

East Area Planning Committee

5th November 2014

Agent: Mrs Mary Gaskell

Applicant: Oxford City Council

All Decisions Due : 3rd December 2014

ApplicationNos

Addresses & Wards: Proposals:

14/02640/CT3
Evenlode Tower
Blackbird Leys Road
Oxford OX4 6JA
Blackbird Leys Ward

Thermal upgrade and recladding. Erection of single storey front extension to form new entrance lobby. Provision of landscaping and car parking. Replacement windows and provision of windows to balconies. Demolition of roof top parapet structure. Installation of feature corner parapet to South West elevation.

14/02641/CT3
Windrush Tower
Knights Road
Oxford
OX4 6HX

Thermal upgrade and recladding. Formation of new entrance lobby. Provision of car parking and landscaping. Replacement windows and provision of windows to balconies. Demolition of roof top parapet structure. Installation of feature corner parapet to South East elevation.

14/02642/CT3
Plowman Tower
Westlands Drive
Oxford

Thermal upgrade and recladding. Formation of new entrance lobby. Provision of car parking and landscaping. Replacement windows and provision of windows to balconies. Demolition of roof top parapet. Provision of canopy to provide covered walkway from car park to secondary entrance.

14/02643/CT3
Foresters Tower
Wood Farm Road
Oxford

Thermal upgrade and recladding. Formation of new entrance lobby. Provision of car parking and landscaping. Replacement windows and provision of windows to balconies. Demolition of roof top parapet structure.

14/02644/CT3
Hockmore Tower
Pound Way
Oxford
OX4 3YG

Thermal upgrade and recladding. Replacement windows and provision of windows to balconies. Replacement of Hockmore Street entrance door and formation of new entrance doorway to Banjo Road.

Introduction

This report combines 5 Separate planning applications for the refurbishment of each of the five residential tower blocks in locations across the east of the city.

Recommendations are made for each application and there is commentary on the general issues and in relation to the details of each specific proposal. All the applications are City Council applications and Committee decisions are therefore required.

Recommendations:

1 14/02640/CT3 – Evenlode Tower

APPLICATION BE APPROVED

For the following reasons:

- 1 The development will improve the visual appearance of the building in nearby and intermediate views. It will provide significant benefits in terms of insulation and consequential heat loss reduction and address problems of condensation and cold bridging. There will be improvements to recycling as a result of the development. There will be improvements to the entrances of the building.
- 2 The Council considers that the proposal accords with the policies of the development plan as summarised below. It has taken into consideration all other material matters, including matters raised in response to consultation and publicity. Any material harm that the development would otherwise give rise to can be offset by the conditions imposed.
- 3 The development will result in improved access to the entrance as well as improved parking that is accessible to all residents.

subject to the following conditions, which have been imposed for the reasons stated:-

- 1 Development begun within time limit
- 2 Develop in accordance with approved plans
- 3 Bat and bird boxes integrated into build
- 4 Landscape plan required
- 5 Landscape carry out after completion
- 6 Landscape hard surface design - tree roots
- 7 Materials as specified
- 8 Car parking management plan
- 9 Landscape underground services - tree roots
- 10 Tree Protection Plan (TPP) 1
- 11 Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) 1

2 14/02641/CT3 –Windrush Tower

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3 14/02642/CT3 –Plowman Tower

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4 14/02643/CT3 – Foresters Tower

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5 14/02644/CT3 –Hockmore Tower

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- 3 Bat and / or bird boxes integrated into build
- 4 Materials as specified

Main Local Plan Policies:

Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016

- CP1 - Development Proposals
- CP10 - Siting Developmnt to Meet Functionl Needs
- CP11 - Landscape Design
- CP13 - Accessibility
- CP22 - Contaminated Land
- CP8 - Design Developmt to Relate to its Context
- CP9 - Creating Successful New Places

Core Strategy

CS10_ - Waste and recycling

CS12_ - Biodiversity

CS10_ - Waste and recycling

CS18_ - Urb design, town character, historic env

CS3_ - Regeneration areas

CS9_ - Energy and natural resources

Sites and Housing Plan

HP12_ - Indoor Space

HP13_ - Outdoor Space

HP14_ - Privacy and Daylight

HP15_ - Residential cycle parking

HP16_ - Residential car parking

HP9_ - Design, Character and Context

SP5_ - Blackbird Leys Central Area

MP1 - Model Policy

Other Material Considerations:

National Planning Policy Framework

Planning Practice Guidance

Relevant Site History:

None relevant

Representations Received:

At the time of writing the report the consultation period had yet to expire. Consultation responses received are set out below and any further representations will be reported verbally at the meeting.

Plowman Tower

J Webb plus 1 other from Plowman Tower

- Loss of garages – overall loss of spaces.
- People want garages and there is a waiting list
- Difficult to find vacant space
- Council will lose £18,000 per year rental income
- Improving legibility of front of block does not make sense
- Letters to tenants were faded
- Incorrect figures quoted in Oxford Mail

Foresters Tower

Dr Luca Settimo – 77 Foresters Tower

- Loss of personal store
- Cycle storage within the lobby not required

Hockmore Tower

Mark Lambourne - 34 Bailey Road

- Current flats are ugly and the revamp would make the area look better

Statutory and Internal Consultees:

Windrush and Evenlode Towers

Blackbird Leys Parish Council –No comment received

Hockmore Tower

Natural England

- the proposal is unlikely to affect any statutorily protected sites or landscapes.

Issues:

Officers consider that the principal issues arising from all 5 applications are as follows:-

- Sustainability
- Visual appearance and design
- Car and cycle parking
- Internal environment

Officers Assessment:

Site descriptions

- 1 Evenlode Tower is situated on the corner of Blackbird Leys Road and Pegasus Road, approximately 5 miles south east of Oxford City centre. The surrounding area is mainly residential along with a number of educational buildings and leisure facilities.
- 2 Windrush Tower is located at the other end of the District Centre to Evenlode Tower on the corner of Blackbird Leys Road and Knights Road.
- 3 Plowman Tower is located in Northway on the corner of Westlands Road and Maltfield Road. It is also within a predominantly residential area but with a parade of shops close by in Westlands Drive.
- 4 Foresters Tower is located in Wood Farm on the corner of Wood Farm Road and Pether Road in a predominantly residential area.
- 5 Hockmore Tower is located in Cowley and forms part of the Cowley Centre rising above the shopping centre.

Proposals

- 6 In all of the applications the main works comprised within the planning applications includes the recladding of the tower blocks with a thermal covering, the provision of new entrance lobbies (except Hockmore Tower which has a new entrance to Banjo Road), replacement windows and the provision of windows to the flats within the tower blocks that have balconies. There are also works to the external areas of nearly all of the blocks. The cladding will consist of brick slips, insulated render and linear aluminium cladding. The lobby areas will generally provide cycle storage, waste and recycling facilities and improved security. On Plowman Tower there is also a canopy to provide covered walkway from car park to secondary entrance
- 7 On Evenlode and Windrush Towers close to the centre of Blackbird Leys there is a wider aspiration to provide regeneration of the area and policy SP5

of the Sites and Housing Plan seeks to facilitate this objective. The proposals in the two applications for these towers reflect this objective and the proposals for the re-arranged parking areas do not undermine any future proposals that may emerge.

Sustainability

- 8 A core planning principle of the National Planning Policy Framework is to support the transition to a low carbon future. The Council's Core Strategy Policy CS9 and Policy HP11 of the Sites and Housing Plan reflect the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework in those regards. One of the main objectives of the project is to renovate and upgrade the tower blocks to provide thirty plus years of life to the buildings. The main element of this is the recladding of the entire building envelope as stated above. Other specific works include replacement heating systems, mechanical ventilation to kitchens and bathrooms, insulation to hot water cylinders, new front doors, enclosed balconies, asbestos removal (where present), structural repairs (where identified), replacement windows and windows to balconies.
- 9 Although none of the applications trigger the requirement for an Natural Resource Impact Analysis in accordance with Core Strategy policy CS9, it is clear that the proposals have sustainability at their core and that the list of works to the buildings will deliver significant benefits in terms of reduced carbon emissions, improved comfort and affordable warmth for occupants, lower space heating bills for occupants and significant opportunities for improved recycling. On this basis the proposals are highly sustainable

Visual appearance and design

- 10 The NPPF requires that local authorities seek high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. It suggests that opportunities should be taken through the design of new development to improve the character and quality of an area and the way it functions. Policies CP1, CP6 and CP8 of the Oxford Local Plan, together with Policy CS18 of the Core Strategy and Policies HP9 and HP14 of the Sites and Housing DPD in combination require that development proposals incorporate high standards of design and respect local character.
- 11 The proposals for the refurbishment of the five tower blocks were the subject of scrutiny by CABI's Design Council as part of a design review. An initial design workshop was held on 4th December 2013 and a more formal design review was held on 27th March 2014. The final design review was held on 22 August 2014. The Design Council was keen to see the scheme develop from its initial concepts and seek to overcome the various issues that arose as part of the refurbishment programme. Initial advice was supportive of the intention to improve the 'elegance' of the blocks and this was to be achieved by devising different design approaches for each of the different façades of the buildings. The Design Council also advocated the redevelopment of the surrounding areas as part of the refurbishment programme. As the schemes progressed the design altered from one which clad the buildings in 'chameleon boards which would reflect sunlight and create a variety of colours to one which sought to emphasis the architectural qualities of the building by highlighting the individual panels of the building because the eye catching approach may not stand the test of time. Instead the use of subtler

tones work well with the residential character of the areas within which the blocks are located.

- 12 In addition, throughout the design process there have been a series of Community consultation events. The open days have enabled residents and the local community to see the proposals for the tower block and feedback and input into the design development. This allowed the residents to take ownership of their tower and feel a sense of pride in where they live. In addition to these events the team went round each block, asking residents of each flat for their feedback and thoughts on the design. This enabled the team to gain a minimum of 50% feedback. The residents were consulted on car parking arrangements, cladding colours, how they used their stores and garages and the entrance lobby design. They were also given a questionnaire and asked to prioritise a list of 'nice to haves'. The feedback was collated and used to develop the brief and scope of the work. As a direct result of this process it was agreed that the balconies would be enclosed.
- 13 In all cases the proposed changes to the external facades will result in an improved visual appearance that will provide a positive benefit to the character and appearance of the areas surrounding each block. The palette of materials are subtle and will emphasise the best architectural features of the buildings and seek to remove some of the features that do not contribute to an attractive visual appearance such as the rooftop parapet structures which are proposed to be removed on all blocks apart from Hockmore Tower.

Car and cycle parking / external areas / trees

- 14 For the majority of the blocks, there are proposed changes to the external areas to facilitate improved parking with improved footways. Cycle parking is provided within the new lobby areas.
- 15 Although there are few comments on the applications from residents, as stated above they have been consulted widely throughout the process and one comment coming from some people who still lease garages is that they do not wish to lose them. Whilst it is clear that those residents derive benefit from the garages they control, it is also the case that many garages are not used, that garages that are used are often not used for car parking, that car parking, particularly indiscriminate car parking around the building entrances was one of the issues identified as requiring a solution that benefitted all the residents. Where garages are proposed to be removed as part of a proposal this is to result in an improved parking arrangement: providing car parking that is convenient whilst not blocking entrances to buildings and providing for the maximum parking provision that will improve the parking situation overall. The Council's parking team are liaising with residents who wish to retain a garage to help locate a suitable replacement with the locality.
- 16 In the case of Windrush Tower, the garages have already been demolished leaving the slabs as parking, albeit the spaces are remote from the building with the result that residents tend to park in close proximity to the building entrance.
- 17 The proposals may impact upon existing trees within the site. Although there are not many trees of significant amenity value of the sites some locations

such as Windrush Tower do have some sizeable trees and tree surveys and reports with recommendations are included with the application. In order to ensure that there is no net harm to trees within the four tower locations that have external areas a raft of conditions are recommended to ensure that there are adequate tree protection measures in place, that works within root protection areas are carried out to the relevant specifications and that new planting is acceptable and will flourish.

Internal environment

- 18 All the blocks suffer with problems related to pigeons. The design team looked at a number of ways of alleviating the problem, including wires, the design of the balustrade and enclosing the balconies to become winter gardens. The latter option was chosen as this also allows residents to use the space throughout the year, with the glazing system folding fully back in the summer to allow a full balcony and to enable the glazing to be cleaned from inside the balcony. The newly covered balcony areas are called 'winter gardens' but, regardless of the name, they will provide significant improvements to the internal amenity of residents by addressing the problem of pigeons if the windows are closed, by providing an extra internal area if desired, by providing an option to open up the windows to the secondary bedroom and mainly by providing the ability to still have the windows fully open to revert to the traditional balcony at times when this is the preferred option. This degree of flexibility will provide a real benefit to residents.
- 19 In addition to the balcony changes there are significant improvements to recycling, heating and insulation as described above which will also benefit the internal amenity of residents.

Conclusion:

The proposals engage with key City Council objectives to regenerate key housing areas and give added life to the Council's housing stock. The proposals will result in structural improvement to the existing buildings and will improve their visual appearance in short term views. Living conditions within the buildings will be improved by addressing deficiencies with existing heating systems, ventilation, condensation, recycling, insulation and the ability to use balconies flexibly to provide added internal space or retain a balcony through choice. In cases where external spaces exist they are being transformed through the provision of additional parking for cars or substantial redevelopment of the spaces to remove existing garages and provide open plan parking that is accessible to all.

Human Rights Act 1998

Officers have considered the Human Rights Act 1998 in reaching a recommendation to grant planning permission, subject to conditions. Officers have considered the potential interference with the rights of the owners/occupiers of surrounding properties under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Act and consider that it is proportionate.

Officers have also considered the interference with the human rights of the applicant under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol caused by imposing conditions. Officers consider that the conditions are necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest. The interference is therefore justifiable and proportionate.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Officers have considered, with due regard, the likely effect of the proposal on the need to reduce crime and disorder as part of the determination of this application, in accordance with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In reaching recommendations to grant planning permissions, officers consider that the proposal will not undermine crime prevention or the promotion of community safety.

Background Papers:

14/02640/CT3

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14/02643/CT3

14/02644/CT3

Contact Officer: Martin Armstrong

Extension: 2703

Date: 27th October 2014

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