

Crossgate Community Partnership

40 The Avenue
Durham DH1 4EB

Bus Station Consultation March 2019

The Crossgate Community Partnership is a charity whose objects are:

- to promote the conservation and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Crossgate and the surrounding area in Durham City
- to promote the establishment, continuation, and improvement of local amenities
- to build and maintain a strong, safe, healthy, and balanced community by encouraging the residents of Crossgate and neighbouring areas to participate in community activities.

At its monthly meeting on March 5th 2019, the Crossgate Community Partnership discussed the Council's invitation to comment on a new Bus Station for Durham City. Partnership members are residents of the side of Durham City adjacent to the Bus Station, and many of us are travellers by bus and users of the Bus Station. We were not entirely persuaded of the need to demolish the building: Cllr Carl Marshall's assertion, quoted on the consultation page on the council's website, that "[B]uilt in the 1970s, the current bus station is now past its best" does not identify which specific faults justify the expense and disruption of demolition and rebuilding, rather than repair and refurbishment (Heating and ventilation could certainly be improved.) However, having been very critical of the previous major redevelopment scheme for the Bus Station and North Road, on which Durham County Council consulted in 2016, we now welcomed the scaled down and apparently more open approach now being taken.

The one aspect of that previous scheme which we had identified as positive was the intention to regenerate the North Road, and some of the contributions of members at our March 2019 meeting indicate that residents still see this as a priority. The consultation page quotes Cllr Marshall as saying "We want to offer visitors to our area the best possible welcome ..." recognising that the North Road is the approach to Durham for visitors arriving in the City by public transport, and offers them both the first glimpse of the World Heritage site and the first taste of the City as a whole. It has the potential to be a worthy entry to the City, being in its own right a historic street, built in the 1830s (hence "Reform Place", the little square named in tribute to the Great Reform Act of 1832). It runs past the old Miners' Hall and Methodist Chapel - a sequence of fine and historic buildings framed by Durham's magnificent viaduct.

Any new building must be sensitive to this context. Members were keen to see something that would look good as a keynote building for the North Road. We welcomed the suggestion that the design might incorporate some features referring to the old Bus Station, now in Beamish Museum and featured in the illustrations on the consultation page of the website. These show not only the decorative metalwork (top row, centre) but also (top left) the way the open arcades are aligned with neighbouring buildings, while retaining the openness of the bus station onto the street. Some speakers remembered the old bus station as a cold and draughty place to wait for a bus, and would like to see Durham's new Bus Station bring together these historic features with modern techniques to create a more comfortable space. We heard praise for Morpeth Bus Station, a modern design with an emphasis on lightness and air.

Ease of passage between the North Road and the interior of the Bus Station could be facilitated by the removal or reduction of the row of retail units which currently form a barrier between them. It appears to be difficult to find tenants for these, and the Bus Station is a logical place for a newsagent and / or café, other businesses could find alternative premises without straying too far from the North Road. Equally, the creation of a mezzanine floor would provide an attractive location for a café, as long as proper provision is made for access, and would free up space at the concourse level.

The provision of public lavatories is inadequate, not to mention its intimidating nature. The station needs much better provision, not only within any café space, and preferably free of charge.

Staff facilities are also in need of improvement: at present there is an area of the opposite side of the street which serves as an unofficial smoking area: this is unsightly, obstructs shoppers and can hardly be satisfactory to staff.

There is a need for good information at the Bus Station, both for visitors to Durham arriving there, and for travellers looking for a bus. The electronic destination displays are useful and work well; but the information is seen from the point of view of the bus companies, showing only the end location of each route. Passengers also want to know which routes serve specific points (e.g. not just "Newcastle" but "County Hall" or "the Hospital") and which will get there first. Surely electronic displays can be adapted to meet such requirements. But the Bus Station is also a logical location for an actual, preferably staffed, information centre.

A constantly improved bus service has a crucial role to play in delivering the County's targets for greater sustainability. The City is a major interchange between north-south and east-west routes. If travellers are not to be deterred from making their journey by bus, it must be easy and comfortable to use. Success here will result in a move from private cars

to public transport, and more people using more buses, and the new Bus Station must be ready to accommodate them. It goes without saying that we hope to see a continuing shift to more sustainable fuels, and facilities which can support this.

There is a major drawback in the present route of buses exiting the bus station, since it involves buses emerging across the flow of pedestrians and unseen by them. It also conflicts with e.g. the 64 route down North Road. Can the opportunity be taken to improve this, whether by bringing the buses into the North Road at the same point but at a more oblique angle, or by creating a new exit altogether?

This last possibility moves beyond what can be achieved by a new building sitting broadly within the footprint of the existing Bus Station, as indicated by the red line on the consultation brief. But the same brief talks about its function “as a major transport hub for the region” and this is surely an ambition which requires a more ambitious plan? For example, if the previous proposal to demolish Hopper / Metcalfe House was reinstated (which would also have the advantage, by removing the overhanging upper storey, of getting rid of a dark and uninviting passageway), could buses be taken out onto the roundabout? This would have the further advantage that the top of the North Road could be pedestrianised.

Finally, nothing can seriously be described as a “major transport hub” which does not resolve the separation between bus traffic and the railway, caused by the very geography of the City. The spiral footbridge over St Godric's Road and the ceremonial flight of steps further up are a challenging route for those on foot with luggage, and the 40 bus is not an adequate solution. If the Council were prepared to undertake an ambitious and creative approach, we endorse the suggestion that what is needed is a lift / escalator from roundabout level to the southbound station yard; this could surely be built at reasonable expense; it would also cut down the number of vehicles travelling up and down the station approach. It would presumably need to be staffed in some way, but could be sufficiently distinctive that a small charge would be acceptable.

Roger Cornwell
Chair, Crossgate Community Partnership
21 March 2019