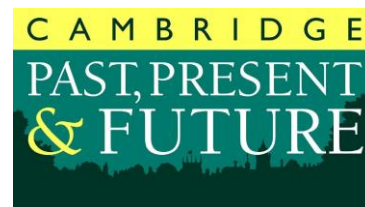


Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service



By email

Charlotte.spencer@greatercambridgeplanning.org
planning@greatercambridgeplanning.org

Cambridge Past, Present & Future
Wandlebury Country Park
Cambridge CB22 3AE
Phone 01223 - 243830
www.cambridgeppf.org

23/08/2022

Dear Charlotte

Response to 22/02814/FUL: 19 High Street Grantchester for replacement dwelling

Cambridge Past, Present & Future is Cambridge's largest civic society. We are a charity run by local people who are passionate about where they live. We operate in the greater Cambridge area and working with our members, supporters and volunteers we:

- Are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature.
- Care about Cambridge and are an independent voice for quality of life in the strategic planning of Greater Cambridge.
- Are working to protect, celebrate and improve the important built heritage of the Cambridge area.
- Own and care for green spaces and historic buildings in and around the city for people and nature, including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve, Cambridge Leper Chapel & Barnwell Meadows, Bourn Windmill and Hinxtton Watermill.

Cambridge Past Present & Future (CPPF) object to this application because this 'unashamedly modern' building, its height and its heavy use of glass will have a detrimental impact on the Conservation Area and Grantchester Meadows, contrary to Local Plan policy NH/14.

In our view it neither 'sustains' nor 'enhances' the Conservation Area and the wider historic landscape as required by policy NH/14.

We support the response of the Conservation Officer.

As well as our interest in protecting the heritage of the village and its countryside setting, CPPF also holds a restrictive covenant on part of this site, which was once part of Grantchester Meadows but was fenced in order to provide an outdoor play area for the school (see Appendix A).

1. THE PRESENT SITUATION

The current building: We share the applicants' view that the building needs considerable updating, and we are not opposed to its demolition and replacement with a single residential property if that is felt necessary. However, it is a matter of regret that the application, whilst dismissing the building as of 'little architectural merit', pays insufficient attention to the ways in which its architect tried to blend it into the Conservation Area.

At first glance, the building does not actually betray its former institutional purpose as a school. It looks more like a domestic dwelling, tucked away at the end of a short drive behind gates and a brick boundary wall. However, it is also visible in part from other vantage points on the High Street. The building was responsively designed: it pays careful attention to Design Guide issues of scale, massing and the use of materials. It is nearly all of one or one and a half storeys and built of Cambridge brick. By its careful positioning on the site

and a six-foot-high brick wall, much of it is obscured from public view. Like many other dwellings in the Conservation Area, it has a pitched roof made of slate.

These various characteristics are clearly captured in the photo at the start of the application's Design, Access, Planning and Heritage Statement (DAPHS, page 1). In short, from the perspective of the Conservation Area, it is both low-key and unobtrusive, even if it does not contribute positively.

The Grantchester Conservation Area: As the Grantchester Conservation Area Appraisal notes, this section of the High Street is at the core of the Conservation Area. It houses a range of buildings, built for a variety of purposes to support village life and dating back several centuries. Several of the buildings in the area of the High Street are listed and more are Non-Designated Heritage Assets. Many of the houses are built from variants of Cambridge brick whilst others are rendered. Roofs are almost invariably pitched whilst roofing materials are thatch, slates or tiles; there are no flat roofs in this part of the Conservation Area.

The Grantchester Conservation Area Appraisal draws particular attention to the very open nature of the village. 'Views out to the open countryside are very important (to the Conservation Area) and it can thus be seen that the fields surrounding Grantchester (the setting of the conservation area) perform a fundamental role in defining its character' (page 13).

There have been no new buildings in this part of the Conservation Area since its designation in 1975.

Heritage significance: We have set out in Appendix A further information regarding the Roman Road which runs through the property.

2. DESIGN ISSUES: VISIBILITY, ORIENTATION AND HEIGHT

This is an important site lying between the High Street and Grantchester Meadows. It is bounded on the Meadows side by a belt of trees which shields most of the current building from public view. A tree on the High Street side softens the view of the roofscape. The roof can also be seen from the garden of the Red Lion pub and now, more recently, from the rear of the Rupert Brooke pub and the Meadows. From most of these vantage points, however, the words 'glimpsed' and 'tucked away' continue to be appropriate. In short, this carefully designed building has a largely neutral impact on the character of the Conservation Area.

Moving the footprint and visibility: As the DAPHS makes clear, it is proposed to move the new building to a much more central position on the site (para. 5.3) which is also on a slight incline. As a direct result the building will be much more visible from the drive and other vantage points in the village, such as from the rear garden of the Rupert Brook pub, across the gardens to the left of the Red Lion as you stand in front of the pub and to some extent from the Meadows and other angles by virtue of its height and construction.

There will be some screening, as at present from trees (although see Screening below) and it would be set back further from the High Street but, by virtue of the more exposed and central position of the building and the increased height, it will be more visible in other locations than the current building.

Height issues: The proposed increases in the height of the building will also impact on its visibility from the public realm. A diagram at the start of the DAPHS is intended to show that the new building will not exceed the height of the existing one by very much. What the diagram shows is that the varied and differentiated heights of the existing building (many parts of which are single storey) will be replaced by a dominant and uniformly two storey straight line. In addition, the atrium (at 9.47 metres) exceeds the height of any parts of the existing building by some margin; the decision to place this feature at the eastern end of the structure rather than the slightly more secluded western wing, contributes further to its prominence. These effects, in combination, will serve to increase the dominance of the new building on the streetscape.

Screening: That the building would be at least partially screened by vegetation seems to be one of the justifications being used for allowing a building which is at odds with the Conservation Area. However, we have noted that two large trees which help to screen the site from the High Street are ash trees (see photo

below). Due to the high risk that they will succumb to Ash Die-Back disease within a decade, the new building should really be considered as though these trees have gone – in other words being much more visible and having a greater impact on the Conservation Area. Even if replacement trees were planted, it would be 30 years before they reached a sufficient size.



Although other trees that screen the property (eg those screening it from the Meadows) are younger, they will eventually die back and open up views of the new building. It would be possible to avoid this if young trees were planted as part of a planning requirement, so that they were sufficiently mature by the time the others died off.

It also goes without saying that, during the winter months the trees will provide less screening and the new building will be much more visible from a variety of locations. We note that the trees screening the building from the meadows are evergreen.

3. JUSTIFICATIONS OFFERED FOR INTRODUCING A REALLY MODERN DEVELOPMENT INTO THE CONSERVATION AREA

The applicants describe their proposal as an ‘unashamedly modern’ building. They then attempt in Section 6 of the DAPHS to weave their way through planning guidance and design advice on new developments in conservation areas to justify their choices. We found their arguments difficult to follow and at times muddled and contradictory. We comment on their main arguments below.

Para 6.2 The principle of development: This paragraph suggests that the existing building is not ‘a heritage asset’.

Comment: we agree with that claim that the current building is not a heritage asset. However, for the reasons outlined above (see The Current Building), we would maintain that it is much more respectful of the 'local vernacular' than the proposed alternative.

Para 6.3 The Scale of the Development: We do not dispute the arguments about the scale of the building. However, we note that the claim that it 'will cover parts of the existing footprint' relates to only around 10 - 15% of the proposed new footprint. We find the claims that the new building will be 'relatively secluded within its setting, set back in excess of 60m from the High Street frontage' and 'will not be prominent in the context of the public realm' contentious (see sections on Visibility and Screening above). We believe the building will have a negative impact on the Conservation Area and the public realm.

Paras 6.4 to 6.6 Design and Impact on the Grantchester Conservation Area: These three paragraphs are at the heart of the argument about the suitability of the new proposal. We think they are high on assertion, thin on argument and overall unconvincing.

Para 6.5 **This is a key paragraph.** It starts by describing the 'proposed design' which it claims, 'not only satisfies but exceeds current building regulations while preserving its core aesthetics and philosophy'.

Comment: We would take it for granted that it conformed to building regulations but are puzzled by the observation that it 'preserves its core aesthetics and philosophy'. Whose aesthetics and whose philosophy?

The paragraph continues by asserting that 'the clear, modern and simple lines of the architectural approach here can be acknowledged as providing a high-quality modern design appropriate in a contextual analysis and to the constraints presented on this site'.

Comment: We do not dispute that HUF house kits can produce 'high quality' designs. However, we do not understand the assertion that a 'modern design is appropriate in a contextual analysis'. What is this so-called 'contextual analysis' and where is the case made for it? Nor are we aware of any 'constraints presented on this site'. Again, we do not understand these remarks and more explanation would have been helpful.

The paragraph goes on: 'In comparison to the other development proposals in the area the proposed HUF house will offer a modern yet sensitive alternative and will add value to the mix of dwellings in its own relative seclusion in the close vicinity'.

Comment: This assertion appears to be talking to itself and its justification appears to be that it is better than other (not mentioned) proposals. We are not aware of other proposals that are relevant other than the building it is replacing (see our comments above about that). Furthermore, we do not understand why this is seen as 'a sensitive alternative', either in terms of its sensitivity (which is not explained) nor in terms of it being an alternative. The assertion that the building will 'add value to the mix of dwellings in its own relative seclusion in the close vicinity' strikes as unfounded and contradictory. Furthermore, if it is 'relatively secluded' from other buildings in 'the close vicinity', how is it adding value?

The argument continues that 'the architecture is acknowledged as taking a modern approach in its style and appearance' but is, apparently and by way of mitigation, a 'high quality design that also seeks to assimilate appropriately in its use of materials and in its overall visual appearance' following national guidance.

Comment: This is a very selective reading of national and local guidance advice and there are sizeable omissions. Principles of complementarity with existing buildings in the Conservation Area are completely ignored as are various issues about designs reflecting local vernaculars in terms of scale, structures and use of materials. No reference is made for example to the building materials currently listed in the Conservation Area Appraisal. And, by way of example, not one of the current buildings uses large expanses of glass.

We are skeptical of the assertions that the building will 'provide a visual enhancement' and 'will assimilate well'. At a minimum we would have expected drawings for these claims.

Para 6.6 The proposal is claimed to be ‘sensitive in terms of the form, scale and positioning of the new house such that the special visual sensitivities of the conservation area would also be protected and enhanced’.

Comment: Again, we find this claim unconvincing. The repeated assertion that the building provides ‘visual enhancement’ does not guarantee that this is the case and ‘sensitivity’ to the core characteristics of the Grantchester Conservation Area needs to be convincingly demonstrated by detailed reference to the core principles outlined for developments in conservation areas.

Paras. 6.7 to 6.9: Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Most of these paragraphs are essentially a summary of LPA guidance for new developments in conservation areas rather than a demonstration that the proposal complies with them.

6.7 This paragraph repeats claims made in earlier paragraphs.

6.8 This lengthy paragraph summarises LPA guidance drawing attention to some seven criteria.

Comment: The summary offers evidence that the applicants are familiar with LPA guidance. What is less clear is whether they think they are complying with all or most of it? Most of the criteria are referred to as ‘should’ rather than what they are actually proposing with one exception. In mid-paragraph they suddenly claim ‘compatibility in terms of scale height, density and site coverage with other buildings in the locality’ which, apparently, ‘can easily be identified on the architect’s overlay plans in the sections above’. They clearly are under the impression that they have demonstrated ‘compliance’ despite the fact that they have provided no plans which could conceivably be described as ‘overlays’. Nor is it clear whether they believe that by referencing LPA guidance they have somehow complied.

Para 6.9: This paragraph summarises the applicants’ claims.

Comment: It is clear from this paragraph that the applicants do believe that they have complied with planning guidance. We disagree with this assessment.

paras: 8.1 – 8.7: Summary

Comment: We dispute the conclusion that the design is worthy for the site. This pattern-book system-built house manufactured in Germany and devised by Peter Huf’s Surrey-based English office will be alien to the character of Grantchester village and meadows. The building’s vocabulary of white rendered walls, black framing and large expanses of glass has no relationship to its setting.

5. ENERGY EFFICIENCY

We welcome that the new building would have high environmental performance but that should not alone be grounds for approving it. We note that there will be significant embedded carbon in the existing building which would be lost, as well as the production of waste material caused by the demolition.

4. IN CONCLUSION

- There is no evidence in the proposal that the design ‘respects the prevailing character of properties within the conservation area’.
- Whilst the design is indeed ‘distinctive’, its height, form, use of large quantities of glass, flat rooves and straight lines, along with its location in a more prominent position on the plot than the building it seeks to replace, will inevitably mean that it draws ‘undue attention’ to itself.

We do not consider that this development ‘sustains’ or ‘enhances’ the Conservation Area and the wider historic landscape as required by policy NH/14.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely
Sarah Nicholas
Principal Planning Officer

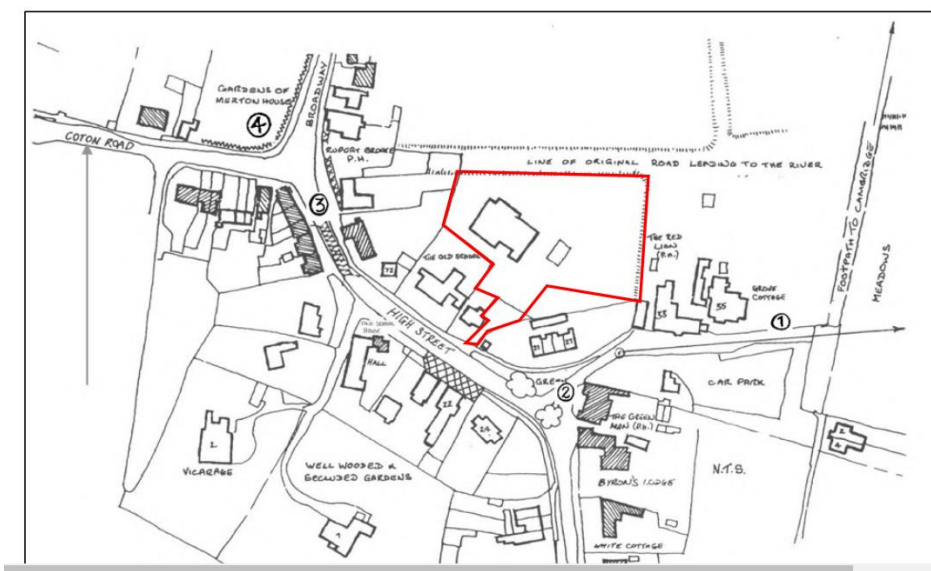
APPENDIX A

The heritage statement makes insufficient mention of the historical significance of the site. The fence encloses a part of the Roman Road which can be clearly identified as a sunken way running across the northern part of the site. Back in Roman and then Anglo-Saxon times the settlement that is now called Grantchester was centred along the route between St Neots and Fulbourn. The main street, once referred to as the Green, is now called Coton Road, however instead of veering NW towards Coton, the route followed the left fork along the bridleway to Barton.

To the east of Coton Road the route is clearly indicated on the OS 1888 map, being marked as 'Supposed ROMAN ROAD'. This continues to the River Cam, where there was a ford. The route is clearly visible as a sunken way, particularly where it descends to the. The distance to the ford from the junction where Coton Road meets the High Street to the south and the Broadway to the north is about 300m. The route to the east of the ford across land reserved for nature and agricultural land is less well defined until it crosses the Trumpington Road. At this point it continues along Long Road, which is an ancient and straight road of one mile length, that joins to Queen Edith's Way, where it crosses the route of the Colchester to Godmanchester Via Devana Roman Road before continuing to Fulbourn.

Please refer to the plans on the following page. The plan from page 3 of the D&A Statement indicates the line of the road as being outside the site area as indicated by the red line, however the Planning Application Block Plan indicates the existing fence line retained and the road contained within the garden.

The process for reclaiming the ancient road as a right of way has been started through the Ramblers Association 'Don't Lose Your Way' Campaign. A pragmatic way of resolving these issues might be for the applicant to agree to a realignment of the North boundary of the site so that the ancient road is returned to Grantchester Meadows. If this was done the siting of the building would need careful consideration as would the screening of it from the meadows.



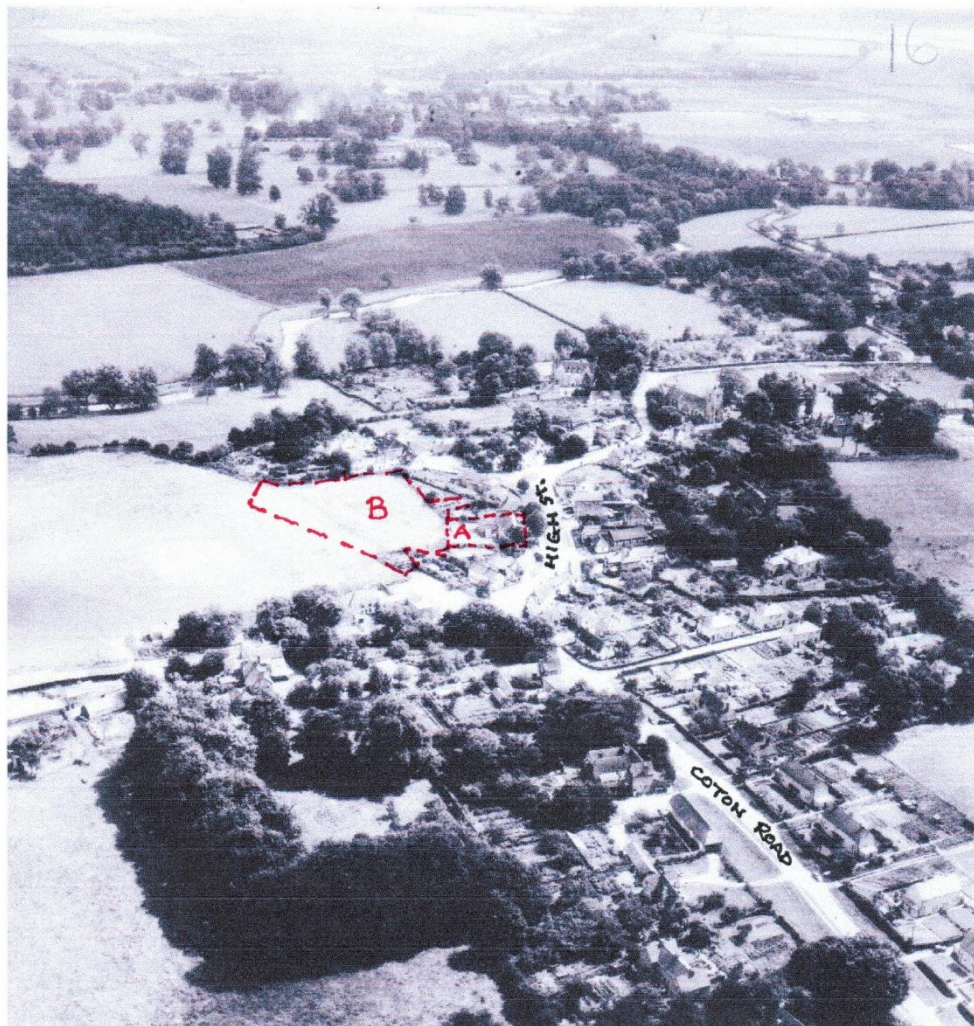
Plan on page 3 of D&A Statement



Block plan indicating site extending across the Roman Road



Late 19thC map indicating the Roman Road



Aerial photo of Grantchester circa 1965

A = The Victorian School and school yard

B = The area of the extended school recreation area and 1973 classroom building being also the site for the current planning application for a large private house and garden.

Site B is clearly identified as part of the land included in the covenant set up by the Cambridge Preservation Society (now CPPF) that restricted the land use to recreation, agriculture and forestry in perpetuity

The sunken way that delineates the Roman road can just be seen crossing site B and the meadows to the ford across the Cam, being a continuation of Coton Road on the route between St Neots and Fulbourne.