

Durham County Council
Planning Development
Central/East Room 4/86-102
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UL

City of Durham Council
c/o Room 103
Floor 1
County Hall
Durham
DH1 5UF

9 July 2018

Dear Mr Pilkington,

DM/18/01115/FPA: Fram Well House, Diamond Terrace, Durham DH1 5SU

I am writing on behalf of the City of Durham Council to object to the above application for a 2/3 storey office building of 1251sqm floor space. My apologies for the lateness of these comments, but the Council has only recently been established and the first meeting of our Planning Committee was barely a week ago.

We have read the case file and your committee report, and support the comments from the principal objectors, namely the Sidegate Residents' Association, the City of Durham Trust, and individual residents of Diamond Terrace.

The additional comments we wish to make are about the case for extending into the Green Belt.

- The main argument in favour is "bringing an underused building back into a productive reuse". This is expanded upon in paragraph 83 of the Officer's report. The NPPF is clear that the harm caused by inappropriate development in the Green Belt should be given substantial weight. The case being made is a weak one and does not outweigh the need to protect the Green Belt.
- This is a speculative development. There is no prospective tenant waiting, and indeed the developer offers the alternatives of letting the building as a single unit or floor by floor.
- The financial benefit is predicated on the new occupiers being from outside the region, whereas the prospects identified in Table 3.1 of the Green Belt Assessment are from within the region and two of them seem to be relocating from within the City.
- Of the seven tenants listed, two (Probation Service and Voicentric) would be relocations (Voicentric is in Bridge House) so the economic benefits in 6c would not accrue. Pulsant and Storey Homes would be relocating from elsewhere in the region. There is insufficient information about the other three.
- The Agent's Update of 25 June is again talking of relocations.
- There is a major building site at Milburngate House and the planning permission is for five office blocks. These are nearer to the City Centre and would surely prove more attractive to prospective tenants. The Officer's report has not considered this at all.

- Salvus House at Aykley Heads is being marketed on behalf of the County Council by Business Durham. This offers smaller suites, comparable to a single floor of the proposed new offices. These are ready for occupancy now.
- The Neighbourhood Plan has proposed this site for housing, and that would, in our view, be a much better use for this site. The temporary benefits to the economy during construction would also accrue should houses be built here.

All parties agree that this is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF (paragraphs 87 and 88) requires that this application should not be approved except in very special circumstances. This is a high standard, and the case advanced does not begin to meet it. In any case, the test is not a simple balance of probabilities, the benefits have to clearly outweigh the potential harm to the Green Belt.

We therefore ask that you revise your report and recommend refusal

Yours sincerely

ROGER CORNWELL

Chair, Planning Committee