



# Sedgefield

## Development Trust Limited

Community regeneration for Sedgefield, Bradbury, Mordon and Fishburn

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### **Further Comments on Planning Application No: DM/21/01984/FPA**

**Formation of community athletics track facility with associated floodlighting, access, car parking, drainage and landscaping on land South West of Burdon Place, Sedgefield TS21 3BF**

This response to the application for planning permission to build a community athletics track is supplementary to that in July 2021, however that first response was required by yourselves against a very tight deadline and before much of the supporting information had been made available. We have now been able to access some of the further information and so our position can be refined.

### **Background to the Sedgefield Development Trust's (SDT's) Woodland & Wildlife Project at NETPark.**

In 2017 SDT was approached by NETPark / Business Durham / Durham County Council to consider leading a community woodland project which was seen as an integral part of the overall NETPark development; it was initially referred to as the "green corridor". NETPark / Business Durham / DCC wished to see improvement to the management of the green corridor for 'the benefit of wildlife and the community' and for the community to manage the area. DCC had prepared a plan of the area showing where DCC's Landscape section would like to see trees planted, new hedges laid and wildflower meadows. SDT was happy to take on this community project as partners of DCC and so the Woodland & Wildlife Group was formed to take it forward.

By early 2018 the project was actively beginning to take shape on the ground. SDT had been able to source the first 840 whips (young trees) from the Woodland Trust and had written authority from the County Council to manage the land. During "the beast from the east" the initial planting took place in line with the County's Landscape Architect's proposals. We have so far planted around 2,000 native trees in the area and have been able to excite, motivate and involve over 100 volunteers to boost the project. These people are from Sedgefield and nearby villages and turn out whatever the weather to plant, manage, survey and pick up litter.

We have also been supported throughout by Durham Woodland Revival (DWR) at the County as well as by accessing grant aided equipment from DWR and grant funding from Brightwater. We have received active specialist support from Durham Wildlife Trust.

### **Planning and Development in relation to this planning application**

The Approved Development Plan for Sedgefield and Durham County are barely two years old. No land use allocations have been made for an athletics track on or near the site which is now proposed. The aspiration to have a track in or near Sedgefield or in East Durham was known before and during the period that the development plan was being reviewed. This proposal is not in accordance with the Approved Development Plan.

The application makes reference to two other sites which the applicant asserts were considered but were unsuitable. This is not an argument in favour of the site now proposed. Indeed, several other sites in Sedgefield have been suggested to the applicant, including land east of Salters Lane Industrial estate, a co-location with the horse racing track and indeed there is also the Winterton Playing Fields, previously used for cricket and football, but not currently in active use. In addition, we believe there will other possible sites elsewhere in East Durham. The fact that the applicant has not even suggested that these have been evaluated must not lead to the conclusion that only this site is possible. There are alternatives and as we will show below, this site is not appropriate for the development proposed.

Before moving on it is worth restating that the former Winterton playing fields site should have been an obvious site to be evaluated. Its former use was playing fields, it is in public ownership (County land we believe) and it had a pavilion with changing rooms adjacent (which was allowed to become derelict but could be replaced) as well as an existing access off the B1278.

### **The application site as it is now.**

The athletics track is proposed to cover land which is currently within the Woodland & Wildlife project initiated by DCC, and which has the backing of Durham Woodland Revival, the Woodland Trust, Brightwater and Durham Wildlife Trust together with the indomitable band of volunteers - which DCC officers wished us to bring together to animate the community support that DCC asked for. This support has been willingly provided.

The "green corridor" originally proposed by DCC has a boundary north of the southern boundary of this application, i.e., it overlaps with the Woodland & Wildlife project. It is marked on site by a bund provided for us to work to by a DCC contractor who was working to the plan set out by DCC's Landscape section. SDT Woodland & Wildlife Group do not want to be pushed off this land because some other group has claimed to "need" it. The land will benefit from further tree planting and hedge laying if the Woodland & Wildlife Project is allowed to continue.

The proposed track also includes land adjacent to, and to the north of, the Woodland & Wildlife site licensed area. These areas are known as East Bog and West Bog. These areas are 'carbon sinks', meaning that the areas have for many years absorbed atmospheric carbon dioxide and continue to do so. Both the W&W Group site and these bogs sequester CO<sub>2</sub> in the ground and are exactly what the UK Government undertook to protect and increase at the recent International Conference on Climate Change – COP 26 - in Glasgow.

The running track proposals involve draining the bogs, re-profiling the land and creating areas of managed (cut) grass. Areas of land managed in that way release carbon dioxide to the atmosphere and therefore contribute to intensifying the climate crisis. In our preliminary response we noted that:

*using figures published by Durham Wildlife Trust in spring 2020 (source Natural England), the land currently proposed for the running track, "lowland fen" typically stores 1.14 tons of carbon per hectare per year. Improved grass land, as the centre of the track and surrounding grass are proposed to become, would emit 4.85 tons per hectare per year.*

That would amount to around six tonnes of additional carbon dioxide per year being released for every hectare altered by this proposal. That would be on top of the major 'one off' release of CO<sub>2</sub> caused by the works within the existing bogs. The application does not attempt to address this international treaty issue; it simply ignores it. We believe that International Treaties have precedence over other planning considerations.

The East and West Bogs have been long term features of the landscape but have been enhanced over the past fifteen or so years. They have been designated as "set aside". The landowner has been paid out of public funds to allow the wildlife value of the bogs to develop, a regime which has produced some remarkable benefits.

### **Wildlife and Ecology**

SDT's Woodland & Wildlife Group have been observing, recording and compiling data on the species found on the 'Green Corridor' site and adjacent land, including the East and West Bogs. The list is not exhaustive, and we know that there are more species present.

The W&W Group's list is reproduced at in the appendix. We wish to draw your attention to the fact that at least two of the species dependent on the area of land covered by this planning application have very high levels of protection. The Marsh Harrier regularly hunts over the two bogs and the Dingy Skipper butterfly is present locally.

*The Marsh Harriers is one of our rarest breeding birds; there are just 400 pairs in the UK. Its numbers have been recovering after being made extinct in Britain. It is still rare, and its protection is still essential.*

*The Dingy Skipper is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. It is also a Priority Species under the UK Post- 2010 Biodiversity Framework. It is in decline and is therefore a priority species for conservation efforts.*

The information offered to support the application to "develop" this site does not identify these top conservation priorities or even recognise the presence of many other species. The work simply had not been done. The Marsh Harrier is feeding on small mammals, frogs, fish, insects and birds which it can reliably find in the east and west bogs.

Buzzards are also seen regularly hunting over the two bogs and the adjacent W&W site. They are not as endangered as the Marsh Harrier but until recent years they were absent from Co. Durham and most of areas east of the Pennines. Their return to these areas is a conservation success, but of course they too are only here because small mammals, birds and amphibians which they prey upon are reliably present.

## Conclusions

The information used to support this application is dreadfully incomplete in terms on COP 26, the Ecological Assessment and the understanding the land's current use. Nevertheless, it is clear to SDT that the implications of developing an athletics track on this site are more damaging than initially thought in July 2021.

If this planning application were to be approved:

- It would be contrary to the obligations the UK government accepted on behalf of all UK citizens, and indeed of the world, to keep embedded carbon stored on this site in the ground; it would also forgo the future for storing more carbon within the ground.
- It would be contrary to the vision, policy and actions of the County Council (and as landowner) to develop a green corridor as part of the NETPark development. That has attracted enthusiastic and widespread support from the community just as DCC hoped would happen. It has attracted charitable funds from national and local sources and is showing results already as tree cover increases and species diversity increases. This vision has always been for the long term: that is, 500+ years.
- It would be contrary to the declared intention of DCC to support the development of community woodlands and to create more local nature reserves.
- It would impoverish local biodiversity and put back the conservation of vulnerable species, the protection of which are national priorities; it would impoverish both local and wider recovery.
- It is utterly illogical and unnecessary, when only half a mile away is Winterton Playing Fields, currently underused and with ample capacity to provide a very good base for East Durham athletics with a rebuilt pavilion and an existing access of the B1278.

We would like to see this application refused and the EDCAT work with the owners of the Winterton Playing Fields (believed to be DCC) to achieve their ambitions on land already allocated for such activity.

**Appendix.**



A Project of Sedgefield Development Trust

**Record of Species on and around the perimeter of the Woodland & Wildlife Site  
(2018 – Present)**

**Birds**

Kestrel  
Buzzard  
Marsh Harrier  
Bull Finch  
Blackcap  
Goldcrest  
Greater Whitethroat  
Lesser Whitethroat  
Robin  
Bluetit  
Pigeon  
Blackbird  
Carrion Crow  
Skylark  
Chiff Chaff  
Willow Warbler  
Reed Bunting  
Tree Sparrow  
House Martin  
Sedge Warbler  
Grasshopper Warbler  
Stock Dove  
Oyster Catcher  
Greater Spotted Woodpecker  
Mistle Thrush  
Pheasant  
Coal Tit  
Song Thrush  
Yellow Hammer  
Linnet  
Long tailed tit  
Tawny Owl  
Barn Owl (evidence, no sighting)

Redwing  
Siskin  
Meadow pipit  
Wren

### **Mammals**

Rabbit  
Field vole  
Common Pipistrelle Bat  
Noctule Bat  
Badger (evidence, no sighting)  
Deer (evidence, no sighting)  
Fox  
Field Mouse

### **Amphibians**

Smooth Newt  
Toad

### **Butterflies and Moths**

Cinnabar Moth  
5 Spot Burnet Moth  
6 Spot Burnet Moth  
Painted Lady  
Red Admiral  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Peacock  
Meadow Brown  
Small Heath  
Elephant Hawk Moth  
Carpet Moth  
Common Blue  
Small White  
Large White  
White Ermine  
Skipper  
Woodland Brown  
Red-necked Footman  
Dingy Skipper

## **Invertebrates**

Many varieties of the following:

Damselflies  
Longhorn beetles  
Spiders  
Grasshoppers  
Crickets  
Snails  
Slugs  
Flies  
Shield beetle  
Leaf hoppers  
Bees  
Beetles  
Lacewings  
Wasps  
Craneflies  
Beetles  
Ants  
Earwigs  
Centipedes  
Woodlouse

### **Species list from a Durham Wildlife Trust Botany Group and Sedgefield Development Trust volunteers survey, during a visit to Winterton Wood - Sedgefield NETPark Nature Reserve 12th August 2018**

Taxon Vernacular

Acer pseudoplatanus Sycamore  
Achillea millefolium Yarrow  
Agrostis capillaris Common Bent  
Anchusa arvensis Bugloss  
Anthriscus sylvestris Cow Parsley  
Arctium nemorosum Wood Burdock  
Arrhenatherum elatius False Oat-Grass  
Artemisia vulgaris Mugwort  
Atriplex patula Common Orache  
Bellis perennis Daisy  
Betula pendula Silver Birch

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Calystegia sepium Hedge Bindweed  
Capsella bursa-pastoris Shepherd's-purse  
Castanea sativa Sweet Chestnut  
Centaurea nigra Common Knapweed  
Cerastium fontanum Common Mouse-ear  
Chamerion angustifolium Rosebay Willowherb  
Chenopodium album Fat-hen  
Cichorium intybus Chicory  
Cirsium arvense Creeping Thistle  
Cirsium vulgare Spear Thistle  
Corylus avellana Hazel  
Crataegus monogyna Hawthorn  
Dactylis glomerata Cock's-foot  
Daucus carota Wild Carrot  
Echium vulgare Viper's-bugloss  
Epilobium ciliatum American Willowherb  
Epilobium hirsutum Great Willowherb  
Epilobium montanum Broad-leaved Willowherb  
Equisetum arvense Field Horsetail  
Fagus sylvatica Beech  
Filipendula ulmaria Meadowsweet  
Fraxinus excelsior Ash  
Galium verum Lady's Bedstraw  
Geranium dissectum Cut-leaved Crane's-bill  
Geranium molle Dove's-foot Crane's-bill  
Geranium robertianum Herb-Robert  
Geum urbanum Wood Avens  
Helminthotheca echioides Bristly Oxtongue  
Heracleum sphondylium Hogweed  
Holcus lanatus Yorkshire-fog  
Holcus mollis Creeping Soft-grass  
Lamium album White Dead-nettle  
Lapsana communis Nipplewort  
Lathyrus pratensis Meadow Vetchling

Ligustrum vulgare Wild Privet  
Linaria purpurea Purple Toadflax  
Linaria vulgaris Common Toadflax  
Lolium perenne Perennial Rye-grass  
Lotus corniculatus Common Bird's-foot-trefoil  
Matricaria discoidea Pineappleweed  
Medicago lupulina Black Medick  
Melilotus altissimus Tall Melilot  
Myosotis arvensis Field Forget-me-not  
Myrrhis odorata Sweet Cicely  
Odontites vernus Red Bartsia  
Papaver rhoeas Common Poppy  
Pinus nigra Austrian Pine / Corsican Pine  
Pinus sylvestris Scots Pine  
Plantago lanceolata Ribwort Plantain  
Plantago major Greater Plantain  
Poa annua Annual Meadow-grass  
Polygonum arenastrum Equal-leaved Knotgrass  
Polygonum aviculare Knotgrass  
Prunella vulgaris Selfheal  
Quercus robur Pedunculate Oak  
Quercus x rosacea Hybrid Oak  
Ranunculus acris Meadow Buttercup  
Ranunculus repens Creeping Buttercup  
Reseda lutea Wild Mignonette  
Reseda luteola Weld  
Rhinanthus minor Yellow-rattle  
Rubus armeniacus a Bramble  
Rubus dasycarpus a Bramble  
Rubus idaeus Raspberry  
Rumex crispus Curled Dock  
Rumex obtusifolius Broad-leaved Dock  
Rumex sanguineus Wood Dock

Sagina procumbens Procumbent Pearlwort  
Salvia pratensis Meadow Clary  
Senecio jacobaea Common Ragwort  
Senecio vulgaris Groundsel  
Silene dioica Red Campion  
Silene flos-cuculi Ragged-Robin  
Silene latifolia White Campion  
Silene x hampeana Pink Campion (S. dioica x latifolia)  
Sonchus asper Prickly Sow-thistle  
Sonchus oleraceus Smooth Sow-thistle  
Sorbus aucuparia Rowan  
Stachys sylvatica Hedge Woundwort  
Symphoricarpos albus Snowberry  
Symphytum x uplandicum Russian Comfrey (S. asperum x officinale)  
Taraxacum agg. Dandelion  
Tilia x europaea Lime  
Torilis japonica Upright Hedge-parsley  
Tragopogon pratensis Goat's-beard  
Trifolium hybridum Alsike Clover  
Trifolium pratense Red Clover  
Trifolium repens White Clover  
Typha latifolia Bulrush  
Ulmus glabra Wych Elm  
Urtica dioica Common Nettle  
Veronica chamaedrys Germander  
Veronica persica Common Field-speedwell  
Vicia cracca Tufted Vetch  
Vicia sepium Bush Vetch  
**Total 106 species** (including 4 hybrids)