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Delivering Services to Coxhoe
and Quarrington Hill

16 December 2024

**FAO John Hewitt Chief, Executive Director of Durham County Council,
Amanda Hopgood, Leader of Durham County Council, and
Ted Henderson, Education Portfolio Holder Durham County Council**

Dear All

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council are reaching out to you with concerns over Durham County Council's policy in securing developer contributions towards education provision in County Durham. They do not believe that this is working fairly or appropriately for rural villages like ours and is letting children, families and council taxpayers down.

Members were disappointed to learn of two planning applications in the village of Coxhoe, County Durham, that Durham County Council require £0 contribution toward primary education as a result of the addition of 183 homes to our village, with yet more to come. One of these applications (ref: DM/20/02046/FPA) was first submitted in September 2020 by Gleasons with a requirement of £441,090, and resubmitted in July 2024 with just 17 fewer properties, requiring no contribution by Durham County Council's Education Department.

Point 6.9 of the adopted policy '[Securing Developer Contributions towards Education Provision in County Durham](#)' states: *"When assessing the nearest school(s) to a development(s) to assess and calculate any developer contributions, the Council will apply a distance of 2 miles from the development measured by the shortest available safe walking route. The Council's School Places and Admissions Team can provide advice and guidance in relation to school rolls and forecasted pupil numbers."* Coxhoe Parish Council formally challenged the appropriateness of the 2-mile policy for 'safe walk to school', which lies between

villages with a requirement to walk over 1.7 miles on often unlit busy rural roads, rather than via a proposed 'safe walking route'.

The Parish Council have corresponded with the 4 local Primary Schools referred to in the Education Officers report to query the number of children on roll, and the capacity of the 4 primary schools cited within the 2-mile policy, and cross referenced with the figures provided by the Education Officer of Durham County Council, and found significant errors. Please see the table below which have been recently reconfirmed with the 4 schools.

School	Capacity	On roll now	Spare places	Spare, with 5% capacity
Bowburn	540	326	214	187
Coxhoe	355	320	35	17
Kelloe	147	121	26	19
West Cornforth	210	203	7	0
TOTAL	1252	970	282	223

Durham County Council stated that the combined capacity of these schools was 1,044 and that the maximum number of pupils over the 10-year period is 789. In contradiction, the 4 headteachers have confirmed that the actual capacities for reception to year 6 of these schools is 1,252 (not 1,044) and the current numbers on roll are already 970 (not 789 as stated by the education officer).

In other words, the Durham County Council's Education Officer believes that there are 208 fewer places in these schools than the 4 headteachers have confirmed directly, and additionally there are actually 181 more pupils than the education officer has accounted for. As a result, their 10-year maximum forecast is already 181 real existing children short. Not only that, the education officer's forecast takes no account of the approved, unbuilt, and pending and latent demand from the many major developments in and around these schools. This could potentially saturate and exhaust all current spare capacity.

When these figures were challenged at the planning committee 12 November 2024, the answer repeatedly given by the planning officer was that the Education Officer remains confident in his analysis, despite the contradictory figures directly from Head Teachers of the schools in question. Additionally, that the education officer's figures were the official figures and that the planning committee had to rely on these. We assert that these figures are factually inaccurate and that the planning committee

based the determination of application DM/20/02046/FPA on factually incorrect data. DCC's 2-mile policy resulted in £257,705 not being contributed to primary education in Coxhoe by the developer.

An additional planning application (ref DMA/24/02602/FPA), situated just 20 metres from Coxhoe Primary School by Millers, was submitted in September 2024, with the same response from DCC to a section 106 contribution to primary education that no primary education contribution was required, despite the fact the developer themselves, during a meeting with the Chair and Clerk of the Parish Council held on 19th August 2024, expressed their expectation to contribute £392,000 towards primary provision.

In this instance it appears that the distance is measured by DCC education department is incorrectly 'as the crow flies'. The walking distance from the properties nearest the 2 entry points to their development 1 Barkers Buildings and 48 Garden Terrace are 2.3 and 2.4 miles respectfully from Bowburn Primary School, and therefore the surplus places at this school should not be taken into account in this planning application?

The previous Gleeson application anticipated 22 children from that development and so, the current 17 'spare' places at Coxhoe will be taken by that development. Pending planning application 24/02564 for 115 new homes in Kelloe will lead to 38 primary school children and remove the current 19 'spare' spaces there, and so an education contribution of £304,330 should be required?

The comments on the planning portal for the pending Millers application 24/02602 from DCC education department are factually incorrect again, and as matters stand this developer will also not be required to make a contribution of £304,330 that they should be expected to when this application is determined under NPPF57, selling short the children and families of Coxhoe, council tax-payers, and DCC's own education budget.

It should also be noted that no account of significant development at Integra 61 (270 homes – 81 primary school children anticipated by DCC 15/00338), and at Parkhill (190 homes – 63 primary school children anticipated by DCC 15/01692) appear to have been forgotten about by planners and whilst these estates are partially completed and some of these 144 children will already have started at Bowburn Primary School, some will come from houses yet to be built and children yet to be born, which were taken into account in the size of primary school required at Bowburn. Similarly latent demand for 3-4 other smaller recent developments in Bowburn and from recently completed phases 2 and 3 of The Limes estates in Coxhoe are completely ignored by the planners in their consideration of available places. Doing so inappropriately leaves the burden of building necessary future primary places on DCC's budgets, and council taxpayers, not developers.

The significant strain on our village school, already struggling to cope with current pupil numbers, is being completely disregarded by Durham County Council's own policies and their application by your officers and planning committees because of the factually incorrect advice they are being given. There is no recognition by DCC that in rural County Durham most families will want to send their children to the local village school, and that it is appropriate for children as young as 4 to walk 2 miles to school. In reality they would be driven to neighbouring schools adding to parking problems and increasing CO² emissions, contrary to DCC's Policy 33.

The school has a third extension designed to accommodate children from newly proposed developments such as these, which could be fully funded by developers, if Durham County Council were to requested the appropriate primary school educations contributions; including a £375,000 Section 106 contribution awaiting draw down for additional school places from the Barratts Bogma Hall Farm development next door to the school. Please note that the senior planning officer also incorrectly advised the Gleeson planning committee 12 November that that this S106 would not be requested now due to the spare capacity at Bowburn Primary School, however that site is 2.8 miles from the Bowburn School. Similarly, no contribution was requested for the 50 property Persimmon development next to this 14/00338, saving the developer £193,132, which is also in excess of 2 miles away.

The education department made Governors of Coxhoe primary school aware that in September 2020 a contribution of £440,000 had originally been factored into extension plans from the aforementioned development (ref: DM/20/02046/FPA), which forms an important part of growing the village school infrastructure to meet the needs of parents and children from the village. Sadly, as the interpretation of the Durham County Council policy has been changed recently, which is putting the completion of this much-needed school extension at risk.

The community in Coxhoe is proud of the contribution such an excellent school makes to the village, but it is vital that the developers building extra homes in the community are required to appropriately support the delivery of education.

The Parish Council were concerned about the imminent announcement of changes to the planning system to accelerate housebuilding and deliver 1.5 million homes over this Parliament, with councils being asked to play their part to meet housing need by reaching a new ambitious combined target of 370,000 homes a year. Members recognise the need for housing, and, in developing our Neighbourhood Plan, are making sufficient provision with the revision of greenbelt boundaries to meet the necessary quota.

However, it is vital that with necessary housing, comes necessary infrastructure, and the policies underpinning these new developments are sufficient, fair, fit for purpose,

and are followed correctly. In light of this announcement, now is the opportune time to review such policies to accord with paragraph 100 of the 2024 NPPF which came in with immediate effect a few days ago.

It is in this vein we request an urgent review of Durham County Council's unreasonably insouciant '[Securing Developer Contributions towards Education Provision in County Durham](#)' policy in relation to primary education contributions, and seek removal or amendment of the DCC 2-mile requirement and ensure appropriately supported infrastructure effected by new housing developments in the area. Also, to take into account the anticipated children from applications already approved or pending to avoid duplication of demand and insufficient provision of places.

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council would be grateful of your support in advance of the determination of any more planning applications in our area and similar rural localities to ensure that developers make the appropriate S106 primary education contributions in rural County Durham Villages.

Your Sincerely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sophie Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Sophie Taylor
Parish Clerk



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18 December 2024

FAO The Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner

Dear Ms Rayner,

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council are reaching out to you with concerns over Durham County Council's policy in ['securing developer contributions towards education provision in County Durham](#)'.

Coxhoe Parish Council share your belief that strong leaders who live and work close to their communities are best placed to shape their communities, and to that end are currently engaged in a campaign to ensure justifiable funding is procured from new developers to support local school infrastructure.

Members were disappointed to learn of two planning applications in the village of Coxhoe, County Durham, that require £0 contribution toward primary education. One of these applications (ref: DM/20/02046/FPA) was first submitted in September 2020 with a S106 requirement of £441,090, and resubmitted in July 2024 with just 17 fewer properties, requiring no contribution by Durham County Council's Education Department, and a reinterpreted application of the Council's own policy.

Point 6.6 of the adopted policy 'Securing Developer Contributions towards Education Provision in County Durham' states: '*When assessing the nearest school(s) to a development(s) to assess and calculate any developer contributions, the Council will apply a distance of **2 miles** from the development measured by the shortest available safe walking route. The Council's School Places and Admissions Team can provide advice and guidance in relation to school rolls and forecasted pupil numbers.*' Coxhoe Parish Council formally challenged the appropriateness of the **2-mile** policy for 'safe walk to school', which in this instance lies between villages with a requirement to walk over 1.7 miles on often unlit

busy rural roads. Members also have concerns over the reliability of the 'advice and guidance' of the School Places and Admissions Team, on which decisions about contributions are made.

Another application that is imminently pending approval (ref DMA/24/02602/FPA), again contains factually incorrect comments, information, and advice from DCC's education officer and is not recommending any primary school education contribution. This advice does not comply with DCC's existing inappropriate policy.

Please see the attached letter to Durham County Council leadership asking that they remove or amend their policy so that it fits with needs of Durham's rural village communities like ours. Our experience so far is that Durham County Council's policies and their application is not ensuring appropriate and necessary primary school infrastructure provisions being funded by the developers. In villages like ours, unless DCC changes its approach and policies the children of parts of our village won't be able to attend their village school and won't walk 1.7 miles to school and instead will add to CO2 levels, traffic and parking problems around neighbouring village schools.

By not taking into account already forecast places from earlier approvals, this is also reducing expectation on developer contributions and shifting the long-term burden on Council tax payers and Council budgets which are already stretched.

The significant strain on the village school, already struggling to cope with current pupil numbers, is being completely disregarded by Durham County Council. The school has an extension, supported by the Head of Education, designed to accommodate children from newly proposed developments such as these, which could be fully funded by developers, if Durham County Council were to request the appropriate primary school education contributions; including a £375,000 Section 106 contribution awaiting draw down for additional school places from the Barratts Bogma Hall Farm development next door to the school.

The Education Department made Governors of the primary school aware that in September 2020 a contribution of £440,000 had originally been factored into extension plans from the aforementioned development (ref: DM/20/02046/FPA), which forms an important part of growing the village school infrastructure to meet the needs of parents and children from the village. Sadly, as the interpretation of the Durham County Council policy has changed, this is putting the much-needed school extension at risk.

The community in Coxhoe is proud of the contribution such an excellent school makes to the village, but it is vital that the developers building extra homes in the community are required to appropriately support the delivery of education.

The Parish Council were encouraged by your announcement of a significant shake-up of National Planning Framework. It is in this vein we request an urgent review of local policy, to appropriately support effected infrastructure by new housing developments in the area, and for our Principal Authority, namely Durham County Council, to urgently reform their unreasonably insouciant policy in relation to primary education contributions which we do not believe complies with paragraph 100 of the new guidance.

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council would be grateful of any pressure that you can put on Durham County Council to make sure that their policies are fit for purpose, they deliver the much needed good homes that people need, but that developers share the responsibility of making sure that developers make the appropriate contributions to the infrastructure their developments necessitate and that children get the best start in education and life in their local communities and don't need to be bussed or driven out of them, often missing out on out of school activities and being too remote from their peers to grow and play together out of school.

Yours Sincerely.

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FAO Bridget Philipson, Secretary of State for Education

Dear Ms Philipson,

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council are reaching out to you with concerns over Durham County Council's policy in ['securing developer contributions towards education provision in County Durham'](#).

Members were moved by your recent speech at the Confederation of School Trusts Conference, and your acknowledgement of your personal achievements being attributed to feeling happy and healthy in school and feeling as though you belonged. The Parish Council believes a strong sense of community belonging is imperative for our young people to thrive, and attending their local school with their friends and neighbours is a big part of this. We are proud to run the local Youth Provision as an arm to this inclusive, community belonging. It is for this reason Councillors are addressing, what they believe, is a huge oversight in educational funding and provision in County Durham.

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distance of 2 miles from the development measured by the shortest available safe walking route. The Council's School Places and Admissions Team can provide advice and guidance in relation to school rolls and forecasted pupil numbers.' Coxhoe Parish Council formally challenged the appropriateness of the **2-mile** policy for 'safe walk to school', which in this instance lies between villages with a requirement to walk over 1.7 miles on often unlit busy rural roads. Members also have concerns over the reliability of the 'advice and guidance' of the School Places and Admissions Team, on which decisions about contributions are made.

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The community in Coxhoe is proud of the contribution such an excellent school makes to the village, but it is vital that the developers building extra homes in the community are required to appropriately support the delivery of education.

The Parish Council were encouraged by The Chancellor setting out plans to fix the foundations, not just of our economy, but of our education system too. You yourself mentioned the tough fiscal situation we face and incredibly difficult decisions as a result, and the fact that education priorities have been protected – including through the £2.3bn increase to the core schools budget next year. It is therefore vital we are procuring all possible and required funds from developers, who have a duty to support the necessary infrastructure for the new housing they build in communities. This truly is the only way to deliver the best chance for every child, to which you pledged a commitment, of which Coxhoe Parish Council are in full support.

Members of Coxhoe Parish Council would be grateful of any pressure that you can put on Durham County Council to make sure that their policies are fit for purpose, they deliver the much needed good homes that people need, but that developers share the responsibility of making sure that developers make the appropriate contributions to the infrastructure their developments necessitate and that children get the best start in education and life in their local communities and don't need to be bussed or driven out of them, often missing out on out of school activities and being too remote from their peers to grow and play together out of school.

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