



**CITY OF DURHAM
PARISH COUNCIL**

Learning from the past.
Building for the future.

Mr Stuart Timmiss
Director of Planning
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UL

City of Durham Parish Council
Office 3 D4.01d
Clayport Library
8 Millennium Place
Durham
DH1 1WA

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Dear Mr Timmiss,

Response by the City of Durham Parish Council to the public consultation on the proposals for Aykley Heads for the submission of a hybrid application which will comprise a detailed application for office use on Plot C and an outline application for Phases one and two.

The proposals

This County Council public consultation seeks comments and feedback on the overall Masterplan and on the intentions for Plot C to help inform and develop the planning application before it is submitted. There will be the usual opportunity to provide comments on the planning application when it comes forward.

The County Council explains that phases one and two in this proposed planning application “will generate around 4,000 jobs, predominantly in high-value sectors such as ICT, FinTech, business, professional and financial services. It will also support small/medium sized enterprises (SMEs) through the provision of flexible units and create construction jobs. The development of additional employment space will also help the city and region retain talented young people from local colleges and Durham University.”

Overall, the maximum office floorspace across the site will be 48,698m² excluding car parking areas. The development site is divided into two phases and six plots. Each plot contains office buildings and car parking spaces. The office buildings within each proposed plot are set in trees and newly planted landscaped areas.

The Parish Council's comments

The principle of pre-application consultation is welcome, and it is hoped that the comments and feedback will prove to be influential in drawing up the hybrid planning application.

Aykley Heads has been a designated prestige office/business development site since the County Structure Plan approval in 1981, carried forward in the City of Durham Local Plan 2004, and reflected

in regional and Local Enterprise Partnership strategies. The prospect of thousands of high-quality jobs is of great importance for the whole County, and the confirmation in the Submitted County Durham Plan of Aykley Heads as a strategic employment site is strongly endorsed.

It is very welcome that the County Council has produced a draft Masterplan for the whole site, as put forward in the Parish Council's Draft Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Policy E1. The proposed outline planning application for Phases 1 and 2 establishes the principles by which the site as a whole can develop, including 2-4 storey office buildings, 1,131 car parking spaces (maximum), cycling and walking paths, and landscaping. More information and details will greatly assist a proper assessment of the proposals when the planning application is made.

For example, care will be need over the height of the office buildings - 4 storeys in sensitive locations could adversely affect the setting of the World Heritage Site. Public transport penetration of the site is an important need if sustainable modes of transport are to be successfully supported, and so are walking routes to the railway station. Strengthened landscaping and recreational routes should be explained. Although external infrastructure changes are not proposed, the number of jobs envisaged is double the present number and therefore some adjustments to the external highway system can be expected.

However, there are significant issues about the Green Belt. The Parish Council is concerned at the information contained in the Frequently Asked Questions on the consultation web-site. This states: "Including future phases, the whole area is capable of attracting up to 6,000 high quality jobs and is worth up to £400m to the county's economy."

The site boundary is true to the allocation proposed in the Examined County Durham Plan Policies Map. It defines the development site as lying outside the boundary of the Durham Green Belt, other than a small part of the site that is currently County Hall's visitor car park and therefore brownfield land. The Examination of the County Plan has caused the County Council to submit Main Modifications in order to assist the Independent Inspector to find the Plan 'sound'. One of the Main Modifications is the deletion of paragraph 4.59 of the Submitted Plan; this paragraph envisaged future extension of the Aykley Heads Strategic Site into the Green Belt, and it is this additional area that would increase the capacity from 4,000 to 6,000 jobs. The County Council was not able to convince the Inspector that this paragraph should remain. Accordingly, with the deletion of paragraph 4.59 the capacity of the Aykley Heads Site in the County Durham Plan will be as set out in paragraph 4.55 i.e. about 4,000 jobs not 6,000 jobs. If the terms Phase1 and Phase 2 and phrases such as "including future phrases" are intended to predicate a Phase 3 in the Durham Green Belt, the Parish Council is wholly opposed to such implications in direct conflict with the undertakings give to the Inspector.

Conclusions

The City of Durham Parish Council welcomes this pre-application consultation, supports the general principles indicated, looks forward to the hybrid planning application to provide more detailed information, and urges the County Council to remove the ambiguities around future expansion into the Green Belt which the Examination in Public has caused the County Council to delete from the County Durham Plan.

Yours sincerely,

Adam Shanley
Clerk to the City of Durham Parish Council