



Planning - Central/East
Planning Development (Central/East)
PO Box 616
Durham
DH1 9HY

27 May 2014

For the attention of Mr Christopher Baxter, case officer.

Dear Mr Baxter,

Re: PLANNING APPLICATION NO DM/14/00921/FPA

Erection of student accommodation for 198 units: land at Magdalene Heights, old scrap yard, Gilesgate, Durham.

I am writing on behalf of the Durham University Bicycle User Group (DBUG), which has a membership of around 300 cyclists drawn from staff and students based in Durham.

Cycle Parking Provision

We are very supportive of the quantity of cycle parking (1 place for every 2 students) proposed for the above development, but note the response of John McGargill, the council's Highways Development Manager in which he expresses a preference for a reduction to 20% (1 place for every 5 students).

He is right to suggest that the cycle parking should be located conveniently round the front of the buildings and away from service vehicle access. We would also support the request for secure, covered cycle parking of a high quality. On the quantity, however, we would prefer that the developer's proposal of 100 places be accepted. The 20% figure (40 places) favoured by Mr McGargill is the Council's **minimum** requirement for student housing, to be secure covered spaces for residents. The latest Non-Residential Parking policy approved by Cabinet earlier this month clarifies the previous 2003 policy with respect to visitor parking, and so a further 1 cycle parking place per 20 students would be required for short-term parking for visitors, giving a total in this case of 50 places minimum.

We have argued before that the Council's cycle parking policy, dating from 2003, is very much out of date, and it is lamentable that it was not revised along with the rest of the policy earlier this month. As far as we know there was no consultation on the policy review except with developers, so cycling organisations and other sustainable transport bodies had no opportunity to comment on it.

The 20% minimum was set in 2003, and since then Durham University has tightened up considerably on use of motor vehicles by students. Students are no longer granted permits for car parking on University land except in very limited circumstances. There has been a growth in the number of students cycling and so it is appropriate to review the requirement and increase it.

Even if we accepted the 20% minimum from the Council policy, you have to ask in what circumstances a higher level of provision would be appropriate. The proposed development would be car-free, and although convenient for the education school is rather further from the main university campus, most of the colleges, and bus routes than most current student housing. These reasons would suggest that a higher level of provision would be appropriate.

We would therefore support the original proposal of 100 places, and at the very least the provision should be higher than the 50 places (not 40) which would be the minimum required by Council policy.

Access to the site

It is likely that the main access to the site for people cycling and walking would be via the footway along the A690 which it is proposed would be widened to 3.0m. We note that the Police have suggested provision of a guard rail along the length of this path. In our experience new guard rails these days tend to be set some way back from the road. Guard rails also reduce the effective safe width for cycling of any path which they protect.

The width proposed, of 3.0m, does not meet best practice for a shared use pedestrian/cycle path. The DfT recommended minimum for pedestrians alone is 2.4m. In guidance published recently by the Space For Cycling campaign (see <http://www.makingspaceforcycling.org/MakingSpaceForCycling.pdf>), a minimum of 2.5m is suggested for bidirectional fully-segregated cycle routes (page 17), but these would be not intended to be shared with pedestrians. For paths shared by pedestrians and cyclists, a minimum of 5m is recommended (on page 24).

There may not be sufficient space to provide 5m width along the full stretch, but if this can be done (even if this involves land purchase) we would urge that it should be pursued. The risk of not providing adequate width is that some cyclists might seek to avoid pedestrians by using the main carriageway of the A690. Part of this section has a limit of 70mph and could therefore be very hazardous, and with a guard rail alongside there would be no means by which a cyclist could escape if there was the need.

The same argument applies to the design of the Gilesgate roundabout and access to the proposed shared-use path along the north side of the A690 towards the development: this needs to be well-designed to avoid the risk of cyclists using the main carriageway by mistake or choosing it by preference over poor facilities. Cyclists travelling to the development might enter the Gilesgate roundabout by any of the arms of road, though the majority would be travelling from town or from the Leazes Road campus. Access off the roundabout and onto the shared-use path needs to be provided (there is currently a guard rail in the way). This needs to be well-designed, clearly signed and with a flush surface. There must not be a kerb with an upstand. There should also be provision for access to the same path from Leazes Lane.

The whole Gilesgate roundabout is problematic for cyclists. There is some off-road provision round the south side of the roundabout, but this is disjointed and the network is incomplete. For many of the possible journey requirements a cyclist has no choice but to use the main roundabout. Large roundabouts are particularly dangerous for cyclists. We would urge that the Council consult with cyclists and come up with a master-plan for the redesign of the roundabout to accommodate safe priority routes for cyclists connected to new or existing cycle routes. We

are not convinced that the developer has demonstrated that there is good enough access to the accommodation site at present with so little pedestrian and cycle provision in the vicinity.

The developer mentions the possible use by cyclists of the footbridge over the A690. The parapet will probably need raising, as the minimum recommended for cycle bridges is 1400mm.

If the footbridge is used by cyclists, it would also be useful to permit contraflow cycling along Station Lane, which is currently one way. Consideration would need to be given as to how to handle such traffic at the roundabout end of the road.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Phillips
(on behalf of Durham University Bicycle User Group)