

The Hadleigh Society

Caring about Hadleigh - yesterday, today and tomorrow

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Philip Isbell
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Dear Mr Isbell,

Comments from the Environmental & Planning Group of the Hadleigh Society upon proposals by Babergh Council for redevelopment of Cork Lane Office complex, Bridge House and Car Park and Angel Court, Angel Street in Hadleigh

These comments are submitted on behalf of the Hadleigh Society, one of whose aims is:- *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.*

The Principal of Housing for Council Complex

The Society is disappointed that the community of Hadleigh is to lose a substantial commercial premises with related employment and economic opportunities. Already Town Centre outlets are experiencing a decline in trade due to loss of jobs from closure of the office.

There was an expectation that a developer, and particularly a local planning authority, should have pursued a rigorous marketing exercise before abandoning all commercial use opportunities. It appears, however, that the Council's advisers opted for a rather soft marketing exercise to dismiss summarily commercial use of the premises.

The Council's decision to defer solely to a housing option is, therefore, unfortunate and seems premature if not contrary to its own long established Local Plan Policy, in particular policy EM24 (Saved Policy from 2006 Adopted Local Plan).

Conservation of Heritage Assets

The Cork Lane complex is a mixture of Listed and unlisted buildings, all of which have a special character in both architectural merit and social interest. There is, therefore, an overriding principle and statutory requirement to preserve, conserve and / or enhance such heritage assets. Whilst it is noted there is intent to retain the Listed Building shells, no indication is given whether conversion to residential occupation can be sympathetically achieved whilst retaining the special architectural and historic interest. In addition it is noted there is the intention to demolish substantial parts of the new build of the complex including the Award winning iconic circular Council Chamber and related function areas. No evidence is given why demolition is required. We would remind the designers of the Council's own saved Local plan Polices CN01, CN03, CN06 that need to be taken into account together with the later Core Strategy Policies CS4, CS5, CS6, CS7, CS8, CS9, CS10, CS11, CS12, CS15 and CS16.

At present it is considered that the conversion works could cause serious harm to the heritage assets and character of the Conservation Area.

Suitability for Housing

There is some doubt over the suitability of the existing buildings to provide housing units both in sympathetic conversion of the listed buildings and retained new build, but also in aspect and adequate provision of communal sit out areas. Added concern is potential conflict between the use of the cricket pitch, and more particularly its practice areas, where its closeness to noise sensitive residential units could result in subsequent conflict between club and residents.

In the exhibition there appeared little information on the number and type of dwelling units being proposed and on how social housing provision was to be provided within the complex. The Society has particular doubts and concerns about the site being readily suitable for such a diverse mix of housing.

Inconsistency in Proposals in Flood Risk Zones

It is noted that both the Cork Lane Complex and Bridge House site fall within Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3 as defined by the Environment Agency. It is understood that residential development in Zone 3 is normally strongly resisted for obvious safety reasons, yet several dwelling units and substantial car parking area are proposed in Zone 3 on that part of the Cork Lane complex which is currently the parking area to the council offices, yet at Bridge House, our Society representatives were told, that no housing or car parking could be provided within the Bridge House car parking area as it all fell within zone 3.

There appears therefore to be a contradiction, or at least an inconsistency, in the proposals for development on Zone 3 Flood Risk Areas. There needs to be an urgent clarification of this matter; if development is curtailed on Zone 3 flood risk designated land then serious reconsideration is necessary regarding scale of development and demolition of the council office complex and the reassessment of the scheme's viability.

The Design Aspects of the Cork Lane Complex

One of the prime aspects in designing a scheme for this group of buildings is the statutory requirement to preserve and / or enhance the Conservation Area besides ensuring that the special character of the Listed buildings are respected and conserved. The complex has a particularly important southern aspect overlooking a notable and well used footpath walk and public open green space set on the northern bank of the River Brett.

Any alterations to this space need to be handled with care to avoid destruction of the area's current pleasant green and treed aspect. The proposed extensive car parking, both over the green and along Cork Lane indicate a lack of respect to the character of the area and represents significant harm to both the setting of the listed buildings and the Conservation Area

It is considered that any substantial new build i.e. where the current car park is located (if permissible under flood risk assessments) ought to reflect the current materials used in the complex of orange brick and red pan tile or clay plain tiles. Smooth render wall sections could be appropriate. Extensive areas of black boarding are not considered in keeping with the architectural or historic character.

Whilst good modern 21st architectural might be acceptable, due to the relative large mass of the existing complex, it is considered the style of new build ought generally to reflect the design attributes and characteristics of the listed buildings

The Design Aspects for Development of Bridge House and Car Park

Bridge House lies in the Hadleigh Conservation Area and, whilst not a listed building, it is considered to have some architectural and historic merit and thus the guiding principal ought to be to retain and adapt it for a new use. It is understood that evidence will be presented by the Council's advisers to show that the building is beyond viable repair and conversion, until this evidence is seen, the Society will defer its support of the buildings demolition.

In respect of the site's visual characteristics, it is on a prominent bend in Bridge Street such that any new building will form an important visual focus from both the southern and western approaches along Bridge Street. The proposed bland blocking of conventional semi-detached and / or terrace units would fail to provide the necessary quality of build needed to create a Key feature in Bridge Street and adjacent Listed Buildings.

There is also concern that the new build is confined to the existing footprint of Bridge House and that the car park is dug up to form conventional average "run of the mill" rear garden estate type housing. It is felt a sympathetic design approach such as found in White Lion Court should be taken as a lead in design housing in this area.

There are several concerns regarding the draft proposals, the first is the failure to consider use of part of the existing car park as a new communal car park for the new units, secondly the ground beneath the car park is heavily contaminated (former gas works) and thus, without extensive decontamination costs, cannot be used for gardens, thirdly it introduces rear garden detritus (miscellaneous sheds, caravans, trampolines etc) into open view along Bridge Street.

Finally there is no indication that any thought has been given to the new boundary treatment along the pedestrian footpath from Bridge Street to Cork Lane that ought to be provided to shield the appearance of the area from the above described domestic miscellanea. It is suggested if this mundane layout is to be pursued that at minimum a 3 metre wide band for new shrub and tree planting be provided along and against a brick and timber boundary fence to new private amenity areas.

It is considered however that the whole site requires a rethink, particularly in respect of the extent of development permissible in the flood risk area, the potential cost of decontamination works and the need to enhance the area.

An example for an alternative scheme is to create office units with parking on part of the existing car park, as it is now; then possibly with maisonettes or flats above. Alternatively a courtyard environment for the new housing with communal parking using part of the existing could be created.

Angel Court

The redevelopment of the site for flats is supported. As no elevational designs were provided the Society can only trust that an architecturally exciting fenestration will be provided; the blocking currently shown with poor hipped gabled roofs is of concern. Whilst the existing Angel Court was a design of its period it provided a strong gabled terminus to the block at the entrance to the car parking. It is hoped that the eventual design will be an asset to Angel Street.

Conclusion

There is a sense of haste in the drafting of the proposals wherein the driving force appears to be to maximise build without due consideration being given to the location of the three sites and their importance to the town and its future well-being.

The Society would welcome further consultation.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Woods
Chair, The Hadleigh Society