

15, Victoria Street, Cambridge CB1 1JP

26th July 2014

Patsy Dell,

Cambridge City Council Planning Department.

Dear Ms Dell,

PLANNING PERMISSION FOR 14 VICTORIA STREET, CAMBRIDGE.

I was pleased to receive from you a personal response to the enquiry into this case by the Local Government Ombudsman, involving an apology and an explanation. I have looked carefully at your replies to a selection of the questions the LGO (Rhona McMeekin) required you to answer.

I'm assuming that her points on disability, light and noise assessment and impact on neighbour's amenity have been addressed by you directly to her office and so restrict my comments to the one pivotal point you discuss with me: the 'computer failure' which blinded the planning department from the very outset to the fact that the building in question is in a Conservation Area and is a Building of Local Interest. This status triggers consideration of Policy 4/12 of the Council's Local Plan regarding alterations and improvements to buildings of this status. This was set aside by the planners and the councillors on the committee were not made aware of it. As the Cambridge policy on conservation is well known to be rigorous – and rightly so – this was a serious lapse on the part of the planners.

Ms. Dell – I have not heard the 'computer glitch' excuse for a decade. I had thought it had been put into the bin along with 'the dog ate my homework'. You ask me to believe that local professionals with impressive titles like 'Director of the Environment' and 'City Development Manager', specialists in Cambridge City planning issues, were not aware of the status of the houses in Victoria Street? The clue's in the name. The information is available to anyone on the Council's own website at a few keystrokes. It was known, acknowledged and used as guidance by the officers in the matter of the extension to number 17, a few yards down the street and a few months previously. I and others from the outset (read my first letter of objection) made mention of the BLI aspect at least nine times both verbally, face to face with officers, and in written statements. Indeed, I mentioned the BLI condition to yourself, Ms. Dell, in a letter on the 12th of December last year.

It is not believable that a computer silence should speak louder than a clear warning shout from the general public.

This omission led to a mishandling of the application and a misinformation to councillors at the area meeting. According to your own rules the proposal ought to have been disqualified before it left the starting block, saving the applicant and his neighbours a year's distress and expense.

You ask, in your letter of apology, whether I have anything additional to be included in your report to the Planning Committee on the 6th of August and whether I would like to speak if it can be arranged under the public speaking scheme. I have experienced this. It doesn't work. The public do not have the right to question information, to challenge lies or to expose subterfuge and omissions. I would simply ask

that someone read out this letter to whichever of the councillors for the area committee are able to attend in the middle of August.

I would also like to take the opportunity at your assembly to thank those councillors who saw through to the essential wrongfulness of the proposal and resisted the onslaught of misinformation and partiality they were subjected to by the planning department. I hope you will be apologising to the committee. In this forum, I hope also you will not mischievously distract them from the main issue by a 'deck-chairs on the Titanic' displacement activity by discussing the factors of light and noise nuisance on the assumption that the proposal will go ahead. These issues would certainly be of intense interest to surrounding neighbours if it did, but, as this is a horse that's made a false start in the wrong lane in the wrong race and earned a disqualification, they may well be peripheral to the matter in hand.

I would suggest that the council revoke absolutely the planning permission it wrongly gave out. This might be most expediently done before Mr Knowles embarks on expensive works. (To date no building preparations have been undertaken.)

I have received from you a cheque for £250 'in recognition of the inconvenience... and the distress...' This sum does not begin to alleviate the stress suffered. In financial terms alone my expenses to date have been:

£2,500 to cover the erection of a fence to conceal the lower part of the glass elevator.

Loss of a year's earnings from writing (est. £10,000 minimum.) Stress in, inspiration out.

An estimated depreciation (agent's valuation) of my house of £50,000.

The cheque I have not cashed as I don't want it to serve as an acknowledgement that I have accepted your explanation and apology. Apology – fine. Explanation – no. We are still waiting to hear the real reason for your vigorous promotion of the scheme. If the moment comes to present the cheque I will make the sum over to the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings.

Yours sincerely,