

# THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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9th September 2024

Ms Michelle Penman  
Durham County Council  
Durham County Council Planning Development  
PO BOX 274  
Stanley Co Durham  
DH8 1HG

Dear Ms Penman,

**DM/24/02164/FPA 3 Lawson Terrace Durham DH1 4EW**

*Single storey rear extension to existing small HMO (Use Class C4) with loft conversion and installation of 4 no. velux roof lights*

The Trust objects to this proposal based on the proposal to insert four skylights in a row on the rear roof slope. It also objects to the single storey extension for the reasons explained below. Together these are an inappropriate design. The proposals will have an adverse impact on the appearance of the terraces and the Conservation Area. In addition, it objects on the basis that the proposals fail to meet both the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) and Durham County Council (DCC) Standards For Houses In Multiple Occupation.

The terraces are a significant part of the conservation area and demonstrate Durham's growth during the 19thC. The combination of the medieval core based around the Peninsula and subsequent growth is part of what gives Durham City its character. When viewed from the train or viewing points the regularity and general uniformity is what creates the contrast against the more organic growth of the city core. As they age, they become of greater importance and the Trust's view is that they need greater consideration when assessing planning proposals. It is not only the front elevation that is important but also the roofscape and rear elevations as well.

It is unfortunate that a substantial number of rear extensions of very varied types have been permitted. Equally unfortunate is the substantial loss of original timber windows and doors to uPVC. Neither can be considered 'vernacular' under any definition. Further loss of the already small yards to more extensions, loss of original rear window arrangements and cluttering of the roof lines with dormers or skylights should all be preventable as changes that will adversely affect the general uniformity and style of the terraces.

In this instance the proposal to insert a bedroom into the loft area is a consequence of the original conversion to a five bedroom House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) straining the communal space and amenities of the house. It is wholly unreasonable that having created

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cramped accommodation this should now lead to unsatisfactory alterations to the rear elevation. There are relatively few rooflights and no dormers on the roofs of the terraces immediate surrounding the application building. Four skylights of a basic type are a substantial intrusion. It is anticipated that pushing a shower room into the loft space will also create external pipework to further mar the elevation together with any new ventilation requirements. The single storey extension will substantially reduce the yard space and remove the original window arrangement. It leaves the new kitchen space lit only by one skylight and either a double or single door (unclear on drawings) creating a dark space with limited natural ventilation for at least five different occupants. The living area will be particularly dark and unventilated. The Trust leaves whether the escape route over the new pitched roof is safe or practicable to the Council's further consideration. There are also confusions between different drawings for the rear extension and the skylights to the front elevation as shown on the existing elevation drawing do not exist.

The Trust's analysis of space standards follows:

## **The Nationally Described Space Standard**

A five-bedroom three storey house must have at least one double or twin bedroom (5b6p) with a minimum floor area of 11.5m<sup>2</sup>. The largest bedroom is Bedroom 1 with a stated floor area of 9.9m<sup>2</sup> is a **fail**.

The required minimum gross internal floor area for a 5b6p is 116m<sup>2</sup>. The floor area of 3 Lawson Terrace, as measured using the IDOX tool, is 109.5m<sup>2</sup> this is a **fail**.

The minimum area for a single bedroom is at least 7.5m<sup>2</sup> and it must be at least 2.15m wide. Bedrooms 2 and 3 are both too small and Bedroom 2 has a width of 2.057m which is too narrow. These are therefore a **fail** under assessment of this new application even though both of these rooms are this size in the current building.

The new Bedroom 5 in the attic has a claimed area of 7.7m<sup>2</sup> but it achieves this only by taking in a narrow alcove. Without this the area would be 6.93m<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the NDSS at 10(i) requires that the minimum floor to ceiling height is 2.3m for at least 75% of the Gross Internal Area. The plans mark a ceiling height of 2.15m in this bedroom and this part of the bedroom has an area of 3.55m<sup>2</sup>, which is 46% of 7.7m<sup>2</sup>. This new bedroom therefore **fails** the standard.

## **DCC Standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation**

Part 2 in section 1 *Space Standards* begins with a note

All habitable rooms, kitchens, bathrooms and water closet compartments shall have a minimum floor to ceiling height of 2.3m except in the case of **existing** attic rooms, which shall have a minimum height of 2.15m. Reference made to floor space means "usable floor space" – actual floor space may therefore be reduced, for example, in irregularly shaped rooms. [The Trust's emphasis]

*and*

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Attics, basements or similar rooms, shall have a minimum height of 2.15m over an area of the floor equal to not less than half of the area of the room, measured on a plane 1.5m above the floor The area of any part of the floor space over which the vertical height of the room is, by reason of a sloping roof or ceiling, reduced to less than 1.5m shall be excluded from the calculation of the floor area of that room.

As this is a new attic room the relaxation in the standard does not apply. As shown above, the minimum height of 2.15m is only achieved over an area of 46% of the total, so this is a **fail**.

There is also a requirement that:

All habitable rooms shall be provided with an area of clear glazing equivalent in total area to at least 1/10th of the floor area of the room, and some part of the window should normally be at least 1.75m above floor level.

The kitchen/dining/living room may fail this. The Velux window has an area of 1.25m<sup>2</sup> and it depends on the area of the glazed part of the door/French doors whether this standard can be met.

The points of objection are:

- Inappropriate insertion of rooflights
- Reduction of usable yard space and encroachment into the rear open areas
- Loss of the original rear window layout.
- Insertion of inappropriate uPVC rear door
- Failure to meet NDSS requirements.
- Failure to meet DCC Standards for HMOs.

The Trust therefore objects to this proposal. The planning policies that the Trust considers the proposals fail against are listed in the appendix.

Yours sincerely,

**John Lowe**

Chair, City of Durham Trust

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## Appendix - Policies

The Trust considers that the proposals fail against the following planning policies:

### County Durham Plan

#### Policy 29 Sustainable Design

- a. The proposals fail to contribute positively to an area's heritage significance and townscape.
- e. The proposals fail to provide high standards of amenity and privacy.

#### Policy 44 Historic Environment

##### Conservation Areas

- f. The proposals fail to demonstrate understanding of the significance, character, appearance and setting of the conservation area and how this has informed proposals to achieve high quality sustainable development, which is respectful of historic interest, local distinctiveness and the conservation or enhancement of heritage assets.
- h. The proposal fails to show respect for, and reinforcement of, the established, positive characteristics of the area in terms of appropriate design (including, features, materials, and detailing).

### Durham City Neighbourhood Plan

#### Policy S1: Sustainable Development Requirements of all Development and Redevelopment Sites Including all New Building, Renovations and Extensions

The proposal fails because it does not:

- d) Conserve the significance of the setting, character, local distinctiveness, and the contribution made to the sense of place by Our Neighbourhood's designated and non-designated heritage assets.

#### Policy H2: The Conservation Areas, Durham City Conservation Area

The development proposals negatively affect the Durham City Conservation Area by not taking into account, and meeting, the following requirements:

- g) protecting important views of the Durham City Conservation Area from viewpoints within the Conservation Area; and
- j) Having detailing appropriate to context, and setting; and
- k) Using high quality design sympathetic to the character and context of the local area and its significance and distinctiveness.