



## **Caversham and District Residents Association**

### **Planning Applications for Caversham Park - 220409/220410**

#### **1. Introduction**

CADRA supports the need to find a suitable purpose for the house and grounds of Caversham Park which would ensure their future. However, in view of significant concerns over the plans submitted, CADRA opposes these applications. Please note that the work of the Emmer Green Residents Association, which recently closed, is now covered by CADRA.

#### **2. Historical Significance of Caversham Park**

After the death of William Marshal in 1219, his eldest son had Caversham Park laid out and fenced as a hunting park, covering an area now occupied by this site and Caversham Park Village. In 1542, Francis Knollys took a lease on the early Manor of Caversham with permission to build a new house on the hill. Caversham Park House was then the seat of the extensive Manor of Caversham until the estate including the “Massively built and Stately Residence” and the “Ancient and Beautiful Grounds” was put up for sale in 1920. The names of the different owners, each with colourful stories which mark their own era, appear in street names across Reading.

The historical importance of the house and grounds continued with the purchase of the house and park by the Oratory School. In 1943 the BBC Monitoring Service moved to Caversham Park. The service covered, not just WWII but the evolution of Soviet Communism from the 1940s to the 1990s, the attacks on 11 September 2001 and subsequent world issues.

Given the deep significance of these stories for Reading and Caversham, it is very disappointing that no attempt is being made to mark or display these important historical events.

### **3. Heritage of House and Grounds**

The heritage issues are well set out by the Conservation Area Advisory Committee, and we will not attempt to replicate them here. In particular, we note the importance of the early and unusual iron frame and the retention of part of the colonnaded sections predating 1850. The Heritage Statement by Saville fails to recognise the significance of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century development.

Caversham Park is entered to the west, along a sweeping driveway past an orchard and the front of the house and the stable yard. This approach offers important views to the northern elements of the park. The 2016 Heritage Statement by Turley said:

*.....the architectural interest of the house is interrelated with the special interest of the formal grounds and landscaped gardens of the RPG. The house was designed to incorporate views and vistas, across the formal gardens and parkland towards Reading and the River Thames. Similarly, its prominence as a substantial classical building, visible on rising ground when approaching Reading on the train, is reminiscent of the historic intent of the house to be a statement of the wealth and status of the owners/occupiers, with viewers aware of the scale and quality of the building (albeit, largely restricted to this garden frontage as discussed later in this Section). This strong, tangible connection between the house and the RPG further elevates their significance, as a key element of their respective aesthetic interest, and is interrelated with the setting of the listed building.*

This important connection would be severed by the parking to the north of the building, the large pastiche nursing home and by the curved terrace of housing to the East – also pastiche.

### **4. Views of the House**

The views of the house from the railway and also from the A329M is protected by Policy EN5 in the local plan. These views represent a significant marker of arrival into Reading on two of the main approaches and as such are significant and important for the whole of the town. Striking views are seen of a distant Palladian mansion on a hill. The RBC document ‘ Assessment of significant

Views with Heritage interest' provides the evidence base for this policy of protection and in particular 'View 8. Towards Caversham Park House and the Railway' in this document is relevant. In respect of this view Para 8.1.11 Sensitivity to change states " built development which might become visible on the skyline/horizon should be avoided" It is for the applicant to demonstrate that any new development proposed to the west and east of the main house does not impact the protected view of the listed building and impinge on the horizon/ skyline in either summer or winter.

## **5. House Conversion**

The subdivision of so many of the larger rooms in the house will inevitably remove the sense of the main house and obscure many architectural features. Internal features include important pillars, mirrors, fireplaces, tiling, panelling, double height rooms, skylights. There are also important features behind façades. There is insufficient information on how these will be safeguarded and allowed to reflect the essence of the stately home from 1850 and before.

Mezzanine floors will also detract, and the proposed stairs will not serve the needs of residents requiring assisted living.

The major reception rooms and spaces in the main house listed building should be retained as complete spaces and properly restored for residents' communal use and all interior architectural features retained.

The new door on the northern frontage will detract from the rhythm of the frontage.

## **6. Nursing Home**

Though a nursing home would be a welcome development, this large pastiche building, immediately adjacent to the main house, completely changes the feature of a large Palladian mansion set in extensive grounds. A different design approach, subservient and contrasting with the main house, would be far more appropriate.

## **7. Eastern Parcel**

The housing to the East fails to meet the needs of residents as they become more infirm and damages the heritage assets and their setting.

## **8. Western Parcel**

The 3 storey block flats close on the Peppard Road are out of character with this section of Peppard Road. Given the housing need and the location, these flats would more appropriately be replaced by family homes

## **9. Quality of life for residents**

It is surprising and concerning that, given the intention to market these properties for retirement and for assisted living, there are so many stairs. This applies particularly in the 3 storey town houses and in the mezzanines with assisted living units. Hardly any of the retirement properties include level access to a bedroom or bathroom. Will residents, who have already faced substantial capital and annual costs, then be faced with the difficulties of installing lifts or chair lifts within a limited space?

Walking from the drive to reach shops and services presents major difficulties, particularly for those with impaired mobility. There is no pavement on one side and several crossings to navigate. St Barnabas Church and Emmer Green Surgery are almost a mile away. Many residents will therefore rely heavily on their car and those unable to drive will face isolation.

## **10. Traffic**

Although 85% of dwellings are specifically for older people, the standard desk-based analysis has been used to assess the reasonable distance for walking and cycling. This is patently unrealistic. Cycling to and from Caversham Centre is physically demanding and unsuitable for all but experienced cyclists. Walking routes are unsuitable for those with impaired mobility.

Comparisons with existing and historic traffic patterns is difficult. The BBC site has been largely unoccupied, following the BBC's decision in 2016 to move away. Prior to 2016, there were several major cuts in staffing. Staff worked in shifts to provide a 24-hour service over 7 days. With many staff living locally and sending their children to the adjacent Hill Primary School, the strong culture of walking and cycling was ahead of its time. All of this served to minimise the former traffic levels.

Traffic at the beginning and end of the school day is a major issue, making 2-way traffic almost impossible.

It should also be noted that the recent approval of new housing on Reading Golf Club will further increase traffic pressures in the vicinity. This includes 442 parking spaces including garages. The Caversham Park application includes 292 parking spaces (Planning Statement para 7.176): the traffic implications need to take both developments into account.

Staff for the Nursing Home are unlikely to live in Caversham or Emmer Green, due to housing costs. They would therefore mostly require two bus journeys to reach work. With a reduced bus frequency at evenings and weekends, this is unlikely to be practicable.

These various issues will add to traffic pressures in an area already facing difficulties and show an increase above former levels.

### **11. Infrastructure and Services**

The assumption that most residents will move from within the local area is doubtful. In any case, a total of 222 new dwellings will increase both the local population and the proportion of older people, placing additional demand on an already overstretched health service and other services and infrastructure.

The 300+ new residents, combined with the 600+ new residents at Reading Golf Club will place major pressures which will be very hard to sustain.

### **12. Maintaining the Park and Gardens**

There is no indication of the arrangements to maintain the historic park and gardens or how this would be funded ongoing. While some public access is very welcome, there are many unanswered questions.

### **13. Trees**

The loss of 100 trees is regrettable and we could find no evidence of planned replacements

### **14. Security**

We note the many concerns identified by Thames Valley Police.

### **15. Bins**

From the comments from RBC Waste Services, it appears that the significant requirements for waste services for both the Assisted Living Units and the Care Home have not been adequately considered. There is also a real possibility of

bin storage in front of the Crescent in the Eastern Parcel which would further detract from the heritage assets and their setting. As is evident in Reading's Conservation Areas, these practical but important issues can seriously impact the appearance of an area.

## **16. Conclusion**

Contrary to the Local Plan, these proposals damage the heritage assets and their setting and detract from the character or appearance of the important landscape. They do not offer acceptable living conditions to older residents. There is pressure on traffic, inadequate supporting infrastructure and services, and building on the Peppard Road frontage is out of character.

We therefore oppose the applications.

*Helen Lambert 9 May 2022*