



## Sanderson Weatherall

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Our Ref: LMC/CNB/211181/CP/VRN

08 July 2021

The Secretary of State for Transport  
c/o Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit  
Department of Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

By email to : [transportinfrastructure@dft.gov.uk](mailto:transportinfrastructure@dft.gov.uk)

Dear Sir,

**Transport and Works Act 1990**  
**The Northumberland Line Order ("the Order")**  
**Objection on behalf of the Bernicia Group**

The Bernicia Group (Bernicia) is a Registered Provider of Social Housing and has interests that are included within and affected by the Order.

On behalf of Bernicia Group, we hereby object to the Order.

Bernicia supports in principle the aspirations of Northumberland County Council ("the Council") in its promotion of the Northumberland Line ("the Line") and welcomes investment in sustainable transport in the region. However, it is concerned that delivery of the Line as presently indicated will have a significant impact upon Bernicia's residents. There are notable "pinch points" in the proposed land-take which will adversely affect residents and to which Bernicia accordingly objects.

The Order affects Bernicia's interests at Bedlington (Plots 269-273 inclusive) and Ashington (Plots 314- 319a inclusive).

### Bedlington

Sleekburn House comprises sheltered accommodation for the elderly and includes 29 one-bedroom flats. The north eastern elevation runs parallel to the existing railway line and seven of the resident's bedrooms and living rooms, on the ground floor, look out onto a secluded garden area which is situated between Sleekburn House and the existing railway line. There are a further eight flats at first floor with the same outlook.

All of the flats are currently occupied which is crucial to the viability of Sleekburn House. The only time when there have been voids has been during Covid when Bernicia was unable to take on new residents for a period of time.

Plot 269 in the Order is shaded pink and envisages outright acquisition right up to the façade of the building, or building-line. It is difficult to see how acquisition of that full extent of land can be justified. Indeed, if acquisition proceeded on that basis it would compromise the enjoyment of the retained land both in its own right and in respect of the use of the landscaped grounds of the property. There is considerable concern that the adverse impact on elderly and vulnerable residents, could in effect render the apartments on that side of the property uninhabitable leading to Sleekburn House becoming unviable as an affordable housing scheme.

Contact with the County Council had indicated that not all the land adjacent to Sleekburn House would be required. Bernicia is therefore disappointed by the extent of the land-take indicated especially in respect of plot 269. It is understood that this is a result of uncertainty as to the final design and therefore the land required. As a result, the Council has at this time included the maximum possible area. We would query this approach. The "maximum extent" approach to land-take is not an attractive one from the perspective of residents given that it correspondingly maximises uncertainty and anxiety.

Given the impact on Sleekburn House and the potential anxiety caused to residents, it is apparent that in the absence of detailed design the extent of acquisition cannot be justified. To that extent the Order is premature and is being promoted in advance of a reasonable level of certainty as to land-take.

We therefore request that at the very least the Order process be delayed in order that the planning process may catch up, and if necessary proposed modifications be made to the Order in order that all parties know where they stand.

#### Ashington

Bernicia's Ashington complex, The Cheviots, is its flagship development. It comprises Ninety-five dwellings including 40 two-bedroom apartments for the elderly known as Hatchmeadow, 55 two-bedroom bungalows for elderly residents or those who require level access accommodation. The flats in Hatchmeadow are for affordable rent and thirty-four of the bungalows are for affordable rent and 21 were sold on shared ownership terms.

In a similar way to Bedlington, previous contact with the County Council had indicated that the land adjacent to Bernicia's property would only be required on a temporary use basis. Our client is disappointed by the approach taken. Again, this is understood to be a reflection of the lack of certainty as to the Scheme's final design.

The County Council will of course be wholly familiar with the site since in October 2014 as Local Planning Authority it granted planning permission for Bernicia's development. At that time the relationship between the railway line and Bernicia's site was assessed. Whilst it is acknowledged that a planning application has been submitted for the Ashington station and associated works, this does not extend to any of our clients land and therefore it is unclear and uncertain what the scheme precisely comprises and what the potential impacts on The Cheviots will be. What is clear, however, is that the extent of land proposed to be compulsorily acquired outright will invariably have a significant impact.

As with Bedlington, the Order is premature in advance of a confirmed design stage proposal.

This does also appear in part to be a product of the diffuse nature of responsibilities for the proposed Line. Whereas SLC has been appointed by NCC to take forward discussions with affected landowners, the principal elements of the scheme namely the rail design requirements rest with Network Rail.

Given the above concerns Bernicia reiterates its objection to the Order and asks that the Secretary of State confirms receipt of this objection, a copy of which has been sent to the applicant.

Yours faithfully  
For and behalf of Sanderson Weatherall

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz McLoughlin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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*CC: Northumberland County Council*