

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
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Durham, DH1 1TH
7 January 2022

Dear Ms Ollivere,

DM/21/03682/FPA. St Cuthbert's House Diamond Terrace Durham DH1 5SU
Demolition of the Main Street USA offices, and the erection of a new build 2-4 storey workplace building and associated landscaping

The Trust wishes to object to this application based on negative impact on the Conservation Area, World Heritage Site (WHS) setting, adverse impact on existing housing and access, and failure to provide residential development as supported by the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan (DCNP).

Context

Sidegate is a remnant of the medieval city, being a pilgrimage route from the east of the city and from Framwellgate Peth to Crook Hall and beyond to Finchale Abbey. The 19thC terraced houses have a distinctive character that enhances this street and are appropriate to its status as an historic route. It is unfortunate that the new office development (Framwell House) to the rear of the terrace fails to adequately respect this character by mass or design. The former Parish Hall was heavily converted to office space leaving little trace of its origins.

The residential enclave has suffered from increasing encroachment by other major development, the Radisson Hotel and now the Milburngate development. Its quality has been retained because of the tree growth on the surrounding banks mostly isolating it from the larger buildings to the south/southeast. Its approach from the south along the original Sidegate route is characterful and pleasant. That to the north into Framwell House is especially poor being oversized and not pedestrian friendly. The small existing office conversion offers little to the approach from the north but is at least modest in height and recessive in the surrounding landscape. The break formed between it and the Diamond Terrace is now particularly important in the distinctiveness of the area (this is believed to have been outbuildings, now demolished except for a small storage building). The site is within the inner setting to the WHS in a prominent position close to the railway embankment forming the skyline from lower lying areas. At present the current office building intrudes little into the green setting beyond Diamond Terrace – this being important from The Sands and areas to the east where it helps define the extents of the historical city and from the Conservation Area's setting. This is also the WHS inner setting and any loss of green view to new buildings is a reduction in quality.

The pedestrian and cycle route on Framwellgate Peth is part of the infrastructure put forward as supporting the Aykley Heads development. It is a route in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LWCIP) and is the principal connection to the new Milburngate development, railway and bus stations, riverside, and the city. Traffic speeds down Framwellgate Peth are high and there is already concern about the possibility of collisions with vehicles slowing to use the entrance, and increasing traffic usage of this entrance and exit of

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the site is a potential issue which led to the Highways Authority objecting to a previous development proposal here.

The County Council Conservation Area Appraisal considers Sidegate to have a distinctive character as *'a steep narrow distinctive lane of great character'* having a *'rural feel'*. The street and its buildings are a distinctive enclave of importance to the city and conservation area. This is partly protected from the encroaching buildings at Milburngate and Framwellgate Waterside by the extensive embankment trees. However, Phase 2 of the Milburngate development has yet to be completed and it will intrude closer to the trees and overtop them in views out of Diamond Terrace. It is negatively impacted by Framwell House and the entrance off Framwellgate Peth, at its lower end the large substation also detracts. This medieval street is worthy of special treatment both in the handling of its setting and any proposed development within it.

It should be noted that, since previous approvals for residential development of the St Cuthbert's House site, the adopted City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan has introduced the need for increased care in inserting new development into the Conservation Area and WHS setting, particularly at the scale proposed. It also supports residential rather than office development of this site - Policy D1 Proposals for Residential Development - 1. Main Street USA, and 2. The Avenue.

Proposal

The proposed office block is higher, by a storey, than the existing office building, wider than the existing terraced houses and infills the yard separating the terrace from the office block. It also intrudes closer to the shared footpath accessing Diamond Terrace. It is substantially larger and forces the existing houses into a very uncomfortable relationship with the proposed office block. There is stepping and fragmentation of the elevation as it adjoins the existing houses, but this fails to disguise the bulk of the building and its relatively plain elevations fronting the rear access road and Framwellgate Peth. There is little to tie the building to Diamond Terrace and the suggested relationship to Highgate is not discernible in the design. The three storeys of the Highgate development are not appropriate here due to negative impact.

The existing wide and unsightly entrance is proposed to be widened further, pushing it close to the Fram Well Head which is Grade II Listed and increasing the deterrent to pedestrians and cyclists. The block faces directly into the rear access with no path or landscaping. Car parking is referred to in the Design and Access statement but, as with the access also, lies outside of the application and is not shown. Cycle parking is proposed.

The tile-hanging elevation treatment may offer some relationship with the brick built terraces but is very dependent on materials choice. The cementitious board panelling is of a different scale and finish that does not relate well to the adjacent residential buildings.

It will have a very uncomfortable relationship with Diamond Terrace by mass, height, scale, and materials. It has more relationship to the larger commercial developments of Milburngate, Framwell House and, in the future, Aykley Heads.

Information on the heritage context is minimal and the impact on the Conservation Area, WHS and City setting is not analysed. The economic/planning justification is also minimal and generic, it only refers to the current failure as office accommodation and, interestingly, notes

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the site as having a '*prominent position.*' The heritage statement (and design and access statement) has only the barest of descriptions of the location and only considers the existing building and the new proposals, there is nothing on adjacent buildings, cumulative impact, or the relevance of the context for the site.

There is little on transport implications and the impact on the existing cycle/pedestrian main route down Framwellgate Peth. These are excluded from the application even though access changes are proposed.

Impact

There is cumulative impact where the new proposal will add to the commercial development of surrounding this small enclave, this building adds height and mass to the intrusion already experienced from Framwell House. The building will effectively complete the enclosure of the residential terrace at its west end, the lower end of Sidegate is also subject to development pressure. Framwell House intrudes to the rear and Milburngate Phase 2 will be prominent. The proposed development will intrude directly onto Diamond Terrace and its shared access path (the path is excluded from the application). This diminishes the character of the area impacting on its historical significance. It also has amenity impacts from forcing a very substantial commercial development with all its pressures onto the small residential enclave. It should be noted, of course, that there are extensive office developments adjacent at Milburngate (230,000sq. ft) and proposed for Aykley Heads (400,000sq.ft.), aside from Framwell House. Milburngate is already moving towards completion of Phase 1 with more offices to follow. Meanwhile, residential provision not in student use is consistently reducing in the inner city.

The intrusion into the green setting of the city (especially from The Sands) is also a cumulative negative impact – there has been substantial built intrusion into the green setting in this sector from buildings adjacent to The Sands and at Milburngate. This green setting is to Sidegate, the city and to the WHS – the further intrusion of buildings being a quality reducing impact on one of the key WHS-related historic routes and the inner setting. A clear loss of '*rural feel.*' This generally has already been eroded and will be further affected by the new buildings abutting Framwellgate Peth at Milburngate.

There is no consideration of lighting, and the proposed offices will intrude into the darker green 'strip' below the railway platform above that leads through into Sidegate and Crook Hall. It will help to increase the overall lighting impact of the adjacent Milburngate development.

The proposal reads as overdevelopment where the access road abuts directly against the foot of the building and there is no space to create even a minimum of separation. This may exist for the current building, but the building extent is doubled under the proposal. The further widening of the access road increases the negative impact of this entrance visually and on pedestrians and cyclists. It impinges further onto the Fram Well Head listed monument. This fails to assist the County Council's own aspirations for this route. Other options to create a safe crossing for pedestrians and cyclists, vehicle access and visual improvement are needed. Traffic speeds are an issue and there is already concern for those entering from Framwellgate Peth. As the parking mentioned is not shown as part of the submission except for a few at the entrance, the concern is that there will be extensive car parking across the rest of the site, further impacting negatively on its general appearance. The illustrated entrance parking will help to

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create visual clutter and further increase its negative impact. The current office can be served by its own yard with cars out of sight.

The increase in building height and extent looking in from Framwellgate Peth will greatly reduce the current positive dominance of the green setting over the existing single storey building. At present this helps bolster the setting on entering Sidegate.

The switch from residential in the previous approvals has no supporting justification and what analysis there is completely fails to explain why this development is needed when there so much new office space being created around it. There is a specific and clear presumption in favour of residential development on the site by the approved DCNP. If approved this development will help reduce the potential availability of residential properties in the city centre and further isolate the existing housing on Sidegate.

Policies

The proposals fail against the following policies:

County Durham Plan

Policy 21 Delivering Sustainable Transport

The transport implications of the development are not addressed as part of the planning application. The proposals fail to fully demonstrate that the development will deliver sustainable transport by:

- a. delivering, accommodating, and facilitating investment in safe sustainable modes of transport
in the following order of priority: those with mobility issues or disabilities, walking, cycling, bus and rail transport, car sharing and alternative fuel vehicles.
- b. providing appropriate, well designed, permeable, and direct routes for walking, cycling and bus access, so that new developments clearly link to existing services and facilities together with existing routes for the convenience of all users.
- c. ensuring that any vehicular traffic generated by new development, following the implementation of sustainable transport measures, can be safely accommodated on the local and strategic highway network and does not cause an unacceptable increase in congestion or air pollution.

The proposals do not show regard to the policies set out in the County Council's Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan and how they might contribute to the development of a safe strategic cycling and walking network and the routes set out in Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

Policy 29 Sustainable Design

The proposals fail to achieve a well designed building and place and have having regard to other local guidance documents, and:

- a. Fail to contribute positively to the area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape, and landscape features, and do not help to create and reinforce locally distinctive and sustainable community.

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Policy 44 Historic Environment

The proposals fail to:

- f. Demonstrate of understanding of the significance and character and appearance of the conservation area and how this has informed proposals to achieve high quality sustainable development, which is respectful of local distinctiveness and the conservation or enhancement of the assets – (*Unlisted - Sidegate and Diamond Terrace, listed – Fram Well Head*).
- h. Respect, and reinforce the established, positive characteristics of the area in terms of appropriate design (specifically - features, materials, and detailing).

City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan

Policy S1: Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development and Redevelopment Sites Including all New Building, Renovations and Extensions Conservation, preservation, and enhancement of Our Neighbourhood:

The proposals fail to:

- c) Harmonise with its context in terms of materials,
- d) Conserve the significance of the character, local distinctiveness, and the contribution made to the sense of place by the neighbourhood's non-designated heritage assets,

Policy H1: Protection and Enhancement of the World Heritage Site

The submitted information fails to show that they sustain, conserve, and enhance the setting of the World Heritage:

- e) There is a 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

The proposals fail to:

- a) Sustain and enhance the historic and architectural qualities of a buildings,
- b) Sustain and enhance a continuous frontage,
- e) Avoid harm to an element of assets (*Fram Well Head, Sidegate and the terraces*) which make a positive contribution to its individual significance and that of the surrounding area.
- g) Protect important views of the Durham City Conservation Area from viewpoints within the Conservation Area.
- j) Have materials and detailing appropriate to the vernacular and context.
- k) Use high quality design sympathetic to the character and context of the local area and its significance and distinctiveness.
- l) To avoid adding to the cumulative impact of development schemes which dominate by their scale, massing, and uniform design (*Framwell House and Milburngate*).

Policy D1: Land for Residential Development

As office proposals the application cannot be supported because - Proposals for housing development on the following sites, as shown on Proposals Map 7, will be supported:

1. Main Street USA

Policy T1: Sustainable Transport Accessibility and Design

The submitted information fails to show how the development proposals contribute to sustainable transport accessibility and design.

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Accessibility

The proposals fail to show how approach routes to the site, and access within the development is accessible to all, or how they give the highest priority to walking, then cycling and public transport, and meet the travel needs of people with mobility impairments.

Impact

The submitted information and proposals fail to show whether adverse transport impacts are avoided. They fail to show how there is mitigation of adverse impacts or improvement to access by walking, cycling and public transport in the area around the development.

The Trust objects to the application, based on the above points, and recommends refusal.

Yours sincerely

Frances Pritchard,
Honorary Secretary, City of Durham Trust