



Planning - Central/East
Planning Development (Central/East)
PO Box 616
Durham
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1 June 2014

For the attention of Mr Henry Jones, case officer.
henry.jones@durham.gov.uk

Dear Mr Jones,

Re: PLANNING APPLICATION NO CE/13/01667/FPA

Conversion and extension of Neville House and demolition and replacement of Sheraton House to form student accommodation development comprising a total of 418 no. beds and associated works and landscaping.

Thank you for notifying us of the revised application submitted by the developer.

Occupancy mix

The original planning application was for accommodation for 424 students. The revision commits to accommodating a mixture of residents. The covering letter sets this out as:

50% undergraduates
30% postgraduates
20% Fellows, Research Students and staff

It is not defined what is meant by 'Research Students'. If this term includes any postgraduate student studying for a research degree rather than a taught course then the conditions could be satisfied with the mix of occupants being 100% students and with no fellows or staff. This definition should be clarified.

Furthermore, page 4 of the Noise Management Plan Rev C states that only 10% of the occupants will be fellows, research students and staff. The Planning Committee should be clear about what is actually permitted.

Parking policy

Since the original application was entered, the Council has adopted a new policy for non-residential parking requirements. The previous policy, Durham County Council Accessibility & Parking Guidelines (referred to hereafter as DCCAPG) was issued in 2003.

The Council Cabinet received a report in July 2013 proposing revisions to the car parking policy for residential developments, placing an obligation on developers to provide a minimum number of car parking spaces rather than a maximum. The report did not touch on cycle parking for residential developments so presumably DCCAPG still applies for cycle parking.

In May 2014 a revision of the non-residential parking policy was adopted. Non-residential properties include student accommodation blocks.

As we explained in our previous response, DCCAPG was ambiguous in relation to cycle parking spaces for student accommodation, apparently requiring 1 place per 5 students and a 1:2 ratio between secure storage for residents and cycle parking spaces for visitors. We suggested that best practice would now be 1 secure covered space per 2 students. For the proposed development that would have worked out as a total of 212 spaces.

The revised planning application has reduced the number of cycle parking spaces by one to 84 spaces, shadowing the reduction in total occupancy of the accommodation from 424 to 418 persons. In other words, this is still only offering a 1 in 5 ratio.

The revised non-residential parking policy requires 1 place per 5 students for residents as before, and clarifies the visitor requirement as being 1 place per 20 students. Overall this works out at one place per 4 students, in a mixture of secure, covered spaces for residents and potentially uncovered, open racks for visitors. Thus if we apply the new policy, there is a shortfall of 21 spaces.

However, the commitment to devote 20% of the accommodation to 'fellows, research students and staff' changes things. Accommodation for non-students would fall under the residential policy, revised in 2013 for car parking but with the cycle parking requirements from DCCAPG still in force. This means that potentially 84 of the residential units would be occupied by non-students.

The residential cycle parking policy of DCCAPG requires 'one easily accessible secure space per dwelling unit' (Table 2, p. 27) and therefore our interpretation of council policies suggests the following provision is required as a minimum:

Category	Number of occupants	Cycle parking required
Fellows, Research Students and Staff (20%)	84	84 secure spaces
Postgraduates and undergraduates	334	67 enclosed covered spaces 17 short stay spaces
TOTALS	418	168

So applying the current policies, there is a shortfall altogether of 84 spaces.

DBUG still maintains that a ratio of 1 cycle parking space per 2 students is preferable, especially given that there is no public transport available from the site to the main university locations. If this cannot be provided at the outset, the Council should obtain a legally-enforceable commitment from the developer to provide additional cycle parking if surveys

indicate heavy use of the initial provision. But in any case the minimum required by current policies, that is 168 places, should be provided at the outset.

The reallocation of up to 20% of the accommodation to staff potentially affects the car parking provision also: the proposals would be sub-standard according to the residential parking policies. It is not completely clear whether the additional 34 car parking spaces will be (a) unavailable to students or (b) generally available to residents of the neighbouring streets. We would like the Council to require that parking spaces in the development only be available to resident staff and disabled students.

There is already a problem with car parking in the surrounding area, with the entrances to footpaths being blocked by car drivers taking advantage of dropped kerbs to park on the footway. Some local houses, when being converted to HMOs, have had garages converted to bedrooms. The Council needs to get a grip on policy in this area, and ensure that the pressure on car parking in the estate is managed. If the Council later extended the Controlled Parking Zone to the area, would residents of the new development obtain rights to apply for on-street permits too? The timing and sequencing of any car parking management measures need to be considered carefully.

While decreasing the proportion of the units occupied by students might help to deal with the objections from neighbours about potential noise, it is likely to put increased pressure on parking in the area. This suggests that the density of occupancy of the development is excessive. The relocation of the new build and the increase in parking spaces has also reduced the size of the central park area. The marketing of the townhouses in Dalton Crescent gave purchasers an expectation of access to a large area of public space behind their houses, which compensated for the relatively small gardens. It is doubtful whether the relatively small changes to the plans which have been made will satisfy local objections.

Cycle parking location and type

Our comments on the type and location of the cycle parking still stand. In summary, the cycle parking for residents should be fully enclosed from the weather and secured so that passers-by cannot gain access. Visitor cycle parking spaces might be sheltered from rain but would be accessible to all. There is no detail in the application of the type of cycle storage to be provided, and we would ask that the committee place a condition on the developer to ensure the cycle parking is of high quality.

As we stated before, considering that the buildings on the site of Sheraton House are new build it would seem more appropriate to accommodate the cycle storage within the building footprint, rather than it being located in odd corners elsewhere in the site.

The DFT's Manual For Streets 2007 states:

“Cycle parking for flats can also be located in communal areas, such as in hallways or under stairs ... Another option is to provide communal cycle-parking in secure facilities, such as in underground car parks, in purpose-designed buildings or in extensions to buildings.”

DCCAPG states (on p. 11) that

“New development should provide for storage of cycles for residents as well as providing secure visitor parking. ... Multi-storey occupancy buildings must provide cycle storage facilities on the ground floor of the building or in an adjacent secure building. ... It should be as (if not more) conveniently located than any secure car parking provision.”

Given the need to accommodate a lot more cycle parking, it would be sensible to review whether it would be better incorporated into the new buildings rather than being free-standing.

Brompton Cycle Hire facility

In our previous response, we welcomed the idea of providing a Brompton cycle hire station, particularly the possibility mentioned by the developer that it would be available to residents in the surrounding streets as well as to the student population.

In the revised plans the Brompton Dock is relocated to the courtyard inside Sheraton House. The Noise Management Plan Rev C (page 2) states that this courtyard will be for student use only.

We would prefer that the Brompton facility be available to the local community and therefore the hire station should be located somewhere more accessible. The experience of providing such a facility in Durham should bring valuable insights which could assist the Council in future promotion of cycling in the county.

Infrastructure connections with the University and city

In our previous letter we identified a number of deficiencies with the pedestrian and cycle routes from the development. We would ask that these be addressed in conjunction with any granting of planning permission. Routes need to be continuous through to the likely destinations, not considering merely the immediate surroundings of the development.

One extra point beyond our previous response: we note that the nearest supermarket (Sainsbury's in Crossgate Moor) has no cycle parking at present.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Phillips
(on behalf of DBUG)