

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A DEVELOPMENT CONTROL FORUM

27 April 2005

11.10am – 12.45pm

APPLICATION: C/05/0236/FUL 3 Sylvester Road, Cambridge

Present:

For Applicant

David Kerr, Bursar, Robinson College

Alan Brown, IID Architects

For Petitioners

Christopher Jeans, West Cambridge
Preservation Society

Morcom Lunt, local resident

Stephen Forrester, local resident

Members of Planning Committee: Councillors Baker, Blencowe, Dixon, Hipkin, Slatter and Hymans (alternate).

Apologies had been received from Councillors Bailey, Dryden, and S Reid.

Also present: Ward Councillors Cantrill and County Councillor A Reid.

Officers: John Summers, Head of Development Services (Chair), Tony Collins, Planning Officer.

The petitioners made a request to tape record the meeting and the Chair followed advice from the Head of Legal & Democratic Services and asked for all members of the Forum – applicants, petitioners and councillors - to agree to this. As there were no objections, the meeting was tape-recorded. At the end of the meeting it was agreed that a copy would be made available to the applicants and to the Council.

At the beginning of the meeting the Chair summarised the role and purpose of the Forum and how it operated.

Case by Applicant

David Kerr and Alan Brown spoke on behalf of the applicant.

1. David Kerr said that the application sought to address the marked shortfall in the College's provision of accommodation for graduate students. Typically there were 120 graduate students but the college could only accommodate 52 and currently there were no graduate rooms suitable for disabled people. This had been an aim for many years.
2. Ten years ago planning permission for a 28-room scheme on land between No 4 and No 5 Adams Road was granted. That scheme would not now meet the requirement and so was no longer viable. That site could not take a larger development.
3. The applicant was aware that residents had concerns about car parking. The College had given assurances to the City Council (and a public undertaking at

- the meeting) that proctorial control would be exercised at the site and that the building would not be used for undergraduates or for conference delegates.
4. The postgraduate students had an average occupancy of 46 weeks in the year and, for most, the accommodation was their home for at least three years. This informed the design.
 5. Pre-submission consultations took place with the Planning Officers in Autumn 2004 and in Spring 2005 copies of the design statement were sent to the owners/occupiers of nearby property in Adams Road, Herschel Road and Sylvester Road. In early April 2005, the architect discussed the proposal with residents.
 6. Alan Brown outlined the development. The site had an area of 0.53 hectares, adjoined the Warden's house, 1 Sylvester Road, (after the meeting, the applicant asked that it be noted that this should have been stated as 4 and 4a Sylvester Road) and was across the road from the main College site and facilities. It was believed to fall within the terms of 'windfall sites' referred to in the re-deposited Local Plan paragraph 7.42, and therefore appropriate for College development. Due consideration needed to be given to the requirements of the conservation area.
 7. The area surrounding the site consisted of a mixture of large residential properties of various styles and eras; larger college and institutional buildings including Clare Hall, Robinson College itself and The Needham Institute; and open space.
 8. The character of Sylvester Road in particular was that of relatively large buildings (both residential and college) surrounded by and emerging from a mature and substantial landscaped setting. Development on Sylvester Road was generally east/west with the gable ends of buildings presented to the road. The proposals sought to be considerate of that character albeit with a density reflecting the larger scale developments in the area.
 9. The plans for alteration and development of the existing 3-storey detached house (Sellenger) had received no adverse comments from the Council's Conservation Officer; the Council's Arboricultural Officer had agreed those trees which could be removed without detriment to the site or character of the area and all trees considered to be of value were to be retained; the substantial perimeter tree screens to northern, western and southern boundaries were to be retained with the required minimum clearance of 10metres from the boundary; initial environmental assessments had been carried out by specialists and detailed surveys relating to wildlife were about to begin; relevant agencies had made no adverse comments on the proposals; archaeological investigations had been made resulting in no restrictions on development; the constraints outlined determined the area of the site available for development as a linear zone running east/west and wrapping around the existing house.
 10. The proposal was a linear east/west development with the principal gables presenting to the road; 2 linear 3-storey buildings with low eaves and dormers (6.2m above ground level) linked in the centre to provide a single point of entrance; traditional pitched roof; set back from the line of the existing house to create a simple central courtyard; rear wing set into the ground to reduce the impact on adjoining properties in Adams Road; vehicle access restricted to the northern boundary with limited car parking; landscaping.
 11. Each floor provided 22 ensuite study bedrooms with generous kitchens and living areas shared between groups of 5-6 students; each floor provided with 1 wheelchair accessible ensuite room with the option to have attendant carers in

adjacent rooms; whole building fully accessible to all disabled people; the Disability Consultative Panel were extremely positive about the design; materials would follow those used on the main site which were considered wholly appropriate for and would contribute to the area.

12. The development would be screened by substantial boundary trees and the rear wing would be set down lower into the ground by 1.2m such that it would present as 2 storeys with low eaves and dormer windows from the adjacent boundaries.

Case by Petitioners

Christopher Jeans, Morcom Lunt and Stephen Forrester spoke on behalf of residents in the area:

13. Christopher Jeans represented the West Cambridge Preservation Society which had submitted the petition with 55 signatures and could easily have obtained over 100. He said that the main objections were loss of amenity and the potential long-term damage to the conservation area with the possibility of further unsympathetic developments. He quoted from relevant paragraphs of the Local Plan concerning designation, character and preservation of a Conservation Area and asked whether the proposed development would “preserve or enhance the character of the area”.

A file of relevant information was circulated to the Councillors, Officers and to some of the other attenders.

14. Morcom Lunt focused on the quality of information provided by the applicant and on the impact on the Conservation Area.

15. He referred to the many drawings and said that information was missing, some of the drawings were inaccurate, and others misrepresented the impact that the proposed development would have.

Referring to the information pack supplied to the Councillors, he showed how the drawing of how the buildings were to fit into the plot did not show their full impact. Also, the elevations were coloured in a way that did not show what the buildings would look like.

Again, referring to the information pack, Number 9 Sylvester Road was omitted from one of the drawings and the trees surrounding the site were not as shown on the elevations. There is only 1 tree that was higher than the chimneys of the original house (Sellenger). The roofline of the higher proposed building is almost a metre higher than the top of the Sellenger chimneys.

The mass of all the proposed buildings, a 73 metre slab would have a great visual impact.

Morcom Lunt contrasted the area-sympathetic development built recently on the main Robinson site with the proposal. Using the drawings provided by the applicant, he superimposed what the proposed buildings would look like to show the degree of visual impact on houses to the north.

He said that Sellenger was on the Cambridge 2000 survey of important houses.

The Local Plan did not provide for university expansion on this site.

He argued that the Local Plan would be irretrievably compromised if the proposal was built.

16. Stephen Forrester explained that there were no objections to the need for additional accommodation. However, there were planning grounds on which to object to the proposal in terms of its impact on neighbouring properties, access/highway issues and loss of trees and wildlife. The 66 room, very high, 72 metre monolithic north-facing wall was too much on too small a site.

17. The proposed development was overbearing in height, size and bulk. It would lead to loss of winter sunshine, increased noise, increased light from windows for neighbouring properties and would overlook local gardens. It was higher than Sellenger and was an over-development of the site. Even though one of the buildings is “dug-into” the ground, the roofline is still higher than the existing height. This design must be the result of the architects’ drive to increase the number of units on the sites: the building footprint already fills the site, so the design had to go up. It is an example of over-development.
- Stephen Forrester showed how the development could have been designed with a series of individual villa-style buildings that allowed for views past the buildings and through to the site: examples were also shown from recent developments at Churchill College.
18. Keeping the main access at the northern boundary was an inappropriate siting as it immediately adjoined all the residential entrances in Adams Road. It would generate noise and light impacting adjacent properties and would be better in the centre of the site. There was a problem of adequate visibility splays at the Sylvester Road exit: the access is to be hard-up against the northern boundary and little can be done about the visibility splay to the north. The residents had commissioned an independent opinion on the transport assessment provided by the applicant. This indicated deficiencies in 3 areas – it does not address the separation of pedestrian, cycle and vehicle movements, the visibility splays at the junction of the access road with Sylvester Road in light of the increase in traffic generation, and the potential impact of on site parking overspill on the operation of the site. The traffic analysis had also to consider the situation at the start and end of each term when most students arrive and leave in cars. There was also a six-week window when the college expects the students to be away from the college and might use the facility for conferences. Any obstruction of the proposed access would potentially threaten the operation of Sylvester Road itself at a time when movement activity is at its greatest. Sylvester Road and Adams Road already get massive congestion with people parking because there is no Resident’s Scheme and no yellow lines.
19. The applicant’s statement that all Category 1 and 2 trees would be retained is inaccurate, as is shown by the applicant’s own tree survey. Two category 2 trees were to be removed. The residents had also obtained an independent opinion about the pre-development tree survey presented with the plans. The main concern from this expert is that the excavations needed for services below roads and buildings mean that all the trees on the northern boundary are at risk: the roadway and parking will come within half a metre of some of the trees. The expert states that these trees are unlikely to survive more than two seasons. The tree survey is incomplete because it does not include a method statement as to how they propose to make sure these trees are not threatened when they do the excavation. Additionally, for two Category 1 trees to be retained, the British Standard for distance from the tree to foundations and footings is not met. They also thought that the whole site would be disrupted during construction such that some of the other trees might not survive that process.

Case Officer

20. The application was received on 25 February 2005 and neighbouring properties notified. A site notice was posted in Sylvester Road and an advert put in the Cambridge Evening News on 18 March.

21. As well as the petition, 27 written representations from residents and 2 from voluntary organisations had been received. The grounds for objection were site designation (in conflict with the Local Plan), design of the buildings (height, length, roof style), character and appearance of the Conservation Area (out of scale), neighbours' amenity (loss of privacy, noise), traffic, car parking (level inadequate), natural environment (harmful to wildlife, water table, risk of flooding) and development of other premises. One letter registering "no objections" had been received.
22. Consultations with other authorities:
- Fire & Rescue Services:** no additional water required
 - Archaeology:** no significant remains
 - Environment Agency:** an additional condition required re surface drainage and consultation with Anglian Water re sewerage provision
 - Highways Agency:**
 - Environmental Health:** no comment yet received.
 - Conservation & Design Panel:** approved in principle but some reservations about the detail of the north and south facades.
 - Arboricultural Officer:** no comment yet received.
 - Disability Consultative Panel:** impressed with the design. Some modifications suggested.
 - Planning Obligation:** The applicant would be required to sign an S106 agreement to contribute to infrastructure, open space and public art.

Members Questions and Comments

23. What was the conservation status of Sellenger and could detailed information about the proposed changes be given.
- A: The Case Officer explained that Sellenger had no special status; it was in the Conservation Area. Alteration was to be made to the south façade on the ground floor where a small extension was to be built.
24. Had the applicant ever thought of applying for conservation status for Sellenger?
- A: David Kerr said they had not.
25. Would the applicant please justify how the design contributed to the conservation area?
- A: Alan Brown said that while the design would undoubtedly change the area, its impact would not be as bold as the petitioners suggested. The quality of the other developments mentioned was due to materials used and this development would also use high quality materials. The 2 elongated blocks were optimal for accessibility and socialising. The gable ends would add to the area. The Conservation and Design Panel had approved the development in principle.
26. Do the petitioners have an in principle objection to the application or are they seeking modifications to the design? Would they be happy with slight modifications to the current design or were they totally unacceptable?
- A: Stephen Forrester said that the petitioners had to accept the need for more college accommodation so they were not objecting in principle. They did want more than slight modifications; they wanted a complete re-think of the whole design and the implications for the trees on the site. Parking was also too close to neighbours' boundaries.
27. What was the density of the development?
- A: 132 per hectare.
28. How many car parking spaces?

- A: 10 spaces in all including 3 disabled parking bays.
29. Was this figure adequate given that proctorial control differs for postgraduates and undergraduates?
- A: David Kerr said that the provision might not meet the expectations of the students but proctorial control would be exercised.
- Stephen Forrester asked the Forum to note that 9 students lived in Sellenger at present and 3 cars were regularly parked there and service vehicles made regular journeys to and from the site. Seven new spaces for the additional accommodation were inadequate.
30. What precise changes were to be made to the existing dwelling? What was the original brief and how did it evolve?
- A: Alan Brown said that the ground floor of the existing building would be remodelled and extended. Existing windows would be replaced to match the quality of the originals. The original brief was for 72 study bedrooms and this had been reduced to 66.
31. A request was made that the Planning Officer's report indicate how far the question of 'need' for more accommodation is a material planning issue.
32. There was current capacity for 52 places, a further 28 could have been accommodated on the permission granted 10 years ago and that would have left a shortfall of 40 for the current site. Would the Planning Officer's report also indicate whether a previous planning permission is relevant to this application.
33. Long corridors were not necessarily best for the disabled and smaller units would appear to address residents' objections.
34. Were the computer aided design diagrams based on actual measurements?
- A: Alan Brown said that, where possible, actual measurements had been used but he acknowledged that they were still only a representation.
35. A comment was made about the justification for not seeking to split the development requirements across other sites.
36. Where was there usable open space for the S106 agreement?
- A: The Case Officer explained that contributions were used to improve the quality of open space in the city in general. Alan Brown explained that the residents in the development would have access to the main college grounds across the road.
37. A request that the Planning Officer's report include advice about how much the history, appearance and nature of Sellenger could be taken into account as constraints to development of the site especially in a conservation area.
38. Was planning permission granted to an applicant or to a site?
- A: The Case Officer confirmed that permission ran with the land.

Summing Up

39. Alan Brown for the applicants acknowledged the importance of the discussion and said that the design had evolved through discussions with the Council's Planning Officers particularly in relation to the conservation area, trees and planning guidance. They still believed that the design was appropriate for the area.
40. Christopher Jeans for the petitioners said that the Local Plan was clear about the protection of the conservation area and the petitioners still thought that this had not been achieved because of the height, location and design. The development would be intrusive and damage neighbouring properties. They were concerned that there had been no consultation with residents prior to the letter of 24 March already mentioned which was after the design was fully finalised. The petition

and the letters of objection spoke of the strength of feeling in the neighbourhood. The Local Plan describes what is to be conserved: it would not be conserved by the proposed development.

41. The Chair confirmed that these minutes would be incorporated in the report on the application to the Planning Committee.