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Durham County Council
Planning Development
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City of Durham Parish Council
c/o Room 103
Floor 1
County Hall
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5 December 2018

Dear Mr Jones,

**Planning application DM/18/02369/FPA:
Erection of office headquarters with associated car parking (inclusive of a
multi-storey car park) with associated landscaping, highway and infrastructure works and
demolition of existing structures,
The Sands car park and Durham Sixth Form Car Park Site,
Freemans Place, Durham City DH1 1SQ**

I write in my capacity as Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council's Planning Committee. The Parish Council has delegated consideration of planning matters to my committee.

At its meeting held on 16 November 2018, the Planning Committee discussed the very considerable number of objections from many quarters and decided to highlight some of the key points that have emerged concerning the matters raised in the Parish Council's objection dated 10 September 2018.

The Committee appreciates the enormous task you face in seeking to represent in a concise and balanced way the exceptional volume of objections in this case, so many of which include a specific fresh aspect to a general issue. This is notably the situation on traffic and parking issues, on business implications, and on tourism.

Parking issues

The claim by the applicant (Planning Statement para 5.56) that "*The proposed relocation of the Council's offices results in a reduction in overall parking provision*" can now be seen as a nonsense. The claimed reduction would only be valid if the existing 1,000 spaces at the existing County Hall site are extinguished. Unless the County Council undertakes to deny car parking provision for the hoped-for private sector office developers at Aykley Heads Strategic Employment site, there will be an increase in overall parking provision. We urge the County to take a City-wide view of this issue, rather than the narrowly focused one adopted by the applicant.

Bus drivers doing local trips (such as the 19 school groups each week to the Freeman's Quay swimming baths) have said that they will not necessarily have time to go to the Park and Ride between dropping off and picking up and would be concerned that traffic might cause them to be late for pick-up causing knock-on problems for schools and parents.

Business implications

The applicant asserts that the new DCC HQ on The Sands will boost business in the city centre, and there are three supporting submissions on the Planning Portal. However, there are now many submissions directly from the individual businesses in the city centre and they all are opposed to the current application. The Parish Council greatly values the role of the business organisations that have expressed support and would not wish in any way to detract from the important contribution they each make to the vitality and 'offer' in the City, but the actual concerns of the business people and traders have, in the Council's opinion, to carry greater weight in this instance.

We are aware that the County Council has circulated individual local businesses seeking support for their proposals, and the fact that none have responded with support speaks volumes. In contrast, the reality of adverse impacts of the proposals on businesses in Durham City is revealed by comments such as *"parking for large vehicles (tall vans etc) will be lost so we will be unable to attend the Farmers' Market."* Features such as farmers' markets are exactly what retail centres need to offer these days, and to damage the successful market in Durham City is perverse even if unintentional.

Tourism

Despite the very late appearance of a letter of qualified support from Visit County Durham, the overwhelming body of information is that the proposal is harmful to tourism here. Durham Pointers have been definite in their first-hand knowledge of the meet-and-greet experience for coach drivers and the jeopardy to continued inclusion of Durham in the itineraries of tours. The Confederation of Passenger Transport (the recognised trade body for UK bus and coach operators with over 90% of UK bus fleet and over 70% of UK coach fleet within membership) authoritatively expresses the same concern from its members' own perspective and objects to the proposal on the grounds of there being no other centrally located coach parking facility.

This is confirmed by a written objection from an individual coach driver, and a coach driver has said to a Parish Councillor that Durham has always been known for being very "coach friendly" with free, easy-access parking but that, if the existing coach park were to be replaced only with access to Park and Ride at Belmont with drop off for tourists at the other side of the river from the current coach park, *"they would be much less likely to come"*.

Further, the Director of Maudes Coaches, Barnard Castle, has submitted a formal objection saying that because of *"the logistics of dropping off our passengers and having to go to Belmont Park and Ride to park our coaches.... with no local coach parking being offered we wouldn't visit local events/attractions at Durham and would have to consider visiting other attractions outside of Durham"*.

The Parish Council wishes to draw attention to the information provided by the County Council's tourism arm Visit County Durham (VCD) who state *"We have conducted research with coach operators nationally, who have visited Durham previously, to gauge their response on this proposal. The research involved some of the UK's largest coach companies including Astons*

Coaches, Woods Coaches, Olympic Coaches, Stita Tours, Shearings, Bakers Dolphin Coach Travel, Johnson's Coaches, Eavesway, Kettlewell's Coaches and Lockett's Travel."

The Parish Council has been advised that, upon checking the websites of these ten companies, seven do not visit Durham. VCD needs to be approached to explain this apparent weakness in their survey.

The VCD submission continues *"It would seem from our discussions with a number of operators that their main concern would be to retain effective drop-off and pick-up points in the city. We understand that pick up and drop off points will be retained in the city centre, so their main concern should be addressed."* Parish Councillors too have been told this, but unless definite proposals are added to the Public Access file, this is not a material consideration that can be taken into account when determining this application.

Flood risk

The Parish Council notes that the Environment Agency has still not, at the time of writing provided comments that are publicly available. Once they are available it may be necessary for the Parish Council to submit additional comments.

Yours sincerely

ROGER CORNWELL

Chair, Planning Committee, City of Durham Parish Council