

**Cambridge City Council  
Design & Conservation Panel**

**Notes of the meeting Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012**

**Present:**

Nick Bullock	Chair (items 1&3)
Terry Gilbert	RTPI (Chair items 2&4)
Russell Davies	RTPI
Kevin Myers	RIBA
Kieran Perkins	RIBA
Carolyn Gohler	Cambridge PPF
David Grech	English Heritage
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Ian Steen	Co-opted member
Chris Davis	IHBC (items 1-3)
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute
Tony Nix	RICS

**Officers:**

Catherine Linford	City Council (items 2&3)
Susan Smith	City Council (items 1&2)
Matthew Paul	City Council (item 2)
Jonathan Hurst	City Council (items 1-3)

- 1. Presentation – Land at Eden Street Backway & Portland Place (rear of New Square).** The pre-application proposal for a residential redevelopment of pre-fabricated concrete garages and brick out-buildings to provide eight new dwellings - five to be accessed from Eden Street Backway and three from Portland Place. The dwellings are of a contemporary design and are intended to respond positively to the character of the Conservation Area. The site is currently owned by Jesus College. Presentation by Michael Hendry of Bidwells with Chris Senior of DPA Architects.

The Panel's comments are as follows:

- Urban grain. This is an area without a consistent arrangement of dwelling fronts and backs. The majority view was that it was therefore acceptable for the Portland Place dwellings to have a different arrangement to those accessed from Eden St Backway. However, some of the Panel were troubled that this arrangement left some of the corner dwellings with very small gardens.
- Materials (brick). The design team are praised for proposing to use reclaimed bricks, although reclaimable materials are becoming increasingly rare.
- Materials (zinc roofing). The Panel would encourage the use of slate rather than zinc if the detailing is crisp, and noted that a slate roof does not need a concrete capping.
- The mews development. The road surface of Eden Street Backway is in poor condition. Its closure by bollards at one end offers an opportunity to explore the possibility of a shared surface area with planting used to help to define and soften the margins instead of hard paving and road markings. Although a private road, Willow Walk was suggested as an example to follow.

- On-street parking space. The Panel would welcome the relocation of the parking space but appreciate the difficulties of this constraint and note that the design team is discussing the issue with the Highways Authority. The relocation of this parking bay would be welcomed.
- Loss of off-street parking spaces. The Panel note the likely loss of car-parking spaces as the new dwellings will not be entitled to residents' parking permits.
- Trees. The existing trees make a contribution to the area and the Panel would welcome further information on the quality of these trees and a clear statement of the rationale for the removal of three mature trees.
- West facing rear garden walls. These high walls will appear stark, casting a shadow on the garden spaces. Smaller fences between properties should be considered, along with increased planting to create a softer edge.
- Sustainable credentials. The Panel note that the sustainable policy has yet to be finalised but is to achieve Code Level 4 and to include solar panels.
- Fenestration. The Panel thought that the fenestration needed further consideration, looking to existing windows in the area for inspiration, and that an additional window on the corner unit would improve surveillance of the road.

### **Conclusion**

The Panel was generally sympathetic to the style of the proposed development but was concerned that the site was being overdeveloped. The Panel would welcome a statement on the rationale for removing the existing trees and further exploration of the rationale for the choice of this layout. In particular, the Panel would be interested to see the benefits of reducing by one the number of units and of trying a form of house-type without gardens on Portland Place.

The Panel also considered that much of the success of the scheme would turn on the quality of the materials and their detailing, and hoped that the detailed design would deliver the crispness suggested by the presentation.

### **VERDICT – GREEN (6), AMBER (5)**

- 2. Presentation – Land between 3&4 Portugal Place.** The pre-app proposal for a new, contemporary dwelling (total footprint 17.5msq) with four storeys of living space and a roof terrace. The proposal is seen as an opportunity to create a remarkable narrow fronted building that enhances the street. Presentation by Andrew Pettican.

The Panel's comments are as follows:

- Materials. The choice of materials has clearly been the result of a robust process. The Panel nevertheless expressed some concern as to how the different elements would be joined. The internal 125mm brickwork would need to sit more comfortably with the glazing.
- Soundproofing. With only 25mm of cavity available, the Panel were sceptical as to the effectiveness of the sound insulation.
- Relationship with adjoining buildings (shadow gap). With the walls of the neighbouring buildings unlikely to be vertical, more of the available building space might be lost than originally anticipated. Questions are therefore raised as to the accuracy of the frontage illustration.
- Light diffusing glass. This material intrigued the Panel. The images provided suggest the windows will appear black during daylight hours. Less stark shades

should therefore be explored. Information on how the windows would appear at night would also have been welcomed.

- Staircase. A dialogue will be needed with Building Control regarding the compliance of such a narrow staircase with regulations.
- Roof terrace glazing. The relationship of the glazing to the roofline is unsatisfactory and should be reconsidered. Recessing the terrace could contribute to a solution.
- Basement terrace and entrance. The Panel expressed serious reservations as to the quality of the environment at basement level. As this light well could become a cluttered and unsightly litter trap, the Panel would suggest that alternative layouts for the basement level be explored. In addition, railings should be explored as a lighter alternative to glass panels. If the doorway is to be recessed, the Panel would recommend that it be lit from above for improved security.

### **Conclusion**

In principle, the Panel welcome and support a contemporary infill solution between 3 & 4 Portugal Place as is proposed. However, to ensure that the proposed build is capable of delivering a quality living environment, the Panel urge that those detailed aspects that are within the purview of the Building Regulations are resolved prior to finalising the design and the submission of a planning application.

### **VERDICT – GREEN (6), AMBER (4)**

- 3. Presentation – Gonville & Caius Boathouse, 28 Ferry Path.** A revised proposal for a new boathouse following the refusal of applications 11/0381/CAC & 11/0380/FUL by delegated powers in August 2011. Presentation by Julian Bland of Bland, Brown & Cole Architects with Joanna Burton of Beacon Planning.

Carolin Gohler and Tony Nix both declared an interest and did not participate in the vote.

Senior Treasurer of the Boat Club Dr Jimmy Altham provided a brief introduction. The current facilities are described as being in a poor state of repair and no longer fit for purpose.

Joanna Burton provided the historical context. The boathouse is not a statutory or locally listed building, although is within a Conservation Area. Its contribution to the 'riverscape' is recognised.

The Panel's comments are as follows:

- The Panel recognises the desire of the College to provide improved facilities for a boat-club that is currently both popular and successful, but questions the strategy that is now proposed. The Panel was unanimous in thinking that the site was being overdeveloped and in considering that the bulk of the flat-roofed section of the main boathouse would, when seen from adjacent properties and from the river, overpower the oldest section of the building.
- The Panel would prefer to see instead **either** an approach that retained the existing main boathouse, relocating certain activities to the side boathouse and perhaps to space in 28 Ferry Path, **or** an approach based on a modern architectural idiom more in keeping with the adjacent houses and boathouse to the West. Though the Panel understood that former members of the College favoured a building that 'did honour' to the original design by Fawcett, the Panel

was not sympathetic to the construction of what was in effect a modern replica of the original.

- The case for demolition. The Panel noted the issues highlighted in the Hannah Reed structural report but concluded that the older part of the building could be repaired while demolishing some of the more modern elements of the building. The Panel were not convinced that the architectural case for demolishing the whole the building had yet been made.
- The Panel appreciate the College's need for improved boat storage, but would have welcomed the opportunity to evaluate alternative interior layouts of the main boathouse.
- Clock tower. The Panel thought that a central clock tower would be more in keeping with the symmetry of the elevations and hoped that its position might be re-considered.
- Lime tree. The Panel hopes that the discussion with officers over the future of the tree will continue, as the case for its removal has yet to be made.

### **Conclusion**

The boathouse stands in a Conservation Area and, while it is not listed, it is seen to make a valuable contribution to the river frontage. The case for its demolition, not strictly necessary for structural reasons, has yet to be made on architectural grounds and would have to demonstrate that the new building would at least match the quality of the original, and enhance the quality of the river frontage. The Panel believe this could be best achieved by a modern design or retention of the existing front building, and a radical reconsideration of the location of the activities necessary for the success of the boat club.

**VERDICT – RED (7) with 2 abstentions.**

- 4. Presentation – Kings College School Sports Centre.** Revisions to the pre-app proposal for a new sports facility. This was last seen by the Panel in January 2012, verdict RED (7), AMBER (2). Presentation by Rob Marsh-Feiley of Hollins Architects & Surveyors. The architect tabled a note documenting the revisions made to the scheme since the last presentation and responses to each of the Panel's observations. Changes to the size, siting and configuration of certain facilities have resulted in a design for a Sports Centre for the School, which is lower in height (by 1.7m.) and with a reduced footprint.

Nick Bullock declared an interest and abstained from the vote.

The Panel's comments are as follows:

- Neighbouring buildings. The earlier scheme failed to respond to its context, particularly its proximity to St Martin's and the University Library. The reduction in height and footprint had contributed to an improved relationship with the St. Martin's building and provided for more generous circulation space and setting. The Panel noted the sacrifices that had been made in reducing the size and in re-siting of various facilities so as to deliver a better external spatial relationship. However, the quality of the courtyard space had to be assured through detailed consideration of the relationship of the space with the adjoining buildings (existing and planned), and in the choice of materials and features. The Panel would urge that a detailed design for the enlarged courtyard between the proposed building and St. Martin's (to include sectional perspectives) be submitted as part of a planning application.

- Climbing wall. A panellist explained that outdoor climbing walls are rarely successful. However, such a facility would be a desirable addition to the sports centre and therefore the Panel would strongly urge that solutions be explored for the provision of an indoor climbing wall.
- End curve to the building's Grange Road elevation. Doubt was expressed as to whether such a feature sat as comfortably with the orthogonal geometry of the neighbouring buildings as did the previous proposal.
- Adventure playground. Some doubt was expressed as to the long-term durability of trees in this area.
- Masterplan. The Panel are aware of a development brief for the site although what's needed is a masterplan that explores spatial planning. Although the Panel appreciate the difficulties associated with this site, the needs of the school are likely to change over time. The designers are advised to develop a longer-term vision for the site.

### **Conclusion.**

It is acknowledged that the architect and client have adjusted the proposals for a sports centre to sit more comfortably on a constrained site which is in a sensitive location. The footprint and height have been reduced, the external spaces are potentially more of an asset; the massing and clues taken from the University Library and St Martin's buildings have combined to improve the scheme. Aspects of the scheme that should be looked at further include the design of the Grange Road elevation and importantly, the detailing of the external spaces so as to create inspirational and functional environments.

**VERDICT – RED (2), AMBER (8) with 1 abstention**

### **5. Minutes of the last meeting – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2012**

Agreed.

### **6. Any Other Business**

- Trinity College – New Court. Site visit arranged for 2.30pm on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> March. 5<sup>th</sup> Studio will begin with a presentation in the PSR. Ask at the Porter's Lodge for directions.
- Jon Harris had attended the funeral of George Brewster. George was a diligent member of the Panel as well as various Cambridge organisations. Nick will write to the Brewster family expressing the Panel's condolences and for appreciation.

### **7. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

#### **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.