

FAO [REDACTED]

From our experience (as heritage guardians challenging a harmful planning application at Woodburn Nursery, Hummersknott Ward Case no. 1 [REDACTED]) we can confidently say that Council's place strategy and remaining policies are totally ineffective in protecting, enhancing or sustaining any heritage assets against harmful or insensitive development at present.

Directors, Cabinet, Local Councillors, Planning Committee and Town Planners all apparently have insufficient knowledge/resources at their disposal to provide a **balanced judgement** as the NPPF requires on heritage issues or the means or will to challenge and adjust the plans of insensitive developers to obtain more **sustainable outcomes** on heritage sites.

By losing or fragmenting local assets that are a significant part of a bigger picture only places a greater burden on the parts that remains diminished ever further until eventually they are forced to succumb. Darlington's public 'leaders' are apparently unaware or uninterested in best practice protective heritage policies within the National Planning Framework or Historic England's best practice guidance documents. Substantial heritage assets in Darlington are unnecessarily being dismantled for no good reason, they are being carelessly diminished and put at future risk whilst better informed public opposition is ignored. Future generations are the losers.

There are no specialist advisers, no cohesive heritage policy or any supportive heritage body in Darlington. Far too many significant monuments and significant buildings have already been lost/harmed. Is it not time for improved public recording and understanding of what remains and how all information might best be meaningfully co-ordinated to advance intelligent understanding both here in Darlington and elsewhere (locally, regionally, nationally). During the Victorian/Edwardian period Darlington was a prosperous town and many architects (regionally & nationally recognised) built here. Their creative work (culturally important) should be seen to be better protected, enhanced and sustained wherever possible. Darlington is becoming regionally and even nationally notorious for its lack of respect for its heritage.

Heritage assets should not be left to rot/dismantled/demolished for unjust reasons. Vulnerable buildings are unfortunately a soft target for less scrupulous developers. Listed buildings cannot always be satisfactorily defended when their original setting is being substantially harmed.

Heritage assets are a diminishing cultural resource and should be seen to be carefully protected by Council rather than be exploited or left simply to providence. **Demolition should always be seen as a last resort (para. 133 NPPF)** and if it cannot be avoided comprehensive impartial investigations (intelligent recording) should be mandatory. Darlington's 'tick-box' planning mentality should be ousted. Heritage assets and their setting/context must be more carefully recorded by qualified conservation historians/architects and not non-specialist town planners in the pay of acquisitive developers.

It is an extremely onerous, expensive and seemingly thankless task to maintain and defend any heritage asset against this Council's and Developers entanglement in a rush for maximising housing targets on unsuitable sites. Cherry picking developers and Council are equally implicated in bringing

harm to distinctive and special places – such as the Quaker Walled Garden at Woodburn Nursery which is ‘minded’ to now be demolished and improperly recorded.

Darlington’s new Place Strategy should aim for best practice – guided by Historic England publications. Directors and Council should as a matter of course be expected to adhere to the National Planning Policy Framework and because of its unique historical importance to the town also protect, enhance and defend its **Quaker and Industrial History** – this should also include the gardens that had and still have a special importance in Quaker history and culture. More work remains to be done on collating the extensive Pease family history, philanthropy, the buildings they created/architectural commissions of note found in archives in Darlington, Durham and documents elsewhere. Darlington is quickly becoming a less distinctive town as it loses more of its assets. Those assets are not all within the town centre.

The West End area is undefended beyond Carmel Road/Blackwell. **Elm Ridge**, its satellite buildings and **Woodburn Cottages** (all by architect [REDACTED]) are at imminent future risk as urban encroachment (Esh housing development) takes its toll. Woodburn Cottage is being substantially harmed by its change of setting. This should be exceptional. **Darlington’s Planners are not effectively delivering protection, enhancement or sustainability in important settings of local character and distinctiveness such as that which is known by local residents at the former Woodburn Nursery.**

Particular reference in the new planning policy should re-inforce in particular paragraphs 58, 59, 60-65 and 126-141 of the NPPF.

Paragraphs 133 and 141 in particular should be stressed in information to developers.

We as local residents are extremely disappointed and saddened by Darlington’s absolute failure to date to have an open and just public consultation process where heritage and environmental matters are concerned. **IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS DARLINGTON WILL BE THE ABSOLUTE LOSER OVER TIME. ANY CLAIMS OR EVIDENCE FOR THE TOWN’S HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE WILL BE GREATLY DIMINISHED OR GONE FOREVER UNLESS IT CAN ACTIVELY BE SUPPORTED NOW BY LOCAL & NATIONAL POLICIES TO MAKE ANY PUBLIC EFFORT TO BE VALUED & WORTHWHILE!**

As heritage guardians we have actively contributed over several years to enhancing local character, engaged with all previous planning policies, and made our carefully considered points throughout the drawn out process for the Woodburn Nursery planning case but are no further forward.

Despite our earlier warnings Planners contributed themselves to over-ambitious ‘guessed’ housing numbers. That un-evidenced ‘wish-list’ to meet those targets led to the loss of the last Local Plan (proven by the Gladman developer’s successful challenge). We noted that in their report to the Planning Inspectors Gladman discounted the over-optimistic numbers on the Woodburn Nursery heritage site and went elsewhere.

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