

Oxford Court, Garage Block (ref 01177/U/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 Oxford Court as part of that strategy.

As we noted in relation to the nearby proposed development at Gunnersbury Close, 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, however, objects to the proposals in application 01177/U/P1 on the grounds that the scale and massing of the proposed building would have a negative impact on the Wellesley Road Conservation Area and on the quality of life of residents in neighbouring properties in Oxford Road North and Chasley Court.

Scale and Massing We consider that replacing the garages and parking spaces along the northern boundary of the site with a bulky building of 2 and 3 storeys is unacceptable. The proposed building would not respect the scale or form of the surrounding Wellesley Road Conservation Area*. It would harm the setting of and outlook from this CA. It is therefore not compliant with Local Plan Policy CC4.

In addition such a building would not be compliant with Local Plan Policy SC4. It would create an overbearing sense of enclosure for the residents of 5 Oxford Road North and would cause a very significant level of overshadowing of the garden. This is well illustrated by figure 3 (pg 9) of the Daylight and Sunlight Report. Moving the goal posts by assessing the sunlight on the 21st of April rather than the 21st of March is not acceptable. Climate Change is impacting seasonal changes and Spring is in general arriving earlier. The eastern end of the building is also within an uncomfortable distance of some of the flats within Chasley Court, especially Nos. 10 and 11.

We recommend that the proposed scheme should be replaced by one based on that first proposed by the developer. Alternatively, the block should be reduced by one storey, providing a building of 1 and 2 storeys.

Whatever the design a Condition should be included to prevent any flat roof being used as amenity space by the residents of the new development.

Trees and Green Space We are concerned as to how trees outside the site but within close proximity of the boundary, especially those in the garden of No.5 Oxford Road North will be protected during construction. All trees are important for their many environmental and health benefits and for their visual amenity.

Access We question the practicality and acceptability of the proposed new pedestrian access route through Chasley Court. The only entrance to/exit from this estate (on Wellesley Road) is gated.

Sustainable development The Sustainability Report of August 2021 from the consultants TACE provides detailed calculations to show compliance with the relevant requirements of (principally) the London Plan in relation to energy consumption and carbon savings and

targets. Nonetheless it isn't clear to the lay reader whether achieving the planned targets relies on offsetting through the provision of electricity via photovoltaic cells. If this is the case then the report isn't clear about their scale and precise location. Both paragraph 4.5 and paragraph 6.0 of the report suggest incorporating photovoltaic cells "to supplement the fabric first approach". At the same time space heating is not to be provided by Air Source Heat Pumps but is to use grid electricity – possibly supplemented by photovoltaic cells – emitted by electric panel heaters. ASHPs will provide hot water to homes but not for space heating. As we noted in our comments on the Gunnersbury Close development, given the Council's adopted approach to Climate Change, which the Society strongly endorses, we would question whether it should not be possible to use ASHP technology for the space heating in this new build development. It is at this critical design and planning stage that sustainability requirements and ambitious standards should be held as a very high investment priority. The Society would support the highest technical sustainability specification for this new building which it seems to us requires some serious further consideration from the consultants and their Client.

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. Nonetheless, the Society remains concerned that the category of 'affordable housing' being applied in this development - 'London Affordable Rents', which are set by the Mayor, are very significantly higher than the average social rents levied by the Council for its tenants. Research shows that very many of the households rehoused by the Council in council owned homes let at social rents rely on some element of housing benefit in order to afford their rents. In common with the Council, Habinteg has a proud and long record of providing specialist housing across the country at social rents and 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 and by Habinteg for its tenants.

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. The existing residents should be consulted on any such improvements.

* It should be noted that there are now a significant number of Locally Listed buildings within this CA better reflecting its high quality. These include the Pilot public house (CH76) which is close to the site, and several buildings on Wellesley Road including the Gunnersbury Baptist Church (CH66); https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20010/planning_and_building/1098/design_and_conservation/6. The Heritage statement on page 19 of the D&A statement is out of date.

WCGS, December 2021