

PLANNING &

12 OCT 2010

SUSTAINABILITY



ENGLISH HERITAGE

SOUTH EAST REGION

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6th October 2010

Dear Jenna

CEDAR PRESS Ltd, CITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
25 storey redevelopment of site to provide Hotel and 122 flats.
Application No 08/01791/ful

Thank you requesting further comments reference to our previous letter 30th January 2009 and for your consultation 13th September and the CD.

Summary

We earlier indicated that this proposal will be prominent - a focal site in the city, and as such we believe it requires much more thought to provide a suitable design. While proposals for tall buildings in various locations in the city centre may be acceptable, English consider they should adhere to a key principle - that location should be plan led - in accordance with the joint government backed combined EH/ CABE guidance. In this respect, the proposal does not seem to comply.

Our detailed comments are set out below. As indicated, we were supportive of the officers draft work on a tall buildings/ skyline strategy for the city but we consider this should be completed before further tall buildings are considered.

We must regard the application as premature to a well informed strategy which, given recent character appraisal work for the CCAP, the City council is in a position to do. However, notwithstanding this, we consider the current proposed design has not significantly altered, it is not elegant nor does it contribute to the quality of the city skyline - the need for significant improvement still remains.

Detailed Comments

The site provides a possible focal point gateway building at the west end of Itchen Bridge but it will also be seen from other key points in the city centre. The design quality of such a tall building should reflect this, but it must also

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consider its wider surroundings, those containing heritage assets and long views across and toward significant heritage assets – such views still appear to be omitted from the application. A Characterisation Appraisal has already been undertaken in order to inform the emerging core strategy and moreover, the City Centre Action Area Plan - CCAAP. This work can also form the base to formulate a tall buildings strategy/policy, as can the emerging appraisals of Old Town and the Oxford Street area. The above Appraisal identified views within character areas and also strategic views such that impact on the heritage values and assets in the city may be assessed.

The joint EH/CABE advice is significant in respect of the location of tall buildings – that these should be plan led. The advice encourages local planning authorities to identify suitable locations where tall buildings are, and are not, appropriate, in areas where such developments are accepted as a possibility. We highlight again para's 2.4 -2.10 of the guidance. The current application proposal does not seem to follow the advice. We note that views from the east towards the site show the building amongst other rather mundane taller buildings. Adding the current application building might be said to be creating a 'cluster' by default rather than by plan.

The application statement looks at a location for a tall building in the immediate site. If this were as a result of a wider city urban design study then views should be shown of the building within the townscape with Heritage assets such as Old Town CA and the Oxford Street/ Queens Park area. For example, views in the DAS evaluation are not shown walking from Mayflower Park along Town Quay, Platform Road and into Queens Park area with South Weston House/Hotel in the view foreground - a kinetic view which has several important heritage assets en route. You may also wish to look at our recent guidance consultation document on setting.

Turning briefly to the proposed design as amended. The form of a tall building in this location should be elegant, in this regard we consider proposals should be substantially improved, we also indicated that it should defer at low level to the Terminus Loco shed, a Listed building adjacent and south west of the site, and to some degree this has been undertaken. However, the scheme still needs to be more convincing in its engagement at street level, and the nature of the tall element floating on the glazed podia without a visual sense of vertical support taken through to the ground appears rather jarring. We have also noted that the view provided here is very close to the site, whereas a view from the south end of the Crescent at Canute Road will show a different view of more significant impact on surroundings. The 'slab' like appearance from Ocean Village walking north through the Conservation Area becomes more noticeable.

We indicated the tower part of the scheme should be significantly improved, however, the strong horizontal bands remain, and they accentuate the mass

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rather than visually narrowing the building into a more elegant form. The south and north elevations remain essentially as a bulky slab block. If a tall building is to be acceptable here, then we believe a more elegant and imaginative building is required. We also consider that other massing options should have been explored, for example a more slender elegant tower combined with an increased volume of the lower element. We believe a landmark building in or near this location as a 'signpost' for views across the Itchen Bridge does not need to be tall and bulky.

In conclusion, while EH could accept the possibility of a tall building in this location, we consider the site selection process for such buildings should be plan led using the published guidance, informed by the recent characterisation/ appraisal work, including townscape analysis and the key views identified. These should transparently inform the decision. Any application should then demonstrate it has fully evaluated the impacts of the development. The proposal should be considered against PPS 5 in particular HE9.4. and HE10.1/2.

Based on the limited information provided, it appears that the current proposal, in particular its combined massing and height, will have some adverse effects on views within and towards heritage assets such as those indicated above.

Recommended.

Our recommendation remains essentially unchanged. English Heritage firstly consider the location of tall buildings in the City should be plan led as indicated above - following the EH/CABE joint guidance and the requisite study - informed by the recent CCAAP linked characterisation work. Any design then needs to be evaluated in relation to its context including views to and from heritage assets.

The application should only progress positively if the design is elegant, adding to the quality of the city townscape. In the current proposal the north and south views and some oblique views will show a 'slab like' block, the view from the east shows the building in its slimmest form but here too horizontal floor elements only emphasise bulk. As indicated above, insufficient information is provided to fully judge the impact of the development in key views that would seem to contribute to the significance and setting of heritage assets. Overall, we therefore must recommend the proposals rejection.

Next steps.

We would welcome the opportunity of advising further. Please consult us again if any additional information or amendments are submitted.

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If, notwithstanding our advice, you propose to approve the scheme in its present form, please advise us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely

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