

Consultation Updates

Report to	Planning Applications Committee	Item
Date	04 February 2009	
Subject	09/01367/F & 09/01368/L YMCA 46 - 48 St Giles Street Norwich NR2 1LP	

Representations

We have received two further letters of representation.

1. One letter from the owner of 3 Rigby's Court a grade II listed property, objecting to the application on the following grounds:
 - a) There is a proposed three storey development planned to occupy the current open courtyard at the western extremity of the planned development. The proposed new development is highly intrusive, brutally architecturally insensitive, completely ignores, and runs counter to, the mediaeval grain of buildings, pedestrian and street patterns, open space and discrete views from out of and in and around the buildings in the area. By reason of this lack of contextual relevance and the danger to the existing area by its implementation;
 - b) I am most concerned of the physical damage that may be caused to my building by the very close proximity of the building works;
 - c) I am most concerned over the deleterious impact that the proposed development will have on my ability to enjoy the amenities of my property. Furthermore, the flats in the western end of the proposed three storey development restrict natural light to and will offer views directly into the first floor windows of my property, severely curtailing privacy.
 - d) The creation of these flats will place significant additional pressure to the on-street parking in this area of the City, which is already flooded with parked cars to well beyond capacity.
 - e) I object to the proposed planning application and request that it be refused Planning Approval based on the foregoing. Moreover, the fact that the proposal appears to be in direct contravention of Norwich City Planning Policies HBE 6, HBE 8, HBE 9 and HBE 12.
2. A further letter has been received from the Greenhouse Trust which is generally in support of the application. The letter makes a large number of comments in relation to current and future policy on renewable energy and sustainable development energy. The letter urges a need for new and improved energy policy to ensure zero carbon developments by 2016. More specifically in relation to the YMCA application the letter makes the following comments:
 - a) On behalf of the Greenhouse Trust I welcome the plan to build these small housing units or move on accommodation. This is an ideal use of the site, offers a great opportunity to develop the site and could be a landmark development for the City Centre.

- b) I note however, that when I was invited to the discussion meeting with Tim Sweeting of the YMCA that the architect's notes referred to a design that references many of the vernacular aspects of Bethel Street and St. Giles it did not include any renewable technology.
- c) I was delighted that the Design Partnership responded to Mr Sweeting's request to include renewable technology on site. However, this Application underlines a number of fundamental weaknesses in the way energy policy is delivered in the City.
- d) Again, before this site is constructed, the economics of renewable energy generation will change (a significant change to the feed in tariff mechanism is expected in April).
- e) So whilst this application should be seen as a very welcome step forward. This application also highlights the challenges ahead, clearly fails to meet the aspirations of all parties involved and does not adequately respond to the challenges that climate change sets us all.
- f) On behalf of the Greenhouse Trust I would like to confirm out full support for the proposed Development. The plans will clearly significantly improve the site in Bethel Street.
- g) In addition I ask that the Committee direct the planning officers to assist the YMCA in delivering a development that fits the social aspirations of the YMCA and the energy/environmental aspirations of the City:
 - To deliver at least a level 4 building in terms of insulation and energy efficiency;
 - To undertake a practical study of how this site could obtain level 5 and/or 6 in order that the knowledge gained will make it possible for Norwich to obtain the Zero Carbon target set by Government for buildings by 2016.
 - That an officer be asked to work with the YMCA/Design Partnership directly in order to establish the appropriate mechanisms that allow for the necessary capital be secured to increase the building/technology standards.
- h) The proposed YMCA development provides a great opportunity, to provide decent homes for some of the most vulnerable people in the City. People that are highly likely to be impacted by fuel poverty. This development is a fantastic opportunity to map out the details of how this Local Authority can operate a carbon investment fund and/or operate as an Energy Saving Company (ESCO).

Consultation Responses

A response from English Heritage has now been received who comment as follows:

The existing gym and adjacent building on Bethel Street are of no particular architectural or historic interest and the gym in particular is a structure that is large and bulky, and is intrusive in the finer grain of older buildings in this part of the Norwich conservation area. The proposed development takes the form of a series of linked buildings that better relate to the traditional scale form

and massing of the area. As such English Heritage has no objection to the principle of this redevelopment, but has some concerns over detailed aspects of the proposal.

The scale of the new development steps up from 2 storey where it abuts the existing building in Rigby's Court, though two and half stories, to 3 stories as it curves round onto Bethel Street, and finally 4 stories at the eastern end. The entrance is contained within a separately expressed 4 storey element that is capped with a shallow, mono-pitched standing seam roof. This mono-pitched roof has no relationship with the design of the rest of the development and is over dominant in the streetscape. In our view it would be better if the metal clad upper floor to this element of the composition was simply capped with a flat roof that might be set at the same height as the roof on the adjacent four storey block. Alternatively it might be capped with a shallow curved roof, similar to that on the dormer further west.

The four storey block at the east end of the Bethel street elevation has windows that are each of a single pane of glass, which give the elevation a rather bland appearance that is compounded by the lack of detailing to the brickwork around the openings. While it may not be appropriate to introduce traditional sliding sashes to these windows, the elevation would benefit from the introduction of some glazing bars to subdivide, and thereby animate, these windows. The windows within the attic floor on this block would also benefit from being sub-divided into pairs of casements. Consideration might also be given to using Flemish bond for the brickwork on this block.

The new street tree in front of the four-storey block on Bethel Street appears to be a bit of a token gesture, since the space available is too small to accommodate a tree of any real stature and the resulting tree is dwarfed by the massing of the development behind. Furthermore there are no other street trees nearby, so this tree will not form part of an avenue of street trees. A piece of good quality public art would contribute more to the public realm.

Illuminated signage is included over the new entrance on Bethel Street. This is not a retail area of the city and an internally illuminated sign will be potentially over intrusive in this part of the conservation area. It would be preferable to incorporate lighting to the soffit of the projecting bay above, which could direct lighting onto the YMCA sign.

We urge you to address the above issues, and recommend this application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice.
