

Application No. 22/01248/FUL: Land at Courtyard Gardens, Wark, Cornhill on Tweed Northumberland

Carham Parish Council has found this planning application lacking in information and short on detail. Based on the information that has been provided, it is our view that the proposed building does not meet the principles set out in the recently-adopted *Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036* and is unsuitable for Wark village.

The Parish Council objects to the application for the reasons described below. In summary, our objections are:

1. The village of Wark will not benefit economically from the development.
2. The impact on the village's infrastructure and services has not been considered.
3. The environmental impact of the proposed building has not been considered.
4. The design of the building is not suitable for the village or for this site.
5. No meaningful information has been provided about the archaeology of this very important site.

The development site is at the heart of Wark village. Carham Parish Council considers it very important that any new buildings on the site are well designed and help to create an attractive centre for the village. We would support a proposal for two family homes here, provided they are proportionate to the size of the village and appropriate to its character.

No economic benefit

The Design, Access & Heritage Statement says that the development will attract tourists to the area, subsequently contributing to the local economy. Wark village has no paying visitor attractions, church, shops, or other services, so it will not benefit from any visitor spend.

Because there are no services in the village, and because the proposed building has very small accommodation units (they are not single bedroom apartments as stated in the Design, Access & Heritage Statement, but one-room studios) and no recreational space, the development will be no more than a dormitory for visitors, who will have to drive to get to it and to get around north Northumberland and the Scottish Borders. There is no bus service. This goes against Policy STP 4 *Climate change mitigation and adaptation*, which states that development proposals should reduce the need to travel.

Wark already has provision for tourists. There are upwards of 50 houses in the village, of which at least six and possibly as many as nine are holiday homes.

Infrastructure and services

The application does not say what the impact of an additional six holiday units would be on the village's infrastructure and services, or how this would be mitigated. We are concerned that

Wark residents will be affected if the infrastructure and services are not able to cope. Our specific concerns are about the water supply and drainage, because of the proposal to install a swimming pool and jacuzzi, and about the pressure on parking. We note that the development would have parking for eight cars, but any additional vehicles (belonging to holidaymakers' visitors, for example) would have to park in Wark car park. This car park is needed by residents who are unable to park outside their homes because the road is too narrow. Even now, it fills up very quickly with the cars of people staying in the holiday cottages and with day visitors.

We are also concerned that holidaymakers in the units would use the village's EV charger, leaving their cars on it overnight, thus preventing residents from using it. This would be a serious problem for those residents who cannot charge their cars at home and depend on them, inter alia, for getting to work, to shops in the area, and to local health service appointments. In an emergency, with long ambulance attendance times to the village, it can be quicker for a casualty to be driven to hospital rather than waiting for the emergency services - but of course this can only be done if a car is adequately charged.

We are concerned about additional traffic passing into and out of the village. Wark has very narrow roads, which can be difficult to negotiate. The principal road that runs through the village in a loop has two exits onto the B6350, with poor visibility.

Finally, we can find no reference to public right of way 210/027 in any of the documentation submitted with this application. This must be rectified and the footpath reinstated.

Environmental impact

The application does not say what the impact of an additional six holiday units would be on the environment, or how this would be mitigated. Policy STP 4 *Climate change mitigation and adaptation* says that development proposals should mitigate climate change and contribute to meeting nationally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The provision of a swimming pool, a jacuzzi and a sauna, all of which will be heated, seems to be the opposite of what this Policy requires, as does the proposed introduction of more vehicles, most of which at this point in time will be fuelled by emissions-producing petrol or diesel. We note that only new building materials are proposed, not reclaimed materials.

Furthermore, the application does not say how the building will be heated or where any storage tanks or heat pumps will be located. If there are fuel storage tanks, there are safety considerations to take into account; not least because the building would be very close to the village's children's play park.

Local character and design

Wark Castle, a Scheduled Monument and Grade II* listed, is described by Pevsner as "one of the most important of all the castles of the Border." The visible remains of the castle about the village of Wark and its remnants lie underneath the village's houses and gardens, which gives

Wark considerable historical importance. Policy ENV 7 *Historic environment and heritage assets* says that “development proposals will be assessed and decisions made that ensure the conservation and enhancement of the significance, quality and integrity of Northumberland’s heritage assets *and their settings* [our italics].”

Wark village is made up entirely of individual dwellings - there are no multi-occupation or commercial buildings of any kind, apart from the farm to the east of the village. The houses vary in age and style but, with one or two exceptions, are of similar, conventional height and proportions, facing onto the narrow village roads.

As well as being within 300 yards (250m) of the remains of the castle, the proposed building is in the centre of the village. In our view, its location makes it incumbent on the developer to pay particular attention to Policy QOP 1 *Design principles*. This policy says that development proposals should “make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness,” and “create or contribute to a strong sense of place.”

The Design, Access & Heritage Statement explains that “the use of natural cut sandstone and corner quoins, render and white uPVC windows sliding sash and casement windows [sic.] and doors, match adjacent properties.” This “match” is a reference to the two modern properties, one recently built, one being built, that belong to the applicant. Considering the design principles set out in Policy QOP 1, there is no obvious match or reference to the established surrounding buildings, the village at large or its history, and the proposed building turns its back to the public realm instead of facing it. It is utilitarian in appearance and appears to be higher and bulkier than any other building in the village. It is not visually attractive and the proposed use of plastic windows and render suggests that it will not be made with the high-quality materials and detailing specified by the Policy.

If any building is to be put on this very visible site in the heart of this historically-important village, we urge Northumberland County Council to require the applicant to employ a registered architect for the work. The site offers a once-only opportunity to create an attractive centre for the village, with a building or buildings of which the owner and the village residents can be proud. A good architect will be able to achieve this, as well as ensuring that any building meets the criteria set out in the *Northumberland Local Plan 2016-2036*.

Archaeological survey

A proper archaeological survey must be made of this very important site, if this has not already been done, so that any remnants of Wark castle are found and properly recorded. The Design, Access & Heritage Statement does not describe the archaeological importance of the site, or make any reference to any archaeological work that may have been done in the past. It refers to an Archaeological Trial Trench Evaluation, but this does not appear to be on the website.

Carham Parish Council
26 May 2022