

Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage

Jean Bennett
Planning Department
London Borough of Merton
Merton Council
Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
SM4 5DX

21 December 2011

Dear Ms Bennett

DEMOLITION AND REDEVELOPMENT OF THE CRICKETERS PUBLIC HOUSE

**Application numbers 11/P3229 & 11/P3273
December 2011**

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage is the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We take an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green conservation area and its environs and have been closely involved in the development of the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and development proposals in the area. We made representations objecting to earlier proposals to redevelop this site and welcomed the decision to reject an appeal in June 2011.

2. We wish to object to the proposals to grant planning permission and conservation area consent to demolish the Cricketers and redevelop the site for residential use. The site is one of the most important and sensitive in the entire Conservation Area and demands the most sensitive treatment. Any redevelopment should be of an outstanding quality. The location has been in community use as a public house for over 200 years and we do not support the change in use to private residential use. Nor do we consider the quality and design of the proposed residential development to meet the standard required for this flagship site.

Context

3. This site is among the most prominent in Mitcham and plays an integral role in defining the character and significance of Mitcham Cricket Green conservation area which was established in 1969. This is the most important development proposal in the area for at least two generations. Any development will need to be able to demonstrate an ability to make a positive and lasting contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

4. We share the view so ably expressed in the Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area Design Guide (1996) that:

“The Cricket Green area is obviously one which evinces a quiet pride in itself, and has largely succeeded in retaining a domestic and human scale in its buildings, the setting of which is enhanced by the variety of its open spaces.”

5. The Cricketers is part of a small assemblage of public buildings permitted on common land at Lower Green, along with the Vestry Hall in the 19th century and fire station in the early 20th century, for public purposes. The area has a long history of campaigns going back to the mid-19th century to maintain the open aspect and protect the common land from encroachment by development.

6. An inn has been located on this site since the 18th century and it has been redeveloped at least four times, with the current building constructed in the 1950s following damage during an air raid in 1940. The inn has played an important role in the history of Cricket Green, not least as the former dressing rooms of Mitcham Cricket Club on the pitch where cricket has been played continuously longer than anywhere else in the world (over 300 years). This continuity of use and the historical associations are very important considerations when addressing the proposals.

7. The current building is redolent of a period of 20th century design which is not without merit and adds to the variety of building styles and types that is such a feature of Cricket Green. It contributes to the *“variety in form and layout, [which] gives the area an eclectic, high quality character that is unified by the greens”* as noted in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. The applicant needs, therefore, to make the case for demolition and redevelopment.

8. We should stress that Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage does not object in principle to demolition and redevelopment of the site. We would welcome an outstanding building of a design and quality that would enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area and include significant community use. We would especially welcome a bold redevelopment that makes the 21st century's first contribution to enhancing the character of Cricket Green.

9. We have considered the proposals in the context of the development plan (UDP and London Plan), emerging Core Strategy, draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and the report of the Inspector rejecting the appeal for the previous proposals to redevelop the site (see below).

10. We have concluded that the proposals depart significantly from the development plan for the reasons set out below and ask that the application be considered as a departure from the development plan. It would be helpful to receive confirmation that the additional publicity required for departure applications has been undertaken. The fact of being a departure also places the onus on the applicant to demonstrate the material considerations which would justify a grant of consent. We do not consider there to be material considerations which indicate that the development plan should be overridden in relation to these proposals.

Change of use

11. We support the current community use of the site as a public house. The land has historically only been allowed to be developed for civic and public uses and it is not appropriate to see it being used for significant residential use. Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy supports protection of employment sites for community use and

Policy 7.1 of the London Plan recognises the value of community uses such as public houses in contributing to neighbourhoods. This is also reflected in the draft National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 126). Policy L16 of the Unitary Development Plan states that the Council “*will not permit the redevelopment*” of established public houses unless they aren’t economically viable, have been marketed as a public house for at least two years and there is adequate alternative provision in the area. We share the view expressed by CAMRA that the site has not been marketed for the two years required under Policy L16 and meets the Pub Viability Test established by CAMRA and widely accepted in planning casework. It is self-evident that the financial returns on housing redevelopment are greater than from continued community use but this is no reason to grant consent for the proposals.

Proposed development

12. We have considered the design and appearance of the proposed redevelopment carefully. We welcome the intention to respond to the objections to the previous proposals by providing a contemporary design that seeks to add to the character and appearance of the area. Unfortunately, we believe the proposals fall well short of what is required.

13. We find the proposals to be unsuitable and damaging to this sensitive site for the following reasons:

- The scale, mass, form, footprint and height of the new development still overwhelms the neighbouring Vestry Hall and fire station despite being set further back and reduced in height – it will introduce a large scale urban bulk into a sensitive triptych of buildings on this landmark island site between two critically important open spaces at the heart of the conservation area
- It will compete with the Vestry Hall on the skyline in terms of its mass, height and windows. The upper windows will be in line with the Vestry Hall roof and the eaves height has been reduced by only 0.4m from the previous scheme. The Vestry Hall should have primary visual status and the height of any development on this site should be no higher than the Vestry Hall windows and provide accommodation over no more than three storeys
- It continues to loom over the fire station despite the stepped reduction in height of this elevation
- It will conflict rather than contrast with the Old Bank House which is both lower (an important point highlighted in the Inspector’s report (para 9)) and presents a very different curve to the street scene – this conflict would also exist were the current proposals to extend the Old Bank House to be permitted. It is disappointing given the applicant’s professed sensitivity to the surrounding townscape that no adequate material has been supplied to demonstrate the relationship with the Old Bank House
- The desire to conceive a modern 21st idiom for this prominent site is welcome but not delivered – while there are aspects of the curved frontage and the more horizontal emphasis which we find appealing, the overall effect is unremarkable, poorly executed and partial:
 - from many vantage points (such as Lower Green West) the development will introduce a new, bulky, block form rather than the “signature curve”

- proclaimed in the application – this will detract from the current “loose and informal grouping” of buildings noted by the Inspector
- the proposed surface materials, metal cladding and three colour finish will be deeply incongruous in the area and runs the risk of rapid deterioration evident in similar buildings elsewhere
 - we have some concerns about the impact of light being reflected from the proposed zinc cladding and urge that this is investigated in terms of its impact on use of the cricket ground and surrounding traffic
 - the appearance of the top storey with heavy use of glazing and large balconies is particularly incongruous
 - the clean appearance of the balconies and windows in the architects drawings will be rapidly undermined by the storage needs of residents for bicycles and equipment and the appearance of tables, chairs and washing put out to dry, which will all rapidly clutter the elevation
 - the set back ground floor apartments and columns will present a discordant public face to the scheme which lacks any local precedent, sits uneasily with pedestrians at ground level and may encourage anti-social behaviour as a refuge during poor weather
 - some of the perspective views presented in support of the scheme are misleading in their use of artistic licence, with angles not from eye-level and suggestions of more open space than exists in reality (e.g. page 50 view from Lower Green West across the entrance to the fire station)
- The important views across Cricket Green and the aspect from the internationally important cricket ground will be significantly harmed
 - The scale of development will overwhelm the parking provision provided and we would be concerned if the parking were to be accompanied by external lighting in this most sensitive part of the conservation area where excess light should be kept to a minimum
 - There are concerns over the use of the fire station exit as a service road while it is still a functioning fire station.

14. As a result, the proposals do not represent a sufficient response to the concerns expressed by the Inspector in rejecting the previous appeal. The footprint remains unchanged, the height has only been slightly lowered and the bulk of the development has not been reduced sufficiently with the result that the new proposals do not mitigate against creating a:

“....dense block of urban development which would significantly change the character of the current loose and informal grouping. This would be harmful to the settings of the two adjoining locally listed buildings and to the character of the adjoining green spaces. The proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area.”

Inspector’s report, paragraph 12

15. The acid test of the proposals is whether they will make a 21st century contribution to the variety of architectural styles which is such an important characteristic of the buildings around Cricket Green that will stand the test of time and which will inspire pride in the area in the decades to come. Regrettably, we find the welcome aspiration for a contemporary design is flawed in its execution and already dated in its approach.

16. We would support redevelopment of this site by a proposal showing real sensitivity to the location. This would need to enhance the character of the conservation area and be inspired by this very special location.

Demolition

17. Given the inadequate nature of the proposals to replace the existing building we believe it would be premature to grant conservation area consent for the demolition of the existing public house.

Planning obligations

18. We welcome the commitment to give appropriate off-site contributions to benefit nearby open space and if the development were to be permitted then we would support an endowment being established, to be managed by the local community for the benefit of the Cricket Green area.

Planning and conservation framework

19. We have considered the proposals against the conservation and planning policy framework for the area. The site benefits from multiple designations as:

- Conservation Area
- Metropolitan Open Land
- Public Open Space
- Metropolitan Park
- Adjacent locally listed buildings at the Vestry Hall and fire station

and we consider the proposed demolition and redevelopment impacts negatively on each of these.

20. The UDP provides the formal development plan for the appeal site and we believe the proposed demolition and redevelopment is inconsistent with Policy L16 regarding protection of public houses and Policies ST17 and ST18 which promote a high quality urban environment with high standards of design and establish a clear expectation that development will protect, preserve or enhance all aspects of the historic environment (including the conservation area and the setting of the locally listed buildings).

21. We are particularly concerned about the impact of the proposed demolition and redevelopment on the character and significance of Cricket Green conservation area. There is a clear legal requirement underpinned in national planning guidance (PPS5) and supported in the existing and emerging development plan policies (e.g. Policy CS5 in the Local Development Framework) for development in conservation areas to be required to preserve/conserve or enhance its character or appearance. We consider the proposed demolition and redevelopment falls well short of this and is in conflict with every aspect of Policy BE1 for the reasons identified in paragraph 14 above.

22. We consider the quality of design and finishing of the proposed redevelopment to be unsympathetic and not worthy of this sensitive site. It fails to meet the requirements of Policy BE22 to respect the surrounding buildings or be of a standard that complements the surrounding townscape.

23. We strongly support the expectation in the emerging Local Development Framework for the heritage assets of the borough to inspire the highest quality development. The essential test should be whether the proposed demolition and redevelopment is good enough to permit not bad enough to refuse. This is ably expressed in paragraph 22.6:

“Merton’s heritage assets should be used to make a positive contribution and inspire new development of imaginative and high quality design, forming a central part of future development and regeneration in the borough. This is particularly relevant for the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden where the significance of heritage assets such as Mitcham Cricket Green and Morden Hall Park will be used to inform new development or regeneration and contribute to the character and distinctiveness of each centre.”

24. We strongly support the view expressed in Policy CS14 of the Local Development Framework that:

“All development needs to be designed in order to respect, reinforce and enhance the local character of the area in which it is located and to contribute to Merton’s sense of place and identity. We will achieve this by....protecting, conserving and enhancing Merton’s heritage assets and wider historic environment”

25. We see insufficient evidence of this in the proposals for one of the most sensitive sites in the Borough. Despite well-intentioned efforts to present a contemporary design which addresses the issues raised in relation to earlier proposals, the development shows too little regard to the special qualities of the site and its surroundings. This is a location where any new development needs to be making a most significant positive contribution to the Conservation Area. This is evident in the other more modern buildings around Cricket Green, including the recently listed Methodist Church.

26. We also consider the proposed demolition and redevelopment of this highly conspicuous site will impact negatively on the adjacent Metropolitan Open Land and thereby conflict with Policy NE2 because of its bulk.

27. For the reasons identified above we ask that planning permission and conservation area consent for the proposed demolition and redevelopment is refused on the grounds that it is a significant departure from the development plan which will detract from the conservation area and result in the loss of an important community use.

Yours faithfully

John Y.R. Strover Esq FCA
Chairman, Mitcham Cricket Green Community and Heritage

c.c John Mansfield – The Mitcham Society – Chairman
Mags Alexander – The Mitcham Society – Secretary