

URPETH PARISH COUNCIL

Lucy Gladders Clerk to the Parish

9 Fenwick Way
Consett
County Durham
DH8 5FD

7 August 2026

By email to: StrategyandDelivery@durham.gov.uk

Copied to: Cllrs: B Quirey, I Cross and S Biggs

Dear Strategy & Delivery Team,

RE: County Durham Scoping Plan Consultation and Call to Sites

Urpeth Parish Council wishes to respond to the current County Durham Plan Scoping Consultation and, in particular, to the inclusion of areas of Green Belt land within and around Urpeth Grange that have been identified through the Call for Sites process as potential future development locations.

The Parish Council understands the purpose of the current consultation and recognises that the Call for Sites exercise does not represent the allocation of land for development, nor does it constitute the submission or approval of planning applications. We appreciate that Durham County Council is seeking to gather evidence and views at an early stage in the preparation of a new County Durham Plan.

However, whilst recognising the scope and purpose of the consultation, the Parish Council cannot ignore the considerable level of concern that has been expressed by residents since the publication of the Call for Sites information. The Parish Council has been contacted by a significant number of residents from across the Parish, many of whom have raised strong objections to the inclusion of Green Belt land around Ouston and Urpeth Grange as potential future development sites. Concerns have been particularly focused on the areas of land adjacent to existing residential communities, including land to the rear of Bellerby Drive.

The matter was discussed in detail at the meeting of Urpeth Parish Council held on 21 July 2026. Following that discussion, the Parish Council agreed to formally communicate the concerns being raised by residents, seek clarification regarding aspects of the consultation process and encourage residents to submit their views directly to Durham County Council.

The principal concerns raised by residents include:

- The potential loss of Green Belt land that currently plays an important role in maintaining the separate identity of settlements and preventing coalescence between neighbouring communities.

- The impact that any future development could have on the character and setting of Ouston and Urpeth Grange and the loss of valued open countryside which contributes significantly to the identity of the area.
- Potential impacts on biodiversity, wildlife habitats and ecological corridors, including species regularly reported by residents within and around the sites.
- Existing pressures on local infrastructure, including roads, healthcare services, school places, drainage infrastructure, utilities and public transport provision.
- The importance of these areas as valued community assets that contribute positively to residents' quality of life, wellbeing and access to the countryside.

The Parish Council notes that many residents have questioned whether the release of Green Belt land can be justified when alternative brownfield and previously developed sites may still exist elsewhere within County Durham. Whilst these matters will be subject to detailed assessment through the plan-making process, it is important that the strength of local feeling and the significance attached to these sites by the community are fully recognised.

The Parish Council also wishes to raise concerns regarding accessibility of the consultation process. A number of residents have reported difficulties navigating and completing the online consultation survey. Whilst we welcome the various consultation materials that have been made available, the Parish Council would welcome clarification regarding alternative methods of submitting comments and representations, particularly for residents who may face digital accessibility barriers or who have struggled to engage with the online platform. The Parish Council believes it is essential that all residents have a fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in the preparation of the County Durham Plan and have their views properly recorded and considered.

Accordingly, Urpeth Parish Council objects to the inclusion of these areas of Green Belt land as potential future development sites within the emerging County Durham Plan. Whilst the Council recognises that the current consultation forms part of an evidence-gathering exercise and that no decisions have yet been made regarding future allocations, it is concerned that the identification of these sites has generated significant and widespread concern within the local community. The Parish Council shares many of the concerns raised by residents regarding the potential loss of Green Belt land, the erosion of the important separation between neighbouring settlements, the impact on the rural character and setting of Ouston and Urpeth Grange, and the potential adverse effects on biodiversity, landscape quality and local infrastructure. The Council is also concerned that any future development of these sites could place additional pressure on roads, schools, healthcare services, drainage networks and other community facilities that residents already consider to be under strain.

The Parish Council considers that these areas of Green Belt continue to perform important strategic, environmental and community functions. They act as valued buffers between settlements, help maintain the distinctive identity of local communities, support wildlife

habitats and ecological connectivity, and contribute significantly to the character, landscape setting and quality of life enjoyed by residents. Given the significance of these benefits, and in the absence of any clear evidence at this stage to justify the release of Green Belt land, the Parish Council believes a precautionary approach should be adopted. We therefore ask that Durham County Council gives substantial weight to the strength of local feeling expressed through this consultation and carefully considers whether these sites should progress any further through the plan-making process. The Parish Council would strongly encourage the continued prioritisation of previously developed and brownfield land before any consideration is given to the release of Green Belt sites.

The Parish Council has encouraged residents to submit individual responses directly to Durham County Council and understands that both individual and collective representations are important in demonstrating local opinion. The volume of correspondence received by the Parish Council, together with the level of discussion within the community, clearly demonstrates the strength of feeling regarding these Green Belt sites and the potential implications of any future development proposals.

Given the level of public interest in this matter and the number of residents who have contacted both Durham County Council and the Parish Council, we would welcome continued engagement with the Policy Team as the County Durham Plan progresses through its subsequent stages. In particular, the Parish Council would be grateful if Durham County Council could consider arranging for a Planning Policy Officer to attend a future Parish Council meeting at an appropriate stage in the process. This would provide an opportunity for elected members and residents to better understand the next stages of Plan preparation, the assessment methodology being applied to potential development sites, and the opportunities available for ongoing community engagement and formal representation. We believe such engagement would help promote transparency, improve public understanding of the process and ensure that local concerns continue to be heard and considered as the Plan evolves.

The Parish Council remains committed to engaging constructively with Durham County Council and looks forward to continued involvement as the preparation of the County Durham Plan progresses.

Kind regards
Lucy Gladders
Parish Clerk

Tel: 07368 183644
Email: clerk@urpethparish.gov.uk
Web: urpethparish.gov.uk