

**Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel**

Notes of the meeting Wednesday 8th June 2016, Guildhall.

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
Terry Gilbert	RTPI (Vice Chair)
Ashley Courtney	RIBA
Tony Nix	RICS
David Grech	Co-opted member (formerly Historic England)
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Helen Thompson	Landscape Institute (items 1&3)

Officers:

Sarah Dyer	City Council (item 1)
Sarah Chubb	City Council (item 1)
Susan Smith	City Council (items 1&2)
Charlotte Burton	City Council (item 1)
Sav Patel	City Council (item 2)
Matthew Paul	City Council (item 2)
Bana Elzein	City Council (item 2)
Glen Richardson	City Council (item 2)
Toby Williams	City Council (item 3)

Apologies – Ian Steen and Chris Davis.

2. Presentation – (16/0687/FUL) Croft Gardens, 27 Barton Road, 4A Millington Road and land rear of 21 & 29 Barton Road.

Demolition of existing dwellings (1-12 Croft Gardens and 3 flats in No. 27 Barton Road), existing storage buildings and Nursery School (4A Millington Road). Redevelopment for residential and student accommodation, provision of new children's nursery and associated cycle and car parking and outdoor space.

Presentation by Nick Brindley and Peter Clegg of architects Fielden Clegg Bradley (FCB) Studios accompanied by Jon Burgess of Beacon Planning with Alison Wright of Bidwells.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

- **Site development and the role of the existing buildings – Croft Gardens and 27 Barton Road.**

During the presentation, the heritage assessment given of the existing buildings on the site was that they were not considered good examples of 1930s architecture, that they were uncharacteristic of the area and contribute little to the streetscape. If retained, they would need thorough renovation that would undermine the few characteristics seen as valuable.

Given the recent BLI listing of these buildings, concern was expressed as to the adequacy of the assessment given to justify demolition. Members of the Panel suggested that the series of semi-detached flats designed by D.C. Wadwha are of interest as a 1930's Art Deco housing development with original landscaping still in place. No 27 Barton Road seemed to be of greater historic interest than was first thought, with evidence of decorative chimneys probably dating from the 1840's and characteristic of work by Richard Reynolds Rowe.

The Panel would have liked to have seen early development options which explored the viability of retaining either or both Croft Gardens and 27 Barton Road alongside some new development on the site. The checkerboard pattern of the proposed villas might allow for some elements of the existing buildings to be retained alongside new. Only with the advantages/disadvantages of the retention option explored and its viability tested, could the issues of quantum and quality of this site be fully understood.

- **Proposed redevelopment**

The Panel were generally supportive of the proposed redevelopment of the site as a series of villas with garden spaces in between. The presence and form of the villas seen from Barton Road and their contribution to the streetscape was felt to be of key importance to the success of a replacement scheme.

The detail of the design and proposed use of materials was not felt to live up to the rich textures of existing housing in the area. The references to the Arts & Crafts movement made during the presentation suggested a richer vocabulary of architectural expression than was evident from the present design proposals.

- **Graduate Building.**

The architectural expression of this building as an extension of the existing terrace on Barton Road is a positive move. However, the proposed elevations do not live up to the quality of the elevations of the adjacent buildings. A more playful approach to their design could provide a greater sense of delight in building next to the existing extrovert elevations.

- **Villas and landscaped spaces**

The Panel would encourage further exploration into the views and route connections made between the villas and vistas through the site, as this is more typical of Arts & Crafts landscaping than just the themed gardens proposed. A thorough evaluation of the landscape 'structure' is encouraged.

- **Materials palette.**

The Panel questioned the choice to use metal cladding to some elements, which according to the architects would help to reduce the impact of the height of the development. It was also questioned whether the large format of the cladding with its particular texture and scale would provide any interest at street level.

- **Trees.**

The translocation of some of the trees on site is applauded. The Panel also felt the woodland environment of existing larger trees to the rear of the site helps to mediate the scale of new development and provide a pleasant green boundary to No 27.

- **Future tenure.**

It is currently unclear whether there was the possibility this development could in future be brought forward to be sold as market housing. If so, it could help to fulfil some of the City Council's affordable housing requirements. Clarity is needed on this issue.

Conclusion.

The issue of whether this proposal preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is critical. This has to be considered in the context of the retention/demolition debate surrounding the existing buildings with the additional policy issue of the recent BLI listing. In the Panel's view the possible retention of some existing buildings and their potential for renovation seem to have been dismissed without having been thoroughly investigated.

The Panel are aware this issue has dominated a lengthy pre-application phase but feel that the case for retention of the most significant elements needs to be investigated more thoroughly before the architects can make a convincing case for demolition.

Should the argument be accepted for total demolition, both the City Council and the Panel would want to see new development of the highest quality on this site.

VERDICT 1.

Based on the proposed site development within which the merits of retention of some of the existing buildings seem not to have not been fully explored:

RED – (6) with 1 abstention

VERDICT 2.

Based on the quality of the site development as proposed, if the demolition of the existing buildings is accepted:

GREEN (1), AMBER (4), RED (1) with 1 abstention.

Reminder

CABE '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.