

Durham City Conservation Area Character Appraisal

Response from the City of Durham Neighbourhood Planning Forum

Introduction

The Forum applauds this extensive and detailed piece of work. It is thorough and comprehensive and we consider it to be a fair assessment of the character and appearance of Durham City. We have agreed in principle to endorse the Appraisal.

It is our understanding that the residents' associations will be replying in detail regarding those areas they represent. The comments from the Forum relate to those generic aspects of the Appraisal, as described in the Executive Summary, as well as additional issues we would like to add in terms of future challenges.

We wholly support the Council's commitment to managing the Durham Conservation Area through the development of policies and proposals. However there is a real urgency to do this, as the pace of development is moving so fast within the City Centre. Major developments, close to the WHS, are imminent such as the redevelopment of The Gates and Millburngate House sites. We need up to date policies so that the developments are '*not detrimental to the special interest of the wider conservation area*' (2.2)

The pace of change is also shown in the fact that since the appraisals were written, sites such the Fred Henderson site and the Neville's Cross Club, where particular consideration was needed, have now been developed. The Appraisal needs to be checked for this sort of inaccuracy due to the time lapse.

Comments on the Summary of Future Challenges

The Forum agrees with the County Council's list of key elements of significance that define Durham City's 'special architectural or historic interest.' In terms of the summary of future challenges the Forum would like to add to this list the huge impact on the visual amenity of letting boards in the City's Conservation Area.

The County Council has identified the need the Article 4(2) protection for areas identified as being under threat in terms of character, appearance and special significance. The Forum considers that the character and appearance of the City Centre is also harmed by the proliferation of letting boards, which often obstruct the architectural character that the County Council has identified as one of the City's unique characteristics.

In January 2015, following a successful application to the Government for a regulation 7 direction, landlords and lettings agents in parts of Newcastle now need to apply for 'advertisement consent' to install lettings boards.

We believe that together with Article 4(2) protection the time is now right in Durham City (working in collaboration with colleagues in the Planning and Property section) to remove deemed consent for these boards, through a

Regulation 7 direction.

Proposed Boundary Changes

The Forum supports the major boundary changes, at St Aidan's College, within the Elvet Character Area, as well as the proposed extension at Old Durham in the Gilesgate Character Area. Both areas form part of the setting and backdrop to the Durham World Heritage Site and will further strengthen the special interest of the area.

Article 4(2) Direction

The Forum agrees with the identification of four areas within the Conservation area to be subject to Article 4(2) direction. These include the Hawthorn Terrace Area, the Hallgarth Street and Church Street area, Claypath and Gilesgate area and the Western Hill Area because *'their character, appearance and special significance is under threat from works carried out under Permitted Development Rights'*

We request however that this is not a definitive list. It is possible that residents will identify additional areas for inclusion, during this period of consultation or in the future and we ask therefore that the Council will appraise these also for inclusion in the list. Examples given to date from members of the Forum are Ravensworth Terrace and the Sidegate area, including Diamond Terrace.

The Forum understands that Article 4(2) Directions only apply to single dwellings, as flats and commercial properties already have limited permitted development rights. Listed buildings are covered by Article 4(1) and therefore are not the subject to this consultation.

The potential exists, should commercial premises be converted to residential use, for a gap to appear in a row of houses subject to an Article 4(2) Direction. Consideration needs to be given to addressing this issue, either perhaps by having a way of automatically extending the scope of the Direction, or by attaching a suitable condition to any planning permission for a change of use.

The Forum requests clarification as to whether non-designated heritage assets and buildings / structures of local interest are subject to Article 4(2) Direction. The County Council states that such buildings *'add to the general architectural richness and character of the area and it will be important that careful consideration is given to any development proposals that are likely to affect such buildings'*. The Forum believes that the County Council should go beyond 'careful consideration' and that if one is not already in place, these should be afforded the protection of an Article 4(2) direction. If this protection is already in place then this needs to be clear within the text of policies, in order that the owners will find it necessary to apply for planning permission for most external alterations.

Some examples that have been identified by Forum members:

- The Georgian cottage in Blue Coat Court - it is the only remaining element of the Blue Coat School and was the headmaster's house.

- The former Bernard Gilpin Society building on The Sands - it has been knocked about badly but is still important.
- There are several buildings fronting Claypath / Lower Gilesgate that are neither listed nor marked for Article 4 protection and inappropriate replacement doors/windows etc would be harmful, so all buildings should be included.
- The old half-timbered and stone wall on the right-hand side of Blue Coat Court is a worthwhile historic structure.

Conclusion

The Forum wishes to be updated on the Conservation Area Appraisal process and looks forward to working in partnership to preserve and enhance the Durham (City Centre) Conservation Area.

Appendix

Errors in street and place names

There are many errors regarding street and place names. We request that when the document is proofread a full check is carried out for typing errors and accuracy of all street and place names. This is extremely important in terms of the importance of place to residents. In addition, given the size of the document, the only practical way to read what is said about a particular street is to search the PDF. If a street name is misspelt then it will not be found.

Some examples include:

- Pelaw Woods is spelt Pelew on page 12 of the Executive Summary and then spelt correctly throughout the rest of the document
- Leases Road should be Leazes Road
- Backhouse Lane should be Bakehouse Lane
- Moody Yard should be Moody's Yard
- Pennyferry Bridge should be Penny Ferry Bridge (or, if the other way round, consistent use of it)
- Blue Coat Yard should be Blue Coat Court
- Clayport Court should be Claypath Court
- Freeman's Quays should be Freeman's Quay. Also at the top of page 127 there is a word missing in the text. It states it is 'well locally' when you presumably mean 'well used locally.'
- St Anthony Vicarage should be St Antony's Priory.
- On page 133 and page 141 there are inaccuracies in terms of the building the Council describe as St. Anthony's Vicarage. The building was the St Nicholas Vicarage; it became the home of The Sacred Mission of St Antony and then more recently had the stone tower chapel built. The old former vicarage building and the stone tower together are The Priory.
- St Anthony Cottage should be St Antony Cottage
- Tinkler's Yard should be Tinkler's Lane.

- Quakers graveyard should be Quaker graveyard.
- St Nicholas churchyard is an unfamiliar term - it is usually called St Nicholas Cemetery or St Nicholas Chapel Cemetery.
- Coalpitts Terrace should be Colpitts Terrace,
- Alexander Crescent should be Alexandra Crescent,
- Quarryhead's Lane should be Quarryheads Lane,
- Heron Site should be [Fred] Henderson Site

Photographs

- The lower photo on page 150 is not Providence Row, but Wanless Terrace.
- Image 86 on page 122 is labelled 'Providence Row and the Sixth Form' which appears inaccurate.