

# COMMITTEE REPORT

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### APPLICATION DETAILS

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<b>APPLICATION No:</b>	DM/25/00198/FPA
<b>FULL APPLICATION DESCRIPTION:</b>	Change of use from Dwelling (C3) to HMO (C4) including driveway extension, single-storey rear extension, bin store and cycle rack
<b>NAME OF APPLICANT:</b>	Sugar Tree Limited
<b>ADDRESS:</b>	38 Coopers Square Gilesgate Durham DH1 1PT
<b>ELECTORAL DIVISION:</b>	Belmont
<b>CASE OFFICER:</b>	Allan Fenwick Planning Officer Allan.Fenwick@durham.gov.uk 03000 261957

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### DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

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#### The Site

1. The application site relates to a two-storey semi-detached property located within Coopers Square, Gilesgate which is a predominantly residential area set to the east of Durham City Centre. In closer proximity is the local centre of Dragonville Retail Park and Tesco Extra to the south-east. The property is currently in use as a three-bedroom dwellinghouse falling within Class C3 of the Town and Country Planning (Uses Classes) Order, and benefits from a driveway to the front and private garden amenity space to the rear.

#### The Proposal

2. The application seeks planning permission for the conversion of the existing three bedroomed C3 dwellinghouse into a four bedroomed C4 house in multiple occupation (HMO) with cycle storage provision proposed within the existing garage and bin and cycle storage proposed to the rear of the property. Also proposed is a single storey rear extension (3.2 metres by 3.1 metres with an overall height of 3.4 metres) incorporating a mono-pitched lean-to roof arrangement and constructed from material to match the host dwelling.
3. The application is reported to planning committee at the request of Belmont Parish Council which considers the applicants contention that the proposed change satisfies sustainable development, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework is not supported by any evidence to justify the economic, social and environmental viability

of the area will be improved. The Parish Council consider that these issues are such that they require consideration by the Committee.

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## **PLANNING HISTORY**

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4. No history relevant to the current application.

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## **PLANNING POLICY**

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### **NATIONAL POLICY**

#### National Planning Policy Framework

5. The following elements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) are considered relevant to this proposal:
6. NPPF Part 2 Achieving Sustainable Development - The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and therefore, at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It defines the role of planning in achieving sustainable development under three overarching objectives - economic, social and environmental, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. The application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development for plan-making and decision-taking is outlined.
7. NPPF Part 4 Decision-Making - Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
8. NPPF Part 5 Delivering a Sufficient Supply of Homes - To support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.
9. NPPF Part 8 Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities - The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities. Developments should be safe and accessible; Local Planning Authorities should plan positively for the provision and use of shared space and community facilities. An integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and services should be adopted.
10. NPPF Part 9 Promoting Sustainable Transport - Encouragement should be given to solutions which support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reduce congestion. Developments that generate significant movement should be located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes maximised.
11. NPPF Part 12 Achieving Well-Designed Places - The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, with good design a key aspect of sustainable development, indivisible from good planning.

12. NPPF Part 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change - The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
13. NPPF Part 15 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment. The Planning System should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests, recognising the wider benefits of ecosystems, minimising the impacts on biodiversity, preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from pollution and land stability and remediating contaminated or other degraded land where appropriate.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

#### **NATIONAL PLANNING PRACTICE GUIDANCE:**

14. The Government has consolidated a number of planning practice guidance notes, circulars and other guidance documents into a single Planning Practice Guidance Suite. This document provides planning guidance on a wide range of matters. Of particular relevance to this application is the practice guidance with regards to; air quality; historic environment; design process and tools; determining a planning application; flood risk; healthy and safe communities; land affected by contamination; housing and economic development needs assessments; housing and economic land availability assessment; light pollution; natural environment; neighbourhood planning; noise; open space, sports and recreation facilities, public rights of way and local green space; planning obligations; travel plans, transport assessments and statements; use of planning conditions; and; water supply, wastewater and water quality.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

#### **LOCAL PLAN POLICY:**

##### The County Durham Plan

15. The following policies of the County Durham Plan (CDP) are considered relevant to this proposal:
16. Policy 6 (Development on Unallocated Sites) supports development on sites not allocated in the Plan or Neighbourhood Plan, but which are either within the built-up area or outside the built up area but well related to a settlement will be permitted provided it: is compatible with use on adjacent land; does not result in coalescence with neighbouring settlements; does not result in loss of land of recreational, ecological, or heritage value; is appropriate in scale, design etc to character of the settlement; it is not prejudicial to highway safety; provides access to sustainable modes of transport; retains the settlement's valued facilities; considers climate change implications; makes use of previously developed land and reflects priorities for urban regeneration.
17. Policy 16 (Durham University Development, Purpose Built Student Accommodation and Houses in Multiple Occupation) seeks to provides a means to consider student

accommodation and proposals for houses in multiple occupation in ensure they create inclusive places in line with the objective of creating mixed and balanced communities.

18. Policy 21 (Delivering Sustainable Transport) Requires all development to deliver sustainable transport by: delivering, accommodating and facilitating investment in sustainable modes of transport; providing appropriate, well designed, permeable and direct routes for all modes of transport; ensuring that any vehicular traffic generated by new development can be safely accommodated; creating new or improvements to existing routes and assessing potential increase in risk resulting from new development in vicinity of level crossings. Development should have regard to the Parking and Accessibility Supplementary Planning Document and Strategic Cycling and Walking Deliver Plan.
19. Policy 29 (Sustainable Design) requires all development proposals to achieve well designed buildings and places having regard to SPD advice and sets out 18 elements for development to be considered acceptable, including: making positive contribution to areas character, identity etc.; adaptable buildings; minimising greenhouse gas emissions and use of non-renewable resources; providing high standards of amenity and privacy; contributing to healthy neighbourhoods; and suitable landscape proposals. Provision for all new residential development to comply with Nationally Described Space Standards
20. Policy 31 (Amenity and Pollution) sets out that development will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there will be no unacceptable impact, either individually or cumulatively, on health, living or working conditions or the natural environment and that they can be integrated effectively with any existing business and community facilities. Development will not be permitted where inappropriate odours, noise, vibration and other sources of pollution cannot be suitably mitigated against, as well as where light pollution is not suitably minimised. Permission will not be granted for sensitive land uses near to potentially polluting development. Similarly, potentially polluting development will not be permitted near sensitive uses unless the effects can be mitigated.
21. Policy 41 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) sets out that proposals for new development will be expected to minimise impacts on biodiversity by retaining and enhancing existing biodiversity assets and features and providing net gains for biodiversity including by establishing coherent ecological networks.
22. The Council's Residential Amenity Standards Supplementary Planning Document (RASSPD) sets out guidance for all residential development across County Durham and will form a material planning consideration in the determination of appropriate planning applications. It sets out the standards Durham County Council will require in order to achieve the Council's commitment to ensure new development enhances and complements existing areas, in line with the aims of the County Durham Plan.
23. The Council's Parking and Accessibility Standards Supplementary Planning Document (PASPD) supports Planning Policy 21 (Delivering Sustainable Transport) of the County Durham Plan and should be read in conjunction with the Councils Building for Life SPD, Residential Amenity SPD and the Highway Design Guide. The PASPD sets out guidelines for car and cycle parking that are to be applied equally across the county and for development to be situated within an accessible location.

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/34069/County-Durham-Plan-adopted-2020-/pdf/CountyDurhamPlanAdopted2020vDec2020.pdf?m=63742496933140000>

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING POLICY**

24. The application site is located within the Belmont Neighbourhood Plan area. However, the plan is not at a stage to which regard is to be had.

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## **CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY RESPONSES**

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### **STATUTORY RESPONSES:**

25. The Highway Authority raises no objection to the application.
26. Belmont Parish Council objects to the development as they consider it will lead to the over proliferation of HMOs in a residential area of family housing which they consider is contrary to Policies 16, 21 and 31 of the County Durham Plan. They also consider the application to be contrary to National Described Space Standards (NDSS) and the Council's Parking SPD. The Parish Council also considers the proposal to be contrary to the aims of the NPPF to build a strong, competitive and responsive economy and fails to contribute to the environmental objective. They also question the need for additional student accommodation in the city.
27. The Parish also reiterate previous assertions made in response to other similar applications that the methodology contained within Policy 16 of the CDP is flawed, and note that in this instance 9.6% of properties within 100m radius are already Class N exempt from Council Tax as being wholly occupied by students.

### **INTERNAL CONSULTEE RESPONSES:**

28. HMO Data have confirmed that the percentage of properties within the 100m radius of and including the application site that are exempt from Council Tax is 9.6% and that there are no unimplemented planning permissions within the 100m radius.
29. Environmental Health Nuisance Team advised that the information submitted demonstrates that the application complies with the thresholds stated within the TANS and notes the submission of a tenant management plan, which would indicate that the development will not lead to an adverse impact and is unlikely to cause a statutory nuisance. They raise no objection subject to inclusion of a planning condition requiring the submission, agreement and subsequent adherence to, a construction management plan and the installation of sound proofing prior to first occupation.
30. Spatial Policy Team advises that proposed development will not result in the 10% threshold being exceeded and that the property is not located on a primary access route for the purposes of CDP Policy 16.
31. Durham Constabulary Architectural Liaison Officer raised no objections but makes several suggestions in relation to design such as use of security glazing, dusk to dawn lighting.

### **PUBLIC RESPONSES:**

32. The application was advertised by way of site notice and neighbour notification letters were sent to nearby properties. No representations have been received.

## APPLICANTS STATEMENT

33. The proposals involve the change of use of an existing dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to a 4-bedroom HMO (Use Class C4) within an area where not more than 10% of properties within a 100m radius are Class N exempt. The proposed development will deliver high quality HMO accommodation operated by one of the largest student landlords in the City to meet the needs of students seeking such forms of accommodation. The proposed HMO would deliver safe and secure accommodation that meets the standards of the well-established accreditation scheme supporting the provision of a range of high quality student accommodation options to meet the needs of the student population, which makes a significant contribution to the City.
34. The application submission also clearly demonstrates that the proposals would not undermine the character of the area and that the proposed HMO would not give rise to unacceptable impacts in terms of residential amenity or highway safety, with no objections raised by consultees on such matters.
35. The proposals therefore represent an entirely acceptable form of development in this location that would fully accord with the adopted Development Plan in force for the area.

*The above is not intended to list every point made and represents a summary of the comments received on this application. The full written text is available for inspection on the application file which can be viewed at <https://publicaccess.durham.gov.uk/online-applications/simpleSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>*

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## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

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36. As identified in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the key consideration in the determination of a planning application is the development plan. Applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In assessing the proposals against the requirements of the relevant planning guidance and development plan policies and having regard to all material planning considerations it is considered that the main planning issues in this instance relate to the principle of development, impact on the character and appearance of the area, impact on residential amenity and community balance/social cohesion, impact on highway safety and ecology.

### Principle of the Development

37. The General Permitted Development Order 2015 (GPDO) permits the change of use from C3 (dwellinghouses) to uses within C4 (houses in multiple occupation - HMOs) without requiring express planning permission. A small HMO is where between three and six unrelated individuals live together in a property considered to be their only or main residence and who share basic amenities such as a kitchen or bathroom. The proposed floor plans submitted with the application indicate that the scheme is such that the development would normally benefit from the provisions contained within the GPDO. However, an Article 4 Direction is now in force which withdraws permitted development rights for change of use from C3 to C4, therefore an express planning permission is required.
38. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a material planning consideration. The County Durham Plan (CDP) is the statutory development plan and the starting point for determining applications as set out in the Planning Act and reinforced at Paragraph 12 of the

NPPF. The CDP was adopted in October 2020 and provides the policy framework for the County up until 2035.

39. The proposal relates to the change of use from a 3-bedroom dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) to a 4-bed HMO (Use Class C4). Other works involve the erection of a single storey rear extension to facilitate the reconfiguration of the downstairs to provide a fourth bedroom and other internal alterations, and the creation of bin and cycle storage. The dwellings current layout is broadly traditional with 3-bedrooms to the first floor with kitchen/dining room, lounge and hall to the ground floor.
40. Policy 6 (Development on Unallocated Sites) of the CDP states that the development of sites which are not allocated in the Plan or in a Neighbourhood Plan which are either (i) within the built-up area; or (ii) outside the built-up area (except where a settlement boundary has been defined in a neighbourhood plan) but well related to a settlement, will be permitted provided the proposal accords with all relevant development plan policies and:
  - a. is compatible with, and is not prejudicial to, any existing, allocated or permitted use of adjacent land;
  - b. does not contribute to coalescence with neighbouring settlements, would not result in ribbon development, or inappropriate backland development;
  - c. does not result in the loss of open land that has recreational, ecological or heritage value, or contributes to the character of the locality which cannot be adequately mitigated or compensated for;
  - d. is appropriate in terms of scale, design, layout, and location to the character, function, form and setting of the settlement;
  - e. will not be prejudicial to highway safety or have a severe residual cumulative impact on network capacity;
  - f. has good access by sustainable modes of transport to relevant services and facilities and reflects the size of the settlement and the level of service provision within that settlement;
  - g. does not result in the loss of a settlement's or neighbourhood's valued facilities or services unless it has been demonstrated that they are no longer viable;
  - h. minimises vulnerability and provides resilience to impacts arising from climate change, Including but not limited to, flooding;
  - i. where relevant, makes as much use as possible of previously developed (brownfield) land; and
  - j. where appropriate, it reflects priorities for urban regeneration.
41. The site is within the built-up area of Gilesgate and occupies a broadly sustainable location and as such the principle of development can draw support from CDP Policy 6, subject to compliance with the criteria listed. In relation to criteria a) and b), it is considered that the conversion of the building into a small HMO in this location would be compatible with adjoining residential uses and would not be prejudicial to any existing or permitted adjacent uses, subject to detailed consideration of the impact of the development on residential amenity, which is assessed in more detail elsewhere in this report. The development would not lead to the coalescence of settlements and there are no concerns that the proposal would lead to inappropriate ribbon development, nor that it would be considered inappropriate backland development.
42. The development would not result in a loss of open land that has any recreational, ecological or heritage value (criterion c) and the site is noted as being within a sustainable location, within Gilesgate on the outskirts of Durham City Centre where there is a wide range of facilities and access to sustainable modes of transport (criterion f). The site would not result in the loss of a settlement's or neighbourhood's valued facility or service (criterion g) given that the site relates to a detached

dwellinghouse, and therefore the development makes best use of previously developed land (criterion i). The requirements of criterion d, e, h of Policy 6 are considered elsewhere within this report. It is not considered that criterion j is appropriate in relation to this proposal.

43. The development to change the use of a dwellinghouse (C3) into a small HMO (C4) sited in a sustainable location would therefore be considered to comply with Policy 6 of the CDP and the principle of development can draw some support from Policy 6 in this regard.

44. In addition to Policy 6, Part 3 of CDP Policy 16 is also relevant which relates to houses in multiple occupation. The policy states that in order to promote, create and preserve inclusive, mixed and balanced communities and to protect residential amenity, applications for new build Houses in Multiple Occupation (both Use Class C4 and sui generis), extensions that result in specified or potential additional bedspaces and changes of use from any use to a House in Multiple Occupation in Class C4 or a sui generis use (more than six people sharing) will not be permitted if:

- a. including the proposed development, more than 10% of the total number of residential units within 100 metres of the application site are exempt from council tax charges (Class N Student Exemption);*
- b. there are existing unimplemented permissions for Houses in Multiple Occupation within 100 metres of the application site, which in combination with the existing number of Class N Student exempt units would exceed 10% of the total properties within the 100 metres area; or*
- c. less than 10% of the total residential units within the 100 metres are exempt from council tax charges (Class N) but, the application site is in a residential area and on a street that is a primary access route between Purpose Built Student Accommodation and the town centre or a university campus.*

*In all cases applications for new build Houses in Multiple Occupation, change of use to Houses in Multiple Occupation or a proposal to extend an existing House in Multiple Occupation to accommodate additional bed space(s) will only be permitted where:*

- d. the quantity of cycle and car parking provided has regard to the council's adopted Parking and Accessibility Supplementary Planning Document (SPD);*
- e. they provide acceptable arrangements for bin storage and other shared facilities and consider other amenity issues;*
- f. the design of the building or any extension would be appropriate in terms of the property itself and the character of the area; and*
- g. the applicant has shown that the security of the building and its occupants has been considered, along with that of neighbouring local residents.*

*New build Houses in Multiple Occupation, extensions that result in specified or potential additional bedspaces or a change of use to a House in Multiple Occupation would not be resisted in the following circumstance:*

- h. where an area already has a concentration in excess of 90% of council tax exempt properties (Class N), that this is having an unreasonable impact on current occupiers and that the conversion of remaining C3 dwellings will not cause further detrimental harm to the residential amenity of surrounding occupants; or*
- i. where an existing high proportion of residential properties within the 100 metres are exempt from council tax charges (Class N), on the basis that commercial uses are predominant within the 100 metre area.*



45. It is noted that objection has been received from Belmont Parish Council raising concerns that approving this application would lead to the over proliferation of HMOs in a residential area of family housing which they consider is contrary to Policies 16, 21 and 31 of the County Durham Plan. In addition, concerns have also been raised regarding how the HMO data is collected and the methodology used in CDP Policy 16, Part 3. With regard to the latter, it is noted that the policy and the methodology contained within CDP Policy 16 was considered sufficiently accurate and robust during the examination in public of the CDP in 2020. The Council has successfully defended several appeals against refusal of similar changes of use where these were in clear conflict with this policy. Furthermore, Planning Inspectors, have assessed the appeals against the CDP and have not disputed the methodology behind Policy 16.
46. The most recent up to date Council Tax information identifies that if planning permission was granted for the change of use of the dwellinghouse into a small HMO within 100 metre radius of and including 38 Coopers Square, 9.6% of properties would be Class N exempt student properties as defined by Council Tax records. There are no unimplemented consents or applications pending determination within 100m radius of the application site. As such the proposal would comply with criteria 'a' and 'b' in this respect. In terms of criterion 'c', the application site is within a residential area but is not on a street that could be considered a primary access route between Purpose Built Student Accommodation and the town centre, or a university campus, and therefore the development would comply with CDP Policy 16 in this respect.
47. As this concentration of Class N Student Exempt properties would be below the 10% threshold stated in the CDP, the development would comply with Policy 16, Part 3, criteria a) and b) (criterion c) not being relevant) and as such is acceptable in principle, subject to further consideration of the proposal against other criteria on CDP Policy 16, Part 3 and the impact of the proposal upon residential amenity, highway safety and ecology.
48. The Parish Council cite the fact that the application fails to demonstrate need for accommodation of this type in this location in objection, and that there is a surplus of student accommodation within Durham City with a high volume of HMOs being currently vacant. However, whilst Part 2 of CDP Policy 16 requires need for additional PBSA accommodation to be demonstrated (along with a number of other requirements) this is not a requirement of Part 3 of CDP Policy 16, and it is this part of CDP Policy 16 against which the application must be assessed. As already noted, it is considered that the proposal would accord with the requirements set out in Part 3 of CDP Policy 16. The lack of any specific information with regards to need can therefore be afforded no weight in the determination of this application and would not outweigh compliance with CDP Policy 16, Part 3. In relation to need, it is recognised that market forces will, in the main, deliver the level of student accommodation required without resulting in a significant oversupply of accommodation, particularly in relation to HMOs which in most cases if not occupied as such, can be occupied again as family homes with limited internal reconfiguration.
49. Paragraph 63 of the NPPF states that the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies (including, but not limited to, those who require affordable housing, families with children, older people, students, people with disabilities, service families, travellers, people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes). Given no more than 10% of properties within 100m radius of the application site are Class N exempt, this would remain the case post development, should permission for the current change of use be granted the aims of NPPF Paragraph 63 would be met.

50. The Parish Council also object to the application on the grounds that the development would have an adverse impact upon social cohesion and unbalance the community to the extent that there would be an over proliferation of this type of accommodation in the locality forcing families out of residential areas. Paragraph 63 of the NPPF considers the need to create mixed and balanced communities and this is reflected in the requirements of Part 3 of Policy 16 which seeks to strike an appropriate balance through the threshold of no more than 10% of properties being in HMO use. As already noted above, in light of the low level of Class N exempt properties within 100m radius of the site at present, it is not considered that this proposal would be contrary to the NPPF or CDP in this regard. Whilst it is noted that tenants would likely change on a yearly basis this is unlikely to have any adverse impact capable of sustaining refusal of the planning application
51. Taking account of the above, it is considered that the principal of development is acceptable, and the proposal would accord with the requirements of Policy 16 of the CDP and Paragraph 63 of the NPPF in this regard.

### **Impact on residential amenity**

52. Paragraph 135 of the NPPF requires planning decisions to create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience. Policy 31 (Amenity and Pollution) of the CDP displays broad accordance with the aims of paragraph 135 in this regard and sets out that development will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that there will be no unacceptable impact, either individually or cumulatively, on health, living or working conditions or the natural environment and that they can be integrated effectively with any existing business and community facilities. Development will not be permitted where inappropriate odours, noise, vibration and other sources of pollution cannot be suitably mitigated against, as well as where light pollution is not suitably minimised. Permission will not be granted for sensitive land uses near to potentially polluting development. Similarly, potentially polluting development will not be permitted near sensitive uses unless the effects can be mitigated.
53. In this instance the application site is a semi-detached property located within a residential area and as such the nearest residential property attached to the west with other residential properties framing the site to all sides.
54. The development would fall within the thresholds associated with Council's Technical Advice Notes (TANS) relating to noise. Although the use is not a change of use to a more sensitive receptor, the source of noise could be greater from the HMO use than a single dwelling. This is due to the increase in household numbers and activity in terms of comings and goings at the property. The demographic that uses this type of accommodation are often associated with greater use of the night-time economy and as such an increased level of night-time noise may occur. However, this is anecdotal, as the potential for impact is associated with the personal habits of the individuals residing there and as such, might differ greatly and recent appeal decisions have established that it is unreasonable to assume that all students conduct themselves in a less than responsible manner.
55. The application site is located within a residential area. The impact of the development upon residential amenity is a material consideration in determination of the application. In most cases, it is held that changes of use from C3 dwellinghouses to HMO use can be adequately mitigated to be within acceptable levels subject to planning conditions where there is no over proliferation of C4 uses. Where an HMO is proposed within a

residential area with an existing high proliferation of HMO accommodation, the cumulative impact of an additional HMO in this context has been considered to have a detrimental impact upon residential amenity from increase in noise and disturbance sufficient to sustain refusal of planning permission. The LPA has refused several previous planning applications in this regard and proved successful in defending those at appeal. However, in this instance it is noted that there is no identified over proliferation of existing HMOs within 100 metres of the application site, and as such it is not considered that the introduction of a single additional HMO in this location would result in a level of cumulative impact that would be detrimental to residential amenity.

56. Notwithstanding the above, the applicant has submitted a 'Student Management Plan' in support of the application which states that the property would be maintained by the applicant, which details matters around safety, noise, anti-social behaviour and penalties should any of these be breached. It should be noted that the Council's Environmental Health Noise Action Team raised no objection to the application which included the submission of the 'Student Management Plan'. Therefore, subject to the inclusion of a planning condition requiring the property be occupied in full accordance with the submitted management plan, the development is considered to accord with the requirements of Policies 16 and 31 of the CDP.
57. The house is semi-detached and as such the applicant is proposing the introduction of sound proofing to the first floor party wall and the ground floor party wall to the proposed 4<sup>th</sup> bedroom. Subject to the installation of sound proofing prior to first occupation of the C4 use, as shown on the submitted plans to be secured via planning condition, there would not be any unacceptable transfer of noise to neighbouring properties. The Council's EHO Noise Action Team makes no objection to the application in this regard.
58. The property includes adequate external space to accommodate sufficient cycle and bin storage located within the garden and therefore accords with criterion e) of Part 3 to Policy 16. In addition, it is considered there is sufficient external amenity space to serve the inhabitants in accordance with Policy 16 of the CDP.
59. In relation to internal space, the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) is a government introduced nationally prescribed internal space standard which sets out detailed guidance on the minimum standard for all new homes and was created with the aim of improving space standards within new residential development across all tenures. Evidence compiled during formulation of the County Durham Plan identified that many new homes in the county were being built below NDSS and that this was having an impact on the quality of life of residents. As a result, the Council determined that it was necessary to introduce the NDSS in County Durham, with the aim of improving the quality of new build developments coming forward.
60. It is noted that the current application relates to a change of use to a property already in residential use and as such would not result in any net increase in the number of residential units. Consequently, the rigid application of these standards is not considered appropriate. Nevertheless, it remains that the NDSS is a relevant measurement against which to assess the suitability of internal space provided within all residential development in the context of Policy 29(e) of the CDP which requires new development to provide high standards of amenity and privacy.
61. It is noted that the proposal is considered to provide an acceptable amount of internal space in accordance with Policy 29(e) of the CDP. Whilst objection from the Parish Council has raised concern that the proposal would not meet minimum standards all bedrooms would achieve a minimum space greater than 7.5sqm and as such be compliant with NDSS.

62. With regard to the total overall internal space provided across the dwelling as a whole it is noted that the NDSS does not provide guidance specifically relating to 4 bedspace, 4 person dwellings. However, it does include standards in relation to 4 bedspace 5 person dwellings and it is noted that this requires an overall area of no less than 97sq metres. Whilst the amount of internal delivered through the current proposal falls below this, it is noted that this relates to a 5 person dwelling rather than 4 (as proposed) and that the rigid application of NDSS is not considered appropriate for the reasons outlined above.
63. Therefore, overall, the proposal is considered to comply with Policy 29(e) of the CDP in that it provides a suitable amount of internal and external amenity space to meet the needs of future occupiers and deliver a suitable quality of development in relation to Policy 29(e) and Policy 16 Part 3 of the CDP and Paragraph 135 of the NPPF.

### **Impact on the character and appearance of the area**

64. Paragraph 131 of the NPPF advises that the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, and that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work. Policy 29 of the CDP requires development to contribute positively to an area's character, identity, heritage significance, townscape and landscape features, helping to create and reinforce locally distinctive and sustainable communities.
65. Objection from Belmont Parish Council has raised concern that HMOs have a negative impact on the residential housing estate, due to them not being adequately maintained and that students are short term occupiers with no stake in local community. Further concerns are raised that the general appearance of the property would deteriorate as a consequence of the proposed use, there is no evidence that this would occur, and the applicant has reiterated that the property would be appropriately maintained. There are also separate planning powers available to address untidy land and buildings should such issues arise.
66. Whilst single storey extension is proposed to the property this would be located to the rear and as such would not be visible in the wider locality and would, in any event, appear subservient to the host building and constructed from materials to match. Consequently, the proposed development would fit with the character and appearance of the area and would not have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the wider streetscene in accordance with Policy 29 of the CDP and Part 12 of the NPPF.

### **Highway Safety and Access**

67. Policy 16.3 of the CDP requires new HMOs to provide adequate parking and access and CDP Policy 21 states that new development should ensure that any vehicular traffic generated can be safely accommodated on the local and strategic highway network. This displays broad accord with Paragraph 114 of the NPPF which requires new development to provide safe and suitable access to the site.
68. The application proposes the change of use to a 4 bedroom property which would require a minimum of 3 in curtilage parking spaces which the applicant proposes to deliver through extending the existing drive to create one additional space, providing 3 in total. The Highway Authority offers no objection to the application and does not consider there would be any adverse impact in terms of highway safety as a result of the proposals.

69. It is not considered that there would be any unacceptable increase in demand for on street parking or any subsequent vehicle displacement that would adversely impact upon highway safety.
70. Cycle storage is shown on the proposed cycle and bin storage layout plan as being within the rear garden which is considered acceptable.
71. Therefore, it is not considered that the development would have a detrimental impact upon highway safety sufficient to sustain refusal of the application. In light of the above, it is considered that the development would accord with the aims of CDP Policies 16 Part 3 and CDP Policy 21 and Paragraph 114 of the NPPF.

## **Ecology**

72. NPPF Paragraph 186 d) advises that opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate. In line with this, CDP Policy 41 seeks to secure net gains for biodiversity and coherent ecological networks. Part 15 of the NPPF seeks to ensure that developments protect and mitigate harm to biodiversity interests, and where possible, improve them.
73. The application was submitted after the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, the date on which the requirements of the Environment Act 2021, as inserted into Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, came into force. However, it is noted that there are a number of exemptions which if applicable, can remove a development from the legal requirement to deliver a minimum of 10% net biodiversity gain through the development. The Environment Act 2021 includes exemptions for permitted development which includes development which does not impact on any onsite property habitat and where there is an impact this must be less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat.
74. The development relates to a dwellinghouse and as such falls within the exemption listed above and as such the development is considered to be exempt from requirement to deliver 10% net increase in biodiversity net gain. The development therefore accords with the aims of Policy 41 of the CDP, Part 15 of the NPPF and Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

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## **CONCLUSION**

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75. In summary, it is considered that the principle of development is acceptable and would accord with the aims of Policies 6 and 16 of the CDP subject to appropriate planning conditions described within the report and listed below.
76. When assessed against other policies of the County Durham Plan relevant to the application, it is considered that the introduction of a small HMO in this location would not unacceptably imbalance the existing community towards one dominated by HMOs, nor would it result in an unacceptable impact upon the amenity of existing or future residents through cumulative impact from an over proliferation of HMOs, highway safety or ecology (including biodiversity net gain) in accordance with Policies 6, 16, 21, 29, 31 and 41 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 9, 12 and 15 of the NPPF.

Public Sector Equality Duty

77. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities when exercising their functions to have due regard to the need to i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct, ii) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share that characteristic.
78. In this instance, officers have assessed all relevant factors and do not consider that there are any equality impacts identified.

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

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That the application be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: Required to be imposed pursuant to Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The development hereby approved shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved plans listed in Part 3 - Approved Plans.

Reason: To define the consent and ensure that a satisfactory form of development is obtained in accordance with Policies 6, 16, 21, 29 and 31 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 2, 4, 8, 9, 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

3. The change of use to a Small HMO falling within use class C4 hereby approved, shall be carried out in full accordance with the requirements of the 'Student Management Plan' received by the Local Planning Authority on 24 January 2025.

Reason: In the interest of the amenities of the area in accordance with Policies 16, 29 and 31 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework

4. The small HMO hereby approved shall be occupied by no more than a maximum of 4 permanent tenants at any one time.

Reason: To protect residential amenity in accordance with the requirements of Policies 29 and 31 of the County Durham Plan

5. The property shall not be occupied until such time as the sound proofing shown on Drawing No. 1303 03 entitled 'PROPOSED Floor Plans & Elevations' have been fully installed. Thereafter the measures shall be retained in situ at all times for as long as the property is occupied as a Small HMO.

Reason: In the interest of the amenities of the area in accordance with Policies 16, 29 and 31 of the County Durham Plan and Parts 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework

6. The driveway and cycle storage as shown on Drawing No. 1303-04 REV A entitled 'Existing and Proposed Site Plans', received by the Local Planning Authority on 19 March 2025, shall be constructed and available for use prior to first occupation of the property as a small HMO (Use Class C4) hereby approved and shall thereafter be retained for use at all times whilst the property is occupied as a small HMO.

Reason: To promote sustainable modes of transport in accordance with policies 6 and 16 of the County Durham Plan and Part 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

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## **ADDITIONAL MATTERS**

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## **STATEMENT OF PROACTIVE ENGAGEMENT**

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The Local Planning Authority in arriving at its decision to approve the application has, without prejudice to a fair and objective assessment of the proposals, issues raised, and representations received, sought to work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner with the objective of delivering high quality sustainable development to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area in accordance with the NPPF. (Statement in accordance with Article 35(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.)

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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Submitted application form, plans, supporting documents and subsequent information provided by the applicant.

Statutory, internal, and public consultation responses

The National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

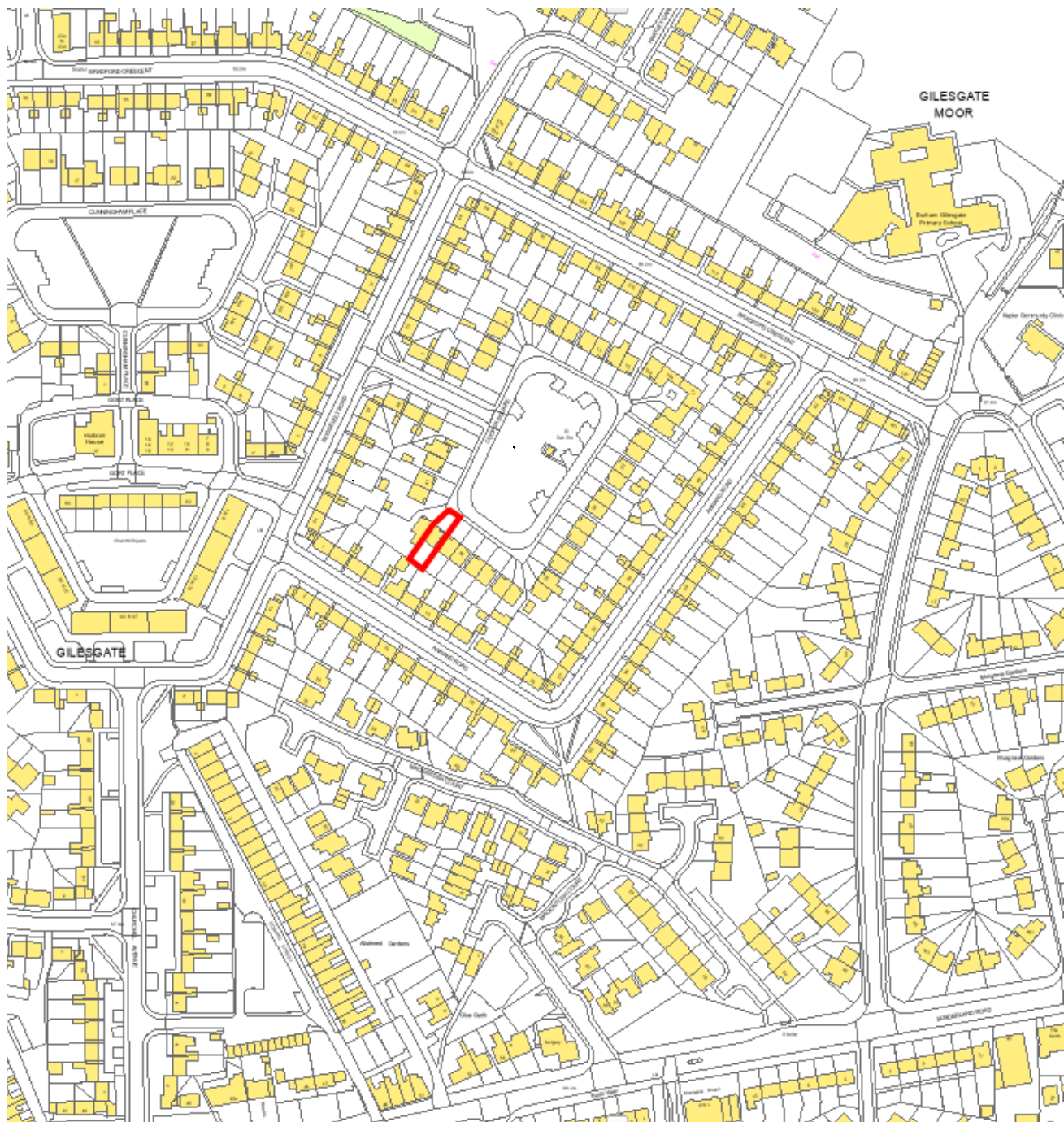
Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard (2015)

National Planning Practice Guidance Notes

County Durham Plan (2020)

Durham County Council Residential Amenity Standards SPD (2022)

Durham County Council Parking and Accessibility SPD (2023)



**Planning Services**

DM/24/01875/FPA Change of use from dwellinghouse (C3) to house in multiple occupation (HMO) (C4), bin and cycle storage at 38 Cooper Square, Gilesgate, Durham DH1 1PT

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08/04/2025

**NTS**