from the A167. The rear gardens of the Whitesmocks Avenue houses help to maintain the character of the Lane. The whole should be considered as a local heritage asset. It is a key component of local character and a green asset. It forms part of the boundary to the World Heritage Site (WHS) inner setting and it is part of the ridgeline area defining the city inner 'bowl'.

The A167 and Club Lane create clear and well defined boundaries to the built up area. Fernhill is separated from other dwellings. The Green Belt in this instance prevents expansion of the built up area and encroachment into countryside that Fernhill is part of. The extent of the built up area and relationship to the countryside setting are an essential part of the character of the City of Durham. These conclusions have been reinforced by an

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appeal relating to Application 4/11/00535/FPA and the reversal of the omission of the site from the Green Belt by the planning inspector considering the County Durham Plan. It is firmly concluded that the site has strong Green Belt value and that development can harm this.

The Trust's assertion is that the Fernhill estate is a designed and managed entity that strongly contributes to the purposes of the Green Belt and AHLV designations. It is characterful and of benefit to the green wedge linking to Flass Vale.

The former garage to the principal house has been approved for conversion to a separate residence (Application 4/03/00880/FPA).

Proposal

Plot one at a potential three storeys, with its very substantial parking and widened access, represents a substantial intrusion into the landscaped area. The applicant's own submission shows in viewpoints one and three that it will significantly protrude into views on entering Club Lane and from the A167. It will involve tree removal across the centre of the landscaped area. The submitted landscape analysis Para. 5.10, Viewpoint 1 confirms that it will represent an extension of the built up area into the Green Belt. This states that Plot 1 will be: *'will be seen in conjunction with existing residential built form along Club Lane'*.

Plot 2 is another reprisal of redevelopment of the stable block, a low timber building appropriate to the estate appearance of the estate. The Trust strongly objected with sound reasoning to the rebuilding of this as a four bed house that was refused and dismissed at appeal. This application now seeks to wrongly capitalise on the subsequent approved three bed house by proposing a two storey building. The latter approval was also objected to by the Trust that considers that it remained substantial green belt intrusion and contrary to the principles the inspector dealt with in the previous refusal. The footprint is substantially more than the stables and its height, extent and mass will create an imbalance with the main house.

Fernhill House previously had a garage, but permission was granted to rebuild this as a standalone small house without examination of the consequences for garage provision for the main house. No explanation of this or the current need for a garage is given in the submission. The proposal is for a very substantial block (as large as a small house) in front of the main elevation of the house. This was designed to view across the City in the manner of a number of larger historic estates in the City surrounds. This will destroy the house/landscape relationship that is part of the estate's character. No views are submitted of this, and the risk is that it will feature in views on entering the site from the A167 and the Lodge. It will certainly be significant on closer approach to the main house.

In combination these represent a very significant built development of the site. It becomes subdivided breaking up the otherwise intact estate and substantially reducing the quality of the landscaped area. Plot 2 and the garage are of an inappropriate scale relative to the main house and weaken its dominance. This is harmful to the character of the existing buildings, loses trees and reduces its value as part of the green wedge leading to Flass Vale.

Green Belt

The principal objection by the Trust is that this site cannot be considered Grey Belt; it provides a strong contribution to the Green Belt and supports the purposes of the Green Belt. There is no value in the contribution to housing provision, the addition of two houses being too minimal to be of significance. The proposal is a substantial extension of the built

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area into the countryside. The proposal will have both visual and spatial negative impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

The Trust points out that the site upholds three of the five purposes of a green belt – to: ‘**a.** check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas’, ‘**c.** assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment’ and ‘**d.** preserve the setting and special character of historic towns’. The Trust considers that none of the exceptions apply that would allow building in the Green Belt and the site is not Grey Belt.

Plot 2 fails as an exception because is not exempted under National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) **Para.154d** because it is not ‘*the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces*’. It is very obviously larger than the stable block and a different use.

The site is not Grey Belt because it strongly upholds the purposes of the Green Belt and the proposed development will undermine this (As shown above - Purposes **a** and **d** see **NPPF Definition of Grey Belt**). There is also no acceptable justification under **NPPF Para 155d** that ‘*There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed*’. The proposal also fails to meet the ‘Golden Rules’ now included in the NPPF. It does not provide affordable housing and lies outside of the defined settlement boundary. It will not enhance the landscape setting or provide for nature recovery; conversely it will impair the current biodiversity value of the site.

The Trust has demonstrated that the combination of Plots 1, 2 and the garage will have a substantial visual and spatial impact, and this will significantly affect the openness of the site. Substantial weight should be given to this as required under **NPPF Para. 153**. The proposal represents an encroachment into the countryside and setting of the historic city.

For the reasons above the Trust objects to the proposals. There are additional failures against the DCNP noted with policies in the Appendix below.

Yours sincerely

Sue Childs

Vice Chair, City of Durham Trust
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Appendix – Planning Policies

The Trust considers that the proposals fail against the following planning policies:

County Durham Plan

Policy 20 Green Belt

Development proposals within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national planning policy – the proposals fail to meet NPPF policy.

Policy 29 Sustainable Design

- a. The proposals fail to contribute positively to an area's heritage significance and townscape.

Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

Policy S1: Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development and Redevelopment Sites Including all New Building, Renovations and Extensions

The proposals fail because they do not:

- d) Conserve the significance of the setting, character, local distinctiveness, and the contribution made to the sense of place by Our Neighbourhood's designated and non-designated heritage assets.

Policy G1: Protecting and Enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure

Protecting green and blue assets

Protecting and enhancing green corridors

The development proposals will impact on a green corridor and do not maintain or enhance its functionality and connectivity and avoid significant harm to ecological connectivity.

The development proposals do not improve the existing green corridors and should not be supported.