

## CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

### Notes of a Development Control Forum

Milton Road School

30 May 2007

10.00am – 11.55am

Application No: 07/0328/FUL  
Site Address: Milton Road School, Milton Road, Cambridge  
Description: Redevelopment for 88bed card home and 4no studios for employees, and 67 flats with community facility. Children's play area and associated parking and landscaping.  
Applicant: Rockley Dene Homes Ltd  
Agent: Carter Jonas, 6-8 Hills Road Cambridge  
Case Officer: Tony Collins  
Lead Petitioner: Councillor Ian Nimmo-Smith

### Present:

#### For Applicant

Andrew Blackwell, Applicant's Agent and  
Carter Jonas  
David Adams, John Cobb & Partners  
Geoff Adams, Rolfe Judd architects

#### For Petitioners

Cllr Ian Nimmo-Smith, West Chesterton  
Ward, Cambridge City Council  
Dr Colin Cunningham, The Victorian Society  
Francisca Malanée, local resident

### Members of Planning Committee

Councillors Bailey, Blair, Boyce, Blencowe, Durrant

### Declarations of Interest by Members

Cllr Blair as a former governor of the school and as a parent of a former pupil.

Cllr Durrant as a former chair of a committee on the Steiner School.

All members are known to the lead petitioner as Councillors of Cambridge City Council.

### Officers

Sarah Dyer (Chair), Tony Collins (Case Officer) and Deborah Fletcher (Committee Clerk).

### Text of Petition

The text of the petition was as follows:

- Oppose the wholesale demolition of school buildings
- Believe that the most significant parts of the main structure of this fine Edwardian building of local interest are capable of being successfully incorporated into a new scheme for the site.

### Case by Applicant

Mr Blackwell spoke to the application and made the following points:

1. The site had been identified as a potential redevelopment site for housing and community use.
2. The Planning Policy stated that there should be a maximisation of urban land. There was an urgent need for new housing.

3. Consultation had been ongoing for two years, including meetings with planning officers, trying to find a workable plan.
4. The applicant understood that the existing building was important to local residents.
5. The applicant aimed to meet the needs of the community in terms of housing and, to an extent, recreation.

Geoff Adams gave a presentation in support of the application:

6. Currently the only focal point on the site was a large fir tree which largely obscured the school building.
7. The main school building was locally listed, rather than the rest of the buildings.
8. Gilbert Road was built by Edwardians, and Milton Road by the Victorians. The school was built in 1908.
9. The applicant was a care home developer, but the site would incorporate social and private housing, and would meet the requirement of 40% affordable housing.
10. The care home would be positioned towards Milton Road with a view of the street. Private gardens would be located to the rear.
11. The access road to the site would be positioned on Gilbert Road as Milton Road was unsuitable.
12. Underground parking would be provided for the private and social housing. A small amount of surface parking would be provided for the care home staff and visitors.
13. The applicant had worked with a specialist architect to design the care home.
14. The applicant had tried to prevent the design overlooking other properties.
15. The site would be made greener, as much of the site was currently under tarmac for the playground. Trees would be planted and a play area would be incorporated.
16. The development would be built using materials common in the area, such as red brick, Cambridge Gault and timber.

### **Case by Petitioners**

Cllr Nimmo-Smith introduced the case on behalf of the petitioners and gave a presentation:

17. The school building was designed and built in 1908 by H.H. Dunn, and opened by the master of Trinity College – these were indicators of the building's importance.
18. The school building looked like part of a village, with a pleasing appearance. It was well designed and built, with a distinctive roofline and quality detail, and was well established in the street scene.
19. It was one of the last exemplars of public building in Cambridge, and the most visible.
20. Buildings of local interest should only be demolished if they are incapable of being reused.
21. The architectural editor of 'Country Life' magazine had described the building as an example of 'Edwardian Freestyle'. It was built during an era described by the historian Charles Booth as a "high watermark of public conscience in education".
22. The neighbouring Westbrook Grove building fitted into the locality well enough as it had pitched roofs. Semi-detached villas were also typical of architecture in the area.
23. The site was the 'green gateway' into Mitcham's Corner. The new development would lead to a loss of trees, particularly the 'category A' Arizona Cypress tree, which was estimated to have 40 years of life left.
24. The petitioners were not against the provision of new housing, but felt that the applicant had not proven the necessity to demolish the existing building.
25. With regards to carbon costs, it was better to refurbish and reuse rather than demolish and rebuild.

26. A conservation architect should have been consulted. The petitioners proposed a reconfiguration of the footprint of the site, retaining the old school building. The petitioners opposed a four-storey development.

Francisca Malanée said that:

27. She had concerns that the application was not in accordance with planning policy, especially regarding the Mitcham's Corner area. A dental surgery did not constitute community use as it was a private business.
28. The architecture currently in the area was one and two storey buildings with pitched roofs, not 3 and 4 storey buildings with balconies, as in the proposed development.
29. Adjoining properties in Mayfair Court and Gilbert Road would be overlooked by the proposed development which would also block daylight.
30. There would be a greater amount of traffic generated by the proposed development, with staff and visitors to the care home and a large number of residents in the private and social housing. This traffic would not be restricted to certain times on 'school' days.
31. The application did not appear to include enough parking for residents and visitors.
32. The access road proposed for Gilbert Road would raise safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists and for residents with driveways on Gilbert Road.
33. Would the proposed development affect access through Westbrook Grove to Gilbert Road?

Dr Cunningham said that:

34. The Victorian Society was concerned with a period up to 1914, which included Edwardian architecture.
35. The Society objected to the total demolition of the school building, but not the adaptation and reuse of it.
36. The existing building made a valuable contribution to social sustainability and civic pride. It was on the local list and so should be safeguarded.
37. There were examples elsewhere in the country where old school buildings had been refurbished for other uses, such as mixed residential and community facilities.
38. The school was a quality building suitable for reuse and the case for demolition is flawed.

**The Case Officer's comments:**

39. Local residents were consulted regarding the application, with a total of 611 addresses contacted.
40. 55 letters in response had been received from 53 addresses.
41. The main grounds given for objection in these letters were that the proposal would represent overdevelopment and a failure to provide community facilities. Its architecture would be out of character with the surrounding area, including the height, materials and roof form. Concerns were raised that it would be damaging to the streetscape and the status of the site as a 'green gateway'. The buildings were considered too close to the highway and the creation of an architectural focal point on the corner unnecessary. Also criticised was the lack of green space and the loss of trees; the configuration of buildings and space which might encourage anti-social behaviour; and the loss of privacy and the overshadowing caused. Traffic from the proposed development would increase congestion in the area, and the position of the access point could create hazards to cyclists and pedestrians. The level of car parking provided was deemed inadequate, and extra pressure would be added to the drainage system. Letters also suggested that the proposal ignored opportunities for co-ordinated development over a wider scale.

42. A petition had been received with 240 signatures opposing the demolition of the Edwardian school buildings and urging their incorporation into a new scheme for development.
43. Two representations had been received from local residents supporting the application proposal.
44. The officer had received consultation responses from the following authorities: the Cambridge Highways Agency, the Head of Environmental Services, Cambridge Fire & Rescue Service, Cambridge Constabulary, the Historic Environment Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology Department, Anglian Water, the Environment Agency, and the Victorian Society.
45. The officer had not yet received comments from the County Council Transport Department, the Primary Care Trust, the Active Communities Manager, the Principal Arboricultural Officer, the Cycling & Walking Officer, the Housing Development Manager, the Sustainable Construction Officer and the Design & Conservation Panel.
46. The officer had written to the applicant regarding the expectation that he would enter into a Section 106 agreement if the application were successful.

The Applicant explained that there was a legal obligation to provide access from Gilbert Road, but no plan to provide road access from Westbrook Grove. There was one car parking space per residential unit, plus cycle and motorcycle spaces. The care home development had been designed by someone who had designed other care homes. A traffic impact assessment would be carried out as part of the application.

### **Members' questions and comments**

47. What is the applicant's response to the idea of retaining the Edwardian school building?
 

*A: The applicant had looked at the options for retaining it, but this was not viable with the view to building a care home and the required affordable and residential housing. The architect had 30 years' experience as a conservation architect, had won awards and counted the City of London amongst his clients. Building regulations would apply to any extensions built onto the existing building. Extending to the side and rear had been considered, but not to the front as this would be too close to Milton Road.*
48. The area had one- and two-storey buildings with pitched roofs, how would three- and four-storey buildings fit it?
 

*A: The height of the three-storey parts of the development would be the same level as the pitched roofs of neighbouring residential properties. There would be no loss of light to neighbouring properties.*
49. What community facilities had been considered for the new development?
 

*A: A dental surgery had been considered but was not a fixed idea. It did not necessarily need to be a private-run facility like a dental surgery. The applicant had discussed this with council officers, and the public had been consulted. The consultation had not thrown up any key suggestions.*
50. How many extra residents would there be on the site?
 

*A: There would be 67 flats, which would be inhabited by about 120 people. The split in sizes of flats had been agreed with the Council. There would be 43% social housing.*
51. How would the children's play area be managed, assuming it would attract local children not residing at the development?
 

*A: The applicant was having discussions with the police and landscape architect on planting, lighting and access.*
52. Had traffic assessments been carried out on other care homes in the City?

*A: A traffic assessment had been carried out on the care home at Cherry Hinton Road.*

53. Had an application been made for listed status for the existing building?

*A: Yes.*

54. Would materials from the existing buildings be reused in the new development?

*A: Bricks would be reused and also materials would be used in the play area.*

55. Why was there a large number of 2-bed flats in the proposal if there was a need for family homes?

*A: The Government set density requirements of 30 units per hectare minimum that the applicant had to meet.*

56. Would it be possible to arrange a site visit?

*A: Yes, this can be arranged.*

### **Summing Up by the Applicants**

57. The meeting had been a useful exercise.

58. Great effort had been made to accommodate the old school building in the proposal, but it was near impossible to retain it and meet the needs of the Local Plan.

59. The Applicant would consider the points made in the Petitioners' presentation.

### **Summing Up by the Petitioners**

60. It was not evident that the proposal had been designed by a conservation architect.

61. The applicant appeared to have bought the site 'by accident'.

62. The minimum density of residential units was indicative.

63. The proposed development was inappropriate for the size of the site.

64. Cambridge University had good examples of retaining old stock.

65. There is an alternative solution for the site which is more sympathetic.

66. The Petitioners hoped that the Applicant would reconsider the application.