

City of Durham Parish Council

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National Planning Casework Unit
5 St Philips Place
Colmore Row
Birmingham
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Dear National Planning Casework Unit

Durham County Council planning application DM/18/02369/FPA

I am writing to request that the Secretary of State calls in the above planning application, which is for the erection of a new County Council Headquarters with associated car parking (inclusive of a multi-storey car park) with associated landscaping, highway and infrastructure works and demolition of existing structures.

In terms of the Caborn Principles, the issues are that it may:

- conflict with national policies on important matters; and
- give rise to substantial cross-boundary or national controversy.

All of these arise in this case because the proposed development lies within the setting of the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site (WHS), and the opinion of the Durham WHS Coordinator is that the impact of these proposals, using the ICOMOS assessment system, is large and adverse. Her objection to these proposals is attached, as are the objection submitted by the City of Durham Parish Council.

Thus the proposal clearly conflicts with national policies on the important matter of large and adverse impact on the Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site and has already given rise to substantial controversy with a virtually unprecedented volume of well-argued objections from residents and local societies in the City and the County.

This Council is acutely aware that, in considering such requests, the response is most often that the Government is committed to give more power to councils and communities to make their own decisions on planning issues and believes planning

decisions should be made at the local level wherever possible. The situation here is now that in May 2018 a new, truly local council - the City of Durham Parish Council - was elected. The new Parish Council covers the communities of Elvet & Gilesgate; Neville's Cross and Durham South and has a population of some 21,000 people. Thus the City of Durham Parish Council is the most local democratic level where Government would wish planning decisions on behalf of local communities to be made wherever possible.

In addition to the Caborn principles there is the Nolan Principle that decision making by public bodies must not only be objective, open and transparent but must be seen to be so.

Public confidence in local government is damaged if decisions are perceived to be biased and self-interested. Planning authorities entirely legally make decisions on applications from their own Council for new schools and so on. However, in this particular case the application is in the name of a construction company for a new County Council headquarters building and multi-storey car park on a site chosen by that County Council to a specification set by that County Council and shaped by intensive and detailed discussions with the planning officers of that County Council. It is incredibly difficult for the public to understand that the County Planning Committee would refuse the application in which the County Council has been so intimately involved. Indeed, to refuse it would be a declaration that its own officers had failed to understand the requirements of the County Council.

Accordingly, the City of Durham Parish Council respectfully requests that the decision on this application is called in and placed with an Independent Inspector on the grounds of conflict with national policies on important matters; substantial national controversy; and public confidence in objective, transparent and impartial planning decision-making. Pending the County Council making a decision, we ask you to issue a holding direction.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Slagg". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stephen Ragg
Interim Clerk City of Durham Parish Council