Present: The Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair), Professor J B Goddard (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Professor O F W James, Professor T F Page and Professor M P Young (Pro-Vice-Chancellors), Dr P E Andras, Professor J B Batchelor, Dr R J Boys, Dr J E Calvert, Professor P S Davis, Mr C Donnelly (student member), Professor A M R Gatehouse, Ms R C Gilroy, Professor A G Hall, Professor M A Hughes, Dr A C Hurlbert, Dr C O Record and Mr A M Wilton.

In attendance: Mrs M O Grant (Chairman of Council), Dr J V Hogan (Registrar), Miss R Draper (Head of the Executive Office), Mr H B Farnhill (Bursar), Mrs V S Johnston (Director of Human Resources), Professor P J W Olive (member of Council), Dr D W Robertson (Director of Business Development), Mr M J Warwicker (Press and Communications Officer) Professor M J Whitaker (Dean of Development, Medical Sciences), Professor N G Wright (Professor of Electronic Materials) and Mrs D A Michie (Senior Assistant Registrar).

MINUTES

PART A: STRATEGIC ISSUE

89. NEWCASTLE SCIENCE CITY

Received an introduction from the Vice-Chancellor, followed by presentations from Professor J B Goddard, Professor M P Young and Professor N G Wright, updating Senate on recent developments relating to the Newcastle Science City Project.

After noting that:

1. The Chairman of Council had been invited to attend this Extraordinary Meeting of Senate because, since she had consulted with members of Council on this matter, she could provide feedback on the position of Council. It was also useful for her to hear the debate at Senate to ensure that any issues raised could be taken forward to the next meeting of Council which would discuss the Science City project;

2. Senate had previously been presented with the background to Science City and had been informed of the deadline of the end of June for the submission of proposals to the Treasury. The deadline had subsequently been extended to early July in order to allow the partnership organisations to discuss the final proposal. This meeting had been called so that Senate could be involved in the University’s part of the proposal and, in particular, the possibility of collaboration in the purchase of a major city centre site;
3. The development of Newcastle as a Science City was set against a background of government concern about the lack of investment in science and the need to bring science and urban/regional regeneration initiatives together. This had been achieved successfully in other countries, for example in New England and Finland, where close interaction between universities and business had helped to achieve regeneration. This concept was totally aligned with the University’s development trajectory which had been drawn up during the process of restructuring;

4. The Science City concept of mixed uses of the physical estate by both the University and other bodies was consistent with the general move by the University towards opening out the campus. Cultural Quarter would be a similar development;

5. The development of a prospectus for taking forward the creation of Science City had been undertaken by a combination of a leadership group, a task group and various workstreams all with representation from the University, the City, the Regional Development Authority and other sectors such as the NHS. It outlined the main programmes which were planned and the related timescale;

6. The government was keen for business, academic activities and the development of the region to be linked for their mutual benefit. Therefore the main theme of the proposals for Science City was to draw enterprise into where the core of expertise lay by providing space to allow the necessary interactions to take place. This would assist with nurturing and attracting people to work in science and to learn science;

7. In order to achieve this a series of criteria had been developed for initiatives which would be included in Science City. Initially the initiatives to be included were: energy and the environment; molecular engineering; stem cell biology and regenerative medicine; and ageing and health – all of which were major research strengths in the University;

8. The University had been presented with a unique opportunity to purchase, in collaboration with Newcastle City Council and One NorthEast, part of the former Scottish and Newcastle Brewery site which could be developed as the hub for Science City. The chance to purchase such a large city centre site provided an unusual opportunity, not available to those other cities designated as science cities, to develop a large central area of Newcastle as a Science City and to have a major input into the regeneration of this part of the city. The site was close to important areas of medical research, such as the Centre for Life and the General Hospital, and would allow a major development of mixed uses to take place in a co-ordinated manner;

9. The existing physical structure of the University had evolved over a period of time and did not reflect the current need to allow interaction to take place. There was little or no translational space on campus and this deterred such new developments as allowing business to come onto the campus and reduced the effectiveness of research. If the physical structure was changed research links and the efficiency of teaching would be enhanced. The development of Science City on the new site would allow this improved connectivity to evolve, business/research links to grow and translational activities to be developed;

10. While the opportunity to purchase the site would provide the three partners with the ability to develop Science City in an effective way, it would take some time to realise and
it would be important that the University did not suffer from planning blight in the
interim period. Current activities should not be sacrificed, including SRIF projects;

11. When considering whether to approve the expenditure on the site, the capital costs of
developing the site should be borne in mind. It was hoped that support for this would
come from a variety of sources, including a long term commitment from the government.
Part of this might come in the form of additional student numbers. It was also planned
that a bid would be made to the HEFCE strategic fund;

12. The University’s share of the cost of the purchase of the site could be met from its cash
reserves and short-term balances. There would be no need to borrow. However, the
budget, which had been prepared for 2005-06, did not include Science City. It predicted
breakeven after costs had been reduced by £2.6 million but this would be affected if the
University used its funds to contribute to the purchase of the site as the estimated amount
of income from interest would be reduced by approximately £500,000 and the
University’s budget would need to be adjusted accordingly;

13. The University’s agreement to participate in the purchase of the site was time critical.
However, there would be no pressure to decide how the site should be developed;

14. The Chairman of Council had consulted the lay members of Council on the proposed
purchase of the Brewery site and had asked that the academic members be invited to the
meeting of Senate. She had been unable to contact three of the lay members but all the
others were unanimous in their support for the proposal. However, some concerns had
been expressed about:
• business being conducted in this way as it did not give enough time for thorough
  consideration
• the need to ensure that the vision was realisable
• ensuring that this did not become a land and property development and that science
  was the key driver
• ensuring that any development benefited both the University and the region
• the resource implications of this purchase;

15. It would be important that there was clarity on both the terms of the partnership between
the University, the City and One NorthEast and the role of each partner. Also, as there
were likely to be unforeseen issues as the project was taken forward, it would be
important to ensure that there was consistency in the academic vision and the format of
paperwork;

16. The purchase of the site to develop Science City would show the Chancellor of the
Exchequer that the University was supporting the initiative outlined in the government’s
ten year plan for science;

17. The Faculty of Medical Sciences felt that this proposal could provide it with many
opportunities to develop their areas of greatest strength. For example, while the
University was currently very strong in stem cell research, other parts of the world were
investing in this area and would provide challenges to Newcastle in the future. Science
City would provide the opportunity to allow the University to continue to compete
internationally. Likewise, the Faculty would benefit from the opportunities provided by
this proposal to allow more effective interaction between medicine, science and technology to take place and for synergies which did not currently exist to develop;

18. The proposal was consistent with the University’s business plan but concern was expressed about the impact of it on other parts of the University. The scale of the proposal might mean that other opportunities would not be pursued. In addition, if the University was granted the additional student numbers it would be requesting, it was likely that this would affect subjects which would not be directly benefiting from Science City. However, the development ought to create a more holistic University and, if successful, should benefit all of its parts, for example by investment in additional staff;

19. The proposal which would be submitted to the Treasury formed the first phase of the process. It would present the vision of Newcastle Science City and the timescale for its development. The second phase would consist of assessing how this vision could be converted into reality. This would require a range of discussions leading to commitments by HEFCE and the partners in the proposal;

20. The proposal to the Treasury constituted an opportunity to submit a prospectus of ideas which might be included in the 2006 Spending Review as it seemed likely that the Chancellor would want to invest in making the science cities and the ten year plan successful;

21. Each partner in the development of Science City would bring different things to the project. The University would bring its science expertise, the City its concern for the regeneration of the city and the Regional Development Agency would act as the instrument for taking forward the Chancellor’s policies. It would be important that each one supported the others and that all were committed to the same vision;

22. Discussions had been taking place with Durham University about its potential involvement in the development of Science City as it would make sense to incorporate the research strengths in science at that University into the vision. However, any involvement would be on the site in Newcastle, not in Durham. HEFCE would encourage taking the opportunity to interface in this way with Durham. Discussions would continue next year as, to date, Durham University had not had the opportunity to discuss this proposal with the academic community.

Resolved that:

(i) Senate support the proposal to collaborate in the purchase of part of the former Scottish and Newcastle Brewery site;

(ii) Professors Goddard, Young and Wright be thanked for their useful presentation.