

22/05155/F – 706 STUDENT BEDS IN NEW BUILDINGS AT PLOT 6, SILVERTHORNE LANE.

Summary.

The proposal is consistent with the approved Master Plan for the greater Silverthorne Lane redevelopment site but, although the Society prefers the present application to the earlier proposal, we have a number of serious concerns to raise. These relate to the assessments on energy and sustainability and noise, the height and impact of the tower block, access to the site in the event of fire, and the lack of improvement proposals for the pedestrian and cycle tunnel under the railway and the nearby footbridge across the Feeder. Improvements on earlier proposals to the public realm including the hard and soft landscape and relationship with the Feeder have been made. These do not outweigh the concerns we have and the Society, therefore, objects to the proposal.

Climate Change and Related Living Conditions Issues.

The Society strongly supports the Council's policies for mitigating the impacts of new development on climate change and ensuring that residential development provides good quality living accommodation. We have noticed apparent inconsistencies between the Energy and Sustainability report and the Noise Assessment documents forming part of the application. The former states that, for adequate summertime cooling, windows would need to be opened. Our view is that building construction and materials used should prevent overheating in the first place. However, if it is necessary for windows to be opened to maintain a comfortable temperature, there should not be a problem arising from external noise. Yet the noise assessment states that windows would have to be shut at night to ensure a good night's sleep. These contradictory assessments need to be resolved before permission for the proposal is granted. Unless they are, there would be adverse impacts on the quality of life of residents of the development. Student accommodation should also be designed to convert to conventional housing and so the need to ensure comfortable living conditions is doubly important.

Aesthetic Issues.

Greater emphasis by central government is now being put on the quality of design of new developments. The Society supports this direction of travel and it is in this context among other issues that we make our comments on the aesthetics of the proposal. We do not support the construction of a 16 storey building on the site. The site is located in the Silverthorne Lane Conservation area. There are no other nearby tower blocks of this size and so it would be particularly conspicuous. It would neither preserve nor enhance the character of the conservation area and could be harmful to the setting of the locally listed Rhubarb Tavern building. Much of it would also overlook the proposed secondary school to the west.

Fire Safety Issues.

All residential development needs to be easily accessible for firefighting appliances. The proposed development is at the far end of Silverthorne Lane which would be vulnerable to being blocked by parked vehicles. The Council must ensure that there is free access along Silverthorne Lane. Alternatively, emergency access only provided through the tunnel under the railway could also be investigated for its feasibility.

Other Improvements Considered Essential.

When the wider Silverthorne Lane redevelopment is completed, there will be considerably more pedestrian traffic to and from the area, not least associated with the student accommodation and the new secondary school. It is essential that the tunnel under the railway is improved so that it feels safe to use at all times for pedestrians and cyclists. There is only a narrow footbridge across the Feeder immediately adjacent to the proposed student accommodation. The Society is concerned that this bridge and the footpath approaching it from Silverthorne Lane are inadequate for the expected increase in pedestrians and cyclists using it. Monies for these improvements must be part of the settlement for permitting the wider redevelopment and this application should be considered in that context to raise a contribution.

Public Realm.

Improvements have been made to the landscape design, particularly between the buildings, compared with earlier proposals to create a pleasant space which would have good access to the Feeder. The Society supports these elements of the application. We also agree with the views of Design West regarding the need to consider wider public access to the open space for nearby residential premises particularly during the academic vacation periods.