

29 July Planning Speaker Statements

#1 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (John Redford)

This letter of representation focuses on possible damage to nearby properties as a result of the demolition and construction works proposed at Wolfson Court.

Vibration is a significant concern given local experience during the construction of the adjacent Centre for Mathematical Sciences and the nearby Hinsley Lane, involving immediate cessation of work and removal of respective plant in one case, cracks in a house in the other. There is anxiety because of the unusual nature of local ground conditions, involving clay of a type, Lower Cretaceous Gault Clay, peculiar to the Cambridge area. The leading national expert on this substrate describes its 'variable and unreliable nature', because of which 'general engineering and building guide lines do not necessarily apply'. The applicant's consulting ground engineers confirmed the sensitive conditions, reporting that on the Wolfson Court site 'vibrations during installation of driven piles could damage existing neighbouring structures'.

There have been some welcome provisional undertakings on working practices, including 'complete avoidance of high vibration generation activities – e.g. percussive piling and dynamic ground stabilisation', with 'vibration generating activities [being] carried out away from the sensitive receptors wherever possible' - but anxieties remain.

British Standards recognise potential for dynamic vibration magnification due to resonance causing damage to buildings 100 or 200 metres away, and the commitment to vibration mitigation is hedged by being 'so far as reasonably practicable', which means having regard to financial implications as well as local conditions. Recommended planning condition 32 seeks to protect nearby households from vibration-caused damage, requiring LPA approval of 'Vibration impact assessment methodology, mitigation measures, vibration monitoring and recording statements in accordance with the provisions of BS 5228-2:2009+A1:2014.' However, the standard national condition does not seem adequate, without more elaboration, for the additional risk here, where a more strongly precautionary approach seems needed. Arrangements with stricter monitoring hurdles are permitted in the Standard which cautions that 'the various formulae...to predict vibration

levels at a receiving point do not take into account variability of ground strata'. It recognises circumstances in which the usual 'guide values' on safe vibration 'might need to be reduced'.

Given the sensitivity of the site's location, it would be reasonable to put in place additional conditional requirements for the outputs of monitoring of exigences at the site boundaries, and for any complaints received to be submitted to the council on a fortnightly basis. This bespoke arrangement would be consistent with recent practice at other sensitive locations e.g. Owlstone Croft. I would strongly request also a condition that vibration monitoring equipment be placed in nearby homes. I understand the Environmental Health Officer does not think these necessary: however, they would help to give reassurance. And I request an arrangement to ensure that if there are any problems likely to cause damage to nearby homes, these can be detected immediately and construction halted/modified. Verbal assurances have been given of achieving a pause for investigation via a contact phone number. The case officer has explained there would be significant details agreed at the condition discharge stage, with residents fully consulted at the time. This is helpful but objectors would like the addition of reasonable bespoke measures to be firmed up at committee if possible.

.....

#2 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Catherine Redford)

Scale of Wolfson Court development

My primary concern is the huge scale of this development. It is misdescribed as merely 'replacement' of the existing accommodation. The number of rooms proposed will be nearly three times the number in the existing accommodation (408 vs. around 145). This was not made apparent in the exhibition last June. Some of the problems with the proposals would be much less severe if they came closer to replacement and the building were a lot smaller.

The Officer's report suggests that the massive increase in numbers is acceptable in part because 'it is already located on an established site used for student accommodation' but that simply dodges the issue of intensification effects. The Local Plan is clear on the potential problem of scale, LP46, 6.13 stating that 'careful consideration should be given to the scale and impact of the development on local residential amenity.' Without enough consideration, the report denies that a

development of this scale, occupied by multiple institutions, with its main entrance on a quiet, mainly residential, street in a Conservation Area, threatens residential amenity. He writes: 'There is no reason to suppose that an increase in intensity of use of the site from the uplift in student numbers could not be well-managed'. But there is every reason to suppose exactly that.

The pattern of use and activity from the far greater number and varying type of future occupiers, as well as attendant servicing of that activity, can hardly escape affecting the residential amenity and character of the area. Clarkson Road has other University facilities on it, mainly hidden behind trees, but these are teaching and research facilities, not residential, and essentially in daytime use only. Adding this huge number of rooms containing transient residents will completely change the peaceful character of the street, overwhelming the number of current permanent residents rather than fostering a well-balanced mixed community. The development will be effectively the same size as nearby entire colleges' main sites (Churchill College at 469 rooms, Fitzwilliam College at 382); but will be far more dense (not containing typical communal college facilities, prompting late night comings and goings to cafes and bars elsewhere) and as currently proposed it will not have the safeguards on the behaviour of young students that colleges typically have, e.g. senior members of staff present on site (the promise of wardens has been withdrawn) and a secure perimeter – benefitting student safety too - with gated access reliably controlled by porters who are present and available 24/7. It is good to see that the proposed development includes some porter provision; however, without a secure boundary this will be far less effective. The benefits of allowing site access for the public are minimal as there is already an adjoining footpath from Madingley Road to Clarkson Road.

The original suggestion that the student occupants would be almost entirely postgraduate, perhaps on whole year licences, has now been changed. Undergraduates or students on many of the one year post graduate courses will not be present for some 3 months in the summer, perhaps also at Christmas and Easter. Letting hundreds of rooms in vacation to very temporary visitors with no attachment to the local area, coming awkwardly from a wide range of sometimes distant institutions, is lucrative for the colleges (and possible already while the undergraduates are housed elsewhere) but exacerbates both local amenity harm and doubt about good occupancy management.

.....

#3 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court -) - (Dr Belinda Bullard)

Scale and design

The approval of this development as it stands would change forever the historic charm of Clarkson Road. The site is in the West Cambridge Conservation Area. The neighbouring houses are on a domestic scale, built for families; many have large mature gardens. A Grade II listed house is directly opposite the site. The Newton Institute and the Maths Centre are on plots of appropriate size and are only occupied during the day. The Local Plan states that in a Conservation Area: 'Proposals for new development should create a scale and form that is appropriate to existing buildings,...which complement the local identity of an area.' The proposed development does not fulfil these requirements. The applicants want to demolish a student residence with 144 rooms and replace it with five blocks having a total of 408 rooms. The blocks are large and barrack-like and with four storeys, they would dominate the neighbourhood. Overall, the appearance of the buildings would be a complicated mixture of heights and angles on a site not large enough for the size or the style. The brief for the development seems to be to provide accommodation for as many people as possible, including transient visitors and to minimize communal space.

Amenity space

The number of people proposed for the site means there is little 'social space'. The two proposed areas of social space are a total of 100 m², which would allow about 0.5 m² per person if half the occupants used the space. A solution would be to keep the existing library, which would provide an ample communal area.

Light pollution

The windows and glazed doors present a large area of glass and the glare suffered by neighbours after dark would be considerable. The kitchen windows on two floors, which are a total of 4.2 m high, face on to Clarkson Road and would be particularly polluting. The Maths Institute installed light-sensitive blinds on the windows. A similar solution should be a requirement here. External lighting should be reduced to a minimum to comply with Conservation Area guidelines. The EHO holds this to be lighting zone 2 not 3.

Passivhaus certification

The colleges and university have spearheaded Passivhaus certification for new buildings. Certification assures high-quality buildings, while reducing environmental impact. Wolfson Court will not be Passivhaus certified. Examples of new-build Passivhaus student housing in the West Cambridge Conservation Area are: Cranmer Road for King's College, Lucy Cavendish College, Newnham College and Hinsley Lane for St John's College. All are noted for the simple clean lines of the architecture and the harmony of the buildings with the surroundings. St John's could take a cue from their postgraduate student housing at Hinsley Lane, which includes additional students from Lucy Cavendish College and Clare Hall. Hinsley Lane has 245 rooms in 39 terraced houses with ample social space. There is no external lighting directly outside the terraces. The measured operational energy cost of Hinsley Lane is 53.3 kWh/m²/yr, while it is estimated that for Wolfson Court it will be 74 kWh/m²/yr and could be higher. The terraced Hinsley Lane houses are two to three storeys and a large proportion of the site is garden or left wild. In 2026 Cambridge should aspire to Passivhaus standards for large multiply-occupied buildings. Wolfson Court could achieve this by directing costs towards a reduced number of high-quality buildings of three storeys, increasing the social space both inside and outside and reducing the number of bedrooms to about half the 408 proposed.

.....

#4 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Elizabeth Davies)

This representation for the Planning Committee is on safety issues on Clarkson Road.

I understand that the highways consultee has effectively ruled out the possibility of demolition and construction vehicles exiting from the Wolfson Court site onto Madingley Road, leaving their egress to Clarkson Road instead, then travelling east around a bend to the awkward junction with Grange Road. This is alarming in safety terms for other road users.

Clarkson Road is increasingly busy with cyclists of which I am one. The road is narrow , narrower than Wilberforce and Adams Road and already difficult to negotiate with vehicular traffic, often in both directions and at school collection time is already hazardous for cyclists and vehicular

traffic. I anticipate with the completion of the Adams Road cycle route there will be a significant increase in residents of Wilberforce Road, the Sports Centre and Tennis Club using Clarkson Road with the deterrence of the Adams Road cycle route forcing frequent stops for car drivers and making it unattractive to use. It is accordingly with horror that it is proposed that construction traffic for Wolfson Court exit the site via Clarkson Road. The road is barely wide enough to accommodate safely the cars and cycles as it is now without the addition of construction traffic to the cyclists, cars and coaches (often but not always related to the Sports Centre use) that use it.

Also the planning framework for Cambridge gives priority in road use to pedestrians and cyclists, with motor vehicles lowest in the hierarchy ('priority will be given to passenger transport services, cyclists and pedestrians,' Transport Strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, adopted by Cambridgeshire County Council in 2014). The University Maths Centre (>1500 staff and students), Camcycle and residents had expressed serious concern about the safety of cyclists if demolition/construction lorries egress the site via narrow Clarkson Road.

Not only is Clarkson Road unusually narrow, it is also weak, breaking up when used by lorries far heavier than those in service when the road was built. The resulting surface becomes less cycle-friendly the more lorries use this route. The applicant's safety consultant's highly inaccurate report may have led to some complacency about risks on Clarkson Road, saying, for example, that there are cycle lanes. This is obviously not the case if you have ever seen Clarkson Road.

Neither the applicant nor the officers acknowledge the important role of Clarkson Road as a link in the City cycle network or refer to the evidence supplied by residents of significant term-time traffic throughout the day which will not be assisted by the operating hour limits that take account of the needs of the school. There is no evidence of serious assessment of the problems

for cyclists sharing this lorry route; no discussion of ways of reducing the heightened risk for cyclists and other road users (eg speed limits, overtaking restrictions, banksmen permanently at the tight junction with Grange Road when lorries are turning). In effect they reverse the hierarchy set by the planning framework, giving priority to lorries over cyclists. Please will the Planning Committee ensure that cyclists be given higher priority. Otherwise unnecessary accidents are to be expected.

.....

#5 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Jessa Leff)

I object to the proposed demolition and rebuilding of Wolfson Court in Clarkson Road by St John's College (reference 25/04832/FUL).

My house in Cockcroft Place faces Clarkson Road and I am concerned about several aspects of the plan to demolish and rebuild Wolfson Court, and wonder what will be proposed to mitigate these risks:

- Possible damage to my house and others in the neighbourhood caused by vibration from heavy plant machinery used in demolition and construction
- Risks to cyclists from big lorries using the very narrow road
- Pollution and noise from the lorries in what has been a peaceful area where many people spend time at home during the day

I hope people involved in planning will give consideration to the people who will be living and working in this area when thinking about the impact of this project.

#6 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Dee Mitting)

Thank you for your consideration of local residents queries and suggestions.

The existing buildings, low in height, spaciouly designed with beautiful courtyards are fundamentally well designed for harmonious living. Student accommodation these days apparently requires luxury hotel standards of living, each with their ensuite bathrooms and so on. A revamp of the existing design, I'm told, is too expensive, but to who? Is the quality of life of long term residents and upkeep of the natural environment taken into account, including the demand on water and other utilities and resources in the area?

I attach a document concerning Representation on Occupancy, which as stated here is still unclear. It suggests that the quantity of people to be accommodated at any one time is equivalent to 5 leading hotels in the region. Why so many for 'students'? Is it that a large hotel is in fact the aim?

Is this a tactic utilised by the University and others to double the demand in order to fulfil what is actually required?

Clarkson Rd is relatively narrow and has underground pipe networks that date back to the 1930's or so. Heavy vehicles consistently wreck the water pipes, noticeable to me at a pedestrian entrance to Cockcroft Place, near No.5, but which happens at other points too.

As with the building of the Mathematical Centre, access for Heavy vehicles and machinery does need to be from Madingley Rd, reasons for which I believe have been stated in full elsewhere.

Representation on occupancy

Many months after this application was submitted, it remains unclear exactly who will be occupying Wolfson Court. It is concerning that the application is being considered while it is not transparent on a matter with such important implications for amenity.

The pause to amend the description has added some puzzles to existing confusion. Sec. 11 of the report (Principle of Development), does not altogether square with stated accommodation needs - Newnham's for 60, not 70; academic visitors for around 20 rather than, suddenly upped, 49; Maths Institute with no current need for staff accommodation yet allocated it, and who can the highly mysterious 'student Fellows' be? Odd too find it said (11.15) that 'The application site is located amongst other student accommodation blocks'. The Maths Institute is not an accommodation building. Opaque description of student type persists, a July letter (report, Appendix B, 9) saying 'the majority of the development is expected to be occupied by graduates who occupy rooms throughout the year' whilst also referencing the student management plan which states, (p.1), 'The majority of Lucy Cavendish students [in 300+ rooms] are likely to be undergraduates in their second and third years of study'. The officer recommendation had been based on postgraduates overseen by wardens; now the proposition appears to be mainly undergraduates without wardens (Heritage and Planning Statement, echoed in D&A, "there will be student wardens on the site"; student management plan, sec.10, 'Wardens are not envisaged or deemed necessary'. But (LP46 (g)), wardens with seniority both support students and help control behaviour.

Clarity on the occupiers of so large a site matters because of differing implications for amenity of nearby residents in this quiet residential area

(not comparable with Mount Pleasant). The risk of disturbance is greatest from the less mature undergraduate population, least from doctoral students who can be expected to feel more commitment to the local area. And it is with undergraduates, and June-finishing masters students, that disruptive short-term letting in vacations, linked to loosely defined 'educational purposes', becomes an issue. The scale if most of the rooms were let would exceed that of 5 leading city hotels combined. But residential amenity could be considerably protected with the full year graduate occupancy sometimes promised. Lucy's need specifically for undergraduate rooms has not been demonstrated. The College already accommodates them, and it is open to them to house postgraduates from this expanding group in Wolfson Court, moving much of the summer trade to sites with fewer residential constraints, to the College's financial advantage. The latest occupancy documents are also worrying because of the hundreds of institutions they could bring in, from ARU to ill-defined 'affiliates' of both universities. Divided management responsibilities between the four identified institutions are already problematic: widening them to the extent envisaged is alarming. Will the committee please retain oversight of the s.106 agreement for the sake of residential amenity?

#7 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Polly Meeks)

Representation on climate change

In spite of their energy efficiency measures, the Wolfson Court proposals have not paid enough attention to climate change. Their green credentials relate to the long term (although the buildings do not meet the Passivhaus standards incorporated into a number of new College buildings, including one for Lucy Cavendish College). But the consequences of galloping climate change are so bad and becoming so close that on that issue the medium term should take precedence.

Perhaps planning law says so too? NPPF 161 says 'the planning system should support the transition to net zero by 2050' and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings'. And 163 says 'the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change should also be considered in preparing and assessing planning applications, taking into account the full range of potential climate change impacts'. But in the case the applicant makes for demolishing the existing buildings, the full range of impacts isn't taken into account

because, as our group of objectors has been arguing, there is no absolute unit reporting of upfront carbon or embodied carbon totals for more basic refurbishment options for the existing buildings. Due climate change impact comparison between basic refit and entire rebuild has not been carried out.

This seems also to have been the view of the Design Review Panel whose full report has only been released to the public this month despite the review dating from May last year. They say the comparison made has been ‘somewhat skew[ed]’ by requiring the old rooms to be refitted to match the standard the new ones would reach, and that the brief the architect was given to work to – which objectors have not been allowed to see, after several requests to do so – also got in the way of considering worthwhile reuse. The 1990s blocks ‘appear in good condition’ and a simpler refit plan without the constraint of the brief ‘might have tipped the balance in favour of retention’.

But it’s not as if building is underway. For the sake of avoiding climate tipping points, is it too big a stretch to suggest the comparison could/should be looked at again at this point, without skewed carbon accounting? If so, a charitable organisation such as St John’s College might feel it right to use the newly established (voluntary) UK Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard in making the comparisons, built on the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Professional Standard, *Whole life carbon assessment for the built environment*.

Another factor is the weight that should be given to the emerging Local Plan. The government has described this as at an advanced stage, and Regulation 19, the legal checking, is now underway. The officer report says it can only be given limited weight: yes, but that can still be quite significant weight given the new plan’s progress, and it is not evident that it has been given *any* weight in the assessment the report makes on this, even though climate change is a material consideration. Policy CC/CE, *Supporting a circular economy and sustainable resource use*, sets up a presumption ‘in favour of repairing, refurbishing, and re-using existing buildings over their demolition...to avoid the wastage of embodied carbon in existing buildings and to avoid the creation of new embodied carbon in replacement buildings’. It is doubtful whether the present application would succeed in rebutting this unless by the ‘exceptional’ route of showing delivery of benefits sufficient to outweigh carbon savings foregone, and this is what the D&A Appendix slider comparisons presented may point to. But some of the claimed benefits could be well gained from refit and modest rebuild, as could some relief

of the pressure on the city's housing market. However, perhaps it is another story with a College imperative that comes into the slider: 'return on investment'.

#8 - Ref:25/04832/FUL Wolfson Court - (Sarah Marsh)

Representation on the vulnerable residential amenity of Cockcroft Place

In their discussions of residents' amenity, the applicants and the planning authority have tended to write as if Cockcroft Place doesn't exist. Its occupants were not identified as sensitive receptors in the consultation process, until other residents pressed for this.

Cockcroft Place comprises 60 households (flats and houses). It borders Clarkson Road to the north and Grange Road to the east. Its nearest building is some twenty paces from the present Wolfson Court buildings. It is a well-liked mix of social and private housing, with occupants ranging from infants to retirees. It operates a successful 'quiet hours' regime from 2300 to 0730.

Residents have lived experience of student hostels bad and good on Clarkson Road. In the past there was an undergraduate hostel (without effective wardens) in Clarkson Road, whose members inflicted frequent, serious, raucous disturbance from 2300 till the small hours as they walked merrily along Grange Road and Clarkson Road, alongside and often through Cockcroft Place, back to the hostel from bars in town and colleges, or as their visitors walked home from drinking in the hostel after closing time.

The loss of many neighbours' amenity from broken nights became so bad that the college owning the hostel replaced the undergraduates with postgraduates and installed a competent warden. This largely restored Cockcroft's amenity. The former Wolfson Court hostel under Girton College's ownership used the same precaution – largely postgrads; and senior warden.

The applicants seem to want instead largely undergraduates and no wardens. And a vast increase in numbers from c.145 to over 400 in term-time - potentially to very many more in vacation when the 'single occupancy' but bizarrely double bedded term-time rooms can be opened up to couples of visiting ecotourists and conferees.

In conversation with objectors the case officer argued that serious disturbance by Wolfson Court occupants off-site, along Clarkson and Grange Roads beside Cockcroft Place, is irrelevant to the approval/rejection of the application for the hostel and beyond the remit of planning. We find that difficult to reconcile with the Local Plan (Policy 46) on the acceptability of new student accommodation being subject to: 'minimising any potential for antisocial

behaviour and, if appropriate, being warden controlled' (p.161), while 'careful consideration should be given to the scale and impact of the development on residential amenity' (p.169).

Is it that the amenity of residents of social housing doesn't count - is it only big houses that do? Disdain towards Cockroft Place is also evident in consideration of the vibration problem discussed in another representation. Please safeguard the amenity of this successful mixed community by requiring that student occupiers will be whole-year postgraduates of the three identified Colleges and that there will be four senior wardens on the site.