

Friends of Mitcham's Corner

Planning Department
Cambridge City Council
PO Box 700
Cambridge CB1 0JH

Friends of Mitcham's Corner
AMC/208.01 let re Staples

4 October 2019

FOR THE ATTENTION OF MAIREAD O'SULLIVAN

Dear Ms O'Sullivan

Ref. No: 19/1098/FUL: 121-125 Chesterton Road, Cambridge

The following comments represent the collated responses of the Friends of Mitcham's Corner to the above planning application for the redevelopment of 121-125 Chesterton Road.

An appropriate use of the site

The retention of retail units and the provision of purpose-designed multiple occupancy units were endorsed by those that responded to the FMC consultation. It is felt that the scheme would bring a greater diversity of residents into the area, and the longer-term basis of the contracts will encourage people who will integrate into the community, in contrast to students or short-stay visitors. In addition, the development has the potential to provide accommodation for key workers, assuming the rents are affordable as the developers are committing to ensure. It is important to know that the measure of affordability is correctly calculated, to ensure that key workers will be able to take up the accommodation on offer.

This site is identified in the Council-adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) document, the *Mitcham's Corner Development Framework*, which sets out specific guidance for the site in Section 4.4. The proposal follows the upper limits for scale and height of development laid out in the SPG. The design makes some effort to remain in keeping with the existing look and feel of the area, especially the Victorian town houses. While the FMC consultation is in agreement with this approach in principle, it was considered that the proposed development currently fails in the detailed execution of the design, as explained further below.

We note that the SPG is predicated on the gyratory system being severed. This does mean that by seeking to follow the guidelines, this proposal comes into conflict with the highway system as it is at present. This is discussed further below.

Disappointing and unsafe in detail

Despite having a number of positive aspects in principle, the detailed design has significant flaws, and the Friends of Mitcham's Corner therefore **OBJECT** to the application on the following grounds:

Over-development: Many of our members feel that the proposed development is too dense, with the personal rooms reduced to the minimum allowable size, diminishing the amenity of residents. The mass

of the building is taken close to the edge of the public highway: in particular, the northern frontage facing onto Victoria Road is overbearing, and the front doors open onto a narrow pavement alongside a very busy road. We would ask the developers to consider a more practical and sensitive development with far fewer units.

Highway safety: We agree with the SPG that the highway system at Mitcham's Corner urgently needs to be restructured. This will probably reduce traffic along the north of the site. However, the application must be judged against the actual situation, and we believe there are considerable safety **issues**. The apex of Croftholme Lane and Victoria Road is the sole access point to the shared-living part of the site. This is a perilous corner on foot or on bike, with two lanes of fast traffic (generally not indicating), and dangerously poor visibility. As proposed, the entrance on that corner would be hazardous to those going in and out of the proposed development, and would add extra danger and difficulty for those going past, whether by car, bike or on foot.

For the proposed scheme to create a safe entrance amenity it needs both traffic calming and increased pedestrianisation. To locate 109 bedrooms for individuals in the middle of what is essentially a giant roundabout without including any highway mitigation measures is unsafe and high-risk.

Streetscape and quality of design: The SPG (Fig. 53) gives clear guidance regarding the way in which the streetscape should be approached: we note in particular the crucial areas of "*broken form to allow sunlight penetration and articulation of massing*" located on both Victoria Road and Croftholme Lane. However, the proposed design ignores the need to break the form, creating a continuous frontage which is overbearing on the domestic scale of properties in Croftholme Lane and Victoria Road.

This site is very prominent, being a 'gateway' for Cambridge as approached from the west and north (the concept of gateways is strongly promoted by the SPG). As such, the development deserves a much more creative and sophisticated approach to its architectural detailing, so that its appearance is fitting for a city of Cambridge's global standing. But the general consensus among our members is that the proposed design is at best mediocre: for example, the elongated 'box' windows are bland and not in keeping with the local Victorian and Edwardian architecture; the brickwork and gable dormers need improving; and the design lacks features of interest. Put plainly, the frontages are boring.

The poor, uninspired treatment of the corner at the junction of the Chesterton Road and Croftholme Lane leave these elevations as simply exposed gable ends suggesting a lack of regard for the public realm and a missed design opportunity. These points should be addressed in a revised design proposal.

Public realm improvements: The scheme gives very little back to the community within which it sits. In particular, the shared space on Chesterton Road should be significantly improved as part of these proposals. We note that the SPG states "*the redevelopment should improve the quality of the public realm adjacent to the site*" (4.4.25) and "*street trees should be introduced where possible, and in particular along the Chesterton Road frontage*" (4.4.27). These requirements are not met. Trees would also benefit the health and comfort of residents of the site – important, given that they are surrounded by a gyratory traffic system (see 4.4.28).

Access and storage of waste: Access for deliveries to the retail units is only from Chesterton Road, and there is inadequate provision for storage and waste disposal. If the waste storage issue is not addressed we could end up with the same situation as with the Co-op store in Milton Road, with waste and industrial wheelie bins littering the public realm – both an eyesore and a safety hazard.

Other concerns

In addition to the points above, which we consider grounds for refusing the application in its present form, FMC members expressed further concerns:

- Management of construction process: This is a major construction project in the middle of a traffic island, and therefore requires an excellent management plan to avoid causing enormous disruption. Lengthy or peak-time stoppages must not be tolerated.
- Future change of use: Some members ask whether the type of long-term occupancy proposed will be maintained, or immediately altered upon coming into use (as was the case with the Student Castle at 1 Milton Road). We understand that the new Local Plan has tightened up on requirements in this area, and assurances are needed during the application process that its provisions would be firmly enforced.
- Car parking: A proportion of the residents will no doubt own cars, putting further pressure on the very limited parking available in the neighbourhood, further exacerbated by the loss of parking spaces within the site.
- Permeability: We are very sorry that the proposals are for a gated community. At present, access is locked down to residents only, therefore removing one of the benefits of residential areas in cities, i.e. to allow people to move more freely within and across the location. If the location is to be turned over to residential usage, then it should allow permeability through the site.

Conclusion

The application is a major step forward compared to the proposals submitted in 2012/13. Many of the guiding principles are in line with the views of local residents and businesses, but unfortunately the detailed realisation falls short: the development is too dense, unsafe, mediocre in design, and lacking in public realm improvements. FMC therefore objects to the application in its present form. This is a highly visible and significant location in Cambridge and must therefore aim for and achieve high quality, inspiring design and visual features. Developing the site presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and we urge the owners to realise the City Gateway vision proposed in the *Mitcham's Corner Development Framework*.

Yours sincerely

ANNE COOPER

Chairman of the Friends of Mitchams Corner

COPY: Cllr Mike Sargeant

Cllr Damien Tunnicliffe

Cllr Jamie Dalzell

Cllr Claire Richards

Cllr Jocelynne Scutt