

Appendix D

The Design and Access Statement

Written for Campion Concerns by David Pavett & Natalie Stephenson, December 2006

This report, by **Clarke Renner Architects**, claims that it follows the written guidance by the **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)** booklet **Design and Access Statements – How to write, read and use them**. We believe that advice, including the requirement to write in plain English, has been largely ignored. Thus, in paragraph 2.3 (on building height, and the appearance of height) we read “New buildings on the site must therefore be of a deferential enough scale to allow Campion House to be the 'Jewel in the Crown’”. “Of a deferential enough scale” presumably means “less high than”. We suspect that this is not what **CABE** wants.

<i>The Statement</i>	<i>Our Comments</i>
2.2	
Given the pressure for development and the demand for new housing in the London region, efficient unlocking of a site's potential must involve the maximisation of unit numbers, though within the context of the surrounding built environment.	We do not contest the need to make efficient use of land. We do contest that this report has made any attempt to assess the “context of the surrounding built environment”. Furthermore, no account has been taken of known local housing need or the impact of other large developments in the area.
2.3	
“..the Architects have been careful to ensure not only that the overall height should be lower than the Victorian buildings, but that the eaves line ... should be brought down as low as possible.”	Residents were clear that they wanted replacement buildings to be no taller than the buildings replaced. One of the residents' main concerns is the massing of the building for which length must be considered as well as height.
2.7	
The proposals would result in “... releasing open space totalling approximately 19,000 sq.m for public use.”	Anyone looking at the plans can see for themselves that most of the area marked as “publicly-accessible open space” would be nothing of the sort. Were it to be used as such it would be of immense nuisance value to the residents of the proposed flats and houses. When we pointed this out to Mr Tilley of CgMs in connection with the first application, he replied “People would have bought the homes under those conditions so they would know what to expect”.
2.9	
“A gate lodge at the south-eastern corner of the site will be retained.”	Try Homes have no say in its retention. It is not part of the property sold to them. It is 104 Thornbury Road.

<i>2.11</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<p>“The proposed houses have a far more significant impact on the character of the scheme than indicated by the mix calculations which show them comprising 8% of the units. ... a footprint measure ... shows them comprising 22% of the new buildings. Houses are the dominant physical form of the new buildings overlooking the northern garden”</p>	<p>This is an attempt to meet the criticism that there are too few houses compared to flats. The dominant physical form seen from Thornbury Road would, of course be the flats. These flats would be of a height, length and massing without parallel in the surrounding built environment. It would be in stark and unpleasant contrast to the houses opposite.</p>

Layout

The CABE advice is that the section on layout should show:

“How the buildings and public and private spaces will be arranged on the site, and the relationship between them and the buildings and spaces around the site.”

This section fails to meet these requirements. It gives some information on the site-layout and compares the proposals to those of the previous application. **Nothing is said about the neighbouring buildings. Such significant omissions are a major feature of the entire application**

There have been some improvements in these proposals compared to the first application. However, the application process is not a matter of approving incremental improvements on a bad design. Rather, it should ensure that the application is in accordance with planning guidelines and design canons.

Scale

<i>2.18</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<p>“...Corner windows at the north and south extremities of the run of buildings will dematerialise the corners (which are traditionally read as 'strong' elements) and ease the visual route past the buildings and through to the green regions beyond.”</p>	<p>The attempt to create a visual impression with this somewhat overblown English would have been better served by providing appropriate illustrations.</p>

Paragraphs 2.20 to 2.25 aim to convince the reader that although the main block is very large (much larger than Campion House which is already “very large”) it nevertheless has been cleverly designed not to be perceived as such. For example:

2.19. “... the north and south ends of the frontage buildings are “crumbled” so that the impression is given that the mass of the building is generated from smaller-scaled “blocks”, and will ensure that the composition builds down at the ends to acknowledge the existing gate lodge and in deference to Campion House”(!);

2.25. “The extreme ends of the frontage are deconstructed and 'crumbled' to break down the apparent scale ...”.

This makes little sense without diagrams/drawings or at least references to them. The avoidance of illustrations suggests that it was not felt that these would support the verbal claims.

The building would be on a scale without parallel in the immediate surroundings. If the developer wants the impression of smaller scale buildings then there is a clear solution: build on a smaller scale. In other words, integrity requires a significant reduction in scale. That is what the residents have clearly asked for. This could be done while still increasing the housing supply significantly and even increasing the average density of housing in the area.

“The mansion itself is actually very large” (2.20). Indeed, that is why the original Davies houses were well spaced. It is proposed to build 8 flats in Campion House. The main block, next to

Campion House, would consist of 204 homes, including 90 flats in the Thornbury Road frontage (more than 50% of which face Thornbury Road). The scale is, so to speak, off the scale.

CABE guidance on reporting scale is as follows (underlining added):

Scale means the size of buildings and spaces, and details will be set out in the planning application. The maximum and minimum sizes will need to be included in outline applications. The statement needs to show why those sizes are right for the site, which often means explaining how the size of new buildings relates to the size of existing neighbouring ones. ...

What to include

- *Drawings that show the relationship between existing buildings on or around the site and those proposed will normally be very useful. For example, the statement could explain why a prominent site can successfully accommodate buildings larger than those surrounding it, while other sites may not be as flexible.*
- *The statement should show that the scale of the development takes account of the restrictions of the site and the need for good design. It should not try to justify fitting a predetermined amount of accommodation onto a site.*
- *It is important to get the three-dimensional aspect of scale across. Computer graphics or plans can often flatten or distort a view, and so mislead the people reading the statement. Pictures should also place the viewer where people would really be, and offer a realistic interpretation of the scale of open space as well as buildings.*
- *The scale of parts of a building and how they work together can be very important. So, the statement should explain how the design considers the balance of features such as doors, windows and detailing for example window sill heights and door widths.*

The **Clarke Renner Architects** Design Statement clearly fails to meet the CABE advice. It is not that the advice is unclear. There must therefore be other reasons.

Finally, we have the interesting statement in 2.23 that “The general scale of the proposal has been influenced (sic) by the existing buildings on site”. This is after having described those buildings as “unsympathetic, not to say depressing”. These buildings nevertheless now reappear as a benchmark!

Landscaping (We have commented on this in a separate document.)

Appearance. This section contains a number of judgements which would have been better left to the reader to decide on the basis of the evidence given:

“The ... scheme is ... of high quality architectural design”;

“The west range of the court, housing apartments, will be elevated on columns to create a cloister, which means that (in the manner of Wren's Trinity College Library in Cambridge), the external landscape can be appreciated from and 'pulled into' the court”;

“The architectural vocabulary has been described as 'Referential Modernism' because although the full gamut of Classical detailing ... has not been summoned, nevertheless, ... the proportioning and ordering are quite manifestly Classically-based”;

“... generous eaves ... imply classical grace”;

After reading this section, with no illustrations and no references to drawings, we are left without much idea of what the buildings would look like and how they would fit into their surroundings.

The root of the problem of scale is maintaining the exact footprint of the institutional buildings. These buildings were already out of character with the area. The attempt to justify this with comparisons to other institutions (Cambridge colleges) simply reinforces the point. What is required is a properly conceived residential development that is harmonious with its surroundings.

Access. We have not commented on this section of the report for want of the appropriate expertise.

Appendix

Quotations from **Design and Access Statements – How to write, read and use them** by the **Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE)**.

1. *The circular, Guidance on changes to the development control system, recommends that applicants follow an assessment-involvement-evaluation design process. This closely mirrors a good design process and means that the final design will be informed by the wider context of the site. (page 12)*
2. *You should demonstrate that you have looked at the context of the site and its surroundings. The size of the surrounding area to be surveyed and the detail with which this is done will depend on the sensitivity and scale of the development. (page 12)*
3. *Social context means how people in the locality will be affected by the development, including any aspirations they may have for the site. (page 12)*
4. *You should clearly show what groups and people you have been, or will be, discussing the scheme with. Government guidance now encourages applicants to carry out professional consultations and community involvement at the earliest possible stage as this will help to avoid the potential pitfalls of not doing so until it is too late to change the scheme.*

The statement should explore the findings of any consultations that have been carried out and explain how they have directed the decisions made by the applicant at this early stage in the scheme's development. (page 12)

5. *Once the site's context has been properly assessed, the local community and the right professionals have been consulted; identifying options for development should be a fairly simple task. (page 12)*
6. *Planning policy statement 1 makes it clear that designs which are inappropriate in their context should not be accepted. It is therefore important that an applicant demonstrates that their proposed development has emerged from a full assessment of a site's circumstances and characteristics. (page 22)*
7. *The applicant should be able to clearly demonstrate through the statement that they have addressed the context of the site and its surroundings. (page 22)*
8. *Social context means how people in the locality will be affected by the development. The statement should demonstrate that the views and aspirations of local communities has been taken into account. (page 22)*
9. *A good statement will tell the story of how the scheme has reached application stage, including ideas that have been trialled but found not to work. Many applicants will use the statement to 'sell' you their scheme. Do not be put off by lots of text or unnecessary images, these are both methods of covering up a bad scheme. You should also watch out for applicants who try to use statements to justify predetermined design solutions – the statement must be relevant to both the context of the site, and the proposed development. (page 22)*
10. **Amount.** *Is the density appropriate? Could the neighbourhood's services support the amount of development planned? (page 32)*
11. **Scale.** *Will the buildings site comfortably with their surroundings? (page 32)*