

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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24th February 2026

Mr David Richards
Durham County Council
Planning Department
PO Box 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Mr Richards,

DM/26/00203/FPA Kepier Farm Kepier Lane Gilesgate Durham DH1 1LB
Demolition of brick kiln (retrospective) and reinstatement of footings with interpretation board.

The Trust fully acknowledges the value of the stewardship of the Kepier Farm and its very significant historic assets. The difficulty of maintaining this range of buildings is understood and the effort to achieve this is appreciated. However, the unapproved demolition of an historic asset noted for its significance is a matter of considerable concern for the Trust. The Trust does not consider the application, justification, and proposal as sufficient response to the severity of the action.

Context

The site is of substantial and continuing resonance for the Trust given its opposition to the power station proposals shortly after its founding in 1942. It is matter of ongoing regret that the occupation by Northern Powergrid results in substantial numbers of pylons, poles and cables that do not respect the value of the adjacent Kepier Farm buildings, the kiln site, and the landscape of the Wear Valley. Their presence is certainly no justification for the demolition of the kiln on any grounds of weakened significance.

The substantial industrial history of the Wear valley adjacent to and in Durham city has been effectively erased leaving only occasional reminders. This is why the recognition and retention of the brick kiln was important as an asset with a strong visual presence. As the Donald Insall Associates Level 3 Building record notes: *'The Brick Kiln is named as a non-designated heritage asset in the Durham City Conservation Area Appraisal (2016) in recognition of its significance as an 'interesting' structure reflecting the area's industrial development.'* This and the Bell Monro Consulting structural report were commissioned after demolition, unfortunately they do not establish what is left of foundations or bricks from the demolition. They do not help establish whether other options than that presented are achievable. Had they been produced and publicly available before the act they might have led to a more useful conclusion.

It should also be registered that it is a *'notable unlisted building in the Durham City Conservation Area'* being included the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Table B1 List. The neighbourhood plan also brought to attention that this was a heritage building at risk. The Trust believes that there was more than enough notice given of the significance, importance, and regard for this building. The objections to this demolition demonstrate that there is wider concern with the demolition.

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In terms of danger, trespass, and risk there was obvious concern, but this needed considerably more public discussion before action was taken. Nobody is now in a position to know whether other solutions were available and what assistance might have been given. It is also not clear whether Northern Powergrid as lessees or the owners took steps to prevent trespass directly into the building occurring. The lease terms are not known to the Trust, but it understands that the kiln site remained open to access a short distance from the public footpath. As the application suggests this is hardly a new problem – it has been an issue for 60 years. There may have been no statutory requirement to safely conserve the building, but trespass and risk alone should have been enough to trigger this as a duty. The opportunity has been lost to establish whether more extensive remains could have been stabilised and protected against trespass.

As a comparison, the former garage on Back Western Hill was fenced off, and the road closed, for a period of time while the matter was considered. A similar approach should have been taken here; the risks and the mitigation are comparable.

It is the Trust's contention that the kiln was worth greater attention in terms of understanding of its significance and that it was already sufficiently recognised as important to not be demolished without public consideration. It had significance as one of the few reminders of the area's industrial past and an important phase of Durham's evolution. This would have increased with time. There was adequate recognition of its importance to act as trigger for public debate that might have resulted in a more beneficial outcome.

Proposal

The information board on the publicly accessible path is a very useful suggestion and one the Trust supports. However, it is not a sufficient gain to offset the loss of the building.

As the building has been demolished it now a question of whether this application offers enough. What is applied for is the minimum. To raise the walls to only 300mm would offer little to suggest the strength and solidity of the original building, being not visible from the public footpath. Noting the concerns about future trespass, the options could possibly have included stabilisation of the structure as it stood, reducing it to take away the threat of roof and wall collapse, a more substantial reduction and conservation as ruined walls/buttresses and the suggestion made in the application. There may well have been variations between these.

The Trust's view is that more is needed. Enough of a rebuild is required that visibly demonstrates the thickness and strength of the walls and their buttressed structure. It is assumed that sufficient salvageable bricks remain to enable this. The bricks themselves have some value as and whether they originated from these brick works or another now lost needs to be established. A survey of the remains is needed.

There is sufficient strength and relevance in Policy 44 of the County Durham Plan to refuse this application as it stands. The application should be withdrawn and a more effective rebuild solution negotiated before a new submission.

The Trust has little option but to object to the proposals as submitted for the reasons above (policy failures are indicated in the appendix below):

Yours sincerely,

John Lowe

Chair, City of Durham Trust

chair@durhamcity.org

Celebrating, Protecting and Enhancing the City of Durham

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Appendix – Planning Policies

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

County Durham Plan

Policy 44 Historic Environment

The proposals fail to:

f. Demonstrate of understanding of the significance and character and appearance of the conservation area and how this has informed proposals to achieve high quality sustainable development, which is respectful of local distinctiveness and the conservation or enhancement of the (*unlisted*) asset.

Heritage at Risk

The deteriorated state of the heritage asset (*this does not exclude non designated assets*) will not be taken into account where evidence shows that the asset has been deliberately neglected or damaged. (*It is not clear to what extent the building and its condition were wilfully neglected*)

Full and proper recording of the asset must be undertaken and made publicly available prior to its loss, in a manner proportionate to the importance of, and impact upon, the asset. (*This only happened after the demolition contrary to this policy*)