

Petersfield Area Community Trust

Petersfield, Cambridge

23rd June 2016



Ref: Application 15/2372/FUL, Addendum Planning Statement of 10 June 2016.

To all whom it may concern,

The addendum planning statement for the above application quotes a meeting with trustees and committee members of the Petersfield Area Community Trust (PACT) on 20th April 2016 and makes some incorrect inferences (the 20th May date mentioned erroneously refers to a second discussion about “phase 2” proposals which are not the subject of any application yet). Given this, we would like to make clear our position, point by point.

We would like to note that the trustees and committee members of PACT are uneasy that we might appear to be “taking sides” between two commercial entities – CSVPA and Bodywork Dance School. It is the protection of community facilities which is the aim here.

Introduction, 1.5. The example given is not obviously relevant. The previous application was not specific to Bodywork, but the local plan strongly differentiates not on the basis of ownership, but on the basis of activities undertaken and who benefits (whether they “cater for a primarily local market”). Bodywork is a locally run company which provides many classes to residents of the City of Cambridge and the surrounding area. Any resident can simply pick up the phone and book onto an extensive set of dance classes, and there is an active school outreach programme. Bodywork can be regarded, under the local plan, as a suitable user of a community facility. CSVPA is a university teaching facility and is unambiguously excluded by Local Plan section 5.21, “*University teaching accommodation, language schools and tutorial colleges are specifically excluded as they do not cater for a primarily local market.*”

1.6. We have been told by Bodywork that they are not in discussion with CSVPA as suggested.

1.7. Ownership is not the issue.

1.8. The council must of course seek to enforce the local plan, and so conditions should be placed on the nature of the intended occupier.

1.9 – 1.12. While CSVPA is undoubtedly a successful local business, but note that no instance of the community outreach referred to is mentioned in this extensive description.

1.13. As noted, everything said here appears irrelevant to the actual issue.

3.1. We note our major concern and objection to the ongoing use of protected open space for car parking. The protected open space has been inaccessible behind hoardings for around 18 months at this point.

4.1. The statement’s focus on community access is not the core point here and was not our interpretation of the focus of the meeting. Rather, the issue was the nature of the intended main occupant.

4.3. The misunderstandings were stark – Bodywork as the intended occupant of this site has been the subject of several press stories and is still the current second news item on the Chard Robinson website even today. This is despite a lease being signed for CSVPA in December 2015, well before this planning application. No arrangement by CSVPA was mentioned until the meeting on 20th April.

4.12. Exactly what CSVPA or Bodywork might commercially be able or not to do, at whatever lease cost etc. they might have, and what the local community might be able to do to work with them, is entirely speculative. Most importantly, it is affected by the lease cost which the applicant charges to Bodywork or CSVPA, for which the market value is naturally much higher if the site is no longer restricted to use which caters for a primarily local market.

4.13. onwards, see below.

5. We note that a genuine community facility would vary costs according to ability to pay and make trade-offs between users, balancing more and less commercial income to cover costs. The flat cost of all access is a key problem with other commercial facilities offering community use.

5.3. The proposals are at most a compensation. The intent of the plan is surely to protect use which is relevant to the local community from being displaced, as we have seen at the former Sturton Street Methodist Chapel and now face seeing here, by uses which are not. It is hard to imagine a clearer example of a contravention of this aspect of the local plan or a clearer example of why it is important.

5.4. Again, lack of a clear indication of charges is not acceptable.

5.4. bullet 2, (iii). It is not acceptable to exclude “any period during which the School is closed”. Community activities must be able to continue on a year-round basis. Further, added availability during daytime hours in holiday periods could be particularly useful.

6.1-3. This agreed condition is noticeably weak. My emphasis:

*The premises shall not be used as a **dedicated** language school or for any non-educational use falling within Use Class D1 of the Use Classes Order without the express approval of the Local Planning Authority (except to the extent that such use is ancillary to the primary use of the premises).’*

The premises are unsuitable for use as a dedicated language school. However, the Cambridge Education Group of which CSVPA is a member has a sister language school which could easily use the premises to expand their activities onto this site without that being the dedicated use. We propose that the condition should be amended to remove the word “dedicated” and as further needed to exclude use by a language school entirely.

It is worth noting further that CSVPA admits many students with limited language skills. The current CSVPA prospectus indicates that the minimum skill level for any element of the student’s English should be International English Language Teaching System 4.0, summarized by Wikipedia as “*Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.*” CSVPA offers intensive tuition to improve language skills at the start of courses. So although CSVPA is not, we agree, a language school, it is surely likely that many international students attend CSVPA with improved English language skills as a major aim.

8.1, 8.2. Again we note that community access is of great value, but is only a secondary issue relevant if the protection of the community facility use of the entire site at all times is not enforceable.

We note that the community access plan does not include costs, booking arrangements or key-holding. Any of these could make a huge difference – it only takes a “grumpy caretaker” to effectively end community use under this kind of arrangement. Internet searches for similar examples seem to indicate that these details are commonly included in agreements.

Conclusion

We suggest that any approval for this planning application should be subject to the condition that its use is consistent with the protection of community facilities under the local plan. Use should surely be for activities fall within the Use Class D1 and which qualify as a community facility under Local Plan 2006 clauses 5.20-5.22 or their replacement conditions under subsequent local plans.

Cambridge is a city whose name is synonymous with high quality education and this brings specific problems to the D1 planning Use Class, which are particularly intense in Petersfield, the most densely populated residential area of Cambridge, on the edge of the city centre. The Local Plan’s protections are entirely appropriate.

We would also like to re-emphasize our concern about the protection of the trees on the site and the use of Protected Open Space for car parking.

Yours faithfully,

John Franks,

Chair, Petersfield Area Community Trust

for Petersfield Area Community Trust.

Petersfield Area Community Trust (PACT) is a registered charity for the benefit of the Petersfield Community, which was founded when the youth club and community centre at the Howard Mallett Centre (called Citylife House in this application) was closed in 1998. PACT’s planning committee acts as a local residents’ association, but PACT also runs various community events and acts as a sponsoring body for other activities of local benefit. This includes summer, Christmas and other events. The 2015 Summer event was held on St Matthew’s Piece and attended by over 700 local residents of all ages. The recent campaign to purchase the Sturton Street Methodist Church, which although unsuccessful ultimately, achieved a remarkable feat in making a community funded bid of £680,000 based on charitable investment by over 400 local residents.