

To: Planning Services, Kirklees Council

Re: Outline application for up to 123 dwellings, Upper Cumberworth – access for consideration only

Application ref: Upper Cumberworth 2025/60/93572/E

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write as a local resident and parent to strongly object to the above proposal. I recognise the need for additional homes – including genuinely affordable provision – but this site is the wrong place for major growth (and doesn't provide much social housing anyway). In short, the plans submitted perform very poorly against national policy on sustainable travel and amenity, risks harm to adjacent ancient woodland, and would exacerbate existing highway and drainage problems. The NPPF requires development to be located and designed to promote sustainable transport, protect irreplaceable habitats and conserve the natural environment; this scheme fails on all three counts.

1) Ancient woodland and ecological impact

The application sits next to ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forestry Commission's standing advice is clear: **a buffer of at least 15 m** from the woodland boundary is the minimum to avoid root damage – **and a larger buffer is likely to be needed** where impacts such as increased public access, pollution or hydrological change extend further. Kirklees' own ecology unit's assessment already recommends this is increased to 30-50 m. The buffer should be made up of semi-natural habitat (not gardens or SuDS [drainage] features), and authorities should refuse schemes that would lead to loss or deterioration of ancient woodland unless *wholly exceptional* circumstances exist.

Based on our day-to-day experience of the edge-of-settlement location:

- A large new estate immediately beside the wood will drive up footfall. The standing advice recognises that increased people pressure brings trampling, soil compaction, fly-tipping and the need for more tree management – all of which can degrade woodland structure and veteran trees over time.
- We have directly observed wildlife that depends on the current open field-woodland mosaic, including roe deer, bats and barn owls, demonstrating that the site contributes to habitat connectivity. Severing or narrowing this functional corridor risks reducing resilience. The standing advice highlights the importance of **maintaining working habitat connections** and avoiding changes to the woodland

edge. (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>).

- Roads, hardstanding and engineered drainage will alter runoff patterns. Natural England's advice linked above explicitly flags changes to the water table, drainage and pollutant loading as mechanisms that can damage ancient woodland ecology; buffers may need to be **considerably deeper** where hydrology or pollution pathways are a concern.

Mitigation planting cannot recreate the openness and long-established Greenbelt edge conditions that would be lost. In NPPF terms, ancient woodland is **irreplaceable** and should be protected accordingly.

2) Sustainable travel – ATE's 800 m expectation and real-world practicality

Active Travel England (ATE) is now the statutory consultee on major schemes. Its standing advice expects **a mix of local amenities within 800 m walking/wheeling distance** of homes via safe, direct, accessible routes. It also sets clear quality standards for footways – **at least 2.0 m wide, with pinch-points not below 1.5 m** – and for access to bus stops. This advice has been linked by them in their consultee response and conflicts with older, out-dated documents from 25 years ago referred to in the submitted travel plan.

- In Upper Cumberworth, everyday destinations beyond the first school – nurseries, most sports facilities, GP surgeries and food retail beyond bare essentials stocked at the post office (we often drive to the Sovereign garage 1 mile away for milk, a newspaper etc.) – generally amenities lie well **beyond 800 m**, requiring travel to neighbouring settlements. That locational reality contradicts ATE's accessibility benchmark for sustainable sites. Illustrative examples are there is no nursery age childcare provision or holiday childcare provision in the village. The nearest nurseries are Greyfell in Shepley 1.9 miles; Denby Dale 1.8 miles; Lanefields in Skelmanthorpe 2.1 miles. For doctors, options are Shepley Health Centre which is 1.7 miles away or Skelmanthorpe Family Doctors which is 2.1 miles.
- Routes to local bus stops, and indeed bus stops themselves heading south-east run along **narrow pavements on a busy 40 mph corridor (the A635)**. The pavement on the northern side of the A635 is less than 1 m wide at both bus stops nearby and there is not a plan to modify this beyond the extent of the adjacent site. One of these is against a retaining wall, and seeing children waiting there for the morning school bus they already look vulnerable – the number needing this facility will increase with this development. ATE's guidance for bus-stop access expects 2.0 m widths with pinch-points not below 1.5 m; that standard is not met in several places, which is especially worrying for families with small children.

- As a parent walking with two young children, I already have to go in single file and, at times, step in behind them when large vehicles pass. During recent roadworks, temporary cones on the central hatched zone were repeatedly knocked into the carriageway – the same location earmarked for a pedestrian crossing – which did not feel safe. These practical observations sit uncomfortably with the NPPF's requirement for places to be **safe and attractive for walking and cycling**.
- We attend church regularly but not in the village because it does not meet the needs of families – we drive. Even if we did attend Cumberworth, church services are infrequent so would need to drive to linked parish churches on many Sundays. (Church highlighted in application as a village amenity).
- In terms of cycling, we actively do so with both children (nursery and primary school ages), and have chosen holiday options to support taking bikes with us, used cycle routes with them such as from Penistone, but would not feel at all safe to take them on any of the roads leading from the village. Indeed, the only cyclists you typically see locally are “serious” cyclists in specialist kit, the busy roads and steep gradients mean you do not see ordinary people cycling to anywhere.

For commuting, the village's public transport options are not workable for most parents managing school drop-off and pick-up, even with wrap around care. Train frequency and timing from Denby Dale – combined with the uphill walk back and limited parking (10 car spaces, 8 bike spaces) – make rail an unrealistic default; missing one hourly bus/train can mean an hour-plus delay and there are key gaps in the bus timetable of longer than an hour to destinations such as Wakefield, even at peak times. In policy terms, the NPPF expects development to **limit the need to travel** and offer a **genuine choice** of modes; the pattern here will, inevitably, mean more car trips.

Expanding on the incompatibility of work, public transport and childcare the practical realities of local travel make it extremely difficult for working parents to rely on anything other than a car. The school run a wrap-around childcare “Sunshine club” from 7:30 am until 6 pm. Considering the nearest major town where broad employment options exist (Huddersfield) and a standard 9-5 job (doable by car – I often in effect do just this) shows the problem. **By train:** Walking from the first school to Denby Dale railway station takes a minimum of 23 minutes (google maps), and although this route is manageable for leisure, it involves boggy field paths that are entirely unsuitable for work clothing, so a longer route is likely. After a 7.30 school drop-off, the earliest feasible train from Denby Dale is the 8.27, arriving in Huddersfield at 8.51 – leaving little margin for a 9.00 start, especially if the workplace is not directly beside the station. The return journey is even more constrained: the first train after 17.00 arrives back at 17.36, and with the 23-minute walk to school, a parent would reach the gates at approximately 17.59, just one minute before closing, meaning that even a trivial delay risks missing pick-up. Missing that train entirely would mean waiting another hour, which is simply unworkable. **By bus:** Buses present similar issues: the D2 at 7.33 only barely aligns with a 7.30 school drop-off, relying on the school gate opening instantly and the handover going smoothly; missing it pushes arrival in

Huddersfield back to 10.42! In the evening, the earliest suitable return service reaches the village after 18.00, too late for school collection. No reasonable parent would accept a transport pattern that jeopardises daily pick-ups, and these constraints make it clear that public transport from Upper Cumberworth is not a viable or sustainable option for working families. Commute data for the immediate area (2021 census data for Kirklees 057F) that is most representative of Upper Cumberworth shows of those that do not work from home 91% get to work in a car or van, consistent with the picture outlined above.

3) Highway safety and day-to-day experience

- **Footway width and safety:** As noted above, several stretches fall below ATE's recommended widths to and at bus stops, which materially affects safety and comfort, particularly the section after the crossing towards the junction with Cumberworth lane (the route to the school for children on site), or on the walk down to Denby Dale where pinch points are less than 50 cm along a 40 mph road.
 - **Children and buses:** Where the footway is too narrow for safe waiting or passing, I – and many parents in my position – will choose to drive rather than risk a child wobbling at the kerb edge. That is the opposite of the sustainable choices sought by national policy.
 - **School trips and road conditions:** The first school already adapts activities and routes in light of safety concerns (*e.g.* School were planning to walk to Denby Dale library (no library in the village) but due to concerns regarding safety of children walking down Barnsley Road school made the decision to walk across the fields, a route they described as “soggy”. They also use the woods for education and wellbeing activities, but with increased road use it is not clear this would still be safe. Adding significant new traffic will compound those issues, not resolve them.
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4) Water infrastructure and pedestrian amenity

Yorkshire water as a statutory consultee make clear the water and in particular sewerage infrastructure cannot cope as this area didn't feature in their planning due to not being in the existing Kirklees Local Plan. They go as far as to say public health may be negatively impacted.

We already feel the infrastructure water shortcomings are serious. We have had three substantial mains water bursts on the Barnsley Road immediately outside our home in recent months and are aware of other mains and sewerage leaks regularly around the village. The NPPF expects infrastructure capacity to be taken into account in decision-making.

When the leaks occurred outside our property – and during heavy rain – spray can cover the full footway width on parts of Barnsley Road, forcing pedestrians either to get drenched or drive, again demonstrating the restricted pedestrian access. Both during the leaks and when there is significant surface water (i.e. whenever it rains) we often undertake the short journey to school by car (~0.14 miles) to avoid the difficult crossing and drenched children before the day starts.

5) Residential amenity – winter sunlight and downhill relationships

Homes to the north including ours sit **downhill** of the application land. Even with layout reserved, it is foreseeable that two-storey development on rising ground could materially reduce **low-angle winter sunlight** to primary living spaces and gardens, particularly late-afternoon sun (when key habitable rooms designed in these properties to be open to the rural aspect and take advantage of natural light). As a household with key habitable rooms and growing areas orientated to the south/south-west, this is a genuine concern that may undermine whether the **number and height** indicated are deliverable without unacceptable amenity impact.

6) Green Belt and settlement edge character

The site forms part of the open green edge that defines Upper Cumberworth's character and provides the transition to ancient woodland. The NPPF's Green Belt policies are explicit: boundaries should only be changed where **fully evidenced exceptional circumstances** exist through the plan-led process, and decision-making should safeguard the countryside from encroachment. Permitting a large, car-dependent estate here would permanently erode that edge and undermine the very qualities that make the settlement coherent.

Conclusion

I do not dispute that the district needs more housing – including social housing – but this proposal is not a sustainable location for it. On **sustainable transport, ancient woodland protection, amenity and infrastructure readiness**, the scheme conflicts with national policy and ATE's standing advice:

- Amenities within 800 m via safe, accessible routes – **not achieved**.
- Footway quality and bus-stop approaches – **substandard** against ATE benchmarks.
- Ancient woodland – **increased buffer** needed and given people pressure, drainage change and pollution pathways; adverse effects must be avoided and even with a larger buffer that is likely not achievable.

- NPPF tests on sustainable travel, Green Belt and conserving the natural environment – **not met**.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the application be **refused**, or at the very least that the applicant be required to relocate or reduce the scheme to a scale and location that can meet ATE and NPPF expectations without harming ancient woodland or residential amenity.