

**15, Victoria Street,
Cambridge CB1 1JP**

01.08.14

Dear Ms. Dell,

Planning Permission. 14, Victoria Street.

Your letter of apology and explanation for mistakes made by the planning department gave me, in its wording, no indication that this matter was to be put up in the air once more and at such short notice. Slipped in as penultimate item. Or that you were pressing for a decision against revocation of the proposal. Having been sent the agenda by a third party - no warning from you – I was alarmed to read there an account containing more mistakes, false assumptions and blatant bias. In regard to the shortness of time available and the complete lack of representation of a differing point of view from your own, I hurry to draw the attention of the councillors to certain points you make which should be challenged and to the lack of logic the planning department continues to show. We have here another sum where three or four negatives are added together and – surprise! - out pops a positive as the answer. I warned you on your original decision that someone would sooner or later require you to show your workings. The Ombudsman did. You had to apologise and admit a serious mistake had been made.

You are now preparing to compound that error.

It is no serious consideration of 'democracy' to allow an objector two minutes to speak when, thanks to the shortness of notice,

The forthcoming meeting, (next Wednesday) at which the above will be discussed will go ahead according to your shaping of the agenda and without the benefit of the Ombudsman's Report which is expected very soon. Why the haste? I think the councillors attending as the Planning Committee deserve to be allowed a sight of the official report. You are withholding evidence. I think they also deserve a less biased presentation of the facts behind this affair. They, like me, might well be outraged by the undemocratic role of judge, advocate and jury combined that you are assuming for yourself. You twist and grease the truth so that it can be slipped down their gullets without a hiccup. They are simply required to vote as you suggest, rubber stamp an injustice and call an end to the meeting.

Accordingly, I shall be sending to each member an e-mail containing my comments. You promised me in your letter of apology some sort of representation at this meeting. Can I rely on you, Ms. Dell, to see to it that this is read out? An associate will be in the audience and he will note whether this is done.

I recommend that, for the sake of the Area, the house which you now agree is a BLI, and the surrounding neighbours who unanimously object to the scheme, that you REVOKE PLANNING PERMISSION C/140342/FUL since it was arrived at, according to your own Legal Officer, as a result of 'a material error in the determination of the application.' Due to planners' negligence, at the original hearing, 'the Committee effectively failed to have regard to all relevant material considerations.'

Paragraphs requiring correction or comment are dealt with below according to their numbers.

3.6 The 'unfortunate' computer glitch which deprived the officers concerned of the knowledge that the building was a BLI. Every dog in Victoria Street knows the lamp post it pees on is protected! It is on the public web site. It was widely referred to in the report on the case of the extension to a similar house two doors away. There is no way any officer working in planning or conservation for the City of Cambridge can have been unaware. Paras 3.6 to 3.13 allow this fault.

3.13 The 6 week period for seeking Judicial Review has not expired. The Ombudsman has this in her sights and it is understood that the 6 weeks period begins from the date of issue of her Report.

3.14 Compensation. This is the sole argument for failing to revoke permission. The tax-payer will suffer. As it stands, the tax payer will suffer less if the decision is taken to deny the client his project before actual work begins. So far there has been no outlay on glass and steel. I note that democratic fairness, justice and regard for the wishes of the people and the area weigh nothing in the planners' scales.

The 'four key questions'.

1. Would officers have made the same recommendation on the understanding that 14 Victoria St. is a BLI?

This is a false question. They did know! The case officer and Ms. Patsy Dell herself were told several times by members of the public. It appeared on page 1 of the objection by the immediate neighbour, posted on the site. The information was suppressed for reasons unknown to others outside the department.

Had they acknowledged the status of the building they would have had to take account of Policy 4/12 of the Cambridge Local Plan.

They would have had to judge the impact of the proposal on the building itself, on the protected area, and its detrimental effect on its neighbours as did the officers in the most recent case of an extension at # 17). They would have had to point out to the applicant that the size of this extension on an existing extension was over large, over tall (2 storeys), and too close to its immediate neighbour. They would have suggested that the design and materials were unsympathetic to the area. A steel-framed construction of industrial sized glass panels in a broken-backed ziggurat shape is a piece of brutalism which is totally incongruous and indeed, offensive, to anyone who has sight of it.

The planners, I fear, make a half-hearted attempt to dismiss the BLI status, with the suggestion that it refers to the facade only. A building is a building. It is not the thickness of a four and a half inch brick. The width of a pencil line on a map. It is the whole construction including its garden. Front or back, they are part of the whole. In fact, the back of the buildings is the more important and worthy of conserving to the people who actually live here. Our lives are lived here, our outlook is here on the green spaces we have created between the two rows of houses. We don't sit in our front windows watching the cars parking.

In the precedent of #17, the selection of building materials was of great importance – they were recommended and approved down to the choice of colour of the mortar!

But in the case of Mr Knowles great glass elevator the rule book is torn up. Anything goes because it's eclectic isn't it. Eh? The planners' buzz word. What does it mean? Innovative? Daring? Challenging and a little bit edgy? No! None of those. It means, pick and mix. Choosing bits from other schools of thought or design and using them for something else. You don't have to be Mary Beard to know that the Eclecticists in Ancient Greece were a school of philosophers who pinched the bits they liked from other schools of philosophy and used them. Because they had no ideas of their own!

It is wrong to say that – well the whole area has been eclecticised hasn't it? That in itself is condemnatory of the supposedly protective power. But it hasn't. Brick and slate and inoffensive congeniality is the order I see from my windows. Another feeble excuse that doesn't stand question.

4.11 The Conservation Officer's luke-warm, unconvincing support refers to 'concerns of reflectivity... visual intrusiveness of garish colours...' and the 'angular' shape. The truth is – look at the drawings – this is an industrial piece of architecture more suited to a hospital or warehouse or Legoland than a green backwater in a central city space.

Question 2. Is there any harm to the amenities of neighbours that has not already been duly considered.

This is a weasel question designed to induce the answer 'No'. In fact the **original** considerations have never been properly addressed. They still remain.

Question 3. **'Would the committee have reached the same decision had they been aware of the status ...?'**

This is unquantifiable. And the question unjustified. The committee need never have been involved had the planners done their work in accordance with their own rules and guidance.

Question 4

'Is the revocation in the public interest?'

Decidedly! If by public we understand: those immediately concerned in a neighbourly context, those who love their city with all its differences in style and those who defend democracy and the systems we the citizens set in place to defend it and its inhabitants from miscarriages of justice, slipshod performance, evasion and cover-up. 'Computer-glitch' and 'we'll learn by our mistakes' have long ago ceased to be acceptable to our ears.

If, by 'interest' you mean cost in pounds paid out to Mr Knowles, again – yes, it certainly is.

No work done so far. If the building were to go ahead, I would bring a suit for damages against the authority. I have had my house valued before any work proceeds. I would have it revalued afterwards. (At the moment the professional estimation is a loss in value of £50,000. And there is stress and loss of earnings plus cost of fencing to cover as much as is humanly possible.) I am in contact with a Planning Barrister. She has just won a similar case with damages of a million pounds for her client. I would not be so greedy, but, with the CCC's apology and acknowledgement of error and the Ombudsman's report to hand she would certainly have a case to make. You may like to enquire into the possibilities and weigh them against Mr Knowles projected sums.

Yours,