

CADRA comments on planning application number 15227, the Arthur Clark Home, 1 Albert Road, Caversham, Reading, RG4 7AN

1. Height and massing.

The site is in an established area of two to three storey housing where third stories are incorporated into the roof space giving a two and a half storey appearance. CADRA share the concern of many local residents that 4 storeys on this prominent corner site is too high and the bulk of the building too great. Since CADRA first commented in April 2015 the 4 storey element has been moved to the southern part of the site. The four storey element with a large roof at the south eastern and most prominent corner of the site remains inappropriate. The prominent gable treatment to the small second bedroom on the eastern elevation emphasises the height of the building, the high roof profile is inappropriate. This area of the building is bulky, poorly proportioned and overbearing.

4 storeys on this site constitute an unsatisfactory planning precedent for other sites in Caversham Heights eroding the character of the area.

The 2013 feasibility study by Reading Borough Council, which itself bordered on overdevelopment, showed 40 apartments (as opposed to the 43 proposed) and a maximum of three storeys. The current proposal represents overdevelopment out of keeping with the area. Three stories should be the maximum for this development.

2. Overlooking, loss of privacy and Overshadowing

Concerns remain about overlooking and loss of privacy to both buildings and gardens of the adjacent properties, not only number 3 Albert Rd but 5, 5A, 7 and no1 Copperfields, particularly from the proposed second floor flats numbers 31, 32 and 33.

Overshadowing and loss of sunlight in respect of number 3 Albert Road affects the amenity of this property. The proposed overshadowing drawing number FC420 -01-10 Rev S1 omits 4th quarter sun diagrams. It also omits all late afternoon sun diagrams. Children will use gardens late afternoon after school and working adults in the early evening. To give a realistic view of the loss of sunlight and overshadowing the sun diagram should include the fourth December quarter and the 6 pm sun diagram for all quarters except the December one.

3. Kitchen, bin and plant room locations

Number 3 Albert Road has expressed particular concerns to us about location of these elements directly adjacent to their property. There is likely to be plant noise and noise from bin movements. Commercial kitchen extract fans run 24 hours a day. There is concern that on a summer evening in the garden, the noise of the fans will be prevalent rather than birdsong. Noise attenuation in respect of plant and fans should relate to quiet evening levels rather than a daytime average. Unpleasant smells from both the extractor fan and the bins is also a concern.

There seems no reason in principle why the position of these elements should not be adjusted on the ground floor plan, to move them away from the boundary with number 3 and all other neighbours.

4. Trees - Impact on Streetscape, the setting of the Conservation area and the Caversham skyline.

In our pre-application response in April 2015 (attached), we emphasised the importance of the mature trees on the site and on its frontages. They are critical for the character of the area, for screening of the new building and for the privacy of residents. We have the following concerns:

T1 and T2 (the Monterey Cypresses). These are very important to the street scene and to the prominent south eastern corner of the site where 3 roads meet (see A2dominion artists impression attached) Documentation indicates that T2 appears is likely to be removed and T1 is shown greatly reduced on the landscape layout. Streetscene elevation drawing FC 420-2-10 Rev S2 in contrast shows these trees fully retained and masking the tallest, bulkiest and least satisfactory 4 storey part of the proposed building. The loss or severe cut back of these trees would expose this part of the building to full and unsatisfactory street view.

T5 (the Lawsons Cypress) also contributes to the street scene, is marked down for removal in the arboricultural survey. It is however, still present on the artists impression street scene (See attached). This is potentially misleading. Due to the proposed parking there is very little room to replace this tree or allow for hedging. The information on the proposed new trees and their planting size in this area, is insufficient to determine whether the removal of this tree may be acceptable. Otherwise it should be retained.

Loss of trees as outlined above, on this frontage to Albert Rd will also increase overlooking to the garden and building of No 8 The Mount.

The walnut trees on the Dovedale Close frontage are very decorative trees and have high amenity value. They are marked for removal.

Trees down on the arboricultural survey for retention appear to be omitted from the landscape plan FC 420 -0-03 Rev S2. The arboricultural survey uses an early building footprint to assess distances from trees. It should be updated to show the current footprint plan.

In our view, the tree assessment in the arboricultural survey, which forms the basis on which trees should be retained, has been made on an arboricultural basis and does not give sufficient weight to aesthetic, streetscape and amenity value.

Furthermore, this survey and the designed building pay no attention to the fact that the tall trees on this site form part of the Caversham skyline; they are visible from Caversham Bridge and they form a part of the setting of the St Peters Conservation area (see marked up photos attached). The removal of a number of tall evergreen trees and substitution of the 4 storey proposed building and high roof

will affect the sky line. The building will be visible and adversely affect the setting of the Thames and the St. Peter's Conservation area. This notable skyline, although more distant, is also visible from Reading station and forms part of the character of Reading. It is specifically included in the Conservation Map – attached for reference – and the views indicated are of interest to Historic England in their ongoing work with Reading Borough Council and local volunteers.

5. Elevational details.

Some elevational details require further development. Plans show balconies projecting beyond tile hung gables, elevations show tile hung gables projecting beyond balconies. There is an awkward change of material junction on the south elevation where render changes to brick in the same plane. The photo voltaic panels on the flat roof should be shown on elevations where they would be visible. The photo voltaic panels on the southern roof slopes would preferably be integrated and designed into the roof slope.

6. Parking and transport

15 two bed and 28 one bed flats are proposed. If all beds are occupied by one person this would result in 58 residents. A2dominion indicate a staffing establishment of 13FTE.

All flats would be able to accommodate double beds. Assuming the two bed flats can accommodate a double plus a single bed, the maximum number of residents could be as many as 101. In this unlikely scenario there should be 13 spaces for staff plus 25.1 (say 25) (for residents) which equals a total of 38 spaces required.

We believe that it is unlikely that every bed space would be occupied so, if we take the lower estimate of 58 residents then 14.5 car spaces (say 15) are required.

A cautious estimate of the number of spaces is 13 for staff plus 15 for residents, which equals a total of 28 spaces required. A2Dominion have allowed for only 21 spaces which is a shortfall of 7 spaces (i.e. 25% BELOW the cautious estimate).

It is accepted that visiting care staff and professionals, as well as visitors, will add to the demand for spaces. It is also the case that the two separate car parking areas with separate entrances will be less efficient.

The Transport Assessment (Paragraph 5.5) states that there are buses every 14 minutes (i.e. 4 buses/hour). There are actually only 2 buses/hour except after 19:00 and on Sundays and Bank Holidays when there is only 1 bus/hour. This poor public transport provision is likely to cause most staff members, especially those working unsocial hours, and visitors to use cars.

The overflow of at least seven cars, in busy times, parking in Albert Road and The Mount will require approximately 42 metres (132ft) of kerbside space. Allowing for entrances to private driveways and other restrictions, this would extend considerable distances up surrounding roads – on Albert Road, as far as the junction with Copperfields. Notwithstanding the poor bus service, Albert Road and The Mount have already become a park-and-walk location for people going to Caversham and Reading but also a park-and-ride location for car sharers and bus users travelling to Reading and elsewhere.

The new single Albert Road access is proposed to be 5.4 m wide with 2m kerb radii on each side. This arrangement would require pedestrians walking along Albert Road to step down to carriageway level then up again to footway level. We believe that a modern 'entry treatment' design should be used to ensure that there would be a step free, level surface for pedestrians walking along Albert Road. Also a similar arrangement would be appropriate for the access to the parking area in Dovedale Close

7. Conclusion.

The above comments show clearly that the 4 storey, 43 flat proposals for this site with all its constraints result in unsatisfactory overdevelopment. Ideally a scheme, two and three storeys in height and totalling 35/36 extra care flats is likely to be appropriate. A2 Dominion have stated that current practice indicates that a minimum of 40 extra care flats are required for care viability. There is therefore a gap between what the site can take and care viability numbers.

In view of the social desirability of achieving extra care accommodation on this site, CADRA has suggested to A2dominion that the following could be explored to see whether planning and design points mentioned above can be satisfactorily and properly dealt with to the satisfaction of neighbours, the wider community and RBC or whether the site is in fact too small.

A) HEIGHT AND MASSING. A maximum three storey roof eaves line be established, no four storey wall elements. The roof space then to be re – examined, fourth floor flats 40 and 41 to be omitted and possibly replaced by one flat within the roof space, flats 42 and 43 to be omitted and possibly replaced by one flat within the roof space, flat 39 to be reduced to 1 bedroom, reconfigured and pulled back into the roof space. Total reduction of two flats. Both the actual and the perceived height of the building should be reduced.

B) OVERLOOKING, LOSS OF PRIVACY AND OVERSHADOWING.

There would seem to be scope for reducing roof volumes and heights to the two and three storey parts of the proposed building close to the northern boundary thus reducing overshadowing. It may be that roof pitches can also be reduced to alleviate this.

If the second floor flat 31 were to be 1 bed only and reconfigured, it seems likely that roof bulk could be reduced and overlooking towards no 3 and no 5 Albert Rd eliminated entirely. If the second floor flats no 32 and 33 were omitted and replaced by one flat reconfigured and pulled back into the roof space, the windows of this new flat would be further away from the northern boundary and overlooking greatly diminished. It seems likely that the eaves and ridge heights in this area could be reduced thus further reducing the bulk of the building and the impact on properties to the north. Sunlight would also be increased into the northern courtyard. Total reduction of one flat, bulk of building reduced improving overshadowing. Overlooking reduced or eliminated.

C) KITCHEN, BIN AND PLANT ROOM LOCATIONS.

Consideration to be given to replanning part of the ground floor and the entrance area.

Flats 1 and 2 to be moved to the current position of kitchen and plant room, adjoining no 3 Albert

Rd. The lounge could be in the position of flats one and two, facing south over the courtyard garden. Other elements including entrance to be re configured accordingly, kitchen and plant rooms moved south.

D) TREES.

Tree assessment and retention to be reconsidered in the light of comments above, with crown lifting as an alternative in some cases.

E) PARKING.

Parking areas to be reconsidered in light of comments above and redesign of main entrance/ ground floor.

The above changes would give a total of 40 extra care flats on the site, would reduce the overall height and bulk of the building and may perhaps be able to satisfy planning criteria and the concerns set out above.

Attachments

CADRA comments at pre-application stage – April 2015

Street view – with comments marked

Conservation Area View – with comments marked

View from Caversham Bridge – with comments marked

St Peter's Conservation Area Map

8 February 2016

Caversham and District Residents Association (CADRA)