

(AUTHOR: JOHN STEVENS)



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. On balance, the workshop concluded that it was **appropriate to specify maximum travel time by sustainable modes**, but that these could vary by location and mode. We suggest that one possibility would be to define York as a whole as a 30 minute city in which any part could be reached by bus or cycle in 30 minutes, and individual communities as 20 minute neighbourhoods, in which all local facilities and jobs could be reached within 20 minutes on foot or by cycle.
2. The workshop concluded that, while York Central could be made sustainable at its planned scale, the **proposed developments in outer York should ideally be replaced by two new communities**, each with a population in excess of 15,000, to ensure that the full range of community facilities and services can be sustained.
3. New settlements should be **built round a core of facilities and services**, including a community building or 'hub'. Each settlement should have a primary school and appropriate health, leisure and retail services, as well as attractive public realm and open space. We should try to build new buildings to be flexible with multiple uses in mind. Land owners might be encouraged hand over the freehold of any community assets to community organisations.
4. We suggest that the planned new settlements should have **a mix of tenure and dwelling types**, in order to attract a diverse population. If possible, Buy to let and AirBnB should be discouraged and controlled.
5. We recommend that the new settlements should have **multiple opportunities for employment within the community or easily accessible by active or public transport**. We should support working from home and using community business 'hubs'. Each development should have a number of live/work units, as appropriate.
6. We suggest that **new homes should have more space, enabling work and/or learning to be separated from day-to-day living**. Each home should have easy access to outdoor space. More attention should be paid to internal and external noise transfer.
7. We recommend that the **new townships should include a variety of different densities and house types** to meet different demographic and lifestyle groups. A minimum average density of 50 dwellings per hectare will be appropriate, except on developments nearer the City Centre, where 100 dwellings per hectare may be acceptable. Density should vary across the site, being higher round the centre/transport hub - to give a varied character.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

8. We suggest that **reducing travel is both necessary and achievable**. It will require an integrated package of measures to support home and community working and learning, land use planning in line with our proposal for York to be treated as a 20-minute city. A major effort will be required to effect behavioural change.
9. We suggest **a target be set for the proportion of non-car travel at the new settlements**. This should be the TCPA standard for Garden Settlements, which is a minimum of 50% of all trips by active or public transport, rising to 60% over the plan period. New settlements should be linked to neighbouring communities and to other parts of the urban area by a network of excellent quality footpaths and cycleways
10. We recommend **high-quality bus service access to and from the new villages**. A frequency of every ten minutes, 7am-7pm, should be adopted; and every 30 mins at other times. No home should be more than 10 minutes' walk from a bus stop. Further research should be carried out into the applicability of ultra-light vehicles to the York situation.
11. We suggest that the Council works with local employers and other interested parties to develop **a campaign of education and incentives designed to reduce the use of private vehicles throughout the city**, but especially in the urban core. This could be accompanied by improved management of the main radial routes, and by diversion of traffic to take advantage of planned improvements to the Outer Ring Road.
12. We recommend that **new communities be designed to give priority access for walking and cycling**, with limited access for cars and limited parking, based on tight maximum standards, provided on the fringes. Roads within the community should not be designed for parking, and need to be adopted rapidly by the Council so that parking can be controlled. New communities should aim to provide a delivery hub, rather than expecting commercial vehicles to service every dwelling.
13. We suggest that consideration be given to **following up a number of identified topics in the field of Sustainable Communities and Sustainable Transport in future workshops** to be organised by the Trust.

CONTEXT

On 9th March York Civic Trust hosted a Zoom workshop on Sustainable Communities and Sustainable Transport. 37 people participated in the workshop, supported by 9 presenters and facilitators. 5 further people expressed interested but could not attend.

The Workshop was intended to develop the Trust's thinking in order that it might develop policy and make recommendations to the Council on the sustainable development of new communities. The Trust sought to gather members' views on desirable attributes for these communities, and to feed in relevant ideas to the new Local Transport Plan (LTP4)..

The discussions took place in the context of the Draft Local Plan. This envisages a 20% increase in York's population over the next 15 years and proposes accommodating it in several large new communities, mainly outside the outer ring road.

Our approach to sustainable development recognises that the social, economic and environmental aspects are integral, and must be considered together. Sustainability needs us to embrace a long time horizon. What we build now could still be in use in 50 or 100 years, but the problem of climate change and responding to the impact of new technologies require more pressing actions.

It takes a long time to get approval for, and to construct, new

settlements, as well as to maintain them thereafter. Much of our current planning is based on already outmoded assumptions. New developments take time to develop and mature as communities.

The workshop was divided into two sections, the first dealing with sustainable communities in general; the second focusing on sustainable transport in new developments. In the second, participants were asked to consider application to three case study developments: York Central (up to 2500 dwellings), Clifton Gate (1350 dwellings) and Elvington/Langwith (3340 dwellings).

Following a welcome by Andrew Morrison and general introduction by Tony May, each section comprised a brief presentation followed by break-out groups. Participants received a Briefing Paper about a week before the workshop, which had 5 or 6 questions on each topic. These questions formed the basis for discussions in the break-out groups. Each break-out was followed by a short plenary session.

Notes were kept of all the deliberations, the main session was recorded and 'chat' comments collected. Participants were invited to provide further reflections and comments by email, and several took this opportunity. Participants were also asked to point up any areas that they felt justified further consideration - and therefore potential future Trust workshops.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #1

Is The Concept Of The 15-minute City Relevant To York, And How Might We Apply It?



The general consensus was that the concept of the 15-minute city was relevant and useful in the York context. In many ways York is a 15-minute city. It is of compact scale and has developed organically. It is ready-made for pedestrian and cycle use.

Some people thought that the 15-minutes should cover all kinds of travel not using private vehicles. York could certainly be a 30-minute city if walking and cycling routes were more direct and attractive. With good rapid transit the whole City could be reached within 15-minutes.

Others argued that the centre of York is in itself a 15-minute city, and expansion outside the ring road will make it difficult to retain this. It is very desirable, but it only applies to York centre.

New settlements need their own focal points. The new garden settlements must not be dormitories, but need to be planned with all relevant facilities and spaces within a maximum 10-minute walk. However, none of them is going to be walkable from the main city functions and services.

People stressed the importance of walkable neighbourhoods. If something is more than a 5 minute walk away people are likely to be tempted to use the car. The Manual for Streets already adopts the 15-minute principle. Major highways can be a physical barrier to cohesive

community building.

Could development on the periphery of the city, be used to catalyse improved transport corridors into the centre of York? Elvington for example, requires improved transport past Heslington and Tang Hall. We could treat the city as a series of wedges, with each wedge becoming a 15-minute community.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

On balance, the workshop concluded that it was appropriate to specify maximum travel time by sustainable modes, but that these could vary by location and mode. One possibility would be to define York as a whole as a 30 minute city in which any part could be reached by bus or cycle in 30 minutes, and individual communities as 20 minute neighbourhoods, in which all local facilities and jobs could be reached within 20 minutes on foot or by cycle.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #2

What is the minimum size and optimum location for a new settlement to be largely self-sustaining, and are the major sites proposed in the Draft Local Plan for York consistent with this?



The workshop gave a very clear and unambiguous message that the current Local Plan site strategy will not create truly sustainable new communities. All three case study developments are too small to be self-sustaining, with employment opportunities and facilities, though it can be argued that York Central does have an employment element, and will have easy access to central facilities and services.

The Local Plan should have proposed two or three larger settlements. A critical mass is required to ensure viability of services/facilities. We should aspire to Haxby-size settlements (c.15,000 pop) by combining some of the smaller sites. This would help support a viable primary school, which is a key social focus of any settlement, as well as community facilities and a dedicated bus service. Scattering the required housing around various small developments will not help, because there will be insufficient people in each place for it to be sustainable.

Clifton Gate is too small to be really sustainable. A larger settlement would have supported a primary school, allowed space for playing fields, and enabled the developer to contribute to a dedicated bus service, linked to the proposed new park and ride site. Over a nine year period the scale of the development has been whittled away.

Langwith is too small to be sustainable. In any case, it will be many years before it is sustainable socially or environmentally. It has an 8,000 final population, but only 5,000 within the Plan period. We seem to be obsessed by the idea that if we create a 'village', it needs to look like a village. We must avoid car-based sprawl, and create real 'places'.

York Central has less need to be self-sustaining than the standalone sites because it is potentially within 15 min. walk of the city centre and existing primary schools (Poppleton Road and St Barnabas). It could meet the 15-minute ideal if the two existing walking/cycling routes to the city centre were improved (riverside path and Marble Arch), with better flood protection and fewer pinch points.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

The workshop concluded that, while York Central could be made sustainable at its planned scale, the proposed developments in outer York should ideally be replaced by two new communities, each with a population in excess of 15,000, to ensure that the full range of community facilities and services can be sustained.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #3

What essential features, services and facilities should a sustainable neighbourhood contain?



The more facilities and services that can be provided locally, the less people will need to travel. New settlements should include a local primary school within walking distance as a focus, a GP surgery and key shops. Also mentioned were dentists, barbers, cafes (perhaps existing cafes placing pods in new communities), community halls with broadband internet / workspace / social space, open space, secure bike storage, green space and water. Churches, communal edible gardens and orchards were also mentioned, together with opportunities for employment.

In order to cope with changes over time we should try to build new buildings to be flexible with multiple uses in mind, for example, doctors' surgeries doubling up as evening class venues or school canteens available out of school hours for community uses.

A key question is how to create a sense of pride in a new place. Each settlement needs a place for social interaction. The early construction of one or more community buildings can provide a valuable focus for community development. This could include a cafe with park/playground, perhaps linked with an existing facility. A particular issue is who owns them; it was suggested that land owners might hand over the freehold of any community assets to community organisations.

Some people argued that sustainable communities should not be designed in isolation, but closely linked to existing communities. There is a need for good interconnectivity - and for all, not just the nimblest. For example, within a kilometre of Clifton Gate there are four primary schools, village facilities in Skelton and Wigginton, and the Clifton Moor shopping centres, employment and a bus terminus, as well as very good access to the countryside.

Derwenthorpe was mentioned as not being big enough to support local services. JRHT set out quite deliberately to avoid self-containment. They wanted the residents to integrate into the local social and physical fabric by using local shops and schools, and joining local groups. Local facilities include several community centres.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:
New settlements should be built round a core of facilities and services, including a community building or 'hub'. Each settlement should have a primary school and appropriate health, leisure and retail services, as well as attractive public realm and open space. We should try to build new buildings to be flexible with multiple uses in mind. Land owners might be encouraged hand over the freehold of any community assets to community organisations.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #4

What kind of mixed development should we seek?



People made no specific comments on employment zones. It was felt that home working had reduced the need for this aspect of sustainability. But this does not provide for young people seeking a career. In this sense, none of the Local Plan proposals in outer York is a sustainable community, because they do not have employment opportunities built in.

It was suggested that new buildings could be developed to be flexible and cope with shifts in demand. For example, some buildings might accommodate both living and retail uses at different times.

There is probably a market for live/work units aimed at small business operators/start-ups. Each village centre should have a business hub where people can meet to exchange ideas over a coffee and host meetings. There could also be satellite hubs. Rowntree Park Reading Café is a good model. Communal hubs can offer a wide range of facilities - delivery drop-offs/pickups to reduce delivery vehicles penetrating developments, or cycle maintenance facilities. Communal hubs may be needed throughout larger developments, not just in a central location.

New settlements should be diverse. We need mixed tenure developments. Developers are

obliged to provide affordable housing for sale, rent or part ownership. CYC policy is apparently 20% affordable on urban sites and 30% in suburban/extra-urban locations like Clifton Gate. Buy to let and AirBnB should be controlled, as they run counter to building sustainable communities. This can be partly achieved by restrictive covenants.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

We suggest that the planned new settlements should have a mix of tenure and dwelling types, in order to attract a diverse population. If possible, Buy to let and AirBnB should be discouraged and controlled.

We recommend that the new settlements should have multiple opportunities for employment within the community or easily accessible by active or public transport. We should support working from home and using community business 'hubs'. Each development should have a number of live/work units, as appropriate.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #5

What are the planning and design implications of increased home working and flexible working?



Home working is here to stay. Also flexible working, where the employee attends the office for 2 or 3 days per week for interchange. Smaller house types are not appropriate for homeworking and improved space standards are increasingly important.

The larger developers are now remodelling their offer to include a fourth bedroom that can serve as an office space. In some cases they are adding garden 'studios'. It is helpful to separate working space from living space, e.g. in the garden or loft conversion, so you can get away from work.

Libraries can provide that home working hub and a café - this is a more purposeful approach than a simple community building. For example, the Derwenthorpe 'coffee morning' actually happens outside Derwenthorpe at the Burnholme library.

Home-working will affect traffic (less of it) and shops (more of them). Amazon is heavily pushing the green credentials of last mile deliveries using electric vans. Others will follow.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

We suggest that new homes should have more space, enabling work and/or learning to be separated from day-to-day living. Each home should have easy access to outdoor space. More attention should be paid to internal and external noise transfer.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

QUESTION #6

What is the appropriate residential density (dwellings per hectare) for these new developments? (for comparison, Hungate is around 100dph, Terry's is 62 dph, Derwenthorpe 25 dph and Germany Beck around 27 dph gross).



The different sites will require different forms of development to suit the communities they intend to attract. Density is less important than creating spaces of quality with sustainable blue and green infrastructure. It does not need to be uniform across a particular community.

The link between higher densities and travel does not seem to be well understood. Most people were happy with the current planned densities. Langwith is estimated at 35 dph and Clifton Gate at 32-34 dph gross. Developers suggest that this is typical for a Garden Village of this type. The variations in residential density and the provision of open spaces have proved popular with Derwenthorpe's inhabitants.

There was some support for higher densities, with more and better quality public realm to promote community activities. It is possible to build at a higher density whilst making attractive public spaces and networks

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

We recommend that the new townships should include a variety of different densities and house types to meet different demographic and lifestyle groups. A minimum average density of 50 dph will be appropriate, except on developments nearer the City Centre, where 100dph may be acceptable. Density should vary across the site, being higher round the centre/transport hub - to give a varied character.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #1

Is reducing the amount of travel realistic, and how can we best achieve it?



Some people argued that this was already happening, and we simply need to speed up the process. Others commented that we all like to travel. We should probably concentrate on reducing 'unnecessary' travel. Travel to work is often wasteful and unnecessary, whereas travel to socialise or for leisure can be regarded as acceptable. Some people pointed out the generational difference in the attitude to car ownership and use. Some people argued that it was not so important or necessarily desirable to reduce travel as such, but to focus on that travel which was most disruptive, through choice of mode. Car sharing should be widely encouraged and incentivised.

The city centre is attracting more people to live. With this in mind, enabling sustainable and convenient living in this location, including York Central, will reduce the demand for out-of-town development.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:
We suggest that reducing travel is both necessary and achievable. It will require an integrated package of measures to support home and community working and learning, land use planning in line with our proposal for York to be treated as a 20-minute city. A major effort will be required to effect behavioural change.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #2

How can we encourage more people to use active travel means (walking or cycling)? And, what should be our standard for an 'easy' walking or cycling distance?



New footpaths and cycleways to the villages should be safe and attractive to use. It will be important to develop longer walks too. It might be possible to open new walking routes along the becks as well as the rivers, thus a whole new network could open up.

Encouragement of cycling should include:

- Making it the most convenient form of transport
- Providing a better network of good quality cycle paths following direct routes
- Reallocating space on roads for cycle paths - improving safety
- New cycle/pedestrian underpasses under major roads
- Segregation from traffic
- Secure cycle storage both at home and at community facilities
- E-Bike charging points at homes and secure bike storage at both ends of the trip.

E-bikes are changing the distance people are prepared to cycle. Classically transport planners work with a 2 or 3 mile limit for urban cycling, but it appears that with e-bikes this is changing

significantly. The problem is safety; people won't travel this way because the roads aren't safe enough. So we must combine the ease of e-bikes with routes that people are happy using. We must also address the question of bike storage. E-bikes are expensive, so all homes at Clifton Gate will have safe, secure storage for bicycles, specifically aimed at e-bikes.

It was suggested that in the Netherlands and Denmark people use active travel not because they want to save the planet but out of convenience. We need to get much more brutal about reallocating space to enable people to get around conveniently and quickly by foot and bike. There is a diagram by Copenhagenize on how to do this - making car journeys longer and more convoluted, and walking and cycling direct and easy. Until we start doing this, people simply will not do it. Education will help, but is not sufficient in itself.

Established areas such as Haxby/Wigginton have more prominent routes and strategies such as pedestrian underpasses which are useful in attracting pedestrian traffic, and which should be seen as important in future development. Langwith will suit cycling, e.g. to the university, rather than walking as it is too far out.

It was suggested that Clifton Gate lacks good footpath and cycleway connections to Skelton,

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #2 (cont.)

How can we encourage more people to use active travel means (walking or cycling)? And, what should be our standard for an 'easy' walking or cycling distance?



Wigginton and Clifton Moor. In practice Clifton Gate will have a dedicated cycle track from the village to Clifton Moor, with a new underpass under the outer ring road for pedestrians and cyclists. It will have low-level non-intrusive lighting and be visible from the road. It must be built so that solo female cyclists consider it safe and appealing.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:
We suggest a target be set for the proportion of non-car travel at the new settlements. This should be the TCPA standard for Garden Settlements, which is a minimum of 50% of all trips by active or public transport, rising to 60% over the plan period. New settlements should be linked to neighbouring communities and to other parts of the urban area by a network of excellent quality footpaths and cycleways

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #3

How can we make public transport a more attractive and cost-effective choice for the residents of new neighbourhoods? And, do we have any views on the acceptable frequency, availability and cost of services?



If more people work at home it could affect the viability of public transport. In this case we might need a minimum settlement size of well over 5,000 in order to support viable public transport operations.

New settlements will need pump-priming funding to ensure that public transport is provided from the outset and of the right quality. Subsidies for buses would get the service up and running and then encourage demand and regular use of it. Development must be designed so that an effective bus route can be provided.

Current bus services are often neither frequent nor direct. We need to improve bus reliability, the quality and comfort of the service. More priority bus lanes would help reliability.

Improved ticketing and flexible fares will help make the services affordable and accessible. Services should run at weekends and in the evenings, and there should be good real-time information.

The wide and complex distribution of trips makes fixed route public transport far more difficult to plan. It might be better if buses could be partly replaced by on-demand minibus/taxis, or by much wider car-share schemes (driver goes free).

Trams would be an attractive alternative to buses, but would probably need higher density

development. They could potentially be paid for by a work-place parking levy, as in Nottingham, or developer/landowner contributions as in London, together with government funding. Trams or reopened railway lines could be funded by developers (witness TfL). Commercial developers would do well to consider subsidising transport into the centre, accessing schools, colleges and employment.

Elvington's transport is currently the subject of research commissioned by the City Council. Participants felt that a connection by ultra-light vehicle would be best. The developer plans to have everybody within 15 minutes of public transport and all facilities.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:
We recommend high-quality bus service access to and from the new villages. A frequency of every ten minutes, 7am-7pm, should be adopted; and every 30 mins at other times. No home should be more than 10 minutes' walk from a bus stop. Further research should be carried out into the applicability of ultra-light vehicles to the York situation.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #4

How can we persuade more people that using private vehicles should be the option of last choice? And, how can we best educate people on the nature and scale of the required behavioural changes?



People need to be educated about the real costs of car use. If we spell out the actual cost of ownership then that will make people think twice about whether or not they really need a car. Higher parking charges at all locations would help hammer home the message.

A campaign similar to that used to dissuade smokers could reduce non-electric vehicle use - creating a 'culture of social disapproval' and shame.

The policy options available to the Council need to be set out in more 'layman's' terms to demonstrate the long term intentions and short term choices and how these feed into each other so that those who don't join these events understand what is happening. Perhaps we underestimate how distant some residents can be from the planning process. We should foster a culture of disapproval for drivers making short 'unnecessary' journeys.

Peripheral development around the city will increase traffic on the radial arteries into the city like the A19 and A59. They need to be really well managed and space utilised as well as possible. In some cases, the routes into the centre aren't as efficient as they could be, so congestion could worsen significantly if nothing is done.

We could drastically reduce parking standards and/or make no parking provision, or introduce charges for private parking. It was noted that Hungate is successful with no dedicated parking provision. However, in Derwenthorpe parking takes place throughout the community, partly because of delays in the Council adopting the roads. There was little discussion of communal parking. People noted the importance of designing communities that are difficult to drive through and park in. Non-car users could be compensated by free car club membership; e-bike and e-scooter rentals should be available.

In the longer term, autonomous vehicles could solve some of the problems - with reduced need for large areas of parking in residential areas and the city centre.

Experience on Derwenthorpe and the Chocolate Works, where housing has been provided with limited parking space, is that many households have more cars, leading to local friction and degraded public space. Some of the excess parking overflows onto neighbouring streets.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #4 *(cont.)*

How can we persuade more people that using private vehicles should be the option of last choice? And, how can we best educate people on the nature and scale of the required behavioural changes?



Summary conclusions and recommendations:

We suggest that the Council works with local employers and other interested parties to develop a campaign of education and incentives designed to reduce the use of private vehicles throughout the city, but especially in the urban core. This could be accompanied by improved management of the main radial routes, and by diversion of traffic to take advantage of planned improvements to the Outer Ring Road.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

QUESTION #5

How can we design new developments so that they are not dominated by private vehicles and local freight delivery services?



It was agreed that we need to prevent the car from dominating new developments development. The car should feel like an intruder. We need to get the design right and to create inviting spaces. New housing should not have through traffic (which might be an issue in York Central). Playstreets should be encouraged. We need to make it difficult to drive through neighbourhoods and reduce parking opportunities outside dwellings, making car journeys longer and more difficult will encourage modal change¹.

There was general support for some kind of local freight hub as a way of limiting white van deliveries. This could simply be some version of the Amazon lockers or it could involve transshipment and consolidation. The hub could be shared with the business hubs described earlier. Multi-use of existing P&Rs might also be possible, e.g. to pick up purchases after visiting the centre.

Summary conclusions and recommendations:

We recommend that new communities are be designed to give priority access for walking and cycling, with limited access for cars and limited parking, based on tight maximum standards, provided on the fringes. Roads within the community should not be designed for parking, and need to be adopted rapidly by the Council so that parking can be controlled. New communities should aim to provide a delivery hub, rather than expecting commercial vehicles to service every dwelling.

¹ So-called 'Copenhagenization'.

FUTURE DISCUSSION

Possible topics for future discussion or workshops:

1. The interpretation of sustainability, and the differing requirements for environmental, social and economic sustainability.
2. Energy consumption. For example, the potential value of district heating systems, or of full eco standards for construction (BREAM 5).
3. Green space and public realm - vital in York Central and the garden villages.
4. Quality of house building and the need for Sustainability Guidelines for housebuilders.
5. The wider debate about Garden Settlements and their green credentials.
6. Protecting natural and cultural assets affected by new construction.
7. The priority given to brownfield sites versus greenfield.
8. How to ensure that facilities and services are available to residents from the very start, that they actually happen and are viable over time?
9. Leadership and community ownership as models for sustaining community facilities..
10. Developing social sustainability - the role of development workers, community assets, and controlling the negative aspects of buy-to-let and AirBnB.