

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Phone (0191) 386 2595
Email: chair@durhamcity.org
Web site: <http://www.DurhamCity.org>

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
29 June 2021

Dear Mr Lloyd,

Your ref: APP/X1355/W/21/3274247
DM/20/03455/FPA 64 Gilesgate, Durham DH1 1HY
Change of use from dwelling to two flats (use class C3)

The Trust wishes to support the decision of the Central and East Planning Committee of Durham County Council to refuse this planning application. It draws attention to its previous objections to the proposals for the building.

Context.

1. Gilesgate is an especially important component of the Durham City Conservation Area. It is part of the original medieval extents of the historic city. It forms a key route into the city, to the World Heritage Site (WHS) and is a formative part of the townscape of the inner setting of the WHS. It offers views down into the city centre.
2. This section of Gilesgate flanking the appeal property is an essential part of the historic streetscene. The terraced properties vary but exhibit a similar rhythm of façade treatment of doors and windows as they step up the hill. It is a very distinctive feature of the area's character. Contrary to the applicant's submission, there are only two additional doors inserted into facades nearby that the Trust has observed. One is in a gap between buildings and the other is a very unsuccessful insertion of a door similar to that proposed. It fails because of the step up the hill and the resulting discordant placement of the door in the façade, breaking the proportions of the frontage and that of the terrace.
3. The Trust's concern is that the change of dwellings to student properties harms the balance and viability of the city. It takes a property out of use for families and increases the domination of the city core by students. Subdivision of small properties creates poor housing for students and deters subsequent use for non-students. It sees the applicant's breaking of the property into two 'flats' as an especially inappropriate treatment of a small property and its interior. It is little more than a device to introduce what will inevitably be student accommodation. This is an HMO and should have triggered refusal under existing policies. There is no confirmed need for more private student housing; the recent County Durham Plan ensured all the necessary allocations for student accommodation. No public benefit can be attributed to this proposal.

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Proposal

4. The proposal introduces a very discordant element into the façade to avoid other inappropriate changes and creation of substandard accommodation. It is simply for the avoidance of classing the proposed change of use as an HMO. It breaks the rhythm of the property façade and the terrace in the same way as already demonstrated nearby. This works against the character of this street and its important role in the Conservation Area and inner setting of the WHS.

5. The proposal will detract from the character and appearance of the host property and the area in general and fail to sustain or enhance the significance of the building and terrace as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. It will impact negatively on the designated heritage asset of the surrounding conservation area,

6. Policies

The proposal fails against **County Durham Plan** Policies as follows:

Policy 44 Historic Environment, Conservation Areas, f) Fails to understand significance, character and appearance of the conservation area and show how this has informed high quality proposals and respect local distinctiveness. h) Fails to respect the positive characteristics of the area in appropriate design.

Policy 45 Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site c) Fails to protect or enhance the immediate (*inner*) or wider setting.

It fails against **Durham City Neighbourhood Plan** policies, which now have full weight following its adoption by Durham County Council on 23 June 2021, as follows:

Policy S1: Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development and Redevelopment Sites Including all New Building, Renovations and Extensions, c) Fails to harmonise with its context d) Fails to conserve the significance of the setting, character, local distinctiveness, and the contribution made to the sense of place by the Neighbourhood's designated and non-designated heritage assets.

Policy D4: Building Housing to the Highest Standards, Fails by not being of high quality design relating to a) the character and appearance of the local area; and b) aesthetic qualities. c) external and internal form and layout

Policy H1: Protection and Enhancement of the World Heritage Site, b) Fails to propose high quality design which contributes to the quality and significance of the World Heritage Site (*setting*); and c) Fails to use materials and finishes appropriate to the vernacular, context and setting, d) fails to seek balance in terms of scale, form, layout, e) Failure to carry out an assessment of how the development will affect the setting of the World Heritage Site.

Policy H2: The Conservation Areas, Durham City Conservation Area, a) Fails to sustain and enhance the historic and architectural qualities of buildings, b) Fails to sustain and enhance a continuous frontage street pattern, e) Fails to avoid harm to an element of an asset which makes a positive contribution to its individual significance and that of the surrounding area.

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g) Fails to protect important view of the Durham City Conservation Area from viewpoint (Gilesgate and to the city centre) within the Conservation Area j) Fails to have detailing appropriate to the vernacular, context and setting. k) Fails to use high quality design sympathetic to the character and context of the local area and its significance and distinctiveness.

The Trust therefore supports the Council's refusal of this application.

Yours sincerely,

John Lowe,

Chair, City of Durham Trust.

Sent by email to: NSI.HAS@planninginspectorate.gov.uk