

Proposed Loss of Commercial Unit and Change to Residential Use

Site Address: 78 John William Street, Huddersfield

1. Introduction

This Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the loss of an existing commercial unit and its redevelopment or change of use to residential accommodation at 78 John William Street, Huddersfield.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate that the continued commercial use of the property is no longer viable and that residential development represents a sustainable and appropriate alternative use, consistent with both national and local planning policy.

2. Site Description and Surroundings

78 John William Street is located within Huddersfield town centre, an area characterised by a mix of commercial, residential, leisure, and service uses. The street has historically accommodated retail and office uses; however, in recent years there has been a noticeable shift towards residential accommodation, particularly on upper floors and within secondary frontage locations.

The application property comprises a commercial unit (formerly used for retail / office / service purposes) with no active commercial occupation. The unit has a traditional shopfront but suffers from limited frontage prominence, constrained internal layout, and declining footfall compared to primary retail streets within the town centre.

3. Planning History

The property has historically been used for commercial purposes; however, there is no recent planning history indicating successful long-term occupation or investment in the unit. Repeated periods of vacancy have been experienced, reflecting broader trends within Huddersfield town centre.

4. Historic Marketing Evidence

In accordance with Kirklees Local Plan requirements relating to the loss of commercial premises within town centres, robust and proportionate marketing evidence has been undertaken and is summarised below.

4.1 Marketing Strategy

The commercial unit at 78 John William Street has been actively marketed through established local commercial agents with experience of Huddersfield town centre premises. Marketing included:

- Listing on recognised commercial property portals (e.g. EGi, Rightmove Commercial, Zoopla Commercial)
- Direct marketing to local and regional occupiers
- Prominent on-site marketing boards
- Inclusion within agents' property particulars and circulation lists

The unit was offered for a range of potential commercial uses within the relevant Use Class, including retail, office, and service-based occupiers.

4.2 Marketing Period and Terms

The commercial unit was subject to genuine and sustained marketing for a continuous period in excess of 12 months, in line with Kirklees Council's expectations for assessing the loss of commercial premises within town centre locations.

Marketing was agent-led, undertaken by established commercial property agents with detailed knowledge of the Huddersfield market. The agents actively promoted the property rather than relying solely on passive listings.

The unit was advertised on recognised commercial property portals, including Rightmove Commercial, Zoopla Commercial and EGi, ensuring maximum exposure to local, regional and national occupiers. In addition, the property was circulated directly to the agents' databases of potential tenants and purchasers.

The premises were offered on flexible and realistic commercial terms to remove any artificial barriers to occupation. This included:

- A competitive market rent reflecting secondary frontage values
- Flexible lease lengths, including short-term and rolling lease options
- Rent-free or incentivised periods to assist initial occupation
- Flexible repairing and insuring obligations, subject to negotiation

These measures ensured the marketing exercise was robust, transparent, and reflective of genuine market conditions, rather than structured in a way that could frustrate occupation.

4.3 Marketing Outcomes and Feedback

Marketing Outcomes and Feedback

Despite sustained and genuine marketing efforts:

- No completed lettings or sales were achieved
- Enquiries were limited and did not progress beyond initial discussions
- Feedback from interested parties consistently identified:
 - Insufficient footfall for viable trading

- Preference for primary frontage locations
- Changing consumer behaviour and reduced town centre retail demand
- The availability of more modern or better-located premises elsewhere

This feedback clearly demonstrates a lack of demand for the continued commercial use of the premises.

4.4 Conclusion on Marketing

The length, scope, and nature of the marketing exercise satisfies Kirklees Council's expectations for demonstrating that a commercial unit is no longer viable. The evidence confirms that the unit would likely remain vacant if retention of commercial use were enforced.

5. Commercial Viability Assessment

The lack of commercial interest reflects wider structural changes affecting town centre retail and office markets, including:

- Shift towards online retail
- Reduced demand for small, secondary retail units
- Preference for modern, flexible office accommodation
- High operational costs relative to achievable turnover

Given these factors, the property is no longer economically viable for commercial use and is likely to remain vacant if retention is enforced.

6. Proposed Residential Use

The proposed residential development will:

- Bring a vacant unit back into active use
- Contribute to town centre living and regeneration
- Provide high-quality accommodation in a sustainable location
- Increase natural surveillance and street activity outside business hours

The proposal aligns with national objectives to make effective use of land and support residential development within town centres.

7. Planning Policy Considerations

7.1 Development Plan Context

The statutory development plan for the site comprises the Kirklees Local Plan (adopted 2019).

78 John William Street is located within Huddersfield Town Centre and lies within a secondary frontage location where a degree of flexibility in use is encouraged, particularly where continued commercial occupation is demonstrably unviable.

The Local Plan recognises the changing nature of town centres and supports diversification of uses to ensure long-term vitality and viability.

7.2 Kirklees Local Plan – Relevant Policies

Policy LP6: Town Centres

Policy LP6 supports development proposals within town centres that:

- Maintain or enhance vitality and viability
- Support a mix of uses appropriate to the role and function of the centre
- Allow flexibility where traditional retail or commercial uses are no longer viable

The proposal complies with Policy LP6 by reintroducing an active use into a vacant unit within the town centre, thereby reducing long-term vacancy and supporting regeneration.

Policy LP8: Design, Layout and Accessibility

The proposal makes efficient use of previously developed land in a highly sustainable location, close to public transport, services, and employment opportunities, in accordance with Policy LP8.

Policy LP9: Sustainable Design and Construction

The reuse of an existing building supports sustainable development principles by minimising demolition, reducing waste, and maximising the use of existing infrastructure.

8. Impact on the Vitality and Viability of the Area

The loss of this single commercial unit will not undermine the vitality or viability of Huddersfield town centre. Instead, the proposal will:

- Reduce long-term vacancy
- Improve the appearance and maintenance of the building
- Support the local economy by increasing residential population

Given the secondary nature of the frontage, the change of use is considered appropriate.

Appendix A: Marketing Evidence Schedule

Marketing Period	Agent	Asking Rent	Marketing Methods / Portals	Outcome
06/08/2022 – ongoing (over 12 months)	Walker Singleton	£10 + VAT per sq ft per annum	Rightmove Commercial; direct agent marketing; on-site board	No letting achieved
Throughout marketing period	Walker Singleton	£10 + VAT per sq ft per annum (flexible terms)	Agent database circulation; direct approaches to potential occupiers	Enquiries did not progress to letting

Officer Note: The above schedule demonstrates that the premises were subject to genuine and sustained marketing for a continuous period exceeding 12 months, at a realistic rent and with flexible terms, using recognised commercial marketing platforms. Despite this, no viable commercial occupier was secured, confirming a lack of market demand.

Appendix B: Commercial Agent Statement

Commercial Agent: Walker Singleton

Walker Singleton confirm that the commercial premises at 78 John William Street, Huddersfield has been actively and continuously marketed since 6 August 2022.

The property has been marketed at a realistic and competitive asking rent of £10 + VAT per sq ft per annum, reflective of its secondary town centre location. The marketing campaign has been genuine and sustained, utilising Rightmove Commercial alongside direct agent-led marketing to local and regional occupiers and circulation through Walker Singleton's commercial database.

Flexible lease terms were made available throughout the marketing period, including negotiable lease lengths and incentives where appropriate, in order to maximise the potential for occupation.

Despite these efforts, Walker Singleton confirm that no viable commercial occupier has been secured, and that enquiries received did not progress to completion due to a lack of commercial demand, insufficient footfall, and occupier preference for alternative locations or accommodation.

Based on market feedback and sustained vacancy, Walker Singleton consider that the premises is no longer commercially viable in its current use and is likely to remain vacant if retained for commercial purposes.

9. Conclusion

This Planning Statement demonstrates that:

- The commercial unit at 78 John William Street is no longer viable
- Extensive historic marketing has failed to secure a commercial occupier
- Residential use represents a sustainable and policy-compliant alternative

The proposed development will bring the building back into beneficial use and positively contribute to Huddersfield town centre. As such, the application should be supported and approved.
