

Gunnersbury Close, Garage Block (ref 02293/A/P1)

Comments from the West Chiswick and Gunnersbury Society

The West Chiswick and Gunnersbury Society welcomes and supports the Council's strategy of optimising the use of its own estates to provide more much-needed affordable homes. The Society supports the principle of building residential accommodation on the site of the garages at Gunnersbury Close as part of that strategy.

The Society also welcomes the specialist housing association, Habinteg, which has a long and distinguished record in providing and managing wheelchair and fully accessible housing as social rented homes across the country including across a number of the London boroughs.

The Society is minded to support the proposals in application 02293/A/P1 provided the following issues can be resolved satisfactorily:

Design In general we find the design and materials to be sympathetic to the surrounding residential properties. The south and north elevations are interesting being well-articulated by means of the fenestration, balconies and associated detailing.

We recognise the need to respect the privacy of the neighbouring residential properties, especially the flats within The Grange, but find the largely blank facades of the east and west elevations “punctured by small service windows” to be an unsatisfactory solution. We consider the unrelieved facades of these two elevations to be unattractive and lacking in interest. They serve rather to emphasise the bulk of the building. The east elevation faces the eastern block of the existing estate across the open amenity space and should provide an attractive aspect. Both east and west elevations of the building will be visible from the Chiswick High Road (see photo 2 on page 3 below). What the building looks like from the Chiswick High Road is as important as what it looks like from Grange Road. While some screening will be provided by the mature plane trees on the landscaped strip fronting Chiswick High Road and by the trees beyond the western boundary, such screening will be reduced significantly in winter.

We request that further consideration is given to the design of the east and west elevations to provide better articulation. For example, larger, angled windows might assist, together with some additional decorative brickwork.

Trees and Green Space We are pleased to note that the one tree within the site and those within close proximity of the boundary will be retained and protected during construction. All these trees are important for their many environmental and health benefits and for their visual amenity. The three mature plane trees within the landscaped strip fronting Chiswick High Road make a very positive contribution to the public realm on this stretch of the busy high road. Protection should be extended to the landscaped strip itself as it provides welcome relief from the harsh environment. This area has been enhanced by the bulbs and shrubs planted by the community as part of WCGS’s Green up Gunnersbury Campaign (see photo 1 on page 3 below).

Sustainable development The Sustainability Report from the consultants TACE seems unclear about the principal form of space heating. Air Source Heat Pumps are suggested for hot water but not it would seem for space heating. Given the Council’s adopted approach to Climate Change, which the Society supports, we would question whether it should not be

possible to use ASHP technology for the space heating in this new build development. In addition it is unclear from the TACE report whether photovoltaic panels are proposed. The TACE report seems somewhat generic and isn't clear about the detail of the recommended approach for the Habinteg development on this site. The Society would support the highest technical sustainability specification for the building which might require some further clarification from the consultants.

Affordable homes The proposal to provide all new homes in this small development as affordable homes is welcomed and supported by the Society with many local households who cannot afford market prices approaching the Council for assistance.

The Society further understands that the level of 'London Affordable Rents' – which are set by the Mayor – are approximately 50% higher than the average social rents levied by the Council for its tenants. Since very many of the households rehoused by the Council rely on some element of housing benefit to afford their rents, the Society would support every effort to set the rents for these wheelchair and fully accessible homes at 'social rent' levels aligning with the rents set by the Council for its tenants. This would also mirror the rent levels set by Habinteg across the rest of its 3,000 homes which are at social rents.

Benefits to and Integration with existing estate As a matter of principle, we believe that developments such as this on existing council estates should aim to provide some tangible benefit to the residents of the existing buildings as some aspects of amenity are often lost. In this case this could include joint planning with the Council for upgrading the communal green spaces which meet on the eastern boundary of the proposed development and improvement to the landscaping of this space, including repairs to the fencing. The existing residents should be consulted on such improvements.

The western boundary of the communal open space is currently formed by the back wall of the eastern row of garages. A 1.8m tongue and groove fence has been proposed as replacement. We question whether the site should be separated from Gunnersbury Close in this way. Might it not be better in terms of community cohesion for the new building to be approached as part of the existing estate with some shared communal areas forming a socially integrated community?



Photo 1: Looking west towards Chiswick Tower. Community planting of bulbs and shrubs in landscaped strip fronting Chiswick High Road – part of WCGS Green up Gunnersbury Campaign

Gunnersbury Close



The Grange



Photo 2: Visibility of site from Chiswick High Road – between railway bridge and Chiswick Tower (planters part of WCGS Green up Gunnersbury Campaign)

WCGS, October 2021