

Durham SU Response to: The Future of Prince Bishops Place

16/8/2023

The Durham Students Union, as representatives of a key demographic in Durham, welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation. Durham students contribute significantly to the local economy and cultural diversity of the area. Durham has a serious housing problem, and the development of more student accommodation could relieve some of the pressure students and locals experience. The most persistent challenge students are facing is finding quality, affordable and flexible housing options. The redevelopment of Prince Bishops Place provides an opportunity to work towards tackling these issues by offering:

- Affordable student accommodation
- Flexible contracts and short-term rental options.
- Developers to contribute to providing local infrastructure and services.

Students are the most obvious audience for this development, given the need for more student housing in Durham and the positioning of the property, making it unsuitable for families. We believe we're on the same page here and welcome this opportunity to help students find decent homes. However, if you build more luxury accommodation, of which Durham is already saturated, you will price out your own market. Students have been left out of cost-of-living measures with, the average maintenance loan only increasing maintenance loans up by 2 when the inflation rate is 7.3%. We advocate for affordable student accommodation as Durham already has a plethora of luxury (=expensive) student accommodation; introducing 300 more, disregarding the national housing crisis and the Durham-specific situation will be a tone-deaf response.

We propose that said student accommodation would include the option of short-term (3,6,9,10 months) and flexible tenancies (extend monthly). Durham hosts several Doctoral and Post Doctoral researchers, visiting academics and fellows each year who require short-term housing. Current housing options for these short-term stays are limited and often expensive. This will not only cater to the needs of these visitors but also contribute to the diversity and vibrancy of the community. Moreover, the white paper released by the UK government in June 2022: A fairer private rented sector, indicates that such changes are about to happen, so it would be sensible to take this into account from the outset.

Developers to contribute to providing local infrastructure and services that are needed due to their development. This would ensure that when developers build student accommodation, they make sure there is a GP close by, supermarkets, bike racks and other amenities that students need.

Students care about the wider community and understand that the thriving of the local community is beneficial for students, too, so we are also pleading for affordable commercial units. The redevelopment of Prince Bishops Place provides an excellent opportunity to work

towards a balanced mixed community which aligns with the Durham County Council's new strategy (see <https://www.durham.gov.uk/thehousingconversation>). Therefore, we advocate for affordable commercial units to attract and support local independent business owners.

Durham Students' Union sees this consultation positively, especially given the values of the companies involved:

Corstorphine-Wright: Our methodology has people at its heart. After all, the underlying value of places is in their ability to foster human connection and support wellbeing.

Citrus Group: We've managed a number of joint ventures over the last 25 years, and are proud to have built an excellent reputation for fairness, integrity, confidentiality and professionalism.

Lichfields: Our planning and development consultancy work provides for the needs of the nation: much needed housing, new schools, larger universities, better hospitals and more infrastructure. We work with local communities to make our country a better place to live, work and visit, and this is reflected in the awards we've won for our project work.

In conclusion, we approach this consultation with optimism and hope that our ideas and suggestions will be given due consideration and translated into tangible actions. Through collaboration and shared values, we believe that the redevelopment of Prince Bishops Place can be a success story that benefits everyone involved and strengthens the bonds between the student community and the local residents of Durham.