



**CITY OF DURHAM
PARISH COUNCIL**

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6 May 2020

Dear Ms Jennings,

DM/20/01008/FPA | Erection of community centre building with associated bin store and cycle parking | Lowes Barn Recreation Ground Off Park House Road Durham DH1 3QF

The City of Durham Parish Council considered this application at its meeting on 1st May and agreed to support this application.

If approved, this community centre will represent the culmination of over 3,500 volunteer hours of work carried out by a small, dedicated team of 6-7 Trustees of the Lowes Barn Community Project (LBCP) and 8 volunteers. Funding for this project has been made possible thanks to the allocation of a substantial amount of Section 106 Community Fund by Durham Area Action Partnership and a further £80,000 committed from the former County Councillors for the area towards the construction of this new centre. A great deal of time, effort, detail and consultation has been carried out ahead of this planning application and the Parish Council applauds the enormous community effort which has allowed the project to reach this stage.

The proposal is for a community centre approximately 272m² in size, which will provide an accessible indoor space for public meetings, recreation, sport and fitness activities.

The proposed centre will be located on the Lowes Barn Recreation Ground (“the application site”) on Park House Road; a residential road which runs along the A167 on the South West side of Durham City along the edge of the Green Belt.

The application site itself is owned and managed by Durham County Council and includes an unused Bowls Green with an associated single-storey Bowls Pavilion, a car park, a children’s play area, a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), outdoor gym equipment and a sports playing field.

Pre-application advice has been submitted for this proposal and the Parish Council believes that the principle for this development is well-established. The proposal to enhance the facilities to serve the local community is very welcome, as the site is located within close proximity of an established

residential area and also benefits from parking, outdoor sports facilities and play space. The number of positive public comments submitted also speak in the application's favour and highlight the level of community support for this project as well as the need for a public meeting space of this type.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) promotes pre-application engagement on applications. Section 39 of the NPPF clearly states: "early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality preapplication discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community". This has clearly been demonstrated in this case and the Parish Council applauds the efforts of the LBCP members who have done this.

Furthermore, the NPPF through paragraph 11 outlines the presumption in favour of sustainable development, where the three strands of sustainability (economic, environmental and social sustainability) are measures of the sustainability of a development. The Parish Council believes the proposal for a new community centre building on this site offers benefits to all three strands of sustainability. In particular, a new community centre offers a new social hub that would contribute significantly to this area of the parish.

Utilisation of the redundant Bowls Green site also offers environmental benefits of a vacant area of land that is unused. The Parish Council believes that its re-use is supported by the core aims of the NPPF (para 11).

Overall, the proposal for a new community centre in this location would meet the in-principle requirement of securing development where there are no significant and demonstrable harm to outweigh the benefits of a proposal. Meeting the three strands of sustainability, the Parish Council considers the development is acceptable in principle.

Through part 12 of the NPPF, 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 should drive up standards across all forms of development. As a core planning principle, plan-makers and decision takers should always seek to secure high quality design, enhancing the quality of buildings and spaces, by considering amongst other things form and function; efficiency and effectiveness and their impact on wellbeing.

The proposal would have limited visual impact upon the surrounding area and be of a modern, low set form that would not be considered inappropriate for the proposed use and its location. Indeed, the Parish Council welcomes the compact design of the building; in particular the proposed pitched roof of the building provides a less bulky appearance and fits in well with the scale and pitched roofs of adjacent residential properties. The proposed scale of the building also ensures a minimum impact on the existing sporting and recreational facilities within the park. The proposal is therefore considered compliant with paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

Moreover, the Parish Council believes that the scheme will add to the overall attractiveness of the area. The proposed location of the centre is both practical and also helps to ensure that the space can be adopted by the local community and encourage a wide range of individual and group outdoor

pursuits and recreation; facilitating social interaction and supporting a healthy and inclusive community.

The Parish Council also welcomes the proposed use of materials for the centre, with the timber cladding and grey aluminium to the windows and doors making for a modern design which reflects the concept of a barn nicely.

The proposed interior design of the centre, which contains a mix of large and small rooms allows for a range and flexibility of uses. Additionally, the proposed toilet facilities, accessed internally and externally, to support a range of indoor and outdoor activities are excellently designed. The disabled toilet facilities and the overall accessibility of the centre ensure these facilities can be enjoyed by all users.

Though this proposal would result in a loss of some of the Bowls Green, the bowls club has now disbanded owing to a decline in its membership and it is widely accepted that participation in bowls is declining across County Durham, with a number of existing groups now consolidating. The Bowls Green is also not included in the County Council's Playing Pitches Plan. In this regard, the Parish Council believes that this application conforms with Saved Local Plan Policy R8 which states: "the location of any new recreational facility will be dependent upon the need to ensure that its appearance and use is not detrimental to the character and amenity of the area". It is also of significance that Sports England has raised no objections to these proposals.

In terms of accessibility to and from the centre, the site is easily accessible via public transport links with nearby bus stops and additional transport links at Neville's Cross within walking distance. The Parish Council also welcomes the fact that the LBCP has indicated that they will encourage sustainable travel modes including walking, cycling and public transport.

As stated earlier, the site currently benefits from an existing car park, located immediately in front of the proposed development, which provides 11 car parking spaces. This car park is owned by Durham County Council and the Parish Council understands that the LBCP is in discussions with the County Council regarding the provision of a disabled car parking space within the car park. The Parish Council strongly encourages the County Council to facilitate this in order to make the proposal acceptable in terms of Saved Local Plan Policy Q2 which states: "the layout and design of all new development should take into account the requirements of users. It will be expected to embody the principle of sustainability and to incorporate the provision of parking space for vehicles used by people with disabilities close to entrances of buildings open to the public".

The Parish Council notes that a number of residents have expressed concern about the demand for parking spaces at the centre exceeding the capacity of the car park and this potentially resulting in cars overflowing into neighbouring streets. The Parish Council understands that the nearby St. Cuthbert's Hospice is to bring forward plans for an expanded car park for their visitors, which could also be made available to the community centre users on evenings and weekends. This will be essential to address the concerns of nearby residents.

The Parish Council notes that the LBCP is seeking permission to use the centre as a disco with operating hours being 07:00am – 11:00pm. Noise needs to be considered when new developments

may create additional noise and when new developments would be sensitive to the prevailing acoustic environment. Consideration should be given to whether significant adverse effect or an adverse effect occurs or is likely to occur; or whether a good standard of amenity can be achieved. Paragraph 180a of the NPPF provides policy support to this aspect.

In order to support this proposed use of the centre, the applicant has carried out a noise impact assessment and this includes an Amplified Music Breakout Assessment. The results of this assessment have indicated this type of noise will have a low impact, when assessed in accordance with the Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE) and the NPPF, equating to 'No Observed Effect Level'. Added to this, it is accepted that these music events are not intended to take place on a regular basis and the non-glazed elements of the building will contribute significantly to the reduction of ambient noise levels. Hence, taking all of this in the round, the Parish Council raises no objection to this aspect of the application.

The Parish Council notes that the applicant has gained planning permission to fell 12 trees to support the development.

There are a number of retained protected species within close proximity of the proposed centre which may be at risk during construction. Therefore, if approved, conditions must be attached to this application in accordance with the recommendations set out in the applicant's arboricultural report, to ensure that retained trees are protected in line with British Standard 5837–2012.

In conclusion, the provision of a community centre in this location is of significant importance to local residents and to the City of Durham parish area as a whole. The social aspect of the proposal in a sustainable location carries significant weight in favour of the proposal.

This application should therefore be approved.

Yours sincerely,

Adam Shanley
Clerk to the City of Durham Parish Council