

Planning Applications Committee: 12 November 2020

Updates to reports

Applications: 20/00808/F & 20/00809/L
Address: Norwich School, The Close
Item no: 4(a)
Pages: 17 - 66

Petition submitted

A petition has been submitted which has been signed by 908 people at the time of writing. The petition raises 5 points, which officers have responded to as follows.

- 1) Ecological benefits loss
 - See Main Issue 2: Trees and Biodiversity within the committee report.
- 2) Permanent spoiling of views
 - See paragraphs 183-186 of the committee report.
- 3) Real doubts the replacement planting scheme is feasible
 - According to the best available data regarding underground utilities, no conflicts have been identified. Further, the off-site trees would be required to be planted prior to the felling of any trees on the site, so if it is found that the planting is not achievable for any unforeseen reason, the development would not be permitted to commence.
- 4) Felling a tree protected by a Tree Preservation Order would set a precedent
 - Each case is assessed on its merits.
- 5) Tree planting schemes can be planned anyway
 - Noted, but it is unlikely that a tree planting scheme of this scale (771 trees) would come forward without being associated with a development.

Additional letters from an objector

2 further letters have been received from an objector, with the following points raised:

- 1) Councillors should be made aware that 12 trees are posed for felling.
 - See committee report.
- 2) We shouldn't be losing trees, we should be adding to their numbers.
 - The application includes a net increase of 759 trees, although it is noted that none of the new trees would be as mature upon planting as the 12 which are to be felled.
- 3) The recommendation ignores the comments of the Tree Protection Officer.
 - See paragraphs 163 and 164 of the committee report.

Additional letter of support

An additional letter of representation has been received which notes support for the application because of the fact that it is in keeping with the council's development management policies and the way the scheme will actually be positive for both biodiversity and biomass in the location and across the wider area. The letter notes that the trees in the city centre will be indigenous species such as English Oak which will lead to an increase in biodiversity, given that they are more likely to attract insects than the existing trees. The letter acknowledges that the constraints on the site preclude simply building around the London Plane and applaud the way the development responds to the historic environment. The letter goes on to state that this application will ensure an increase in biodiversity, an increase in biomass and an increase in community facilities for the people of Norwich and therefore the writer supports this application and hopes that members of planning committee will support it too.

Questions submitted by Cllr Stutely prior to the committee meeting

Cllr Stutely has submitted 3 questions in advance of the meeting, which officers have responded to as follows:

- 1) What is the cost to the school of the replacement planting on- and off-site?
 - While this matter shouldn't have a bearing on the planning decision, the School has confirmed that the cost of the tree planting will be "well in excess of £100,000, plus ongoing maintenance costs of £10-14,000 per year (for 15 years)". There will be other indirect costs such as legal fees for the various landowners and an associated suppression of land values.

- 2) How will this facility enable the School to reach out more to the community?
 - Appendix 1 and Schedule 2 of the submitted Planning Statement provide details of the School's current charitable outreach programme and details of the lettings which have been made at reduced or free rates.
 - The facilities which this application proposes would allow the School to offer a medium-sized, high-quality conference facility with full kitchens, a large open hall and many smaller classrooms for break-out spaces. The School regularly gets enquiries for lettings from charitable groups which they are unable to accommodate at present.

- 3) Does the School have plans to expand further? Can the council prevent them from increasing student numbers?
 - The School has confirmed that they do not have plans to expand.
 - Officers have advised the School not to expand further due to the significantly constrained nature of their historic city centre site, but pupil numbers cannot be controlled through Planning.