Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service

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Response to 26/03884/FUL and 26/03911/LBC: Demolition of 14-18 George IV Street, erection of building for commercial office use (Class Eg) on George IV Street. Alterations and extensions to 20 and 22 Hills Road to provide 18 co-living units (Sui Generis), at 14-18 George IV Street And 20 And 22 Hills Road, Cambridge

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 Hinxton Watermill.

26/03884/FUL

Introduction

Cambridge Past, Present and Future objects to the proposal to demolish Nos. 14–18 George IV Street and replace them with a large office building of up to five storeys. While we support appropriate adaptive re-use or a change of use for the existing buildings, their wholesale demolition would result in the total loss of valued heritage assets, erode the human-scale historic character of George IV Street, and harm the wider significance of the New Town and Glisson Road Conservation Area. For these reasons, we consider the proposal to be contrary to national and local heritage and design policy.

Heritage Assets Affected and Their Significance

The application site sits within a sensitive historic environment containing both designated and non-designated heritage assets:

Non-Designated Heritage Assets on George IV Street: Located within the New Town and Glisson Road Conservation Area, the site features Nos. 15–18 George IV Street, alongside No. 14. No. 18 is a formal Building of Local Interest (BLI) and Nos. 15–17 are proposed BLIs; despite later alterations, the buildings and a rear outbuilding form non-designated heritage assets that preserve the area's early 19th-century townscape and character.

George IV Street is characteristic of the narrow streets laid out between 1820 and 1835 following the crowning of George IV in 1820, and these buildings remain tangible remnants of that 19th-century streetscape in contrast to the brutalist Hanover Court opposite and the more modern 21a Union Road adjacent. Attractive two-storey buildings with parapets concealing low-pitched roofs, well-proportioned facades, a regular rhythm of sash windows, string courses, and projecting door canopies, they make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The New Town and Glisson Road Conservation Area: The historic buildings along George IV Street make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, which derives much of its character from its traditional scale, grain, and historic street patterns.

Impact of Demolition and Scale of Redevelopment

Demolishing Nos. 14–18 George IV Street would cause the total loss of the significance of these non-designated heritage assets and remove buildings that make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

Replacing two-storey buildings with an office block of up to four storeys plus mansard represents a marked departure from the modest, human-scale historic character of George IV Street in terms of scale, height, and massing. We do not accept attempts to justify this massing envelope by reference to Hanover Court or Cintra House: Hanover Court is atypical of this conservation setting, while Cintra House occupies a prime frontage onto Hills Road capable of supporting a larger, more imposing presence. Nor does the proposed design successfully reflect the architectural detailing that enables the existing buildings to contribute positively to the Conservation Area.

Policy Considerations

We consider the proposal to be inconsistent with relevant national and local policy objectives:

National Planning Policy (Policies HE6 and HE9): Under policy tests addressing substantial harm or total loss of heritage significance, consent should be refused unless it is demonstrated that the harm is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Given that sufficient provision is being made for office development elsewhere in Cambridge, economic benefits do not outweigh the loss of these heritage assets. Furthermore, because the proposal results in the loss of buildings contributing positively to the Conservation Area through their scale and detailing—and fails to reflect that detailing in the replacement design—it fails to meet the expectations of policy frameworks such as HE9.

Local Policy (Policies 55, 61, and 62): For the reasons described above, the scheme is contrary to Policy 55 (Responding to context) because it does not respond positively to the historic importance, scale, and grain of the street. It also runs counter to Policy 61, which seeks the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment, and Policy 62, which aims to retain local heritage assets.

Conclusion

Cambridge Past, Present and Future strongly urges the refusal of this application. The demolition of Nos. 14–18 George IV Street would permanently destroy non-designated heritage assets that anchor the street's early 19th-century origins, while introducing an over-scaled office building of up to five storeys that fails to respect local context or the setting of nearby designated heritage assets. Because sufficient office capacity exists elsewhere in the city and appropriate adaptive re-use or change-of-use offers a constructive alternative to demolition, the substantial heritage harm is unjustified and contrary to local and national policy.

26/03911/LBC

Cambridge Past, Present and Future (CPPF) strongly supports the concerns raised by the Georgian Group, particularly regarding the proposed remodelling of the doorway on the principal Hills Road elevation of No. 20 and the removal of its steps and railings. As acknowledged in the applicant's supporting documentation,

the existing door and fanlight are original features; altering them and losing the associated steps and railings would harm the principal elevation.

The existing elevation of No. 20 has balanced proportions, with the lintels above the doorway and ground-floor window aligned and the door sitting directly beneath the upper-floor windows. Removing the steps while introducing a wider, lower, and off-centre doorway would disrupt this arrangement and erode the balanced proportions characteristic of early 19th-century/Georgian architecture.

We do not consider that the proposed works meet Policy 61 (*Conservation and enhancement of Cambridge's historic environment*), which requires development affecting heritage assets to preserve or enhance their significance and character, respect local scale, form, and architectural detailing, and provide robust justification for any resulting harm. By remodelling the original doorway at No. 20 and removing its steps and railings—resulting in a frontage that fails to respect the building's historic character and detailing—the proposal fails to preserve the special architectural and historic interest of this Grade II listed building or enhance the character and appearance of the New Town and Glisson Road Conservation Area

Yours sincerely
Sarah Nicholas
Principal Planning Officer