

DURHAM CITY CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AREAS AND CHARACTER APPRAISALS CONSULTATION 2025

<https://letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/en-GB/projects/durham-city-conservation-area-boundary-areas-and-appraisal-documents>

RESPONSE OF THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

INTRODUCTION

All the appraisals are impressively detailed in their analysis with ample illustrative material: photos, maps and key views. Similarly, they identify common weaknesses such as poor door and window replacements out of keeping with the area, street furniture clutter, and poor road and pavement surfaces. This is ironic since most of these problems could be dealt with by DCC with better planning control and enforcement, and more sensitive repairs by the Highways Department. They also identify a major weakness in many areas, namely excessive motor traffic in the City's narrow medieval streets. We trust that these issues will be addressed by the management strategy.

All the documents would benefit from a final, detailed, proof reading. There are many typos and misplaced apostrophes.

We haven't attempted to answer the four generic questions as we felt they were too broad. We are generally well satisfied with the document as a whole and we have identified specific issues in our detailed comments on each area. The one instance where we disagree with the proposed boundary is that we think that Grey and Collingwood Colleges should be included with the other Hill Colleges.

We have added some comments about Non-native Invasive Species that apply across the city.

We've used the page numbers on the printed pages rather than those that appear alongside the PDF.

Crossgate Conservation Area

Crossgate is part of the city's medieval town plan established by 1250 known as the "old borough". It is characterised by historic buildings from the Georgian and Victorian periods, spread over a distinctive hilly land form. The area grew up around the Church of St Margaret of Antioch and was connected to the peninsula when Bishop Flambard built Framwellgate Bridge in 1128.

Page 13 Paragraph 2

Should be "coal measures"

Page 15 Photo of Wear Gorge and cathedral

Caption should read "densely wooded River Wear Gorge".

Page 27 Positive contributors

The Trust has often pointed out the quality of the terraces along The Avenue. They are significant enough to rate a mention together with Nevilledale Terrace. These also get a mention elsewhere in the CACA reinforcing their quality.

Page 31 Paragraph 2

Refer to "significant views of Durham Castle"

Page 36 map

Restricting the map to PROW sells the historic pattern short (see also Framwellgate CACA). This map should include Crossgate Peth, Blind, Margery and Clay Lanes as key historic routes.

Page 38 last paragraph

Refers to Durham Union Workhouse but this became St Margaret's Workhouse later.

Page 42

It is perhaps worth considering adding in the allotments as the Cathedral quarry site - it helps form the road layout around it and subsequent development.

Page 75, paragraph 2

Loss of several trees fronting the Avenue in rear gardens of Crossgate Peth.

Page 88 paragraph 2

The Avenue is used as a rat run by traffic via Farnley Mount.

Page 100

Green spaces

Some front gardens lost to hard standing or decorative stones.

Threats

There is also pressure from attic conversions for student accommodation to introduce dormers into terraces without them, disrupting the roofscape.

Page 129

Ongoing pressure on terraces for discordant changes to rental accommodation.

Elvet Conservation Area

Elvet is an ancient diverse place that was occupied before the arrival of the community of monks carrying the body of St Cuthbert on the peninsula in 995AD. Old Elvet is a grand spacious street with Georgian townhouses that contrast with Victorian properties and mid-20th century social housing at Whinny Hill. It includes the important historic green space at The Racecourse used as a sports ground since at least 1733.

Page 34 First Paragraph

There needs to be a mention of the negative impact of the intense prison security lighting.

Page 72

First paragraph

It should be mentioned that this is a problem exacerbated by the number of cars parked by students during term time.

Second paragraph

There is substantial concern about the number of students using the road crossings and the difficulty in crossing the road at this junction.

There is also a section of Hallgarth Street that is a problem.

Page 99. Negative elements (buildings)

Whinney Hill continues to be under pressure from conversions to student letting - this helps fuel inappropriate building changes and use of front gardens for parking.

Page 129. Weaknesses

Add:

- Increasing conversion of properties to student lets
- Narrowness of paths at pinch points
- Pedestrian congestion at Stockton Road crossings
- Prison security walls and lighting

Page 131. second paragraph

This should include the University Territorial Lane site and area surrounding the Baths building.

Framwellgate Conservation Area

Framwellgate is significant as part of the city's 19th and early 20th century expansion associated with the wider industrial heritage of the county developing as a result of the railway coming to Durham. It includes grid patterns of Victorian workers houses, terraces aspiring more to the middle classes, the medieval site at Crook Hall, and important historic green spaces such as the Victorian Wharton Park, and Flass Vale.

General Observations

As with all the appraisals it is impressively detailed in its analysis with ample illustrative material: photos, maps and key views. Similarly, it identifies common weaknesses such as poor door and window replacements out of keeping with the area, street furniture clutter, and poor road and pavement surfaces. This is ironic since most of these problems could be controlled by DCC with better planning control and enforcement, and more sensitive repairs by the Highways Department.

Detailed Observations

Page 8 lh col, 2nd bullet:

This refers to the area as "forming the heart of the Bishop's Borough" while on p.21 rh col, 2nd para the Bishop's Borough is "Framwellgate/Sidegate" and the "fortified peninsula" is separately identified.

Page 12 Views - from The Battery at Wharton Park

But unmanaged tree growth is now obscuring views.

Page 16 Map 4

is a particularly useful one showing the WHS at the centre of the 7 CAs.

Page 19

second paragraph

It is, to some extent, speculation but the slums may well have been the remains of historic buildings - all of which were removed by demolition followed by road improvements. It is a reasonable assumption, for instance, looking at the 1860 map where it shows the burgage plots and buildings relating to them - more than likely from periods earlier than the 19thC. It is the complete loss of an historic area of Durham. See Fig.15 on page 24.

third paragraph

It may be that, somewhere, Riverwalk deserves a little more detail. It could include the two phases, the first at Framwellgate Bridge end more successful in design terms than the second. Then the 21stC reworking mostly leaving the phase one as originally designed.

Page 21

The infill of the Framwellgate Peth burgage gardens is very noticeable. The gas works and other buildings are indicative of industrial expansion that continues up to Crook Hall.

Page 23

And, after an intervening phase where 1930's housing replaced the demolished historic houses, it eventually led to the loss of a residential area to commercial development now reversed with new flats at Milburngate.

Page 28 NDHAS

"Former industrial buildings, Back Western Hill" - No longer in existence!

Page31

I'm puzzled by the suggestion that private front gardens in Albert Street and Princess Street constitute a green corridor down North Road. The front gardens of Albert Street are negligible and don't front onto North Road. I would add that the gardens of Diamond Terrace and Sidegate do constitute a green corridor and this is illustrated by the photo on **p.32**.

Page 34, paragraph 2

It's not all good. Framwellgate Bridge is badly floodlit, and the new Riverwalk leisure uses emit a distracting amount of light into the river area particularly from signage and the upper storeys.

Page 35, map

Given the stress placed on Crook hall and National Trust ownership , the view form it to the Cathedral should be included.

In the Map Key item I is the cathedral, not the castle.

Page36, mid col:

It would be clearer to identify the school as St Leonard's

Page 37, Figure 32

Blighted by some 20 wheelie bins permanently left out on both sides of the carriageway.

Page 38, map

This shouldn't be avoided - the high level link over the A690 and lift access from Milburngate and Riverwalk down to the riverside level has yet to be properly resolved and the otherwise redundant Riverwalk lift tower brought into use.

Page 39, first paragraph

There is more needed here on the main historic routes. Framwellgate Peth is significantly historic (by use and name), actual origin unknown More conjecturally, Framwellgate Peth leads through to South Street as the earliest route through Durham. The Flass Vale route may well have led (there are enough thoughts on this) to Beaufort. Sidegate out to Finchale is also a clear route.

Page 40, map categories

Aren't the flats in the Milburngate development residential?

Page 41, lh col:

Sidegate is on the East side of Framwellgate Peth, not the West.

Page 48 paragraph 8

These buildings are now demolished. The replacement school building dominates the site even more.

Page 61, rh col:

The pub at Durham station is called "The Waiting Room", not "The Signal Man".

Page 62 Negative elements (buildings)

Delete "Former industrial buildings, Back Western Hill". No longer in existence, leaving behind an eyesore of a demolition site.

Page 66

paragraph 1

add to "visually marred": and by refuse bins left on front entrance landings and the footpath

paragraph 2

add: an excessive number of refuse bins

Page 77

Built form

Delete first paragraph: Both buildings now demolished (or to be demolished).

Urban Spaces:

In particular, the lower end of Princes Street is in really poor condition. Your refer throughout to "Princess Street" rather than "Princes Street".

Threats, 4th bullet point

Add: and refuse bins

Page 84 paragraph 4

two interpretation boards

Page 107

Threats

Add:

- The original Miners Hall poor condition needs a separate mention.
- Continuing pressure from commercial uses on shopfronts and buildings condition.

Page 112, lh col:

The "larger detached dwelling" at the West end of Sidegate is in fact two semi-detached dwellings, Nos. 8 & 9.

Page 112, mid col:

Is it correct to say that Crook Hall Gardens are "outside the public domain"? Access is readily available via the National Trust.

Page 116 Negative elements (alterations)

Delete "graffiti to the disused chapel building." The "disused chapel" has now been demolished and the developer, Hanro, has surrounded the site with a wooden stockade. They have planning permission for another office block but there is no sign of it being built. **See** p.121, lh col.

Page 117

The Camino Inglés ends in north western Spain (Santiago de Compostela), not starts there.

Page 119. Views

The Crook Hall view to Cathedral needs to be added here (?View 3), and described in the following page(s).

Page 121 Threats**Add:**

Pressure on car parking and other changes at Fram Well House and development/redevelopment at entry to car park. This can alter the character of Diamond Terrace.

Page 130, very end of page:

“bust stops”!

Page 134 Threats**Add:**

- The potential failure to get the Riverwalk lift installed and/or a safe high level crossing of A690 is threat. This could leave the Riverwalk lift tower as an unnecessarily prominent redundant feature.
- The clutter caused by external seating on the Riverwalk Terrace especially at the southern end makes access less easy for pedestrians, looks unsightly and can block the view of the listed building. Also see the photograph on Page 136 for spillage out onto Framwellgate Bridge of intrusive street furniture.

Page 140

Delete "Former industrial buildings, Back Western Hill". Buildings no longer in existence

Gilesgate Conservation Area

Gilesgate is an ancient route that connected the cathedral priory with its farm estates at Sherburn and beyond. The buildings occupy a ridge line where two sides of the river valley meet. The main streets are Gilesgate and Claypath framed by Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian buildings with the village green a focal point. The area also includes the medieval Kepier Hospital site, and the impressive Victorian buildings at Hild and Bede College.

General comments

A superb piece of work, hugely creditable to those involved. Poor proof-reading is forgivable therefore! Now need implementation tools and programmes.

Detailed comments

Encountering overlapping of text and photographs: e.g. page 124.

Page 2 paragraph 6

Given the crucial role of the river in shaping the city and being part of the character and experience of the city, it is worth praising here not only green assets but also this wonderful blue asset.

Page 8 - The Sands Bullet Point

There should be a reference here to the Freeman and Common poss. also elsewhere - part of area's history.

Page 12 Communities and intangibles

I would add here (and it applies to other areas of the city): The significance of multiple streets of working-class terraced houses behind Claypath that hold and trigger the memory of manual labour within this Cathedral and University city.

Page 28 – Map and List The rear wall and service entry of Walkergate and Walkergate itself should not be considered positive contributors

Page 28 – Map and List The curved building at the Sixth Form Centre could be a worthy candidate for positive contributor.

Page 28 – Map and List A potentially debatable inclusion as positive is the Student Castle Building - well detailed but ultimately over scaled for its location in Claypath

Page 34

Paragraph 3

Leazes Road is an unpleasant environment for pedestrians because of the furious vehicular traffic, and so is not walkable by choice except in an emergency.

After the crossing point at the Gilesgate roundabout Leazes Road itself has no crossing points now that the footbridge has been removed.

Paragraph 7

and the disconnection due to the gap made for the Leazes Road underpass.

Page 36 – Map Should the Gilesgate Roundabout also be a Gateway?

Page 38- Map Are Walkergate Flats residential?

Page 44 paragraph 4
and Orchard Drive

Page 48 paragraph 1

Other than The Chains, set well back from the historic frontages and unmistakably a municipal block of flats.

Page 49

paragraph 7

The green space around St Nicholas Mortuary Chapel is worthy of a bit more praise.

paragraph 8

but these trees are a vital component of the green visual quality of the historic city.

Page 54 Figure 39

Leazes Place, please.

Page 57 – Photo There must be doubt that the Army Reserve building is a positive contributor

Page 57- Photo Given its scale, Student Castle is not a wholly positive contributor

Page 62 - Missing sections /photos here?

Page 66 Negative elements (sites and buildings)

Greatly welcome this section, hopefully leading to an action plan. In addition to the examples you give, there are visual issues of garish commercial signage and street clutter such as A-boards.

Page 104- Negatives Model School change of use is adding to threat of minor changes adding to cumulative signage clutter.

Page 105 – Threats Pressure from conversion to student accommodation on building frontages and rear areas.

Page 108 paragraph 2

brick kiln: Unfortunately, these remains have been demolished and lie on the grounds as a pile of bricks.

Page 113 paragraph 1

brick kiln: Unfortunately, as noted earlier, these remains have been demolished and lie on the grounds as a pile of bricks.

Page 119

Built form

The brick kiln is in a perilous condition and “at risk. "Risk" has become "demolished".

Threats

brick kiln: "Threat" has become actual loss.

Page 121 paragraph 3

Now superbly extended and re-purposed as an art gallery and workshop.

Page 124 paragraph 5

This is an important statement; no further buildings along the river should be allowed beyond this point.

Page 128 – Fig. 85 There is room for disagreement here. Contrasted with the control exerted at Riverwalk , the signage can be aggressive and oversized and not sympathetic - see Rio

Page 130 paragraph 4 'The Journey'

Actually it is cast bronze copy of the wood-carved original which can be found in St Mary's Church on Lindisfarne.

Page 138 bullet 5

brick kiln at Kepier. Obviously needs rewording now.

Page 139

Opportunities

Again, re-wording needed now regarding the "at risk" Kepier brick kiln.

Hill Colleges Conservation Area

The Hill Colleges are unique within the city consisting of purpose built colleges that were part of the university's post war expansion programme. They are of high architectural quality with boldness for the time by well-known architects, designed to embrace the landscape with views of the cathedral marking the universities original home on the peninsula.

Overall comment

Grey and Collingwood should be included in the Hill Colleges Conservation Area because the post-war plans for the expansion of Durham University envisaged six new colleges, and they should all be included as a group. Grey College was founded in 1959, with buildings opening in the early sixties. Collingwood College was opened in 1972. Our reasons to include these two colleges are given below, related to the text of the document.

Page 6, paragraph 3

The term "Hill Colleges" is understood by all to include Grey and Collingwood.

Page 8:

"Collingwood College ... were assessed as having insufficient architectural quality to justify conservation area status." However, all the other conservation areas will include buildings of poor, or poorer, architectural quality but they have not been excluded from these areas.

"Grey College is not included as its identified significance does not lie in the site's architectural interest, character, or appearance but in its social/educational history, its setting and cathedral view protected by the world heritage site's setting." However, elsewhere in the document you cover "Community and intangibles" and views as being significant attributes for the conservation area. (See e.g. page 11 below).

Page 11

Architectural Interest

"Consistent theme of buildings designed to embrace the unique topography, landscape features and setting, with designed sightlines of the cathedral."

This is also true of Grey and Collingwood. The open space between the two wings of Grey College was designed to give a splendid view of the Cathedral. This is also true of the Pennington Room. Collingwood is designed to blend in with the landscaped woodland setting (the remnants of the old site of Oswald House Estate) that side of South Road. (See Page 12 below)

Community and intangibles

- "There is high significance in the life of the student communities at the colleges and in providing workplaces for the wider region.
- The importance in terms of the collective memories of college and university life for students and staff.
- The importance of the colleges as part of the historic and internationally renowned Durham University."

This is as true for Grey and Collingwood as it is for the other Hill colleges.

Page 12

See also the emphasis on "Topography and setting" and "Green ... infrastructure assets". In terms of topography it is strange to separate the Hill Colleges on what appears to be the line of South Road, as if the topography and its importance does not extend to the east of this road. In fact the woodland setting is even more pronounced on this side of South Road, and this is indeed where Great High Wood and Little High Wood (noted as important on Page 12, column 1) are located.

There is also the emphasis on Views.

- "The designed visual relationship between the colleges and the peninsula, providing spectacular views of the cathedral from elevated ground. These are of importance to the college sites and the setting of Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site.
- The high value of the unfolding views approaching the colleges giving a visual appreciation and understanding of their architectural style and quality."

Once again, this is also true for Grey and Collingwood.

Page 23.

It is noted that Grey College is an NDHA.

Page 29. Movement, activity and atmosphere and Page 51 Ambience and pedestrian experience

The University's new super highway (pedestrian and cycle route) provides a landscaped and wooded route, away from the traffic-congested South Road, from the Science site up past Grey College and to the start of the road up to Collingwood College.

Additionally, the map of the Hill Colleges Conservation Area sharply limits the eastern boundary to South Road, whereas the composite 2024 consultation map of the proposed areas includes what appears to be Grey College on the other side of the road. However this is now not included.

Detailed comments

P 118. Bow School

Is this going to be taken back into the University's estate and possibly become a development site for a University purpose?

Old Durham Conservation Area

Old Durham is characterised by rural vernacular buildings set within a scenic open agricultural landscape. It include the 17th century pleasure grounds of Old Durham Gardens, a fine example of formal garden design developing over the centuries.

Page 29. final paragraph

Worth a note here that the Beck is a realignment of the River Pitting to the South, hence relatively straight course. I presume this was realigned in connection with the industrial workings.

Page 33. first paragraph

Worth noting the negative impact of the Maiden Castle Sports Ground lighting

Durham City Peninsula and Riverbanks Conservation Area

The peninsula is the foundation of the city that expanded out from it during the medieval period. Its crowning glory is the castle and cathedral of international significance and recognised around the world. It includes the Market Place, the historic commercial and civic core of the city, the historic commercial streets such as Saddler Street and Silver Street, North and South Bailey, Georgian in character with an academic air, The College, and the distinct natural environment of the riverbanks.

General Observations

As with all the appraisals it is impressively detailed in its analysis with ample illustrative material: photos, maps and key views. Similarly, it identifies common weaknesses such as poor door and window replacements out of keeping with the area, street furniture clutter, and poor road and pavement surfaces. This is ironic since most of these problems could be dealt with by DCC with better planning control and enforcement, and more sensitive repairs by the Highways Department.

Detailed Observations

Page 19, first paragraph

Debatably, there has been some significant alterations. Prince Bishops, Riverside University buildings, the large stores (Stack, Ex Burtons and Tescos). Also addition then loss of town walls. Loss of the gates. Modern buildings either side of Framwellgate Bridge, bottom of Silver Street

Page 23 fig 15

Elvet Bridge, not Framwellgate

Page 27 mid col, end of 1st para:

"...what is now the iconic view of the Durham." Ends in mid-air

Page 51 lh col, 1st para:

"south west corner" twice

Page 55:

1st para has 2 character areas while 2nd para has 3

Page 59 lh col

ends with the enigmatic phrase "compounded by the riverside tower". If this refers to the green tiles it should say so.

Page 63, fig 18:

This is the east side of the Market Place, not the west.

Page 73 lh col, 3rd para:

"Sadder Street"

Page 74

Third paragraph

In the early evening this is added to by rubbish bags being stacked up awaiting collection

Fifth paragraph

It also has led to a substantial increase in takeaway deliveries with drivers often parking in the Market Place and in Saddler Street adding to congestion.

The Trust view is that while outside seating does bring vibrancy, it also brings poor quality street furniture, overextends to block easy pedestrian movement. It also clashes with cycle movement.

Page 77, first paragraph

The use of A boards does detract! Restaurant/bar seating and street furniture/signage is poor

Page 82, Urban spaces

bullet point 5

There needs to be a mention somewhere about the school generated traffic morning and afternoon on Saddler St

bullet point 7

and overextension of seating areas

bullet point 8

Add in problems of increased leisure use generating much more rubbish that leads to the large nos. of bins and stacking of rubbish on the street for collections

Page 90 lh col

St Mary le Bow is not set back

Page 108, paragraph 3

Note what seems like increased use of Palace Green for marquees?

Page 128, paragraphs 3,4 and 5

Name confusion of Mill?

Page 127

lh col

Elvet Bridge is in the east, not the west.

mid col

"...on the opposite riverbank." Opposite to where?

Page 132, Negative elements, paragraph 4

A landslip has destroyed the steps to Cuthberts Well adding to its poor setting.

Page 144

Built form

Query the condition of the icehouses

Urban spaces

There has to be mention here of the general care of the Riverbanks Gardens area. There is continuing threat of loss of features from the garden area - retaining walls and steps. There is a need for tree management. Some areas round the boathouses are poor.

Page 145, Threats

Lack of maintenance to the Riverbanks Gardens

Page 147

Add to table: Drury Lane – Poor

Page 149 mid col

“The need to ensure the implementation of Durham University’s Durham Castle Conservation Area Management Plan.” Strange to see this listed as a Threat.

Page 150 Opportunities and options appraisal

Should Riverbanks Gardens also feature here - after all it has been the subject of Lottery bid?
Cuthberts Well?

Across all sub-character areas: Invasive non-native species (INNS)

There is no coverage of the problem of dealing with invasive non-native plants, especially Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed, on the riverbank for instance. Pelaw Wood is a known trouble spot for Himalayan balsam but this seems unnoted in the Gilesgate document. Beacon Hill is overrun with balsam. The Wear Rivers Trust is claiming success in eradicating giant hogweed from Old Durham Beck, which is understood to be a crucial source of infestations elsewhere, but this is work that will still need monitoring and extending. Should not something be said in the CAMP documents in relation to DCC supporting work to deal with the serious problem of invasive non-native plants, maybe with something specific in that respect being added to those sections of the CAMP documents about desirable future work, e.g. in the Threats and Options sections. The CAMP documents acknowledge the importance of green spaces but seem not to take on this problem of INNS. Given the relative neglect of the decline of the natural environment in the City, it will be important that specifics of the CAMP for each area be committed to reflect the priorities of the LNRS, once that is finalised.