

Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum – Management Committee

7pm, 20 March 2025

Zoom call

Attendees:

Mike Shiels – Secretary
Anne Louise Grant – Treasurer
Mark Russell – MC member
Ian Peart – MC Member
John Million – MC member
Maureen Clyne – MC member
Niamh McDonald – MC member
Jo-Anne Garrick – Planning Consultant

Apologies:

Christine Thomas – Chair
Kelli Turner – MC member
Anthony Robson – MC member
Richard Lumley – MC member
Lucy Reed – Data Protection Officer

Minutes

1. Final Housing Needs Assessment

Still awaiting final copy from AECOM.

2. Design codes

Deadline of 3 April sent to AECOM, so we can have draft before next Forum. Becky has accepted these dates.

3. Update from Ian about GIS mapping progress

Ian sent an updated status grid:

	Heritage	Open Space
Consett North	Peter	Maureen
Consett South	John	Ian
Benfieldside	Peter	Peter
Pont	Mark	Draft
Delves	Ian	Anne-Louise

- Green areas are completed and ready for Jo-Anne to review.
- Mauve areas are allocated to MC members to complete – John and Peter have licences to update directly, others will update spreadsheet and return to Ian for upload.

- Pont needs a knowledgeable person to update. After discussion, we believe the original data came from Andy Plant/Alan Shields – Ian to reach out to Andy Plant to see if he is prepared to meet and help complete the GIS data.

All agreed that any reviewer can reach out to wider MC if more info needed for their area, and members will help if they can.

4. Update from Ian about DCC

Still pending with Ian (decided to focus on completing GIS first, as a priority)

5. Update on NP draft

Jo-Anne has not yet started her final review, as waiting for MC to complete any final comments on the draft. Agreed that MC should complete further comments by 28 March, so Jo-Anne can start this.

6. Full Forum meeting - Sunday 6th April

Delves Lane Village Hall booked for this meeting. MC discussed possible agenda. Ideas include:

- If the design codes draft is received, we should share this before 6 April and invite feedback (as we did for HNA)
- Repeat high level roadmap information for completing a Neighbourhood Plan, and share where we are in the process.
- Re-iterate how NP fits with wider planning process, as recent government policy will result in major revision to County Durham plan. Need to emphasise that NP is still needed for Consett Area to have its voice.

7. Actions completed / new actions

Actions were updated - See action log.

8. AOB

None raised.

9. Date / time of future meetings

- Next MC meeting, 7pm 3 April, location TBA.

APPENDIX

Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum (CANF)

Office 69 Viewpoint, Consett, Co Durham

Email: cthcanforum@gmail.com

27/02/25

To: The Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Reference: APP/X1355/W/24/3358099

Subject: Objection to Planning Appeal for Development at Land to the Northwest of 20-26 Duchy Close, Consett

1. Introduction

The Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum Management Committee formally objects to the appeal by **Project Genesis Ltd** regarding the proposed **development of 71 new dwellings** at **Duchy Close, Consett (DM/24/00593/FPA)**. This objection is based on **the findings of the draft Consett Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)**, which provide **compelling evidence that the proposed development does not align with local housing needs** and will **exacerbate existing infrastructure deficits**.

We urge the Planning Inspectorate to **reject this appeal** on the following grounds:

1. **Failure to meet identified local housing needs** as outlined in the draft **Consett Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)**.
2. **Over-provision of unaffordable housing** while failing to deliver **affordable and specialist housing required by the community**.
3. **Significant strain on infrastructure**, including **overburdened schools, medical facilities, inadequate transport links, and an overstretched sewerage system**.

2. Misalignment with Local Housing Needs

The Consett draft **HNA (2024)**, prepared by **AECOM for Consett Town Council**, identifies a clear need for:

- **Affordable, energy-efficient housing** for first-time buyers and low-income families.
- **Specialist accommodation for older residents** to meet the demands of Consett's aging population.

- **Smaller one- and two-bedroom homes** to address local demographic trends and downsizing needs.

Why This Development Fails to Meet the Need

The appeal **fails to provide an appropriate housing mix** and instead prioritises **higher-profit, larger market homes**. According to the HNA:

- The majority of the proposed homes are **three- and four-bedroom detached houses**, which are **already oversupplied in Consett**.
- Only **7 two-bedroom bungalows (affordable)** and **3 three-bedroom bungalows (private sale)** are included, which **fails to meet the identified need for smaller homes**.
- The **10% affordable housing allocation** falls **far short of the 25% affordable housing target** suggested for some parts of Consett in the **County Durham Plan**.

The **lack of affordable homeownership and rental options** could **force local people out of the market** while attracting external buyers **with no connection to the area**.

3. Infrastructure Overload & Lack of Services

This development would **further strain Consett's already overstretched infrastructure** without providing any remedial solutions:

A. Overburdened Schools

- The draft **HNA highlights that local schools are already at or exceeding capacity**.
- No new school places are proposed, meaning **families moving in will struggle to access education**.

B. Inadequate Healthcare Services

- **Consett Medical Centre and local GP practices** are already experiencing severe strain.
- Additional residents will **exacerbate waiting times** and reduce service accessibility.

C. Transport and Road Safety Concerns

- **No new transport infrastructure or public transport improvements** have been proposed.
- Increased traffic will cause **congestion, road safety issues, and pollution**.

D. Sewerage Infrastructure and Environmental Risks

- Adding to the existing strain on Consett's sewerage infrastructure poses significant environmental and public health risks, particularly concerning the River Derwent.

Environmental and Health Implications

- These pollution events have degraded the river's ecological status, harming aquatic life and posing risks to public health. The discharge of untreated sewage introduces harmful pollutants into the water, adversely affecting both the environment and communities relying on the river for recreation or as a water source.

Impact of the Proposed Development

- The proposed development of 71 new dwellings at Duchy Close would increase the volume of wastewater entering an already overburdened sewerage system. Without significant infrastructure upgrades, this additional load could exacerbate the frequency and severity of sewage overflows into the River Derwent, contravening environmental protection standards and posing heightened health risks to local residents and wildlife.

Sewerage System Improvement

- Given the current limitations of Consett's sewerage infrastructure and the documented pollution incidents in the River Derwent, approving the proposed development without ensuring adequate upgrades to the wastewater system would be environmentally irresponsible and detrimental to public health. It is imperative that infrastructure improvements precede any further residential expansions to prevent exacerbating sewage pollution in the region.
- The consensus of government and independent reports is that while the Derwent has shown signs of ecological recovery (e.g. migratory fish returning), urgent action is needed to reduce sewage pollution and achieve the "good" water quality status required by law. Enforcement and investment are beginning to ramp up. Moving forward, continued scrutiny from environmental authorities, combined with infrastructure upgrades by Northumbrian Water (as mandated by the new Storm Overflow Discharge Reduction Plan), will be crucial to improve the Derwent's water quality. The goal is a healthier River Derwent with fewer sewage spills, thriving biodiversity, and safe, clean waters for the community – a goal that multiple recent reports insist must be pursued without further delay
- In 2024 the economic regulator Ofwat proposed a record £17 million fine for Northumbrian Water due to "systemic mismanagement" of sewage networks

- Ofwat found that operational failures at many Northumbrian Water sewage works led to excessive spills, and that the company lacked adequate monitoring and maintenance of its infrastructure

4. Conclusion & Request for Rejection

This appeal should be **firmly rejected** because it:

- **Ignores the findings of the draft Consett Housing Needs Assessment.**
- **Fails to provide housing that meets actual local demand.**
- **Places additional pressure on already stretched infrastructure.**
- **Benefits developers rather than the local community.**
- **Would significantly worsen the sewage pollution crisis in the River Derwent.**

We urge the Planning Inspectorate to uphold Durham County Council's decision and **refuse permission for this development.**

Signed:

Christine Thomas

On behalf of the **Consett Area Neighbourhood Forum, Management Committee**

27/02/2025

For reference – the Housing Needs Assessment has been presented to the community and the full Forum for feedback, and its in the process of being finalised. As a draft, this is a public document but will be a full and final document when the appeal takes place.