

COMMITTEE REPORT

APPLICATION DETAILS

APPLICATION No:	DM/16/00129/FPA
FULL APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:	Refurbishment of Weardale House to provide 24 student beds, demolition of 2 existing accommodation blocks and erection of purpose built student accommodation block (198 beds)
NAME OF APPLICANT:	College and Jansons Property
ADDRESS:	East Durham And Houghall Community College Houghall Durham DH1 3SG
ELECTORAL DIVISION:	Durham South
CASE OFFICER:	Henry Jones, Senior Planning Officer 03000 263960 henry.jones@durham.gov.uk

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

The Site

1. The application site comprises of approximately 0.6ha of land within the East Durham and Houghall Community College site, an agricultural teaching college. This parcel of land contains Weardale House, two further buildings to its rear (the Derwent Unit and the Brancepeth, Stanhope, Hamsterley, Satley and Lanchester accommodation blocks) and the associated curtilage which comprises of areas of lawn, trees and pathways. The trees within the application site are protected by virtue of the Houghall College Tree Preservation Order (TPO) No. PN1-408.
2. The wider college site is approximately 380ha in size and is situated approximately one mile to the south east of Durham city centre. The campus boundary to the north is formed by the edge of the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area with its southern boundary defined by the River Wear which forms the western edge of Shincliffe Village Conservation Area. Listed buildings are located within the vicinity of the application site. To the north of the site is the Durham University Sport campus. Sports pitches also lie to the east and west of the college buildings. To the east of the site is a plant centre and café, and approximately 750m to the south west of the main buildings is Houghall College Farm and an outdoor ménage. The campus is low lying and predominantly flat. The campus is essentially a patchwork of green open fields defined by hedgerows and trees with denser areas of woodland within the campus and enveloping it, most notably Great High Wood (ancient woodland) and Houghall, Maiden Castle & Little Woods Local Wildlife Site forming a scenic green backcloth to the west.

3. The college campus is located within the Durham City Green Belt, with the main group of buildings (which the application site forms part) being designated by the City of Durham Local Plan as a major developed site in the Green Belt. The site is within an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV). The site is accessed via the A177 to the east.

The Proposal

4. The application proposals contain two main elements. Firstly, it is proposed to refurbish Weardale House to create a total of 24 student studios (1 bed) provided, 8 on the ground floor and 16 on the first floor. Associated communal spaces such as a reception, common rooms and kitchens would also be provided. Weardale House has most recently been used for teaching space at ground floor, with vacant accommodation at first floor. Physical alterations to Weardale House associated with the conversion works would involve internal alterations to accommodate the new layout whilst externally replacement windows are proposed together with a disabled access ramp, cycle store and bin store located to the rear of the building.
5. Secondly the two remaining buildings within the application site are proposed for demolition and replacement with a purpose built student accommodation building. The building would be “H shaped” and comprise of 3 floors of accommodation with a total of 198 student beds. The student accommodation would be provided as a mixture of 1 bed studios and cluster flats which share living and kitchen spaces. The lowest floor within the building would be elevated with the building beneath reserved as a flood defence measure.
6. The elevations of the proposed building would be constructed of red brick with terracotta through render sections and falzinc cladding to upper sections. Powder coated metal windows are proposed with a glazed curtain walling system in sections. The roof would be treated with a dark grey single ply PVC roofing membrane. The proposed building would have a total height of approximately 11.8m, width of approximately 56m and length of approximately 46m. Associated with the proposed building a rationalisation of the surrounding footpaths, erection of fencing, erection of a substation and provision of 6 parking spaces is are proposed.
7. The proposed student accommodation building would be for occupation by students in general. Therefore whilst some occupancy may come from Houghall College students themselves the majority are likely to be students from other further education establishments ie Durham University.
8. This planning application is being reported to the Central and East Area Planning Committee because it constitutes a major development with more than 1,000m² of floorspace proposed and is under 10,000sqm and less than 2ha.

PLANNING HISTORY

9. There have been over 20 previous planning applications in the last 19 years at the College which have largely been for advertisement consent, works to trees and temporary buildings.
10. Outline planning permission was granted in 2002 for additional residential and administration blocks, sports pitches, car park and an indoor tennis centre. This permission was never implemented.

11. Planning permission was granted in 2006 for the erection of a wooden cabin for use as a café.
12. Most recently in August 2015 planning permission was granted for the redevelopment of main entrance building to provide new glass lobby and single heightened atrium. Erection of animal care centre, animal sheds, equine centre, kennels, feed store, agility area, aviary, associated facilities, car parking and road widening (DM/15/01041/FPA). This planning permission followed that in 2014 for a similar redevelopment proposal and description (Ref CE/13/01542/FPA).

PLANNING POLICY

NATIONAL POLICY

13. The Government has consolidated all planning policy statements, guidance notes and many circulars into a single policy statement, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The overriding message is that new development that is sustainable should go ahead without delay. It defines the role of planning in achieving sustainable development under three topic headings – economic, social and environmental, each mutually dependant. The presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF requires local planning authorities to approach development management decisions positively, utilising twelve ‘core planning principles’.
14. In accordance with paragraph 215 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the weight to be attached to relevant saved local plan policy will depend upon the degree of consistency with the NPPF. The greater the consistency, the greater the weight. The relevance of this issue is discussed, where appropriate, in the assessment section of the report. The following elements of the NPPF are considered relevant to this proposal.
15. *NPPF Part 1 – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy.* The Government is committed to securing economic growth in order to create jobs and prosperity, building on the country’s inherent strengths, and to meeting the twin challenges of global competition and of a low carbon future.
16. *NPPF Part 3 – Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy.* Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.
17. *NPPF Part 4 – Promoting Sustainable Transport.* The transport system needs to be balanced in favour of sustainable transport modes, giving people a real choice about how they travel. It is recognised that different policies and measures will be required in different communities and opportunities to maximize sustainable transport solutions which will vary from urban to rural areas. Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion.
18. *NPPF Part 6 - Delivering a Wide Choice of High Quality Homes.* To boost significantly the supply of housing, applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
19. *NPPF Part 7 – Requiring Good Design.* The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, with good design a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning. Planning decisions must aim to ensure developments; function well and add to the overall quality of an area over the lifetime of the development, establish a strong sense of place, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses, respond to local character and history, create safe and accessible environments and be visually attractive.

20. *NPPF Part 8 – Promoting Healthy Communities.* Recognises the part the planning system can play in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy and inclusive communities. Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities and planning policies and decisions should achieve places which promote safe and accessible environments. This includes the development and modernisation of facilities and services.
21. *NPPF Part 9 – Protecting Green Belt Land.* 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 permanence. Green Belt land serves 5 purposes; to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another; to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; to preserve the setting of historic towns; and to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
22. *NPPF Part 10 – Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change.* Planning plays a key role in helping shape places to secure radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimising vulnerability and providing resilience to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy.
23. *NPPF Part 11 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment.* The planning system should contribute to, and enhance the natural environment by; protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognizing the benefits of ecosystem services, minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, preventing new and existing development being put at risk from unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability, and remediating contaminated and unstable land.
24. *NPPF Part 12 – Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment.* Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/2116950.pdf>

25. The Government has consolidated a number of planning practice guidance notes, circulars and other guidance documents into a single Planning Practice Guidance Suite. This document provides planning guidance on a wide range of matters. Of particular relevance to this application is the practice guidance with regards to; air quality; conserving and enhancing the historic environment; design; flood risk; housing and economic development needs assessment land stability; noise; transport assessments and statements; tree preservation orders and trees in conservation areas; use of planning conditions and; water supply; wastewater and water quality.

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>

LOCAL PLAN POLICY:

The City of Durham Local Plan (2004) (CDLP)

26. *Policy E1 – Durham City Green Belt.* Outlines the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt in order to preserve its intrinsic openness.
27. *Policy E2 – Major Developed sites in the Greenbelt – Infilling.* Limited infilling will be allowed provided that it has no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development, it does not exceed the height of existing development and it does not lead to a major increase in the developed proportion of the site.
28. *Policy E2A – Major Developed Sites in the Green Belt – Redevelopment.* States that redevelopment will be permitted where it has no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development, it does not exceed the height or site coverage of existing development and contributes to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in the Green Belt.
29. *Policy E6 – Durham City Centre Conservation Area.* States that the special character, appearance and setting of the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area will be preserved or enhanced as required by section 72 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The policy specifically requires proposals to use high quality design and materials which are sympathetic to the traditional character of the conservation area.
30. *Policy E7 – Development outside of Settlement Limits.* Development outside of settlement boundaries will only be permitted when it accords with other policies in the plan.
31. *Policy E10 – Areas of Landscape Value.* Is aimed at protecting the landscape value of the district's designated Areas of Landscape Value.
32. *Policy E14 – Protection of Existing Trees and Hedgerows.* Views hedgerows and trees as a valuable resource to be protected when new development is being considered.
33. *Policy E15 – New Trees and Hedgerows.* Tree and hedgerow planting is encouraged.
34. *Policy E16 – Nature Conservation – the Natural Environment.* Is aimed at protecting and enhancing the nature conservation assets of the district. Development proposals outside specifically protected sites will be required to identify any significant nature conservation interests that may exist on or adjacent to the site by submitting surveys of wildlife habitats, protected species and features of ecological, geological and geomorphological interest. Unacceptable harm to nature conservation interests will be avoided, and mitigation measures to minimise adverse impacts upon nature conservation interests should be identified.
35. *Policy E18 – Site of Nature Conservation Importance.* The Council will seek to safeguard sites of nature conservation importance unless the benefits from the development outweigh the nature conservation interests of the site, there are no alternatives sites and measures are undertaken to minimise adverse effect associated with the scheme and reasonable effort is made by appropriate habitat creation or enhancement to compensate for damage.

36. *Policy E21 – Historic Environment.* The Council will preserve and enhance the historic environment by requiring development proposals to minimise adverse impacts on significant features of historic interest and encourage retention repair and re-use of buildings and structures which are not listed but are of visual and local interest.
37. *Policy E22 – Conservation Areas.* This policy seeks to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas, by not permitting development which would detract from its setting, while ensuring that proposals are sensitive in terms of scale, design and materials reflective of existing architectural details.
38. *Policy E23 – Listed Buildings.* The Council will seek to safeguard listed buildings by not permitting development which detracts from its setting.
39. *Policy E24 – Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Remains.* Ancient monuments and other nationally significant archaeological remains and their settings will be preserved in situ and damage would not be permitted. Archaeological remains of regional and local importance will be protected in situ and where preservation in situ is not justified by, ensuring that in areas where there is evidence that significant archaeological remains exist, or reasons to pre-suppose they exist, pre-application evaluation or archaeological assessment will be required and requiring as a condition of planning permission, that a programme of archaeological investigation, recording and publication has been made.
40. *Policy H16 - Residential Institutions and Student Halls of Residence.* This policy provides for purpose-built accommodation provided that they are well related to local facilities and are not likely to impact adversely on adjacent development or lead to community imbalance.
41. *Policy Q1 – General Principles – Designing for People.* The layout and design of development should take into account the requirements of users including personal safety and crime prevention and accessibility requirements.
42. *Policy Q2 – General Principles Designing for Accessibility.* The layout and design of all new development should take into account the requirements of users and embody the principle of sustainability.
43. *Policy Q5 – Landscaping General Provision.* Sets out that any development which has an impact on the visual amenity of an area will be required to incorporate a high standard of landscaping.
44. *Policy Q15 – Art in Design.* This policy states that the Council will encourage the provision of artistic elements in the design and layout of proposed developments. Due regard will be made in determining applications to the contribution they make to the appearance of the proposal and the amenities of the area.
45. *Policy R11 – Public Rights of Way and other Paths.* Public access to the countryside will be safeguarded by protecting the existing network of PROW's and other paths from development which would result in their destruction.
46. *Policy T1 – Traffic – General.* States that the Council will not grant planning permission for development that would generate traffic likely to be detrimental to highway safety and/or have a significant effect on the amenity of occupiers of neighbouring property.

47. *Policy T10 – Parking – General Provision.* States that vehicle parking should be limited in amount, so as to promote sustainable transport choices and reduce the land-take of development.
48. *Policy T20 - Cycle Facilities* – Seeks to encourage appropriately located, secure parking provision for cyclists.
49. *Policy U5 – Pollution Prevention – General.* Planning permission for development that may generate pollution will not be granted if it results in; an unacceptable adverse impact upon the quality of the local environment; the amenity of nearby and adjoining land and property or; will unnecessarily constrain the development of neighbouring land.
50. *Policy U7 – Pollution Prevention – Development Sensitive to Pollution.* *Developments which are sensitive to pollution will not be permitted on land which is subject to unacceptable levels of contamination, pollution, noise or vibration.*
51. *Policy U8a – Disposal of Foul and Surface Water.* Requires developments to provide satisfactory arrangements for disposing of foul and surface water discharge. Where satisfactory arrangements are not available, then proposals may be approved subject to the submission of a satisfactory scheme and its implementation before the development is brought into use.
52. *Policy U9 – Watercourse.* States that development that affects watercourses will only be permitted provided that it; does not increase flood risk; does not pollute the watercourse; results in no adverse nature conservation or landscape impacts.
53. *Policy U10 – Natural Flood Plains.* Proposals shall not be permitted in flood risk areas or where development may increase the risk of flooding elsewhere unless it can be demonstrated by way of sequential test that there is no alternative option available at lower risk, there will be no unacceptable risk of flooding, there will be no unacceptable increase in risk of flooding elsewhere and appropriate mitigation measures can be put in place to minimise the risk of flooding which can be controlled by planning condition.
54. *Policy U11 - Development on Contaminated Land.* Sets out the criteria against which schemes for the redevelopment of sites which are known or suspected to be contaminated. Before development takes place it is important that the nature and extent of contamination should be fully understood.
55. *Policy U12 – Development near Contaminated Land.* Measures must be undertaken which would be sufficient to stop contaminants leaches or gases penetrating the site and accumulating in buildings and structures which could be harmful gases should be prevented from migrating into surrounding land.
56. *Policy U14 - Energy Conservation – General.* States that the energy efficient materials and construction techniques will be encouraged.

RELEVANT EMERGING POLICY:

The County Durham Plan

57. Paragraph 216 of the NPPF says that decision-takers may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to: the stage of the emerging plan; the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies; and, the degree of consistency of the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the NPPF. The County Durham Plan (CDP) was submitted for Examination in Public and a stage 1 Examination concluded. An Interim Report was issued by an Inspector dated 18 February 2015, however that Report was quashed by the High Court following a successful Judicial Review challenge by the Council. In accordance with the High Court Order, the Council has withdrawn the CDP and a new plan being prepared. In the light of this, policies of the CDP can no longer carry any weight. As the new plan progresses through the stages of preparation it will begin to accrue weight.

Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

58. In July 2013 Durham City was granted approval for designation of a neighbourhood area having regards to the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012. A Neighbourhood Forum has been established to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan for much of the unparished area of the City. The Neighbourhood Forum is still at the evidence gathering stage of the plan preparation and as a result there is no policy position within the emerging Neighbourhood Plan against which to assess the application.

The above represents a summary of those policies considered most relevant. The full text, criteria, and justifications of each may be accessed at:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/article/7215/Durham-City-Local-Plan> (City of Durham Local Plan)

CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES

STATUTORY RESPONSES:

59. *Highway Authority* – Raise no objections. The site is considered to be located within a sustainable location. A permit parking scheme is to be implemented and parking standards are being met by the development. Significant off-site parking demand is not likely to occur. An assessment of the net change in vehicular and pedestrian movements as a result of the development has been undertaken which indicates that flows towards the City Centre at peak times can be accommodated by the existing highway network.
60. *Northumbrian Water* – Raise no objections subject to a condition being added to any planning permission to resolve the management of surface and foul water emerging from the development.
61. *Environment Agency* – Raise no objections subject to a condition being added to any planning permission that the development is implemented in accordance with the mitigation measures contained within the submitted flood risk assessment.
62. *Drainage and Coastal Protection* – Raise no objections. The development should be implemented in accordance with the recommendations contained within the flood risk assessment.

INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:

63. *Spatial Planning* – Raise no objections. Advice is provided on the planning policy context including regard to the status of the development plan and emerging plan considerations including the interim student accommodation policy. It is confirmed that whilst the application relates to a residential use, student accommodation is not considered to be a component of housing land supply and therefore the current housing land supply position is not relevant to the determination of the application. The proposed purpose built student accommodation building is considered to constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore the key consideration is whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated to permit the development.
64. *Landscape* – Raise no objections. The proposed building would not have a significant effect on the character of the wider landscape or its immediate campus setting. In turn no unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape quality or appearance of the designated Area of High Landscape Value would result from the development. The site is described as being visually relatively well contained. Trees covered by a TPO are proposed for removal with some adverse impact as a result. Replacement trees should be planted. Trees to be retained should be protected from the development works.
65. *Design and Conservation* – Raise no objections. Impacts upon heritage assets are considered limited to the impact of the proposed new building upon the setting of the non-designated heritage asset of Weardale House. Limited harm is considered to occur as a result of the location and scale of the proposed building. However, this should be balanced against the beneficial impact of ensuring the use of the heritage asset through a viable redevelopment proposal. No objections are raised on more general terms to the scale or design of the proposed building which is considered an acceptable contemporary response to the site. No objections are raised to the refurbishment proposals at Weardale House.
66. *Employability* – Request that targeted recruitment and training clauses are included within a S106 legal agreement in the event of approval.
67. *Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (Contaminated Land)* – Raise no objections, however, a contaminated land investigation/remediation condition should be added to any planning permission.
68. *Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (Noise, Dust and Odour)* – Raise no objections. The mitigation measures contained within the submitted noise impact assessment should be ensured via condition.
69. *Environment Health and Consumer Protection (Air Quality)* – Raise no objections. A condition should be added to any planning permission so as to ensure the implementation of a Dust Action Management Plan during the construction/demolition phase of the development. No concerns are raised with regards to the operational phase of the development, however, it is recommended that a travel plan should be implemented.
70. *Ecology* – Raise no objections the recommendations contained within the submitted ecology reports should be implemented and a condition added to ensure this.
71. *Sustainability* – Raise no objections. Further details with regards to how the scheme embeds sustainability and minimizes carbon from construction and operational emissions are requested.

72. *Archaeology* – Raise no objections. Recent evaluation work in the vicinity of the site found no archaeology to be present. No further archaeological works are necessary either pre or post determination.
73. *Access and Public Rights of Way* – Raise no objections, the development would not affect any recorded public rights of way.

PUBLIC RESPONSES:

74. The application was advertised within the press, on site and letters were sent to neighbouring properties. A total of 6 letters of have been received 4 raising objection and 2 in support/raising no objection. The matters raised are summarised below.

Objection

- Objection to the scale and appearance of the proposed building.
 - The development is inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
 - Adverse impact upon the rural and green belt surroundings of the site.
 - Adverse impact upon the non-designated heritage assets at Houghall College.
 - Concerns raised regarding the safety of pedestrians and cyclists in movements to and from the site.
75. *City of Durham Trust* – Raise objections. The development is contrary to relevant national and local guidance on development in the Green Belt and the applicant's justifications for this form of development in the Green Belt are disagreed with. It is suggested that there is not the need for further purpose built student accommodation. Accessibility for cyclists is considered to be unsatisfactory.
76. *Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)* – Raise objections. It is stated that in sheer principle terms the CPRE do support purpose built student accommodation developments in locations which would divert pressure from the City Centre. However, the development is considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt and it is considered that the necessary "very special circumstances" to permit such development has not been demonstrated. Concerns are also expressed with regards to flood risk.

Support

- Comments of no objections to the refurbishment of Weardale House are made.
77. *Durham Constabulary Architectural Liaison Officer* – Raise no objections. The crime risk assessment for the proposed development is assessed as being low, however, it is stated that a robust management plan must be implemented. Advice is provided in regards to ensuring the security of external doors and windows and that adequate lighting is provided.
78. *Durham University* – Support the application. It is considered that the proposal could meet a student accommodation need within the City which is currently unmet by available and approved purpose built student accommodation developments.

APPLICANTS STATEMENT:

79. East Durham College is a medium-sized Further Education college with two main campuses, both in County Durham - Peterlee and Houghall. The Houghall campus is the only site delivering land-based educational courses in County Durham. The campus itself employs 162 staff and an average of 700 students per academic year.

80. The first phase of a campus-wide redevelopment is currently underway and will be open for the upcoming academic year. It involves the erection of small animal care, Equine and Agricultural buildings in addition to refurbishment of some existing buildings. Beyond Phase 1 the college still has many buildings which are in a poor state with over 97% being classified as Category C & D. The College have always had a long term masterplan to continue replacing their aged buildings and enhancing their facilities and educational offer, of which this application forms part.
81. This proposal seeks to replace existing student accommodation, originally built in the 1960's, which is now sub-standard and in no way meets the requirements of modern-day students. The scheme is a mixture of part new build and part conversion, the existing Weardale house being converted and brought into viable use. The new build proposal replaces the existing buildings on a greater scale to accommodate a total of 222 bedrooms but importantly has been designed in such a way to account for long and medium range views to avoid adverse landscape impacts in this sensitive location.
82. The redevelopment will provide the College with the means to fully implement the previously approved Phase 1 development, which has had to be scaled back from its original plans due to unforeseen rising development costs. It will also assist in creating a much stronger financial profile for the college.
83. Whilst the college may have a need to utilise some of the newly created bedrooms and in line with our growth plans our demand for beds could increase in time, however to be viable it will also serve University students and is particularly well related to the Maiden Castle Sports Centre and the growing number of elite athletes that use this facility.
84. This proposal and provision of on-site accommodation is the next logical step after Phase 1 and will then allow the college to focus upon the further phase namely the consolidation of the remaining buildings and creation of a new centralised teaching and administration block, it is hoped this can come forward within the next five years.

The above represents a summary of the comments received on this application. The full written text is available for inspection on the application file which can be viewed at:

<http://publicaccess.durham.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application>

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

85. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that if regard is to be had to the development plan, decisions should be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In accordance with Paragraph 212 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the policies contained therein are material considerations that should be taken into account in decision-making. Other material considerations include representations received. In this context, it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to impacts upon the Green Belt, acceptability of student development at the site, landscape impact; design and heritage impact, flood risk and drainage, highway safety and accessibility, residential amenity; and ecology.

Impacts upon the Green Belt

86. The CDLP allocates the Houghall College site as a designated major developed site within the Green Belt.

87. The NPPF attaches great importance to Green Belts, and identifies, at Paragraph 85 that the Green Belt serves five purposes. At Paragraphs 89 and 90 it states that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt should be considered as being inappropriate development, except in specific, identified instances, and at paragraph 87 it states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved, except in "very special circumstances".
88. Paragraph 88 clarifies that Local Planning Authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, and that very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
89. CDLP Policy E1 relates to the Green Belt in general and in similarity to NPPF Paragraphs 89 and 90 establishes the forms of development that are considered appropriate. However, Policy E1 is considered only partially consistent with the NPPF as it is more restrictive than the guidance within the NPPF which introduces a wider scope of development that can be considered appropriate in the Green Belt. As the policy is partially consistent with the NPPF it can be attributed weight in the decision making process.
90. CDLP Policies E2 and E2A relating to major developed sites in the Green Belt are considered consistent with the advice contained within the NPPF and therefore should be attributed their full weight in the decision making process.
91. The refurbishment of Weardale House which would result in alterations to an existing building within the site but without any disproportionate additions or greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and would not therefore constitute inappropriate development.
92. However, it is considered that the proposed purpose built student accommodation building would constitute inappropriate development. The proposed building would replace two existing buildings with one single building larger in size both in respects to its height and massing and also in terms of its floor area and coverage of the site. Although the site forms part of a wider designated major developed site within the Green Belt it is considered that the newbuild proposal would result in a redevelopment which would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and does not constitute one of the forms of development identified within CDLP Policies E2 and E2A or at NPPF Paragraphs 89 and 90 that would not be inappropriate.
93. The development is therefore only acceptable if very special circumstances exist and consideration must therefore be given to the amount of harm arising from the inappropriate development and in turn the extent of the benefits to be delivered by the development so as to inform on whether those benefits clearly outweigh the harm (both in terms of Green Belt and any other harm) so as to amount to very special circumstances.

Level of harm to the Green Belt

94. The NPPF does state that any inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and that substantial weight should be attributed to any harm. However, there can nevertheless be varying degrees of harm in the Green Belt.

95. Paragraph 80 of the NPPF sets out the five purposes of Green Belt, and the designation of Green Belt, which are as follows;
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built- up areas;
 - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
 - To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
96. The proposed development would remain within the bounds of the designated major developed Green Belt site. The application site is bounded by a road to its immediate north-east, north-west and south-west and buildings within the said designated site to the south-east. It is therefore considered that the development would not result in a harmful sprawl of development or contribute to any merging of settlements.
97. The justification to CDLP Policy E1 highlights that of all the purposes for including land within the Durham City Green Belt the need for the designation so as to aid in preserving the special character of Durham City is of particular importance. The impact of the development upon heritage assets is considered in more detail elsewhere in this report, however, it is considered that the development would not result in any harmful impacts upon the setting of Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area or indeed nearby Shincliffe Village Conservation Area. It is considered that the development would result in no harmful impacts upon the setting and special character of these nearby historic settlements.
98. Due to the impact on the openness of the Green Belt by reason of the scale and massing of the proposed development it is considered that a visual encroachment into the countryside would result. Currently Weardale House is the highest building on the site and the most dominant. The two accommodation blocks proposed for demolition are lower and appear subservient to this main building.
99. The proposed building would be greater in height than Weardale House by approximately 2m at the highest point. The proposed building would result in three floors of accommodation (together with a vacant lower floor necessary for flood risk alleviation purposes) across the entirety of its “H” shaped floor area. This would result in a clear and noticeable change in comparison to the existing two and single storey buildings to be replaced.
100. The greater scale of the proposed building over the existing, would be apparent in views towards the site and the extent to which the current openness of the Green Belt and countryside would be affected would be apparent. Examples of such views include those from Bent House Lane and from Public Footpath No. 32 (Durham City).
101. However, Landscape Officers consider that the site is visually well contained whilst wider landscape impacts are considered to not be significant. With respect to effects on the Green Belt, Landscape Officers consider that the development would not result in a significant effect on the visual perception of the openness.

102. It should also be noted that an existing redevelopment proposal is in the process of being built-out at the site. This redevelopment proposal (known as Phase 1) most recently approved under application DM/15/01041/FPA in August 2015 comprises of a range of developments which, if completed, would result in the erection of a range of agricultural buildings to the rear (south-west) of the proposed student accommodation building. This extant planning permission would result in an increase in built development on the periphery of the application site and would have an impact in screening elements of the proposed building. As a result, it is considered that once Phase 1 (or elements of) is completed, the addition of the proposed student accommodation building, though clearly adding to the overall visual impact at the campus, would be a less obvious addition to the grouping in visual terms than if no Phase 1 development were to occur. Instead, the proposal would become a further element of the enlargement to the current grouping of buildings at the campus.
103. It is also noted that during the course of the application the proposed building has been reduced in scale, with a floor of accommodation removed, so as to lessen the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and provide a form of development in terms of scale and mass more appropriate to existing buildings on site.
104. Overall, a clear and noticeable impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and encroachment into the countryside would result from the development. The impact of this inappropriate development is by definition harmful and must be attributed substantial weight in the decision making process. Nevertheless, the above described mitigating factors limit the extent of this harm.
105. The development would make use of previously developed land and involve the demolition and replacement of underused and vacant buildings. However, the site being located within the open countryside is not urban land. The applicant's justification for the development (discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report) seeks to highlight intrinsic linkages between the proposal and the site and therefore that the development cannot occur in another location. Notwithstanding the content of the very special circumstances argument, clearly there is potential for a student accommodation development to be developed in a location which would recycle land in an urban location and extant planning permissions on such land do exist within Durham City.
106. As a result it is considered that the proposals' conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt rests on the encroachment into the countryside and the resultant impact on the openness of the Green Belt and to a lesser extent that the development would not encourage urban regeneration.

Very Special Circumstances

107. As the development constitutes inappropriate development, the proposal can only be considered acceptable if very special circumstances exist which clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm.
108. The applicant has submitted a Very Special Circumstances Justification (VSC Justification). This VSC Justification highlights that not all elements of the previously approved Phase 1 redevelopments at the campus can currently materialise.

109. The Phase 1 redevelopment proposals approved under application DM/15/01041/FPA (and previously under application CE/13/01542/FPA) were based upon a very special circumstances case. Within these applications it was acknowledged that the agricultural, equine and land-based teaching college is a well-established, unique and valuable facility for the whole County and that the proposals would support and benefit the local economy by providing both employment and skills development which can contribute to the well-being of the local economy and community. Internal and external review of teaching and learning at the campus has evidenced that there is a poor standard of accommodation and resources at the College. An Ofsted inspection as far back as 2002 identified concerns relating to the provision of land based courses including poor resources and accommodation for equine and animal care studies and that overall quality of provision is poor, which impacts on the education that students receive. In turn the college has been under threat from competition from other agricultural colleges in neighbouring Cumbria and North Yorkshire.
110. The VSC Justification explains that the construction contract relating to the Phase 1 redevelopment does not include the whole scope of the latest planning permission. After engagement with the main contractors Phase 1 was scaled back as the budget was insufficient to complete all elements as designed. Elements of the Phase 1 redevelopment not contained within the construction contract include the refurbishment of the existing outdoor equine arena, reinstatement of a grain store, IT upgrade and furniture and fitted equipment upgrade. Missing elements of the approved phase 1 scheme would result in a less comprehensive redevelopment scheme and the extent of the improvements to the campus facilities and in turn educational offer would be more limited than previously anticipated.
111. The capital receipt that would be received as a result of the development proposal subject to this application can in part be utilised so that the remaining elements of the Phase 1 scheme come into fruition.
112. Furthermore the vast majority of the Phase 1 redevelopment is paid for through a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) grant. However, a loan and reserve monies were necessary to gap fund a shortfall of approximately £2 million. This loan added to existing loans of the college results in total borrowings of the college of 46% of their income. The July 2015 Area Based Review (ABR) of Further Education Colleges assesses how sustainable and ultimately how financially secure Further Education institutions are going forward.
113. Based upon the current borrowings as a percentage of income the college would not score well on this measure, as the ABR sets a threshold of 40%. What this means in practice is that the college has to reduce its borrowings to improve its financial sustainability. At 46% of borrowings to income the college would not easily be able to raise more capital to fund ongoing improvements to its premises or to plan for future phases of its Houghall campus consolidation (which are aspirations of the college).
114. As a result of the capital receipt gained from the development proposal the applicant states that they would commit towards to the completion of the Phase 1 redevelopment (which the construction contract currently would not). The applicant states within the VSC justification that this would represent a £770,000 commitment. The applicant also states that a further £400,000 commitment would be made to repay a loan so as to improve its overall financial position and increase future borrowing potential. The VSC justification highlights that this would place the college on a more even keel financially and in a stronger position to undertake further improvements to the college.

115. The VSC Justification states that the applicant would enter into a S106 legal agreement to ensure those elements of the Phase 1 redevelopment currently missing from the construction contract are undertaken.
116. Reviewed against the CIL regulations and NPPF paragraph 204 the S106 commitment to agree a precise schedule of works and to complete the Phase 1 redevelopment works is considered necessary to make the development acceptable and is related to the development as it forms part of the very special circumstances case without which the development would be unacceptable. The works to be ensured by the S106 are considered fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. However, it is considered that the applicant's proposal to repay a loan debt is less clearly related to the development itself. Though an additional offer of the applicant, it is considered that the commitment to repay a loan debt should not be afforded weight in the decision making process.
117. The VSC Justification highlights that a degree of redevelopment could occur at the site and constitutes appropriate development for which there would be no planning policy objection. In principle this is correct, CDLP Policy E2 permits some infilling development for example, whilst the NPPF accepts redevelopment of previously developed land which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and accepts that existing buildings can be enlarged provided that additions are not disproportionate.
118. The VSC Justification presents a theoretical exercise on how the grouping of buildings at the campus could be redeveloped in a way that would not constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt and that this could provide 114 accommodation beds. Whilst a theoretical exercise it does demonstrate in principle that some redevelopment works could occur at the site which would not constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt.
119. It is also noted that a particular quantum of development is likely required for the scheme to be deliverable and viable. Purpose built student accommodation schemes of too small a scale can be unattractive to investors in the student market. There must also exist competitive returns to a willing land owner/developer for a scheme to be deliverable.
120. The submitted VSC Justification states that a further benefit of the development would emerge from the re-use and refurbishment of Weardale House and remedial works to its chimneys, which is a non-designated heritage asset. This benefit, however, must be tempered by any impact to its setting caused by the development proposal itself and this is discussed in more detail elsewhere in this report.
121. Ultimately in planning terms, the key consideration is simply whether there are considerations which clearly outweigh the degree of harm to the Green Belt such that very special circumstances exist. The final planning balance of all considerations cannot be undertaken until all material considerations have been assessed and this is considered in detail later in this report.

Acceptability of Student Development at the Site

122. CDLP Policy H16 relates to student halls and forms of residential institution. Subject to a number of criteria being met such development will be permitted within settlement boundaries. The application site is not within a settlement boundary but within the designated Durham City Green Belt and in turn within the countryside. CDLP Policy E7 relates to development outside of settlement boundaries and establishes those forms of exceptional development which can be considered acceptable within the countryside. Purpose built student accommodation is not identified as an acceptable form of development within CDLP Policy E7. The development is therefore contrary to Policies E7 and H16 in this regard.

123. The Council has recently approved an Interim Policy on Student Accommodation subsequent to public consultation. This policy introduces criteria that purpose built student accommodation proposals will be required to demonstrate that; there is a need for additional accommodation; that the accommodation is deliverable; that the development would not have a negative impact on retail, employment, leisure, tourism or housing; and partnership working with the relevant education provider has taken place. The policy advises that development will not be permitted unless a number of further criteria are met. Some of the criteria relates to general development principles such as design, layout and parking standards. However, the interim policy also requires that any proposed student accommodation development is readily accessible to an existing university or college academic site, that the impacts of the occupancy of the development is acceptable having regards to the amenity of surrounding residents and that the applicant has demonstrated that the security of the building and its occupants has been considered along with other local residents and legitimate users.
124. The interim policy does not form part of the development plan and therefore the weight which should be attributed to the interim policy in the decision making process is less than a development plan policy.
125. It is considered, however, that the application does demonstrate significant compliance with the interim policy. It is particularly noteworthy that Durham University have submitted supportive comments with regards to the development stating that the proposal could meet a student accommodation need within the City which is currently unmet by available and approved purpose built student accommodation developments. It is considered that the development would result in no negative impacts upon retail, employment, leisure, tourism or housing. Indeed the development has the potential to strengthen the position of Houghall College, an institution valued within the County.
126. Matters of accessibility are discussed elsewhere within this report, however, the site is considered an accessible location for a student development despite its siting within the Green Belt. This degree of accessibility complies with guidance contained within CDLP Policy H16 albeit it is acknowledged it is in conflict with the policy due to the siting beyond a settlement boundary. Furthermore the proposal would in part replace existing accommodation at the site rather than introducing a wholly new form of development to the wider campus.
127. Similarly matters of residential amenity are discussed elsewhere within this report. However, it is considered that the development would not result in any unacceptable adverse impacts upon existing residents. In accordance with the interim student policy the application is accompanied by a student management plan. The end operator of the student accommodation is not known at this stage and therefore the student management plan establishes management principles. A condition can be added to any approval requiring that a final management plan be devised. Again the considered acceptability of impacts upon residential amenity is compliant with guidance contained within CDLP Policy H16.
128. The proposed purpose built student accommodation building due to its location within the countryside is contrary CDLP Policies H16 and E7. However, despite this the site is considered a sustainable location for student accommodation. If occupied by Houghall College students the building would provide accommodation on site. Even if occupancy is predominantly by University students the site is within easy reach of existing University facilities, including Mountjoy and Maiden Castle and the city centre. As a result it is considered that the development can still be considered acceptable provided that very special circumstances can be demonstrated and no other harm exists which would warrant the withholding of planning permission.

Landscape Impact

129. Though the above discussion considers the impact of the development in the context of the Green Belt, consideration must also be had to the acceptability of the development in more general landscape and visual impact terms.
130. The application is accompanied by a landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) which has been updated during the course of the application to reflect design changes to the purpose built student accommodation proposal.
131. The application site lies within a locally designated Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) to which CDLP Policy E10 applies. Essentially Policy E10 states that development that would have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the AHLV will be resisted. As a locally designated landscape it is considered that the landscape within which the application site is located constitutes a valued landscape which NPPF paragraph 109 states should be protected and enhanced.
132. Landscape Officers raise no objections to the development. The site and development would primarily be visible from the immediate grounds of the college to the north and west, in filtered views from footpaths within Great High Wood and in views from a section of the A177 from which it is otherwise screened by roadside vegetation. In terms of the effects of the development upon landscape features the development would entail the loss of a number of specimen trees which are covered by a TPO. These are attractive and valued assets to a campus with a strong arboricultural identity but the trees do not figure significantly in wider views. The loss of the trees can be accepted, however, planting specimens elsewhere to compensate for the loss should occur and a condition in the event of an approval can ensure this.
133. In terms of impacts upon landscape character, Landscape Officers consider that the development as a whole would not have significant effects on the character of the wider landscape or its immediate campus setting whilst an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape quality or appearance of the AHLV would not occur. In terms of visual effects the site is visually relatively well contained. The proposed student accommodation building would be visible in views as presented within the submitted LVIA, however, significant effects on the visual amenity of the users of roads and footpaths in the vicinity would not occur.
134. As a result officers raise no objections to the impacts of the development as a whole in landscape and visual impact terms with the development considered compliant with CDLP Policies E10, E14, E15 and Q5 and Parts 7 and 11 of the NPPF. CDLP Policies E10, E14, E15 and Q5 are considered either fully (E14, E15 and Q5) or partially (E10) consistent with the NPPF and can be attributed weight in the decision making process.

Design and Heritage Impact

135. The application is accompanied by a Heritage Statement (HS). The HS highlights that a number of designated heritage assets are located within close proximity of the site though none within the site. Designated heritage assets in the vicinity of the site include Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area (approximately 180m to the north), Shincliffe Village Conservation Area (approximately 470m to the south-east), Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site (WHS) (approximately 1km to the north-west), the Grade II listed Boundary Stone (approximately 100m to the north-east), the Grade II listed Water Board Cottages (450m to the south-east), the Grade II listed Shincliffe Bridge (approximately 520m to the south-east), the Grade II listed medieval barn to the rear of Houghall Farm (approximately 1km to the south) and Maiden Castle Scheduled Monument (approximately 330m to the north). Within the grouping of the Houghall College campus buildings Weardale House is identified as a non-designated heritage asset.

136. In assessing the proposed development regard must be had to the statutory duties imposed on the Local Planning Authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Firstly, when considering whether to grant planning permission for a development which affects a listed building or its setting, the decision maker shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Secondly, the LPA must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area. If harm is found any such harm must be given considerable importance and weight by the decision-maker.
137. Impacts upon several of the designated heritage assets are discounted within the submitted HS due to the lack of intervisibility between the assets and the site including the WHS, Maiden Castle, and the Grade II listed Water Board Cottages. The submitted HS therefore focuses its heritage impact assessment upon Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area, Shincliffe Conservation Area, the Grade II listed Boundary Stone and the non-designated Weardale House.
138. The HS considers that no harm would occur upon the significance of the Grade II listed Boundary Stone. Though the proposed development would be visible in the same views as the heritage asset, it is considered that this would not be harmful. The significance of the stone is primarily historic in its identification of an historic boundary and this would be unaffected by the development.
139. The proposed student accommodation building would be visible from the boundary of the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area at the bottom of Great High Wood and the A177. The significance of this steep wooded embankment is in containing views of and from Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area and marking the change from an urban to rural landscape. Despite the greater scale and visual impact of the proposed student accommodation building the overall context of a rural campus set in an agricultural context would not alter. The HS concludes that the impacts of the development upon the Conservation Area would be neutral.
140. The HS considers that views of the proposed development from Mill Lane within Shincliffe Conservation Area would be limited to glimpsed views rather than any prominent impact. These glimpsed views would not be harmful upon the Conservation Area.
141. The HS considers that minor harm would occur upon the non-designated heritage assets within the Houghall College campus due to the impact that the introduction of a student accommodation building of this scale would have upon the setting and therefore significance of the asset.
142. Design and Conservation Officers raise no objections to the content of the submitted HS and its conclusions are essentially agreed with. Limited harm upon Weardale House as a result of the scale and siting of the proposed student accommodation building is identified. No harm to designated heritage assets is identified.
143. However, it is also acknowledged that the implementation of the proposed development would result in the refurbishment and reuse of Weardale House and the applicant has stated that the schedule of works to complete the Phase 1 redevelopment would include repair works to its chimneys. These impacts would be beneficial upon the non-designated heritage asset and overall it is considered that the impacts upon the asset would therefore be neutral.

144. In general design and character terms Design and Conservation state with regards to the proposed student accommodation building that architecturally the contemporary form follows function, the development designed as a clear planned building type with a clear effort to synergise the new and old developments by materiality. The “H shape” of the proposed building is described as mirroring the plan-form of the adjacent Weardale House. The simple palette of materials proposed to the external envelope - primarily red brickwork, zinc cladding and powder coated aluminium glazing assist in breaking down the scale of the building and respond to the colour palette of Weardale House. No objections to the design of the proposed student accommodation building are raised.
145. Archaeology officers raise no objections. Recent evaluation work in the vicinity of the site found no archaeology to be present. No further archaeological works are necessary either pre or post determination.
146. Overall impacts upon both designated and non-designated heritage assets either within or in the vicinity of the application site are considered to be neutral. No objections are raised to the development on design grounds. The application is therefore considered compliant with CDLP Policies E6, E21, E22, E23, E24, Q1 and Q2 and Parts 7 and 12 of the NPPF. CDLP Policies E6, E21, E22, E23, E24, Q1 and Q2 are considered either fully (E21, E22, E23, E24, Q1 and Q2) or partially (E6) consistent with the NPPF and can be attributed weight in the decision making process. There is no conflict with the statutory duties imposed on the Local Planning Authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Flood Risk and Drainage

147. The application site is located entirely within flood risk zone 3a and therefore a high probability of the risk of flooding applies to the site.
148. National guidance contained within the NPPF and PPG advises that a sequential risk based approach at all stages of development should be taken with regards to flood risk the aim being that where possible development is steered towards the areas of least risk. If it is shown that it is not possible, consistent with wider sustainability objectives, for the development to be located in zones of lower flood risk then where appropriate, a further “Exception Test” should apply. This Exception Test applies to the development as the student accommodation nature of the proposal constitutes a “more vulnerable” type of land use.
149. The application is accompanied by a site specific flood risk assessment (FRA), a Sequential Test and an Exception Test. The Sequential and Exception Test submissions have been updated during the course of the application to reflect the supplementary justifications to the development which the applicant has submitted.
150. The submitted Sequential Test considers that alternative reasonably available sites in areas of lower flood risk do not exist to provide the proposed development. The submissions on the Sequential Test effectively reflect the VSC Justification with respects to the Green Belt in that the submission considers that in order for the benefits to the agricultural college to emerge the proposed student development scheme must be located on college land. The Sequential Test therefore discounts the availability of sites beyond the campus on this basis and concludes that within the bounds of the college reasonably available sites to relocate the development do not exist.
151. It is accepted that only development within the bounds of the campus could bring about the benefits to the agricultural college. Though in sheer principle terms sites for student accommodation development on land at less risk from flooding could likely be identified in the area, as the proposal is linked to facilitating benefits to the college such a scheme would not be appropriate for the development having regards to the advice contained within NPPF paragraph 101.

152. An Exception Test should meet two criteria;
- i) it must be demonstrated that the development provides wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk, informed by a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment where one has been prepared; and
 - ii) a site-specific flood risk assessment must demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.
153. With regard to the wider sustainability benefits of the development subject to the first test, there is overlap with the VSC Justification with the submitted Exception Test focusing upon the benefits to the improvement to the facilities and higher education provision at the college. Further sustainability benefits including in terms of addressing the need to provide high quality student accommodation and economic benefits from job creation in the construction sector and supply chains are detailed. It is considered that wider sustainability benefits that meet the requirements of the Exception Test have been demonstrated.
154. Regarding the second test and matters of flood risk, the FRA highlights that the site has suffered from flooding in the past with the most recent recorded flood event in 2009. The proposed student accommodation building has been designed to include flood mitigation measures. The finished floor level of the habitable ground floor is to be raised to 38.2m AOD with the lowest floor of the building effectively left vacant and designed so as to resist any flood water penetration. Flood defence barriers are also proposed. To compensate for the loss of flood plain storage as a result of a larger building being constructed on site land to the south is to be excavated.
155. Full and final details regarding surface water disposal have at this stage not been devised. The FRA acknowledges that surface water should be disposed of in accordance with the drainage hierarchy which establishes a preference of i) via infiltration ii) via a watercourse iii) via the sewer. The FRA states that infiltration techniques are unlikely acceptable due to the soil conditions which have low permeability. The FRA therefore states that final surface water disposal is likely to be via the River Wear. Discharge rates would require control and the FRA indicates that an underground attenuation tank would be used for this purpose.
156. Drainage and Coastal Protection Officers have raised no objections to the application. The proposed surface water drainage system and restriction of surface water run-off rates (to 4 litres per second) are considered acceptable in principle.
157. In the event of any approval a condition can be added to resolve the final detailed drainage scheme for the development and resolve the final details of the flood risk mitigation measures such as the barriers and compensatory flood plan storage.
158. The Environment Agency raises no objections to the application subject to the development being implemented in accordance with the mitigation measures contained within the submitted flood risk assessment. Conditions can ensure that such mitigation measures are implemented.
159. Foul water disposal is proposed via the mains sewer and though Northumbrian Water raise no objections in principle it does state that full details with regards to foul and surface water disposal have not been provided within the application. Northumbrian Water requests a condition to resolve final details in the event of an approval.

160. As a result, it is considered that the application has demonstrated that the development would be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere. The requirements of the Exception Test are therefore considered to be met by the proposal and no objections on flood risk grounds are raised. The application is considered compliant with CDLP Policies U8A, U9 and U10 and part 10 of the NPPF. CDLP Policies U8A, U9 and U10 are considered either fully (U8A) or partially (U9 and U10) consistent with the NPPF and can be attributed weight in the decision making process.

Highway Safety and Accessibility

161. The NPPF advises that development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe. The application is accompanied by a transport statement (TS) and a travel plan (TP). The TS has been amended during the course of the application.
162. The submitted TS includes a site accessibility audit a matter which the submitted TP also addresses. The site is considered accessible to a range of modes of transport. Pedestrian and cycle access along an existing shared footpath cycleway on the adjacent A177 would provide access to Durham City. Main flows are likely to be towards the City Centre and the Durham University campuses and these areas would be accessible for future occupants. The Stockton Road campus for example is approximately 850m from the site via the A177. The nearest bus stops are approximately 250m and 350m from the site and provide a range of services. The site is considered an accessible location for the development. This degree of accessibility and connectivity with Durham City is considered important given the site is physically separated from any settlement which sometimes can result in developments which are residentially occupied being considered isolated and thereby unsustainable.
163. The submitted TS presents the predicted trip generation emerging from the development and anticipates that the majority of trips in peak hours will be pedestrian trips with relatively few vehicular comings and goings from the site.
164. The TS outlines the Council's car and cycle parking requirements for student accommodation and seeks to meet these through a combination of onsite provision and use of a permit system for car parking within the wider Houghall College site. Six parking spaces are proposed on-site with 10 further permit parking passes to be provided. For cycles a total of 52 spaces are to be provided to cater for both occupiers and visitors.
165. The Highway Authority raises no objections to the development essentially agreement with the conclusions of the submitted TS. The site is considered accessible for the development proposal with no significant impacts upon the local highway network.
166. No objections are therefore raised to the development with regards to matters of highway safety/highway issues with the development considered compliant with CDLP Policies T1, T20 and Q2 and Part 4 of the NPPF. CDLP Policy T1 is considered partially consistent with the NPPF and Q2 and T20 fully consistent and can be attributed weight in the decision making process. CDLP Policy T10 regarding parking standards though applicable to the development is considered inconsistent with the NPPF and therefore is attributed no weight.

Residential Amenity

167. The application site benefits from its relative isolation to other surrounding developments beyond the Houghall Campus. As a result there are no neighbouring sites or occupiers beyond the bounds the wider campus that would be directly affected by the presence of the building having regards for instance to privacy and outlook. Mountjoy House is located approximately 280m to the west of the application site and is the closest residential property to the development.
168. Where purpose built student accommodation developments are located within existing residential areas public concerns over the impacts of noise and disturbance are frequently raised. Again as a result of the relative detachment of the development the impacts of the development upon neighbouring occupiers are reduced in comparison.
169. With the proposal creating a total of 222 student beds there remains the potential for significant comings and goings from the site and this would include pedestrian movements for instance passing properties on route to University sites or the city centre. However, it is considered that these movements would add modestly to existing movements in these parts of the City and not be disturbing or harmful.
170. The application is accompanied by a noise report which has been updated during the course of the application. The scope of the report is to consider the implications of existing noise sources upon the occupiers of the development. The principal noise source is identified as traffic on the A177. The submitted noise report concludes that the provision of minimum façade sound insulation would be required for the new build portion of the proposed development whilst a noise limit of 28dB(A) in proposed bedrooms with respects to noise from any mechanical services/plant necessary.
171. Environment, Health and Consumer Protection Officers raise no objections to the methodology or conclusions of the submitted noise report. It should be noted that the comments of Environment, Health and Consumer Protection Officers relate to the potential of the development to cause a statutory nuisance, as defined by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, with regard to residential amenity officers concur with their views that objection not be raised to the development on the grounds of the impacts of the noise environment upon future occupiers.
172. So as to reduce the potential for noise and disturbance during the construction phase of the development it is considered that a construction management plan be agreed under condition in the event of any approval. In accordance with the advice of Environment, Health and Consumer Protection Officers this management plan should include a Dust Action Management Plan.
173. No objections are raised to the development on with regards to matters of residential amenity with the application considered compliant with CDLP Policies U5 and U7 and having regards to parts 7 and 11 of the NPPF. CDLP Policies U5 and U7 are considered partially consistent with the NPPF and can be attributed weight in the decision making process.

174. The application is accompanied by an ecological appraisal report, bat survey report and badger report. The presence of protected species is a material consideration, in accordance with Circular 06/2005 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their Impact within the Planning System) and Part 11 of the NPPF. In addition with regards to with regards to European Protected Species (EPS) (which includes bats) under the requirements of The Habitats Regulations it is a criminal offence to (amongst other things) deliberately capture, kill, injure or disturb a protected species, unless such works are carried out with the benefit of a licence from Natural England. Regulation 9(3) of The Habitat Regulations requires local planning authorities to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive in exercising its functions. Case law has established that local planning authorities must consider whether the applicant might obtain a protected species licence from Natural England. This requires an examination of the derogation provisions. However, the need to consider if an EPS licence may be granted only occurs where there would be interference with an EPS.
175. The submitted ecological appraisal report considered the potential for the development to affect a range of species and statutory and locally designated ecological sites. Within this the potential for impacts upon great crested newts (GCNs,) grass snakes, water voles, hedgehogs, brown hare, red squirrel, white clawed crayfish, otters and bird species are considered. With regards to statutory designated ecological sites none are located within 2km of the site. With regards to locally designated sites 8 local wildlife sites are located within 2km of the site the closest being Houghall, Maiden Castle and Little Woods approximately 140m the west.
176. The ecological appraisal report narrows down the potential impacts of the development to impacts upon nesting birds, risk of harm to terrestrial mammals, residual risk of harm to GCNs and reptiles if present at the time of works and risk of dispersal of the invasive species Cotoneaster.
177. In terms of further work, due to the nature of the buildings to be affected by the development and the site settings which could provide foraging opportunities the ecological appraisal report concluded that bat surveying was necessary. Similarly due to existence of records of badgers in the vicinity of the site badger surveying was also considered necessary.
178. The submitted bat survey report highlights that the results of the surveying found no roosts within the buildings surveyed and overall it is considered within the report that there is a low risk of roosts being present. The report does propose mitigation measures, however, including that a checking survey is undertaken prior to demolition works occurring at the site and the provision of bat boxes within retained trees at the site.
179. The submitted badger survey report concludes that whilst no licence (having regards to the protection offered to badgers under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992) will be required to undertake the development works, as a precaution, a checking survey is advised prior to the commencement of works, method statement be produced and “toolbox talk” with staff delivered.
180. Further remaining ecological mitigation measures are proposed within the ecological appraisal report including that vegetation clearance occurs outwith the nesting season unless a checking survey is undertaken prior to works and that any excavations left open overnight include a means of escape for mammals.

181. Ecology officers raise no objections to the submitted report but recommend mitigation measures are implemented. It is considered that the development would not interfere with any EPS with no requirement to consider whether an EPS licence would be granted. Ecology officers raise no objections with regards to the potential for the development to affect any statutory or local designated ecological sites.
182. As a result no objections are raised to the development on ecological and nature conservation grounds with the development considered compliant with CDLP Policies E16 and E18 and Part 11 of the NPPF. CDLP Policy E16 is considered fully consistent with the NPPF and Policy E18 partially consistent and therefore weight to both policies can be attributed in the decision making process.

Other Issues

183. Environment, Health and Consumer Protection (Contaminated Land) raise no objections, however, a contaminated land investigation/remediation condition should be added to any planning permission having regard to CDLP Policies U11 and U12 and Part 11 of the NPPF. CDLP Policies U11 and U12 are considered fully consistent with the NPPF and can be attributed weight in the decision making process.
184. Employability officers request that targeted recruitment and training clauses are included within a S106 legal agreement in the event of approval. It is considered that a condition can ensure these clauses in the event of an approval.
185. Access and Public Rights of Way officers raise no objections. Officers consider that the development would not affect any recorded public rights of way having regards to CDLP Policy R11.
186. Sustainability Officers request further details with regards to how the scheme embeds sustainability and minimizes carbon from construction and operational emissions having regards to CDLP Policy U14 (fully consistent with the NPPF) and NPPF part 10. A condition can be added to ensure that a final embedded sustainability scheme is agreed and implemented.
187. CDLP Policy Q15 seeks to encourage artistic elements in the design and layout of development or seeks a financial contribution in lieu of such provision. In this instance it is considered that finances emerging from the development are more appropriately directed towards ensuring the completion of the Phase 1 development proposals as per the VSC Justification. CDLP Policy Q15 “encourages” rather than requires artistic incorporation into developments. The policy is considered only partly consistent with the NPPF. As a result it is considered that objection not be raised to the absence of artistic elements forming a part of the development proposal.

Whether Very Special Circumstances Exist

188. Whilst accepting that any degree of harm to the Green Belt must be attributed substantial weight in this instance it is considered the level of harm to the Green Belt and degree of impact on openness is relatively limited.
189. The economic and social benefits that would result from the completion of the Phase 1 redevelopment works and the related beneficial impacts upon the education offer at Houghall College are such that it is considered very special circumstances do exist which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the siting of the development within the countryside. A S106 legal agreement can ensure that the precise schedule of works to complete the Phase 1 redevelopment are agreed and delivered.

CONCLUSION

190. The development would in part involve inappropriate development in the Green Belt. There is a presumption against such inappropriate development in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.
191. It is considered that very special circumstances which permit the development to be acceptable exist and have been demonstrated. The development is therefore considered compliant with NPPF Paragraphs 88 and 89.
192. The proposed development would in part replace existing poor quality accommodation with a new student accommodation building fit for purpose. This purpose built accommodation would be suitable for both Houghall College students and Durham University students with University sites within easy reach of the development. A proportion of the financial receipt of the development would be invested into ensuring that a previously approved redevelopment of the agricultural college is delivered in full rather than in a less comprehensive form currently subject to the construction contract. The comprehensive redevelopment would benefit the agricultural college providing an enhanced offer of facilities at the only agricultural college within the County. The works to complete this previously approved Phase 1 redevelopment would be ensured via a S106 legal agreement.
193. The agricultural, equine and land-based teaching college is a well-established, unique and valuable facility for the whole County and the proposals would support and benefit the local economy by providing both employment and skills development which can contribute to the well-being of the local economy and community.
194. The development itself would result in some direct and indirect economic benefits such as providing construction jobs and creating further jobs within associated supply chains.
195. The development would result in a clear impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and encroachment into the countryside would result from the development. This would be in conflict with CDLP Policies E1, E2, E2A, E7 and H16. The impact of this inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and must be attributed substantial weight in the decision making process. However, mitigating factors do reduce the extent of the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and in turn limit the potential for harm.
196. The proposals' conflict with the five purposes of the Green Belt is limited to the encroachment into the countryside and to a lesser extent the failure to encourage urban regeneration. The development would necessitate the loss of protected trees and this is a further associated harmful impact of the development.
197. However, on balance it is considered that very special circumstances exist which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the associated encroachment into the open countryside and loss of protected trees.
198. The proposal has generated some public interest. Concerns expressed regarding the proposal have been fully taken into account, and carefully balanced against the scheme's wider social, economic and environmental benefits. However, they are not considered to raise issues that justify planning permission being withheld.

199. The application must be referred to the Secretary of State via the National Planning Casework Unit for their consideration as to whether they seek to “call in” the application for their own determination. This referral is necessary due to the proposal constituting inappropriate development in the Green Belt consisting of the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000m² or more.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be **APPROVED** subject to:

- the referral of the application to the Secretary of State via the National Planning Casework Unit; and in the event of the application not being called in, the Head of Planning be authorised to determine the application.
- the completion of a Section 106 Legal Agreement to secure;
 - i) The agreement and completion of a schedule of works so as to complete the Phase 1 redevelopment of Houghall College

and subject to the following conditions;

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in strict accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

Plans:

Proposed Roof and Site Plan (Dwg No. SP-001 rev. D)
Proposed Elevations (Dwg No. EL-001 rev. D)
Weardale Proposed Ground Floor (Studios & Management Suite) (Dwg. No. SK(00)105 rev. B)
Weardale Proposed First Floor (Studios) (Dwg. No. SK(00)104 rev. C)
Proposed Ground Floor Plan – Alternative Option (Dwg No. AL_20_001A rev. D)
Proposed First Floor Plan – Alternative Option (Dwg. No. AL_20_006 rev. A)
Proposed Second Floor Plan – Alternative Option (Dwg. No. AL_20_007 rev. A)
Proposed External Lighting Layout (Dwg. No. E-(90)-00-001 rev. 2)
Landscape Site Plan (Dwg. No. N478-ONE—00-XX-DR-L-10001 rev. B)
Tree Protection Plan (ref. 4331 Houghall College)
Tree Protection Plan

Documents:

Arboricultural Method Statement for Houghall Campus, Durham (ref. R01) by E3 Ecology
Bat Survey (ref. RO1) by E3 Ecology
Façade Acoustic Design Strategy 5217.1 C by Apex Acoustics
Transport Statement Final – Revision A by SAJ Transport Consultants
Badger Survey by Fairhurst

Reason: To define the consent and ensure that a satisfactory form of development is obtained having regards to the City of Durham Local Plan Policies E1, E2, E2A, E6, E7, E10, E14, E15, E16, E18, E21, E22, E23, E24, H16, Q1, Q2, T1, T20, U5, U7, U8a, U9, U10, U11, U12, U14 and Parts 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 of the NPPF.

3. No development shall take place until a construction management strategy has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Said management strategy shall include but not necessarily be restricted to the following;
- Details and methods of dust suppression which will include a Dust Action Management Plan
 - Details and methods of noise reduction
 - Confirmation that the burning of combustible material shall be prohibited on site
 - Details and methods of reducing the potential for mud on the roads in the vicinity of the site
 - A management plan for the construction vehicle and delivery vehicle movements to and from the site including details of predicted movements any Banksmen and Signallers to be employed
 - Details of parking arrangements/management of construction site staff
 - Details of compound location
 - Details of the site construction hours within which construction activities including any deliveries to and from the site shall be permitted

The construction phase of the development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved construction management strategy.

Reason: In the interests of the residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers having regards to the City of Durham Local Plan Policies U5 and U7 and Part 11 of the NPPF. *Required to be a pre-commencement condition as construction activity mitigation must be agreed prior to the commencement of the works.*

4. No development shall take place until a detailed scheme for the disposal of foul and surface water from the development has been first submitted to and then approved by the Local Planning Authority. The submitted shall accord with the hierarchical approach to surface water disposal. The scheme shall include but not necessarily be restricted to the following;
- Detailed designs of features, infrastructure and any associated works and landscaping
 - Full details of all surface water run-off rates and discharge rates to any watercourse
 - Full details of the management and maintenance proposals/regime

The development shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved scheme. The approved scheme shall managed, maintained and operated in perpetuity.

Reason: To ensure adequate surface water disposal measures for the development in the interests of reducing the risk of flooding having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policies U8A, U9 and U10 and Part 10 of the NPPF. *Required to be a pre-commencement condition as the final drainage system should form an integral part of the layout of the development.*

5. No development shall take place until precise details of the flood barrier systems and the provision of compensatory flood plain storage as detailed within paragraphs 6.8.1 and 6.8.2 of the submitted "Flood risk and drainage assessment January 2016" have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved details and in accordance with the protection to flood levels as detailed within paragraph 6.8.1 of the submitted "Flood risk and drainage assessment January 2016".

Reason: In the interests of reducing the risk of flooding having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policy U10 and Part 10 of the NPPF. *Required to be a pre-commencement condition as the final flood risk mitigation solutions should form an integral part of the layout of the development.*

6. No development shall take place until a scheme/programme for the provision of targeted recruitment and training opportunities arising as a result of the development has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Such a scheme could include but may not necessarily be restricted to the following;
- Job Opportunities
 - Apprenticeship
 - Traineeship
 - Graduate Internship
 - Work Placements

Thereafter the approved scheme/programme shall be implemented.

Reason: In order to maximise the economic and employment opportunity benefits arising from the development having regards to Part 1 of the NPPF. *Required to be pre-commencement as the scheme of targeted recruitment must be determined prior to the commencement of the construction works.*

7. No development other than demolition shall take place until a detailed landscaping scheme has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The landscape scheme shall include the following:

Trees, hedges and shrubs scheduled for retention

Details of hard and soft landscaping including surface materials, planting species, sizes, layout, densities and numbers. The soft landscaping shall include details of a replacement tree planting scheme to compensate for the loss of trees protected by the TPO

Details of planting procedures or specification

Finished topsoil levels and depths

Details of temporary topsoil and subsoil storage provision

Seeded or turf areas, habitat creation areas and details

The establishment maintenance regime, including watering, rabbit protection, tree stakes, guards etc

Trees, hedges and shrubs shall not be removed within five years. Any trees or plants which die, fail to flourish or are removed within a period of 5 years from the substantial completion of the development shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species. Replacements will be subject to the same conditions.

The approved landscaping scheme shall be carried out in the first available planting season following the completion of the development.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenity of the area having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policies E14, E15 and Q5 and Part 11 of the NPPF.

8. No development other than demolition shall take place until full details of all materials to be used in the external construction of the development including details of all fenestration works hereby approved have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter construction shall take place only in full accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity and in the interests of preserving the character of a non-designated heritage asset having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policies E21 and H16 and parts 7 and 11 of the NPPF.

9. No development other than demolition shall take place until a scheme to deal with any contamination has been submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include the following:

Pre-Commencement

(a) A Phase 2 Site Investigation and Risk Assessment is required and shall be carried out by competent person(s) to fully and effectively characterise the nature and extent of any land and/or groundwater contamination and its implications.

(b) If the Phase 2 assessment identifies any unacceptable risks, remediation is required and a Phase 3 Remediation Strategy detailing the proposed remediation and verification works shall be carried out by competent person(s). No alterations to the remediation proposals shall be carried out without the prior written agreement of the Local Planning Authority. If during the remediation or development works any contamination is identified that has not been considered in the Phase 3, then remediation proposals for this material shall be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority and the development completed in accordance with any amended specification of works.

Completion

(c) Upon completion of the remedial works (if required), a Phase 4 Verification Report (Validation Report) confirming the objectives, methods, results and effectiveness of all remediation works detailed in the Phase 3 Remediation Strategy shall be submitted to and agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority within 2 months of completion of the development.

Reason: To ensure that risks from land contamination to the future users of the land and neighbouring land are minimised, together with those to controlled waters, property and ecological systems, and to ensure that the development can be carried out safely without unacceptable risk to workers, neighbours and other offsite receptors in accordance with City of Durham Local Plan Policies U11 and U10 and NPPF Part 11.

10. No development other than demolition shall take place until a scheme to minimise energy consumption has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme and retained so in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of sustainable construction and energy conservation having regards to District of Easington Local Plan Policies 1 and 35 and Part 10 of the NPPF.

11. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until details of all means of enclosure to be erected within the site have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of the character and appearance of the area having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policies H16 and Q5 and parts 7 and 11 of the NPPF.

12. The development hereby approved shall not be occupied until details of a final student management plan based upon the principles established within the submitted "Student Management Plan" by Jansons has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring appropriate management of the site in the interests of residential amenity having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policy H16 and the Interim Student Accommodation.

13. No development shall take place unless in full accordance with the submitted "Façade Acoustic Design Strategy" report 5217.1 version C by Apex Acoustics.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring adequate amenity is provided for the occupiers of the development having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policy U7 and Part 11 of the NPPF.

14. No development shall take place unless in full accordance with details and mitigation requirements contained within section 8 of the submitted Badger Survey by Fairhurst, section G of the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by E3 Ecology and section G of the submitted Bat Survey by E3 Ecology.

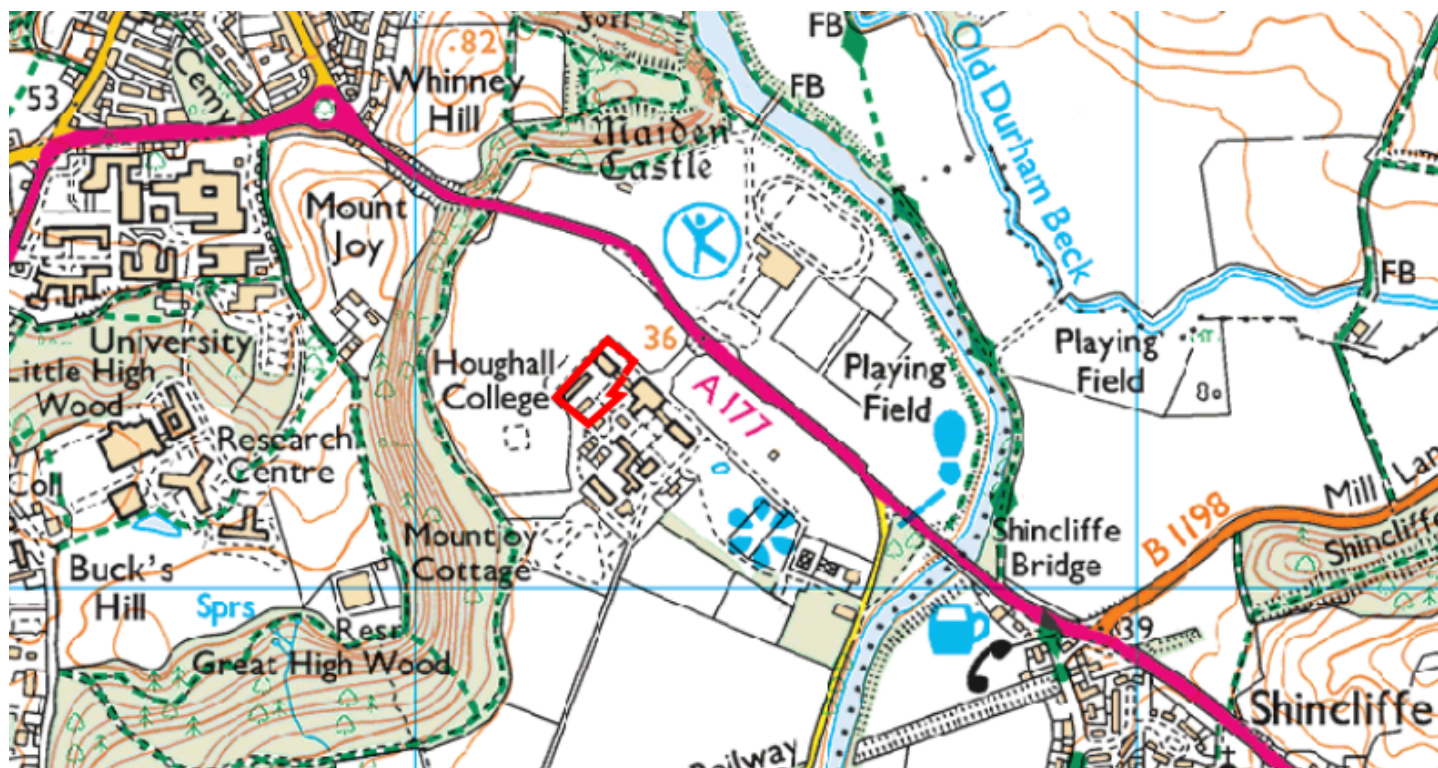
Reason: In the interests of conserving biodiversity having regards to City of Durham Local Plan Policy E16 and part 11 of the NPPF

STATEMENT OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The Local Planning Authority in arriving at its decision to support this application has, without prejudice to a fair and objective assessment of the proposals, issues raised, and representations received, sought to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner with the objective of delivering high quality sustainable development to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area in accordance with the NPPF. *(Statement in accordance with Article 35(2) (CC) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.)*

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Submitted application form, plans, supporting documents and subsequent information provided by the applicant
- The National Planning Policy Framework (2012)
- National Planning Practice Guidance
- City of Durham Local Plan
- The County Durham Plan (Issues and Options)
- Interim Student Accommodation Policy
- Statutory, internal and public consultation responses



Planning Services

Refurbishment of Weardale House to provide 24 student beds, demolition of 2 existing accommodation blocks and erection of purpose built student accommodation block (198 beds) at Weardale House East Durham And Houghall Community College Houghall Durham DH1 3SG (DM/16/00129/FPA)

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Comments

Date July 2016

Scale Not to scale