

PLANNING - PRE-APPLICATION DEVELOPER PRESENTATIONS

25 January 2019
10.00 am - 12.00 pm

Present: Councillors Baigent, Blencowe, Hipkin, Smart and Tunnacliffe

Chair: Sharon Brown, Assistant Director, Delivery

Case Officer: Mairead O'Sullivan, Senior Planning Officer

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

19/1/Plan Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Hart, Thornburrow and McQueen.

19/2/Plan Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

19/3/Plan Pre-Application Briefing by the Developer - Grafton Centre Hotel

Key points from developer's presentation

- 1.1 There has been an extensive redevelopment of the Grafton Centre over the past number of years. Planning permission was granted for the food court and gym to diversify the outdated shopping centre and add to the existing leisure use with the existing cinema.
- 1.2 The developer has been involved in the SPD process working closely with the city and county council. The first proposal to come forward from the SPD is this hotel. The other key elements of the proposal are the relocation of the bus interchange and provision of improved public realm. The aim is to submit an application next month subject to the result of this discussion with members.
- 1.3 The bus interchange is already not used by the park and ride service at busy times as it causes delays. The provision of the public realm has been seen as a key benefit to residents, the city council and other stakeholders.

- 1.4 The proposal has already been through public consultation and engagement. The main concerns were the building design/height, impact on traffic congestion, whether another hotel is needed, impact on residential amenity (noise/overlooking/air quality), difficulty understanding the highway changes, how parking will work. The public realm improvements were viewed positively.
- 1.5 The shopping centre is of its time and is inward looking. The proposal offers an opportunity to respond to East Road. This has been important in discussions with the city council, Design and Conservation Panel and residents. The cinema has limited activity. East Road is a key arrival route into Cambridge. The proposal may allow for tree planting which would soften the street. The removal of the bus interchange creates a relatively large site area. The restaurant at ground floor would be open to members of the public and has the potential to open out onto the public realm with outdoor dining.
- 1.6 The elevations have been worked to a higher standard than is normally required for a budget hotel given the sensitive nature of the site. Back of house has been designed so it would be tucked away and screened from the street. Verified views will be provided as part of the planning application. Key views have been agreed with planning officers and are being worked up
- 1.7 The materials proposed would be high quality. This was identified as being very important at the Design and Conservation Panel. The brick is proposed to be a buff brick with variation to contrast with the flat buff brick of the shopping centre. The colonnade will provide street frontage. The ground floor would include the reception and the restaurant. There would be 6 full levels of bedrooms with the top level recessed 3m to provide relief. Floor to ceiling windows are proposed. The window panels break up the façade and incorporate ventilation.
- 1.8 The building has been designed to be inclusive and accessible with accessible rooms at each level. Premier Inn has onerous requirements for thermal performance. It requires 60% of hot water at peak times to come from renewables. It also requires grey water recycling. The aim is for the proposal to meet BREEAM excellent in line with the City Council's policy.

- 1.9 The East Road dual carriageway dates from the sixties/seventies. It is a car dominated streetscape. It experiences a high volume of cyclists with over 400 at peak times.
- 1.10 The removal of the bus interchange is a key aspiration of the SPD. The highway proposals have been developed in consultation with Cambridge City Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP), Stagecoach, Camcycle and Cambridgeshire County Council. The proposal will also remove the central reservation and change the proposal to 1 lane of vehicular traffic each way. The goal is to repair the streetscape and create more space for pedestrians and cycles.
- 1.11 The hope is that the improved cycle infrastructure will result in more cycle trips. Both on and off road cycle lanes are proposed. A new pedestrian crossing (possibly a zebra crossing) is also proposed following a desire line to the Grafton Centre entrance. The reduction in vehicular space means opportunity for additional planting
- 1.12 Public consultation raised concerns about increased congestion. The developer has worked with the county council to produce a model which shows no worsening of congestion. This is being assessed by the county council and further work will be done if they are not satisfied. Funding discussions are ongoing.
- 1.13 No car parking is proposed for the hotel. This is consistent with other city centre hotels such as the IBIS at the station. There is the potential for visitors to use the Grafton Centre car park. Guests are predicted to mainly utilise public transport. Taxis and delivery/service vehicles will have a dedicated bay at Crispin Place. 33 staff and visitor cycle spaces are proposed. Traffic and hotel noise is currently being assessed but it is likely there will be a small improvement to nearby residential properties to the east due to moving traffic lanes further from their boundaries.

Member's questions and comments

Councillor Hipkin:

When the application is submitted will the council require certainty on funding to ensure the public benefits of the scheme will be provided.

- 2.1 There have been extensive and ongoing discussions with GCP about funding. There will be a joint paper produced with the city council, county council, GCP and the developer which will detail the shared goals and

aspirations of the project. The SPD looked at the highway and public realm improvements as part of a wider long term redevelopment of the different sites within the SPD. As proposals come forward we will need to understand how the benefits will be provided. If one scheme overprovides this may need to be balanced with another proposal providing fewer benefits than it is allocated.

- 2.2 Abbey Gate house is an upcoming scheme which will be subject to pre-application discussions in the near future. The developer has other sites within the SPD framework. Phase I may shoulder responsibility for the delivery of a large number of the benefits. Phasing the highway proposals would be difficult and discussions with the city and county council have suggested that these should all come forward at once for practical reasons.
- 2.3 There are ongoing discussions with GCP cycling team which suggest they would be willing to part fund the project as it ties into their aspiration to have a cycleway from Lensfield Road to Elizabeth Way Bridge. This would be subject to their approvals process.

Councillor Tunnacliffe

Why was a budget hotel chosen? The design is considered uninspiring. Why was this not done to a higher standard?

- 2.4 Premier Inn was chosen as it was most commercially suitable. It is considered to provide a high level of community and inclusive access. Following discussions with city council officers, the restaurant has been promised to be open to the public to enliven the public space. Although it is a budget operator, it would be well placed and deliverable.
- 2.5 The design is considered to respond to context. The area is characterised by brick. It is a simple and elegant building form. The colonnade responds to the public space. This design has come about following amendments in line with comments from the Design and Conservation Panel. The proposal then went back to Design and Conservation Panel and was viewed positively. The materials will be high quality

The colonnade on the Premier Inn on Coldhams Lane is poor. It is uninviting and not good design. The building is repetitive and boring. It looks more like an office block than a hotel. Cambridge already has a lot of restaurants and cafes.

- 2.6 The colonnade provides an opportunity to have restaurant doors and windows open and potential for outdoor dining to make use of the public space. It has been increased in width to 5m in response to comments from Design and Conservation Panel. It can also function as a covered space to wait for the bus. The hotel use is a good fit with the existing centre uses.

Councillor Bick

Concerned about the balancing of the delivery of public benefits outlined in the SPD. This may mean that one scheme will be impoverished at the expense of another. Also concerned about the implications on public transport. There is a perception that GCP have not had much involvement. The committee needs to be reassured of how the project sits in the wider context of GCP projects.

- 2.7 The public benefits of the scheme need to be carefully considered and will need to be CIL compliant. The County Council have been keen to progress environmental improvements at the early stages of the project. The developer is working with the county council to ensure this happens. This could make the hotel very high cost. We need to ensure the project does not become unviable and would meet with the tests for CIL. The proposal has been through a long pre-application process which is still being worked through. We will need a clear strategy as to how the improvements will be delivered and S106 matters resolved by the time of determination. A joint position statement with the developer, city council, county council and GCP will need to come forward.
- 2.8 Stagecoach and the County Council public transport officers support the proposal as it results in reduced travel times. The current bus interchange can take approx. 14 bus stops per hour. The new bus stop system will accommodate 25 stops per hour. The existing pedestrian crossing has the most significant impact on the highway corridor as it is

triggered regularly. The developer will ensure there has been further consultation with GCP before the application is submitted.

Concerned that the loss of car lanes and additional pedestrian crossing will only worsen congestion.

- 2.9 The modelling shows the proposal would not reduce congestion but it would also not make it any worse. The existing extra lane is queuing space rather than capacity. The additional pedestrian crossing does not causing queueing to extend as far as the Elizabeth Way roundabout. If the County Council is not happy with the current modelling, a micro simulation will be provided.

Councillor Baigent

Restricting traffic down East Road could be seen as a benefit to many residents. GCP is a political organisation and there timeline for a decision on funding could be much greater than the developer is predicting. Is there a cycle route through the public space? There have been issues with cyclists mixing with other modes of traffic at the station. GCP and the City Council expect an increase in cycling. Will the public space be publicly owned or controlled by L and G. Is the application for only the hotel or does it include the highways and public realm matters? The removal of the bus interchange is supported. Has the developer considered a curved building?

- 2.10 The county council have also asked the developer to work through a model with a 20% decrease in car movements but the main issue is understanding the current baseline. The developer is clear that the GCP ratification timeline may be greater than predicted. There would be no cycle route through the plaza as there is no desire line. There would be dedicated cycle lanes on both sides in a mixture of on and off road.
- 2.11 The square will be controlled by L and G but if members have concerns about the future of the space, L and G are willing to have provisions within S106 for buskers, events, community use to ensure these can happen and their provision is formalised in a legal agreement. The curved building would be difficult for the hotel use. As concerns have been expressed about the design at the briefing, a further review will be

undertaken. Any changes will be balanced with the comments from Design and Conservation Panel.

Councillor Smart

Did the public consultation involve knocking on doors and leafleting? Some of the consultation occurred during half-term but not at the weekend? Were all comments recorded? Concerned about the height of the building. The public realm improvements could be done without the need to provide a commercial building. The proposal lacks colour both literally and metaphorically. A concrete based building would not be environmentally friendly. Cambridge is the biggest cycling city in the UK so the way cycle infrastructure is treated is of great importance. How will jobs be selected to ensure they are local? How will the hotel manage noise from Hen and Stag dos?

- 2.12 Leafletting was tracked and details can be provided as part of application. Will need to work with the city council to decide the best way to communicate/illustrate feedback from consultation as part of the Statement of Community Involvement. Members of the public's opinions were recorded. Although no consultation happened at the weekend, they did occur on evenings, including Friday evening.
- 2.13 The building will meet BREEAM Excellent in line with the city council's policy. The base of the building may not be concrete. It could also be steel framed.
- 2.14 A management plan will be in place to deal with noise. The hotel is best placed to respond about staff selection. This will be addressed as part of the application.

Councillor Robertson

Would like to see further elevations with the building in its wider context. The building is not set back from the road and would appear dominant. The colonnade does not help.

- 2.15 A full townscape analysis including verified views from locations agreed with the city council will be provided as part of the application. The scale and massing is in line with the parameters of the SPD.

Councillor Blencowe

The proposal will need to be tested with members of the public. The county council's response to the traffic modelling will be key in the assessment. How will the hotel link with the Grafton Centre?

- 2.16 There is no proposed physical link. The colonnade runs almost to the entrance. An additional canopy could be considered to ensure the walkway from the hotel to the centre would be fully covered. Works to the entrance do not form part of the scope of this application. The public realm works will improve the area and make it more inviting. Proposals to alter the entrance may come forward in the future once this project is complete.

Councillor Robertson

Where is the hotel serviced from? Where are taxi drop-offs? Should there be a physical link to the car park?

- 2.17 The loading bay and taxi drop-offs are from a dedicated bay on Crispin Place.

Conclusion

- 3.1 Members expressed concerns about the design in relation to the overall height and mass, the dominance of the building on the street, the detail, repetitive form and the colonnade.
- 3.2 Members expressed concerns about the highway implications of the scheme. There were concerns about causing further congestion, how the proposal relate to wider schemes for highway changes, how the changes would impact highway safety, how the cycle strategy would work and how the scheme would be delivered.
- 3.3 There were other concerns about the number of jobs and how these would be sourced, amenity of neighbouring properties, management of noise and how the proposal links to the existing shopping centre.
- 3.4 As developers had more questions and the allocated time was up, the idea of an additional briefing was suggested. This will be discussed with the developer and will be dependent on timescales for submission of an

application. Alternatively members may wish to provide a list of questions which would be circulated to the developer for a response.

The meeting ended at 12.00 pm

CHAIR