

Petersfield Area Community Trust
Petersfield, Cambridge
7th May 2016



Re: Application 15/2372/FUL, Citylife House, Sturton Street, Cambridge CB1 2QF

Dear Ms O'Sullivan,

As you may know, the 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 and has been deeply involved with the building ever since, including successfully resisting massively unpopular development on the site and its impact on the rest of the St Matthew's Piece area. PACT also runs annual community events and acts as a sponsoring body for other activities of local benefit. This includes both a summer event on St Matthew's Piece which was attended by over 700 local residents, and 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. This only underlines the local need for community facilities.

Given the troubled history of the Howard Mallett Centre site, the prospect of having it occupied by a school which qualifies as a community facility and has a body of local (Cambridge) and national students, as intended by the previous application 14/1252/FUL (5 Aug 2014) and referenced by its conditions, was viewed as the best of outcome likely.

The owner's intention now, however, is for the international Cambridge School for Visual and Performing Arts (CSVPA) to occupy this space. The unannounced change of the intended occupier of the Howard Mallett was a huge surprise to ourselves and members of the local community. There was a lot of publicity about the occupier being the Bodywork School and at the time of writing, this is still the current "news" on the Chard Robinson company website. Stories on both graffiti & delays in their occupation of the building have appeared in the Cambridge News. The much more significant news that these plans had changed and a lease signed with CSVPA in December 2015 did not emerge until after the end of the consultation period on the current application - the impact of which was underestimated due to this. Chard Robinson met with us to discuss this change. Chris Maughan from CSVPA has offered to make some facilities available to community use during the evening and at weekends at cost. This would be appreciated but there is no legal guarantee which would affect the planning decisions.

We feel that, given these intended changes, the local community's rights must be fully protected to the extent of the ability of planning rules. Our planning committee (which acts as a de facto residents association) and our trustees are united in making these points, and we have of course had many discussions with other local residents. The volume of local concern on this is visible in the number of objections to the current application.

I note that this building is referred to in this application as Citylife House and as the Chinese Community Centre etc. in various other planning applications. For simplicity I will use the name by which it is most commonly known, the Howard Mallett building.

At this time, we would like to make three points.

Status as Community Facility

The current application is summarized as :

“Change of use from the permitted use as a studio/cafe/bar/multimedia education centre and community facility (sui generis) granted under permission 97/1020 to general education use within use class D1, including alterations to eastern & southern elevations, external landscaping and reconfigured cycle parking.”

We note that, although the exact use has varied over many years, no-one has at any point challenged the fact that the Howard Mallett building qualifies as a community facility, and one of very significant size. Although it has included a café and other facilities, these have always had a community focus. This dates back to the establishment of the Central Youth Club in 1965, when the City Planning Officer noted that:

"the reasons for the siting of the above building on land zoned for Public Open Space are as follows.... 2. It is a use which may be associated with, and complimentary to, an urban public open space..."

The D1 planning category of course includes community facilities, but also includes educational uses which the current and draft local plans exclude explicitly from being classed as such facilities.

It is vital that any successful application is approved only on planning condition that all such excluded uses are not undertaken, in order to protect this status to the full extent of the Local Plan.

Explicitly, that is stated in section 5.21:

“University teaching accommodation, language schools and tutorial colleges are specifically excluded as they do not cater for a primarily local market.”

The “university teaching accommodation” exclusion appears to rule out occupation by CSVPA as a community use since it runs Foundation, BA and MA courses which are awarded in association with RADA (validated by King’s College, London), and others which are accredited by Kingston University, London, and the University of the Arts, London.

Further, CSVPA has a clear international focus - its own October 2015 Independent Schools Inspection Report notes that "Most students are from overseas" and this is the focus of its expansion, notably the new MA course, launched in Thailand recently.

Protected Open Space

We are concerned about the protection of the open space (POS) on one side of the site. There is agreement (including from the current applicant) that there have been violations of planning protections on this site over the last decade, and we ask that the open space protections are exerted as part of any planning approval, and further, that any approval is conditional on removal of tarmac (& car parking spaces) which may be on the protected open space.

The POS is referenced in the Eastern Gate SPD 2011 and was clarified and exactly specified to PACT in a letter dated 13 November 2006 from Tony Collins, planning officer (it makes reference to the rejected planning application of that year):

“The Protected Open Space extends 14.8m along the northern boundary of the car park from the diagonal corner at the rear of the footway adjacent to the York Street / New Street roundabout.

From a point on York Street level with the north-east corner of the proposed building, the Protected Open Space extends 17.8m towards Sturton Street from the rear edge of the York Street footway.

Where the northward projection of the Protected Open Space meets the main area of St Matthew’s Piece, the boundary turns west towards Sturton Street, the distance between that boundary corner

point, and the rear edge of the York Street footway, measured along a continuation of the east-west boundary line, is 27.6m.”

Further, the 1998 application C/97/1020 makes clear that this open space is intended to be “*available and freely accessible to members of the public at all times*”. We ask that this too be exerted as a condition or part of any approved application, including removal of fences which have been erected in the interim. This application also notes that the landscaped areas should be “maintained in a healthy condition in the interests of visual amenity,” further reinforcing the previous point about the removal of any car parking which spills onto the Open Space.

We note that planning officer Mr Tony Collins took a similar view in his report to planning committee of 9th June 2006 regarding the Citylife planning application (paragraph 9.15).

The open space is also part of a well-known right of way from York Street at an angle across the protected open space to the corner of New Street/Sturton Street which needs to be accessible.

We are concerned that both the protected open space and the right of way have now been blocked for building work for well over a year.

Travel Plan

Condition 12 (Travel Plan) of the previous application is one of many parts of the application to make explicit reference to Bodywork. The full time student body of the now intended occupant, CSVPA, is larger and very different in nature - we note particularly the very high traffic of taxis and hire cars at its current home in Round Church Street. A further travel plan is clearly one item which is critical for any new occupier. New Street could be seriously impacted by such traffic.

We are aware that the planning office is awaiting further information from the applicant and there will be further public consultation on this application and we may wish to make further comment.

Yours sincerely,

John Franks
Chair, for the Trustees & Planning Committee of the Petersfield Area Community Trust