

City of York Council
Examination of the City of York Local Plan
2017 – 2033

Phase 3 Hearings

Schedule of Matters, Issues and Questions for the Examination
(EX/INS/37c)

Matter 2 – Universities and Colleges

Response by O’Neill Associates on behalf of
York St John University
5 July 2022



Chartered Town Planning Consultants

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ref. ysj2206.MIQ.M2

1. Introduction

1.1 This statement responds to the Inspectors' questions as relevant to York St John University in the Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) (EX/INS/37c) issued on 15 June 2022. These are:-

Question 2.1 What are the needs of the various Universities and Colleges?

Question 2.2 Does the Plan properly provide for the needs of the various establishments?

Question 2.3 Is the approach of the Plan to the Universities and Colleges justified in Green Belt terms (whether in terms of Green Belt boundaries, or 'washing over')?

Question 2.4 Are policies ED1 – ED5 and ED7 effective?

1.2 This response does not address issues relating to student housing, which is covered in the University's separate response to Matter 3.

2. York St John University

2.1 York St John University is a Higher Education (HE) provider with 8,500 enrolled students this academic year. The University was established in 1841 and provides a range of courses from undergraduate to post-graduate level.

2.2 Its main academic campus is at Lord Mayors Walk and comprises a 4.5ha site to the north of the city centre, facing the City Walls. The Campus includes facilities for teaching, research, staff, social activities, and business linkups. Originally built around a quadrangle dating from the mid-19th Century, the Campus has seen major development over the last 20 years. It has a mixed historic and modern built environment, with part of the site located in the Conservation Area and several Grade II listed buildings.

2.3 The University has earned a particular reputation for sport science, offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and research opportunities focusing on a range of associated aspects, including: sport psychology; physiotherapy, sport and exercise science; sport and exercise

therapy; and sports business management. Its Sports Campus is located at Haxby Road 1.5km to the north of Lord Mayor's Walk. Since acquiring the 23ha site in 2012, the University has invested over £13m to transform it into a centre for sporting excellence providing exceptional facilities for students and the local community.

- 2.4 The University contributes an estimated £70m to the local and regional economy each year, and indirectly supports thousands of jobs in and around the city. Its student population has grown from 5,500 in 2016 to approximately 8,500 full time equivalents (FTEs) in 2021/22, with growth predicted to reach 10,000 students in the next 4 years. FTE staff numbers have grown by 54% from 651 in 2016 to almost 1000 in 2022. In the same period, turnover has increased from £58.7m to an estimated £75m and will continue to grow as the University considerably increases research output and partnerships and delivers increasing numbers of graduates in Allied Health disciplines which are in great demand in the local and regional economy.
- 2.5 Recent growth has also seen the University establish a London campus in 2018 which is experiencing significant growth, anticipated to exceed 2000 students in 2023 and is spurring further development at both locations alongside cross-campus working.

3. National Policy Context

- 3.1 The 2012 NPPF sets out the process for the preparation of the Local Plan and establishment of its Green Belt boundaries. At its heart is the presumption in favour of sustainable development (§14).
- 3.2 LPAs are required to objectively identify and meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth (§17). NPPF §18 and 19 sets out the Government's commitment to ensuring the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth, and requires that planning operates to encourage, and not act as an impediment to, sustainable growth.
- 3.3 §84 states that defining Green Belt boundaries for the first time should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. §85 requires that when defining boundaries, Local Planning Authorities should

ensure consistency with the Local Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development. Land which it is not necessary to keep permanently open should not be included.

- 3.4 §155 states that early and meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbourhoods, local organisations and businesses is essential. §156 requires LPAs to set out strategic priorities for the area including strategic policies to deliver, inter alia, the provision of homes and jobs needed in the area; community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities.
- 3.5 LPAs must ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up to date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area (§158). They should work with other providers to assess the quality and capacity of various infrastructure types, including education (§162).
- 3.6 §182 states that the Plan submitted for examination should be ‘sound’, that is: positively prepared; justified; effective and consistent with national policy.

4. Responses to Questions from the Inspectors

Question 2.1 - What are the needs of the various Universities and Colleges?

- 4.1 As a key employer, landowner, and driver of economic activity and provision of community services, the University needs a supportive planning environment to facilitate its sustainable growth.
- 4.2 Its student population has recently grown significantly to 8,500 FTEs in 2021/22, representing an increase of circa 80% in the last 10 years. Staff numbers have grown by 54% over the last 6 years, and these jobs are on average paid significantly higher than the rest of the York economy. The University provides significant indirect economic benefits to the local economy through supplier and student spend in York, and other local multiplier impacts. Growth in student numbers has resulted in an increased number of graduates available for the local economy, particularly in areas of extremely high demand such as nursing, paramedic science, computer science and teaching.

4.3 The University is part-way through a Strategy to 2026 which will see it strengthen its status as a Higher Education provider over the next 5 years and beyond. National government policy in relation to static tuition fees has provided a necessity for growth and diversification. Student numbers are forecast to reach over 10,000 in York by 2026/27. The demand for, and growth trajectory of recently expanded degree programmes in Allied Health and Computer Science, growing international student numbers, postgraduate and world-leading research growth means that these projections are highly conservative. Beyond 2026, national demographic trends and improving graduate employment prospects in the University's subject mix all point to continued growth up to at least the year 2030, albeit at a slower pace beyond 2027.

Lord Mayor's Walk Campus

4.4 The Lord Mayors Walk Campus has limited scope for further new build development due to a combination of spatial and heritage constraints. Recent development, including the £18m Creative Centre, has taken place in parts of the Campus outside the Conservation Area.

4.5 The University has an immediate need to support and enhance its teaching and research facilities at the Campus, and meet the demands of an increased student population. At Lord Mayors Walk this includes:

- Major new development to provide a Venture Creation Lab / graduate business incubation, large lecture theatres and additional catering facilities in an undeveloped area at the northeast corner of the Campus;
- Converting sport teaching and gym accommodation to Allied Health teaching and research facilities, with the potential re-provide enhanced sporting accommodation at the Haxby Road Sport Park;
- Enhancements and provision of flexible space to meet teaching, research, staff, and business linkups accommodation demands;
- Delivery of decarbonisation projects to assist the University's drive toward carbon neutrality, with internally adopted targets of a 65% carbon reduction by 2025 (compared to the 2005 baseline) and 80% by 2030

Haxby Road Sport Park

4.6 The Sport Park lies either side of Haxby Road, named Mille Crux to the east and Northfield to the west. Mille Crux has recently undergone major development, and provides 3 full-size floodlit artificial pitches; 3 floodlit

outdoor tennis courts; Hub Building with changing and teaching facilities; indoor Sports Hall; indoor tennis centre; an all-weather sprint track; grass pitches; and a bowling green.

- 4.7 Northfield consists of two areas of playing fields separated by an access track which are currently laid out to provide 2 football/rugby pitches, 3 football pitches, and up to 3 junior pitches. It does not presently have any built facilities and the pitches have no floodlighting.
- 4.8 Both parts of the Sport Park comprise a busy sports campus used by students across a wide range of courses, by student sports clubs, and by the wider community.
- 4.9 Mille Crux is now effectively built out to capacity. The University needs flexibility and support for continued growth and the enhancement of its facilities to maintain its reputation for sporting excellence. If further development is to be provided at the Sports Park, it would necessarily have to be at Northfield. This may comprise;
- additional built sports and sports teaching facilities
 - floodlighting and/or synthetic surfacing of existing grass pitches
 - replacement and enhancement of indoor sport facilities formerly located at the Lord Mayors Walk Campus
 - re-location of built sport facilities elsewhere in the city with potential to free-up land for alternative uses (e.g. at the University-owned gymnasium adjacent to the Heworth Croft student allocation Site SH1)
 - other development supporting the use of the site as a sports campus

Question 2.2 - Does the Plan properly provide for the needs of the various establishments?

- 4.10 No, the Plan does not properly provide for the needs of the University.
- 4.11 The wording of Policies relating to the University seems careful to provide support for the '*continued success*' (ref DP1, ED4) rather than growth or expansion. ED4, titled "*York St John Further Expansion*", does not in fact provide meaningful support for expansion, relating only to the allocation of a small site for student housing and formalising a sporting use for Northfields by the University that commenced 10 years ago. Support in

the explanatory text stating the Plan's commitment to "*help unlock the further potential*" of the University (§2.4) or "*supporting future plans for expansion to accommodate growth*" for some education institutions (§1.57) is not carried forward to Policy relating to the University's Sports Park. To the contrary the policy approach of the Plan actively looks to constrain growth

Haxby Road Sport Park

- 4.12 The Proposals Map (North) allocates the entirety of the Sport Park (Northfield and Mille Crux) as areas of 'Existing University Campuses' and as 'Existing Openspace'. Northfield, and not Mille Crux, has an additional designation as Green Belt.
- 4.13 Contrary to its policy title, ED5 does not contain wording which supports the expansion of the Sport Park. Explanatory text for ED5 (§7.16) states that appropriate uses of the Northfield site "*may include*:"
- *outdoor sports facilities, together with associated car and cycle parking and floodlighting;*
 - *appropriate indoor sports facilities; and*
 - *other outdoor recreational activity"*
- 4.14 However, this supportive text is not reflected in the wording of the Policy itself - which instead states only that Northfield is allocated for "sports uses" by the University, a use which now has been ongoing for 10 years.
- 4.15 In any event, support at §7.16 for provision of built facilities is entirely undermined by the proposed inclusion of Northfield in Green Belt. This represents a significant constraint to the recognised need for expansion of the Sport Park, given that any proposals mentioned in §4.9 of this statement would inevitably impact on openness and require the University to demonstrate very special circumstances for approval, despite the fact that this growth is known to be needed.
- 4.16 In turn, this would result in significant uncertainty in the University's need to forward plan and severely impact on its ability to bid for funding to deliver facilities that will maintain its status as a university known for sporting excellence.

- 4.17 The Plan states at §7.15 that the allocation of Northfield for sport use:
“reflects York St. John University’s ambitions and supports its major investment in the Sports Park. It will assist in further extension of its strategy for sport that supports the teaching of a range of sports degrees but also for the general fitness and enjoyment of students and community teams who use the site”.
- 4.18 In contrast, the University contends that the Plan will severely, and unnecessarily handicap its ambitions and strategy for sport teaching, research and community / NHS partnerships and that the proposed Green Belt designation is contrary to the support for *“the further success of higher education institutions”* as stated at Policy DP1, and the intention to make York *“a world class centre for education”* (§7.1)
- Lord Mayor’s Walk
- 4.19 Policy ED4 supports the development and redevelopment of the Lord Mayors Walk Campus *“provided that it is limited to higher education and related uses and its design takes into account the sensitive location of the campus and its setting”.*
- 4.20 Whilst the University welcome this policy as broadly supportive of its needs, it has concern that it is weighted toward protection of the Campus’ setting and is not balanced by considerations otherwise contained in the explanatory text, including providing support for *“enhancing the environmental quality of the estate and ensuring optimal use of the campus”.*
- 4.21 Including reference to this in the wording of ED4 is of particular concern to the University in context of its need to bring forward proposals to adapt existing buildings to help meet its objective of achieving carbon neutrality. Also, a significant proportion of the Campus is not within the Conservation Area nor sensitive in heritage terms, and the University would welcome policy amendments which acknowledges this fact and offers support for greater flexibility (e.g scope for higher density, building heights) of development in these areas.

Question 2.3 - Is the approach of the Plan to Universities and Colleges justified in Green Belt terms (whether in terms of Green Belt boundaries, or ‘washing over’)?

- 4.22 We consider that the Council’s approach to defining the Green Belt is flawed, and that inclusion of Northfield within its boundaries conflicts with the Plan strategy to meet the identified development needs of York St John University.
- 4.23 Green Belt boundaries around York are being established for the first time. In establishing boundaries, the Council must meet the identified requirements for sustainable development, i.e. it must allocate land to meet identified needs for housing, employment, education, leisure and other needs.
- 4.24 Section 4 of the TP1 Addendum (EX/CYC/59) summarises the Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development, and how the strategy to meet these requirements has been formulated. In relation to ‘Education Needs’, §4.46 states the Plan has a role to help meet the vision to making York a world class centre for education **“by providing sufficient land to for educational facilities to reflect the aspiration and needs of local communities”**.
- 4.25 In relation to the University’s Sport Park, §4.51 states:
“the need for additional land for sports uses to support the universities (sic) development of a centre for sporting excellence at Northfield, Haxby Road will be met within the main urban area”.
- 4.26 At §10.28, the Addendum states that **“there has been ongoing dialogue between the Council and York St John University through iterative consultation on the Local Plan to understand their growth needs up to and beyond the plan period”**. However, representations made by the University in July 2019 (ref. EX/CYC/22) set out its objections to the Green Belt designation for Northfield and the conflict with the Plan’s support for expansion of the Sport Park.
- 4.27 In referencing **“ongoing dialogue”**, the Addendum at §10.29 re-emphasises support for expansion of the Sport Park, and asserts that this will be met on land outside the Green Belt:

“Whilst there is a recognition of the need...for additional sports facilities, this has been met on identified sites within the urban area and is supported by policy ED5”.

- 4.28 The Council’s evidence base thus explicitly identifies the need for the expansion of the University’s Sport Park, and acknowledges that additional facilities to meet this need should be provided at Northfield. At the same time, it contains the assumption that Northfield will be considered in the Plan as part of the urban area.
- 4.29 In contrast to the above, the Council’s detailed assessment for Inner Boundaries (EX/CYC/59d) inconsistently concludes that Northfield must be kept permanently open in relation to each of the three purposes relevant to the York Green Belt.
- 4.30 Thus, there are fundamental flaws with the way the Green Belt methodology has been applied in the assessment of detailed boundaries as set out in the Annexes to the Addendum.
- 4.31 In particular, the Council has taken an overly constrictive approach in its evaluation of boundaries, which seems intent more on serving a pre-established conclusion of where these must be fixed, rather than providing a critical analysis of whether it is necessary to keep land permanently open, and whether or not development needs are being met.
- 4.32 The University disputes the conclusions reached by the Council in the assessment in EX/CYC/59d, and its representations submitted in June 2021 set out in detail its opposing view as to why it is unnecessary to keep this land permanently open.
- 4.33 However, this exercise is not the sole overriding factor in determining whether the site must be included in Green Belt. In this instance, the Council has clearly and explicitly identified a need to facilitate the University’s future development for the Sport Park at Northfield. This would be delivered in an accessible location, alongside existing Sport Park infrastructure, and its further development would contribute to sustainable patterns of development. However, in proposing the Green Belt boundaries, the Council has failed to factor-in the strategy of the Plan to meet the University’s development needs.
- 4.34 As such, inclusion of Northfield within the Green Belt would be contrary to the NPPF §84 and 85 which require LPAs when drawing up boundaries to take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development

and ensure consistency with the Plan strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development.

Question 2.4 - Are Policies ED1-ED5 and ED7 effective?

- 4.35 Of the policies noted in Question 2.4, Policies ED4 and ED5 relate to the University. Both these contain elements relating to student housing, which are addressed in the University's separate response to Matter 3.

ED4

- 4.36 Policy ED4 in relation to the Lord Mayor's Walk Campus is broadly supported. However, it could be made more effective by enshrining in policy the explanatory text which explicitly supports the ongoing renewal and redevelopment of the Campus, and the need to enhance the environmental quality of the estate and ensure its optimal use. It should also acknowledge that a proportion of the Campus is not in a sensitive setting, and that greater flexibility for development in these areas applies.

ED5

- 4.37 The explanatory text for Policy ED5 states that the intention of allocating Northfield for sport uses "*reflects York St. John University's ambitions*" and "*will assist in further extension of its strategy for sport*" (§7.15). It also supports the provision - at Northfield - of a range of development types, including indoor sports facilities subject to compliance with other policies in plan.
- 4.38 In contrast to Policy ED7 relating to Askham Bryan College, the proposed Green Belt status of Northfield is not mentioned in the policy wording of ED5, its explanatory text or the named other relevant policies, listed as H7, ENV2, D2 and D4. §7.17 goes to the trouble of requiring that proposals at Northfield take into account light pollution issues in accordance with EN2, but makes no mention of Policy GB1. This strongly suggests that ED5 has been drafted on the assumption that Northfield is not within the Green Belt, a supposition which would be supported by the Council's own evidence (ref. §4.25-4.27 of this statement).
- 4.39 However, the fact that Northfield is proposed for inclusion in the Green Belt would directly undermine the intention of the Policy to support the growth of the Sport Park, and render ED5 entirely ineffective in this regard. This clear conflict between the Plan strategy and the Green Belt boundaries (contrary to NPPF §84 and 85) can only be addressed by excluding Northfield from the Green Belt. The alternative Green Belt

boundary in Appendix 3 would represent an appropriate and logical defensible boundary consistent with the NPPF.

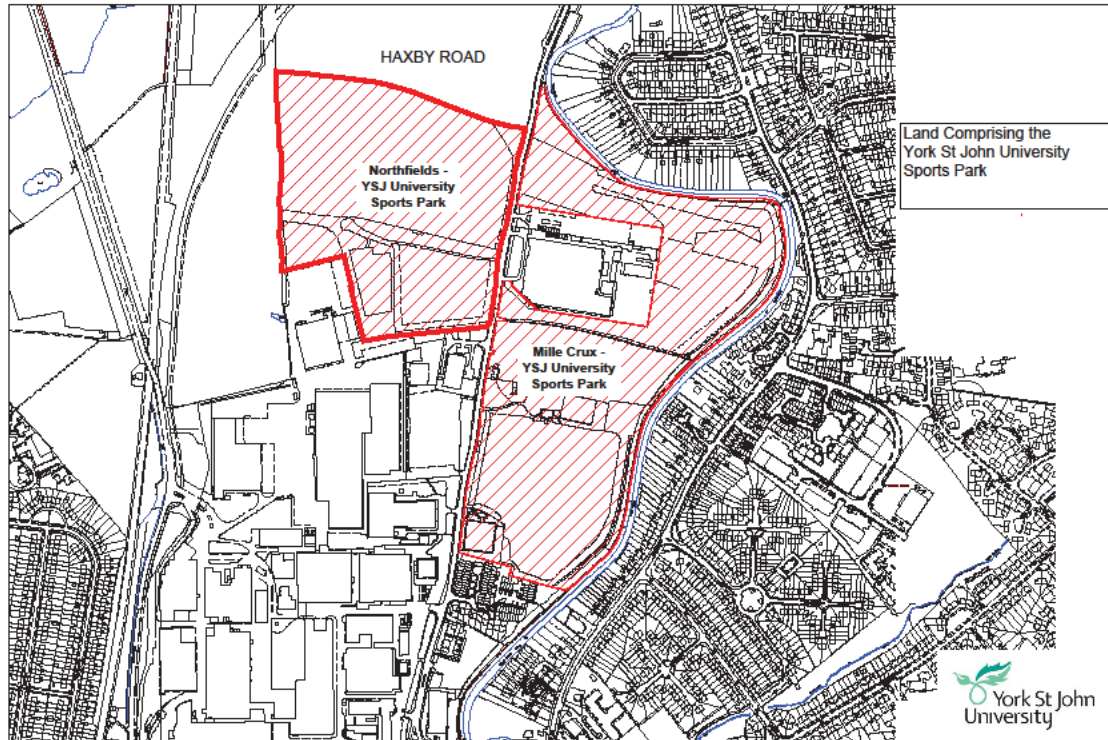
- 4.40 Without these changes, we consider Plan does not meet the tests of soundness required by NPPF §182, as outlined in the University representations of July 2021.

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Director

ref. ysj2206.MIQ.M2

APPENDIX 1

LAND COMPRISING THE UNIVERSITY'S SPORT PARK



APPENDIX 2

AERIAL VIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY'S SPORT PARK



APPENDIX 3

PLAN SHOWING POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE GREEN BELT BOUNDARY

