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MS LIZ HURST - SOMERSET COLLEGE OF ARTS & TECHNOLOGY

ERECTION OF 4 STOREY ARTS AND DESIGN BUILDING, 3 STOREY TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION BUILDING, SINGLE STOREY STORE, ELECTRICAL SUBSTATION, RECONFIGURED SERVICE YARD, LANDSCAPING AND DEMOLITION OF BUILDINGS AT SOMERSET COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY, WELLINGTON ROAD, TAUNTON AS AMENDED BY PLANS 4673/D23A AND D70A

321699/124681

FULL

PROPOSAL

The proposal is one to improve the Art and Design teaching accommodation by construction of a new purpose built building. The current accommodation is out of date and not fit for purpose and refurbishment of the building alone would run into millions of pounds. The building is designed to give a range of facilities, including interactive activities, for informal learning, display of work and for presentations and performance.

The site of the new building lies to the east of the main Atrium building on the campus and will involve the demolition of two blocks, currently the HE Common Room and Pupil Referral Unit, plus the west wing of the existing Art and Design building. The new building will be prominent from the main approach to the campus and it will be aligned with main site building and will be visible through a stand of mature trees. Temporary 3 storey accommodation will be provided for the demolished west wing for the duration of the construction period. The new building will be contained beneath a gently sloping roof, rising to the rear of the site, from 3 storey in the south to 4 storey in the north. The overall height will be similar to the existing Arts and Design building and the 4 storey wing of the Atrium building. The form of the new building has been influenced by the context of the site, the functioning of surrounding buildings, the uses of the building, the building's orientation and sustainability objectives. A U-shaped plinth towards the rear of the site provides a series of workshops forming a Technical Resource centre on the ground floor. Above lie the main studio and seminar accommodation in three storey blocks linked along the north edge of the building by informal social/teaching area. A main performance space of double height volume forms the centre of the building. An Independent Learning Centre (ILC) is contained in a box like form raised two storeys above ground to allow for an entrance foyer below which would provide further gallery and exhibition space. Entrance blocks extend over 3 storeys either side of the ILC and accommodate front of house accommodation for reception, administration, café and gallery space activities.

The building is contained below a single span roof rising from south to north. The roof overhangs to the south containing the projecting ILC while providing solar shading to the entrance foyer. The sloping roofscape is punctuated by groups of zinc clad north lights and wind catchers related to the spaces below. The main roof

will be largely single ply membrane and will have part intensive sedum roof to the lower terraces at the rear. Externally the building will have oak and larch timber cladding with timber double glazed windows while the cantilevered ILC projection will be clad in a gold patinated copper alloy.

The building is being designed to attain a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating and this is achieved through the use locally attainable and recycled materials. The design of the building will provide a predominantly naturally ventilated environment with high levels of daylight combined with solar control. The combination of a centralised boiler with localised solar heating will address the renewable energy requirements of the proposed building.

The construction of the building will require the partial demolition of the existing accommodation and a decant strategy is required to provide a temporary home over the construction period. This involves modification to the east wing access and the provision of a three storey temporary office building to the east of the existing building.

CONSULTATIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

LANDSCAPE OFFICER - No Objections, subject to the details of landscape proposals, hard and soft.

NATURE CONSERVATION OFFICER - Wessex Ecological Consultancy survey found that the site has minimal nature conservation value and the development will have no significant impact on wildlife. However the trees on site provide nesting opportunities for a variety of birds. A recommendation of a condition that if the time period between the original survey (dated May 2008) and the commencement of the works extends more than one year, then a further survey must be commissioned and submitted to and agreed in writing by the local authority.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER - No Objections.

CIVIC SOCIETY - The Society are pleased to see and in principle are supportive of the continued development of Somerset College. We understand the desirability of ending the isolation of the Performing Arts school and giving it suitable purpose built premises. The papers submitted demonstrate the College's requirements are substantially different from the original building and that adaptability is now a key requirement. We would not seek to suggest the general design of the building is not a good solution to the design brief, our concerns are with the context of the building, with details of the external appearance and materials used and with the decision to demolish (initially partially one of the few good Brutalist buildings in the south west).

Many HE facilities show effects of outgrowing their site and of piecemeal capital funding. It is disappointing that Somerset College is also demonstrating this problem, as it is clear that the proposed building has been designed to meet a functional specification without sufficient consideration of the interaction of buildings and the spaces between them and of the opportunities that could be grasped to create an impressive, interesting campus compatible with the long term aspirations of the college. Such thinking could result in civilised inter-related paved and planted spaces

that could enhance the experience of all those using the College. The present proposals perpetuate the stringing along the Wellington Road of buildings that are in an unsatisfactory visual competition with each other. Drawing D56 shows the building more massive than the atrium building and consequently out of scale.

An untidy and cluttered roof is a common problem with 'green' buildings and contributes to the unsatisfactory appearance of this design. Judging from detailed east and west elevations we believe the photomontage from the Wellington Road is carefully composed to minimise the many protuberances from the 'gently sloping roof'. That is a nice phrase but in fact is a roof with two elevated flat platforms from which spout 6 pairs of ventilation chimneys, and these platforms are surrounded by a plethora of rooflights and solar collectors and 2 further chimneys. It does not help that the two rooflights nearest the front are of different sizes and asymmetrical. We consider if this building is erected as proposed the frontage along the Wellington Road will exhibit far too many different materials. The existing Atrium building façade uses 5 materials and this building proposes to add at least another 9, none of which correspond to anything in the earlier building. This results in confusion. We deprecate the current fashion for wood cladding, believing that in the south west with our quite high rainfall, it will deteriorate quickly and prove to be a high maintenance choice.

The existing Brutalist style building is quite striking and is one of the very few architecturally distinguished 20th century buildings in Taunton. The Council should be very careful before consigning it to oblivion - and it is clear that if the proposal to demolish the western section is approved the eastern part cannot be defended. While the proposal submits evidence that the costs of reusing the existing building are prohibitive and will not be sanctioned by the Learning Skills Council, we hear that Jeremy Gould, Professor of Architecture at Plymouth (and a CABE commissioner) has written a report that does not agree with the conclusions of the estate audit and consider this should be made available.

COUNTY HIGHWAY AUTHORITY - The applications are for the redevelopment of a section of the existing SCAT complex. In the main it results in the demolition and rebuilding of elements of the College. The development also results in the relocation to the site of 2 currently off-site activities. This will result in a limited number of extra people on site but parking and therefore trip generation will be very similar to the existing trip patterns. This therefore will not have significant adverse effect on the Highway Network. The college contributed to Highway Works as a result of a previous application and I do not propose to require further works.

The College currently has a Travel Plan, set up in 2002. I believe it is important that this develops and changes as the College develops. To this end I would request a condition be attached to any consent to require the existing Travel Plan be updated, agreed by the LPA in conjunction with the Highway Authority and implemented prior to the new development coming into use.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY - The environment agency objects to this application in its current form as it has been submitted without a fully compliant Flood Risk Assessment (FRA). Insufficient information has been submitted regarding surface water drainage and the scheme for surface water limitation. In the event of the

environment agency's objection being overcome, we would request the inclusion of the following conditions and informatives and recommendation, in addition to any flood risk conditions and informatives that may be applied as a result of information received in respect of the above.

WESSEX WATER - The development is in a foul sewer area and point of connection will need to be agreed. A public surface water sewer crosses the site and an easement or diversion works may be required. An informative to protect the integrity of Wessex systems will be required. The developer will need to contact the Development Engineer to discuss acceptable discharge rate for surface water flows.

DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE - Means of escape, access for appliances, water supplies and the demolition of buildings shall all comply with the relevant approved documents and standards required.

Neighbour Consultations: One comment about expenditure not on planning grounds.

POLICY CONTEXT

PPS1

Regional Planning Guidance Note 10

Policy SS5 – Principal Urban Areas

Policy SS14 - Taunton

EN1 – Landscape and Biodiversity

EN4 – Quality in the Built Environment

TRAN1 – Reducing the Need to Travel

RE2 – Flood Risk

Regional Spatial Strategy – Following the Panel Report the Draft RSS has recently been revised. Relevant policies are:

SD1 – The Ecological Footprint

SD2 – Climate Change

Policy A – Development at the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns

Policy G – Sustainable Construction

F1 – Flood Risk

Somerset & Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan Review

STR1 – Sustainable Development

STR4 – Development in Towns

Policy1 – Nature Conservation

Policy48 – Access and Parking

Taunton Deane Local Plan

S1 – General Requirements

S2 – Design

M2 – Parking

C12 – Renewable Energy

EN6 – Protection of Trees/hedges

EN28 – Development and Flood risk

ASSESSMENT

The proposal is to provide a new Art and Design building to replace the existing one which dates from the early seventies and is no longer suitable for its purpose. The new building is sited on the line of the main campus buildings and will involve the demolition of a number of existing buildings including the west wing of the existing Art and Design building. The main issues in considering the proposal are the design and flooding issues.

The building is approximately 48m x 51m and 17m high. The building is considered to reflect the scale of the other buildings on the front of the campus, although it is 3m higher than the main flat roof of the existing Art and Design building adjacent but is lower than the tower elements of this building which extend to approximately 20m. The materials are largely timber cladding reflecting the cladding on the existing stair tower on the campus frontage. The roof is designed to allow for light and air to penetrate the building with north facing rooflights, wind catchers and solar panels. It is accepted that these elements are necessary in terms of the 'green' design of the building and it is not considered that this results in a such a cluttered appearance of the roof to warrant a design objection. The range of external materials of the building is considered to sit together well and the appearance of the building in the context of the existing campus buildings is considered an acceptable one. The design and access statement has considered carefully how this building links in with the rest of the campus and hard and soft landscaping is proposed and would be conditioned as part of any scheme. The works will involve the removal of the west wing of the existing building and the loss of this element is considered acceptable. The Civic Society raise concern over a number of issues including the loss of the existing building. However the demolition of this building in itself would not require planning permission and it is possible for anyone to approach English Heritage to seek the listing of any building. The status of the existing building was raised with the applicants prior to the current application being submitted and estate audit submitted with the scheme indicates the inadequacies and costs involved with maintaining the current building.

It is accepted that a temporary office building will be required on the site to provide accommodation during the construction period and this option is considered to be preferential to having to decant staff off site during this period. The siting of the temporary 3 storey office building is considered acceptable and not to harm the amenity of neighbours in light of its orientation and a condition to secure removal of the building on completion of the construction is considered necessary.

The application was submitted with a Flood Risk Assessment and this concluded there would no increase in flood risk from the scheme. The Environment Agency initially raised objection on the basis of a lack of information in respect of surface water drainage and attenuation. Further information has been supplied by the applicant to address this issue and a response from the Environment Agency is awaited. It is considered this technical issue can be overcome and the recommendation is therefore subject to the Environment Agency removing their objection.

The proposed scheme will provide an improved new building accommodating the same staff numbers as existing. The Highway Authority have raised no objection to

the scheme and consider the proposal not to raise adverse effects and consider the proposal acceptable subject to the revision of the College's travel plan.

In summary the proposed application is considered to provide a modern new Art and Design building providing new and improved facilities for the College in an exciting building that will enhance the campus and the scheme is one that is supported subject to removal of the Environment Agency objection.

RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the withdrawal of the Environment Agency objection and any necessary conditions the Development Manager in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair be authorised to determine and Permission be GRANTED subject to conditions of time limit, materials, hard and soft landscaping, programme for art installation, travel plan, oil storage, prevention of pollution during construction, disposal of surface water drainage, removal of temporary office accommodation, site clearance and survey work, making good following demolition, recording prior to demolition and cycle parking. Notes re nesting birds, protection of Wessex infrastructure, Waste Management License Regulations, waste disposal and SUDs.

If the Environment Agency objection is not withdrawn by 14th September permission be refused for reason of inadequate FRA contrary to PPS25.

REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposal is not considered to harm the residential amenity or character of the area and not to create additional flood risk and is considered to comply with Taunton Deane Local Plan policies S1, S2, M2, C12 and EN28 and material considerations do not indicate otherwise.

In preparing this report the Planning Officer has considered fully the implications and requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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