

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
14th May 2022

Steve France
Planning Development Strategic
Room 4/86-102
County Hall
Durham City
DH1 5UL

Dear Mr France,

DM/24/00969/TCA St Leonards Catholic School North End Durham DH1 4NG

Proposed felling of 21no. trees within the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area, as detailed within Arboricultural Impact assessment ARB/AE/3301/d) For the avoidance of doubt, tree no.33 referenced within the report is subject to a Tree Preservation Officer and is not proposed for removal pursuant to this Notice.

The Trust objects to the proposed removal of trees. This is because there is no clear justification for tree removal and that this felling should be considered as part of the full application of the development of the site and not in advance of detailed scrutiny. The reason for objection is because the three applications now covering tree removal are confusing and fail to demonstrate a clear set of reasons for removal. As noted in its previous objection to tree removal as part of the demolition application (**DM/24/00883/FPA**) the Trust understands the urgency and need for the demolition and school rebuilding and does not wish to stand in the way of that proposal. However, the handling of the tree felling is very unconvincing and falls considerably below what should be the expected standard in dealing with a substantial application for a high impact development in a conservation area and with pressing need to resolve accommodation for school pupils.

Context

The trees form a partial screen between the adjacent Springwell Hall Cottage, and the rear of houses on Fieldhouse Lane and The Crescent. They soften the impact of the school buildings on those residential properties. They also contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area. Their loss would cause negative impact. It also now appears that one of the trees in this grouping (T33) is covered by the TPO.

Felling and Planning Applications/Notices

DM/24/00883/FPA St Leonards Catholic School North End Durham DH1 4NG

Demolition of existing disused school buildings

The Trust has objected to this because there was no justification within the application and demolition methodology. It was clear that any future full application would need to clarify why felling is needed. It is premature to include the felling. It also included the proposal to fell what transpired to be a TPO tree, No. 33.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

DM/24/00969/TCA St Leonards Catholic School North End Durham DH1 4NG

Proposed felling of 21no. trees

The Trust is objecting to this. It is concerning that the TPO covered tree, No. 33 is now referenced. Of much greater concern is that if the trees are not covered by a new TPO by 24th May (6 weeks for validation date of 24th May) then the applicant will be free to fell the trees. This will be before full consideration of the application for rebuilding. If considered as a standalone application, it would have opened the way for the tree removal to be omitted from Biodiversity Net Gain calculations, although this does not appear to be the case.

DM/24/01173/FPA St Leonards Catholic School North End Durham DH1 4NG

Demolition of existing school buildings and development of a replacement school building and works to the retained Springwell Hall, along with car parking, hard and soft landscaping including works to trees, replacement playing pitches, and access arrangements.

Puzzlingly, this also covers both demolition and tree removal. The Trust is reserving its comments on this application pending further consideration. What is clear is that the felling is partly due to the footprint of the new building but mostly caused by altered car parking arrangements and a combined cycle/pedestrian route through the site. The landscape proposals for tree planting are minimal as presented and offer little replacement screening or visual softening for local residents.

Proposals

The existing trees in the boundary area close to existing properties have a value, and this has not played a clear role in layout considerations. The complex circulation and parking arrangement has been allowed to dominate together with an expanded building footprint. The Trust was not included in the informal consultation process held in March.

The Trust strongly suggests that a TPO is made as quickly as possible, and a requirement made to protect these trees during the demolition works. It therefore objects to the felling proposals covered by this notice (**DM/24/00969/TCA**). An alternative would be to omit the felling proposal in the demolition application (**DM/24/00883/FPA**) and include tree protection measures and to retract this felling application. This would then allow full consideration of the new proposals, tree losses and replacements without the threat of the trees being removed before the application (**DM/24/01173/FPA**) is properly considered. This would seem unlikely to delay progress.

As noted, the Trust reserves its comments on the full application but looks forward to responding in a positive and constructive manner. This is a substantial proposal in the Conservation Area, and it needs to play a positive role in enhancement creating a high quality sympathetic building.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,
Chair, City of Durham Trust