

25 June Planning Speaker Statements

25/00516/FUL Varsity Hotel – Cllr Bick – Item 8 and 25/00411/FUL Varsity Hotel – Item 9

I am a city councillor who represents the city centre area which includes the Varsity Hotel. I have made representations at the committee on previous applications to enclose the roof top of the hotel into an additional storey.

Cambridge city centre is a unique environment, comprising many of the city's remarkable, world-renowned heritage buildings. Yet I am well aware that this is a working city and that its centre must evolve and innovate and I have come to this committee in the past to support developments which do that, where they work with the grain of what makes it such a special place.

Although the enclosure of the hotel roof top might be understandable from a purely entrepreneurial point of view, it unfortunately does not work with the grain of the historic environment of the city centre. It is really important that this committee continues to tell the difference.

I note that the Case Officer clearly identifies the materiality of the recent decisions of the committee to these new applications and in particular of their confirmation by two planning inspectors at appeal. Consistency is a necessary quality for the credibility of the planning authority: otherwise repeated applications for more or less the same project which do not address the reasons for earlier refusal will be incentivised.

Clearly the decisions to be made today must be rooted in the detail of the applications in front of you. In my own reading of both of them, I was looking to see if the changes made address the reasons for refusal of previous iterations of the same basic proposition. I see the changes made – but I do not believe they address the concerns.

Indeed both new applications were surprisingly submitted before the reasoning for the refusal of the appeal for the last one was known. In

that judgement the Inspector provides a very clear analysis, much of which relates equally to the scope of today's applications.

As can be seen from the visuals, under both new applications the building would still protrude further into the skyline from several key surrounding positions. With all the changes in material, it remains to the eye a metal framed superstructure. As officers have commented, with both variations, it appears in its context as an alien structure, discordantly drawing attention from the surrounding features. There are many planning policies, referred to in the officer's report, which are rightly flashing a red light for a sensitive location like this.

Though there are similarly powerful arguments relating to the various different viewpoints, the ones valued and seen by most people are that from Jesus Green and that from Magdalene Bridge, where the intrusion cannot escape the eye. These will be even starker in winter months, both because there will be less foliage and because of lighting coming from the newly enclosed floor.

No new redeeming benefits are provided by either of these iterations. As was noted previously, benefits do exist in terms of employment, but as the inspector has assessed, these are minor in relation to the potential harm, which is just as great as in previous applications.

I would therefore urge the committee to refuse both applications. In my view our planning policies combined with the very recent and material decision of the Planning Inspector don't offer much option. If not refused today, there is no appeal possible to protect the environment, which we should be treasuring, from irreparable harm.

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25/01440/FUL 22 Grafton Street – Matt White – Item 10

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Matt White, and I am the owner of 22 Grafton Street – the house my parents bought in 1981 and where I grew up. I've been

carrying out much-needed renovations to modernise and expand the house in line with what my late parents always hoped to achieve. I'm incredibly proud of the quality of accommodation we've created and pleased to be keeping this home in the family and continuing our connection with Cambridge.

The application before you is for a very modest change: an increase in HMO occupancy from 6 to 7 people. This single extra occupant triggers a change in planning use class, and that is why I am here. Nothing else is changing – the works are already largely complete, the house remains in the same family ownership, and the management will be handled by a professional, experienced agency. I respectfully submit that the material impact of this change is minimal.

I understand that the term “HMO” can raise concerns. But this is not a low-quality bedsit or transient short-let property. This is a beautifully designed, secure, high-standard home, with space standards that exceed regulations. The interior and shared social spaces are arranged to avoid disruption to neighbours, and our layout intentionally faces away from neighbouring properties.

Some objectors have raised concerns about anti-social behaviour and short-term letting. Let me be clear: these are typically let for at least 12 months, just like the surrounding homes, and will be actively managed to prevent issues. The design even incorporates Secure by Design principles to improve the safety of the adjacent green space, which has suffered from unrelated historic issues for decades.

In short, this is a carefully considered, well-managed home for a small number of people – no different in impact to what's already permitted, but requiring planning approval purely because of technical thresholds.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will support this application.

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My name is Alex Babouris, and I'm the founder of Babouris – a specialist in professionally managed HMO accommodation, now more widely known as co-living. I'm speaking today in support of our high-quality application for Grafton Street and to reassure you of the way we operate – particularly in areas where sensitivity to the local community is vital.

We manage over 1,000 rooms locally, making us the most experienced operators in Cambridge. Our approach has been recognised nationally with several HMO Awards – including Best HMO Agency and Best Manager of Professional HMOs – and locally, where we've received an Honours Award from the Red Cross Residents Association for our work in the Greenlands community.

We've successfully delivered and continue to manage high-profile schemes in sensitive locations such as:

328–332 Mill Road, opposite the mosque;

3 Willis Road, in Petersfield;

And 18 Upper Gwydir Street – all of which operate quietly, respectfully, and in harmony with their communities.

Our typical resident is a young professional earning £37,000 a year, who stays with us for an average of 14 months. These are not transient occupants – they are healthcare workers, researchers, engineers, and early-career professionals who need affordable, well-managed homes close to the city centre.

Our management model includes:

Routine professional cleaning;

Structured waste management;

Support and education, plus 24/7 support;

Proactive repairs and maintenance;

Clear house rules;

Strict onboarding and suitability checks;

Community standards

- all as part our comprehensive management plans

Our goal is simple: to deliver housing that strengthens communities – for the benefit of everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration.