

**Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel**

Notes of the meeting Wednesday 6th May 2015

Attendees:

David Grech	Historic England (Acting Chair)
Chris Davis	IHBC
Mart Barrass	RIBA
Russell Davies	RTPI
Carolin Gohler	Cambridge PPF
Jon Harris	Co-opted member

Officers:

Sav Patel	City Council (item 1)
Matthew Paul	City Council (items 1&2)
Toby Williams	City Council (item 2)
Susan Smith	City Council (item 2)

Observers:

Emma Farrington	City Council
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Apologies – Di Haigh, Terry Gilbert, Helen Thompson and Tony Nix

1. Presentation – 186-188 Histon Road (15/0120/FUL)

Proposed demolition of two existing semi-detached dwelling houses and construction of 14 residential units (comprising 10 x 1 bed flats, 3 x 2 bed flats and 1 x 3 bed townhouse), including land for the storage of vehicles associated with the adjacent commercial units at 184 Histon Road, along with 2 x car parking spaces, cycle parking and hard and soft landscaping.

Presentation by Peter McKeown of Carter Jonas accompanied by Mark Richards of Studio 24 Architects and applicant Nick Brown (HTS Estates Ltd.)

This proposal follows an earlier consented scheme in August 2013 (13/0231/FUL) for 12 units. Changes since then include re-modelling, increasing the number of units from 12 to 14 (including the introduction of a townhouse), soft landscaping and a greater threshold (forecourt) on the Histon Road frontage.

The Panel's comments are made in light of the consented scheme and were as follows:

Histon Road elevation – scale, massing and treatment.

Some concern was expressed regarding the massing, particularly in terms of its relationship to the top of the brick parapet on Akeman House. The Panel however also considered the width of Histon Road, and concluded that a larger building could in general terms be accommodated in this location. The decision to split the elevation into two distinct elements was also broadly welcomed. There was some concern that the palette of materials would result in an over-busy appearance, and a simplified treatment might give a calmer overall appearance. This might also include introducing a flat roof in place of the current shallow pitch that would also provide greater consistency with its neighbours.

The return down French's Mill Lane.

The Panel were concerned that the increased height of the return wing on French's Mill Lane could appear overpowering, in particular when viewed by ground floor residents in Akeman House. The additional floor would also increase the overshadowing of the shared garden

area. Panel noted that this wing had been reduced in width, but the lack of daylight studies made it difficult to properly assess the impact of the additional floor. Panel also felt that the garden area might be enhanced if it were formed as a single shared garden along with that serving Akeman House, thereby omitting the fence along the boundary.

Townhouse.

The Panel were informed that the addition of the townhouse was to provide a 'sense of place' in a predominantly commercial context. The absence of a mews-like quality to French's Mill Lane and the rather ambiguous relationship with the 3 parking spaces for the commercial premises to the south were regarded as disappointing. The Panel were also concerned by the very limited amount of private amenity space for this house and the lack of privacy to the rear ground floor windows. Consideration should be given to providing private amenity space for the townhouse to the rear of the ground floor living space. The Panel noted that the existing commercial building immediately to the south is in the same ownership as this site. This commercial building is of poor architectural quality and its redevelopment for residential use would provide the opportunity for a more holistic proposal, with a more satisfactory resolution of the parking and access arrangements. Whilst that may not be part of the current proposals, an awareness of the implications for the future redevelopment of the block to the south on the current proposal would be helpful.

Green roofs.

The exploration into the use of green roofs combined with PV is encouraged for greater sustainability.

Conclusion.

This scheme would benefit from significant further work. The Panel accepts that a number of design parameters have been established through the previously approved scheme, including parking and access arrangements. However, the justification for the increase in units from 12 to 14 is questioned, especially given the impact of the extra floor on the return wing along French's Mill Lane. The scale of this east wing of the development appears tall and oppressive, while removal of the top floor and the number of units would significantly improve the quality of the communal garden space. A re-visiting of the Histon Road frontage with a simpler palette of materials is also encouraged.

VERDICT – AMBER (unanimous)

2. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 10th June 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.