

**Planning Committee**

**17 August 2007**

**Development by the  
County Council**



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**Report of Rod Lugg, Head of Environment and Planning**

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**Purpose of the report: To enable the Committee to determine applications for planning permission which have been received in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992.**

**City of Durham District:** Proposed erection of new school, demolition of existing buildings and re-modelling of external environment, Durham Johnston School, Crossgate Moor, Durham (Regulation 3).

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## **Introduction**

- 1 Durham Johnston School is currently located on two sites. 900 – 1000 pupils within school years 8 – 13 are based at Crossgate Moor on the north west side of Durham City and about 450 pupils within years 7 and 8 are situated at Whinney Hill approximately 1.6 miles away on the south eastern edge of the city (see attached plan). The existing schools date from the 1950's and 1930's respectively and are in need of significant improvement to meet modern learning requirements. It has been a longstanding objective in education terms to consolidate the Durham Johnston School on a single site and Crossgate Moor is identified for this purpose in the adopted City of Durham Local Plan.
- 2 The County Council is now seeking to realise this ambition by constructing a new school building on the northern part of the existing school site and remodelling the remaining part of the grounds. The proposal would be the first of a number of rebuilding or refurbishment schemes to be undertaken at comprehensive schools across the County as part of the Government's Building Schools for the Future initiative. This is a 10 - 15 years programme aimed at transforming secondary education to meet 21st century needs.
- 3 Planning permission was granted in November 2006 for a range of temporary buildings and works on the Crossgate Moor site to ensure that curriculum requirements and health and safety standards would not be compromised by building operations associated with the proposed school. These preliminary measures have now been implemented. Should planning permission be granted for the main scheme and subject to construction timescales, it is anticipated that the new school building would be ready for occupation after Easter 2009.

## **Site and Proposal**

- 4 The existing school occupies 9.5 hectares of land between the A167 Newcastle Road, Flass Vale and Redhills Lane in the Crossgate Moor area of Durham. The existing buildings (approximately 9,100m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace) are mainly brick built shallow roofed structures of one, two or three storey height that are interspersed with an assortment of demountables. Vehicular access is currently gained from Redhills Lane. Playing fields are arranged to the south east and north of the school buildings.
- 5 The proposal involves provision of a part two storey and part three storey school building (13,099 m<sup>2</sup> floor area) on the northern playing field area. The building would be orientated to present its main frontage to the A167. Internal space would be organised off a circulation spine or street running north to south. Two projecting teaching wings and the sports block would extend to the east of this area and the assembly hall and surrounding teaching and office space would be positioned on its west side adjacent to the main entrance. The building would have an

overall length of 162m, width of 77m and maximum roof height of 13m. The main part of the building fronting the A167 and one of the teaching wings would be 3 storeys in height. The remaining accommodation would be arranged on two levels. Roofs would be flat or would have minimum pitches set behind parapets.

- 6 In terms of external design the building is intended to have a simple box like appearance with clear lines and projections and a mix of materials that combine to provide definition and visual interest as a unified whole. The main spine of the building would be glazed curtain walling punctuated at different points on the main elevation by coloured panels and over sailing windows systems and by plug in element associated with staircases and lobby areas on its eastern side. The eastern projections would be constructed in a mix of glass, red multi stock facing brickwork and multi coloured panels. The entrance canopy at the south west corner of the building and conical wind vents on the roof would provide further feature elements, adding to the interplay of planes and lines on the building.
- 7 The proposals also include a stand alone energy centre building to house a biomass boiler. Other works within the grounds include the formation of 6 playing pitches (including a synthetic turf pitch) on land to the south east of the building, sports store, two hard games courts, an outside performance space, various soft play areas and uses and nature conservation trails and wildlife sites. Games areas would be fenced where appropriate and the site would be enclosed by dark green 2.4m high weldmesh security fencing. Existing tree and hedge planting along the site boundary would be largely retained and this would be consolidated and reinforced by new structure planting and soft landscaping. Hard landscaping would predominate in areas around the building and would include an extensive plaza on the approach to the main entrance and informal courtyards and play areas between the teaching wings.
- 8 Vehicular access to the site would be gained from the A167 at a central point along the school frontage. This entrance and associated highway works within the A167 carriageway including the relocation of a pedestrian refuge, formation of a right turn island and keep clear markings adjacent to the access, has already been provided as part of the earlier enabling works and is currently in use in association with construction traffic.
- 9 Footpaths adjacent to the access would allow pedestrian entrance to the school and two other segregated pedestrian routes would be available from the site frontage. The existing Redhills Lane access would also operate as a pedestrian/cycle route. This would be closed to vehicular traffic and the boundary adjusted to incorporate a 3m wide gate. The footpath/cycleway within the school grounds would be suitably lit.
- 10 80 formal car parking spaces and 15 bus spaces would be formed off a one way internal road system to the south of the school building. Cycle shelters and stands would also be provided in two locations accommodating a total of 120 cycles.

## Revisions

- 11 A number of revisions to the scheme have been made since the application was first submitted. These essentially involve re-siting the main building 10 metres further to the west (towards road A167) and associated modifications to external areas and landscaping such as the introduction of landscape mounding and additional structure planting around the eastern boundary of the site. Several minor changes to the design of the main building and energy centre have also been made. These include the removal of the mesh system to the front of the assembly block and most of the wind catchers on the roof. One of the external lift shafts on the rear elevation has also been removed. Changes to the type and level of panel treatment on the elevations have been incorporated and the energy centre now has a square appearance instead of oval as first shown. In terms of access arrangements it is intended to remove right turn markings within the centre lane of the carriageway so that this can be used by vehicles turning into the site and into neighbouring properties. Provision is also now being made for a parent drop off area using part of the existing site access. The changes have been made to help address some issues of environmental concern and to achieve appropriate cost savings.

## Consultations and Representations

- 12 Durham City Council welcomes the scheme in principle although concern was expressed regarding the new access to the site from the A167 and its implications for highway safety. It was therefore requested that representatives from the County Council meet local ward members of the City Council on site to discuss the access and its operation. The proposals were otherwise supported subject to the following safeguards:
- i) Careful control of lighting within and outside the school buildings to minimise impacts on adjoining residents and long and short distance views particularly from the World Heritage site.
  - ii) Careful selection of plant species on the boundary with Flass Vale to reflect the character of that area which forms part of the City Centre Conservation Area and along the Redhills Lane boundary to complement existing vegetation.
  - iii) Further consideration being given to the choice of fencing along the Redhills Lane boundary.
  - iv) Full implementation of proposed post-construction ecological mitigation measures.
  - v) Arboricultural Impact assessment being carried out in accordance with required (BS5837) standards.
  - vi) Involvement of the County Archaeologist in the development and where possible battlefield interpretation material being included within the site.

*Comment: Appropriate measures and safeguards would be incorporated as necessary within the scheme and would pick up many of the issues raised by the City Council. Highway representatives have met the local City Councillor on site as requested to discuss the access issue.*

- 13 Sport England raises no objection subject to the imposition of suggested conditions covering the quality of playing pitches, details of the design and layout of changing rooms and the synthetic turf pitch and provision of a community use agreement to ensure that the new facilities are made available for community use.
- 14 The Environment Agency has no objections provided conditions are attached to any consent requiring the provision of oil interceptors from car parks and hardstandings and approval of a scheme for surface water drainage works prior to the commencement of development.
- 15 Natural England advises that the proposal is unlikely to have an adverse affect on wildlife species especially those protected by law subject to the development being carried out in accordance with mitigation measures detailed in the submitted protected species reports and these being covered by a suitable planning condition. No additional are made on the revisions.
- 16 English Heritage does not wish to comment in detail but offers general observations about the need to establish the visual impact of the scheme in views across, towards and from Flass Vale. It is suggested that this should be established by a robust visual analysis.

*Comment: Additional visual assessment work has been produced as part of the revisions to the scheme. This indicates that the development would have limited impact on views across Flass Vale and upon the World Heritage Site. Comments from English Heritage on the revisions are still awaited.*

- 17 City of Durham Trust welcomes the promise of a new school and the potential of community use in the evenings. Whilst appreciative of the intention to create a building of civic proportions and break from stock school design the Trust considers that the project does not fully achieve its aim and is disappointed in the project as an architectural exercise based on current plans and drawings.

Traffic movement is cited as an almost intractable problem and given current road conditions on the A167 increase in school personnel and access and exit arrangements there appears to be less change of efficient movement than under present arrangements.

- 18 ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) considers that any major development around the Durham Bowl such as the proposed school should be subject to an impact assessment that considers the visual impact of the proposals on the setting of the World Heritage Site. Determination of the application should be deferred until this has been undertaken.

*Comment: Additional visual assessment details have been produced and passed to ICOMOS for comment. No response has yet been received.*

- 19 The application has been advertised on site and in the press and neighbouring residential properties notified. The proposals were also the subject of an earlier public exhibition at the school in September 2006. 17 letters were received from or on behalf of nearby residents (including 6 from one person and 5 from another) in response to the planning notification. These raise the following issues and concerns:
- (i) The main school access and its junction with the A167 raise serious health and safety concerns for residents opposite the entrance in Moor Edge. The right hand turn to the school within the carriageway creates an extra lane of traffic and requires a dangerous turning manoeuvre in the face of oncoming traffic and restricted views by cars turning in and out of these properties. The arrangement also creates problems for emergency service vehicles, potentially blocking their pathway. It was introduced without prior notification to residents. Recent accidents and near miss incidents on this stretch of carriageway and around the entrance indicate how dangerous it is.
  - (ii) A school of the size and cost involved requires proper traffic management not a poorly conceived slip road. Traffic problems with the A167 junction were highlighted by almost a third of respondents at the public exhibition. Alternative solutions to this problem should be found including relocation of the access to the south or north, creation of a mini roundabout, provision of traffic lights or the creation of an in/out system using both the existing Redhills Lane access and the new access. In/out arrangements on the new access could also be an option by creating an island in the bell mouth with separate north south entry and exit lanes. Minor works within the highway verge to assist turning in and out of one property should also be considered. A pelican crossing should be included in the scheme. The Council will be blamed and sued if accidents occur as a result of the access arrangements. Consideration of the application should be deferred to allow residents to seek professional advice about the adequacy of the access. The right turn road marking at the new school entrance should be removed to allow residents to access their properties.
  - (iii) The traffic assessment is seriously flawed and car parking standards within the development are inadequate and do not allow for pupil parking. This will lead to all day nuisance parking on Redhills Lane. There are already on street school related parking issues and the increase in school numbers, especially younger pupils, will increase drop off and pick up rates on Redhills Lane and worsen conditions at the A167 junction. A layby should be formed on the A167 to allow pupil set down and pick up.
  - (iv) The temporary car park behind 13 Redhills Lane is a source of pollution and land contamination for the neighbouring residential property and should be removed as soon as possible.
  - (v) The location, design and bulk of the school building would be significantly detrimental to the amenity of the occupants of an adjacent property. Consideration should be given to re-siting the building.

- (vi) The proposal would materially change and intensify the use of the northern part of the site with resultant increases in noise levels and light pollution.
- (vii) The application does not contain an adequate analysis of the development in terms of impacts on the AHLV, Green Belt Conservation Area and World Heritage Site. The effects of noise traffic and impacts on archaeology have also not been thoroughly assessed.
- (viii) The use of the annexe site for residential development and an indication of what is proposed here should have been included with the submitted plans because of the potential amenity impacts and because the school redevelopment is linked to the sale of this land. There are inconsistencies between the boundaries as shown on the submitted plans and the draft planning brief that has been prepared for this site.
- (ix) Inconsistencies on plan as to the location of the temporary access point on Redhills Lane and extent and treatment of boundary planting should be rectified to accord with earlier commitments and maximise hedge retention. The treatment of the site periphery also needs to be the subject of further discussion with residents and interest groups such as the Friends of Flass Vale to achieve an integrated approach.
- (x) The plans show a potential external store adjacent to the playing field of a significant size but with no details of its appearance. This should be located out of the conservation area and out of the line of sight from the Cathedral tower.

*Comment: The main traffic implications of the scheme are considered in paragraphs 40-51 although the Head of Highway Management has responded directly to some residents about the points made. The temporary car park would be removed on completion of the development. The annexe area does not form part of the development site (also excluded from the local plan school redevelopment allocation) and its future use is being progressed separately. A design brief is being produced to outline the planning parameters of any future development and any planning permission would be sought from the City Council in due course. Surrounding residents have been given the opportunity to comment on the brief and would be able to make representations on any development proposals submitted for planning permission. Additional information about the external storage facility has now been provided and full details of this and other matters including boundary treatment can be covered by planning condition. There is already a planning requirement to submit and agree the details of any temporary access onto Redhills Lane.*

- 20 A further 4 letters were received following re-notification of residents about the proposed amendments. These relate to the access arrangements which are considered to be seriously flawed and seek clarification of how the junction would operate. Two from a single resident express continued objection to the new school junction and disappointment that no changes to the access / egress arrangements are proposed. The following additional points are made:

- i) When buses are standing in the right turn lane it is doubtful whether anything other than a car will be able to pass on the nearside lane. This together with the volumes of traffic waiting to enter the site will cause the road to back up and block the northbound carriageway.
- ii) The junction would rely on the goodwill of other road users giving way to traffic accessing and egressing the site and neighbouring properties. This would not occur on a regular basis and would lead to dangerous manoeuvres.
- iii) No provision is made for parent drop off/pickup within the scheme despite promises to this effect in a consultation document. Students dropped off on the Moor Edge side of the road will be tempted to cross at various points in dangerous conditions including through standing traffic.
- iv) There is concern about emergency vehicles on a vital route blocked by standing traffic at peak periods around the junction.
- v) The new junction poses an unacceptable level of risk to staff, students, road users and local residents and raises issues that were not addressed by the County Council's road safety team. Its provision is contrary to Policy T1 of the Local Plan precluding development generating traffic that is prejudicial to road safety.

## **Planning Considerations**

### Policies

- 21 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that where regard is had to the Development Plan for the purpose of determining planning applications, decisions must be made in accordance with the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 22 The school is safeguarded for development as a single site comprehensive school in the City of Durham Local Plan under Policy C6. Other policies that specifically relate to the development site include Policy E25 (Neville's Cross Battlefield) and Policies E6 and E22 (Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area). Policies E3 (World Heritage site and setting), E10 (Areas of Landscape Value), E18 (Sites of Nature Conservation Importance) deal with key designations and impacts around the site. A range of general policies cover the principles and quality of development (including Q1, Q2 and Q5) safeguarding requirements for open space used for recreation (R3) nature conservation (E16) and traffic generation and parking (T1 and T10).
- 23 In terms of sustainable development, Policy 40 of the draft Regional Spatial Strategy requires major developments to incorporate a minimum 10% of energy supply from renewable sources and Policy 39 requires developments of this kind to achieve a BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) rating of very good or excellent. Policy U14 of the City of Durham Local Plan encourages energy conservation measures in the design and construction of buildings.



- 24 Having regard to the above framework it is considered that the proposals would accord with Policy C6 of the adopted Local Plan and would not materially conflict with other development plan policies.

### Design and Layout

- 25 The proposed new school would replace existing buildings that are in poor condition. These are largely unassuming and lacking in design quality. They are centrally located on the site and do not relate to any significant extent to either Moor Edge or Redhills Lane boundaries. The overall contribution of existing school buildings to the character and appearance of the surrounding area is therefore limited.
- 26 Whilst the existing buildings are not worthy of retention, they do impact on the layout of the replacement school. The need to keep these in use until the new development is completed has heavily influenced where it can be located on the site. The position on the northern playing fields was one of two siting options that were considered. This area was preferred because it fronts a main transport route and avoids more sensitive vistas and landscape designations on the south side of the site.
- 27 In terms of detailed design, the proposed scheme generally responds well to the opportunities and constraints that are present on the northern part of the site. The A167 frontage can accommodate a building of 3 storeys in terms of scale and massing and the form and appearance would be visually striking and significant. The glazed atrium street and treatment of the main entrance area would provide suitable civic presence and community focus to the building.
- 28 The brick faced classroom wings to the rear would have a more traditional feel and uniform appearance. However, there are variations in height and depth to address space restrictions on the east side of the site and strong detailing and the interplay of projections on the elevations would create a satisfying contemporary impression that reflects the overall design approach. The scheme has been the subject of a design review process along lines advocated by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and is generally considered to provide a good architectural response to the key design criteria including functionality, appearance, environmental management and relationship to the site and its surroundings.
- 29 The proposed school is intended to be prominent along the A167. However its affect on surrounding open land to the south, north and east would be more muted and it would not appear as a significant skyline feature in more distant views from the City Centre.
- 30 The school sits on high ground on the edge of the Durham Bowl and has open views across the south east playing fields towards the Cathedral and Castle. The existing buildings can be seen from the Cathedral tower against the wooded backcloth of Flass Vale and rising open land beyond the settlement boundary to the north west. The new school would have a more significant 3 storey element but would have

a more compact form overall. It would be set further to the north closer to road A167 and angled away from the Cathedral tower behind the tree line. The new buildings would still be seen but it is not considered that there would be any significant new or adverse visual impacts on the setting of the World Heritage Site. (English Heritage and ICOMOS have no objections in this respect.)

- 31 The Area of Landscape Value (and also part of the Green Belt) extends to north of the site and wraps around its elongated eastern boundary. The concentration of buildings and hard surfaced areas at the northern end of the site would create more of an urban edge to the adjacent designated landscape but this area is already punctuated by two residential properties set in extensive grounds. The remaining part of the site especially where it borders more extensive wooded areas would largely be retained in open use. The overall relationship to the surrounding landscape and the affect on its character and quality would not therefore materially change. The affect on the Durham City Centre Conservation Area would also be limited. This traverses the southern playing fields. It is intended to retain this area in its current use and the proposals would not adversely affect the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. One of the proposed single storey sports equipment stores would be located within the Conservation Area and would need to be appropriately designed for its setting. Floodlighting of the synthetic sports pitch was primarily omitted from the scheme as a response to the sensitive surrounding environment.

#### Residential Amenity

- 32 The school site is bordered by residential development and there are a range of houses and bungalows along different parts of the boundary or with views into the site. Properties to the west in Moor Edge would look across the A167 to the building at distances of 55 - 65 metres. Properties in Redhills Lane to the south and streets radiating from it would be further away. The repositioning of the building further to the west would bring it closer to these properties and the physical presence and visual impacts along the A167 frontage would be increased. However, this area has a strong public dimension and a major road separates the development from housing on Moor Edge. The closest part of the building to the road would be two storey with three storey element aligned behind this. There are also number of tall trees along the school boundary and within the highway verge together with several 10 metres high street lighting columns. Planting within or along front gardens also provides some screening of the development site for properties. Although the building would impose itself on the frontage it would be sufficiently far away to avoid direct amenity issues associated with loss of light, visual intrusion and disturbance. It would affect the outlook of occupiers but the main private aspect from Moor Edge lies to the west and across open countryside and this would be unaffected by the development.
- 33 The detached property adjacent to the north east of the site would be most affected by the building. This is accessed from a private road immediately to the north of the site boundary and the two storey western façade of this property currently backs on to a playing field.

This area would become part of the main school complex. The proposal has been revised to set the school building 10 metres further away from this property and the two storey classroom wing would come within 75m of this house presenting an end elevation stairwell to a height of 8m and width of 17m. The property is at a slightly lower level to the playing field and there is hedge planting on the boundary adjacent to a public footpath to a height of 2 – 3 metres. Although windows facing the site would lose their open aspect, the house is largely orientated to take advantage of vistas to the south towards the Cathedral. The glazing on the stair well on the ends of the two and three storey wings of the school would be formed from obscure glass and windows would be unopenable to help maintain privacy. A substantial and mounded area of tree planting would also be formed along the site boundary and outside the site to help soften and screen this part of the development. Given the building to building distances, massing, orientations and extent of proposed landscaping around the eastern boundary of the site, it is not considered that the new school building would unacceptably dominate or adversely affect the amenities and privacy of these neighbouring residential occupiers.

- 34 The location and use of external spaces including formal and informal play areas and car parking areas has some potential to generate noise and disturbance at certain times. These have generally been sited away from or directly off the boundaries with neighbouring properties and are not visually prominent. Dwellings in Neville Terrace would be situated to the south of the new car park and the bus parking area would be 12 metres from the gable wall of the end house in Neville Terrace and the rear elevation of Garden Villa which is on the site boundary. Tree planting would partially screen the car park and these properties would benefit from the removal of existing school buildings. Whilst there would be some change in the nature of activity in this area it is partly used for parking purposes at the moment and any change would not be significant. One of the hard surfaced play courts would be located approximately 18 metres to the rear of the residential properties on Redhills Lane. This area is currently used as the main site access and for car parking and use of courts for managed play would not give rise to new amenity issues. There would be some informal play and general activity around the courtyards and hard surfaced areas next to the teaching wings. These would be busy at break times but activity would be more limited and managed overall throughout the school day. Part of this area is already hard surfaced for play purposes and the remainder forms part of the playing field which is in regular use for formal and informal sport and recreation.
- 35 The school wishes to maintain good neighbour relations and a management plan covering school operating times and activities is proposed. This would be reviewed on an annual basis by the school in consultation with local residents to ensure that any operational changes and issues arising from use of the site and impact on surrounding properties can be raised, discussed and appropriately dealt with. The production of a management plan would be a planning requirement covered by condition.

## Sport and Recreation

- 36 The school would incorporate sufficient on site outdoor play space to meet statutory education requirements. The number of playing pitches on the site would be increased from 5 to 6 and would include a synthetic turf pitch that would be available for all weather use. New pitch drainage systems would be installed on new play areas and those that are being reconfigured. The two existing pitches currently available to the lower school at Whinney Hill are leased from the University and would be returned on relocation. Temporary arrangements would be put in place to ensure continued use of some pitches during the construction phase. It is the intention of the school to encourage community use of its facilities and external play areas would be made available for this purpose. Subject to appropriate planning conditions to ensure that the required standard of facilities are provided and made available for use by the wider community, the formal recreation elements of the scheme are considered acceptable.

## Nature Conservation, Landscape and Archaeology

- 37 The proposals have been the subject of various surveys and assessments to ensure that key elements of site's natural environment are protected and where possible enhanced by the development. Protected species surveys have been undertaken and appropriate mitigation measures would be put in place to ensure that those species identified (there is bat roost in part of the existing building) would be safeguarded during demolition and catered for in the detailed design of the new school. The site lies adjacent to the Flass Vale Site of Nature Conservation Interest and the grounds development strategy has had regard to strengthening the links to this area as well as generally increasing the opportunities for biodiversity.
- 38 Tree cover on the site is not extensive and is largely confined to the western perimeter and pockets around the existing access and south west corner of the site. Some of this would need to be removed to accommodate elements of the development especially the car park. However, a tree constraints plan has been produced to ensure that a suitable planting framework is retained. New planting proposals would be interwoven around to strengthen all boundaries and provide a suitable landscape context to the building and external spaces and activity areas.
- 39 The school site lies within the area across which the Battle of Neville's Cross (1346) was fought. Much of the area has been built on over the years although some open land forming part of the Battlefield is on English Heritage's Register of Historic Battlefields. The school site is not within this area and the land has previously been disturbed in association with the construction of existing buildings and playing fields. It is therefore unlikely that any physical evidence of the battle is present. The proposed development would not affect the overall interpretation of the course of the battle and subject to an appropriate planning condition to allow monitoring to take place during ground disturbance works archaeological interests would be safeguarded.

## Traffic, Access and Parking

- 40 The proposal involves the consolidation of the existing school on a single site on a heavily trafficked section of the Durham road network and there would be a range of traffic related implications from the intensification of use and repositioning of the site access.
- 41 The Crossgate Moor site currently caters for 900 pupils. It is serviced by 6 school buses in the morning and afternoon. Vehicle access to the site is gained from Redhills Lane and its junction with the A167. Following completion of the development, pupil numbers would increase up to 1450. An expected 12 school buses would visit the site using the new access directly off the A167. There are approximately 164 permanent and temporary full time members of staff employed by the school as a whole. Most operate from the Crossgate Moor site although 38 people based at Whinney Hill would transfer to the new school. Not all users of the site arrive by car or school bus and there are good pedestrian/cycle and public transport links to the school including bus stops within easy walking distance.
- 42 In view of the potential highway implications of the school redevelopment, a transport assessment was commissioned by the County Council to look at the capacity of the road network and junctions to accommodate predicted traffic flows generated by the development. The study by Arup concluded that traffic levels associated with the scheme would not have a material impact on traffic flows or adversely affect the capacity of existing junctions around the site. It was also considered that vehicular access to the site from a single point on the A167 (in the form of a ghost island priority junction) would be sufficient to cater for the anticipated school traffic although vehicles leaving the site and turning right at the end of the school day could experience a small delay.
- 43 Many of the concerns expressed by local residents are directed at the proposed access arrangements and the suitability and safety of the junction. The access and protected right hand within the highway has already been provided as part of earlier enabling works although its use is currently restricted to construction traffic. Its existence has changed access and egress arrangement for the residents of 6 properties turning in and out their driveways, as they are now required to cross the right turn lane and the carriageway when turning south on the A167 or when returning home from the north. They consider that this manoeuvre in the face of two potential streams of oncoming traffic is more dangerous than the previous arrangement where vehicles could be positioned within a central hatched area.
- 44 The Head of Highway Management has considered these concerns. Whilst it is accepted that this is not an ideal arrangement it is one of a number of manoeuvres from private drives and side roads that have to be carried out on major roads such as the A167 and is legally permitted. Nevertheless, in order to ease turning movements to and from these houses it is now proposed that the right turn arrows within the lane be removed so that the area can be used by vehicles accessing the site and the driveways of adjacent houses. The

presence of vehicles within the lane and movement of vehicles on the road will vary around school hours and peak periods of the working day. The new junction arrangement may cause some additional frustration and delay for these residents but provided due care and attention is exercised it is not considered to be inherently dangerous in highway terms. The revised arrangements have been adopted elsewhere along the A167.

- 45 A safety audit of the junction was undertaken as part of the design process and has confirmed that it meets required safety standards for all users. A further stage 3 safety audit of the junction would be undertaken in accordance with adopted highways practice when the junction becomes operational for school traffic.
- 46 Alternative access arrangements were considered as part of the overall design process for the school, including use of the existing access on its own or as part of a one way 'in and out' system with the new access on the A167. Access from a roundabout on the A167 and a traffic light controlled junction to the school were also examined. The existing site access on Redhills Lane is poor and creates congestion around this residential street at school times and at its junction with the A167 which lies very close to the Toll House Road traffic signal controlled junction. The generation of additional traffic arising from the transfer of the lower school was considered unacceptable. A one way system through the school grounds was not favoured in traffic management terms and because of the safety implications and space constraints on the site.
- 47 The roundabout option was not considered to be justified to serve the levels of traffic associated with the school and would have raised safety implications for pedestrians and cyclists and a different set of access constraints for properties located off the roundabout. Controlling the junction via traffic signals would have provided appropriate segregation and control for vehicle and pedestrians. Nevertheless this solution was also considered inappropriate and excessive for the intended levels of use and access to the nearest houses on Moor Edge would still have been compromised. Other traffic management options based on separate in and out arrangements are not considered to be practical and would involve long detours for many vehicles accessing the site.
- 48 Having regard to the size and nature of the development and school travel patterns, visibility constraints and the location of other junctions and accesses in the vicinity, the preferred highway access arrangement remains the priority T junction in the position provided. Reconfiguration of the access is not therefore considered necessary and depending on the scale of the works and land requirements would involve adjustments to the layout of the building and grounds.
- 49 Most new developments introduce change and this can be to the relative advantage or disadvantage of those surrounding a site. Although concern has been raised that Redhills Lane would still be used to drop off children (an existing area of hardstanding within the site is shown to be retained as a dropping off point) and for on street parking purposes in association with the school, residents would benefit overall from the closure of the existing school access to

vehicles. Those living along Moor Edge are accustomed to heavy traffic flows on the A167 and most would be relatively unaffected by the increase in school traffic and change in access arrangements. The occupiers of six properties would need to negotiate the junction although, as a response to the concerns of these residents, it is now intended to amend the road markings to allow drivers to turn in and out of their properties without crossing a protected right turn area. On the balance of the traffic assessments and traffic related amenity issues across the scheme the highway impacts of the scheme are considered acceptable.

- 50 The proposed level of car parking on the site (76 spaces and 4 disabled parking bays) would be in line with the recommended standard for school use in the County Council's revised 'Accessibility and Parking Guidelines'. Dedicated bus bays and a layby are included within the parking layout and there is some provision for occasional overspill parking on a hardsurfaced play area in association with special events. Cycle parking would also be provided although this would initially be at a level below the expected requirements. However, there is a commitment to provide additional cycle areas in the future as demand increases.
- 51 Current parking on the existing school sites suggests that the potential demand for spaces would be exceeded. However, it is intended to produce a travel plan in association with the development to help manage school travel patterns and promote safe walking routes from the surrounding area. The upper site currently permits parking by sixth formers and this would be stopped as part of the travel plan. Staff and pupils would generally be encouraged to access the site by means other than the car using the good pedestrian, cycle and public transport routes around the school. Traffic Regulation Orders would be used as necessary to prevent the dropping off and collection of pupils at key points along the surrounding road. Associated works, signs and markings within the highway to give effect to these measures would need to be covered by planning condition and implemented as part of the development at the applicant's expense.

## Sustainability

- 52 Sustainable development principles have been embedded within the scheme and the detailed design would be subject to a BREEAM schools assessment. The building is expected to achieve a BREEAM score of 'very good' for its environmental performance and would incorporate a range of sustainable features and measures to minimise its environmental impact. These include a 'low carbon' biomass boiler within the proposed energy centre and solar thermal water panels on the two storey teaching block. At least 10% of the energy requirements of the school would be supplied from renewable sources. The building layout would be designed to maximise natural light and ventilation where possible and reduce excessive solar gain and heat loss. Rainwater harvesting and water efficient fittings and supply systems would be used to help reduce water demand. Landscape and ecological proposals within the grounds would protect the natural environment and enhance its ecological potential and transport related measures are intended to manage access.

## Conclusion

- 53 The proposed development would achieve a longstanding education objective of consolidating the Durham Johnston School on a single site and would accord with Local Plan policy that allocates the Crossgate Moor site for this purpose. The principal planning considerations therefore relate to the integration of the scheme on the site and within its surroundings and the impacts on the built and natural environment.
- 54 The site presents a number of opportunities and constraints. The layout design and condition of existing buildings is poor and the access arrangements are not ideal. The proposal provides the opportunity to address these issues and create a development that can meet modern educational and community needs and aspirations and wider sustainability objectives.
- 55 The scheme as presented would largely achieve this. Working within the space and development restrictions placed on different parts of the site, the building design appears well conceived and integrated and it has a simplicity and uniformity that is carried throughout the layout and elevations. The projections, variations in materials and detailing within the façade and roof add further layers of texture and colour and serve to enhance its appearance and status as a public building of significance. The basic design concept has not been radically altered or unacceptably diminished by revisions that simplify the elevational treatment.
- 56 The relationship of the building and external spaces and activities to surrounding residential properties would be acceptable in amenity terms and the development would not intrude significantly on sensitive views and areas of recognised importance in and around the site. The landscape and ecological importance of the grounds and its integration with the surrounding environment would be improved.
- 57 The proposal would increase the numbers of staff and children on the site and together with the repositioning of the main school access would affect vehicular movements and travel patterns within the vicinity. The traffic impact of the development is a key concern of some surrounding residents.
- 58 Nevertheless, the overall affect of school traffic on the surrounding road network would be within acceptable limits and there would be some local benefits arising from the closure of the Redhills Lane access and in the area around the existing Whinney Hill lower school site when it is closed. Although the position and configuration of the new school entrance would change the way several adjoining properties are accessed, it would meet highway design and safety requirements. Whilst accepting that the occupiers of properties involved would be disadvantaged to an extent, possible alternative junction options are not considered to be viable. The Head of Highway Management considers that the operation of the junction would need to be monitored once it becomes fully functional but subject to this requirement supports the proposed arrangements.



## Recommendation and Reasons

- 59 Having weighed the planning and highways implications of the scheme I **recommend** that planning permission be granted for the proposed new school for the reasons stated below, subject to conditions listed in Appendix A relating to building, landscaping and external works details, agreements and mitigation measures to ensure that the development is provided to the required standard and identified interests of importance are safeguarded.
- i) The proposal would accord with Policy C6 of the City of Durham Local Plan in that it would involve provision of a replacement single site Durham Johnston comprehensive school on land safeguarded for this purpose at Crossgate Moor.
  - ii) The proposed school building and external works can be appropriately accommodated on the site in terms of size, siting, design, layout and appearance, would meet the needs of users and relate satisfactorily to surrounding development in visual and residential amenity terms in accordance with Policies Q1, Q2 and Q5 of the City of Durham Local Plan.
  - iii) The proposal would not adversely affect the setting of the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area, World Heritage Site and Area of Landscape Value or the interpretation of the Neville's Cross Battlefield in accordance with Policies E3, E10, E22 and E25 of the City of Durham Local Plan
  - iv) The proposed transport implications of the scheme in terms of traffic generation and movements on the surrounding road network, the siting and design of accesses and provision for parking within the development would not prejudice the free flow of traffic, highway safety or wider transport objectives aimed at reducing reliance on the private car. The proposal would accord with Policies T1 and T10 of the City of Durham Local Plan.

### **No departure**

**Background Papers:** Application details, plans and supporting information. Responses to consultation and publicity.

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**City of Durham District:** Proposed erection of new school, demolition of existing buildings and re-modelling of external environment, Durham Johnston School, Crossgate Moor, Durham (Regulation 3).

