

Cambridge City Council Design & Conservation Panel

Notes of the meeting 9th September 2015

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
Terry Gilbert	RTPI
Ian Steen	Co-opted member
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Mart Barrass	RIBA
Anthony Nix	RICS (item 1)

Officers:

Susan Smith	City Council (item 1)
Angela Briggs	City Council (item 1)
Jonathan Brookes	City Council (item 1)
Bana Elzein	City Council (item 1)
Sarah Dyer	City Council (item 2)
Christian Brady	City Council (item 2)
Jonathan Hurst	City Council (item 2)

Apologies – Carolin Gohler, Chris Davis, Helen Thompson and David Grech

1. Presentation – Gonville Hotel, Gonville Place (15/1200/FUL)

Refurbishment of Gresham House to provide an additional 10 hotel bedrooms, extension to rear of Gresham House to provide an additional 21 hotel bedrooms, (subterranean) basement to Gresham House and provide a gym, dance studios and subterranean day spa facilities and a plant room, front extension to Gonville Hotel to provide a new dining area, and associated external works and landscaping. This follows an earlier pre-application presentation to the Panel in March this year (verdict AMBER – 7, GREEN -1).

Presentation by Michael Vanoli of Annand & Mustoe Architects with representatives from agents Carter Jonas.

Full details of this submitted scheme including the D&A Statement and Heritage Statement are available via the City Council website

www.cambridge.gov.uk/online-applications

Alterations to Gresham House and Proposed Extension

- **Massing.**

Although the Panel strongly approve of the retention of Gresham House, there were renewed concerns from the Panel that the scale and massing of the new building detracts from Gresham House itself. However the proposed revision of the street frontage on Gresham Road to form three gable ends is considered an improvement. Minimising the size of the lift over-run and its impact on the skyline is encouraged.

- **Materials.**

Ancaster stone or similar is to be used for the detailing of the extension to Gresham House. The Panel were reassured that the PV range would not be visible due to shielding from the mansard roof.

- **Spa design.**
There was some concern that the spa design is still vague as a spa consultant has not yet been appointed. The footprint of this underground facility has a massive impact on the gardens above and the setting of Gresham House. The Panel felt that it is essential to develop and define the internal layout of the spa and questioned whether the disabled facilities had been adequately considered.
- The Panel were satisfied with the assurance that no trees would grow above ground level from the sunken spa gardens and thought that the new wrought iron balustrade barrier proposals are an improvement.

Hotel Frontage to Gonville Place

- **Landscaping.**
The Panel had hoped to see a holistic treatment of the hotel frontage along Gonville Place facing Parker's Piece, one of the foremost public spaces of Cambridge. They wished to see a photo montage of the existing and proposed trees. The tree officers had expected a series of mature trees evenly spaced along the frontage, but this was not apparent in the proposals.
- **Transport.**
The Panel questioned the basis for the reduction in car parking as it was stated that guests usually arrive the hotel by car or taxi. They felt the taxi drop off point should be at the front of the hotel. They could not comment further on the transport proposals as the revised transport plan is due to be submitted imminently.
- **Restaurant design.**
The Panel felt that the design of the new restaurant could have been made more inviting to customers as it is very visible from Parker's Piece and will be lit up at night. They felt disappointed that the design proposals for this element had not been moved forward since the last panel discussion.
- **Main hotel.**
The Panel felt that the brief given to the architects for consideration of the redesign of the main part of the hotel did not extend far enough. They would welcome any proposals to upgrade the street elevation and felt that this is a missed opportunity for the hotel to radically improve its image.
- **Banners.**
The Panel discussed the proposals for banners and supported the idea in theory, dependant on the size and scale of the posts which are not part of the present application. If the existing street frontage of the main hotel had more presence this in itself may make the hotel more inviting to customers. However, the Panel repeated that a coordinated vision for the front of the building was required.

Conclusion

The Panel felt that the application was composed of a number of disparate elements which did not work well together. Their main disappointment was the lack of coordinated development of the proposals for the frontage of the whole hotel. Their other concerns were the scale and massing of the extension to Gresham House and the lack of appointment of a spa consultant. The Panel renewed their support for the retention of Gresham House and because of this decided to give two separate votes on the verdict.

VERDICT –

Gresham House scheme as proposed - AMBER (2) and GREEN (4)

Whole site as proposed - RED (1) and AMBER (5)

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.