



Bath Heritage Watchdog

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APPLICATION NUMBER: 17/03771/FUL

ADDRESS: Unit 2, Lymore Gardens, Oldfield Park, Bath

PROPOSAL: Erection of 7no two bed dwellings with parking following demolition of existing structure

CASE OFFICER: Christine Moorfield

DATE: 7 September 2017

COMMENT: STRONG OBJECTION

Bath Heritage strongly objects to this application.

The application has been brought to our attention by local residents. It is regrettable that the applicants have not approached the local community or stakeholder groups such as ourselves.

We have an 'in principle' objection to the demolition of the building which we consider to be an Undesignated Heritage Asset. The building was originally constructed to form the Hygienic Laundry in 1898 (not the 1900s as stated in the Planning Statement). The Bath Water Works Act of 1846 extended the supply of water available to the city and in combination led to the rise of the steam laundry. By 1938 it was one of the largest in the West of England.

Red brick buildings are relative uncommon in Bath and given the close proximity to the Victoria Brick & Tile Works (now known as the Brickfields at the end of Lymore Gardens) it is likely it was constructed using bricks manufactured on this site. The fact that the owner of the Victoria Brick & Tile Works, Thomas H Delabere May, was involved in the establishment of the laundry means the importance of the building locally straddles the two businesses. The detailing of what is an industrial building shows the importance the Victorians placed on their buildings.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

We have looked at the recent planning history for the building and see that permission was granted previously for the conversion of the current building. Whilst a commercial/industrial use is preferable as there is a distinct lack of employment space in this area, and in Bath in general, the premise of residential has been set. The approach of conversion is always supportable over demolition.

We are concerned that within a matter of months of gaining permission to convert the warehouse into residential that the building is now deemed to be structurally unsound that it will need to be demolished. We find it hard to believe that any sensible developer would have plans drawn up and go through the planning process without investigating the viability of conversion first.

We note that the structural report supposedly justifying demolition has been drawn up by IESIS Group and that the applicants, Farleigh Rengen (One) Ltd are a subsidiary of IESIS. Indeed they share the same directors and company address. It is an uncomfortable arrangement whereby the developers' own structural department provide the justification for demolition.

IESIS are predominantly known for carrying out developments for student accommodation (Canal Bridge, Widcombe Social Club, Radway House, 1-3 James Street West & Bath Sea Cadets, to name some examples). It would therefore appear to be a front for the use of any build on the site for student accommodation. We see very little demand locally for such new builds given the price that they will no doubt be. Oldfield Park, and the immediate area in particular, is already saturated by student accommodation and HMOs and we have concern that this is another Trojan Horse project which appear to be coming more and more prevalent to circumvent current legislation.

The design of the build includes garages for each property. Sensible given the lack of on street parking locally, however these can, in due course, be converted to habitable use without the need for planning permission, therefore giving the option for even further future internal works to reconfigure to house more students. If the officer is minded to approve the application we would request conditions removing the Permitted Development rights for such conversions and the use for students being prohibited.

Given the number of people that could leave across the development we query whether the proposed parking arrangements conform to the Placemaking requirements. Indeed in order for the garages to be used the current on street parking would need to be removed which would further adversely impact on the current residents.

DESIGN

The design is alien to the area and would provide the houses opposite with an outlook of large garage doors. The rear elevation is haphazard with alien materials. In fact the rear elevation is reminiscent of the reviled development of Carlton Buildings, a result of the first Sack of Bath.

One of the main characteristics of Oldfield Park is the uniform terraces. The current building, being low and not without some architectural detailing, 'fits' well into the locality. By no stretch of the imagination can the design put forward be considered to fit into any locality in Bath let alone this one. The design is clearly arrived at with a future alternative use in mind.

DOCUMENTATION

The Planning Statement contains some inaccuracies and some statements that appear to be designed to mislead.

- There is a bus stop on Lymore Avenue, but only one infrequent service serves it and does not run on a route that would generally be of use, especially for work.
- The bus stop at Ascension Church (Claude Avenue, not Lymore Avenue) does have a more regular service but with the withdrawal of other services recently it is now already over subscribed.
- Crossfit Bath is due to close (if it hasn't already) due to possible redevelopment plans at the Wansdyke Business Centre.
- *'The area is characterised by terraced homes with no on plot parking, pitched roofs and small private gardens'*. Accurate to a point but there is no mention of the saturation of HMOs.
- *'There are no listed or locally listed buildings within 100m of the site. There are no listed or locally listed buildings within 100m of the site. The Grade II listed Church of the Ascension on Claude Avenue is 140m to the east of the site, with no visual links to this location'*.
- From which point distances have been measured is not known but one important fact has been omitted and that is the Oldfield Park Junior School (formerly South Twerton Junior School) is also Grade II listed. It is noted that the distance to the church is stated to be 140m and the school 170m. How this can be when they are adjacent to each other we do not know.
- Bath Community Academy is also mentioned but this is to be closed in the not too distant future.

SUMMARY

It is clear that this application is not all it purports to be. If development is to be permitted here then it is conversion not rebuild that should be carried out, as per the previous permissions. The application should be refused.