

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 30 November 2016. Minute of Meeting of the PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Finlayson, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Boulton, Cooney, Corall, Cormie, Greig, Jaffrey, Lawrence, Malik, Jean Morrison MBE, Nicoll, Sandy Stuart and Townson (as substitute for Councillor Hutchison).

Also Present:- Councillors Allan and Dickson.

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found at:-

<http://committees.aberdeencity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=348&MId=4458&Ver=4>

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HEARING

VICTORIA ROAD - DEMOLITION OF THE EXISTING VICTORIA ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ERECTION OF 56 RESIDENTIAL UNITS, ALONG WITH OPEN SPACE, PARKING AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE AT VICTORIA ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL, VICTORIA ROAD ABERDEEN - 161051

1. The Hearing was opened by the Vice Convener who extended a warm welcome to all present. The Vice Convener also advised that the Convener Councillor Milne intimated his apologies for the hearing due to a Regional Transport Partnership's meeting with Planning and Transport Ministers.

The Vice Convener made it clear that the purpose of the Hearing was not to determine the application but to allow the Committee to consider (1) officers' objective views of the development; (2) details of the development presented by the developer and their agents; and (3) the views of those who submitted written representations and responded positively to the invitation to speak at the Hearing. The Convener advised that a decision would not be taken until a future meeting of the Planning Development Management Committee.

The Vice Convener invited **Mr Andrew Miller, Senior Planner, Aberdeen City Council**, as the first speaker to address the Committee. Mr Miller described the application proposal, advised on the policy background and the main issues arising, and identified the nature of the concerns expressed by consultees and objectors. His presentation to the Committee was in the following terms:-

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The application before members was for detailed planning permission for the demolition of Victoria Road Primary School and the erection of 56 residential units that would be split into the following:-

- 23 terraced 3 bedroom houses in the northern half of the site accessed from Abbey Road; and
- 33 flats in two 3-storey blocks on the southern half of the site accessed from Victoria Road.

The units would be finished in white dry dash render and grey slate effect roof tiles, and the flats would incorporate new granite into certain aspects of their elevations. The distinct split in the site would involve a difference in levels, with the northern half being elevated above the southern half of the site by approximately 2.3 metres and both halves of the site would be connected by stairs and a ramp.

Car parking would be provided within the site (78 spaces) with 2 on street spaces provided for Car Club cars. Cycle parking and bin stores would also be provided for the flats in the southern half of the site.

Mr Miller advised that within the site, there would be a loss of six trees though nine would remain and these would be subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

Regarding the consultee comments, Mr Miller explained that 560 letters of representation had been received and they could be summarised as follows:-

- Loss of Granite Building/Built Heritage and insufficient re-use of granite in development contrary to policy D4 of the Aberdeen Local Development Plan;
- Design and siting out of character with Old Torry;
- Insufficient parking on site and subsequent overflow on to surrounding streets;
- Insufficient access for emergency vehicles such as fire engines;
- Loss of education resource with identified need for new primary school in Torry.

Mr Miller also explained that they were awaiting final comments from the Roads department and Scottish Water and the Flooding team requested further information. SEPA also asked that conditions be attached to the application.

Members then asked questions of Mr Miller, and the following information was noted:-

- The tennis courts to the right of the site was managed by Sports Aberdeen and the play area operated by Aberdeen City Council, both of which were in use by members of the public;
- The application contained five blocks and not four as stated in the report;
- There was sufficient space for the largest type of fire engine to turn should there be an emergency;

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- There was sufficient space in the development for waste services to access communal bin areas and turn vehicles safely.

The Convener then invited **Mr Gregor Whyte, Engineering Officer, Aberdeen City Council**, to address the Committee.

Mr Whyte explained that the Roads department was comfortable with the outline proposal that had been submitted, as well as the car club provision. He indicated that there was no concern in regard to the overflow of cars onto Victoria Road due to adequate parking being provided. Mr Whyte advised that there were two bus services which would connect the site with the city centre and the cycling amenities were adequate with the facilities located properly and securely.

The Vice Convener then invited the applicant to address the Committee. **Mr Scott Pettit and Mr Tommy Hart from Barratt North Scotland** outlined the application to members.

Mr Hart advised that the original planning application was for 62 units but this was reduced to 56 with an amended layout and the removal of one block within the site. The application was withdrawn due to a recommendation to refuse the application and as a result, the amendments were made and a new application was submitted. Mr Hart explained that the current application was based on discussions and comments received from various parties, and advised that during consultation they moved one of the blocks eleven metres to the east and also moved the cycle store following discussions with planning officers and Police Scotland. Mr Hart went on to advise that they intended to use as much of the granite as possible and would retain the boundary walls as well as using new granite in certain areas. Mr Hart also noted that the building was not listed however Barratts aimed to deliver a significant economic benefit to Torry and it was clear that the current building was not fit for purpose.

Mr Pettit explained that Barratts won the tender for the site and had always said that it would be on a cleared site. Mr Pettit advised that this was a great opportunity for Torry and would incorporate 25% affordable housing, as well as developer contributions going towards core paths etc and would help improve Torry, as well as the economic benefits including a creation of jobs.

Members then asked questions of Mr Pettit and Mr Hart, and the following information was noted:-

- Mr Pettit would investigate the percentage of granite that could be reused and would inform members;
- The granite that could not be re-used would either be sold or stored;
- The destination of the granite could be conditioned but would be subject to an agreement with both parties;
- It was very expensive to redevelop the site as it was and as a result the tender for a clear site was submitted and accepted by ACC;

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- The new building would be a modern tenement building and built to a high standard;
- White dash render finish was a contemporary finish however Barratts would be open to discussion with officers regarding a different type of finish.

The Vice Convener then welcomed **Mr David Fryer, Secretary of Torry Community Council**, to address the Committee and he did so in the following terms:-

Mr Fryer thanked individuals who had given their time to submit a letter of objection regarding the demolition of Victoria Road School and noted there had been a global response. He explained that the building was a local granite building and Torry Community Council stated in their objection that Torry was a community and not a dormitory. He advised that this building had a special place in the heart of Torry.

Mr Fryer advised that the building was a gift from Torry Fishing Society in the 19th Century and worked for 125 years before its closure. He indicated that the building was structurally sound and felt it was a crime to demolish it as it had a future use. It had Edwardian architecture and Mr Fryer asked how there could be a granite planning policy in place, only for this building to be demolished.

Mr Fryer explained that this was the last civic building in Torry. He then showed various slides to members and the slides focused on recent developments which featured buildings that had been redeveloped rather than built again following demolition.

The slides included:-

- Causewayend School
- Millburn Street
- Midstocket Church
- Mile End School
- Crown Street Post Office
- Cornhill hospital site
- John Knox Church

Mr Fryer highlighted that if the building was to be demolished, the granite would go to landfill and sit for years to be re-used.

Mr Fryer asked that the application for demolition of Victoria Road School be refused and requested that the building be saved.

Members then asked questions of Mr Fryer, and the following information was noted:-

- If the site was to be redeveloped rather than demolished, the Community Council would be content with a site of flats;
- Other uses could be found for the school and Mr Fryer noted that the heart would be ripped out of Torry if this building was to be destroyed.

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The Committee then heard from **Mr George Wood** who explained to Members that he was against the development and addressed the Committee in the following terms:-

Mr Wood advised that the revised application had some superficial tinkering but was still based on the flawed premise that the demolition of a granite heritage building was acceptable. He indicated that nearly 600 individuals had spent their time, their resources and their money in opposing the application for a second time and that was only those who went public.

Mr Wood also explained that the agent failed to address residents concerns in their supporting statement. He advised that building a retaining wall and bin store and cladding an elevation with materials alien to the streetscape, did not alleviate the stark fact that the adoption of the submission consigned Victoria Road School, financed by fishers for the good of their own community, to join what he felt was the long list of Aberdeen's civic vandalism to heritage buildings.

Mr Wood also advised that the developers noted justification for demolition; however the Council's policy clearly stated that "Conversion and adaption will be favoured." He indicated that a sacrifice to commercial benefit was not acceptable and said that removing a building which should continue to stand as a memorial to Torry's heritage was unacceptable. Regarding the proposed materials to be used, Mr Wood did not consider that the proposed materials paid any compliment to the local environment and felt that the near white, imported granites were totally alien to the texture and hue of a traditional local stone and did not match the heritage.

Members then asked questions of Mr Wood and the following information was noted:-

- Mr Wood was prepared to see other uses for the building including a school, flats or some form of heritage museum
- Mr Wood understood that the planning committee was not bound by other committees in the Council.

The Committee then heard from **Dorothy Bothwell** who was against the demolition of the Victoria Road School and addressed the Committee in the following terms:-

Mrs Bothwell advised that she felt that there were few cities that had treated their built fabric with such institutional contempt, chiefly in working class areas and asked why Victoria Road School could not be spared and made part of the regeneration programme.

Mrs Bothwell indicated she felt that housing or any other building being built by the developer would last a few decades and not the hundreds of years this historic building

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could last. Mrs Bothwell advised that she felt the Council should be making better use of the existing resources.

Mrs Bothwell highlighted that she felt the whole character and feeling of the city were being swept into the background and the main concern was turning a fast profit. She advised she felt that Aberdeen's heritage was an important link with the past which she did not want to see broken.

The Committee then heard from **Mr Simon McLean**, who was against the demolition of the former school on Victoria Road.

Mr McLean addressed in the Committee in the following terms:-

Mr McLean explained that a survey run by Torry Community Council saw a 17% response rate and noted that Victoria Road School was ranked 6 out of 26 options of things important to Torry residents.

Mr McLean advised that he witnessed questionnaires being left in public view at Tullos Primary during a council consultation about the location of a third primary school in Torry and he intimated that all questionnaires made reference to Victoria Road School and to return the site to a school.

Mr McLean spoke about safety concerns at the new South of the City academy and asked questions regarding the consultation event. Mr McLean then went on to speak about the planning application and explained that the first thing Councillors were told was that the site was not safe to enter, however he wondered why others working on the site were allowed to enter the area to make its valuation on the condition of the building. He questioned whether there was evidence that the building was not structurally sound.

Mr McLean advised he felt that the agenda to shut Victoria Road School and sell it off crossed over time to different political parties however the constant was the bureaucrats. He noted that it was easy for political parties to blame each other but harder to admit the advice received from Council officers and subsequent decisions made by Councillors to be flawed.

Members then asked questions of Mr McLean, and the following information was noted:-

- Mr McLean did not live in the area when there was protests over the closure of the school;
- He would like to see the site redeveloped and possibly an extension built in order for the site to be acceptable for a Curriculum for Excellence school;
- Mr McLean accepted that either the sports facilities or a play park would be lost should the building be used as a school with said extension.

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The Committee then heard from **Mr Andy Fletcher**, who spoke in the following terms:-

Mr Fletcher advised that he did a lot of walking and had an interest in older buildings and was horrified to hear about the proposed demolition. He noted that the building survived the World War and felt that the building was worth keeping albeit for a different use. He explained that the conditions of the sale had angered him and as the building was still standing we should fight for it.

Mr Fletcher advised that he felt it was wrong to tear buildings down and from the heart he felt passionately about the building. He indicated that Councillors had the influence to stop this and to think again and urged members to reject the application.

The Vice Convener thanked all participants for their presentations and noted that the application would go before members of the Planning Development Management Committee in due course for determination.

- **COUNCILLOR ANDREW FINLAYSON - Vice Convener**

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