

To: The Planning Inspectorate
f.a.o.: Case Officer - Aisosa Charles
Ref: APP/W0530/W/22/3307903
Site: Former Felix Hotel, Whitehouse Lane, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0LX
Date: 5 December 2022

Dear Planning Inspectorate,

I am writing in regard to appeal reference (APP/W0530/W/22/3307903) which relates to South Cambridge District Council's unanimous decision to reject planning application (21/00953/FUL). I am **against** the appeal proposals.

This letter is additional to representation previously submitted during the public consultation period that, per the Site Planning Notice [1], requested comment by 24/05/2021, a date echoed in the "Important Dates" section of the local planning portal entry [2] and which was widely understood to be the public consultation cut-off date. The material considerations I raised then were reflected in the reasons provided within the refusal Decision Notice [3] so need no repetition.

My comments here are intended to support transparency and efficiency of the appeal process, and relate to:

- 1) Outcome of the public consultation period at 24/05/2021 (78% Objections)
- 2) Robustness of the decision-making process leading to the refusal

Taking each in turn:

1) Outcome of the public consultation period

Following publication of the Appeal Form [4], I note in section G.3 that the first reason to choose an Inquiry was given as "*There has been significant public interest (47no. letters of objections, 33no. letters of support) in the application*". This has clearly been drawn from the local planning portal's Public Comments section [5] but provides no granularity on the balance of submissions before versus after 24/05/2021. The associated Statement of Case document [6] repeats these figures in Appendix 2, s7.0 as part of the Committee Report prepared by LPA's Planning Department for the decision meeting of 13 July 2022, rightly mentioning (s7.3) that full details of the representations are given on the council's website. That public record includes both date and postcode for each submission.

Given the Appeal Start letter para 2 [7] states the appellant's preferred choice was considered in deciding to hold an Inquiry, I assume cited reasons (in the Appeal Form) may have been a contributory factor. The government's official

guidance on the process for efficient and inclusive consultation of planning applications [8] emphasises the importance of submitting comments within the public consultation period's timeframe (para 005). Whilst post-deadline submissions may be accepted on a discretionary basis (para 034), in consideration of a key goal of public consultation being to gauge feedback from neighbouring residents and community groups (para 001), I'd like it noted that data of the planning application's public comment section indicates:

a) At the Site Notice's "comment by" date of 24/05/2021, a total of 55 comments had been submitted with 78% objecting to the proposal, the vast majority (70%) of whom are located within a 2-mile walking distance of the site (source: postcode analysis, Google Maps Data);

b) Of the 12 submissions made in support of the application by that same date, zero (0%) originated from the same 2-mile walking distance of the site. The closest supporting submission came from the University Arms Hotel, Cambridge CB2 1AD who, per s 1.4 of the appellant's original Planning Statement [9] shares the same parent company as the planning applicant;

c) Several weeks after the Site Notice's "comment by" date of 24/05/2021, a further 25 comments were submitted which, collectively, showed a markedly different profile of support for the application at 84%, but still with barely any (just 8%) of those supporters originating from postcodes within the local site vicinity per the same 2-mile walking distance benchmark used above.

I believe this breakdown merits consideration in any assessment of the public interest and strength of local opposition to the proposal.

2) Robustness of the decision-making process leading to the refusal

Based on the time line and content of emails released on the planning portal website plus the prolonged concern felt by many local residents, the process for progressing this application showed room for improvement. Delays, possibly prompted by role changes, were likely compounded by the unprecedented upheavals in working practices that the Covid pandemic imposed on all of us (indeed the appellant's original Planning Statement s1.4 [9] relates the impact of Covid-19 directly to Hotel Felix's closure). I have sympathy with frustration experienced by all parties.

Fortunately, those days are in the past. It was reassuring to see the application dealt with so thoroughly in the Planning Committee meeting held on July 13, 2022. The matter was called in by a Councillor for Girton, recognising the need to bring focus, clarity and closure to a matter of such local significance. The meeting – broadcast live [10] – was attended by planning department representatives, council members and the appellant. It allowed for in-depth discussion of the key issues; opportunity for specific queries to be addressed by

the appellant; well-rounded and participative debate, and culminated in a unanimous vote to refuse the application on multiple grounds.

In gathering background information to a potential inquiry, I would recommend that viewing this meeting in its entirety would be a very worthwhile use of the Planning Inspectorate's time.

Thank you sincerely for considering these comments. I'm a great believer in transparency and inclusion within the planning process and am most grateful for the opportunity to participate.

References:

[1] Site Notice (sent to you by LPA with Appeal Questionnaire, re Part 2)

[2] Details / Important Dates subsection of LPA original application record
<https://applications.greatercambridgeplanning.org/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=dates&keyVal=QPCE54DX0AS00>

[3] Decision Notice letter (sent to you by appellant with Appeal Form)

[4] Appeal Form (sent to you by appellant)

[5] Public Comments subsection of LPA original application record
<https://applications.greatercambridgeplanning.org/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=neighbourComments&keyVal=QPCE54DX0AS00>

[6] Statement of Case for the Appellant (sent to you with the Appeal Form)

[7] Appeal Start letter (sent by you to by LPA on 2/11/2022)

[8] Government Guidance on Consultation and Pre-Decision Matters
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consultation-and-pre-decision-matters#Public-consultation>

[9] Planning Statement (which may have been sent to you with the Appeal Form as ID15 per the "List of the original planning material sent to the Local Planning Authority"; sent as ID12 per Covering letter to LPA accompanying the original application)

[10] South Cambridgeshire DC – Planning Committee meeting, July 13 2022
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzdpAguvvU0>

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