

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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c/o Blakett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
24 September 2021

Dear Mr Spurgeon,

DM/21/02697/FPA Farnley Tower, The Avenue, Durham DH1 4DX
Addition of conservatory and terrace to serve the restaurant and bar

The Trust wishes to object to this application based on its detrimental impact on local amenity and negative heritage and design impacts contrary to County Durham Plan and Durham City Neighbourhood Plan policies.

Context

The building is a highly distinctive example of a gothic revival style 19thC villa in a large garden setting. It is noted in both the Durham City Conservation Area appraisal and Neighbourhood Plan as being of local heritage interest. The building and garden are on the ridgeline to the City's inner green 'bowl' close to the boundary of the World Heritage Site (WHS) inner setting. The site's trees are part of the WHS setting. The building is important in forming the character of this section of the conservation area with other villas. The east elevation is on view from the Avenue and was designed in a coordinated manner with the rest of the building as one of two principal elevations.

Proposal

The submitted analysis of heritage and design context and impact is minimal. The contemporary conservatory and roof terraces sit on the rear elevation. Submitted detail for the extension is sketchy and does not clarify the styling or materials to be used. Balustrade detail shown appears to be part decorative. It is a standardised response and has little design merit to recommend it. Access to the roof terraces is cut through feature windows that are an essential part of the elevation. A staircase tower further adds to the harmful impact. There is a conflict of style with the new proposal appearing uncoordinated with the existing building and causing negative impact. There is no interesting interplay between existing building and new extension; it is a very discordant detraction from a principal façade. The roof balcony will introduce lighting intrusion and potentially noise nuisance as sound carries substantially from raised balconies and terraces. There is loss of trees with no justification other than to site the new extension. It appears to occupy part of the site of the connection element of the proposed two story rear extension as it joins the existing house.

There are already parking issues impacting on local residents and this proposal fails to deal with any issues arising from expansion of dining provision. We note that the current restaurant has an area of around 23m² and the proposed conservatory would add around 43m² to this. According to the applicant's website, they can cater for 35 people in the current restaurant, so the enlarged area could cater for approximately 100 people. Their listing also says, "Free onsite Car parking (Subject to availability)" and the experience of residents is that the car park is often full. Local residents have told the Trust of the adverse effect that the existing operation is having on them through inconsiderate on-street parking when the car park is full.

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The hotel has 17 bedrooms and there are currently only 14 on-site parking spaces. The application form indicates two less spaces and shows 13 on the submitted layout. Any reduction is going to exacerbate the problem. Trees are also removed in altering the car park layout. If the two storey extension were to be approved in addition to these proposals, they would very substantially overdevelop the site and have character changing negative impact on the conservation area. Together they will cumulatively increase the pressure on car parking space.

Policies

The Trust considers that the proposals fail against the following planning policies:

County Durham Plan

Policy 8 Visitor Accommodation

a. The development is not appropriate to the scale and character of the area.

Policy 21 Delivering Sustainable Transport

The Design and Access Statement does not address the transport implications of the development, as required by the opening sentence of this Policy. Both the current (2019) and emerging (2020) Parking and Accessibility SPDs have a parking requirement of 1 space per bedroom for hotels, the current provision does not meet the needs of hotel guests and there is no provision for restaurant users. Loss of up to two spaces because of this proposal will make the problem worse.

Policy 29 Sustainable Design

a. The proposals fail to contribute positively to an area's character, identity, heritage significance and townscape and landscape features, and fail to help create and reinforce a locally distinctive and sustainable community.

Extensions and Alterations The proposals for the extension fail to ensure the development is sympathetic to the existing building and the character and appearance of the area in terms of design, scale, layout, roof design and materials.

Policy 44 Historic Environment

The development fails to sustain the significance of a non-designated heritage asset and the contribution made by its setting. The development proposals fail to contribute positively to the built and historic environment.

Conservation Areas

f. The proposals fail to demonstrate understanding of the significance, character, appearance and setting of the conservation area and how this has informed proposals to achieve a high quality sustainable development that is respectful of historic interest, local distinctiveness and the conservation or enhancement of the asset.

g. The proposal fails to respond positively to the findings and recommendations of a conservation area character appraisals.

h. The proposals fail to respect and reinforce the established, positive characteristics of the area in terms of appropriate design (massing, features, height, form, materials, and detailing).

Policy 45 Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site

The development affects the World Heritage Site setting and (c.) fails to protect and enhance the inner setting.

Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

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 in terms of scale, layout, density, massing, height, materials.

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d) fails to conserve the significance of the setting, character, local distinctiveness, important views, tranquillity and the contribution made to the sense of place by a Neighbourhood's non-designated heritage assets.

Policy H1: Protection and Enhancement of the World Heritage Site

The development proposals, to a minor degree, do not sustain, conserve, or enhance the setting of the World Heritage Site because of tree loss and negative impact on the setting.

Policy H2: The Conservation Areas, Durham City Conservation Area

The development proposals negatively affect the Durham City Conservation Area by not taking into account, and meeting, the following requirements,

- a) Not sustaining and enhancing the historic and architectural qualities of buildings, and
- b) Not sustaining and enhancing, the street pattern; and
- e) Not avoiding harm to an element of an asset which makes a positive contribution to its individual significance and that of the surrounding area; and
- f) Not avoiding loss of open space that contributes to the character and appearance of the surrounding area; and
- g) Not protecting important views of the Durham City Conservation Area from viewpoints within the Conservation Area; and
- i) Not having appropriate scale, density, massing, form, layout; and
- j) Not using materials, detailing, and lighting appropriate to the vernacular, context and setting; and
- k) Not using high quality design sympathetic to the character and context of the local area and its significance and distinctiveness, and to the immediate landscape; and
- l) Not avoiding adding to the cumulative impact of development schemes (if the two story extension is approved) which dominate by their scale, massing, and design.

Policy G1: Protecting and Enhancing Green and Blue Infrastructure, Protecting green and blue assets

The development proposals fail to protect a green asset with significant heritage landscape and townscape value by having a negative impact through tree removal and the reduction of the greenspace area.

Policy E4 Evening Economy

In supporting in general terms applications that support the evening economy, this Policy says Proposals should include a strategy regarding public safety and appropriate evidence that the development will have no significant adverse effect upon local amenity, including the amenity of local residents. Lack of parking will adversely affect residents as will noise/light nuisance from the roof balcony.

Policy E6: Visitor accommodation

The development proposals for extended visitor accommodation fail because: b) the location, scale and character of the development will have an unacceptable adverse impact on the historic environment

Based on these policy failures the Trust objects to the proposals.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust