



THE SEVENOAKS SOCIETY

for the conservation and improvement of the town

8 November 2010

please reply to :

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Dear Sir

Land West of Bligh's Meadow, London Road, Sevenoaks

We have studied the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) containing the Development Brief for the above site, we have attended the exhibition and inspected the model and are familiar with the site and its surroundings. We appreciate that the document has been prepared by your officers and consultants with the advice of the Kent Architecture Centre (KAC) and scrutiny by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) Southern Design Panel.

Whilst accepting the principle of a mixed development for the site, the housing element being especially welcome, we now write on behalf of The Society to express our views, with reservations, on what is being proposed.

Introduction :

We understand that following consideration of the results of the current consultation, the intention is to seek tenders for the re-development of the whole site from interested parties early in 2011 and on the basis of the approved briefing SPD. We would be interested to know how the proposed tenderers are to be invited. Will this be by general advertisement or by some form of selective tender? The document, and particularly Appendix 2, appears to be rather prescriptive and we would therefore like to know whether those invited to tender will be allowed to submit alternative proposals for your consideration or will they be strictly tied to the brief?

The Site :

The site is approximately 0.57 ha in gross area, is an irregular shape and lies to the west of the present Bligh's Meadow development, to the east of the London Road with its two storey listed Victorian cottages and to the rear of the gardens to the individual properties, largely commercial on the south west side of Pembroke Road which joins the London Road at the northern apex of the site. There is a notable difference in scale between the properties on Pembroke Road and the

/small domestic

small domestic cottages on the south west side of the London Road and which needs to be taken into account in the new development.

Apart from the three storey Social Club located just south of the middle of the site, and which is to be demolished, the main use of the site is for car parking, at the southern end, around the Social Club and at the north end; there is a certain amount of mature vegetation between the two northern car parks and along the rear gardens to Pembroke Road.

The brief indicates a fall of some 5 m through the length of the site and observation suggests this is largely from the position of the Social Club northwards, the southern part being fairly level. A ragstone wall, varying in quality, forms the larger part of the London Road boundary at the rear of the pavement and it varies in height between approximately one and half and two metres. The ground levels above the top of the ragstone wall again varies between one and a half and two metres depending in part on the varied widths of the site.

Altogether a complex site and one which should be capable of producing an imaginative design making full use of the varying levels, etc.

The Proposals :

As already indicated, we are sympathetic to a mixed development for the site although perhaps in the light of the present economic situation, some further consideration should be given to confirm that the amount of commercial development proposed is appropriate to meet the present and future needs of the town.

While this site should be considered as a whole, the proposals indicate that the site has been divided into three parts not really relating to each other. The three being from the north, blocks A1 and A2 being designated as residential; the centre blocks B, C and D1 are also residential although the latter possibly has some commercial element on the ground floor and the third area with blocks D2, E1, E2, E3 and E4 all being commercial in one form or another. We comment on these, starting in the north :

We agree with the proposal that blocks A1 and A2 should form part of a gateway to the town centre and linking the houses/offices in Pembroke Road with the offices of the West Kent Housing Association on the apex between Argyle and London Roads. However, we feel it could make a stronger impression/impact if the buildings were in one block rather than the two proposed with the planting in front retained provided it does not diminish the impact of the building(s).

Whilst we appreciate the siting of blocks B, C and D1 is acceptable from an orientation and amenity point of view, we are concerned with the impact they are likely to have and however sensitively designed we feel they are likely to dominate over the Victorian cottages on the west side of London Road. Judging from the sections through the site shown in image 18 insufficient allowance has been made for the height of the ragstone wall plus the ground level behind when determining the levels for the three buildings and their respective storeys. These are but perhaps not so crucial impacts with the east end of the blocks where

/they overlook

they overlook the rear gardens of the Pembroke Road properties. There is also the possibility that the three blocks will appear to merge together as a single building when seen from a distance such as the North Downs and be reminiscent of the 1960's Tubs Hill blocks further north down the London Road.

The third and southern section, blocks D2, E1 to E4, is the most difficult and as presently conceived is unsatisfactory. It should link the London Road in with the recent Bligh's Meadow development and through it to the High Street and at the same time reflect some of the character of the town to the south and form a connection with the three blocks of the present development to the north. At present it does not seem to do any of these satisfactorily. A small car park for five cars between blocks D2 and E3 would appear to prevent a more positive edge to the existing central Bligh's Meadow car park or leave it open to link with the London Road. The Blocks E1 to E4 do not appear to relate to each other or to reflect the character of the town to the south.

It has been suggested that all these blocks should be taller like the adjacent ones in the London Road at this point especially numbers 50 and 52. It has also been suggested that block D2 should be increased in height, by say two or three floors, with a 'posh' restaurant and/or viewing terrace at the top to provide a 'magnet' attraction and form the dominant building for the whole of the Bligh's Meadow development; it should NOT simply be a larger version of the 'Market Hall' at the end of Bligh's Road on the other side of the central car park.

The small 23/25 space car park/market square seems to be a lost and unrelated open space. Why not make it into a more positive amenity area with seats and other ornamental features ? !

Highways and Car Parking :

Taking the latter first, we have calculated that the existing car parking capacity amounts to 128 spaces, i.e. 58 off Pembroke Road and 70 off the London Road including the public and private around the Social Club. These are largely public spaces which are to be replaced by 66 in the underground car park serving the residential buildings and a possible 25 for the general public in the car park/market square. This results in a considerable shortfall of public spaces of say between 103 and 128. Bearing in mind that the commercial aspects of the new development are likely to draw in additional customers/car driving public, we submit this is unacceptable and would be interested to know how this problem is to be resolved.

With regard to Highways, we note that the existing access in Pembroke Road to the existing car park is to be retained to serve the new underground car park but we wonder what arrangements there will be for servicing the flats ? We suggest the need for a London Road access will depend on the final decision on the treatment of the 'market square' area as indicated above.

Design : Architecture :

We strongly recommend that the architectural design treatment should be

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in the modern idiom of today throughout the development in preference to any traditional 'pastiche' and using modern materials and those sourced locally; we found the indication of these in the brief to be rather misleading. We have some sympathy with the indicative sketches in the brief, Images 19 and 24 but find the images part 20, 22 and 23 rather twee 'pastiche' ! It should be borne in mind that the existing Bligh's Meadow development was deleted from the latest High Street Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and therefore should not be taken as a precedent for the new development.

Design : Landscape :

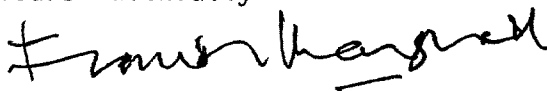
The mature trees suggested on the model and in the sketches, especially those sited over the underground car park, are not feasible since they will not have the necessary depth of soil unless car parking spaces are sacrificed. The 4 m high trees indicated in the brief images 20, 21, etc. will not have the same impact and character.

Conclusion :

We will look forward to a development of a high standard and quality, especially in the architectural and landscape design and sustainability in accordance with the requirements of the SPD and Core Strategy. We strongly recommend that the weaknesses identified by ourselves and others are carefully considered and rectified before the documents are issued to developers for tendering purposes.

We would be interested to receive answers to the queries we have raised and would be willing to discuss any of these issues if this would be helpful.

Yours faithfully



Frank Marshall
Chairman, Planning Sub-committee

cc : Councillor Peter Fleming, Council Leader
Councillor Mrs Jill Davison, Portfolio Holder for Continuous
Improvement and Strategic Planning
Councillor Roger Walshe, Chairman, Environment Select Committee
Councillor Ian Bosley, Chairman, Development Control Committee
Kristen Paterson, Community and Planning Services Director
Alan Dyer, Planning Policy Manager
Sir Michael Harrison, Chairman, Sevenoaks Conservation Council
Sevenoaks Society DG, TP, CM, RW, file