

PLANNING REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday 15 December 2011

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Brett (Chair), Altaf-Khan, Armitage, Lygo, Rowley, Young, Coulter, Khan and Price.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock (Democratic and Electoral Services Officer) and Murray Hancock (City Development)

22. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the following:-

Councillor Antonia Bance – Councillor Bob Price substituted;
Councillor Laurence Baxter – Councillor Shah Khan substituted;
Councillor Ed Turner – Councillor Van Coulter substituted.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations were made:-

- (1) Councillor Khan – personal interest in the planning application for 51 Union Street as a member of the West Area Planning Committee which first heard the application; however he was hearing it afresh tonight and approached it with an open mind.
- (2) Councillor Brett made a personal statement concerning an article in the Oxford Mail which had highlighted views he had previously expressed about some of the comments made about students resident in East Oxford. He clarified his position and made it clear that he approached the planning application before the Committee with an open mind and would take all points of view into account before coming to a decision.

24. PLANNING APPLICATION 11/02248/FUL - 51 UNION STREET

The Head of City Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended) concerning the demolition of the former school canteen, erection of 26 en-suite student rooms with shared facilities, 2 parking spaces for disabled students and 26 covered cycle spaces – 51 Union Street, Oxford. Murray Hancock (Planning) presented the report to the Committee.

Councillor Brett (Chair) explained that he would allow up to 10 minutes for people speaking against the application and the same for those speaking in favour of it.

Sue Widgery (Head Teacher, East Oxford Primary School) and Halima Baranas (Parent Governor) spoke against the application and made the following points:-

- (1) The objectors were not “anti-student” but felt that there was a disproportionate number of students in East Oxford, and that this imbalance impacted upon local residents;
- (2) Access to the site was a concern because it was very narrow and there was no separate access;
- (3) Further lighting would have implications for local people – there had been issues already with lighting on the all-weather pitch;
- (4) The Thames Valley Police Crime Prevention Officer had suggested that the school should improve its boundaries (which had been done), and that there should be the submission of a lighting plan for the site. Concern had been expressed about a possible increase in users of the school site;
- (5) She felt that having student accommodation overlooking the playground of a primary school would be a safeguarding issue
- (6) The school already contained an Early Intervention Hub, youth facilities and a lifelong learning facility on the site. It was a well used site. This added to the concern about the narrow entrance;
- (7) There was also fear that the new facility could be used outside university terms by students who were left unsupervised;
- (8) Other uses of the site were possible, but did not seem to have been explored;
- (9) Strong local feeling was exemplified by a petition of over 200 names.

Mark Crampton-Smith (Applicants Letting Agent), Peter Uzzell (Agent for the Applicant) and Daniel Stone (Charities and Community Officer, Oxford University Students Union) spoke in favour of the application and made the following points:-

- (1) The site had unrestricted Class B1 use, so could be used for offices or light industry, and if so would employ more staff who would generate more car movements than the proposed use before the Committee;
- (2) Security would be enforced by a 2m high metal fence around the site, and there was little likelihood of trespass by students;
- (3) The playing pitch on the school site already had a wall and fence around it and the school buildings were 50m away from the proposed blocks of student flats. Most urban schools had residential developments around and overlooking them;
- (4) The site was in a 24 hour CPZ, and was in any case intended to be a car-free development. The access road contained speed humps and its use by 26 students was little different to its use by the 35 employees who worked at the site previously;
- (5) The Letting Agents were well versed in the management of student property. They maintained strict controls on their sites and respected the views and activities of the local community;

- (6) They were also mindful of child protection issues and controls over residents of the student flats would mitigate in favour of child safety. It was also useful for young people, possibly away from home for the first time, to learn how to live amicably within a community;
- (7) There had been many adverse comments about students, but these flats were intended for graduate students who had a very different lifestyle from undergraduates. There was the potential for students to add something to the local community by working with it, and this should not be overlooked.

The following points were then clarified by the Planning Officer, the Applicant, and the Objectors, in response to questions put by members of the Committee:-

- CCTV would be installed at the entrance to the site and the site was intended to be car-free apart from 2 parking spaces for disabled students);
- It would be unreasonable to condition the occupation of the site to post-graduate residents only. There was not normally any distinction drawn between graduates and undergraduates;
- It was expected that Oxfordshire County Council Highways Authority would have visited the site – this was their normal practice;
- The access route was owned by Oxfordshire County Council but the applicant had an unrestricted right to pass over it;
- Within the school boundary, when moving around the site, the ratio of children to teachers was 25:1, when moving beyond the site it was 8:1;
- It was anticipated that students resident in the flats would be on full year, full time courses. In other developments student accommodation could be used for (for example) conference delegates during vacations when not in use by students;
- Proposed condition 3 limited the site's use to full time students only. Language Students, being on short term courses, would not comply with this and so would not be eligible to occupy the development;
- The Police Crime Prevention officer had been consulted on the application but had made no comment to Planning Officers – the reference to the Crime Prevention Officer was in relation to an email reply direct to Councillor Benjamin;
- Lighting could be controlled by a Grampian condition; planning officers did not feel that the County Council was likely to oppose the introduction of lighting to the access road.

Councillor Nuala Young then sought a deferral for the application for the following reasons:-

- (1) To allow the Applicant to meet with the Police Crime Prevention Officer in order to help produce a lighting plan for the site:

- (2) To assess whether or not dusk to dawn lighting would impact on the residents;
- (3) To assess whether or not dusk to dawn lighting would encourage people to access the school grounds and loiter there.

Councillor Young expressed concerns about parking, increase in traffic and loss of amenity. She felt that safety would be compromised and that designing out crime was an important feature.

Councillor Bob Price proposed that the deferral was not agreed, and proposed instead that the application be approved for the reasons and with the conditions laid out in the planning officer's report. He felt the report was clear, there would be a reduction in traffic, conditions suggested by the West Area Planning Committee made it clear there would be less car use of the site, and that fears of the consequences of overlooking, for which there was no evidence, were exaggerated.

It was resolved not to defer the application.

Members considered all submissions, both written and oral, and then RESOLVED:

- (1) To approve the application with conditions laid out in the Planning Officer's report; subject to the completion of an accompanying legal agreement, and that the Head of City Development be authorised to issue the notice of permission upon its completion;
- (2) To add a Grampian condition requiring a scheme of lighting to the access road; and for that lighting to be installed and commissioned before occupancy;
- (3) To add an advisory note that the screening of the site from the neighbouring all weather pitch should be discussed between the Applicant and the School.

25. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2011.

26. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved to note the following dates:

22nd December 2011
25th January 2012
29th February 2012
28th March 2012
25th April 2012

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.15 pm