

18/1930/FUL - Appendix A

(In Appendix A the sections of the main text (other than the conclusion) relevant to the present application are underlined)

Cambridge City Council

Design & Conservation Panel

Notes of the site visit and meeting – Old Press Mill Lane Masterplan Wednesday 8th November 2017

Impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Overall, the Panel are supportive of the aspirations of the Masterplan to secure the longer term future for this important part of the city. However the Panel has concerns over certain key aspects of the proposal. Some of these concerns result from the uncertainties that any Masterplan has in respect of the detail design issues and the design of individual buildings. In a Conservation Area these uncertainties make it much harder to determine whether or not a proposed Masterplan would *preserve or enhance the character or appearance* of that Conservation Area.

The appearance of this part of the Conservation Area will necessarily change as a result of implementing these proposals; but that change could be beneficial, neutral or harmful. The character of the area is currently quite ‘gritty,’ reflecting its largely industrial past and over-gentrification of the area could be harmful to this character.

In the discussion it was agreed that at least some of these concerns might be addressed through more detail being added in key areas to provide a greater degree of certainty.

Proposed demolitions.

The Masterplan includes for the demolition of all or part of a number of existing buildings. The buildings identified for full or partial demolition were originally assessed as being of low or moderate significance in the 2008 Beacon Planning ‘Historic Environment Analysis’ that informed the SPD, though parts of three buildings identified as significant are also now included for demolition. The analysis and understanding of the area has also moved forward since the preparation of the SPD, and the updated Conservation Area appraisal for Central Cambridge identifies many of these buildings as either Buildings of Local Interest (BLIs) or buildings that contribute positively to the Conservation Area. Furthermore - and as noted by the design team - when considering

buildings for demolition, a holistic overview is required to fully understand the cumulative impacts that such demolitions might have on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In the Panel's opinion, while there is scope for some selective demolitions, the current proposals are out of balance, and the proposed demolitions are too extensive, and therefore likely to result in harm to the character of this part of the Conservation Area.

The Anchor Public House

The Panel are supportive of the proposal to demolish the early C20 northern section of this building. Any harm would be more than outweighed by the improved public realm at the eastern end of Silver Street Bridge and the opening up of views of the gable and corner turret to 16 Silver Street.

Laundress Lane Building

The current Masterplan proposes total demolition of the Laundress Lane Building and replacing it with an extended public realm that would provide improved access to the river, plus a small extension to the Anchor PH to compensate for the floor area lost through the demolitions on its north side. The existing Laundress Lane building is of some interest, particularly through its former role as a granary in association with the now lost watermill. The Panel acknowledges that the building's significance has suffered as a result of changes over time, but the building continues to have some positive townscape value through providing enclosure to the east side of the Mill Pond and defining the west side of Laundress Lane.

The Panel therefore recommends that the decision to demolish this building be reconsidered.

There would be scope for incorporating an extension to the Anchor PH within the northern end of the existing building, while the remaining ground floor might then be opened up to provide improved pedestrian access to the river in conjunction with a new pontoon on the east side of the Mill Pond. The upper floors could be used for student accommodation. The Panel also noted the fine views that can be enjoyed over the Mill Pond and Laundress Green from this building.

15 Laundress Lane (Bicycle Shop)

The Panel welcomed the decision to now retain the existing Bicycle Shop building on Laundress Lane. Whilst this is again a relatively modest structure, unlike its neighbour it retains its original segmental brick arches to the window and door openings and it contributes positively to the character of Laundress Lane

16 Mill Lane

This is a complex building and the section fronting onto Mill Lane comprises an older central section that is flanked by two 'wings' dating from the 1920s. This Mill Lane frontage is the part that is of greatest interest, and where the industrial character of the existing structure contributes positively to both the character and appearance of the area. The current Masterplan proposes to retain the façade of this Mill Lane section, and to construct a new building behind this façade that incorporates commercial space at ground level and student accommodation above; the latter set around two raised courtyards.

The Panel were informed that the existing building is a framed structure, but the constrained floor-to-ceiling heights and the poor relationship of the floors to the street make it difficult to reuse. Whilst this may be the case, the Panel would wish to see further work done on the possible retention and adaptive reuse of a greater element of that part of the existing building fronting Mill Lane. It may be possible for commercial uses to be accommodated in 1 ½ storey height elements that incorporate street level access on mezzanine levels that then lead down into semi-basement areas. The retention of just the Mill Lane façade should only be as a last resort.

The Panel acknowledges that there is then scope for demolition and new building(s) to be constructed north of this Mill Lane section, and the Panel has no concerns over the demolition and replacement of the late C20 infill element fronting onto Silver Street; noting also the opportunity that this would afford for improving permeability through the site.

Millers Yard

The Panel were informed that under the current Masterplan only the front section of Miller's Yard facing onto the south side of Mill Lane is to be retained. The rear section is to be demolished and replaced by a new building providing student accommodation for Pembroke College. Whilst

the Panel are not too concerned over the loss of the rear element of Miller's Yard, they would wish to see further work done on the possible retention and incorporation of the Bailey Grundy Barratt Building into the southern wing of the new courtyard.

Mill Lane Lecture Rooms

The Masterplan proposes that the existing Mill Lane Lecture Rooms building be demolished and its site incorporated into the new Pembroke College student accommodation set around a new courtyard. Although this building is the work of Dunbar Smith, who were architects of some note and who also designed the extensions to the Fitzwilliam Museum; the Panel are fairly relaxed concerning the fate of this building, which they regard as contributing less to the character of Mill Lane than its neighbours.

75 Trumpington Street

The Masterplan proposes that a major pedestrian link be created from the existing Pembroke College to the new student accommodation on the south side of Mill Lane through the demolition and replacement of 75 Trumpington Street. The Panel acknowledges that No 75 is the least significant of the older buildings along this part of Trumpington Street, but nevertheless it contributes to the setting of the Grade II listed Kenmare House at 74 Trumpington Street.

Kenmare House is quite different from its neighbours; a double-fronted symmetrical composition containing four Venetian windows and with its front elevation set back from the pavement behind a dwarf wall that once incorporated railings. Part of this building's significance is derived from this hierarchical relationship with its neighbours, and it would be important for any replacement building to continue to provide enclosure to both the forecourt of Kenmare House and Trumpington Street. Furthermore, when considering the Masterplan proposals for this area, the Panel has concerns that the suggestion to incorporate the forecourt of Kenmare House into the street might dilute the linear nature of Trumpington Street, whereas reinstating the lost railings to the dwarf walls might greater reveal the significance of Kenmare House.

Therefore, while the Panel are not opposed to the principle of demolition and replacement of No 75, further work is required so as to clearly demonstrate that it would not result in harm to the character of this part of the conservation area, nor would it adversely impact on the

significance of Kenmare House. The Panel would however, resist the demolition of No 76 and/or the construction of a wider frontage replacement building that failed to acknowledge the historic plot widths along this part of Trumpington Street.

Finally, on this matter, the Panel considers that further work is required on how the pedestrian circulation is to be handled between the existing Pembroke College and the new court. It might be more fitting for a raised table type crossing to be constructed at the junction of Mill Lane and Trumpington Street rather than outside No 74, while the impact on Hobson's Conduit will also need to be carefully considered.

The Panel notes that access to the existing college might also utilise the gateway immediately south of the college chapel rather than channelling all students via the gateway at the Porters' Lodge.

Syndics Building.

Some discussion took place amongst the Panel over the merits of retaining the Syndics Building in its current form or returning it to its original single storey form. The Panel concluded that, on balance, it would be preferable to retain the Syndics Building in its current two storey form, but to remove the rather awkward 'S' shaped first floor link from the Syndics Building to the Pitt Building. Retention in its current form would retain the sense of enclosure to both Mill Lane and the courtyard at the rear of the Pitt Building.

New pedestrian routes and permeability.

The improved permeability of this area will be crucial to the public benefit derived from the proposals. The Panel broadly welcomes the proposed new pedestrian circulation within the site and the linking to routes beyond the area, but it will be important that these remain open and are not closed off by colleges. In particular, the Panel are concerned that the through routes on the north side of Mill Lane remain ungated.

The re-purposing of buildings.

The Panel were informed that the majority of the retained buildings would be adapted for new uses, and that in most cases this would include an element of commercial use at ground floor level. Some concern was expressed as to whether high commercial rents would result in a level of 'sanitising' at street level that would rid this area of its

quasi-industrial feel. This concern is likely to be compounded if the level of demolition and new build is too high; leading to the loss of smaller, quirky spaces that might otherwise command a lower rent, and thereby encouraging a more diverse usage that in turn might engender a new and unique character for this part of the city.

Such diversity might be further encouraged if the evolving Masterplan allowed for a greater degree of flexibility in the size and use of the ground floor spaces, and if the University adopts a flexible approach when setting rents and avoids relentlessly pursuing the highest returns.

Public realm, the riverfront, landscape treatment and street furniture.

The Panel would like to know more about how the public realm is to be treated within the proposals. The Panel appreciate that it is still early days in the design process and with limited time available, it was not possible to explore all aspects in detail. Amongst other issues, the Panel are keen to know if Mill Lane would become a shared surface or if pavements are to be retained, and how the river frontage is to be detailed. The treatment of the public realm will be a key component in defining the character of the area, along with associated street furniture and the provision of new street lighting. Given the tight nature of the spaces, the Panel would encourage the use of good quality street lighting that is mounted on the buildings, rather than cluttering the public realm with new lighting columns.

The proposed re-modelling of the ground floor of the University Centre, along with the treatment of the space between that building and the river, are also important aspects of the project that require further work.

The opportunity to re-site the boathouse building so as to open up views of the river from along Little St Mary's Lane would be worth exploring as part of a detailed reconsideration of this space.

Silver Street.

Although beyond the parameters of the Masterplan, pedestrian circulation along Silver Street is a real issue, compounded by the existing narrow pavements and the number of tour buses that drop off day visitors at the west end of Silver Street. The Panel wish to encourage the City Council to work with the University to explore how the scope of the Masterplan might be expanded to help address this

problem, and to examine what opportunities might exist for widening the pavements along Silver Street. The City Council's emerging work on City Centre Access and the Spaces and Movement SPD could play a significant role here and the Panel will look forward to seeing the results.

Conclusion.

This Masterplan presents a 'once in a generation' opportunity to transform and enliven a part of the city long in need of investment. There are however a number of questions that remain unanswered.

The emerging Draft Local Plan stipulates the need to provide 350 student rooms within this site. How those rooms are to be provided, the extent of demolition and re-building, and the impact of any consequential gentrification of the area require further investigation to ensure the area's 'gritty' character is retained.

Although in general terms the Panel feel the design team are heading in the right direction, from this initial examination of the emerging Masterplan the Panel concluded that there should be greater retention of some of the older buildings. This would help preserve the character and appearance of the area and enhance the experience of those visiting it.

Further work is clearly needed and the Panel would look forward to re-visiting these proposals at a future meeting.

VERDICT – GREEN (1), AMBER (5)