

Application Ref: 14/1154/FUL

AMENDMENTS:

Received: 27th January 2015

Case Officer: Tony Collins

Response Date: 16th March 2014

Respondents: Jonathan Brookes and
Susan Smith

**Comments on amended proposals information submitted
January/February/March 2015**

Comments August 2014

The Urban Design & Conservation Team first commented on the application in August 2014 and raised a number of serious concerns with the proposals due to a lack of information that could allow an accurate assessment of the visual impact of the proposals and the daylighting/shadow impact on the proposed amenity space and the existing properties adjacent to the site. A number of concerns were raised relating to the details of the elevations. Overall the application was not supported in Urban Design & Conservation terms.

Amendments November 2014

A series of further amendments were submitted and we provided comments in November 2014. The amendments went some way to resolving a number of our concerns regarding the richness and detail of the proposed elevations, to resolve concerns about the quality of accommodation facing on to the courtyard and overlooking. However, the further information provided on the CGIs and assessment of shadow impact revealed that the scheme had potentially significant shortcomings that could not be overcome without a more fundamental redesign of the scheme and consequent loss of units. The delivery of trees on River Lane continued to be an issue as did the relationship of the Godesdone Road and Rowlinson Way blocks.

Overall the scheme failed to resolve a number of the previous concerns and indeed revealed potentially significant new concerns relating to the overall massing of the scheme. Our conclusion was that the proposals represented overdevelopment of the site and that an alternative development form was needed.

Amendments January and February 2015

The applicant has submitted a series of further revisions and clarifications as summarised in their description of the changes below.

1) Additional screens on rear elevation to enhance privacy in Godesdone Road. Increased articulation of pavilion building facing Godesdone Road. Increased window sizes in lower floors facing courtyard. Altered facade detailing. Introduction of fritted glass in some windows. Increased articulation of Rowlinson Way elevation. Addendum to Design and Access Statement.

2) Amendments to west end of upper storey; amendment to River Lane block; amendments to roofs of rear blocks; amendments to fenestration; amendment to

position of east elevation; amended tree planting; additional daylighting information; additional transport assessment; additional drainage information; additional verified views of development.

In addition, further documents have been produced to respond to concerns raised by local residents and to clarify further the specification and accuracy of the verified views.

Overall scale and massing

The scale and massing of the scheme has to be considered from four aspects.

- 1) The first is the impact on the Conservation Area and particularly the increase in the height of the Newmarket Road and River Lane corner and accordance with the guidance contained in the Eastern Gate SPD.
- 2) The second is how the overall scale and massing impacts on the existing properties in terms of shadow impact/daylighting and whether the scheme could be considered to be overbearing when viewed in the more immediate context.
- 3) The fourth aspect is daylighting into the proposed student accommodation.
- 4) The third is the impact on the quality of the courtyard that forms the only amenity space in the development.

Conservation Area Impact

1. The overall scale and massing identified in the Eastern Gate SPD has been the focus of significant discussions at both pre-application and application stages and summarised in previous comments on this application. The application now accords with the guidance given in the SPD with the exception of the 3 bay corner section fronting on to Newmarket Road and 2 bay return on to River Lane. The corner itself forms a chamfered section reducing the apparent length of the frontages when viewed at street level.

The impact of the increase from 3+setback 4th floor to a full 4 storeys has been assessed in terms of the impact on views within and across the Riverside Conservation Area. The view (unverified) is provided in the Design & Access Statement Rev A (page 22). Our view has remained consistent in that the change in the height is not significant in terms of these views and accordingly the departure from the SPD is acceptable. The form of the building will create a minor change to the established roofscape with the chimneys and varied roofline of the existing buildings of Riverside filtering views towards the site. The variation in the height helps to break down the horizontal nature of the Newmarket Road elevation and the increased height helps the scheme to respond to the increased scale of more recent developments on the south side of Newmarket Road.

The applicant has submitted verified views to satisfy paragraph 3.4.12 of the Eastern Gate SPD. Our assessment of each view is detailed below.

Verified views

The submitted verified views have helped to clarify uncertainty about the previously submitted views of the scheme. What they demonstrate, at 50mm, is a good approximation of what the naked eye would see when positioned at each of the viewpoints. As such they allow a more accurate and considered assessment of the impact to be made.

View 1: View from Newmarket Road looking West (50mm lens)

The proposals clearly create a significant change to the existing view looking west. Previous concerns related to the scale of the proposals when seen with the Corner House pub. Aside from any issues relating to the overall massing and scale and corresponding impact on River Lane, our view is that the 4 storey corner and receding 3+1 section of the building are appropriate in this context. The Corner House Pub still reads a significant and different form and the overall height of the corner block does not dominate over the existing pub. There is clearly a marked difference in scale between the proposed scheme and adjacent furniture warehouse but the SPD provides guidance on the height for the adjacent land should redevelopment occur.

View 2a: View from Newmarket Road North East (50mm lens)

This view demonstrates the problems with trying to reconcile the deep plan form of double banked accommodation in the finer grain of development to the north of Newmarket Road. The setback upper floor and minor 150mm setback on the west gable go some way to relieving the overall massing. However, the shadow indicated by the latter looks somewhat exaggerated in this view. If future development of the furniture showrooms occurs, in line with the SPD, then the depth of the proposals will be masked from this viewpoint.

View 2b: View from Newmarket Road North East (24mm lens)

This is similar to the view above although the chosen lens provides more context and as such is not what the eye would see. However the image demonstrates how the frontage responds to the changing character of the Coldhams Lane junction whilst stepping down to the lower scale of the section of Newmarket Road located immediately to the west of the site.

View 3: View from Coldhams Lane looking North West (50mm lens)

The limited view cone towards Riverside created by the scale of the recently completed hotels limits views of the scheme in a wider context. From this viewpoint the scheme appears appropriate in both scale and massing.

View 4a View from River Lane looking South East (24mm lens)

This view is not as the eye would see but does provide more context. The stepping up of the scheme is acceptable. The setting back of the building line on River Lane and Rowlinson Way allows for a better transition between the proposed and existing development. However further changes may be required to address concerns about the impact of the scheme on River Lane properties opposite the site.

View 4b View from River Lane looking South East (50mm lens)

The view provides a clearer indication of how the scheme would be seen standing at the chosen viewpoint. As with the previous view the scheme is acceptable in terms of the stepped form but, as noted above, may have to be changed to respond to

concerns about daylighting to River Lane properties opposite. The view demonstrates how the scheme hides the top of the Premier Inn when looking up River Lane.

River Lane

2. The impact of the scale and massing of the development at a local level in terms of the amenity of existing River Lane properties opposite the site has been the focus of ongoing concerns at both pre-application and application stages. When the daylighting and shadow impact studies were finally submitted as part of the amendments to the application in October 2014, they revealed significant concerns with regards to the impact on existing residential properties on the north side of River Lane. As a result of these concerns the City Council commissioned an independent evaluation of the proposals.

A revised Daylight report has been submitted by GVA which concludes at paragraph 5.1, *'that whilst the proposed development will result in reduction to the existing levels of sunlight and daylight to 6-24 River Lane none of these properties will suffer from unacceptably low levels of daylight or sunlight amenity when considered in the context of the locality and against the relevant criteria detailed in the BRE Guide.'*

The independent assessment undertaken by EB7 Ltd for Cambridge City Council agrees with the conclusions reached in the GVA study. So whilst there is some additional impact and the situation versus the existing will change, the level of change is concluded to be acceptable.

As such the scale and massing of the River Lane elevation with the stepped form and general compliance with the SPD guidance is acceptable in design and conservation terms.

Central amenity space

3. A revised Daylight report for the courtyard has been submitted by GVA. The shadow impact has also been reviewed by CCC appointed consultants EB7 Ltd. The GVA report 'Executive Summary' page 4 states *'the Time in Sun assessment shows that almost 40% of the courtyard area will benefit from at least two hours of direct sun light on 21 March. This is a significant improvement on the previous scheme, where the figure was marginally over 30%.'* The GVA report page 7 states *'to summarise, the Guidelines recommend that appropriate amenity areas should receive at least two hours of sunlight on 21 March.'* BRE guidelines paragraph 3.37 says *'as a check, it is recommended that at least half of the amenity areas listed above should receive at least two hours of sunlight on 21 March.'* When considered against the BRE wording and demonstrated through the GVA assessment, the space fails to meet the minimum recommendations identified by the BRE, however the conclusion is that this is to be expected given the urban nature of the site.

It should also be borne in mind that the amenity space referred to is only now improved in terms of the percentage receiving sunlight because it has been significantly reduced in size.

Therefore, whilst the space fails to meet the 50% guidance set out by the BRE, and the impact on the courtyard is entirely due to the scale and massing of the proposals

on the development site, the independent review undertaken for the City Council supports the GVA conclusion that the shadow impact on the proposed amenity space will be acceptable.

Daylighting to courtyard bedrooms

4. A revised Daylight report has been submitted by GVA. Previous issues were resolved with the October amendments. However since these amendments, the courtyard has reduced in size and so the impact may have changed. The daylighting to bedrooms has been reviewed by City Council appointed consultants who support the conclusions of the GVA study.

Elevations

Newmarket Road

The extent of the Newmarket Road frontage has been reduced by a bay as a result of the adjustment to the building line on River Lane to accommodate proposed tree planting.

The lower 3 storey block that rises to 3 storeys with a setback upper 4th storey block measures 25m in length and remains unchanged and improves the balance of the two sections along Newmarket Road. When compared to the originally submitted scheme, the setback 4th storey has been reduced in length by approximately 5m.

A modest 200mm setback creates a notional break between this section of the building and the 4 storey corner. As discussed before the impact of the change in scale of this corner, over the guidance in the Eastern Gate SPD, in views across the Conservation Area is not considered to be harmful.

River Lane

Changes were made to this elevation in October 2014 and were broadly supported. The introduction of the transoms to the northern River Lane 2 storey section of the building, demonstrates how the further subdivision of the window 'void' helps them to relate more appropriately to the existing proportioning of houses within the Conservation Area. A problem with full height glazing to bedrooms is the impact on the privacy of occupants as well as the 'clutter' that accumulates against the lower sections. This is well demonstrated on the M1 and M2 Student Block at CB1. Transoms should be introduced to break down the overall scale of the window openings and a spandrel panel or fritted glass introduced to the lower section to improve privacy and reduce the potential for a cluttered appearance.

The setting back of the building line allows for the trees to be delivered within the site ownership. It increases the footpath width and accommodates parking spaces and drop-off in an acceptable way. Trees will need to be semi-mature to provide an appropriate scale within the streetscape.

Rowlinson Way

The concerns relating to the horizontal form of the Rowlinson Way elevation have now been addressed through the introduction of a more articulated roofscape. A series of 4 shallow pitched roofs, reminiscent of the more industrial buildings on the site, creates more variety and breaks the scale of the building down and so creates a more appropriate transition to the adjacent Conservation Area. The changes result

in an overall increase in height of the proposals along this part of the site of approx. 1m to the top of the ridge.

The building line has been setback from its previous alignment to allow for replacement tree planting at the interface between the proposed development and the existing residential terrace to the north. Trees will need to be semi-mature to provide an appropriate scale in the streetscape.

Godesdone Road

The previous amendments introduced a series of blind windows that provided some relief to the other blank rear elevation of the pavilion block. We were still concerned about the strong horizontal form of the roof against this boundary and the Conservation Area. As with the Rowlinson Way block the scheme has been amended to introduce a series of shallow pitched roofs grouped into two pairs with a flat roof section located in between them. Again the change increases the overall height of the proposals from 6m to 7m (1m change) to the top of the ridge. The overall increase is acceptable and the roof form addresses previous concerns.

Our comments dated 5th November 2014 raised a concern that 'with the specification of views now provided...we are now concerned that the rear of the Newmarket Road block will read more significantly than previously thought and that it will impact on existing Godesdone Road properties in terms of the scale relationship. This is partly due to the rear not being setback like the front elevation and due to the continuous nature of the roof form. The scale, when combined with the other horizontal forms proposed, creates an overbearing scale against the existing Conservation Area.'

Verified views have not been produced of the views on page 32 of the amended D&A Statement. The views provided show the scheme as an outline 'line model' and do not provide the detail of the change in materials and architectural detailing. We have considered the impact of the proposal further and in light of the removal of the projecting section to the western end of the upper floor. The top floor of the building is proposed to be finished in metal cladding and will accordingly read as a more subservient 'roof' element with the brick of the floors below creating the main section of the building beneath. It will be important that the proposed coping between the 3rd and 4th storeys is clearly pronounced to create a clear separation between the two elements. Our previous concerns about this view and impact on the Conservation Area therefore no longer stand.

Courtyard elevations

The uppermost sections of the courtyards are proposed to be finished in the metal cladding used on the street elevations. A modest setback of approx. 100mm is proposed formed by the change in material at the upper floor. The change in materials at the upper level helps to break down the overall massing of the proposals.

Internal layout

The internal arrangement of the proposals has been the focus of a significant part of the discussions and comments by the Design and Conservation Panel. Whilst the internal layout of the proposals is outside the normal planning considerations, it is important to note that it plays an important design driver in terms of the overall depth

of the blocks and the horizontal connectivity needed to service the bedrooms. The internal layout has therefore driven the external form.

In terms of improvements to the scheme as part of the submitted amendments, the ground floor communal area now connects via a wide staircase to the lower ground floor and allows improved access to the amenity space.

All of the accommodation in the main development is accessed by one of 2 cores. The limited number of cores results in the need for longer corridors and the corresponding arrangements of rooms. Suggestions at the pre-application stage to introduce a third core and therefore greater flexibility in the arrangement and organisation of bedroom clusters have not been incorporated. A separate block backing on to Godesdone Road is accessed via the main entrance on Newmarket Road, through the communal area, down the stairs to the lower ground floor and across the amenity space. A staircore within the block then provides access to further corridors to serving the bedroom clusters.

The arrangement of units relies on the use of double banked corridors that allow access to the bedrooms and kitchens located off them. The corridors themselves have no apparent means of natural daylighting and could combine to create a somewhat 'warren like' effect typical of this kind of student accommodation model. However, the chosen accommodation model and consequent internal arrangements are outside the control of the planning system.

Conclusion

The proposals will result in a significant change to the corner of Newmarket Road and River Lane. The verified views demonstrate the impact of the scheme in a more accurate way and allay previous concerns about how the proposals will sit in their context. As a result, the overall impact on the Conservation Area of the revised proposals is considered to be acceptable.

The amendments to the Godesdone Road and Rowlinson Way blocks to introduce a series of pitched gables, have removed previous concerns about the overly horizontal form addressed concerns about the impact of the horizontal forms of the proposed buildings that abut the adjacent Conservation Area.

In terms of the sunlight and daylight impacts, the usability of the amenity space has been independently assessed and is considered to be acceptable. The impact on properties to the east of the site on River Lane has been independently assessed and is considered to be acceptable.

The amendments to the scheme and additional information provided have improved the overall scheme and clarified the potential level of impact on the Conservation Area and adjacent properties. Overall the proposals are considered to be acceptable in design and conservation terms.