

# THE CITY OF DURHAM TRUST

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

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

22nd April 2026

David Richards,  
Durham County Council Planning Development  
PO BOX 274  
Stanley  
County Durham  
DH8 1HG

Dear Mr Richards,

**DM/26/00770/AD Whitechurch 29 Church Street Head Durham DH1 3DN**

*Hand painted signage to front and side elevation gable and walls (retrospective)*

The Trust objects to this application on the grounds of design inappropriateness and negative impact on the host building and the conservation area.

**Context**

The building is presumed to date from the 1850s or earlier and is likely to have been a more basic vernacular building used as a public house – The New Inn. As shown on the 1856/65 OS mapping it marked the extent of the City and development along Church Street Head. The corner position makes it a prominent landmark building important to the Conservation Area (CA). It is at the CA boundary and marks the entry into the historic City extents present from before 1850. The New Inn name was in use for a long period before the change to Whitechurch. An Article 4 Direction covers the surrounding houses.

The former complex half-timbered upper storey decoration may have been added interwar and although of a different and pastiche style was of some quality and added to the impact of the building as a landmark. The building's more recent changes have resulted in a steady decline in quality of the external appearance. The removal of the half timbering has left the building with a more contemporary and basic styling without returning to the probable original vernacular appearance. This has been compounded by a modern extension to the side and very poor collection of rear outbuildings. The latter have been capped with a particularly large range of air handling flues and vents. The Church Street Head side is a visually poor and very discordant entry point into the CA. The Stockton Road side has also been added to with an extensive contemporary canopy, again detracting from the historic origins of the main building. The net result is that of a discordant adaption for leisure use at odds with the CA. The traditional 'Stockton Road' sign has been removed.

**Proposal**

The Trust's view is that the painted walls on the Church Street Head frontage and side wall by the Stockton road extension are advertisements painted with the sole intention of drawing attention to the building and its leisure use. The monstera leaf outlines have no relationship with the building style, its origins, or the CA. The font used for 'Whitechurch' is overlarge in both instances. The building, extension and outbuildings being in bright white render have negated the quality that the building once had. The painted signage cumulatively adds to the more contemporary appearance. The monstera leaf outlines turn

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the walls into a canvas for these unnecessary large scale graphics. They fail to enhance the building, lack any distinctiveness relative to the building and the CA. They have a negative impact on both. The application therefore fails to accord with the requirements of the County Durham Plan Policies 29 and 44 and the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Policies S1 and H2. The main frontage now has planters along its full length above the ground floor. The addition of 'Free House' beneath the 'Whitechurch' lettering on the main Stockton Road façade appears not to have been included in this or previous planning applications. The same applies to the external side wall floodlighting by the Stockton Road extension and the 'Welcome' directional painted signage and menu board. Ambiguously, the submitted drawing also shows screening to the flues and vents showing on the Church Street Head frontage although this is not referenced in the application.

There is no need for additional advertising as the pub is a well known location and more modest signage would suffice. The painting is ephemeral; it is something of the moment and of no lasting value. Ownership and uses can change more quickly than in the past.

The submission shows little understanding of the building's significance or setting. It does not respect the form of the building and helps to mask its origins. It is cumulative harm when seen in combination with the other built alterations to the building and the external seating use with its large contemporary canopy. It takes away from the quality of views into the CA and is incongruous within the CA. Approving this will encourage other leisure premises to attempt similar advertising – of concern because of the number of and competition between leisure uses in the city centre.

The Trust's objections are therefore:

1. It is functionless
2. It does not accord with the design of the building
3. It has negative impact on the Conservation Area.
4. It would be a very poor example encouraging other overscaled signage.

The Trust objects to this application for the reasons above (policy failures are indicated in the appendix below). The fact that it is a retrospective application makes it all the more objectionable.

Yours sincerely

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.

#### **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:

- c) Harmonising with its context in terms of scale.
- 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.