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BEESTON COMMUNITY FORUM

Mrs Victoria Hinchliff - Walker
Leeds City Council
by e mail

5th September 2013

Dear Mrs Hinchliff-Walker

RE PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE 13/03499/LA – USE OF SITE AS A NEW PARK AND RIDE FACILITY

We are taking this opportunity to lodge an objection to the above numbered planning application. Whilst we are not opposed in principle to the concept of a Park and Ride facility, we strongly believe that the proposed site at Elland Road is highly unsuitable for a Park and Ride facility. We believe that Leeds City Council has placed such emphasis on the fact that the site is already owned by the Council and therefore offers an opportunity to set up a Park and Ride facility at little cost, that it has ignored the substantial evidence that this site is unsuitable, as well as local public opinion which we believe is strongly opposed to the proposal.

We believe that Leeds City Council's own publicity about the proposals for the scheme betrays the real reason for the proposal. The publicity states that ' *Elland Road can be a quick win for Park and Ride in the City. The site is in council ownership and is underutilised for under 300 days a year. This also makes the site relatively low cost compared to sites on green fields with no current access*'. We feel that the council has ignored a significant body of professional opinion supporting the view that the site is unsuitable. A study commissioned by Leeds City Council in 2009 and undertaken by Halcrow put forward Tingley or Gildersome as the most suitable location for a Park and Ride Scheme to serve the south and west of the City. The Elland Road site was considered but the report concluded that other sites were more suitable. Additionally, Neil Holt of Metro, when appearing as a guest speaker at the Beeston Forum's meeting on 12th November 2009, expressed strong opposition to the concept of a Park and Ride facility at Elland Road. I refer to the relevant extract of the note of Mr Holt's contribution to the meeting (subsequently accepted by Mr Holt as a fair and accurate record of the discussion)

Bill Birch referred to rumours that Metro is planning a Park and Ride Scheme at Elland Road. He asked whether this is true, and whether we would be consulted. He referred to fears that this would cause more congestion. Neil Holt said that Metro is not applying for a park and ride site at Elland

Road. However, Metro would like a park and ride site, and were seeking to work with First on this. He suggested a site at Cross Green close to the new East Leeds Link Road. He noted that the site is owned by Leeds City Council, who originally said that this is a good idea, but then said that the land might be required for other purposes. The idea had gone no further. Neil Holt also pointed out that Elland Road is too close to the City Centre for a Park and Ride to be effective. It would not take much traffic off the road. He noted that Elland Road has good access from the M621 motorway. However, the junction between the Ring Road and Elland Road is solid with traffic, which raises questions as to whether cars would be able to go smoothly and easily into any Elland Road Park and Ride site. On the contrary, Neil Holt said that he is attracted by the idea of a park and ride scheme close to the East Leeds Link Road. The concept would work there as buses give a quick route into Leeds City Centre.

As stated above, we believe that local residents are strongly opposed to the proposals. The Beeston Community Forum hosts monthly meetings dealing with issues which are relevant to the community. These meetings are widely advertised, notably on posters in the area and on our website. We have, on several occasions hosted guest speakers dealing with the Park and Ride proposals, notably our meeting on 6th June 2013, when we hosted Councillor Richard Lewis, Mr Martin Farrington, Mr Andrew Hall and Mr Paul Foster and our meeting on 5th April 2012 when we hosted Councillor Lewis and Messrs Farrington and Hall. We have also discussed the proposals on other occasions. There has not been a single expression of local support from local residents for the proposals and we believe that the reason for this is the sheer unsuitability of the location.

We have also expressed concerns that the survey organised by Leeds City Council in relation to the scheme has been skewed in such a way as to produce the result which Leeds City Council wants, namely support for the scheme. We note that copies of the survey have been circulated to only 600 local residents, whilst copies of the survey have been given out at locations which are remote from the site, including Briggate, Leeds City Centre. We note that whilst the planning application has been submitted, the results of the survey have not been included amongst the documents supporting the planning application. We trust that when the results of the survey are published, they will be broken down so as to identify separately

- a) respondents living in the vicinity of the site
- b) respondents living further away from the site and
- c) respondents whose address cannot be identified (as a result of not stating their postcode in their response to the survey).

The fact that the planning application appears to have been submitted before the results of the survey are available will of course heighten suspicions that the consultation process is not genuine.

Our most important reasons for opposing the application are related to congestion and pollution. We believe that the successful Park and Ride Schemes which operate in cities such as Chester, Cambridge and York are successful because the sites are some distance away from the City Centres and the buses run along roads which have little congestion. In contrast, motorists using the proposed facility will have to travel into an area where the roads are already congested. Additionally, the route proposed for the buses is frequently congested, particularly at peak hours. The greater incidence of standing and slow moving traffic will increase the level of pollution in an area of the city which already suffers from excessive pollution. The levels of Nitrogen Dioxide and particulates (PM10s) will be increased. The applicants claim that the introduction of a park and ride facility will result in an overall reduction in the level of pollution. However, it is hard for us to believe that there will not be an increase in the level of pollution in the immediate vicinity of the site; an area which, as stated above, already suffers from an excessive level of pollution. It is significant that the application does not appear to be accompanied by any predictions of the impact on pollution in the area around the proposed facility.

We also doubt whether the facility will be financially viable. We note that it is intended that the related bus service will operate every fifteen minutes. Where there is little congestion on the roads, the journey from the site into Leeds City Centre could be completed in around 15 minutes or perhaps slightly less. We wonder whether motorists would be persuaded to park their cars at the facility and wait up to 15 minutes for the bus, when the option of continuing their journey into Leeds City Centre in their own car would be available. As stated above, however, the roads are likely to be congested at peak periods, so that any journey into Leeds City Centre (by bus or car) is likely to take longer. Furthermore, if the facility is aimed at persuading shoppers to leave their cars at the facility, rather than drive into Leeds City Centre, it is significant that the facility will (perfectly reasonably) not operate on Saturdays which are Elland Road matchdays, when many shoppers will be coming into Leeds City Centre. We feel that this will undermine the financial viability of the facility and of any associated bus service.

We are aware of suggestions that a Park and Ride facility is a part of the masterplan for the Elland Road area. I attended the consultation meeting about the masterplan which took place on 2nd June 2007 and took contemporaneous notes of the meeting. There was absolutely no mention of the possibility of establishing a Park and Ride Scheme. The executive summary of the consultation process in relation to the masterplan, produced by Frances Wells Associates stated that '*Consultees, mainly from outside the community were often keen to investigate the potential of the site becoming a park and ride facility for the city centre during weekdays to operate at off peak times for the leisure facilities*' (emphasis added). This is not evidence of public support for the concept of a Park and Ride facility. Moreover, these views were expressed at a time when it was considered likely that the Leeds Arena would be sited at Elland Road (the arena has, of course been built elsewhere). We therefore reject the view that the Masterplan includes a Park and Ride facility.

There have been suggestions that the Park and Ride facility might be accompanied by improvements in facilities (such as improved bus services) which will benefit the people of the surrounding area. Whilst we are unequivocally and absolutely opposed to the introduction of any Park and Ride facility at Elland Road, we believe that this is something which Councillors should consider if they are minded to approve the application. However, we feel that nothing would be adequate recompense for the increased health problems which we believe will result from the increased pollution caused by the facility.

We feel that this application represents a determination by Leeds City Council to set up a Park and Ride facility at minimal cost. This determination has led to the applicants ignoring the substantial disadvantages of the site, which in our view is completely unsuitable for a Park and Ride facility. We therefore hope that the application is rejected.

Yours sincerely

ROBERT J.W. WINFIELD