

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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4 February 2020

Michelle Hurton
Planning Department
Durham County Council
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UQ

Dear Ms Hurton,

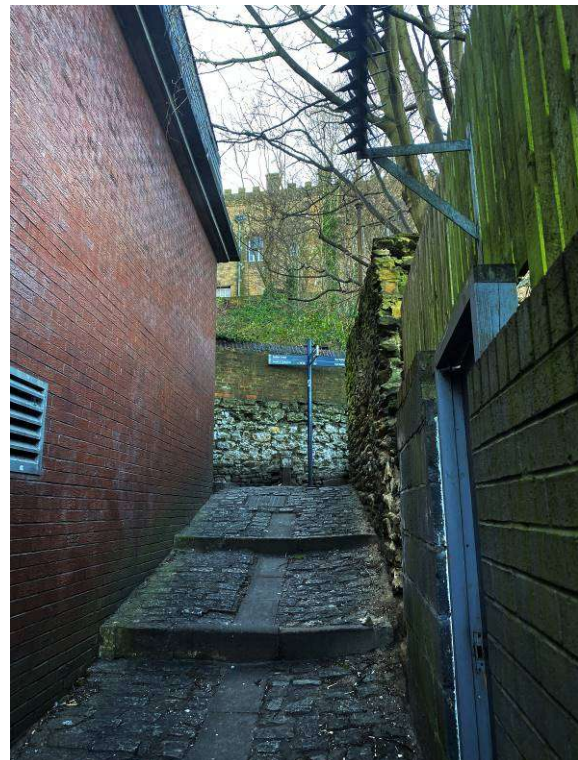
**DM/19/03967/FPA 9 And 9A Silver Street Durham DH1 3RB
Change of use of upper floors from retail including loft conversion into residential
accommodation providing 5 no. studio apartments**

Trustees object to the above application because of the poor security offered by the rear access for residents and the potential for the negative impact of increased security lighting and security measures on the historic environment.

The Trust in most instances would wish to support reuse of the upper floors of retail buildings. The reduction in upper floor impact from the previous application is welcome and no issue is raised with the proposed window insertions.



Adjacent property Rear Security



View from Rear of Property to Castle and Terrace

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The problem for the Trust lies in the misleading underestimate of the safety and attractiveness of the rear entry and the potential the increased use of a rear access has for demands for increased lighting and security. Moatside Lane is never well used, despite the hope that it should be. Because of the lack of use and bends obscuring views along the Lane this remains a challenging walk for any individual, even by day. By night it is a clear security threat being unlit and indicators of drug use have been observed. The extent of heavy duty spiked anti climb deterrence on the rear fences and height of the fences clearly demonstrate how unsafe this rear access is considered. Lighting is for rear access points only and is assumed to be off unless in very rare use. One PIR system further along Moatside Lane and the spiked anti climb devices may well not have planning permission.

Moatside Lane and the rear of buildings backing on to it remain a very sensitive nighttime environment relative to the World Heritage Site (WHS) and the Conservation Area. There are views up to the Castle and its North Terrace. The lighting of the WHS buildings relies on a dark surrounding without competing bright light sources and the facing elevation of the castle is lit. There is a steady cumulative erosion of the dark setting of the fringes of the WHS and in foreground views due to the demands of security and leisure uses. This is demonstrated by the highly visible lighting of the Windy Gap footpath. While increased security for nighttime users remains something the Trust would wish to support, the sensitivity of the historic environment and the WHS to additional lighting may override this.

As has previously been pointed out in a previous objection, the saved Policy Q1 of the City of Durham Local Plan and its supporting text deal with the security of proposed development. In para 12.10 the text states - ***Care should be taken to avoid sharp bends, dark recesses and restricted views.***

It is not immediately in the applicant's gift to be able to carry out exterior lighting on the approach from Silver Street through Moatside Lane. This could cause negative impact and would require substantial funding and cooperation of neighbours, as would attempting to reduce the highly negative visual impact of the rear security. Rear security measures are not detailed and what is currently there is unsuitable for a residential entrance as well as being poor in appearance. How the lighting to the building rear would work to improve security without having undesirable spillage is not fully detailed and negative impact remains a possible outcome. On its own it cannot overcome the dark and hidden access up Moatside Lane. The residents' ability to haul bins out for rubbish collection also has to be questioned - this would be up and out into Moatside Lane and down to Silver Street. On-street accumulation of rubbish bags and bins awaiting collection is an issue for the historic streetscape.

Conclusion

Desirable as upper floor use is, the rear access in this proposal is unsafe and unworkable in its proposed form. Any effective solution could have undesirable negative impact on the historic environment and the WHS and require a substantial reworking of both this and neighbouring property boundaries. Trustees ask that this application therefore be refused and suggest that alternatives are investigated.

Yours sincerely,

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John Lowe, Chair, City of Durham Trust.