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31<sup>st</sup> March 2014

Dear James

Re: Russell House, Dunstable Road, Ampthill. Ref: CB/13/03499

Thank you for sending us a copy of your Planning Committee Report for the Planning Meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April. We have reviewed this document and there are a couple of matters that we would be grateful if you would bring to the attention of the Committee, by way of an update.

Before we review the report I would like to take this opportunity of stating that we are most grateful for the time and effort that you and your colleagues have put into this project to make it special, and one for which we will all be proud. The site has been derelict for a least 7 years and its redevelopment will enhance the Conservation Area and will bring wider benefits to the whole community. There is an identified need for Care Homes in this area, and this scheme will go some way to help alleviate this need, as well as providing some high quality housing in the Town centre.

From the outset of our purchase of the site from Central Bedfordshire Council we have engaged with the Town Council and various neighbours around the site. As a result of these meetings various amendments have been made to the scheme and the Care Home has been reduced in size, windows removed, provided additional on site parking and enhanced landscaping introduced. We have also been made aware of some of the traffic issues in Ampthill, and as a result we have offered, via the S106 Agreement, to either fund up to the value of £40,000 or carry out the works to provide an additional car parking in Bedford Street.

A Viability Appraisal, for this mixed use brownfield site, has been reviewed and accepted by the Council's Valuer. Although the scheme will contribute £270,098 in offsite S106 costs, it has been agreed that as a result of the need for an exceptionally high quality replacement building (designed by Robert Adam of Adam Architecture) and the associated increase in build costs, the site would be unviable if it were to accommodate Affordable Housing. The site was bought directly from the Council about two years ago, and given the time taken, the price paid, the demolition of the existing buildings, the quality of the design, the wider community benefits, together with the direct social benefits of the Care Home it was agreed that no onsite affordable was appropriate in this case. It is a special site with a special design and we are hopeful that it will win awards for its quality of design.

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We have made various amendments to the plans as a result of our consultations and given that our neighbours will be the ones most affected by any redevelopment, we have concentrated on endeavoring to address their concerns so we have recently agreed to build a brick wall, subject to the details of construction being agreed with the Tree Officer, along our mutual boundary with Alameda House and we are happy to accept a condition to that effect.

Secondly we have also been requested to remove a window at the end of the corridor on the Western end of the Care Home wing. This could be replaced with a roof light and we are also happy to accept a condition on this matter.

Furthermore there has been some additional consultation undertaken about the levels, as the site is considerably lower than the land to the North. The relationship is satisfactory and will make for an attractive scheme, but in the interest of the adjacent landowners, we are happy to accept a levels condition in order to alleviate any further concerns on this point.

Finally, there is a point in the report where English Heritage commented, at the beginning of the planning process. It needs to be clear that they made their initial comments without the benefit of seeing our Heritage Assessment, when, thereafter they changed their view to a neutral stance and returned the case to Central Beds to determine taking into consideration all matters including the wider Community benefits.

Therefore, in summary, we believe that the proposal in front of you has been carefully designed using a well known and Nationally recognized Architect, who has produced a building that is in scale and in keeping with the surrounding buildings, it has been articulated to a high standard, with bespoke detailing and quality materials to a degree that it will compliment and enhance the Conservation Area and bring this important site back into beneficial use. We would therefore urge the Committee to support the Officer's recommendation to approve this application.

Yours sincerely

  
Hugo Haig  
On Behalf Campbell Buchanan