

Business School DM/22/01005/FPA Transport Statement

The main focus of the transport statement is in demonstrating that the motor vehicle traffic generated by the site as the Durham University Business School will be less than that expected for the County Council HQ. This is a reasonable approach for a change of use application. Notwithstanding the Trust's reservations noted below, the consultants appear to demonstrate that the motor traffic impact will be reduced. Significantly, they neglect to consider whether there will be additional impact, particularly from pedestrian traffic. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Durham City has identified the need for investment in walking routes, and this is a material consideration. Other major applications from the University, such as the Teaching and Learning Centre, have included multi-modal analysis.

Car trip generation

The use of TRICS data to estimate trip generation is standard practice, but validity of the method depends on the sites selected. There are three factors which each might overstate the reduction in car traffic:

- The consultants have included “Edge of Centre” as well as “City Centre” sites in the analysis. Edge of Centre office development would be expected to have a higher car trip generation rate, whereas the difference between Edge of Centre and City Centre trips for educational sites may be less pronounced.
- Most of the office sites selected in the TRICS database had no Travel Plan in operation, whereas the County Council HQ had permission granted conditional on a Travel Plan.
- The Business School may not be a typical HE building in terms of car traffic, as there are more mature students studying for MBAs.

Pedestrian traffic

Figure 3 shows the walking times from the site. The main University campus at Lower Mountjoy is shown as being 20-25 minutes walk from the site, and substantial amounts of university accommodation, such as the hill colleges, are even further removed. It is not clear from the application how much teaching will be split between the different sites: in many subjects the Teaching and Learning Centre on South Road is used for larger lectures. Although car traffic may be reduced by the change of use, there is likely to be a marked increase in foot traffic. Pedestrian flows along South Street may be replaced by additional traffic along New Elvet and Church Street, both of which suffer from severe pedestrian congestion at peak times and have been identified for improvement in the LCWIP.

The Transport Statement offers no analysis of these potential flows, and section 2.3 on “Existing pedestrian and cycle facilities” merely notes the existence of footways and paths, and does not assess the quality. The Trust would like to see the footway widths evaluated with respect to the Transport for London guidance on pedestrian flow rates. The evidence presented does not rule out the possibility of severe cumulative impact on the highway network.

Cycle access and parking

The analysis of cycle accessibility, repeated also in the Travel Plan, is superficial. Any Transport Statement which mentions connections from Darlington and Hartlepool to Consett and South Shields, and even Barrow-in-Furness, without scrutiny of realistic local journeys cannot be taken seriously. The NCN 14 route is well-known to be of very poor quality in Durham city centre, with sections where cyclists have to dismount (including the one-way part of Freemans Place near to the site) and one of the steepest hills in the city, Redhills Lane. The excerpt from the council's cycle map includes every small scrap of cycling infrastructure, including a bus lane on the busy A690, but it is clear there is no coherent network. In particular, there is not adequate cycle provision from the

site to the main University campus or many of the colleges. While some cyclists will use the ordinary road network, the lack of a dedicated network will substantially reduce the numbers of people likely to cycle. As for walking, the analysis pays no attention to quality. The new DfT guidance cited by the Transport Statement, LTN 1/20, includes assessment methodologies for links and junctions. Without such analysis, Figure 4, the map of cycle accessibility, is worthless.

The Travel Plan notes that there are 50 cycle parking spaces. The building is said to be able to accommodate 2,300 students and staff. As around 5.6% currently cycle to the University, and the Travel Plan aims to increase that to 7% by 2025, a total of 160 spaces would appear to be needed if the building is ever fully-occupied. The Trust would like a condition to be applied to identify space for additional cycle parking spaces, and to install these in the future if required.

Car parking

Access by public transport is good, and the Trust accepts the consultants' position that the level of car parking provided will be sufficient.

It is unclear whether Durham County Council will continue in ownership of the adjacent surface car park, or whether it will be managed by the University as part of the latter's provision. It appears from the University's Travel Plan ambitions that its overall car parking provision will soon exceed that required to accommodate staff. A reduction in the car parking available for University use across the estate, combined with charging for permits or use, would be appropriate. The Trust suggests that the Travel Plan and the annual survey should be updated to reflect the opportunities to reduce travel demand through working from home, and a condition to this effect could be applied if planning permission is granted.

Travel Plan

The Trust highly approves of the level of ambition in reducing single-occupancy car use shown in the overarching Durham University Integrated Sustainable Travel Plan (ISTP), which derives its targets for transport from the UK's carbon emissions reductions targets. The County Council should be requiring similar targets from all travel plans submitted with planning applications. The Trust notes that the targets might need to be reformulated now that more people are working from home, because in this context a simple percentage of employees and students travelling by car is not enough to determine the progress in reducing emissions.

The Travel Plan for the site only includes promotional and training measures to increase cycling, and does not address the top three factors suggested by the University's own Travel Plan survey as being the most effective for encouraging people to cycle, namely cycleway improvements, traffic-free cycle routes, and road safety improvements (see ISTP, Figure 12, p. 35).

The discounted public transport ticket scheme is excellent, but the University should consider extending the scheme to cover the region's other main bus operator, Go North-East.

Overall, the University's Travel Plan shows a well-evidenced level of ambition, and includes many practical and effective measures, especially regarding bus travel. More work is needed on management of car parking, and on aspects outside the University's direct control, such as the walking and cycling infrastructure.