

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
Aire House
Mandale Business Park
Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH
11th June 2022

Emma Price,
Durham County Council Planning Development
PO BOX 274
Stanley Co Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Ms Price,

DM/25/01422/AD 22 - 23 Market Place Durham DH1 3NJ

Blue background vinyl with white lettering at 2400 x 740mm overall size

and

DM/25/01423/LB *Replace WH Smith sign with like for like TG Jones sign to front elevation*

The Trust objects to both of these applications on the grounds of poor design inappropriate to the building and negative impact on the conservation area.

Context

The Market Place is the secular centre of Durham City with important buildings demonstrating the evolution of Durham as a services and retail centre. They retain the character but have suffered from some impact from changes in use. Shopfronts are mostly appropriate, but there has been intrusion by modern shopfronts and signage as the uses change.

This building has retained the framework of its 19thC Gothic styled shopfront. However, it has suffered from degradation in quality by the intrusion of the unsympathetic automatic doors in contrasting white and the vinyl signs for the Post Office and W.H. Smith. The need is for a more thorough overhaul of the shopfront remedying these problems and removing excess wiring over the cornice. As a listed building in this important central location in the Conservation Area it should be subject to more sensitive care and appropriate introduction of changes of the traditional shopfront.

Proposal

The change of ownership to T.G Jones might be welcomed in that it continues the use in a central location to the benefit of Durham's residents. This should not mean that any consequent change is accepted no matter how inappropriate. The solution chosen is the most basic application of a vinyl in the corporate colour and lettering. The colour stands out against the frontage and the lettering is too large and in a contemporary font. It is a clear case where corporate branding is simply being rolled out with no concern for the individual context of the building. While the previous W.H. Smith signage was poor, this is worse. It adds to the accumulation of unsuitable changes and should be resisted. As the font style is changed it is not like for like as maintained in the submission.

As the Shopfronts Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (quotes in italics) notes *'In conservation areas and on listed buildings some corporate colour schemes, styles and logos can be obtrusive and overbearing'*. This is an instance of this. The sign must be appropriate to the shopfront – *'Attaching a sign to the fascia of the shopfront is the most prominent place for signage but must complement the overall façade'*. The lettering must be in scale and harmonise with the design of the shopfront – *'This is of particular note in terms*

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

of colour palette and lettering, which should not be oversized and respect proportions of the fascia and building's architectural features'. Individual letters are preferred- 'Traditional handwritten sign writing, vinyl sticker letter or individually applied letters in timber or metal are preferred'.

The submitted heritage statement is misleading. It states - *'Changes proposed as part of the works to change WH Smith branding to TG Jones branding includes installing heritage aesthetic styled signage to the existing front'* The vinyl is not heritage styled or aesthetically appropriate. It also asserts – *'These additions are very much keeping with the character of the area and will have very little impact on the surrounding properties'*. As noted, this is not in keeping with this building in the Market Place. There is cumulative negative impact, and this sign adds to it and the inappropriate changes to other shopfronts. The sign proposed does not follow the advice in the Shopfronts Design Guide SPD.

For the reasons above the Trust objects to this application (policy failures are indicated in the appendix below).

Yours sincerely

John Lowe, Chair, City of Durham Trust

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Appendix – Planning 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.

Policy 44 Historic Environment

Listed Buildings

- b. The sign fails to respect the historic form, setting, fabric, materials, detailing, of the shopfront

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 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:

- a) sustaining and enhancing the historic and architectural qualities of buildings, 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.