

**Northumberland and Newcastle Society
Planning and Development Team – December 2023**

Planning Comments

Application Reference	Application Type	Location Details	Proposal
23/04596/FUL	Full Application	Leazes Head Humshaugh Northumberland NE46 4BE	Proposed demolition of existing portal framed cattle building and replacement with new build self-catering/bed and breakfast wheelchair accessible holiday accommodation (Resubmission of Application 22/01374/FUL)
Planning Officer	Rachel Campbell		
Comment	<p>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) supports grant of approval for this scheme.</p> <p>The Society notes this resubmission of a previously refused scheme 22/01374/FUL reflects the applicant's work with the planning authority and other representatives to address their concerns over local policy non-compliance. These centred around the sustainability of the location, and the lack of demonstrable need for accommodation of this type in this area, therefore contravening policies STP1, ECN12 and ECN15 of the Northumberland Local Plan.</p> <p>It is evident the required additional information is now included, particularly in relation to the tourist market it is aimed at and the provision of existing facilities in the area, thus appearing to meet expectations. We therefore fully support what we believe is an exceptionally high quality renovation, to deliver a laudably low energy PassivHaus scheme, that will sit sympathetically in the landscape to the benefit of both tourists and the local community.</p>		
23/04342/FUL	Full Application	Former Benfield Motors Garage Hillgate Morpeth Northumberland NE61 1XY	Demolition of all existing buildings within the sites application boundary and construction of a residential care home and care apartments with associated car parking and landscaping.
Planning Officer	Richard Laughton		
Comment	<p>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) supports grant of planning approval for this application subject to the following amendments.</p> <p>As a general principle we enthusiastically support repurposing of brownfield sites in urban areas, equally we recognise the importance and value of the facilities this proposal will bring to Morpeth. This site has been an eyesore for so long that it is gratifying to see these proposals.</p> <p>We share the concerns of Historic England in respect of the loss of the 18th century house on the Castle Square street frontage and fervently believe this building should be retained and renovated. Access to the car park would be provided via the established vehicular route adjacent to the south elevation of this building. Retention of this historic building will both maintain the continuity of the historic streetscape and mitigate the impact of the massing of the new buildings. We would also suggest the car park be moved back by reducing the South block appropriately, as illustrated in previous preapplication proposals. This would have the advantage of</p>		

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	<p>screening the view of the rather unprepossessing gables of the South block from the main street.</p> <p>Comment has been made regarding the height of the proposal, when considering its relationship with Ha Hill and the Castle. We do not consider that reducing the whole scheme by one storey would improve matters greatly. The exception to this is, in our view, the South block, which will dominate views from Castle Bank and Carlisle Park. In addition, the gables of this block and those onto Hill Street could benefit from more detailed treatment.</p> <p>Comments from Consultees regarding Highways issues, Flooding and Biodiversity appear to require further consideration before the scheme can be considered satisfactory.</p> <p>Finally, the Society is an enthusiastic advocate for inclusion of solar PV generation within new developments and we note this is suggested on all the flat roofs.</p> <p>In summary we support the concept behind the application and believe this is a reasonable scheme subject to it being amended in accordance with our comments above.</p>		
23/04190/FUL	<p>Full Application</p>	<p>Land West Of Station Road Hexham Northumberland</p>	<p>Erection of retirement living accommodation (48no. apartments) with vehicular access, substation, communal facilities, landscaping, boundary treatments, amenity space and car parking provision following the demolition of existing buildings and boundary walls (part)</p>
<p>Planning Officer</p>	<p>Neil Armstrong</p>		
<p>Comment</p>	<p>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) submits grant of planning approval for this application is deferred for amendment subject to the following comments.</p> <p>The Society welcomes the use of a fringe of town brownfield site for a development which will benefit Hexham even though the market is specially defined one of retirement living. The location has car free access to the town centre (albeit with a steepish climb) and is close to public transport, retail and leisure facilities.</p> <p>The content, size and scale of the development is appropriate to its location and site topography, the proposed materials are location driven and therefore acceptable.</p> <p>Overall the Society does not object to the proposed scheme but would highlight 2 main areas where an alternative approach would, we feel, produce a better scheme, residents, the town and for the site.</p> <p>Firstly, we believe that the planning of the accommodation on the site is not as good as it should be. The developers have clearly taken a standard “ off the peg” block layout, given it a degree of articulation and centred it on the site. This results in an orientation in which half of the units face North West, albeit across the open playing fields, but away from the sun, and half face South East across a busy road. To the East is a no man’s land of parking, to the West, a sliver of a garden of proscribed usefulness.</p>		

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	<p>It is our view that a cleverer, non-standard layout, in a C shape in which the vertical leg of the C to the East would be closer to the road resulting in a layout in which habitable rooms face an enclosed landscaped garden, AND enjoy the best views out of the site. In such a scheme, the rooms would back onto the road, such as bathrooms, stairwells, storage and service spaces etc, with small apertures to mitigate sound and vibration. This would be more acceptable in architectural townscape terms as a street frontage as well as benefitting the residents.</p> <p>Our second area of comment is more one of regret. The scheme's design relies on attempting a pastiche of a 19th century style, making reference in the D & A context study to buildings of similar size and scale which is appropriate. To achieve this look, however, is very difficult with modern bricks, modern windows and modern rainwater goods etc.</p> <p>We regret that an approach which acknowledges the fact that it is being built in the mid 21st Century, broadly using the same materials but in a contemporary way has not been attempted. We have no objection to buildings of this use, scale, size and profile on the site but there are many examples of a 21st C approach, even in the immediate area, that have contributed to the history and development of the town in which each era is apparent, present and celebrated .</p> <p>The Society would therefore recommend that the application be deferred for redesign.</p>		
23/04126/FUL	<p>Full Application</p>	<p>Marley Tile Factory Lead Lane Newlands Consett Northumberland DH8 9JQ</p>	<p>Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment of former Marley Tiles Factory to provide 61no. residential dwellings (Use Class C3) with associated access, parking, landscaping and infrastructure</p>
<p>Planning Officer</p>	<p>Neil Armstrong</p>		
<p>Comment</p>	<p>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) supports grant of planning approval for this application subject to it being conditional on amendments referred to below.</p> <p>As a general principle we enthusiastically support repurposing of brownfield sites, whether these be sited in urban or rural locations. This site has been an eyesore for so long that it is gratifying to see proposals which remediate the land and bring it back into productive use. It is disappointing that the Biodiversity Net Gain 10% can only be met using statutory credits elsewhere, but we accept that this may simply reflect the inherent nature of this post-industrial site.</p> <p>We note that this development site has been subject to a previous planning application refusal 18/02239/FUL and a subsequent appeal which was also dismissed. Inappropriate design was amongst the reasons given for refusal, the proposed dwellings failing adequately to reflect the Northumbrian farm vernacular of dwellings in the surrounding rural landscape (LP Policy QOP1).</p> <p>Although the applicant states the previous reasons for refusal have been addressed, overall the lower density and suburban quality of the housing typologies still cause us concern, and we find ourselves in agreement with the Built Heritage and Design Officer's comments in particular. The 'high standard of design' claimed by the applicant throughout does not appear</p>		

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	<p>to follow through into key areas such as active transport provision and design for sustainability.</p> <p>Specifically, we note cycle times and practicalities appear to be exaggerated and the very necessary public transport links are as yet unconfirmed. There is no attempt to provide surfaced cyclepaths to Ebchester / Whittonstall to meet the justified concerns of locals whose assessment of the terrain is more realistic. Triple detached garages, and references to a 'mobility hub' which turns out to be just a bus stop with a cycle rack, do not inspire confidence in the developer's commitment to active transport and as such fall short of policies STP1 (village interconnectivity) and STP5 (safe, comfortable, inclusive pedestrian and cycle provision).</p> <p>The Society is equally disappointed with apparent commitment to a fabric first approach to sustainability that we feel is not matched by active provision of renewables to demonstrate that commitment, such as solar PV panels on every unit.</p> <p>The provision of affordable housing is still unclear from the documentation, and seems to lack required clarity in an oblique reference to a separate note and further discussions, which we find is a matter of profound concern, and in apparent breach of LP Policy HOU6.</p> <p>On a more positive note, features such as the recreational walk provided for residents, and the intention to provide an EV Car Club charging bay, add merit to an otherwise unremarkable scheme.</p> <p>In conclusion, in principle we believe this scheme represents a reasonable use of a vacant and derelict brownfield site, however we would expect planning approval to be conditional on binding commitments to address the matters we have referenced above.</p>		
23/04044/AGTRES	Notification of Prior Approval	Land North West Of Middleton Hall Middleton Belford Northumberland	Notification of Prior Approval for Conversion of existing former free range egg laying poultry building to create 4 no. dwellings together with associated package sewage treatment plant and retaining the remaining building for sundry agricultural storage.
Planning Officer	James Wellwood		
Comment	<p>The Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) objects to grant of planning approval for this scheme and submits the following comment in respect of this application.</p> <p>The Society has recently seen multiple schemes seeking approval for change of use from 'modern' purpose built agricultural buildings to dwellings which indicates that such proposals are likely to proliferate in Northumberland.</p> <p>It appears that since 2015 Permitted Development Class Q has provided for permission in principle to convert any agricultural building to a dwelling, subject to conditions. Our interpretation of the rationale for this Permitted Development was that it was intended to support agricultural businesses to diversify by developing these structures for a variety of residential uses, and to bring beneficial use back to farm buildings that would otherwise fall into disuse and decay. These building are usually of a type that has a relatively short design lifespan as a temporary structure specifically intended for agricultural use.</p>		

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As a general principle the Society supports repurposing of unused buildings as dwellings where this is reasonable and appropriate. Notwithstanding this, we are profoundly concerned at the potential for this specific Permitted Development Class Q rule to be misused. Given the predominantly rural environment of Northumberland there is a real risk this will open the 'floodgates' for inappropriate applications, often in remote locations. The Society acknowledges it may not be in a position to challenge the principle of this change of use, and in fact would broadly support the concept given our generic belief in renovating vacant buildings, however, we are deeply concerned this could lead to substantial harmful outcomes.

It is our belief that all such schemes should be subject to rigorous examination of justification criteria and sustainability credentials regarding transport, levels of insulation and renewable energy provision. We note the extensive specific provisions that apply to Permitted Development Class Q and would expect that all the conditions of this legislation are thoroughly observed and referenced in this application accordingly.

In this scheme we believe the proposal is neither reasonable nor appropriate as a response to Permitted Development Class Q and thus it should be refused.