

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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

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Ms Michelle Hurton
Durham County Council
Planning Department
PO Box 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Ms Hurton

**DM/26/02449/PIP: Permission in principle for 5no residential dwellings,
Woodside, Sleetburn Lane, Langley Moor, County Durham DH7 8LQ**

The City of Durham Trust has considered this application for Permission in Principle for five residential dwellings in the Durham Green Belt and has decided to submit the following objection.

We note that the application involves the replacement of the existing dwelling called Woodside and the construction of four new bungalows of 1.5 storeys. However, the submitted proposed site layout plan shows five new dwellings and the existing dwelling. This anomaly needs to be addressed to comply with the submitted Planning Statement that describes the proposal as "Permission in Principle for 1no Replacement Dwelling and Construction of 4no 1.5 Storey Detached Dwellings."

The applicants live at Woodside, and the planning consultant author of the submitted Planning Statement is one of the applicants. In that Statement he prays in aid of an earlier application DM/22/01402/PNH for the demolition of an existing redundant building on this same site and construction of a dwelling. Much is made of the fact that Durham County Council approved that application - the Statement claiming that *"The decision confirms that Durham County Council previously accepted the principle of replacing an existing building with a dwelling within the immediate locality."* This is not a valid claim: the County Council found that what was proposed was classified as Permitted Development and so could not be refused.

Further, the Relevant Planning History section of the Statement extraordinarily omits the fact that a subsequent application DM/22/02365/FPA by the applicants on this site for the redevelopment of existing stables to form a 2-bedroom dwelling was refused on appeal. The Inspector concluded that *"the site is within the open countryside as it is outside the boundary and the defined settlement of Langley Moor."*..... *"Substantial weight should be given to any*

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harm to the Green Belt and in this case I have found that the proposal is inappropriate, having a greater impact on openness and causing moderate harm to the openness of the Green Belt.”

Whilst that refusal on appeal precedes the NPPF 2026, the Trust considers that material circumstances ‘on the ground’ have not changed and that the current application should rightly be assessed as being located in open countryside outside the boundary of Langley Moor and within the Durham Green Belt.

Turning to the need to assess the proposal in the terms of NPPF, the key consideration is whether the site constitutes ‘Grey Belt’. This term arises from a recognition that Green Belts have within them unattractive plots such as former factories, car parks, petrol filling stations. Such plots are neither beautiful nor green, hence the term ‘grey’. The applicants’ photographs show an open green pasture, unmistakably not part of a built-up area or previously developed.

Therefore, the crucial test is whether the fundamental principle that any development in the Green Belt is unacceptable, as re-affirmed in NPPF 2026, can be set aside in this case on ‘grey belt’ grounds. In summary, the relevant grounds for ‘grey belt’ exceptions in a locality being made are as follows, provided always that the impact on the openness of the Green Belt is minimised:

- there is an evidenced unmet need for the type of development proposed
- the site or area is within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected railway station
- the site or area does not materially check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
 - Green Belt purpose (a)
- nor prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another - purpose (b)
- nor preserve the setting and special character of historic towns - purpose (d).

Taking these in turn:

- County Durham currently has an unmet need for many thousands more dwellings to meet the requirements of the ‘Standard Method’. The application to create a net increase of 4 more dwellings at Sleetburn Lane is inconsequential when set against the scale of the requirement, and cannot be a justified exception to the fundamental ban on built development in Green Belts.
- The site is 4 kilometres from the nearest railway station and so is not within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected railway station. It cannot be a justified exception on those grounds.
- The Langley Moor/Meadowfield/Littleburn built up area is a significant urban conglomeration, experienced as a continuation of the built-up area of Durham City. Extending Langley Moor into the countryside beyond its existing boundary would be classic sprawl. The proposal conflicts with Green Belt purpose (a).
- In County Durham terms, the Langley Moor/Meadowfield/Littleburn urban unit is like a town, but the Trust recognises that each community regards its own locality as a village, and so the proposal does not engage purpose (b).
- The nearest historic town is Durham City, so the application does not engage purpose (d).

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Our assessment is that the proposal does not involve 'grey belt' exceptions and is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, contrary to Policy 20 of the adopted County Durham Plan.

The proposal also conflicts with Policy 10 of the County Durham Plan as it represents development in the countryside unjustified by any of the specific purposes set out in the policy. The site is overwhelmingly open countryside, as shown below.

Remarkably, the applicants' Planning Statement at paragraph 1.5 states *"The scale and amount of development are proportionate to the surrounding built form and local infrastructure capacity, and the site is physically and visually well-related to the existing pattern of residential development."* The Trust considers that this is not so, as shown by the following photograph as well as by the applicants' submitted photographs.



The mis-characterisation by the applicants continues in Planning Statement paragraph 2.6, which states *"The immediate area is characterised by a dispersed but established pattern of residential development comprising detached and semi-detached dwellings, smallholdings and associated outbuildings. The application site is closely contained by existing built form, with development and domestic curtilage evident on three sides. As a result, the site is physically, functionally, and visually associated with the existing residential enclave and has a clear relationship with the surrounding settlement pattern. It does not exhibit the characteristics of open countryside and would be perceived as a logical and well-contained location for a modest extension of residential development."* Frankly, claims that the application site is closely contained by existing built form, with development and domestic curtilage evident on three sides, are obviously fanciful and wrong.

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In addition, the site immediately abuts the Deerness Valley Area of High Landscape Value. This designation backs up the importance of the Deerness Valley as it joins the Browney Valley as an ecological corridor. Being acknowledged as an area of open countryside meeting the edge of the river valley gives it a supporting role in defining this part of the Green Belt. It therefore assists the Green Belt in preventing coalescence between the Langley Moor/Brandon/Meadowfield grouping, its Sleetburn Lane offshoot and Broompark. Sleetburn Lane is a small, contained 'hamlet' that has expanded from more historic roots. This upholds the Trust's assertion that the site meets the following purposes of a Green Belt:

- (a) Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;*
- (b) Prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;*
- (c) Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*

The site generally supports purpose (a) and strongly supports purposes (b) and (c).

The development will require a new access opening onto Sleetburn Lane. This is a small road with only a narrow footpath to the opposite side, and the access point would be sited close to a blind bend. This will create an increased risk of road traffic accidents. Indeed, a similar access point was included in a previous application for the site and resulted in a strong objection from the Highways Authority on those grounds. Most of the frontage hedging and possibly trees will need removal to create visibility splays, increasing the negative impact of the development and urbanisation of this rural edge beyond the hamlet.

In conclusion, the City of Durham Trust considers the application to be contrary to important Policies 10 and 20 of the County Durham Plan and the relevant policies of the NPPF 2026, and as such should be refused.

Yours sincerely,

Allan Gemmill

Chair, City of Durham Trust

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