

DURHAM CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING FORUM



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Copied to Durham County Council

Response to the University's Public Consultation April/May 2018

The Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum presents a response to Durham University's recent consultation on plans for the Mountjoy and South Road locations. These cover:

1. the new Mathematical Sciences and Computer Science Building, Upper Mountjoy
2. Hollingside Lane improvements, Upper Mountjoy
3. South Road Improvements

A separate response on Church Street will be sent to the Council, copied to the University. This response focuses on generic and key issues. We will of course also be responding in detail to any future planning applications covering these topics. It should be noted that Our Neighbourhood Plan has completed its Regulation 14 consultation and we are currently assessing the comments received and revising the Plan. Our response is made in the light of the amendments we will be making to the Plan.

The expansion of the University at the rate currently proposed is a significant threat to the capacity of the City and to its population balance. A pause in these plans is needed so that the University can gain a full understanding of the potential problems and produce ways to avoid or ameliorate them. The University's plans need to provide real benefits to the long-term resident population as well as being of business value to the University. The incremental effects of the University's expansion are hidden by their piecemeal approach to revealing their plans. A **detailed** master plan (not a business plan) for the University's proposed expansion across the whole City is required before further planning applications are made. This plan needs to be made publicly available. This master plan should include a traffic management plan, jointly with Durham County Council, that puts the needs of the long-term resident population at the forefront. The University's expansion is of such magnitude and significance that the master plan should be subjected to a strategic environmental assessment.

New University buildings should be of high quality design that is sympathetic to the heritage and green setting of the City, and result in buildings in which both the University and the City can take pride. Developments should be environmentally assessed, and be compatible with the University's published commitments to environmental sustainability, the minimisation of carbon emissions, and the protection of bio-diversity. Proposed, and recently agreed, developments will result in significant loss of green spaces and green assets, especially trees. Compensatory provision of

green assets of an equivalent or better quality elsewhere on the University estate, or in the City, is required.

The new Mathematical Sciences and Computer Science Building will result in a significant loss of green space. Details of what will happen in a knock on effect to the existing buildings for these disciplines on Lower Mountjoy is needed. The design of the building gives the impression of an all-purpose shell that could be found wrapped round any large enterprise such as a call centre or an administration centre. It does not proclaim the importance of mathematics and computer science either in the past or in the future and as such is disappointing. It needs to provide an inspirational experience for young people to encourage interest in the subjects, and have facilities that give a genuine opportunity for students and teaching staff to reach out to the community and to benefit themselves from such inter-reactions. Whilst BREEAM 'Excellent' is the sustainability standard required, it is difficult to see how this building would achieve it unless its energy footprint approaches neutral, and also its transport requirements respect the transport hierarchy of pedestrian, cycling and public transport users in that order. The role of innovative energy sources and energy sharing / generating schemes across the whole of the Mountjoy site has not been exploited.

The new car park of up to 250 spaces at Upper Mountjoy is to replace parking spaces lost elsewhere by future developments. However, no details of these future losses are provided so the justification for the new provision is not clear. University travel survey figures show no change in the proportion of staff driving to work over the period 2008 to 2014. The University must put in place an adequate travel plan which delivers a significant reduction in commuting by car, and therefore an overall reduction in parking spaces required. County Council measures to prevent the overspill of car parking onto neighbouring streets will also be required. Mitigation measures / barrier arrangements to protect biodiversity in Great High Wood in close juxtaposition to the car park are required. A highway engineer's evaluation is needed of the impact of increased traffic flow through the upper Mountjoy site to the Hollingside Lane junction with South Road and the Mountjoy junction with the A177. Details are needed of the traffic management arrangements to be put in hand to control traffic movement in relation to the new building, the new car-park, and the proposed through-way. While the provision of a footway on Hollingside Lane is welcomed, it is unlikely to be adequate mitigation for the effect of the additional traffic on a lane which currently provides a quiet access route for pedestrians and cyclists.

The provision of new footpaths on the University estate is welcomed. However, hard facts are needed about the number of trees to be felled, the effect on habitats, and the mitigation measures to be used, and the visual impact. Part of the route includes steps which are a barrier to wheelchair users and to cyclists. Advice from accessibility groups, e.g. the Durham City Access for All Group, should be sought. Paths on the University site are used by students, staff, visitors and members of the public. A wide range of mobility and visual abilities need to be accommodated. Matching provision on the west side of South Road is also necessary via an off-road route down between Trevelyan College, St Mary's and Teikyo, emerging by the new teaching block. Whilst pedestrians have been catered for, there is no capacity provided for cyclists or public transport users. Provision of segregated paths for pedestrians and cyclists are preferred if they can be provided without significant loss of green assets. Provision must be made for the opportunity to provide a continuous loop through the site (and to other University developments across the City) for a future public transport service, preferably for an electric bus service which the University should help to plan and support.

Roger Cornwell
Chair, Durham City Neighbourhood Planning Forum