

9th July 2024

Strategy and Delivery (planning)
strategyanddelivery@durham.gov.uk

County Durham Shopfront Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) Second Stage Consultation Draft, June 2023

Thank you very much indeed for the opportunity to comment on the above 2nd draft document. The City of Durham Trust strongly supports the County Council's initiative in producing a range of SPDs to assist with interpretation and application of particular County Durham Plan policies. We share the desire to secure consistent and focussed planning applications and submissions that address the requirements laid down in policies and to remove the difficulties that have been experienced by Members, officers, applicants, and consultees in some cases. The Trust particularly appreciates that SPDs should be used positively by developers to submit applications that are in line with the guidance they contain and therefore should be capable of approval.

The Trust notes that following the first consultation changes have been made. However, it considers that the document can be made even more useful by further refinement.

Sections 1-5, Pages 1-9 The content of these pages is useful but would benefit from more clarity of aims by summarising them. As a reminder, the Trust saw its key issues as:

1. The retention and repair of traditional shopfronts
2. The intrusion of contemporary additions or changes, particularly signage, lighting and for leisure uses.
3. New leisure and shop frontages.

For the Trust, its issues might be translated into aims:

1. Ensuring the retention and repair of traditional shopfronts
2. Ensuring that changes to traditional shopfronts take account of the existing shopfront, the host building and its context.
3. Ensuring that retail and leisure shopfronts in contemporary buildings respect both the building and its context.

Section 6, Pages 10 and 11

Useful summary of shopfront elements and principles. This is mainly for traditional buildings and shopfronts and, while useful for contemporary buildings within areas with a strong traditional character, it is less appropriate for other contemporary buildings. It would benefit from more clarity on this point.

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

There can be building names or business lettering or logos inscribed into the front elevation of buildings. The Trust considers that these are of significance, part of the building fabric and should be retained as the use of the building changes. An example is the lettering on the former Barclays Bank in the Market Place in Durham. There are also name boards, plaques etc that are attached to the building. There are examples that have been lost (e.g. the Three Tuns and some of the plaques celebrating buildings and/or people). Another section should be added to cover this.

Section 7, Pages 7-17

Corporate Image – Thank you for this addition.

Signage Page 13 – The Trust considered the statement on the first draft regarding A Boards to be very welcome, this was: "*Signs on the pavement, such as A boards will not be permitted as they obstruct the highway and are a hazard for disabled or partially sighted people.*" Is there any reason that this cannot be reinstated into the SPD? Weakening this will result in the continuation of what is widely viewed as a serious problem.

Internal Lighting – If the section is considered appropriate, does the feedback comment that internal digital screens are outside the scope of an SPD still stand? The Trust remains concerned about problems with intensely bright LEDs and screens that can overwhelm when inserted into traditional shopfronts. Internal hanging neon signs can also be intrusive. These are particular threats in conservation areas.

Window Displays– There is a crossover with the section on **Signage**: the issue being with lettering applied to main shopfront windows and also upper storey windows. This can be very discordant and difficult to counter through the planning process. Guidance would be useful.

Materials - Is there scope for using high quality marine plywood?

Outdoor Seating - Noting that there are limitations for the scope for this SPD, comments in the feedback related to outside seating areas. This Trust response relates to built seating and screening areas and not basic removable tables, seats, and parasols. Introduced in increased numbers during pandemic responses they are becoming permanent features. These are featuring in planning applications where construction is involved. They can be sited in front or close to the shopfront or building and are often of a poor quality that does not uphold the design principles otherwise promoted in this SPD. A reference to this would be useful to ensure that they match the quality and style of the attached shopfront.

Section 8, Page 18, Contemporary Shopfronts

A very helpful addition.

Conclusion

The second draft SPD is an improvement over the first but needs fine tuning in some areas. The Trust looks forward to seeing the final SPD.

Yours sincerely

John Lowe,

Chair, City of Durham Trust