

**CAMBOURNE TOWN COUNCIL**

District of South Cambridgeshire

Council Meeting 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021**Correspondence**

The below schedule is a summary of correspondence circulated by the Town Clerk to Councillors

	<b>FROM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>
<b>6.1</b>	Email from Newcest Estates Limited	Update on the High Street Development

Correspondence circulated since the last meeting by email

John

Further to our conversation earlier this week, I am now emailing to provide an update, as promised.

Although progress has been slow since our Teams meeting with you in late February, we have at least enjoyed a dialogue with two senior planning officers since then - namely Chris Carter and Mike Huntington. Whatever actions either the Town Council or the Ward Councillors took to get the High Street on the planning agenda after our meeting, certainly seems to have helped. Having said that, it remains frustrating that our Pre-App has been ongoing for 28 months and counting - possibly a World record?!

From a practical perspective, much of our dialogue in relation to the detail of our scheme has been with Mike. I have endeavoured to be as accommodating as possible regarding any issues he has raised, and this has resulted in various changes to the layout of our proposed scheme - the cumulative effect of which is, I believe, an improved proposal. A copy of our latest, updated layout is attached - which is very much 'hot off the press', I having only received this version late yesterday. The principal changes to the plan you will have seen in February are:

1. The westerly relocation of Block A, as shown by the broken red line. Here, Mike wished to see a closer link between this building and the neighbouring Cambridge Building Society block. Although this has resulted in the loss of a few parking spaces, we are still able to maintain an acceptable number/ratio. Positively though, this move has enabled us to both increase the size of the public Piazza between Blocks A & B, and also introduce a new outdoor seating area to the west.
2. We have removed the residents' access road on to the High Street between Block C & D on the southern site. Mike felt this was unnecessary (which was contrary to the view of one of his predecessors, hence it was previously included), and we were happy to agree with him. As you can see, in losing this, it has enabled us to introduce a green pedestrian corridor through the site at this point, which gives the scheme a greener and more spacious feel. Again, a distinct improvement.
3. Mike took the initiative with County Highways in relation the design requirements for the required upgrading of the High Street roadway. These discussions have resulted in the GCP no longer requiring a highway devoid of any traffic calming measures, which they had previously required to minimise the journey time of the proposed guided bus that will use this route. Accordingly, we have been able to introduce 3 width restrictions along this section of the highway, thereby significantly improving the pedestrian-friendly nature of the scheme.
4. Although not immediately apparent, we have agreed to slightly adjust the location of Blocks A, B & C, and also marginally reduced the highway width, in order to maximise pavement widths adjacent to the shops - again, to improve the environment for pedestrians/shoppers.
5. We have tweaked various areas of car parking throughout, in order to maximise the introduction of landscaped areas, thus breaking up the expanses of parking as much as possible, given the constraints of the sites.
6. The measures we have taken to maximise 'green space' will result in the introduction of almost 150 new trees into our scheme - which is more than one per residential unit.

Hopefully you will agree that all of the above adaptations are very positive and, for our part, I am happy to be able to make these changes. Equally, this list only focuses on

the 'highlights', we having also made numerous other minor changes in an effort to create the best possible scheme.

This basically then leaves us with a single, remaining issue - namely that of private amenity space and here, discussions are ongoing. In fact, both Chris and Mike were kind enough to join Ed Durrant and me on a Teams meeting this morning, where the focus was almost entirely on this.

Essentially, this conversation centres on the provision of balconies for each of the upper floor apartments. Technically, in planning terms balconies are not required to be provided. Rather, guidance is given that they are a desirable addition, with latitude to enable officers and members to take a view on their inclusion/exclusion where circumstances dictate. These circumstances could include many scenarios, such as:

- The proximity of abundant public open space.
- The fact that balconies would be north facing or shaded by other buildings, thus benefitting from little or no sunlight.
- Where balconies might enjoy poor views - eg. over the Morrisons car park.
- In a retail setting, where their provision might conflict with a high pedestrian footfall below.
- Where their addition is economically unviable.
- Where their inclusion might cause management issues.
- Where site constraints make their inclusion very difficult/impossible.

In summary, I think it is fair to say that whilst balconies are a desirable inclusion, their omission is not at all unusual in schemes such as the one we are proposing. Indeed, the current McCarty & Stone development does not include balconies on the High Street elevation, and this was approved under delegated powers, with the Officer's report confirming it to be fully compliant in planning policy terms.

As you know, we have not included balconies for various reasons - not least the fact that having them would increase the aggregate width of our development by around 6m, whereas the constraints of these poorly allocated sites mean that we literally only have centimetres to play with. However, we have included Juliette balconies and large, bi-folding doors in every one of our apartments - which we saw as a very positive compromise.

Moving forwards, the point of our meeting with the Officers today was as a result of Chris's suggestion that the 'balconies issue', should be left until we have submitted our application and not further concluded during Pre-App. For many reasons - not least the fact that we have now been in Pre-App for 28 months, coupled with the cost of making this application is likely to be in the order of £150,000, I want this issue to be thrashed out in advance and concluded.

In fairness to both Chris and Mike, they appeared to now take this on board and said they would revert to one or more of the elected councillors on the planning committee to discuss it (principal, I think, they meant Tumi). Hopefully they revert positively, as I quite literally have nowhere to go if they do not.

Conversely, and perhaps more positively, they did confirm that if they, the Town Council and the elected Cambourne Ward Councillors are all supportive of the application we ultimately make, then it would be possible to give planning under delegated powers, following the usual consultation period - which is actually how detailed planning has been given on almost all phases of Cambourne, including the latest High Street element (ie McCarthy & Stone). Given the circumstances, this is a route I would very much like

to pursue, so if the Town Council need any further dialogue to enable them to get sufficiently comfortable to provide their support, I would be very happy to engage with them.

I trust this update helps. As I hope I have conveyed, I am still very committed to providing the vibrant High Street that I think all of us want to see, as soon as possible. Clearly the length of time the planning process has taken is frustrating to us all but if we can collaborate positively, I remain hopeful that a great outcome can be achieved. As ever, any pressure you as a Town Council can bring to bear to assist, would be very much appreciated.

Kind regards.

Duncan

