

**Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel**

Notes of the meeting Wednesday 11th February 2015

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
David Grech	English Heritage
Mart Barrass	RIBA
Russell Davies	RTPI
Ian Steen	Co-opted member
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute
Tony Nix	RICS

Officers:

Tony Collins	City Council
Susan Smith	City Council (item 1)
Jonathan Brookes	City Council (item 1)
Christian Brady	City Council (item 2)
Catherine Linford	City Council (item 2)

Apologies – Terry Gilbert, Carolin Gohler, Helen Thompson and Chris Davis

1. Presentation - Wests Garage Ltd, 217 Newmarket Road (14/1154/FUL)

The erection of new student housing (222 study bedrooms) and associated communal facilities, cycle parking, and external landscaping following demolition of the existing buildings. This was last seen by the Panel in May 2014 (verdict RED – 5, AMBER – 1) Presentation by Sandeep Shambi of Glenn Howells Architects with Andy Thompson of Beacon Planning accompanied by Tim Barlow of HUB.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

- **Follow up from previous review.**
The Panel appreciated that several adjustments had been made in response to comments from the previous review in May 2014.
- **Eastern elevation.**
The setting back of this elevation is a welcome improvement, as it allows for an improved public realm along River Lane both in terms of planting and greater separation from adjacent properties.
- **Vertical townhouses.**
The Panel was told that the massing of the building was seen as a series of vertical townhouses. This assertion was questioned, not least as massing of this development seems predominantly to consist of long horizontal blocks.
- **Central courtyard.**
The Panel continues to have concerns about this space being located a floor below the street and entrance level. Although the submission of additional technical information on sunlight exposure is noted, (though it was not shown to the Panel), there were still concerns about overshadowing of the space from the surrounding blocks. In addition the circulation routes down to the courtyard seem very unclear and indirect.
- **Context of Newmarket Road**
This development needs to respond more effectively to its new context of the taller hotels along Newmarket Road.

- **Termination to Coldham's Lane.**
Although the Panel were informed of the SPD's limited specifications for this area, there was nevertheless the view that a more positive marker was needed for this end of Coldham's Lane. The view across from Coldham's Lane is a key view of the scheme, which does not yet live up to its potential to hold the opposite corner. Local sensitivities regarding building heights in this area are understood.
- **Elevations to Newmarket Road**
Although this elevation has developed, the Panel felt that the rigid grid of windows currently shown falls short of what a building in this prominent position requires. It was suggested that the horizontal bands of fenestration to the nearby Premier Inn achieve a degree of flexibility in window placement. Further work is needed here.
- **Design of windows.**
Further thought is also needed in terms of the detailed design of the windows to the student rooms to achieve daylighting, views, ventilation, sound attenuation, privacy and security. A very generic window design is currently illustrated on the elevations.
- **Student rooms and adaptability.**
The Panel questioned the proposed room width of 2.25 metres, which seems tight and allows for no flexibility in the layout of furniture. Issues around possible future change of use and adaptability are worth considering as more generous room widths would allow for a wider range of uses.
- **Studio rooms**
The Panel questioned whether the recessed windows achieved any benefits. At ground floor level they could become unsightly litter traps.
- **Circulation corridors.**
The Panel questioned the need for double corridors to achieve room groupings. They seemed to be very narrow and, with no exposure to natural light, would need to be artificially lit at all times.
- **Renewables/sustainability.**
The Panel would encourage a more holistic approach to an environmental strategy for the development that goes beyond the token inclusion of PV panels.

Conclusion.

Although the Panel welcome the improved visibility through to the courtyard from the ground floor cafe, and the set-back on the eastern elevation allowing River Lane more breathing space, it was felt that the design team have still failed to respond to the fundamental points raised at the last review. The majority Red vote should have prompted a substantial re-think, yet key areas of concern such as the quality of the accommodation and sunken courtyard remain substantially unchanged. This is a high profile site which deserves a better scheme.

VERDICT – RED (6), AMBER (2)

3. Notes of the previous meeting 14th January and of the site visit 23rd January 2015.
Agreed.

4. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 11th March 2015

Reminder: 'traffic light' definitions:

GREEN: a good scheme, or one that is acceptable subject to minor improvements.
AMBER: in need of significant improvements to make it acceptable, but not a matter of starting from scratch.
RED: the scheme is fundamentally flawed and a fresh start is needed.