

THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

Web site: <http://www.DurhamCity.org>

c/o Blackett, Hart & Pratt, LLP
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Belmont
Durham, DH1 1TH

23rd March 2026

Clare Walton,
Durham County Council Planning Development
PO BOX 274
Stanley
County Durham
DH8 1HG

Dear Ms. Walton,

DM/26/00357/FPA Coviello 24 Silver Street Durham DH1 3RD

Remove front door and windows, dwarf wall to provide level plane and new black aluminium bifold doors.

The Trust objects to this application on the grounds of design inappropriateness, failing to meet County Council Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) guidance and negative impact on a building, Silver Street and the Conservation Area.

Context

Silver Street is one of the most important city centre historic streets and is formed from a range of different buildings of varied ages with ground floor commercial premises. The host building for these proposals is in the middle of a varied row of traditional buildings. The upper parts of the buildings remain relatively unaltered except for some with inappropriate windows. Silver Street is a narrow winding road creating a more intimate setting for its commercial premises.

Silver Street has retained a lot of the traditional shopfronts but progressively the rich detail and ornamentation of the 19th/early 20th century have been lost. The shopfront to this building is important because it retains the ornamental cornice and side plinth, pilasters and corbels. The traditional arrangement of the shopfront includes the inset doorway – providing useful shelter, level access and an original feature. The setting back of the door is also useful because it takes account of the steep street slope and creates a level entrance. This shopfront retains its earlier traditional form and quality of design.

The County Council SPD on Shopfront Guidance notes in connection with changes over the past 60 years that: *‘These changes have often been at the expense of the original shopfront’s basic rules of scale and proportions have tended to be ignored.* The Trust has ongoing concern about the cumulative impact of inappropriate changes on Durham’s historic streets and sees the shopfront guidance as essential in achieving improvements and reducing unnecessary negative impact.

Proposal

The complete removal of the lower shopfront and replacement with what appears to be dull domestic scaled folding doors is a completely inappropriate approach. It also creates a low retaining wall acting as a step and hindering access for all. It would fail to harmonise with otherwise traditional frontage. This will negatively affect the building, the street and ultimately the conservation area.

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The proposal fails to accord with the Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD guidance is:

6. Principles of Shopfront Design

Generally, the shopfront should respond to the character of the local area and streetscene and reflect the traditional pattern of frontages, which are comprised of several distinctive elements.....:

Entrance Door: *The entrance door should be accessible to all. The entrance door should be wide enough to allow unrestricted passage for a variety of users including wheelchair users.*

The proposal completely fails to respond to the street character removing the traditional door and front glass and replacing it with a modern door insertion. It also will create a step causing an entrance obstruction. These points are also referred to in the following section on design principles:

7. Design Principles - Access

Any upgrading of a property must carefully consider how access for all can be accommodated.The use of the recessed doorway can assist in providing a gently ramped nonslip surface instead of a stepped arrangement for wheelchair users.

When within the historic environment, including conservation areas, the design of new shopfronts should aim to achieve the characteristics of these historically appropriate materials and external finishes.

Also of concern is the current arrangement of four tables, eight chairs and an A board outside the restaurant in the street. This is entirely unsuitable for this narrow and busy section of the street, and they block the defined level pathway running in front of the shopfronts. This is unsightly and also a hazard for people including those with sight, mobility impairment or in wheelchairs moving along the street or trying to get into this or other premises. The new proposal is concerning because it has the potential to increase the usage and privatisation of what should be public highway. The strip of artificial grass is both inappropriate and a trip hazard. (See photograph below)



The Trust supports the conclusion of the County Council's Design and Conservation advice that the proposal is unsupportable and for the reasons it provided. The Trust's objections (policy failures are indicated in the appendix below) to the proposals as submitted are therefore that:

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1. The proposal removes a large section of a distinctive and fully appropriate existing traditional shopfront that enhances the streetscene
2. The new proposed doors will not enhance the building
3. They fail to observe the guidance in the Shopfront Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) December 2024.
4. They will have a negative impact on the building, Silver Street as an historic street and the Conservation Area.
5. The existing doorway provides a fully accessible entrance for all users, and the new proposal creates a step that is both a hazard and a barrier to wheelchair access.

John Lowe

Chair, City of Durham Trust
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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.
- f. The proposals fail to contribute towards healthy neighbourhoods and consider the health impacts of development and the needs of existing and future users, including those with dementia and other sensory or mobility impairments.

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 heritage assets.
- h. The proposals fail 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 proposals fail because they do 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 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 and outside the Conservation Area
- 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.