

From: John Niven

Sent: 13 February 2020 21:15

To: Spatial Policy

Subject: Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

Dear Durham County Council,

As a recently arrived (October 2019) Durham City centre resident, I have read with great interest the draft Durham City Neighbour Plan and I would congratulate all those who have contributed to its preparation.

I realise that the plan has been a number of years in the preparation and from my knowledge of the city most, if not all the issues which affect this most loved and globally important place, would seem to have been noted and addressed within the plan framework.

Unless I have missed it however, the Plan on its own, does not propose any specific actions to deal with current identified problems or shortcomings within the plan area, but I understand that the D C N Plan Working Party has prepared a considered follow-up document 'Looking Forward : Durham as a Creative and Sustainable City' which may go some way towards providing an 'action plan'. I have yet to have sight of this document but I am hopeful that it will include some serious proposals to actively deal with those aspects which the Plan identified as requiring change, improvement or urgent attention.

For what it may be worth, I would like to submit a request to the County Council, the Durham City Parish Council and any other authority who may have an interest or jurisdiction, to address, in whatever way, and by whatever means they can, what I consider to be a very real blight on current living conditions in the City centre and a serious threat to its future well-being if left as it is. This relates to the numbers and type of motorised vehicle traffic using and passing through the city centre, particularly during a typical working day.

Whilst I have only been living in the City centre [*address redacted*] for a few months, I have been coming to the city very regularly to visit family who live nearby, for the past 5 years and have noticed a significant increase in vehicle numbers, with the attendant increase in all the known health and environmental problems, in that period.

Ironically, whilst I have the benefit of living in one of the many attractive residential locations in the city, overlooking the river alongside a no-through road, this area has become a recent replacement car park for The Sands car park, which the County Council removed to provide a site for their new offices, and the area has now joined the ranks of other areas in the city, suffering from the negative effects of too much motorised traffic.

I do not however wish to dwell on my local situation (which the new County Hall site hoardings imply will be 'sorted' by the end of next year) but to request your urgent consideration of how the excessive levels of city centre traffic could be reduced, with reference to what was achieved in Durham City centre some 40 years ago.

This was the Durham City Pedestrianisation Scheme, which enabled the removal of almost all through motorised traffic from the Market Place and the surrounding medieval streets, and the

pedestrianisation of the area, through a multi-agency exercise in which I was closely involved as a conservation architect employed by the then City of Durham Council.

Whilst the implementation of this scheme was not without some resistance at the time, mainly on the part of some of the city centre business owners, I cannot imagine that any sensible person would suggest today that it would be good to let motorised traffic return to these particular streets, with the response to the Neighbourhood Plan consultation confirming a desire, by definition, to reduce the volume of vehicle traffic in all the other streets within in the city centre.

To put the current levels of vehicle traffic in a historical context, it is perhaps interesting to note, that the 'A Plan for Durham' prepared by Thomas Sharp in 1944, which led to the pedestrianisation scheme, suggested that the numbers of vehicles going through the Market Place at that time, had, at an average of 5,000 during a 16 hour day reached 'an almost intolerable pitch of congestion', where this is only just over 1/10th of the number of vehicles crossing Milburngate Bridge every day in the 2015 survey, which has no doubt increased further since.

I therefore support the relevant aim of the Neighbourhood Plan to reduce or even eliminate the most negative effects of excessive numbers of motorised vehicles and strongly encourage the earlier implementation of actions to achieve this; to make the city centre safer, healthier and more attractive for all users, together with compensatory improvement of facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users - an early application for a piece of Boris's Bus and Cycle billions, could be great start.

I look forward to the early adoption of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan and to seeing the early implementation of its recommendations, to help reverse the environmental deterioration which has been allowed to occur in recent years, mainly by over-development, and to restore the City of Durham to its proper place as one of the most attractive and important historic cities in Europe.

Yours sincerely,

John A. G. Niven, B. Arch. (Hons), M.Sc. (Environmental Conservation) Registered Architect.