

**CUMBERLAND COUNCIL**  
**CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

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**Proposal:** Proposed erection of nine detached dwellings

**Address:** Land to the rear of Hunter Rise, Beckermert

**Reference:** 4/25/2200/OF1

**Date:** 08/07/25

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**Description:** Site is a long, grassy field running down to Morass Road. Owing to late-20<sup>th</sup> century housing development, it is now surrounded and is one of the last remnants of Beckermert's agricultural ribbon development form, which grew up following the end of the middle ages.

**Conclusion: Recommend refusal**

**Assessment:**

Context

- The context for this assessment is similar to that of an outline application for a single dwelling (4/22/2460/001) refused in 2023. The following major points on context are therefore common to both, however the impact of this proposal would be high due to the greater quantum.
- The Copeland Settlement Landscape Character Assessment Part 3 - Settlement Studies, part of the Copeland Local Plan evidence base, states the following in its assessment of Beckermert:
  - "The traditional feel of the village and isolated farms contributes to a sense of stepping back in time and is sensitive to unsympathetic village expansion.
  - "The small field pattern characteristic of the old part of the settlement is sensitive to development, domestication and hedgerow loss."
- The map defines this location as part of "Landscape Scale Green Infrastructure and green wedges between settlement".
- Beckermert's Conservation Area Appraisal notes this field in its section on Open Spaces, and refers to remaining evidence of historic land cultivation patterns. The appraisal defines this site as one of only three key open/green spaces within the conservation area.
- Beckermert village developed piecemeal in the medieval period as a ribbon of small farms spaced out along a road with fields and small agricultural buildings among them, and tracks, lonnings or snickets leading back from the road. This site is almost the last survivor of that character.
- The site is immediately adjacent to a listed building (Barwickstead Hennerly-Piggery) and within the close setting of another (Barwickstead Barns). These are former agricultural buildings, and the survival of this field contributes both to the significance of these buildings and to their ability to be appreciated by allowing them to be viewed uninterrupted when passing southward down Morass Road.

#### Heritage Impact:

- Harm would be done to the conservation area (and to Beckermets simply as a place) by the development in the form of loss of this green area, which is a key remaining part of Beckermets agricultural ribbon development. This applies both directly to the conservation area, and to its setting.
  - I would view this as a substantial harm to the conservation area on the basis that this field represents virtually the last of its kind, and with it would be lost the sources of significance outlined above. Beckermets conservation area has a character distinct from Copeland's other conservation areas due largely to the survival of some elements of agricultural character. Even in St Bees, structurally the most similar to Beckermets, Main Street has long-since lost its agricultural character except for a single barn at the top end that hasn't yet been converted into housing.
- The development would also pose less-than-substantial harm to the setting of the grade II listed Hennyery-Piggery at the road side, and to a lesser extent to the grade II listed range of barns at Barwickstead. This would be in the form of loss of the agricultural character of the setting, which contributes positively to the architectural and historic significance of these buildings.
- This harm should be given special regard and great weight in the planning balance, under the 1990 Act and NPPF 212.
- Additionally, there would be some harm to the setting of the ruined observatory a short distance to the south of the red line. This is a non-designated heritage asset, built on what would have been a dark, rural hilltop at around the turn of the last century for the purposes of stargazing. This should be taken into consideration in weighing the application.
- There would additionally be some harm to the settings of other non-designated heritage assets: Coneygarth House, The Lodge, Barwickstead 1, 2 and 3.

#### Summary:

- This field is a key constituent of Beckermets conservation area.
- It is fragile. Virtually any development here would substantially drain away its significance.
- This would be born in setting harm to several listed buildings, non-designated heritage assets, and in direct and setting harm to the conservation area.
- I do not believe the public benefit justifies this level of harm, so recommend refusing the application.

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#### Relevant Policies and Guidance:

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 establishes a need "in considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works [for the Local Planning Authority to] have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest" [Section 16(2)]. This requirement also applies to the granting of planning permission affecting a listing building or its setting [Section 66(1)].

Section 72 of the 1990 Act states that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of [a conservation] area."

Paragraph 139 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) asserts that “Development that is not well designed should be refused”.

NPPF para. 210 states that “In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation...”

NPPF para. 212 states, in the case of designated heritage assets, “great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation”, irrespective of whether potential harm is substantial, less-than-substantial, or total loss. Where harm to a designated heritage asset is less-than-substantial, it should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (para. 215).

Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states the effect on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account when making decisions.

Opportunities should be sought for new development within conservation areas and the settings of heritage assets that enhances or better reveals their significance. (para. 219)

Referring to assets in a conservation area, NPPF para. 220 states that loss of an element that makes a positive contribution to a conservation area should be treated as either substantial (under para. 213-14) or less-than-substantial harm (under paragraph 215).

The Copeland area’s Local Plan contains a number of relevant policies:

- BE1 provides for the preservation and enhancement of built heritage assets by:
  - Requiring a heritage impact assessment or heritage statement where the proposal would affect a heritage asset;
  - Giving great weight to the conservation of Copeland’s designated heritage assets when decision making;
  - Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to local character and history;
  - Supporting proposals for the appropriate reuse of vacant historic buildings, recognising that putting buildings into viable uses consistent with their conservation can help sustain and enhance their significance;
  - Supporting proposals that increase the enhancement, promotion and interpretation of Copeland’s architectural and archaeological resources;
  - Strengthening the distinctive character of Copeland’s settlements, through the application of high-quality design and architecture that respects this character and enhances the setting of heritage assets.
- BE2 states that development should preserve or enhance designated heritage assets (or important archaeological sites) and their settings. The more important the asset, the greater weight that will be given to its conservation. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset will require clear and convincing justification.
- BE4 refers to non-designated heritage assets, saying that development should preserve or enhance such heritage assets and their settings. Proposals that better reveal the significance of heritage assets will be supported in principle. Proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets or their settings should demonstrate that consideration has been given to their significance.
- DS4 outlines the Council’s expectation that all new development will meet high-quality design standards that contribute positively to the health and well-being of residents.

- DS5 refers to the importance of achieving good standards of design in both hard and soft landscaping.

The Conservation Area Design Guide is a supplementary planning document adopted in 2017 that is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within conservation areas in the legacy Copeland area. It is therefore applicable to this application.

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