

COUNTY COUNCIL

20 JUNE 2018

QUESTIONS FROM AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIPS

DURHAM AAP

Durham University is vitally important to Durham City but over recent months issues regarding its future planned expansion have raised serious concerns with local residents and businesses. These issues have been well publicised and the University have held a very well attended public meeting at which some of these concerns were raised. Durham University is obviously a key partner for Durham County Council and Durham AAP recognises the value that the University brings to the City and to County Durham. However there is a strong feeling that by bringing even more students into Durham the balance in local communities is being tipped in favour of students and away from local residents.

What can Durham County Council do to reassure local residents and communities that their concerns are being listened to and that measures are being put in place to ensure that local communities are sustainable in the longer term and that Durham City does not become a term time only city? Can more be done to encourage Durham University to provide more on campus accommodation as the ever increasing number of 'Houses of Multiple Occupation' are pushing families and long term residents out of the city centre?

RESPONSE

I would like to thank the Durham AAP for their question.

The Council recognises the importance of Durham University to the City and the County. Having a world class university at the heart of the County delivers major economic benefits in terms of reputation, organisational spend and employment. Their plans for expansion will mean the University maintains its position as a market leader and will continue to contribute to the economy of County Durham. However we are well aware of the need to balance the ambition of the University with the experience of local residents. Like many university towns Durham has to manage the impact of increasing student numbers and this is something we do in partnership with the University, the local community and the other public agencies.

The Council has sought to put in policies to help limit the impact of students in older housing areas, through the Local Plan and through the article 4 direction. Of course many of these homes became student HMO's many years ago, but to try and provide alternative accommodation, and reverse the trend, the Council has supported new purpose built accommodation in appropriate locations. The University are now providing substantial new campus accommodation at Mount Oswald, while also exploring the use of the new purpose built blocks. We have encouraged them to look at increasing the amount of accommodation they manage and they are keen to accept that approach. We have also allocated land in the Local Plan to direct new development to the right locations. Over time I'd like to think that

this will prevent more homes from becoming HMO's while perhaps also leading to a gradual conversion of existing HMO's back to family homes.

Over recent years we have maintained an open dialogue with residents groups to enable us to respond as issues arise. All partners appreciate that we need to be alert to issues and tackle them as quickly as possible. The University are committed to greater transparency and are undertaking a range of consultation events on their future plans. This partnership approach will be essential if we are to keep moving forward. By working together I hope residents will keep the benefits of having a world class university in the City, while also feeling that they can continue to influence the way it develops over the coming years.

STANLEY AAP

It's great to see some major developments being completed in the town and starting to happen, but some land use issues still remain, including areas of vacant land, the Board School and the old Council Offices. Does the Council have plans to build on the recent positive developments to help ensure the remaining derelict sites on our Front Street are addressed?

RESPONSE

I'd like to thank the AAP for their question and for the work they have done over recent years to support the regeneration of Stanley. I've taken a keen interest in the land and buildings mentioned which were also identified as priorities in the Stanley masterplan and welcome the opportunity to provide an update.

Since the masterplan was approved the Council has been working with a range of owners and operators to secure the regeneration priorities we set out. These include resolving the former Bus Station and Front Street gap site and more recently approving further plans for redevelopment on Clifford Road Retail Park. Through our positive engagement with local businesses and interested developers we have also recently received a planning application for refurbishments to the Berties Bar premises, previously damaged by fire.

However, our aspirations for Stanley town centre extend beyond these schemes and we are also currently considering proposals for the old Council offices and other sites across the town as well as providing support to the current owner of the Board School property to secure the redevelopment of that site.

Our aim of creating vibrant and successful towns goes beyond land and premises projects. We are also providing a range of support services to both new and existing businesses which has recently been taken up by eight local businesses resulting in new jobs created, vacant premises occupied and new opportunities within the town. I expect further opportunities to follow in the near future.

Conversations with Members and partners have highlighted that the issues in Stanley are similar to those across the County. I would also like to take this opportunity to mention that we are also developing a new approach to town and village centre regeneration which will help tackle these issues over coming months and years.