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M4. Housing development

Blackwell Grange East housing allocation (ref 403)

The two files on the Local Examination page [PD02 Publication Representations \(Green Michael\)](#) need to be *opened*, not simply viewed on the page, to access LINKS within each document. Both documents are relevant to the Inspector's questions regarding Housing Development and 403.

Communication with Council and representations at Regulation 19, were made on behalf of 'Parkland Heritage Network.' ([Green Michael DBLPSS5, 16, 53](#) (Appendix D-H Ethnographic Study Part 6 found in Green Space Submission2020' p49)

Introduction

It is not possible to address the Inspector's questions without reference to:

- (i) Composition of Heritage Network. (ii) Involvement of the community*
(iii) 010 and Blackwell Parkland Policies Map (iv) Heritage Impact Assessment.

Heritage Network: Composition

- Regional Surveyor/property valuer: Local Authority experience
- Local Diocese/lay Reader.
- Independent journalist/author. Former BBC correspondent/investigative journalist.
- 5th Baronet and QC – Blackwell Grange Havelock-Allans. Patron of the Golf Club
- Former Local Councillor
- Former Teacher (Natural Sciences)
- Former Courts' Social Worker
- Local Paramedic
- Local Harriers Youth Coach/International athlete
- Parish Priest
- Retired Engineer/respected community member
- Australian descendants of the Allans of Blackwell Grange
- Descendants of Local Historian William Hylton Longstaffe
- Members of Local Naturalists' Field Club + retired Medical Officer
- Ex-pat conservationist & Director of UN-supported Ethical Investment.

- Ex-pat barrister/Deputy District Judge.
- Business Support Consultant IT /Admin.
- Retired Medical Consultants x 2 . GP/Psychiatrist
- Construction Company project managers
- Member(s) Local and National Friends of the Earth Group
- Local Arts Group Co-ordinator
- Local/National Green Party Members.
- Movie maker
- North East Historical researcher.
- Former LEA Officer
- Mentor/Guide (Theology Centre)
- Woodland Trust Volunteer Warden & Natural Sciences researcher.
- Environmentalist & Community Campaigner (s)
- Former Local Authority Project Officer: experience of land transfer and finance.

Aims and Purpose

- * To see the Blackwell Parkland and curtilage securely protected for future generations. [*Town House Resolution - 2018*']
- * To see a partnership of Community and Local Authority aiming for a sensitive restoration plan. [*Green Space Submission2020*': [SD29 Heritage Impact Assessment Update \(2020\)](#)]
- * To be a voice for individuals, campaign groups and interest groups opposing development on the Historic Parkland. [*DBC Consultations 2015, 2018, 2020*].

Catalyst and Wake up Call

February 2018 saw the devastation of meadows, ponds and habitats, adjacent to the Blackwell Parkland, and the loss of over 200 trees to developers within the space of a week or so. (Referred to as 010).

<https://vimeo.com/262078375>

The shock and protest, spread very quickly from neighbourhood, through the Ward, the community, and the whole town.

Action began with the realisation that the Parkland was next, through plans revealed by the Council in 2015. Interest groups became involved, the *Ethnographic Study* was born.

Note: At this point, site 403 was regarded as part of the Parkland.

Organic Growth of the Heritage Network Through Ethnographic Study:

The *Blackwell Parkland Network Campaign* developed as an extensive Ethnographic Study.

- The aim of Ethnography is to get “*under the skin*” of a problem and ‘*associated issues*’, to achieve deeper understanding of all issues and *design a better solution*.
- Ethnography is a qualitative *method*. Researchers observe/interact with a study’s participants in their real-life environment.
- Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (text, video, audio) understanding concepts, opinions, experiences, leading to insights, generating *new ideas*.

“As co-authors we were not spearheading a new campaign, but designing a solution. Campaigns were launched from 2013 onwards, by others, when plans to sell the Blackwell Meadows and the Historic Parkland were revealed. It was simply a drawing together of the facts, with the expectation that there would be this true understanding, designing a better and justified solution.” (page 36 Local ‘Green Space Designation’ Submission 2020)

The ‘better solution’ did emerge as a resolution in 2 parts: (*Local Green Space Submission 2020 pp16,33 [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#)*)

Part (i) of the resolution achieved:(*“Town House Resolution”*)

Amendment of draft Local Plan by the removal of any housing allocation from the main body of the Blackwell Parkland (Cabinet and Full Council, February 2020.)

Part (ii) of the resolution yet to be achieved.: *The protection of the Parkland by designation as ‘Local Green Space’/‘Green Wedge’/‘Field-in-Trust’/‘Town Green’*

Incorporated Individuals, Campaign and Interest Groups.

The Blackwell Action Group "Say No" 2012-present (page 18 Part 5. Ethnographic Study "One Thirds Two Thirds." 07.01.19) [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#)

#Lovedarlotrees & lovedarlotrees-movement February 2018 (Appendix 8 Part 5. Ethnographic Study. "One Thirds Two Thirds." 07.01.19)

Blackwell Parklands Association 2013-2018 (Appendix 7 Part 5. Ethnographic Study. "One Thirds Two Thirds." 07.01.19)

Community Response

- 1300 signature petition 2015 (*Part 1 Study "Prior to the Draft Local Plan" p 9*)
- 175 responses giving over 1000 individual comments following the initial Local Authority information day 2015 (*page 46 Local Green Space Designation Submission Summer 2020. Appendix III*) [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#)
- 280 household community survey 2018 (*Part 1 Study "Prior to the Draft Local Plan". Appendix 3 & 5, and Part 3 of Study "Compilation and Update" Appendix 'K p.99'*)
- 200+ comments and letters: Local Press
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MniIAhoEyd2V7B64xqjxW37snLqSdAE_/view?usp=sharing (*Part 4 Study "Scrapbook: the Happenings" pp29-61*)
- 89 comments on the Draft Local Plan Portal June/August 2018 (*page 45 Local Green Space Designation Submission 2020. Appendix II*) [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#)
- 350+ signed "Protection Resolutions" [*Paper Copies*] and over 1000 on-line

Recognition

Views have been presented by *Network Members* through:

- Lobbying and meetings with Officers and Elected Members
- Scrutiny Committee; Cabinet Meetings; Council Meetings
- Hard copies / electronic documents held by Elected Members
- Representation at Regulation19 level
- Submission as a Local Green Space for the Blackwell Parkland

<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/17783164.study-sparks-move-preserve-historic-darlington-parkland/?fbclid=IwAR38FfteMBqdmv6wn-dlafzACG8njlpPb0UwUN6DQkH1JSRsBwrZ7Z4vKKA>

<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/local/darlington/18014127.mayor-heralds-work-historic-parkland-preservation-group/>

INSP4 – Matters, Issues and Questions

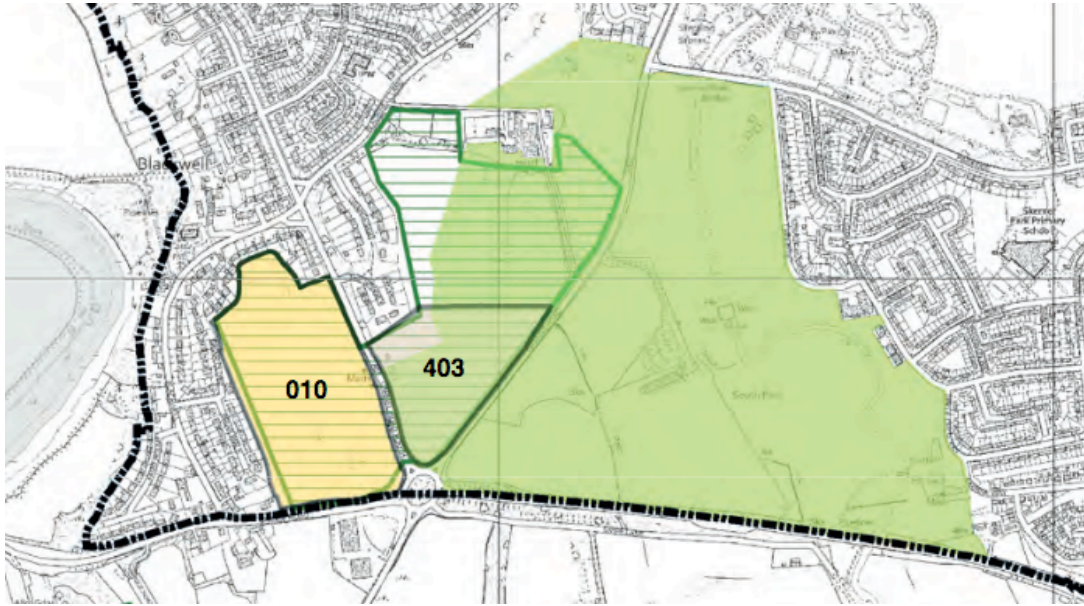
Q4:13 *Blackwell Grange East housing allocation (ref 403): EXTRACT:*

Inspector comment: “The Council’s response to PQ26 advises that the policies map incorrectly designates both the Blackwell Grange East housing allocation (ref 403) and the Blackwell Grange West housing commitment (ref 010) as local wildlife sites.”

- *What are the Council’s criteria for designation and/or removal?*
- *Site 010 ceased being able to host wildlife in 2018 following the devastation of the meadows, the loss of 200+ trees and damage to existing ponds: <https://vimeo.com/262078375>*

Inspector comment: “A representation made in response to the regulation 19 consultation suggests that the housing allocation should be designated as Local Green Space, this is not proposed in the Plan.”

- *Site 403 was incorporated into the ‘Local Green Space Submission 2020’ as one of 3 options. (Local Green Space Submission 2020 p56 [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#) uploaded file).*
- *We have not been informed of any decision*
- *We address the submission, decision and appeals procedure for Local Green Space and Blackwell Parkland in Q10:12*



Policies Map 9

Sites 010, 403 and Blackwell Parkland



KEY: SITE 010 Blackwell Meadows - Lost to developers 2018. 'Catalyst and Wake up Call'. <https://vimeo.com/262078375>

SITE 403. Known locally as 'The Blands Corner Triangle'

Blackwell Parkland and orchards of 1802. Vacated 2013. Submission as 'Local Green Space' made 2020. Boundary of the Parkland: former Mill Lane, Grangeside, The Spinney, Blackwell Lane and Upsall Drive considered as curtilage. (Page15 [SD29 Heritage Impact Assessment Update \(2020\)](#))

Blackwell Golf Club. Moved to council owned **Stressholme** Golf Course 2013. Parkland lease surrendered.

Q4. 13 . 'Is the proposed Blackwell Grange East housing allocation, with an indicative yield of 72 dwellings, justified? In particular:

a) Would development be suitably located in the context of policy SH1?'

In considering Q4.13 (a) we refer to the 'demise of green space' in the Ward and spirit of the core policy **SH1** with particular reference to *environment, heritage and mitigation*:

- "Failure to respect the scale and function of places can lead to inappropriate development and loss of environmental quality and local character."
- To ensure "potential adverse impacts of development are mitigated." [4.0.8](#)
- "Where this does not prejudice heritage or nature conservation, or impinge on land protected for recreational purposes." [4.0.5](#)

Demise of Green Space.

Evidence for our response is accessible in PD02 [Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#) as (i) comments, (ii) attached/uploaded documents:

"Local Green Space Designation Submission"(2020).

"Ethnographic Study Part 5: One Third Two Thirds"(2019).

(Council holds documents in electronic/hard form. Appendices give links to entire *Six-Part Ethnographic Study*.)

- (iii) [SD65 Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance](#) Local Plan webpage as supplementary document. Also pp.47-48 "Local Green Space Designation Submission"(2020).

The theme of these documents is clearly that of “*environmental quality and local character*”, illustrating both the gradual and dramatic:

- fragmentation
- erosion of green spaces
- effect of new development on the existing community.

“*One Third Two Thirds*” 07.01.19, evolved from the ‘*Wake up Call*’ described earlier, as a deeper response to the demise of green areas in Blackwell.

This demise is described and illustrated visually in:

- Aerial view Blackwell in 1945 (*‘One Third Two Thirds’* 07.01.19 p77 *Archaeo-Environment App A*)
- Aerial view Blackwell in 2020 (*“Local Green Space Submission”* Summer 2020 p14)
- Maps of 010, Parkland and 403 (*‘pp13-16“Local Green Space Submission”(Summer 2020)*)
- Aerial Views & Maps (*‘One Third Two Thirds’* 07.01.19 pp24-27)
- Movie clips

<https://vimeo.com/262078375>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkr1QjrXEa8>

(Movie links give clear insight into the loss)

Blackwell Grange Chronology and Erosion of Green Space

The Chronology document referred to in *Part 5 Ethnographic Study: “One Third Two Thirds”* holds some details of this loss: <https://www.aenvironment.co.uk/online-library-darlington-blackwell-grange/>

Loss - Phase 1

- Recorded in 1183 *Blackwell Mill* carried on working until 1907, and was demolished in 1938.

Loss - Phase 2

- *Blackwell Manor* was demolished in 1964 and now Cypress Grove and the Mormon Church are on its site.

- *Blackwell Hall*, bought by Raines builders 1965, despite national misgivings was demolished . Blackwell Grove, Briar Close and Briar Walk housing are now on its grounds.
- *The Angel pub* at Blands Corner closed in 1873 and was converted into a Sunday school and demolished in 1971. Now it is Evans Halshaw's car dealership,

Loss - Phase 3

- The *Manor, Blackwell Hill* demolished in 1972 and the development known as Farrholme built on its site.
- The loss of green spaces (1970s-1990s) became more noticeable with housing development on the *fringes of the Parkland*:
 - (i) *Spinney* (ii) *Grangeside*, (iii) *Upsall Drive* on the former nursery land of the Parkland [SD65 Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance](#) pages 48,74

Loss – Phase 4

- Demolished for housing in 2015, *the stables* which were separate from the demolished *Blackwell Hall*, and part of an earlier *manor house*.
- Demolished for housing in 2015, *Blackwell Golf Clubhouse*. The Clubhouse was called the '*British Pavilion*'. The 1930 old clubhouse was of historic importance to the heritage of Blackwell.
- Loss of 12 hectares in 2018 with the sale of *Blackwell Meadows*. 200+ trees felled, damage to habitats and ponds.

<https://www.flipsnack.com/5A8DDEEEFB5/blackwell-parkland-timeline/full-view.html>

<https://vimeo.com/262078375>

Summary

- Prior to the **Phase 4 losses**, Blackwell Meadows (010) and the Blackwell Grange Parkland, (incorporating 403) formed the last remaining green tree filled areas of Blackwell and Southern entrance of Darlington
- The loss of the 12 hectares of meadows and trees, has meant a significant reduction this remaining green area of approximately 30%
- This has contributed to, and accelerated the erosion of green spaces of Blackwell, and is feeding the continuous *development-creep* of housing which began the 1960s.
- The evidence clearly illustrates how this most recent dramatic land loss in February 2018, added greatly to changes in the environment, town entrance and local character.
- Much interpretation of policy, in particular aesthetics, landscape, environment is often subjective, open to debate and interpretation.
- Land loss, green areas, open space is objective and clearly measurable; less open to interpretation and opinion.

Conclusion

It seems neither *sound nor justified* that development of 403 'be suitably located in the context of **policy SH1**', without evidence of:

- (i) A robust mitigation plan for 403 and the adjoining Historic Parkland
- (ii) Completion timeline - Site 010
- (iii) Additions and modifications yet to be explored.

Q4.13.b) Subject to the Council’s proposed modifications, would the requirements of appendix B, along with relevant policies in the Plan, be effective in achieving sustainable development on the site?

In our response to part (b) we refer to ‘Appendix B Housing and Employment Allocation Statements Blackwell Grange East: Issues and Requirements.’

It is not possible to refer to Site 403 without considering:

- *The Council’s reasons for development of 403*
- *‘Public harm v public benefit’*
- *The Parkland’s historic relationship with 403*

[SD29 Heritage Impact Assessment Update \(2020\)](#)

[Statement of Common Ground between the Council and Historic England DBC5.1](#)

[SD65 Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance](#) [pdf document]

[Green Michael DBLPPS5, 16, 53](#) [pdf document]

If 403 were lost to developers, the above documents illustrate the need for:

- (i) *Serious mitigation* in a restoration approach to the Parkland
- (ii) *“Retaining and improving this special landscape”* as in **ENV3**, with a robust and enhanced **Appendix B**.

NB: Blackwell Parkland is one of the Borough’s urban assets:

<https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/local/darlington/18014127.mayor-heralds-work-historic-parkland-preservation-group/>

Policy ENV3[C] : Local Landscape Character (Strategic Policy).

*“Retaining and improving the special landscape, heritage and ecological qualities of urban and rural parklands; South Park, North Lodge Park, West Cemetery, **Blackwell Grange**, Rockcliffe Park, Middleton Hall, Walworth Castle, Redworth Hall, Hall Garth, Newbus Grange and Neasham Hall.”*

Council Reasoning and 403

Just as we see the tension between *subjective and objective* when interpreting policy, here we see circular argument and tension between preservation, mitigation, funding. viz

- In order to achieve a balance of housing mix across the Borough, and for Council to meet perceived housing numbers projection, suitable sites needed to be identified.
- The community importance of the Blackwell Parkland had always been recognised by the Council. (1997-2001 POLICY E9 -Protection of Parklands DBC) [SD58 Borough of Darlington Local Plan \(1997, including adopted alterations 2001\)](#)
- For mitigation to be achieved, landscaping with public access, *'retaining restoration and improving'* will require considerable funding.
- 403 as identified site, would achieve Council's perceived housing targets, raise finance from land sale and provide Parkland funding for *'retaining restoration and improving'*.
- The Leader of the Council, and other Ward Councillor covering Blackwell, supportive of the *'Town House Resolution'*, referred to the need to explore funding for protection of the Parkland. (Part 6 *"Last of the Georgian Pleasure Parks"* p44 Appendix J)

Marginal justification through robust mitigation.

Additions and Modifications required to Appendix B: Housing and Employment Allocation Statements Blackwell Grange East: Issues and Requirements:

Policy SH1 is clear: *"Failure to respect the scale and function of places can lead to inappropriate development and loss of environmental quality and local character"*.

The development of 403 could only be *marginally justified* with a number of guarantees, modifications and provisos:

- A modified Appendix B to prevent further erosion and fragmentation, offering *public benefit and compensating* for the 2018 loss.
- A *development scheme* to restore the remaining Parkland area to the Grade II Listed Building, including trees, as detailed in SD29 and SD65([SD29 Heritage Impact Assessment Update \(2020\)](#) [SD65 Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance](#)) with '*public benefit*' and access.
- *The 1802 Parkland Boundary* as far as the line of the former Mill Lane, Grangeside, The Spinney, Blackwell Lane and Upsall Drive be accepted as curtilage. [Page 15 SD29 Heritage Impact Assessment Update \(2020\)](#)
- The Parkland within this curtilage designated '*Local Green Space*' as presented by the '*Parkland Heritage Network 'Local Green Space Submission 2020'*' document, and the '*Town House Resolution*'.
- *The Green Wedge* illustrated in Policy Map 9 to be extended within the entire curtilage, incorporating the northerly fringes/boundary where proposed development was highlighted on the original Local Plan, prior to Cabinet and Full Council changes 2020. [Policy ENV3 A](#) (Blackwell/Skerne Park.) [SD65 Blackwell Grange Park Statement of Significance p 12.](#)
- *The Wildlife hatching* on the South East side of the Grange extended to the northerly fringes/boundary where previous development was proposed prior to Cabinet and Full Council changes 2020.
- That assessment is made relating to the *Historic significance* of the Parkland, in accordance with the appropriate Council policy documents. [Glossary: Non-designated heritage assets: Proposed Main Modification](#)
- Consideration given for *Community orchard project* with involvement of appropriate Cabinet Portfolio holders. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11466/1973262.pdf
- That a *full ecological survey* be carried out regarding in particular the Great Crested Newt, and other wildlife, fauna and trees to avoid the 2018 confusion.

Mitigation is the Key

As stated at the beginning of this representation, the aim of an ethnographic study is arrive at a *'better solution.'*

In order to achieve this *'better solution'* regarding the potential loss of the Blands Corner Triangle (403), measures must:

- (i) Consider the impact of 010 and 403 against **SH1** "loss of environmental quality and local character," and **ENV4(g)**
- (ii) Protect and enhance the quality of *Darlington's built, natural and historic environment.* **ENV3(d)**
- (iii) Have the most robust mitigation scheme and guarantees as outlined above.

A *'justified solution'* without such measures would be *'no development'*.

Past Planning and Damage Limitation.

Lessons need to be learned from earlier Development Plans. In 1995, the 12 hectare Blackwell Meadows (010) lost to developers in 2018, was designated as *'official open space'* in the Local Plan.

In 1995 Officials at the Golf Club had asked for the meadows to be included in the Local Plan for housing, to give the option of selling the area for development.

The Council and the Inspector turned this down, as the *"Council had a policy of not allowing the building of homes on greenfield sites and green pasture land."* (**Northern Echo 1995 Newsquest [North East] Limited**)

[20 years later it was sold to developers.]

The 1995 press header read:

"A GOVERNMENT inspector is to decide the fate of one of the most attractive areas in Darlington's West End."

Without modifications and guarantees, there is a certainty of further development creep, demise of green space and the loss of the *'last of the Georgian Pleasure Parks of Darlington.'*

"Failure to respect the scale and function of places can lead to inappropriate development and loss of environmental quality and local character." (**SH1**)