

Visit to site of 4B East Newington Place with S Harrison developers (Wednesday 24th November)

We were contacted by Alex Orr from Omni Communications on the behalf of S Harrison Developments Ltd. They are planning a development on a site on East Newington Place, which has been a garage for an undertakers. They invited members of the Community Council to see the site and discuss their plans for the site. They were upfront that their intention was to build student accommodation. A meeting was agreed for 1.30pm on Wednesday 24th November. Joan Carter, Philip McDowell and Stephen Rodger Benson agreed to go along to represent the Community Council.

We were met by Alex, and taken inside the now empty garages, where they had set up stands with their current plans for the site. Also present was a senior representative from Harrison's, another member from their development team, the architect, and a representative from their planning consultants. They gave a brief history of their company and the kind of developments they have worked on (a lot of work in York), and then took us through the current plans for the site.

Their intentions are to build a block to house 60+ students. They will be in individual 'studio style' rooms (so including en-suite bathroom facilities and cooking facilities in each room), arranged over 4 floors. There will also be space for some amenities. Harrison also say they intend to retain ownership of the site and manage the accommodation themselves (which they have some experience of doing elsewhere). The intention is to be ready to take students in 2023. They were very keen to point out where they had made accommodations to take account of the location, such as ensuring the roofline did not extend above the neighbouring tenements, attempts to make the building fit in the character of the local area (such as by making the third floor appear more like a roof to fit better with local buildings, and considering what material to clad the building in), and had been considering the impact on neighbouring properties (such as privacy distances between residents and light to neighbouring properties). They also wanted to point out where they were trying to be sustainable in their design, looking at how they heated the building etc. Overall the presentation seemed quite good, and they certainly had considered some of what might be the major objections to the development.

There were still a couple of questions they could not give solid answers to. One was the ability of the building to be repurposed if no longer being used as student accommodation (which we understand is a requirement of new student developments). They said this depended partially on the framing of the building, and that if they went with a "light frame", rather than a concrete or steel frame, this might put limitations on how much it can be renovated for alternative use. They also said they were assessing the impact on the Georgian townhouses on the other side of the road, but this had not been finalised. This new development would be notably bigger than the current low garages, and as it is south of the existing houses it *could* reduce the amount of light being received by those buildings, particularly when the sun is low. There might also be issues with the access to the site during building (and the inevitable noise), though they said they would work with responsible partners in construction, have their own people monitoring the site, and that they would be responsive to any complaints. In the end, I think our assessment was that for what the development is, it didn't look too bad (presuming they kept to the steps they had outlined).

However, none of this dealt with the central objection the Community Council would have, namely that there is too much student accommodation in the local area, and that what the area really needs is genuinely affordable housing. The three of us that went along had no objection to the idea of developing the site itself, and felt a number of decent residential flats could fit in the same location.

We put this objection to the developers. Their response was similar to ones the Community Council have received from previous developments, including the suggestion that new student

accommodation may relieve pressure on residential properties. We explained this has never turned out true in the past. Joan mentioned that in the very local area where the accommodation is sited there is already over 60% student accommodation, which already exceed the limits that were meant to be in place. The planning consultant said they had looked at the locality in a different way, and had come up with a different figure of closer to 40%, but this seems to have been by increasing the area being assessed and averaging the figure out in their favour. One concerning point was that during his response he seemed to imply that during their pre-planning discussions with the planning department they had been told that this approach to assessing it was being accepted.

Neither side really convinced the other on this matter, but they are now aware of our core objection. They said the application for the development is meant to be going in the next few weeks, so we will need to keep an eye out for it to make the objection. Joan is also going to contact the councillors to investigate the planning department apparently indicating they already look favourably at this development.