

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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2 February 2026

David Richards,
Durham County Council
Planning Department
PO Box 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Mr Richards,

DM/26/00032/FPA Allotment Gardens Farnham Close Newton Hall

Change of use from amenity open space to allotment to provide an extension of the adjacent allotment site, with boundary fence, disabled access planter area, and unbound parking area.

The Trust objects to this substantial removal of the recently forested area. This is on the basis of negative landscape impact, loss of openness of green belt and long term weakening of the green corridor leading from Hoppers Wood into developed areas of Framwellgate Moor and Newton Hall. This represents a failure to adequately plan the future of this green belt area.

Context

The area is green belt. There is the nearby new housing extension across the former police skid-pan area that intrudes into this area. This has made the value of the remaining corridor greater in order not to weaken the connection. The Durham City Neighbourhood Plan (DCNP) has recognised the value of the corridor. The Parish section extends over Hoppers Wood and is considered a valuable part of the Emerald Network proposal. The DCNP includes as much of the wedge as is covered by the Parish Area.

It was recognised as an important area for extra tree planting by both the County Council and Forestry Commission who funded the new planting. As a landscape, the topography, hedgerows, and informal management make this a very important open space relative to the surrounding housing areas. It has strong visual value and informal recreational value serving a substantial number of people.

The Arboricultural audit mentions a penalty that would be payable to the Forestry Commission should the newly planted trees be displaced.

The green corridor has considerable value as a wildlife corridor. Part has been recognised by the County Council as a local wildlife site for protected species.

Proposals

It is the Trust's view that the allotment extension will be a highly visible intrusion into the open space and weaken the value of the green corridor. The existing allotments are openly on view because of the hillside and are made more so by the numbers of polytunnels and sheds. The proposed allotments would intensify this impact, with prominent greenhouses dominating the area from higher ground. The landscape

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impact of the development is evident in the image reproduced below but is masked by the submission of the Arboricultural and Biodiversity audit. The area deserves a more coherent overview of function and zoning to establish the appropriate approach to its use and positive enhancement as green belt. A holistic view for the future has not been established.



The arboriculture study only concentrates on the extension area itself and does not identify replacement planting for that loss. As young trees the planted area scores low in the assessment but in reality, it is a valuable addition to the area and will in future continue the Hopper Wood woodland. It already has some birch trees over 3 metres in height and should form an extension of the wildlife corridor, being linked by a small area of scrub to the Aykley Wood Nature Reserve close by. The extension of a wildlife corridor accords with the priorities of the emerging and soon-to-be-finalised Local Nature Recovery Plan. Similarly, while the Ecological survey covers the wider area, the nature of assessment of Biodiversity Gain narrows impact down to the immediate area lost and limited adjacent areas. This causes a disproportionate plus for a small section of new hedgerow. There is no holistic assessment of the impact of the loss to allotments on the wider area. The Habitat Management report simply ‘mops up’ if the extension were to proceed and is based upon the development proposal.

In terms of Green Belt, the Trust considers that there will be loss of openness because of the intensive nature of the allotments and their many structures as demonstrated already. This development should not be considered as ‘not inappropriate’ under exclusions. It should be noted that the National Policy Planning framework (NPPF) Para 145B allows for: *‘the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and **allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of***

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including land within it. The Trust considers that the facilities do conflict with the purposes of including the area within the Green Belt.

The value of allotments is upheld by the Trust, but any benefits of the proposals are outweighed by the harm caused to the green corridor, its landscape, and the desirability of enhancing wildlife corridors. It considers that the disabled planters area at the flat top area of the site could be part of a much reduced and modified proposal with suitable mitigation to take into account the area's landscape value.

The Neighbour Notification List is incomplete. The new housing built on the former police skid pad is close by. It is now "Woodward Way" and the odd numbered houses 47-65 in particular have direct views of the threatened newly created woodland area.

While the Trust recognises the value of allotments and in general supports their development, in this specific instance it objects to this application for the reasons above (policy failures are indicated in the appendix below).

Yours sincerely,

JOHN LOWE

Chair, City of Durham Trust

chair@durhamcity.org

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Appendix – Planning Policies

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

National Planning Policy Framework

13. Protecting Green Belt land

142. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

143. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas(*the proposal creates visual 'sprawl'*)
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment (*The area could be loosely termed 'countryside' given its size, character, and extension from the River Wear/Frankland area via Hopper Wood*)
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns(*The proposal encroaches into the general setting area*).

Proposals affecting the Green Belt

153. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness (*The proposal intrudes visually on the openness of the Green Belt*).

County Durham Plan

Policy 29 Sustainable Design

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

Policy 39 Landscape

Proposals for new development will be permitted where they would not cause unacceptable harm to the character, quality, or distinctiveness of the landscape, or to important features or views. (*The proposals create unacceptable harm to the landscape, features, and views*)

Proposals will be expected to incorporate appropriate measures to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects. (*The adverse effects are not fully recognised or mitigated against*)

Policy 40 Trees, Woodlands, and Hedges

Trees

Proposals for new development will not be permitted that would result in the loss of, or damage to, trees of high landscape, amenity, or biodiversity value unless the benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the harm. (*Given the size and context of the tree planting, although young, in the future they will be of high landscape, amenity and biodiversity value*)

Proposals for new development will be expected to retain existing trees where they can make a positive contribution to the locality or to the development, maintain adequate stand-off distances between them and new land-uses, including root protection areas where necessary, to avoid future conflicts, and integrate them fully into the design having regard to their future management requirements and growth potential.

Where trees are lost, suitable replacement planting, including appropriate provision for maintenance and management, will be required within the site or the locality. (*The limited mitigation submitted is wholly inadequate*)

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