

Cheltenham Borough Council Planning Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 27 March 2025

Meeting time: 6.00 pm - 6.58 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Garth Barnes (Chair), Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp, Glenn Andrews, Adrian Bamford, Jackie Chelin, Jan Foster, Tony Oliver and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Claire Donnelly (Planning Officer), Chris Gomm (Head of Development Management, Enforcement and Compliance), Michael Ronan (Lawyer), Ben Warren (Senior Planning Officer) and Lara Daniali (Conservation Officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen, Baker, Clark and Wheeler. Councillors Chelin and Garcia Clamp attended as substitutes.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3 Declarations of independent site visits

The following Councillors attended sites 6a and 6b during Planning View:

- TBC

Councillor Chelin declared that she had visited the neighbour of site 6b.

4 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February were approved and signed as a correct record.

5 Public Questions

There were none.

6 Planning Applications

7 24/01189/FUL - Cotswold Grange Hotel Pitville Circus Road, Cheltenham

The Senior Planning Officer introduced the report as published. He highlighted that an officer update had been circulated discussing the impact on the Beechwood Special Area of Conservation with an updated recommendation to permit subject to S106 agreement and specified conditions.

There were two public speakers on the item: an objector and the applicant.

The objector addressed the committee and made the following points:

- Representing the residents of Moor Court Drive, all of whom are in objection to the plans and have contributed to the speech.
- Developments should provide an overall benefit to the area, with potential public benefits balanced against and outweighing the many detriments recognised by officers. Residents believe that the detriments have been underplayed, and stated benefits are both exaggerated and do not compensate for the negative impact of the development.
- Moor Court Drive is a quiet, leafy, airy, and attractive residential cul-de-sac. There are no shops, cafes or other hotels nearby to create noise. It is not unusual for the street to be described as a haven. The starting value and amenity of the area for residents is very high.
- Activities within the Cotswold Grange Hotel have previously been contained within the building or within an enclosed courtyard garden, minimising the impact on local residents. This would be fundamentally changed by the proposed development which would leave the street overlooked by an overbearing glass pavilion and first floor terrace. The construction design and material will provide no sound or visual barriers which, along with increased use, will cause significant noise and indoor light disturbance to residents. It will change the nature of the street from being residential to feeling more commercial, which cannot be mitigated by adding conditions.
- The whole building sits within a conservation area, characterised by light, airy space around buildings, and it is contrary to the council's policy to have unacceptable erosion of that space. The proposed development adds the equivalent of a 2-storey house to the street, well beyond the existing build line for the road and infilling to the edge of the property. The design is intrusive, solid and overbearing and will remove the airy feel of the street. The Conservation Officer acknowledges that the proposal is large in relation to the current footprint and that developments in this conservation area are normally set away from existing boundaries. Allowing this development may set a dangerous precedent.

- The rear extension backs on to a residential street and homes rather than a service road. With the new bedrooms looking into the properties opposite.
- The suggested public benefits are economic but are not backed up by data or research and appear to be exaggerated. The claim that an increase of four bedrooms would lead to an increase of four permanent full-time staff is questionable and it is not possible for planning conditions to compel the applicant to make these appointments.
- Further economic benefit for the town would need the additional rooms to bring people to Cheltenham who wouldn't have stayed otherwise. Cheltenham's economic strategy and the Tourism Officer have confirmed that outside of the two main Race meets there is spare capacity in similar hotel rooms within Cheltenham. These rooms will not provide additional revenue for 96% of the year. This modest revenue does not balance the significant negative impact.
- The proposed plans will unnecessarily change a lovely, residential street for the worse forever, with minimal actual public benefit.

The applicant addressed the committee and made the following points:

- He has had the privilege of running and owning Cotswold Grange for the last 18 years. It is a well-established, family-run hotel occupying a beautiful period building dating back to the 1850s. Featuring 20 bedrooms, a bar and function rooms it is one of the last few independently run, boutique hotels in the area and has long been a unique part of Cheltenham's hospitality offering.
- They are committed to carefully restoring and protecting the historic building whilst ensuring it continues to meet the needs of modern guests. A substantial refurbishment in 2015 ensured the period features were preserved. The hotel attracts visitors from around the world who appreciate staying in a hotel with a story, a soul, and a true sense of place. Places like Cotswold Grange survive because of care, dedication and the ability to evolve thoughtfully in a way that respects the building's character, enhances guests' experience and integrates the local community.
- The proposal includes a larger and more flexible function space which will enhance the hotel's current offer, providing a much-needed venue for local events, small celebrations, and cultural gatherings in compliance with the hours outlined in the officer's report. A modest increase of six guest bedrooms will allow the hotel to meet demand whilst maintaining an intimate, personal experience. It will also improve accessibility with a new lift at the main entrance and a fully accessible bedroom.
- With 26 bedrooms, the hotels anticipate over 13k overnight stays annually with the visitors staying projected to spend between £1.5 – £2 million per year, directly benefiting Cheltenham's shops, restaurants and attractions.
- The construction phase will represent a substantial investment to the local economy, and the full-time hotel team will increase from 9 to 13.
- The proposal has been developed in consultation with planning officers, the design review panel and neighbours. Feedback has been listened to, plans adapted, and key requests have been incorporated. The revised proposal places the development more than 21m from the nearest neighbouring property and window placement has been carefully designed to avoid overlooking concerns.

- Important to ensure that independent, characterful places are kept alive in a world in which they are disappearing. The proposal seeks to secure the future of a historic property, ensure that it continues to welcome guests, support local jobs and contribute to Cheltenham's wider visitor economy. Without the ability to adapt businesses struggle and we don't just lose jobs and revenue, we lose a piece of what makes Cheltenham special.

The matter then went to Member debate where the following points were made:

- It's good to see where applicants have worked with planning officers to develop a better scheme that serves the area better. The alterations and compromise were highlighted, and the plans were felt to have significantly improved.
- Whilst the addition of a terrace was not generally preferred and was described as conspicuous, it was noted that in this instance this was a good design.
- It was highlighted that owners of listed buildings do need to be able to generate income to maintain these buildings.
- Concern was raised that during construction the laurel hedge would be damaged, which provides an element of privacy for the residents. The rear extension was felt to be acceptable if this hedge was maintained. The applicant was urged to maintain this hedge as far as possible.

The Senior Planning Officer noted that it was not possible to protect the laurel hedge, however, one of the recommended conditions requires the provision of a landscaping plan setting out all landscaping that should be retained as well as additional planting. Once submitted and discharged they would need to comply with this plan, and if any plants and trees die within a set period they would need to be replaced. This would allow some protection for the hedge.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to permit subject to S106:

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

Voted unanimously to permit subject to S106.

8 24/01486/FUL -103 Shurdington Road, Cheltenham

The Planning Officer introduced the report as published. She highlighted that an officer update had been circulated regarding the Environment Agency's updated flood risk mapping. The outbuilding remains in flood zone 3, flood zone 2 has been extended and the main dwelling on the site now sits within flood zone 2.

There was one public speaker on the item: an objector.

The objector addressed the committee and made the following points (a printed copy of his speech and a Three Counties flood risk assessment was provided to each Member):

- A number of issues with the application had been raised with officers but responses had not been received or the responses received had been unsatisfactory and shown a lack of duty of care.
- The previous building of a garden house built under permitted development for garden outbuildings should have been subject to full planning.
- Hatherley Brook was described by the applicant as 'a stream' with no history of flooding but another neighbour's representation had noted flooding within the garden of 103 Shurdington Road recently and footage of the brook showed that at its full it was a 'raging torrent'.
- The building would be on flood zone 3 and increase the danger of flooding due to displaced water. Flood resilience measures such as flood protective material had not included in previous building of the garden house.
- The application was incorrectly submitted with trees shown in the wrong places or missing.
- If the annex is being built due to the need for additional space for a family member the applicant could have applied to do a loft conversion with the rear extension as was done at 101 Shurdington Road.
- The Environment Agency requires that developments must consult with planning departments to gain permissions and licences, and permission must be asked if building within 8 meters of a flood defence. This was not followed during the building of the garden house.
- The proposed tin roof does not reflect the character of the surrounding area, with other properties using clay tiles or concrete interlocking. The roof will look like a factory and increase noise for surrounding properties during heavy rain.
- The flood risk assessment used is incorrect as the site plan does not show the rear extension correctly, nor the large, raised patio area which adds to water displacement. An enforcement investigation has been requested.
- Damage to properties has occurred from flooding and been reported to the Environment Agency. A footpath on the Merestones Estate has washed away, and a retaining wall was washed away when South Acre Lodge flooded.
- The elevations included in the application were incorrect and shown as higher against neighbouring land than reality. Drainage was also not identified, and concern was raised that this could lead to the brook being polluted and foul air invading nearby gardens, affecting health and welfare.
- The development could be used as a rental property bringing extra vehicles to the property and leading to increased safety risks. The new garden wall would reduce sight lines and could lead to incidents with a cycle path for the new high school.
- The objector asked for it to be recorded that points 13 to 17 of his objection were not read due to time limits.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that:

- The Environment Agency were consulted, and their response was that the site did not meet their consultation checklist, so they did not provide a detailed response to the consultation. The council's Drainage and Flooding Officer did provide comments and raised that the development is within a functional flood

plain and that the floor levels are not above the estimated flood level. They acknowledged that the building is ancillary so occupants of the annex could evacuate to the main building in case of flooding. If the building roof was lowered it would fall within permitted development rights, which includes no requirement for officers to give regards to flooding.

- The applicant's submission meets the council's validation requirements. Officers have considered the application accurate enough to consider and submit for decision.
- Trees aren't protected, so if they have been removed consent is not required.
- The planning officer did visit the site and did not identify any concerns over loss of amenity. A land level survey was not required for this type of development.

The matter then went to Member debate where the following points were made:

- They did not identify any real planning objections to the proposal as it is extending what is already there. As the area to be filled is already hard standing they did not believe this would increase flood risk.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to permit:

For: 5

Against: 0

Abstentions: 3

Voted to permit.

9 24/01872/FUL and LBC - 38, 40, 42 46 London Road, Cheltenham

The Conservation Officer introduced the report as published.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to permit and grant:

For: 8

Against: 0

Abstentions: 0

Voted unanimously to permit and grant.

10 24/01875/FUL and LBC - 2 Montpellier Spa Road

The Conservation Officer introduced the report as published.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that:

- These are Cheltenham Borough Homes properties which are now managed by Cheltenham Borough Council.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to permit and grant:

For: 8
Against: 0
Abstentions: 0

Voted unanimously to permit and grant.

11 Appeal Update

The appeal updates were noted.

12 Any other items the Chairman determines urgent and requires a decision

There were none.

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