

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
10 March 2022

Dear Mr Russell,

DM/22/00139/FPA The Beauty Spot, Saddlers Yard, Saddler Street Durham DH1 3NP
Proposed 4 Bed HMO with accompanying communal living area and kitchen in existing loft spaces. A dormer link will be formed to connect the two loft spaces.

The Trust notes the submission of amendments but maintains its objection based on lack of information and negative impact on the retail unit on the ground floor.

The principal relevant issues relating to the application are the value of Saddlers Yard as a retail asset and clarifying heritage and management/access arrangements.

Retaining the Beauty Spot ground floor retail unit is essential as it forms part of the Saddlers Yard complex – an important and characterful part of Durham’s retail offer. There being no proven need for student accommodation (and HMO) on this site, the only positive reason for conversion of the upper floor is to help with maintaining the viability of the lower floor unit. There is ancillary benefit in use of vacant space, but this is shown as being at the expense of storage, kitchen facilities and toilets for the retail unit. Conspicuously, there is no submission of ground floor plans showing that the retail unit is uncompromised by loss of these facilities. The proposal relies on ground floor access and the detail of this is omitted from all the plans submitted.

The management arrangements for Saddlers Yard with its gated access and shared bin storage are not clarified and cannot be relied on. 24 hour access is not proven for the proposed HMO. Agreement to use the shared bin storage also remains in doubt. The Design and Access statement continues to identify a means of escape via the adjacent Waterstones building. The plans fail to indicate how this might be achieved and particularly when Waterstones is closed for business. It is striking that there are 26 properties on the Neighbour Notification List, but not one of them has submitted a comment. This could indicate that they are unaware of the potential management and safety implications of the proposal.

Although spaces are now indicated for bin and bike storage, this not fully detailed on the ground floor plan. Given that this is a student let, there is an obvious need to control the bin and bike arrangements to avoid residual build up of rubbish and to make an adequate allowance for access to the bikes.

No sections are submitted, and floor area/ceiling clearance cannot be proven as meeting the required National Space Standards.

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The Heritage Statement (and the Council Design and Conservation response) fail to properly deal with the importance of the east/west burgage plot formation and its shaping of the current roofscape. The County Council response writes off the impact of the dormer on the principle of 'if it can't be seen it has no impact'. It seems that the view from the Castle North Terrace and Keep has not been checked as should be required in relation to the World Heritage Site that is in very close proximity. The roofscape on view from these positions has been considerably compromised by the large blocks of the former Woolworths, Marks and Spencer and Burtons buildings. This has been negatively impacted by the Marks and Spencer building extension, also for unneeded student accommodation. The block of roofscapes that this proposal relates to is the only major demonstration of the original burgage plot division. The dormer runs counter to that (as acknowledged by the County Council heritage response). It is a very basic and unsympathetic solution. The submitted elevations fail to match the photographic evidence for window styles and this needs resolving. Fire protection arrangements may require the ground floor door to be changed and this needs clarification.

Positive benefit is not proven and there are negative management, retail, and heritage impacts. The Trust therefore continues to object, based on the policy failures it outlined in its original objection.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust