

## DURHAM CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FORUM



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### Response to DCC Consultation on Proposed Changes to Church Street

A starting point must be that Church Street is the principal highway access to Durham City from the South and South West; it is therefore essential that this function is not unnecessarily impeded. There was no evidence in the presentation that this issue had been properly considered.

Church Street is the location of St Oswald's Church and vicarage; also in this street are a nursery and primary school, two community centres, some sheltered housing, a park, a picture framing business and a dental surgery. It is a residential street and the only access to two side roads of residential housing – Oswald Court and Boyd Street. The street is further used as access to the cathedral by way of Kingsgate Bridge. All of these users have a need for adequate parking either to access their own homes or to provide for deliveries, visits, public services and use of the community spaces (the park and St Oswald's Institute).

It is concerning and astonishing that there appears to have been no official consultation with local residents. Despite this issue being of such importance to local residents, there was only one officer, Dave Wafer, from the Council present at the recent consultation at Durham University. There was a lot of demand to speak to Mr Wafer, and consequently many residents were not able to discuss the plans as fully as they would have liked. The materials available at the consultation were also inadequate, e.g. a map that was too small, and no images of Church Street. The Forum suggests that a meeting should be scheduled to which stakeholders, including the Elvet Residents Association, are invited to go over the plans and the issues in greater detail.

The plan to widen parts of the pavements is designed to ease the passage of University students to and from teaching buildings on New Elvet and the Lower Mountjoy site (and in the future Upper Mountjoy). The volume of foot traffic is undoubtedly a problem already, and the Forum has expressed concern about the added volume that will result from approval of the new teaching block on St Mary's field.

The Forum notes that the Council was conducting automated traffic counts on New Elvet, Church Street and Hallgarth Street on Friday 18th May. Has a count been made of pedestrian traffic on each side of each of these roads? Was it made before the numbers started to tail off with the start of exams? Where are the students coming from and going to; what routes are they using; what about their use of cycling or public transport? What level of pavement congestion does the Council deem to be appropriate?

There is concern that the needs of the students have been prioritised over the retention of parking spaces required by residents and the other users of the street mentioned above. What surveys of the use of the parking spaces have been undertaken; at all times of the day as well as the working day of the University? What percentage of demand will be unmet following the removal of the spaces? How will the parking spaces be managed (e.g. by time limitations) to ensure that the new provision will meet all the varied needs? The presentation did not even indicate how many spaces will be removed. Residents would like these facts and survey results to be made public to inform further consultation. The pavement congestion has come about entirely as a result of the expansion of the University, and it is not appropriate for mitigation to be paid for from council tax revenues: there should be a substantial contribution from the University, which might have been achieved through Section 106 contributions if the Council had taken a more robust approach to previous planning applications.

There will always be the limiting factor of the narrow north end of the street, and while the plans appeared to include widening the pavement right to the junction with New Elvet, the design of this area will need careful consideration, e.g. by repositioning the stop lines, sequencing the lights. If the stop line is to be set back by 40m, it is highly likely that pedestrians will seek to cross Church Street forward of the stop line as the road narrows. There will also need to be some measure of protection for cyclists travelling southwards, as the steepness of the hill means they are likely to face oncoming traffic here. Perhaps a different style of road surface would help to alert people, however they are travelling, that additional care and consideration is necessary in that area. The Forum's survey of pedestrian needs also identified the difficulty of crossing the north end of Hallgarth Street, which lacks any pedestrian crossing, and the narrowness of the pavement there was mentioned in our public consultation.

Notably missing from the presentation is any consideration of alternatives: perhaps a pedestrian route could be established away from Church Street, or some of the flows could be diverted to other routes, or the Churchyard could be used. Start times of lectures could be staggered to halve the peak flows. While this may present a timetabling headache, with the aid of modern software it is surely easier than trying to accommodate yet more students on Church Street.

In conclusion this proposal needs further consideration, consultation with residents and with the police. In its present form it is not acceptable.

Roger Cornwell  
Chair, Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum