



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

1st June 2014

For the attention of Mr Peter Herbert, case officer.
peter.herbert@durham.gov.uk

Dear Mr Herbert,

Re: PLANNING APPLICATION NO DM/14/01268/RM

Reserved matters application in regard to northern access road pursuant to planning permission CMA/4/83 (Mount Oswald), by Banks Property Development Ltd.

I write in connection with the above planning application on behalf of Durham University Bicycle User Group (DBUG). We are familiar with the masterplan for the Mount Oswald site but have concerns about the level of cycling provision planned for the area. In particular the current application for the access road design has no provision for cycling and poor pedestrian provision. This conflicts with the picture painted in the original application documents of a development where cycling and walking would be encouraged.

We therefore wish to comment on the access road in particular, and on the need for a good cycling and pedestrian network to be planned, around which the development of the various zones may be designed.

We understand that the access road is needed in order to start work on the construction of the houses, and that certain features will only be finished once the construction work is completed, to avoid them being damaged by construction traffic. But it appears that the application covers the finished road design. We are therefore working on the assumption that now is the proper time to comment on anything which we think should be changed as far as the final road design is concerned.

Access road and walking

The access road plans show a 1.8m footway along the northern side of the road separated from the road by a grass verge, and on the southern side a block-paved footway immediately adjacent to the

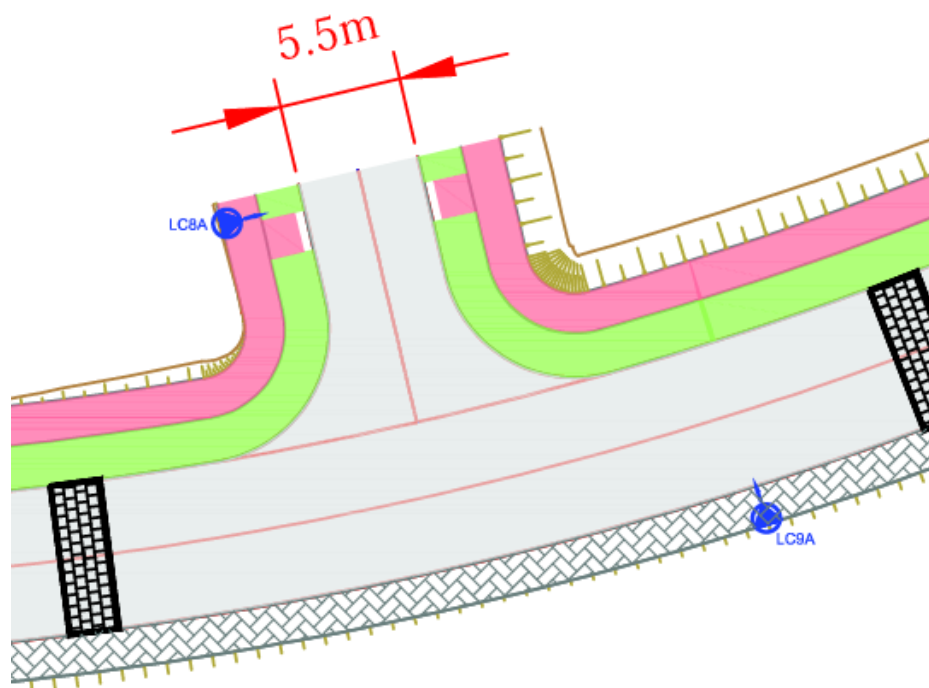
road, also 1.8m wide.

While there is no absolute minimum footway width requirement in law, the Department for Transport *Manual for Streets* (2007) recommends a minimum clear width (i.e. unobstructed by street furniture) of 2m for footways (para 6.3.22) for lightly used streets, such as those with a purely residential function. The 2m figure should be increased alongside busier roads (e.g. non-residential) and also increased if there is high pedestrian flow. Note these widths are for dedicated footways, not shared-use with cyclists.

The access road is likely to have high pedestrian flow because of the accommodation for 1000 students which is proposed. Therefore we would suggest that the footways be increased in width from the 1.8m shown in the plans to something more generous (e.g. 2.4m).

Pedestrian facilities at junctions

At the side road leading north towards the proposed student accommodation the junction detail is shown as follows:

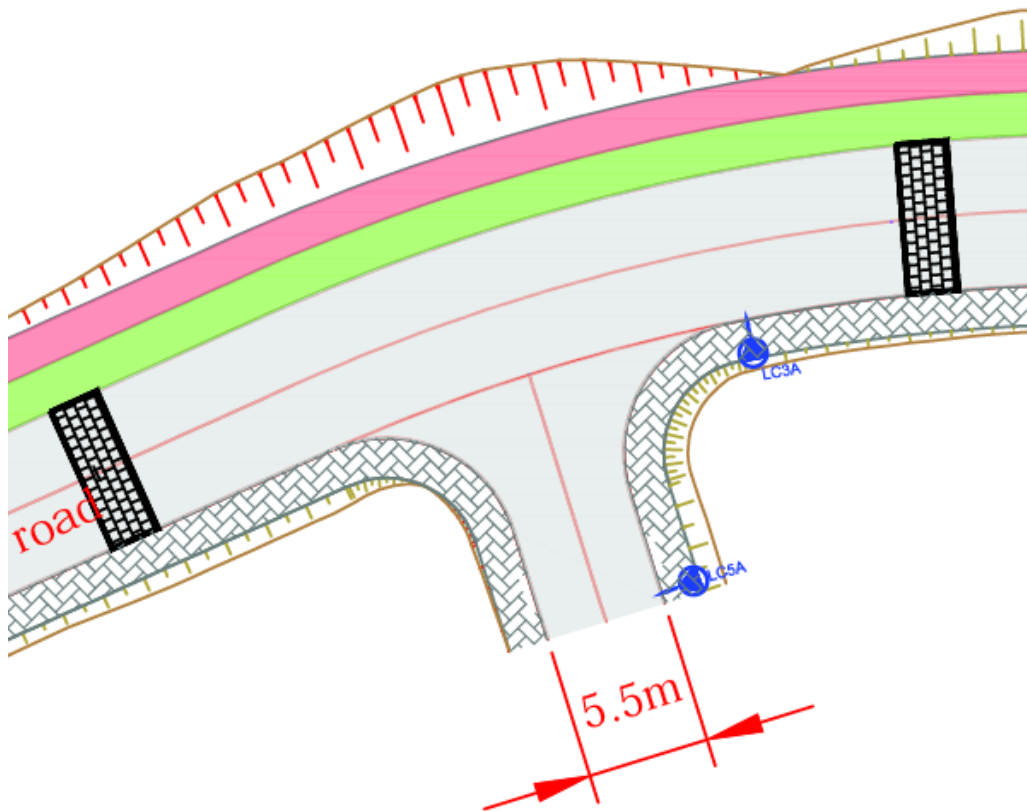


People walking along the footway shown in pink will have to deviate considerably from the desire line across the mouth of the side road. The route should be as near as possible in a straight line. If the crossing has to be set back for some reason, the approaches should head towards it gradually with the grass verge widening.

Tightening the corner radii will reduce speeds of motorists using the junction and thereby make pedestrians safer. The radii shown in the diagram are between 5 and 6 metres. A tight radius of as little as 1m is recommended by sustainable transport consultants (e.g. Phil Jones Associates, Cycle Infrastructure Design training course). There should preferably be some form of junction treatment such as a raised table. Indeed, more progressive councils are designing side roads so that the pavement goes straight across, giving a strong visual indication to the motorist that pedestrians have the right of way. A level pavement across the junction particularly benefits parents with buggies and users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

The other junctions with side roads could do with similar treatment. On the south side the footway is shown paved with blocking and next to the carriageway, but again corner radii should be tightened and a level surface for pedestrians could be provided. This sort of feature helps to

regulate speed of drivers through the estate by designing-in low speeds. This is far cheaper and more effective than subsequent speed enforcement.



The junction pictured above leads to the medical centre and a car park possibly for the offices pictured alongside. The verge is shown continuous on the north side, but there should be breaks in the grass verge to provide for pedestrians to reach the kerb to cross the road on each side of the junction.

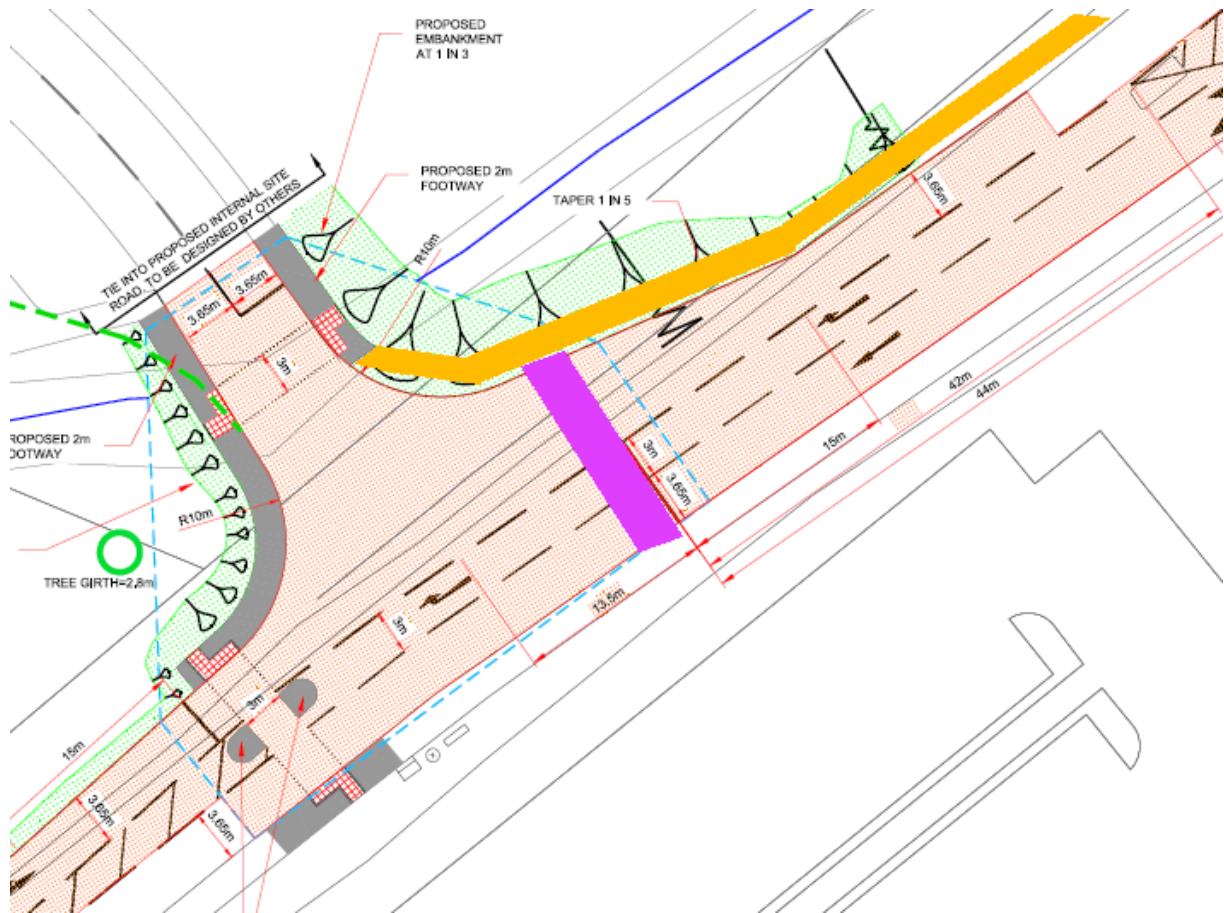
At the junction with the A177 the facilities proposed for pedestrians are very poor. Pedestrians walking along the north side of the access road (for example those walking from the student accommodation) would have to first cross the access road at the lights, go round the corner and cross the A177 before turning back towards the University. We understand from the Planning Statement submitted by the developer (paragraph 2.10) that the outline planning permission which established the access point on the A177 had the footway in a different place but this was changed at the request of Highways officers. Was this in consideration of free traffic flow, or of pedestrian convenience, or for some other reason?

Why is there not a third pedestrian crossing? If there can only be two crossings, surely it would be better to omit the A177 crossing that is shown and instead cross the A177 the other side of the access road (added in purple on the excerpt below) where more of the potential users are likely to want to go?

Perhaps the reason no crossing is provided is the 1:5 taper which is probably to help buses turning towards Durham out of the access road. Is this strictly necessary? It may not even be in the right place for buses (see later section). Wide junction mouths are not good for cycling safety either.

The other big omission is that of a pedestrian footway on the north-west side of the A177 heading towards the town centre (added in orange on the excerpt below). There is no footway at present, but surely one should be provided: we have too many roads in Durham with pavements only on one side as it is. There might be a problem extending a footway past Van Mildert College but it should at least be possible to provide one as far as the traffic lights for the Park & Ride, where a pedestrian crossing of the road could be incorporated (this might also obviate the need for three crossings at

the access road junction). Providing a footway might require some of the former golf course land to give sufficient width.



Cycling facilities in the Mount Oswald estate

Section 4 of the National Planning Policy Framework covers 'Promoting sustainable transport'. Key points include:

- actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling (para 17)

- give priority to pedestrian and cycle movements (para 35)

- create safe and secure layouts which minimise conflicts between traffic and cyclists or pedestrians, avoiding street clutter and where appropriate establishing home zones (para 35)

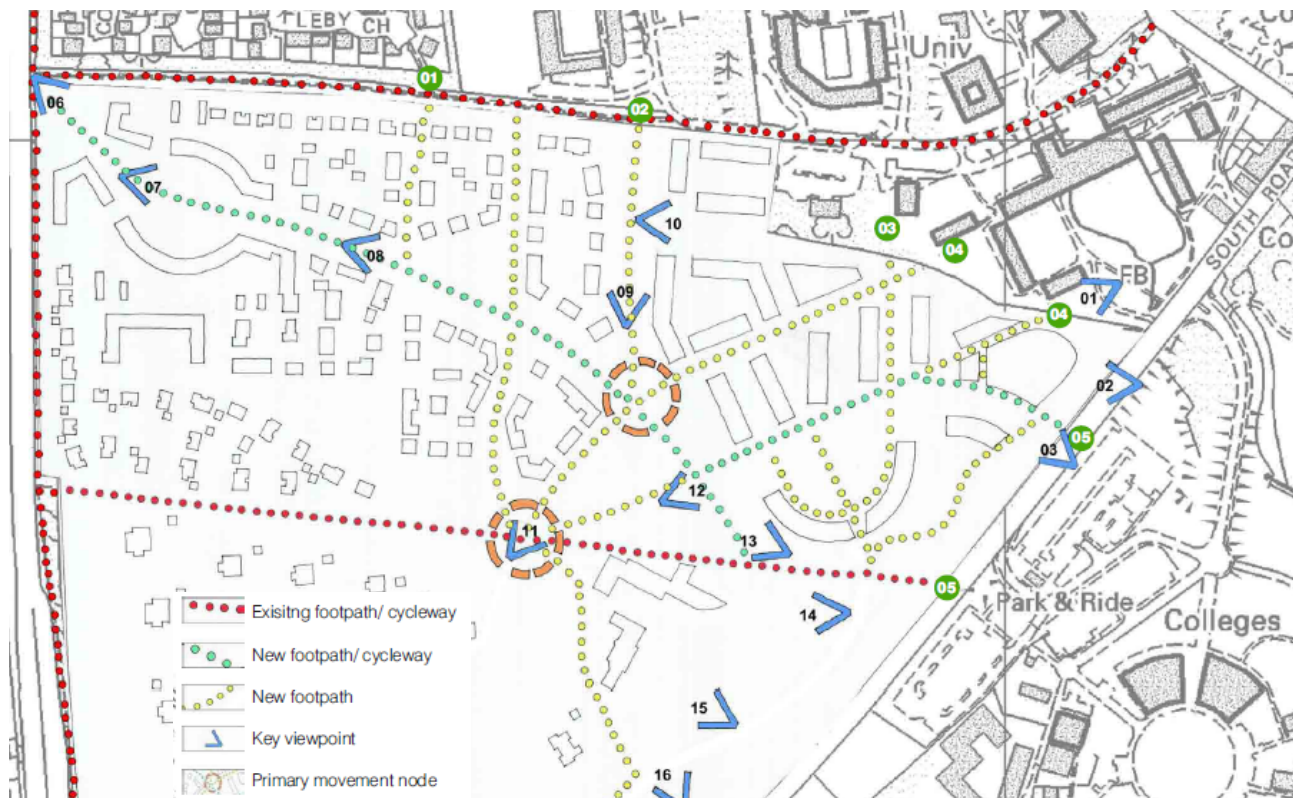
As this is a new development, it should be practical to accommodate all these requirements.

Firstly, it is clear from the planning application that along this road no facilities are proposed for cycling, and nor is there any provision at the A177 junction. The footways are of insufficient width to be shared use with pedestrians (even if that were desirable) and there are no other facilities apart from the main carriageway.

To make the fullest possible use of cycling, space must be devoted to safe, direct and attractive cycling routes. There is a much greater consciousness now among experts that the poor quality provision of the last few decades is never going to create the mass take-up of cycling as seen in countries like Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. Instead we need low speeds in local streets, coupled with shortcuts and 'filtered permeability' for cycling and walking. On primary and secondary routes fully segregated provision is necessary, in other words three networks, for motor traffic, cycle traffic and walking.

The development overview diagrams for the Mount Oswald site look promising where it comes to the local residential streets. In some cases curvy roads (which reduce forward sight-lines) will keep the traffic speeds down, making people feel more safe. There are many paths shown, which if properly designed would benefit cycling permeability as well as walking, though it falls short of a comprehensive network as there are notable gaps in places. There is a linear park through part of the land, and connections to existing footpaths and bridleways.

However, the plans shown at the public exhibition prior to the granting of the outline planning permission actually show few routes for cycling. On the excerpt below the blue dotted lines are footpath/cycleway and the green dotted lines are for walking only.



We have not shown the southern part of the plan, containing the first phase of development for which full planning permission was sought in January 2014, as there are no cycling routes shown there at all: only a rather indirect walking route.

The blue dotted line linking to the A177 on the plan above is actually on the line of the access road that is the object of this planning application. It is noticeable that the following routes likely to be required for cycling are not provided:

- linking the southern neighbourhood to the northern part of the development
- access to the A177 (because cycling provision is not included in the access road)
- links to the Business School, various colleges, the Oriental Museum and onwards to Elvet Hill Road and the route into the city via Prebends Bridge.
- internal links within the estate to encourage cycling: these could be mostly via the roads if they are designed carefully.

In summary, a better cycling network should be developed at this early stage, before exact building positions are fixed and it is still possible to have an overview of the whole development. The network should provide good access throughout the development including linking to the first phase just north of the St Oswald's Drive estate. One of the council officers, during consultation for the phase 1 full planning application, requested that the new paths from that phase letting onto the rest

of the site be increased in width to 3m, so the need for a cycling route has been recognised by the Council. Now is the time to firm up how the rest of the network will connect, and to what standard it will be built, as the facilities are crucial to encouraging utility cycling rather than just outings for leisure.

The Mount Oswald network should exhibit best practice design for cycling, where cyclists can maintain momentum via routes which are gently curved and which have priority at road crossings. The longer-distance routes, where people would want to cycle faster, should be parallel to walking routes, not shared use. This can be reinforced by a distinctive surface and a slight change of level (e.g. by means of a 45° sloped kerb).

The *Manual for Streets* says:

If cycle tracks are provided they should be physically segregated from footways/footpaths if there is sufficient width available. (6.4.8)

The design speed for a cycle track would normally be 30 km/h (20 mph). (6.4.7)

The recent *Making Space for Cycling: a guide for new developments and street renewals* stipulates a 2.5m width for segregated cycle paths. Paths should be well drained and machine-laid.

As this is a green-field development, there is sufficient width available for high quality cycling provision, fitting with the stated aims of the developer for a high quality development overall.

The particular relevance to the access road application being considered now is:

- a segregated cycle route will need to parallel the access road, via a 2.5m width path which is not shared with pedestrians
- the access road needs to be designed with the intersections with the rest of the cycle network in mind.

During the construction phase a flat access road is desirable. Ideally the cycle network should have clear priority at any crossings, as the effort expended in stopping and starting makes cycling less attractive. This can be achieved on the level with the road if the cycle paths are built to meet the road on the level. The coloured surface of the cycle path can be continued across the road, with 'elephant foot' markings (likely to be approved from 2015) to make the route clear. Alternatively crossing tables could be added later after the construction traffic has finished, to allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross the roads at pavement level. Crossings level with the road would be better on the proposed bus route into the estate.

South Road (A177)

The main road towards the University science site is an important desire line for travel. Students and staff of the university are the most obvious prospective users of this route from the houses and student flats of the Mount Oswald development, but families with children will also be likely users as St Oswald's School on Church Street is one of the nearest primary schools.

At present the road has a 40mph speed limit from the junction with the A167 until the Park and Ride site, and 30mph thereafter, but this limit is often exceeded. There is sometimes a temporary speed indicator sign positioned part way down the hill within the 30mph stretch, and on one Saturday afternoon I observed it for a few minutes. Not one car was within the 30mph speed limit and several of them were exceeding 40mph.

The pavements are insufficient to take the volume of pedestrians when students are going to lectures or returning in the evening. There was a pedestrian fatality on this road a few years ago when a student stepped off the pavement. The volume of foot traffic makes the road more hazardous for cycling also: to allow for sudden pedestrian movements cyclists are obliged to give a wide berth, but on the long uphill stretch this puts them in conflict with cars escaping the city

centre. Students at the university who wish to cycle make complaints about South Road in the travel survey.

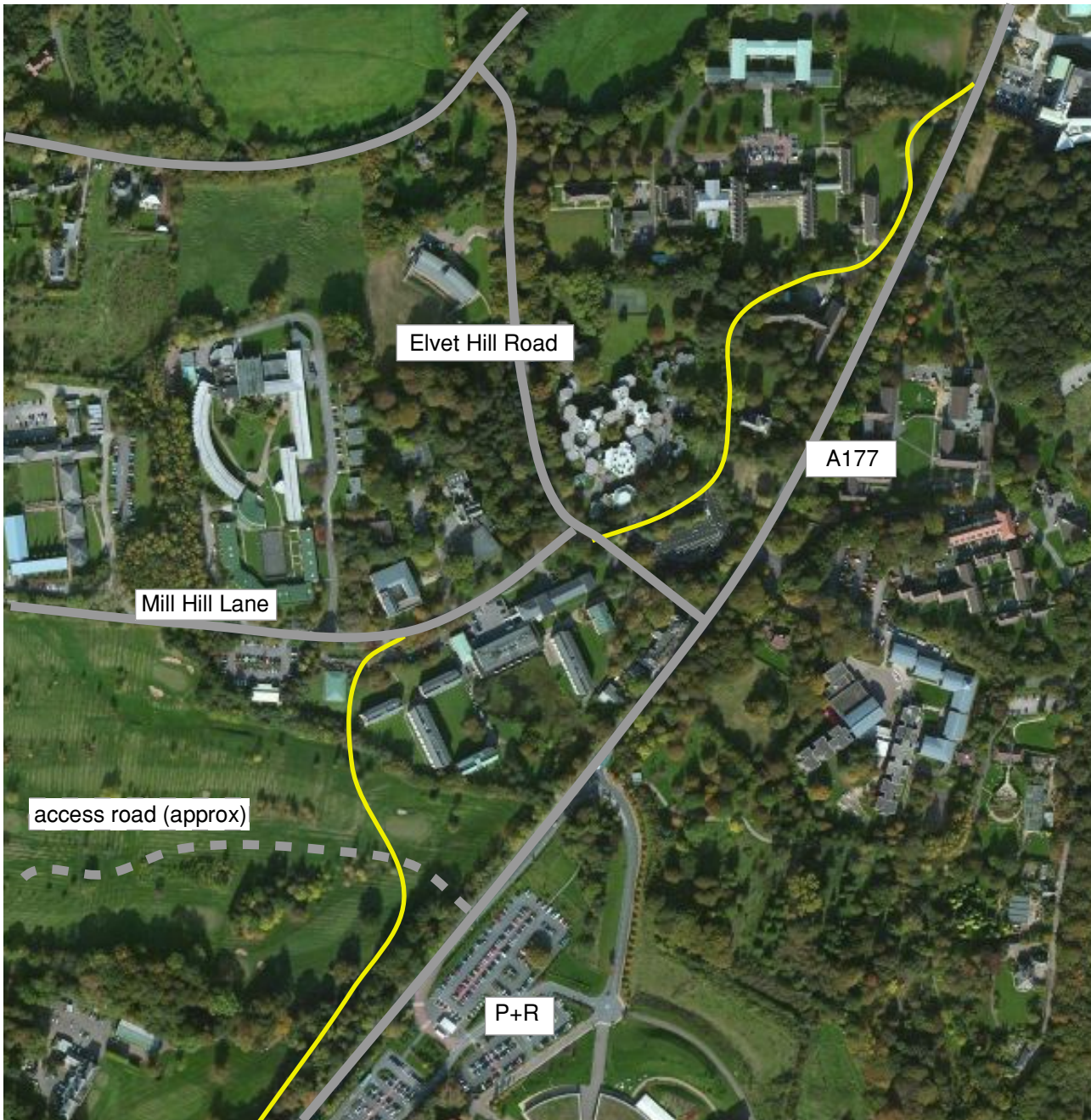
The speed of the road, risk from pedestrians, and lack of cycling facilities combine to make it far from a pleasant cycling environment. You cannot imagine parents wishing to cycle with their children to St Oswald's School along this route, or indeed cycle anywhere else that way for leisure.

The A167 was designated as a prospective cycle super route in the draft County Plan in 2012 and would form part of the Great North Cycleway. The stretch of the A177 from the A167 junction to the University's science site was not even designated as a secondary cycle route. It should be obvious to any transport planner that this is a key route, as the science site is the biggest destination for cycle traffic in the city at present.

The development of the Mount Oswald site represents a key opportunity which must not be missed. As the A177 is a major road it is essential that segregated cycle paths are provided along (or in parallel to) as much of its length as possible. Without doing a thorough survey we cannot say whether this could be done within the existing highway land. At certain points there may be width constraints, but the carriageway width is also quite generous in places and might be narrowed. If extra land or a different route is needed, this need must be identified as soon as possible, because the former golf course is the best source of land remaining. We hope it is not too late to require Section 106 contributions or similar, or contribution of land to provide a high quality segregated route to assist in meeting NPPF requirements for sustainable development of Mount Oswald.

As well as the potential longer-distance cycle traffic from the south via the A167, the cycle route must serve the people living on the existing St Oswald's Drive estate and the new neighbourhood to be built at the south end of Mount Oswald. The girls' school could be an important destination and should be served if possible. The development at the northern end of Mount Oswald, with its mixture of housing, student accommodation and possibly offices, and the existing university colleges nearby must be connected to the route. Ideally the route should reach as far as the New Inn junction where it would connect with a secondary route identified in the *Durham City Integrated Transport Approach* document (part of the proposed County Plan). It should be designed to facilitate a future extension along Church Street and New Elvet, serving St Oswald's Primary School, other university buildings (such as the student union) and the town centre.

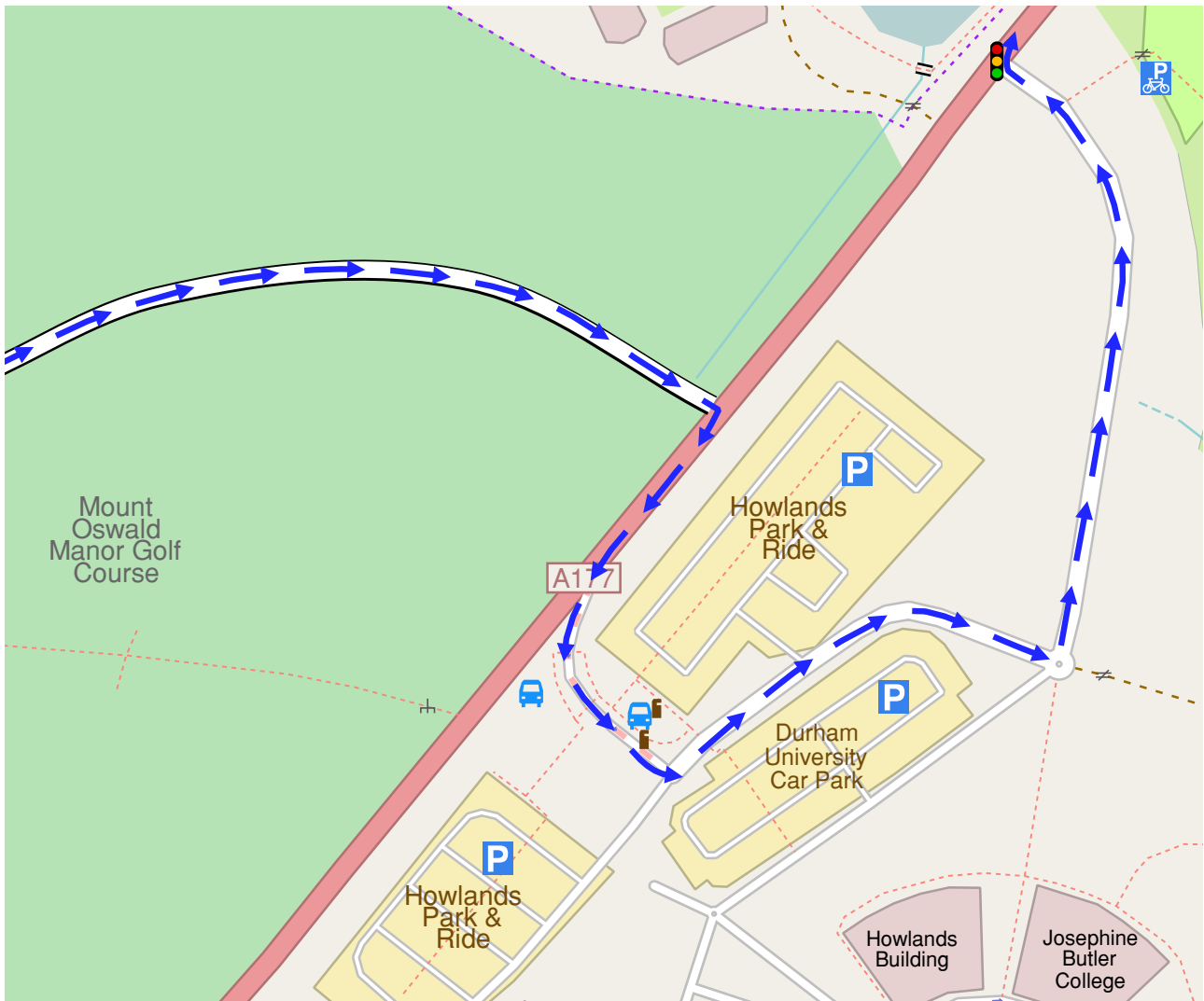
The section from Elvet Hill Road down to the New Inn could be problematic because of the height of the neighbouring land limiting the width available. The pavements are already narrow. An alternative might be to take a route opposite the end of Mill Hill Lane across University land down the side of Trevelyan College and the boundary between St Mary's College and Teikyo University's buildings. There may not be enough space to do this, and the University may be unwilling to see a public route created on this alignment. The route from the south along the A177 would have to connect to Mill Hill Lane close to Van Mildert College to achieve continuity. This option would however also connect nicely with the popular cycling route along the north edge of the Mount Oswald site. The route in yellow on the following satellite view shows one idea for this.



The Council should assess the potential options for forming an A177 cycling route as a matter of urgency, and ensure that as much as possible can be realised through the planning process for Mount Oswald.

Bus route

We have already remarked on the 1:5 taper at the access road junction with the A177, and questioned whether this is necessary. If its purpose is to aid buses turning out of the estate, then it may be in the wrong place. The plan proposed for the bus service to the new development involves extending the Park & Ride shuttle bus services which currently serve the Howlands Park & Ride site. It would be undesirable for the buses to pick up passengers at the Park & Ride car park and then to drive into the Mount Oswald estate, as this would delay users of the Park & Ride from getting into town. The bus will surely be picking up in the Mount Oswald estate before picking up at Howlands. The route would therefore be as shown below:



Thus the buses would be turning right out of the access road, not left.

We note that there are no bus stops shown on the access road. According to the DfT's 2007 *Manual for Streets* the footway width at bus stops should be a minimum of 3.0m wide. It would also be necessary to ensure that any cycle track provided passed well behind the passenger waiting area rather than cyclists being routed between the bus and the footway. These considerations should be taken into account in a revised application, or a condition imposed upon the developer to provide these facilities at the conclusion of the works subject to the design being approved by the Planning Authority.

Conclusion

- Cycling provision has not been considered adequately in this application, nor in the outline planning permission already granted.
- The Council should identify and safeguard a segregated cycle route along the A177 as a matter of urgency, and seek to realise as much of the route as possible through the planning process for Mount Oswald. Such a route would have to cross the proposed access road and they should be designed together.
- High quality cycling routes which are segregated, not shared with pedestrians, need to be planned, to connect all parts of the new development and the surrounding area, and the access road should be redesigned to take the cycle network into account.
- The access road should give priority to pedestrian and cycle crossing points, with corner

radii reduced to contain speeds. Wider footways should be provided throughout.

- The junction with the A177 needs rethinking, particularly how cycling and walking is to be made safe and convenient. A footway on the north-west side of the A177 should be provided at least as far as the Park & Ride junction.

Only with such changes will the site be fulfilling its potential as a sustainable development in accordance with NPPF.

If this application is to be decided by councillors, please take this as notice that DBUG would like to send a representative to speak at that Planning Committee meeting. Please let us know as soon as possible the date of the meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Phillips
(on behalf of DBUG)