

## **CITY OF YORK LOCAL PLAN PHASE 4 HEARINGS**

### **RESPONSE TO INSPECTORS' MIQs**

#### **FROM HESLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

#### **AUGUST 2022**

#### **Matter 2 – University of York**

##### 2.1 What are the needs of the University of York?

Heslington Parish Council (HPC) would like to see full and well-justified reasons as to why the development (ST27) has been put-forward as being necessary in the proposed location. There is no clear explanation of why further university uses could not be incorporated into the two existing campuses, or be located on more distant brown field sites such as Imphal and Strensall Barracks.

CYC should provide evidence of the “benefit of co-location” (SS22 p.72), especially given changes in working practice since the draft LP was published in 2018. There is no evidence in the report that the existing Science Park (Campus West) is being fully used for STEM purposes and requires a further site. In the light of the varied and non-STEM usage of the Science Park on Campus West, HPC would prefer UoY to focus on re-invigorating the existing Science Park and maintain its focus on cutting edge technologies intimately linked with UoY research before considering expansion.

We look to UoY to support Heslington to maintain its historic character as a rural village, and to avoid contributing unthinkingly to its demise. Heslington Village and surrounding rural agricultural landscape provides an important and much valued amenity for the students and staff of UoY and therefore preservation of, and respect for, its identity, should comprise one of the UoY's “needs.”

HPC supports York and its thriving universities, but not at the cost of the historic setting and character of York and Heslington village. As a university almost wholly within Heslington Parish, UoY brings some commerce to Heslington Village, a frequent bus service and local employment, but it is a neighbour that also brings less desirable qualities such as traffic jams, parking problems, and anti-social behaviour.

Widespread residents' parking has had to be introduced throughout Heslington Village and Badger Hill which is both costly and inconvenient for residents. Traffic jams have become a daily occurrence. Students impinge on residents' enjoyment of amenity throughout term times, and, in the case of HMOs, beyond those dates. Anti-social behaviour is frequent and has been regularly reported to UoY. As was explained during Phase 3 Hearings, significant anti-social behaviour, and on occasion damage to property, continues throughout the night during term time. Students' night-time socialising impacts negatively on households along their routes. Any university expansion, especially where new transit routes are opened up in

currently dark skies, and through quiet back lanes, is bound to exacerbate an already difficult situation.

#### 2.4 Does the Plan properly provide for the needs of the University?

CYC must provide evidence of the necessity for co-location, (SS22 p.72), especially given changes in working practice since 2018. It is not clear why an employment site needs space contiguous to the university campus. The existing Science Park adjacent to Campus West is used for a variety of purposes. Some of the listed firms have no STEM role or only a rather tenuous link to health care, and they have no need to be contiguous to the University Campus. The site includes offices being used for UoY functions, such as Estates, and in recent years UoY has changed the use of some of the largest STEM businesses on the site, such as the former Smith and Nephew building, to be wholly within UoY activities.

There is therefore no hard evidence that a further B1 site adjacent to Campus East is needed except as a means of expanding the overall University site and creating an income stream. This cannot be justified on a green field site, previously designated by the Secretary of State as an important buffer to contain Campus East and separate it from Heslington Village. In the light of its current usage, we would prefer UoY to focus on re-invigorating the existing Science Park and maintain its focus on cutting edge technologies intimately linked with UoY research.

The NPPF supports more optimum and intensive use of developed land. The NPPF states that brown field sites should always have preference over green field. UoY could look at maximising best STEM use of brown field sites within the current Science Park, or more remotely, instead of building on a green field site into a designated buffer zone. If CYC and the Inspectors are minded to over-rule the planning constraints pertaining to Campus East, then might a better solution be to increase the density of building on both campuses and retain the existing boundaries absolutely? The rural character of Campus East is already utterly changed. Parkland within the campus should be sacrificed before allowing urban sprawl into valuable open spaces which are also currently active food producing areas.

HPC suggests that the plan goes a long way towards meeting the wishes of UoY, but we do not feel it has properly identified the needs of UoY and, particularly, the need for more land. If there is a genuine need for increased university activity, even taking into account the huge increase following the development of Campus East, then the plan should seek to provide for these needs in a way that is less damaging to the communities around the university, to the rural and agricultural setting of the university, and to York as a whole.

#### 2.5 Are Policies ED1-ED3 effective as an approach to the University of York?

HPC suggests that the restriction to 23% built environment on both Campus West and Campus East should be re-considered. The original purpose, to maintain a parkland

environment and open views has been lost. In terms of views through Campus West to green spaces and the feeling of an open aspect around York City, these have been almost entirely obliterated by further buildings around the margins of the site. Campus East, restricted to match Campus West, and to retain something of its agricultural origins, is so dominated by modern university building and bright lighting, that any pretence of an agricultural atmosphere is entirely lost.

## 2.6 Is the 23% restriction on the developed footprint in Policy ED3 justified?

No, this is no longer justified. HPC feels that if there is a pressing need for further building for UoY, co-located with the existing sites, then the restriction to 23% built environment on Campus East site must be reconsidered. This would be far preferable to expanding the site as a whole and sprawling into the surrounding countryside. While the building restriction may provide some openness for UoY members, HPC considers that the harm from site expansion greatly outweighs aesthetic changes within the site. The rural character of Campus East is already utterly changed by building, by lighting and by infrastructure. Not only could the site be built on more intensively without substantially affecting its impact, but height restrictions could also be somewhat relaxed as appropriate to the terrain. Indeed, the presence of the very high water table 15 years ago, which restricted availability of space at ground level, should also be re-visited in light of Climate Change and advances in engineering.

## 2.7 Is Policy SS22 (ST27) soundly based?

HPC contends that ST27 is not soundly based and should be removed from the Local Plan because it is

- contrary to CYC's own policies about acceptable sites for development
- is unjustified in terms of need
- it is contrary to the Secretary of State's ruling 2007
- it will cause reduction of green belt land
- it will result in avoidable harm to local communities and the environment.

Instead, CYC and UoY should work to find alternative means of provision for possible increased UoY activity. Campus East should remain within its original boundaries and this should be reinforced by designating green belt up to the present perimeter of the Campus East site.

Allowing employment development at ST27, even with the reduction in the 2021 modification, directly contradicts CYC's reasoning for not allowing further housing development within the ring road. TP1 Addendum Annex 5p.5.15 "degree of harm (of ST15) has been judged to be far less than would be caused should the housing development in those settlements be located, instead, on the edge of the existing built up area of the City or in its surrounding settlements."

3.5 p 27 “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. This work also indicates that there are areas of land outside the built up areas that should be retained as open land as they prevent communities within the environs of York from merging into one another and the city. These areas are considered to have a key role in preserving the identity of the settlements and villages around York. The relationship of York to its surrounding settlements is an important aspect of the city’s character.”

HPC do not consider that CYC has justified this contradiction.

Campus East was portrayed as a one-off development complete as planned and agreed in 2007 with no intention to spread beyond its then boundaries. HPC expects CYC and UoY to honour that intention. "While the area of open land between the A64 and the developed edge of York would be reduced if the development were to proceed, a substantial area of Green Belt would be retained between the road and Low Lane. Furthermore, Low Lane would provide a clearly defined and obvious limit to development." (Inspector's (H G Rowlands) Report to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, IR 676 732). Currently there is no access to Low Lane from Campus East in order to maintain the agreed buffer zone, and as protection for the village from through traffic. The Parish Council feels that it is important to maintain this as a no through traffic road.

Much of the southern boundary of Campus East was landscaped for conservation and wildlife, in consultation with York Ornithological Club (CYC Further Sites Consultation June 2014). If ST27 were to go ahead as planned, what mitigation for the loss of this habitat will be put in place and how long ahead of the site being built upon? Habitats Regulations Assessment Feb 2019 p31 3.22 indicates the landowners undertook their own ecological reports. We would expect an independent report to be repeated prior to any building work commencing as part of the planning application condition, were ST27 to be approved. This would need to include a detailed assessment of the impact of roads within ST27 and links across to the rest of Campus East.

Low Lane, Green Lane and associated footpaths are important and highly valued amenities for Heslington residents. The land is not a vacant plot, but is productive farmland providing local food and local employment. The fact that Low Lane is a no through road protects it from becoming a desirable vehicular route and preserves it as an example of an unlit country lane with abundant hedgerows and farming activity on each side. The loss of, or change to, Low Lane as a part of the former farmland now taken over by Campus East, would be a source of grief for Heslington residents. We look to UoY to respect the 2007 ruling and to endeavour to do more, rather than less, to contribute to the well-being and rural amenities of Heslington residents.

Heslington has more strategic sites allocated in its parish than anywhere else in York. The cumulative effect of these needs to be addressed in terms of congestion, air quality, the

carbon zero ambitions of CYC and the impact on the amenities of existing York residents and businesses. In addition, the settlement of Heslington, identified as part of the important rural setting of York (figure 3.1 p.27), risks becoming entirely engulfed by UoY to the long term detriment of the university itself as well as to its neighbouring communities and to the City of York

There are a number of alternatives to accommodate potential increased activity by UoY that would not require building on green field sites. Some of these such as increased density of building or off-site brown field development are described above. Others, such as a re-appraisal of the amount of work space needed in light of the last 3 years' changes, is an exercise that should be re-visited before irrevocable changes to York's rural surroundings are allowed.

## 2.8 Will it be sufficient for the needs of the University of York?

Please see responses 2.1 and 2.4 above

## 2.9 Is the 23% restriction on developed footprint in Policy SS22 justified?

Please see responses 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 above

## 2.10 Is the approach of the Plan to the University of York justified in Green Belt terms (whether in terms of Green Belt boundaries, or 'washing over')?

Campus East was presented to Heslington Residents in 2007 as a "one-off" development that would not expand further and there was a strong requirement for the existing boundaries to be preserved. "While the area of open land between the A64 and the developed edge of York would be reduced if the (Campus East) development were to proceed, a substantial area of Green Belt would be retained between the road and Low Lane. Furthermore, Low Lane would provide a clearly defined and obvious limit to development." (Inspector's (H G Rowlands) Report to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government IR 676 732).

CYC's own submitted Local Plan states p.27, "areas of land outside the built up areas that should be retained as open land as they prevent communities within the environs of York from merging into one another and the city. These areas are considered to have a key role in preserving the identity of the settlements and villages around York. The relationship of York to its surrounding settlements is an important aspect of the city's character. The areas of land considered to serve this purpose are illustrated in Figure 3.1." The figure (p.28) illustrates that all the land south of Low Lane and at the western end of the Campus East site north of Low lane/School Lane are "Areas retaining rural setting." The siting of ST27 south of Low Lane is in direct conflict with this.

Low Lane, Green Lane and associated footpaths are important and highly valued amenities for Heslington residents. The land is not “empty” but rather is productive farmland providing local food and local employment. The fact that it is a no through road protects it from becoming a desirable vehicular route and preserves it as an example of a country lane with abundant ancient hedgerows and farming activity on each side. Many residents of Heslington use it for recreation and leisure purposes, and it is an essential part of the rural character of Heslington Village, including the unlit surroundings to the village that remain following the development of Campus East. The loss of, or changes to, Low Lane/Green Lane as a part of the former farmland now taken over by Campus East, would be a loss for Heslington residents.

When planning policy discourages development on green field sites, it is difficult to understand why this would be permitted beyond the development boundaries for Campus East set by the secretary of state in 2007. The Secretary of State particularly commented that the lake and wetland area will provide a positive limit to built development to the south of the Heslington East site and help Heslington still preserve its unique rural village character.

Building on a green field site, designated by the Secretary of State as an important buffer to contain Campus East and separate it from Heslington Village, and previously treated for all planning purposes by CYC as Green Belt, is not justified in the plan. Moreover, allowing development at this location, even with the reduced allocation of the 2021 modifications, directly contradicts CYC’s reasoning elsewhere for not allowing further housing development within the ring road in order to preserve the historic setting of York e.g. as expressed in TP1 Addendum Annex 5p.5.15 “degree of harm (of ST15) has been judged to be far less than would be caused should the housing development in those settlements be located, instead, on the edge of the existing built up area of the City or in its surrounding settlements.”

The NPPF states that brown field sites should always have preference over green field. UoY should look at maximising best STEM use of brown field sites within the current Science Park, or more remotely, instead of building on a green field site into a designated buffer zone. If CYC and the Inspectors are minded to overrule the planning constraints pertaining to Campus East, then a better solution would be to increase the density of building on both campuses and retain the existing boundaries absolutely as described above. The rural character of Campus East is already utterly changed by building, by lighting and by infrastructure. Parkland within the campus should be sacrificed before allowing urban sprawl into valuable open spaces which are also currently active food producing areas.