



Caversham and District Residents Association

220409 Caversham Park House & Gardens

Comments March 2024 followed by August 2023

March 2024 Revisions

1. Pedestrian access to Lowfield Road

The proposed new access point is welcome and will benefit residents as well as local people. However, the position of the access and the associated crossing point requires further examination. Traffic moves fast on Lowfield Road round a blind bend and careful provision will be needed for frail elderly residents to cross safely.

2. Proposed Cricket Pitch

We acknowledge the concern from Sports England and the concern over lost sports facilities. However, this too requires further examination. The previous cricket pitch was created by the Oratory School. We believe it may last have been used when BBC Monitoring were still active on the site – over six years ago.

We assume that the cricket pitch would be used by visiting teams, with few if any players resident on the site. There will therefore be a significant requirement for additional parking to avoid conflict with parking for residents and visitors. Visitor parking is likely to be greater at weekends when the cricket pitch is in use. Additional parking would conflict with the heritage concerns, and it is not clear how these conflicting pressures could be resolved.

Similarly, further detail is needed regarding the various uses of the pavilion. It is unlikely that the cricket pitch could function satisfactorily without some use of the pavilion.

An operational procedure should be drawn up in association with a local cricketing organisation and consideration given to potential conflicts before plans are agreed.

3. Design of new housing

We commented on 9 September 2023 on the designs of the new housing, expressing concern they do not have regard to the context of this unique site. We repeat this concern.

4. Traffic issues

We commented on 9 September 2023 on traffic issues. We repeat this concern.

5. Other Changes

We welcome the reduction on mezzanine floors in the main house and changes to the layout and new built development which may improve the setting of the house within its grounds. We leave it to others to comment on the detail.

6. Conservation Management Plan

We welcome the inclusion of a Conservation Management Plan and stress the importance.

7. Materials of footways

The visuals of proposed footways suggest a very modern finish, out of keeping with the heritage setting. Materials specified should be agreed with appropriate heritage specialists.

8. Retention of a satellite dish

We note the proposal to retain one satellite dish to echo the history of BBC Monitoring on the site.

We believe that the 5m dish that faced down the hill towards Reading at the back of the woods is still in place and recommend this should be the dish selected for retention. Standing at the back of the building this is on the far left before the woods end at the fields with a footpath through the woods to reach it. It forms part of the heritage view. In the event this dish no longer exists, then we advise one of the 5m dishes on the satellite farm, which sits just to the left of the main building.

Helen Lambert

CADRA Chair

15 April 2024

August 2023 Revisions Comments

1. CADRA is pleased to comment on the substantial revisions to the plans first submitted.
2. This is a large, complex, and technical application and we have not attempted to cover every issue.
3. In principle, we support the new purpose for the house and grounds, subject to suitably high standards appropriate to this important site.
4. We were pleased to have discussions with Beechcroft as the plans continued to evolve.
5. We expressed concern that the early plans for the Care Home read as an extension to the main house. We support the principle of a more modern building, set back and clearly subservient to the main house.

6. Housing parcels

Three separate and very different areas of new housing are proposed: the western block of two-storey housing, with affordable housing; the Courtyard Block to the east of the main house; and the apartments to the north-east of the main house. Our main comment is that while the individual design of these is good, and would be welcome on any new estate, they do not have regard to the context of this unique site.

Having the imposing and important main house as a close neighbour, surrounded by the equally important parkland, should set the agenda for consistency and complementarity of style across the development as a whole, with a shared regard for the historic context. But the scheme reads as three individual blocks which, however good, could be anywhere. While each area has its own needs and constraints, the overall scheme lacks cohesion. Within that overall comment, we have comments on each component area:

1) The western block

The proposal fits in well with Peppard Road and would be a commendable scheme in any other setting. But an opportunity is being missed for innovative and high-quality architecture which is 'of a piece' with a wider scheme, worthy of this very special site. We question the choice of materials: would stucco make it relate better to the main house?

2) The Courtyard Block

A different design style and type of brick is proposed which is intended to evoke the vernacular of the Estate Building. We doubt this objective has been successfully achieved. Again, it lacks an overall consistency to complement the listed building. The scheme in itself is well-designed, though the archways giving vehicle access to the central parking areas are a bit cumbersome. Might it be better for the units to look inwards to a communal garden, with the parking outside, rather than the opposite as currently proposed?

3) The apartments

We like these as a piece of design and especially their more innovative approach. Like the other blocks, we would commend these in any other setting, but they echo our point of lack of regard for the context.

7. We welcome the changes in the state rooms, providing communal space and relocation of residential units so that there is greater sense of a grand house and better display of the important internal features. But we would like to see this go further.

8. We share the concerns of local residents that the 27 new homes in the enclosed field to the north of the BBC Records Centre are likely to result in more on street parking which causes particular difficulties at the start and end of the school day. We note the proposed 106 contribution towards parking restrictions. Proposed restrictions need to be made much clearer for local residents with an opportunity for them to engage.

9. We welcome the proposals for the footpath around the site and the provision of interpretation boards on the path and in the pavilion. A daytime only, pedestrian access by the tennis court, would give the most direct possible access to Emmer Green shopping centre, reducing the walking distance for residents. See reference to Glanville report in 10 below.

10. In relation to the Travel Plan, we believe that the assumption residents will be able to walk 2km to local facilities is ill founded. In relation to staff at the Care Home, it is unlikely a significant proportion will live locally and the limited service of the 25 route will not support shift patterns. These issues will all tend to increase car use and further measures are needed.

This view is reinforced in the Glanville report on parking, indicating a conflict with the Travel Plan:

4.10 It is noteworthy that Caversham House is located circa 300m from Peppard Road, with the Land to the East being over 500m from Peppard Road. As such, these parts of the development are well beyond the 200m that residents would normally walk from a car parking space to their house. This matter is further reinforced by the fact that the residents of the retirement units will be older, and therefore far less likely on average than residents of non-retirement homes, to walk a significant distance to their homes

4.16 The arrangement of the Care Home has been developed by an architect working directly for the future operator of the facility. The operator is well incentivised to ensure they have enough spaces, as if either staff or visitors have issues parking it will impact the operation of the home, a risk they cannot entertain.

11. In relation to the Construction Method Statement, we note that all construction traffic will enter and leave from the mini roundabout at the junction with Buckingham Drive, Old Peppard Road and Lowfield Road. This is very close to the entry point for construction vehicles for Vistry, Reading Golf Club. Beechcroft should establish liaison with both Vistry and Reading Buses.

Helen Lambert, CADRA Chair - 9 September 2023