

**Cambridge City Council  
Design & Conservation Panel**

**Notes of the meeting Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2016, Guildhall**

**Attendees:**

David Grech	Acting Chair (items 1&3) (Co-opted, formerly Historic England)
Russell Davies	Acting Chair (item 2) RTPi
Stacey Weiser	Cambridge PPF
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Mark Richards	RIBA
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute

**Officers:**

Michael Hammond	City Council (items 1&2)
Christian Brady	City Council
Jonathan Hurst	City Council (item 1)
Gail Broom	City Council
Charlotte Witheford	City Council (item 2)
Tony Collins	City Council (item 3)
Bana Elzein	City Council (item 3)

**Apologies** – Di Haigh, Ashley Courtney, Tony Nix, Helen Thompson and Ian Steen.

**1. Presentation - Cambridge Union Society, 9a Bridge Street (16/0673/FUL & 16/0674/LBC)**

Demolition of ancillary buildings and removal of 1930's facade at the grade II listed Cambridge Union Society. Construction of replacement facade, reinstatement and refurbishment of historic features and internal and external access and refurbishment works including enlargement of existing cafe (use class A3) and re-opening of 'Footlight's' entertainment space (sui generis). Demolition of squash courts and unlisted 3-5 Round Church Street in the Conservation Area. Construction of new link building for access and ancillary uses for the Union Society. Construction of adjacent new building with ground floor restaurant (use class A3) with 41 room post-graduate student accommodation above (use class C2) together with basement storage and services.

This was last seen by the Panel at pre-application stage in September last year. As the proposals then were regarded as 'work in progress' a vote was not cast. Presentation by Adrian Nicholas of BB&C Architects accompanied by Joanna Burton of Beacon Planning, Jamie Buchanan (landscape architect), Bill Baliey (CUS Bursar) and Jake Nugent of Bidwells.

**The Panel would like to emphasise that although Cambridge PPF have already submitted their comments regarding this proposal, Stacey Weiser's input is from a personal perspective and is not representative of Cambridge PPF's Planning Committee.**

The Panel's comments are as follows:

- **The impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.**

Although the Panel did see the benefits of removing the existing discordant 1930s elements, concern was expressed as to the quantum of development on this site, and the impact of such a dominant development on the Conservation Area. The Panel regard Round Church Street as transitional space; moving from the busy, commercial character of Bridge Street to the quieter and predominantly residential character of Park Street. It was therefore felt that this development should respond to this changing character, but instead of stepping down in scale and massing it steps up, with the taller elements likely to create a canyon effect along Round Church Street and result in a significant increase in overshadowing of the public realm.

The Panel was also not convinced that the height of the existing debating chamber element of the Waterhouse building should be seen as the precedent for the height of the new-build element on the back of the pavement along Round Church Street. The debating chamber is sited in the heart of the site, well away from the adjacent streets, in much the same way as Trinity College's taller Wolfson building is encircled by lower buildings lining the adjacent streets.

- **Treatment of New Entrance (Round Church Street).**

The Panel noted the examination of options for the new entrance off Round Church Street, but questioned the decision to treat this as a negative 'void' between the new Trinity Building and the restored and extended Waterhouse wing. The Panel was not convinced by the justification that this formed a third element in the street-scene. The Panel would encourage a greater celebration of the entrance, but one which is also architecturally incorporated as part of the Trinity Building, for a more successful result. The Panel would also have welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the architectural treatment for the new circulation space and stairwell within the Waterhouse building, but lack of time forced the debate to focus on more pressing matters.

- **New Trinity Building.**

In addition to their concerns over the building's impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, the Panel felt that this building would be more successful if it could be seen to have its own identity, rather than attempt to be seen as part of the 'family' of Waterhouse structures on the site. Particular concerns were expressed regarding the end double-gable that appears over-dominant and muscular, in particular when compared to the scale of the listed cottages along Park Street. The Panel was not convinced that the lower elements facing on to Park Street helped address this issue of scale, while the large areas of glass would afford views into the communal kitchen facilities; the experience of the student housing at CB1 suggests this might be unfortunate, and particularly inappropriate when viewed in the context of the listed cottages on the opposite side of Park Street.

- **Treatment of the retained Courtyard space (including provision of disabled ramp).**

The Panel noted that the current treatment of the Courtyard is to retain the existing paths and to introduce a new dog-legged path to provide a ramped access to a new disabled entrance on the side wing. At the same time a triangular area of grass abutting the rear of the Round Church would be replaced with paving. The Panel felt that this important external space would benefit from a more holistic consideration, including how disabled access might be provided to the main entrance (as opposed to a side entrance), and where it might be best to provide hard landscaping for external seating (including consideration of the impact on the setting of the Grade I listed Round Church).

- **Listed cottages (Park Street).**

The presentation made no reference to the impact of the proposal on the setting of the listed cottages on the east side of Park Street. The Panel felt that further clarity was needed regarding the development's impact. Based on the information provided, the reference to the stepped end gable 'addressing' the cottages was viewed as tokenistic and unconvincing. The Panel also had a concern that the new Trinity Building appeared to mask more of the cottages in the proposed image looking down Round Church Street from Bridge Street.

**Conclusion.**

**At the last presentation in September, the Panel stated that they could accept the demolition of 3-5 Round Church Street providing the quality of redevelopment was of a sufficiently high standard.**

**The design of the scheme as currently proposed has not met this requirement, and the Panel considered the case had not been made to justify the quantum of new development on the site. The Panel recognises that this is an opportunity to restore the Waterhouse Building and put the future finances of the Cambridge Union Society onto a sound footing but, in the Panel's view, this scheme would be harmful both to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed cottages on Park Street. While there would be some undoubted enhancements to the Waterhouse Building, on balance, the Panel felt these benefits did not outweigh the harm.**

**VERTICT – AMBER (2), RED (3) 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.