

**CITY OF YORK LOCAL PLAN**

**PHASE 3 HEARINGS**

**MATTER 2: UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES**

**STATEMENT BY FULFORD PARISH COUNCIL**

**JULY 2022**

**Introducton**

- 1 The University of York (UoY) lies within the south-eastern quadrant of the City which includes Fulford, Heslington and Badger Hill. The rapid expansion of the University over the past decade has had major negative impacts on Fulford through increased traffic congestion, on-street parking by students and staff, conversion of family houses to student accommodation, and occasional anti-social behaviour. The area has changed from one of predominantly family houses to one where there is a significant transient population with little interest or investment in the local community. Although the undoubted benefits of the University are spread over the City, the costs of its rapid expansion are borne disproportionately by the communities closest to it. These costs are not properly addressed by the Local Plan.
- 2 In line with the Inspectors' previous rulings, we have assumed that the University's proposed extension to Site ST27 has the status of an omission site and will not be considered in the Phase 3 hearings.

**Q2.1 What are the needs of the various Universities and Colleges?**

- 3 To our knowledge, CYC has not published any assessment of the UoY needs which justifies ST27. The promised SoCG with the University has not yet been produced which places FPC and others objecting to ST27 at a major procedural disadvantage.
- 4 The only CYC evidence to-date justifying ST27 is set out in the 2016 ELR (SD064) and relates to its contribution to meeting the Local Plan's 650 pa job target and the need to provide space for knowledge-based businesses.

- 5 The 650 jobs target was discussed during the Phase 2 hearings when FPC pointed out that it predated BREXIT and was not supported by any up-to-date econometric employment projection. Since the Phase 2 hearings, much new economic evidence has emerged which casts further doubt on its credibility. At the Phase 2 hearings, CYC argued that the UK economy was in a V-shaped recovery from COVID and that past levels of job creation would soon be restored. There are now no reputable economic forecasters which support this position. All the new economic evidence since then has confirmed that the national economy is entering a prolonged period of slowdown and potentially recession. The Bank of England forecasts of May 2022 (which now look optimistic) anticipate very little economic growth and a loss of jobs nationally over the next three years. As Oxford Economics has confirmed the close link between the prospects for the York and national economies, it inevitably means that after two years of very little job growth due to COVID, York is likely to experience, at best, a further three years of insignificant employment increase. The result is that there will be very little employment growth over five of the sixteen years of the plan period, and little prospect that the 650 jobs per year target will be met up to 2033.
- 6 The second part of the ELR justification is that the site would meet a need for knowledge-related businesses related to the University. However there is no evidence of any significant demand for new premises for such businesses. Much of the existing Science Park contains service users such as solicitors and architects who have no relationship to the University. There have also been problems of vacancies within the Science Park. The 2007 Secretary of State decision for the UoY Campus East allowed up to 25ha of the 65ha "allocated area" to be developed for knowledge based businesses (Condition 5). However, in reality, very little of Campus East has been developed for these purposes, limited to the 2700sq.m Catalyst building and the 650sq.m Ron Cooke building. In any event, there is no need in the age of modern telecommunications for university-related business uses to be physically on campus. There are many examples of successful university science parks being located some distance away from the university, for example at Cambridge, Oxford and Durham.
- 7 The only evidence for extra academic space comes from the UoY in the form of projected potential growth in student numbers which is translated into land needs. The methodology used is to apply potential growth rates (expressed as percentages ranging from 0.5% to 4%) to the total student population, thereby deriving increases from 1901 FTE students to 22,011 FTE students by 2038. The University seeks to use the higher figures on basis of reflecting recent past growth

8 The University's projections of need have serious failings:-

1. The methodology is very crude. It is not related to any long-term plan for expansion of particular departments or parts of the University. As expressed, it is little more than a desire to continue growing indefinitely into the future at a constant rate without any definable end-state. There is also no hard evidence about the need for significant expansion. The University is clearly doing extremely well at its present size. Much of York's attractiveness (especially to international students) is because it is a relatively small elite university located within a small historic city. The University's only published requirements are for a new School of Physics, Engineering and Technology and a new School of Architecture. Both could be easily accommodated within the vacant land on Campus East.
2. The UoY's preferred growth rates are derived from 2011 onwards when it was experiencing major expansion due to the development of the second campus. This cannot be considered to be a normal rate of growth. There would inevitably be a slowing down as Campus East is fully developed.
3. Past growth was fuelled by the rapid expansion of university education for UK students. This growth has now come to an end as the Government target for university participation is met. More recently, growth has been driven by international students, especially from China. However growth from this source will become increasingly more difficult as China and other countries rapidly develop their own university sectors.
4. By using a compound rate of interest model to project future growth rather than an absolute number per year, the university is exaggerating the potential increase in student numbers. For example at 4% increase per year, the University would double in size nearly every 17 years. Such a rate of growth would be completely unsustainable and endanger the key attributes which make UoY attractive to students. It would also result in the University becoming overly dominant within the City.
5. The University has not properly considered the potential for its growth needs to be met in alternative ways than just by constant peripheral expansion, including:
  - There is potential for more intensive use of land within the existing campus, including the large area still to be developed on Campus East. The existing large surface car parks could be replaced by multi-storey structures and low-

rise buildings by taller buildings. This may mean compromising some of the existing planning rules but this would be preferable to developing open land vital to York's setting and special character.

- Developing alternative sites close to the University. The Plan makes two large general housing allocations adjacent or very close to the University: ST4 (Hull Road) and Imphal Barracks (ST36). Both sites would be better used for university expansion if this cannot be accommodated within the existing campuses. The large brownfield Retreat site next to Campus West has also recently become available. There is no need to retain these sites for housing as the Plan significantly over-allocates housing land up to 2038 against its requirement.
- Meeting University needs on sites away from the existing campuses. Most universities operate on split sites as a matter of necessity. The UoY would continue to be successful if it adopts this widely used model. A significant proportion of the University's own projected land requirement is for student accommodation. Many existing students already live off-campus and this could be expanded. In any event, when ST27 is fully developed, the UoY will need to adopt a different business model if it is to continue expanding as it will have run out of available land adjacent to the existing campuses.

9 In conclusion, the UoY has overstated its expansion needs which can be met in more environmentally acceptable ways than continual peripheral expansion into the open countryside. As an example, the University's current Strategic Plan says (page 12) that the intention is to have "*as many students studying at a distance as we have on campus.*"

**Q2.2: Does the Plan properly provide for the needs of the various establishments?**

10 See Q2.1 response.

**Q2.3: Is the approach of the Plan to Universities and Colleges justified in Green Belt terms?**

11 Policy SS1 says that the location of development through the Plan will be guided by five spatial principles. The first is to conserve and enhance York's historic and natural environment which includes "*the city's character and setting.*" Fig 3.1 shows the areas which the Plan considers are most important to the historic character and setting of York. Paragraph 3.5 adds:

*"Technical work carried out by the Council indicates that, regardless of the extent to which the city may have to identify further land to meet its development requirements and needs, there are areas of land outside the existing built-up areas that should be retained as open land due to their role in preserving the historic character and setting of York."* (our underlining)

12 Fig 3.1 identifies the site of ST27 as being one of these areas of open land that should be kept permanently open "*regardless*" of development need. The basic contradiction between Policies SS1 and SS22 makes the ST27 allocation irreparably unsound.

13 CYC's latest Green Belt assessment of the site is set out at pages A679 to A.686 of EX/CYC/59e (May 2021). The section says that it is assessing a Green Belt boundary which "*runs along the drainage ditch from the edge of the outdoor cycle track (of York Sports Village), along the southern extent of the lake to the weir which crosses the lake.*" ST27 is to the south of this boundary.

14 EX/CYC/59e makes clear statements about the harm to the Green Belt which built development south of the University lakes would cause, including ST27, saying:-

*"1.1 The land should be kept permanently open as part of a wider view of a dense compact city in an open or rural landscape."*

*"1.2+1.3 The land should be kept permanently open as part of maintaining the scale and identity of York and its districts as well as maintaining a connection to open and historic setting."*

*"3.1 The land should be kept open to aid the understanding of the historical relationship of the city to its hinterland."*

*"4.1 Land is connected to the urban area and therefore relevant for sprawl."*

*"4.2 Land is contained by strong boundaries on more than one side and is therefore contained, however, development would still represent sprawl."*

*"5.1+5.2 The land contributes to the character of the countryside through openness and views."*

15 EX/CYC/59e best summarises the conflict with Green Belt purposes as follows under the heading of "urban sprawl":-

*"The proposed boundary defines where University Campus East meets its rural setting. Should development be allowed to occur freely within the land to the south*

*and south-east of the proposed boundary (i.e. on ST27) it would be eventually contained by the York Outer Ring Road. However, given that this land is important to keep permanently open in line with Purpose 4, allowing development up to the road would represent unacceptable sprawl as it would result in the loss of compactness and the rural setting, which would be detrimental to the York Green Belt."*

16 The section goes on to consider the allocation of ST27. It says that there have requests from the University for expansion and there is potential to extend the "*new nursery and excellent transport links which exist in this location.*" On this basis it says there is potential here for a sustainable employment growth location, adding that the 2017 ELR identifies the site as a sustainable location when judged against the site selection criteria and employment land assessment and that the September 2017 Heritage Impact Appraisal (HIA) has identified some potential scope for development if the compactness of the city and its rural setting can be preserved.

17 We consider this reasoning makes little sense. One of the principal elements of the Local Plan strategy is to conserve and enhance York's historic and natural environment (Policy SS1) which includes its setting and special character as a historic town. If, as EX/CYC/59e suggests, ST27 would cause "*unacceptable sprawl*", the allocation cannot be considered to be a sustainable location. The references to the site selection criteria and employment land assessment are irrelevant as these do not include detailed consideration of Green Belt purposes. In respect of the HIA (SD101), it identifies the serious harm that would be caused by the proposal, saying:-

*"There is concern that, in conjunction with...ST15 the expansion of the University would effectively reduce the gap between the edge of the built-up area and this new settlement to 1.6km, with the potential for serious harm to the city's compactness."*

*"Development here will inevitably result in the loss of part of the rural setting of York, bringing development very close to the Ring Road.. Buffering and green infrastructure may reduce its impact, but development will 'in principle' change the relationship which the southern edge of York has with the countryside to its south, and which the historic City of York has to its surrounding villages."*

The HIA does say that screening and landscaping may give "*some*" protection to the rural view from the A64 but this is very different from saying that the impacts are acceptable.

18 In conclusion, CYC's own evidence demonstrates that ST27 would cause serious harm to the setting and special character of York which is the primary purpose of the York Green Belt. Our analysis supports the same conclusion as the proposal would extend urban development south of the long-term defensible boundary of the University Lakes up to the Ring Road. This would substantially alter the perception of York as a compact town set in the open countryside to the south of the city (see Secretary of State's decision and IR on Campus East). The Heritage Topic Paper (SD103) emphasises that "*the rural edge setting viewed from majority of ring road by way of field margin*" is a principal character element of the setting and special character of the city. The proposal would significantly damage this rural edge over a long length of the A64. The type of heavy landscaping and bunding required to hide the development from this elevated section of the A64 would appear as alien features within the currently flat and open landscape to the south of Low Lane.

19 The proposal would also conflict with openness and the other Green Belt purposes:-

1. It would appear in the wider landscape as further **urban sprawl** towards the Ring Road and would also act as a precedent for further development both to the north of Low Lane and to the west towards Helsington Village.
2. It would result in the loss of a significant area of open countryside contrary to the **third Green Belt purpose**. Although not of high scenic value, the land to the south of Campus East is the most accessible area of open countryside close to Helsington and is valued by local people as a local recreational asset. Low Lane is particularly prized as an area of relative tranquillity which would be lost if the proposal proceeds.
3. By using open countryside when urban alternatives are available, the proposal would be in conflict with the **fifth Green Belt purpose** which is to assist in urban regeneration.

20 In conclusion, the site of ST27 fulfils very important Green Belt purposes and should be kept permanently open. Its development would be contrary to national policy.

#### **Q2.4 Are policies ED1 and ED5 and ED7 effective?**

21 Policies SS22 and ED1 do not achieve the objectives or clarity required by NPPF paragraph 154.

22 If ST27 is retained, Policy SS22 should be amended as follows:

- The first part of the policy should state clearly the allocation is for the expansion of the UoY which includes related knowledge-based uses.
- Criterion v) should be strengthened so that any proposal must demonstrate that measures will enable upwards of 15% of trips to be undertaken using public transport.
- Criterion vii) should be amended so that it applies the stronger NPPF paragraph 32 test to traffic impact, namely that the residual cumulative impacts on the surrounding highway network are not severe, including with the cumulative impact of ST4, ST36 and ST15.
- Criterion viii) should be amended. FPC is opposed in principle to the new junction but if it is to be provided, ST27 and the rest of Campus East should make use of it to benefit local roads and residents.
- A further requirement should be added so that only knowledge-based businesses genuinely requiring a location on or immediately adjacent to the University campus are allowed to occupy premises on the site.

23 Policy ED1 should be amended as follows:

- The policy should not allow conference facilities which are not ancillary to university needs. No case has been made why such facilities are justified. Such facilities could significantly intensify usage of the university site to the detriment of surrounding communities. In line with NPPF paragraph 23, conference facilities unrelated to the university should be directed towards the City Centre.
- The statement on student housing should be amended (see our Matter 3 statement).
- The policy should address the issue of on-street parking by students and staff. FPC considers the main way of doing this is an enforceable Travel Plan.

24 Our Reg 19 representations set out the detailed wording being sought.

**Q2.5 Is the Policy SS22 (ST27) sufficient for the purposes of the University of York?**

25 See above responses.