

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Web site: <http://www.DurhamCity.org>

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20 December 2023

Mr David Richards
Planning Development Central/East
Room 4/86-102
County Hall
Durham City
DH1 5UL

Dear Mr Richards

DM/23/03400/FPA: Change of use for the first floor of Bridge House from office (Use Class E) to purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) (Sui generis) providing 8 x new studio apartments. Replacement and enlargement of one existing window to install a new uPVC window to match existing. First Floor Office Bridge House North Road Durham DH1 4PW.

The Trustees of the City of Durham Trust considered the above planning application at our meeting held on 11 December 2023 and resolved to submit the following objection.

The Design and Access Statement accompanying the application sets out the thinking behind this proposal:

“The proposed amendments will be the final phase of the redevelopment of Bridge House which have taken place over the past 7 years by Ridley Properties – a local developer and provider of high quality rental accommodation for students and young professionals. Levels 2 and 3 have been converted from office to C3 use and have proved popular to help meet growing demand in the City Centre. The proposals will convert the remaining floor on level 1 to provide specific PBSA accommodation to compliment (sic) the existing use.”
Given that some of the units fall below the minimum nationally described space standard (37sqm for 1 bed unit), the use will be C2 as opposed to C3, with the facility managed by Ridley Properties.”

The proposal is wrong in representing the intended use as C2. Use Class C2 is defined as **Use for the provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care (other than a use within a class C3 (dwelling house) and use as a hospital or nursing home.** Quite clearly, neither students nor young professionals fit within the terms of Use Class C2. The applicant appears from the above quote to be applying for Use Class C2 because some of the units fall below the minimum Nationally Described Space Standard as required in County Durham Plan Policy 29.

The applicant in fact contradicts himself by describing the proposal as a PBSA (Purpose Built Student Accommodation). On that basis it is of no specific Use Class; it is *Sui Generis* and falls to

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be determined under County Durham Plan Policy 16.2 which sets out a number of requirements that proposals for PBSAs must meet but are not addressed in this case. In particular:

- there is no attempt to meet requirement (a) of demonstrating a need for additional student accommodation of this type in this location;
- no consultation is evidenced with the relevant education provider (requirement b) pursuant to the identified need; and
- the size of some of the units fail requirement (f) for an appropriate standard of internal design, layout and size of accommodation.

Given the contradictory descriptions of the proposal, the Trust wonders if a satisfactory scheme could come forward that represents a Use Class C3 residential adaptation of the current offices by removing and moving a few partitions so as to comply with the minimum Nationally Described Space Standard and thereby meet the terms of CDP Policy 29.

No explanation is given as to the reasons the current dental practice is to cease. It may be the landlord wishes to have a different kind of business there in line with the uses on the other floors of Bridge House. We note that there is a chronic shortage of dental services and a replacement dental service would be of great community value. The Durham City Neighbourhood Plan specifically tackles such issues in Policy C3:

“Policy C3 Protection of an existing community facility. Development proposals which would result in the loss of a valued community facility for which there is a demonstrable demand should make equivalent alternative provision within or adjacent to our Neighbourhood.”

No such alternative provision is offered. This consideration is relevant whether or not a revised internal layout to meet the minimum space standard comes forward.

On the above grounds of not meeting the terms of the proposed C2 Use nor the terms for PBSAs set out in CDP Policy 16.2, nor the requirement in DCNP Policy C3 for alternative provision of a valued community facility, the City of Durham Trust asks the County Council to refuse this application as currently configured, without prejudice to the possibility of a revised proposal as outlined above. In any case, the provisions of DCNP Policy C3 need to be included in the planning balance.

Yours sincerely,

John Lowe

Chair, City of Durham Trust