

Report from the Environmental & Planning Group of the Hadleigh Society concerning PLANNING APPLICATION B/16/00760

These underwritten comments are submitted on behalf of the Hadleigh Society, whose objectives are:- *“to protect and enhance Hadleigh’s heritage and environment by supporting and promoting high standards in planning, conservation, regeneration and development of features deemed to be of historical or environmental significance in the town.”* Having studied the application The Society wishes to lodge its response regarding the proposed development.

1. In principle the Hadleigh Society supports the proposal enshrined in planning application B/16/00760 for predominantly residential properties on the former Brett Works site.

2 The Local Character

Hadleigh is an ancient and historic market town (not a village as referred to in the applicant’s Design and Access Statement). The site adjoins the historic centre of the town with its listed buildings and is also very close to the High Street, from which the site is accessed; this street, evidenced in medieval Hadleigh documents, has a distinct character formed from its ancient origins with timber framed, plastered walled and plain clay tiled buildings, where some have subsequently been “georgianised” with brick facades and a few redeveloped in the Victorian period. The resultant character has developed from this tightly knit, continuous built-up frontage of attractive, interesting and historic architectural styles. The proposed residential plan for the former Brett Works site is markedly suburban in nature, the 25 chalet and bungalow designs being alien in style and form to the historic context of the area and inconsonant with Hadleigh’s historic and characterful main street.

Any development of the site, therefore, could be improved by being designed as an extension of the “High Street” with perhaps some strong continuous frontages. Specific designs should be of the 21st century, but drawn from the extensive and varied palette of past architectural styles and traditional materials found in the High Street to produce a good modern innovate design which enhances and accords with the special character of the area. Shared courtyards could be more in keeping, (such as White Lion Court). Also by reorientation of the dwellings, with their principal aspect looking over the open space there is an opportunity to form a more intimate urban character.

Could such adaptations be made to the design of the buildings to give a character more in harmony with the High Street and its long history?

3. The two-storey block of retirement apartments

The Hadleigh Society’s major concern with the scheme is the design and location of the apartment block. The overall height and bulk of the proposed building appear overwhelming and incompatible with its historic surroundings. Being so close to the very centre of historic Hadleigh, it is quite out of context with the nearby heritage buildings which include the site of the manorial messuage of the medieval manor of Hadleigh (Hadleigh Hall area), the Deanery Tower, St Mary’s Church and the Guildhall complex.

There is strong potential for a dominant and unfortunate impact as one proceeds down historic Pound Lane and observes a remarkable heritage scene on the left and a really rather incongruous and prominently sited maltings on the right. The obtrusiveness in the design of the apartment block is greatly exacerbated by the introduction of the seven oast house vents rising from the roof to between 12 and 13 metres above; this design feature actually renders the height of the roof almost comparable to the height of the nearby Deanery Tower, one of Hadleigh’s grade one listed buildings. This block of flats would dominate the southern end of the proposed site and create a sharper sense of it, and possibly the whole residential development from the Pound Lane vantage point, being incredibly out of scale and character with its historic and its conservation area surroundings.

The fact that currently there are trees screening the proposed new residential buildings from the heritage area may not necessarily always be the case. This could be of crucial future significance and should be borne in mind.

The malting's design is also irrelevant to the historic context of the site in question and most certainly does not reflect the nature of its former industrial usage which was dyeing of wool and pasturing of animals in the medieval period and then later small scale industrial works (e.g. tanning, rope-making, matting), all undertaken in single storey units.

Consideration could sensibly and aesthetically be given to a lower, less dominant and more appropriately designed apartment block sited at the north end of the site; this would eliminate much of the existing conflict with major heritage assets, minimize traffic movements through and within the site, and avoid overshadowing of the flats from the current trees. It would also offer an opportunity for a south facing street frontage, at the south end of the site, creating good entrance to the development, and attractive views along the path towards the river.

4. Mix of Land Uses

While there is most definitely a need within Hadleigh for the creation of housing for retired persons, as a town centre site some housing for young and old, singles and families might add variety and enrichment to life in this potentially rather pleasant location.

Also the provision of two small commercial units is welcomed but why only two. Additional small offices, studios and live-work units could extend the town centre ambience and with a higher density of 30/hectare would provide greater sustainability for the site.

Might consideration be given to the provision of some housing for younger folk and families and of three or four more small commercial units (offices, studios, workshops).

5. The External Boundaries

It is noted that the external boundaries to the private and communal gardens are generally to be enclosed with 1.8 metre high timber fencing. Whilst some is to be softened with new planting to the private dwellings those fences around the malting building, wherever it is sited, could benefit greatly from screening concordant with the Conservation Area which government policy designates as a "Heritage Asset" (National Planning Policy Framework - Glossary of Terms).

Can we be assured of aesthetically pleasing boundaries and screening planted with indigenous bushes and trees appropriate to the conservation area and which would complement, preserve and/or enhance the setting of these special buildings and areas.

6 The Footbridge and the Public Open Space

The submissions indicate that one of the significant merits of the scheme is the provision of new Public Open Space and integration with existing public rights of way, in particular provision of a new footbridge linking the Riverside Walk with the town centre. From examination of the application there appears, however, to be no inclusion of a footbridge nor is its detailed design in the application. The accessing of the proposed Open Space is stated to be by new public footpaths but the application specifically states that no new public rights of way or public roads are to be provided within or adjacent to the site. Also who will look after the public open space?

Full clarification of the proposal is required before this aspect of the application can be meaningfully assessed. This should include explaining the mismatch and detailing the plans for maintenance of the public open space.