

Girton Parish Council Statement to the Hotel Felix Planning Appeal

I speak as Vice-Chair of Girton Parish Council with their authority to do so, and I am accompanied by the Clerk of the Parish Council.

From the outset, let me make it clear that the Parish Council is not against any development on this site. The Council is opposed to this specific development, however. In simple terms the Parish Council supports the District Council's Statement of Case to this appeal, with its three core reasons of:

1. It is outside Girton's Development Framework and is in Green Belt with all the National Planning Policy Framework aspects which that entails
2. Loss of heritage
3. Failure to be justified on Very Special Circumstances grounds

It also maintains its concerns about burial provision as noted in submissions to the original application (see for example paragraphs 10.108 to 10.110 of the Committee report 21/00953/FUL dated 13 July 2022).

I note what is said in the Appellant's Statement of Case which I will refer to as the Bidwells' Report dated September 2022, but I wish to bring out certain Girton specific aspects.

Firstly, Green Belt. The parish of Girton lies outside the Cambridge city boundary with the village itself being surrounded by Green Belt. Unlike Cherry Hinton where the village element has been largely subsumed by the City, Girton remains a distinct entity from the City and wishes to remain so. While it enjoys the presence of its local big brother, Girton has no wish to be part of it.

To this end the land that separates the two entities is important. It lies in Green Belt and used to comprise both the current site and the adjacent playing fields AND NIAB land (the latter largely within the city boundary). With the Darwin Green development on the NIAB land (Phase 1 underway and Phase 2 being planned), the open gap between the entities has shrunk. This can be seen very well on Figure 1 and Figure 3 of the report by Ms Martina Sechi dated 17 December 2022. The importance of the so called 'Girton Gap' is referred to at paragraph 3.1.5 of Ms Sechi's report. In fairness I should also refer you to paragraph 3.1.6 of Ms Sechi's report, but if you actually walk the area the gap is real, noticeable and marks a notable change from the city, in the form of Darwin Green, to the more rural Girton. Therefore, it is more important than it might otherwise be to retain the gap and to retain it as Green Belt with its associated national policies regarding development. The Parish Council therefore requests that you set the bar higher in such considerations than might otherwise be where separation is not so important. Thus, when reading the various studies on landscape and Green Belt presented by the Appellant, we ask that these are read through such a lens so as to put it into the correct local perspective for Girton.

Secondly, heritage. The various reports all note that the original 1852 Victorian villa at the heart of the existing buildings is a non-designated heritage asset holding only a modest (Bidwells' report) or medium/moderate (Ms G Bloom report dated January 2023) level of significance. The Bidwells' report states at paragraph 6.4.1 *'is typical of its type, constructed during a time when numerous examples are apparent'*. At a national level, when compared to the great houses of Britain, it does not rank highly and there may be many of similar buildings elsewhere. However, in relation to Girton specifically, the Bidwells' statement is incorrect. Girton was originally a village based on agriculture as well as geese to provide the university with quills, and so has small, cottage style houses. It then expanded steadily in the twentieth century with fairly typical suburban homes. The few large homes lie mostly in the area of Girton Corner. While Bidwells' statement might well be correct on a national

level, it is not in Girton. We have the glorious red brick Victorian buildings of Girton College, but no others of this date (1852), size or ilk in the pale brick in the village. It is therefore unique within Girton and so forms a much greater part of Girton's heritage than that of the nation, on which the Appellant's assessments of heritage are based. Therefore, we ask you to read the heritage reports in that light.

We also note that in terms of a national perspective, the Appellant's case that the building is in poor repair and so this lessens the harm done by its loss might be persuasive. However, paragraph 6.47 of the Bidwell's report makes it clear that they rely on an absence of a policy requirement to consider alternatives to demolition to simply seek the commercial expediency of demolition rather than re-use. Hardly an environmentally friendly approach. We also ask that you note the report by Ms Broom dated January 2023 (summarised at her paragraph 11.4) which identifies the reported cracking and water ingress issues not being beyond repair or an improvement in maintenance.

Finally, the Appellant is forced to argue Very Special Circumstances because the plans are, by their own admission (as in paragraph 1.6 of the Bidwells' report and paragraph 6.11 of the Statement of Common Ground), inappropriate in Green Belt. I understand that the inappropriateness is because the proposed building is larger than the existing. The gross internal floor area proposed as of October 2020 is 6.4% larger than that of the existing building, with the footprint being 13.5% larger (see pages 25 and 28 Ms M Magee's Proof of Evidence dated 9 January 2023). The building is also moving back towards the adjacent residential roads of The Brambles and Thornton Way. It is not clear to me as I am no expert in the matter, whether the green screen between these houses and the proposed development is actually being enhanced despite the data in paragraph 6.20 of the Bidwells' report. The screen is important to all parties for future mutual quiet co-existence should the appeal be allowed.

Therefore, in summary, Girton Parish Council supports the District Council's views but adds strength to those aspects specific to Girton of having a high bar in relation to the Green Belt requirements of the Girton Gap and of taking account of the heritage nature of the original Victorian villa to Girton rather than the nation as a whole. The Parish Council also objects to the increase in size that makes the Appellant argue about Very Special Circumstances and the change of location of the building in relation to the adjacent houses. If you are minded to accept the appeal, then we request the green screens to the houses are enhanced considerably.

Finally, we have found no supporting evidence in the enquiry comments already submitted on line to show that Girton residents are in favour of this. Those that are, come from people outside the village and it has been suggested that they have links with the developers.

Councillor Corrine Gavie, who represents Girton on the South Cambridgeshire Council is unable to be here this morning. She has asked that I also mention that this development will require at least one extra GP. There is already a GP shortage nationally and particularly in this area. She would also like to highlight the need to consider biodiversity within the area.



Ann Muston, Vice-Chair Girton Parish Council
31st January 2022.

Personal statement to the Hotel Felix Planning Appeal

As a teacher, I would like to express my personal concerns about the demolition of the Felix Hotel as it is an example of a Victorian building.

When it was the County Centre, it was used by schools and those on courses there were able to see and learn first-hand about the heritage. *(Not stated in my presentation but I worked for Studio Schools in Cambridge and many young international students attended summer courses there where history and the specific environment were hugely appreciated.)*

When it was The Felix Hotel, it was used by many Girton residents as a place to meet and enjoy the surroundings. In my job, I took international families there to explain about the history and also experience afternoon tea as well as dinner.

I have a 13 year old girl who has written a 45,000 word novel based in Victorian times started because she was able to see the Victorian building and envisage life there. When my children were young, I drove around Cambridge, finding examples of Victorian architecture for them to see and experience as photographs never do justice.

One of my daughter's who got married last year would have liked to get married at The Felix Hotel. As it had closed, she had to find another similar venue. She did but it was in the Lake District. It was the building and heritage were important to her.

I have lived in Girton for over 30 years. The residents of Thornton Road and especially this side of the village from the A14 bridge, need amenities that they can use and still feel part of a village community. This is something that is desired. I moved to Girton because it was a village and in the Green Belt.



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