

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Web site: <https://durhamcity.org/>

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25th June 2026

Mr Will Laing
Durham County Council Planning Development
PO BOX 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Mr Laing,

DM/26/01153/FPA Land North And East Of Meadow Edge Sherburn DH6 1EX

Full planning application for the erection of 173 dwellings, creation of a new access from Park Road, internal roads and car parking, provision of public open space, landscaping, SUDs attenuation ponds and drainage systems and other associated infrastructure

The Trust objects to this proposal based on concerns about traffic generation, access safety, house design and layout, and landscaping.

Traffic and Access.

The Trust notes and echoes the concern expressed in objections and comments from local residents about traffic safety. The Park Road access into the site is currently outside the village limit and its 30mph speed limit. The centre of Sherburn already has traffic pressures on its junctions. The footpath access proposed onto Cookshold Lane is onto a narrow lane with no footpaths and outside the 30mph speed limit. It is the most obvious access to the adjacent school.

The applicant proposes repositioning the 30mph speed limits, but unless this is accompanied by engineering changes to the carriageways the lowered limits are unlikely to be given credence. The applicant suggests that providing a footway along the northern edge of Cookshold Lane is a viable option (see Transport Assessment figure 3.7). The Trust considers that such a footway is essential, but notes that substantial mature vegetation would need to be removed, which has probably not been included in the biodiversity and habitat calculations. To avoid loss, the carriageway would have to be repositioned further south to allow for an adequate footway to take the place of part of the current carriageway.

A more cost-effective solution might be to close Cookshold Lane to through motor traffic using bollards. Few people would be inconvenienced by this: the B1283 can be used to reach Littletown. The wider benefits to horse-riders, walkers and cyclists would be considerable.

The applicant's drawing of the main site access junction onto the main road shows footways on either side, but no continuation of these in either direction. There are no footways provided on the main road at present. The applicant is therefore relying on other footpaths for pedestrian access to the site.

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From the western part of the site, the applicant proposes two footpath links connecting to the residential area to the south. (They are circled in purple on the following excerpt from the Proposed Site Plan below.) That on the western edge of the site is in a good location, but the footpaths it connects to are well below the recommended national minimum width of 2m. The Trust considers that the applicant should be required to fund the widening of the path as far as Forster Avenue.

The position of the other footpath link is quite arbitrary. It does not enable any direct, coherent or legible connection.

Cycling access

None of the links provide for cycling access. The Trust considers that an at-grade connection for cycling should be provided, as indicated by the purple dashed line in the following excerpt. Bollards and fencing will be needed to block use by cars. Such a link will allow residents to reach the primary school avoiding the main road. CDP Policy 21(b) requires development to provide “appropriate, well designed, permeable and direct routes for walking, cycling and bus access, so that new developments clearly link to existing services and facilities together with existing routes for the convenience of all users”. Bus access would not be appropriate, but cycling access certainly is, and is not currently catered for beyond the basic road access. The footpath access to Cookshold Lane should also include an at-grade connection for cycling.



Planning Statement para. 5.53 states that Park Road and Cookshold Lane form part of the National Cycle Network (routes 70 and 14) and as such there is safe cycling access to the development. This is a very common fallacy. Much of the National Cycle Network is only suitable for experienced cyclists: a 2018 report found that half of the network is not suitable for a 12 year old to use independently.

The Active Travel Audit provided in Appendix 6 of the Transport Assessment scores a number of routes and junctions within the village. Almost every criterion is scored “good” despite there being no facilities for cyclists. In particular, Junction 3, the junction of Hallgarth Street and Front Street, which has a mini roundabout, has been scored “good” against all criteria. This junction would certainly fail to meet the requirements of LTN 1/20,

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the national cycling design guidance. The Transport Assessment does not audit any routes beyond the village, so the isochrone map provided in Appendix 4 is worthless. The applicant has not made any serious attempt to evaluate cycling access or provide improvements.

Bus access

The Planning Statement paras. 5.29 and 5.30 discuss access to bus stops. It is stated that the closest bus stops would be around 540m to 590m from the middle of the site, and recognises that this exceeds the 400m limit given in the Parking and Accessibility SPD. It then argues that because this is based on research from 2000, some flexibility might be appropriate as “trends and appetite for walking and public transport may have shifted in the past 25 years”. Car ownership and use have increased in that period, which does not support the applicant's argument. If the applicant wishes to rely on more recent research, CIHT has updated its guidance on bus stop distances in *Buses in Urban Developments* (January 2018) and this recommends maximum walking distances dependent on the frequency of the services. For 400m to be acceptable, a service every 12 minutes or more would be required. On less frequent routes, the maximum walking distance drops to 300m.

To make up for the relative inaccessibility of bus services, additional effort should go into promoting and enabling other forms of sustainable transport. Further off-site improvements in cycle access could be funded, and a car-club scheme could be supported for use by residents of the development and of Sherburn village.

Transport summary

The Trust considers that the development cannot be considered to have good accessibility by sustainable modes while:

- footways are lacking or of substandard width
- no cycling links are provided from the development
- the route audit uses questionable methodology and scoring
- reaching the edge of Durham City by cycling relies either on major roads like the B1283, or on unlit and uneven paths like Renny's Lane.
- cycle connections to Durham City centre include links and junctions which are not suitable for the majority of potential users
- bus stops are beyond the 400m limit for most of the proposed houses
- there are no other sustainable transport interventions proposed, such as car club provision

Of these matters, the applicant only proposes funding footway improvements. It is not clear whether additional bus stops are being considered.

Design

Sherburn retains its tightly defined boundaries, agricultural setting, and a village core. It has been extended in the 20thC and more recently. This development is a poorly connected separated extension to the established village. It is effectively a large countryside intrusion unconnected to adjacent housing. The submitted character analysis is particularly weak. None of the examples chosen illustrate influences that reflect something of a more distinctive character from the village or its setting. The examples selected are all recent nearby housing consisting of other house builders' standardised designs that have reflected nothing of the potential the sites once had for distinctive layouts and house design. It is pointless to use these as an influence. The result is to create an anonymous very basic design theme creating no distinctiveness. This is not the purpose of design character analysis and thwarts the possibility of improvement.

The layout is predominantly detached/semidetached houses with extensive short access roads and driveways. These combine to create an extensive surfaced interior to the housing enclave, leading to dull street frontages.

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Density and house types

Page 11 of the Design and Access Statement gives the gross development area as 8.08 hectares and the net area as 4.789 ha, but the accompanying diagram shows that to reach the net figure the applicant has excluded the SUDS basin, the green space within and around the development, and also the footpaths, roads and shared driveways. The total number of dwellings is 173.

The RICS professional standard document *Land measurement for planning and development purposes* (2001, p. 3) defines the net density as:

a measure that includes everything that is developed but excludes major roads, open and public realm, schools and their grounds, and commercial and community buildings. It is calculated using net development area.

There are no major roads proposed in the development, only the local access roads. These, the driveways and footpaths should be included when working out the density of the development.

The applicant states the area of the open landscape, play area and SuDs area on p. 11 of the Design and Access Statement. Subtracting these from the gross area gives 7.29 ha, and with 173 houses this would represent 23.7 dwellings per hectare, a little higher than the gross dph of 21.4.

Achieving an appropriate density of development is critically important for sustainable transport. To support viable public transport services the density needs to be 50 dwellings per hectare or higher (“Settlement patterns, urban form & sustainability: an evidence review”, RTPI, May 2018, section 3.5, pages 17 to 18). Lower density development also has an adverse impact on active travel because distances to walk or cycle to amenities are longer than desirable, and local services are harder to sustain.

CDP Policy 29(p) requires a minimum of 30dph “in and around town centres and locations where there is good access to facilities and frequent public transport services”.

In paragraph 5.32 of the Planning Statement the applicant claims that the site “has good access by sustainable modes of transport to relevant services and facilities”, in compliance with Policy 6(f) on Development on Unallocated Sites, but this is not quite the same wording as Policy 29(p) so the minimum density of 30dph may not apply. Even so, the development is considered to be relatively low density and is likely to lead to car dependence.

The applicant has not given any clear breakdown of the number of bedrooms that will be provided in the proposed development. The Planning Statement para. 4.27 cites Policy 19 of the County Durham Plan which requires an appropriate mix of dwelling types and sizes, but the applicant provides no evidence as to whether the policy is satisfied.

Landscaping

The site was once of importance historically; it contains ridge and furrow traces demonstrating its agricultural relevance to the village. Crop marks also show the possibility of uninvestigated and earlier agriculture enclosures. These demonstrate its landscape relevance as a site to the historic use of the landscape surrounding the villages.

The proposed landscape areas are mostly pushed out to the site boundaries and are dominated by the SUDS requirements. The central open space is predominantly a SUDS basin and the remainder eroded by parking but does contain a play area. The landscaping is otherwise retention of the hedgerow field boundaries. In most instances the house units, access and gardens and proposed footpath links will heavily restrict the potential for hedgerow/tree growth. There is a characterful current access into Sherburn from the north

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along Park Road, to the west of which is green belt. This leads into a generous landscaped strip both sides of the road helping create a distinctive village approach. The proposed development offers a setback, but it is dominated by shared drives, footpaths, and parking plus the road entrance visibility splay. This will also heavily restrict the capacity for screen or tree planting to develop.

The combination of the failures in adequate landscape development along the boundaries will substantially increase the visual intrusion of the development. This matters because the pattern of development locally is of constrained housing developments around village cores and separated by the green belt from Durham City's westward expansion. The ground falls away slightly to the north and is overlooked from Sherburn Hill. The site will be highly visible in the surrounding agricultural landscape. This erodes the separation between the nearby villages of High Pitington and Sherburn Hill. It will form a particularly poor boundary against the green belt intended to keep Sherburn separate from Durham City. The houses will be of dull standardised design with no distinctiveness or relationship to the potential of the village with minimal effective landscaping and highly visible as an unnecessary extension to the village.

The net result of the design and landscape failings is to create a featureless housing block adding nothing to Sherburn and bringing only more pressure on its limited facilities. The Trust therefore objects to the proposals.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe

Chair, City of Durham Trust

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