

Comments on *Campion House: Design Notes*

Campion Concerns, 1st July 2006

This short document (15 paragraphs) provides us with very little information. The first three paragraphs (about a quarter of the document) are just general introduction.

The comment on Campion House in paragraph four is interesting. It describes the house as “not a building of any great distinction”. This combined with the evasive comment in the **Planning Statement In Support of A Planning Application In Respect of Campion House**: “The Council have included Campion House on the list of buildings of local townscape character and consider it contributes to local architectural and historical interest”. It seems clear that this is not the view of Try Homes.

The attempt to describe the site in dismissive terms gets out of control in paragraph five where the back of the site is described as having “one or two undistinguished trees”. Would that be the fifty or so trees that the development would remove? The same paragraph describes the houses opposite the site as “a mixed bag” which nevertheless includes “some pleasant pairs of Arts-and-Crafts semis”. That is one of the few positive comments about anything in the conservation area in the entire documentation for this application. Even so this paragraph omits any mention the pairs of attractive Edwardian semis that are also opposite the site. It also omits to say that the Arts-and-Crafts and Edwardian houses are two-storey buildings. The flats in Kilberry Close to the south do not rise above 3 stories.

Paragraph six explains that the development will strip away the undistinguished accretions to the house so that it can assert its presence as “the jewel in the crown”. Would that be the same house that was a couple of paragraphs earlier described as “not a building of any great distinction”? The comments about the trees in the rest of this paragraph are so confused as to not be worth commenting on. The whole of the first page reads like a text written by someone who has got to fill up some paper with nothing particular to say.

Paragraph seven claims that the residents expressed a wish to see “classical design tenets applied”. There are no reasons to take this seriously as has been shown in our comments on the Statement of Community Engagement. The same applies to all the claims made in this paragraph.

Paragraph eight says that the “western portion” of the site should remain as open space and therefore it was decided to use the “southern part” for development i.e. By building on half of the “western portion”. At this point one gets the distinct impression that the author of this document had his mind on other things. The rest of the paragraph is just waffle. Also the division into paragraphs has clearly gone wrong at this point since the first part of the next paragraph clearly belongs to this one!

The main claim of paragraph ten is demonstrably false. It is claimed that the present “unrelenting and impermeable cliff” of the seminary block would be improved by breaking down the frontage by allowing views into the depth of the site. We presume that it the tunnel view into the main courtyard through the courtyard entrance that is being referred to. Only a small angle of view would be possible from the pavement and very little would be seen. On the other hand the scale of the proposed block would be far more dominating and “unrelenting” than the present one.

Paragraph twelve says that “all agree that the new buildings should not be taller than the existing house”. As Try Homes knows perfectly well what the residents agreed was that the replacement buildings should be no taller than the ones they replace. Later it is stated that the “eaves height” of the main block will match the eaves height of Campion House. Maybe so but that eaves height is much higher than that of the present building and will contribute towards the impression of an “unrelenting and impermeable cliff”.

The final three paragraphs contain comments of a similar quality to the above. At the end of it all we have learned next to nothing about the design features of the building. An architect specialising in conservatin areas to whom we showed the drawings and the architects notes was amazed at the virtual total lack of information on materials. All we are told is that a “consistent palette of materials” will be used, that the walls will be of “warm, rosy, brickwork, that there will be “grey panelling”, the roofs will be of slate with some lower-pitched elements of “zinc or terne”.

This document is notable for its paucity of genuine information and for its inaccurate and misleading assertions. Incidentally, “warm, rosy bricks” would clash unpleasantly with the predominant colours used in the area generally and in the houses opposite specifically. The design brief was clearly to maximise the number of units without reference to the context of the surrounding area. It is not surprising that the result is so hopelessly inappropriate and on the wrong scale.