

PLANNING APPLICATION 21/01313/OUT – Willow Grange Care Home 1-3 Adelaide Road

Good evening Committee Members

My name is Siu Bun Yuen and I am speaking on behalf of concerned residents opposed to the planned redevelopment of Willow Grange Care Home at 1-3 Adelaide Road. My elderly mother owns and resides in No 5 Adelaide Rd, which is the closest building to the proposed development site, hence my involvement.

Taking into consideration this Committee's stated preference for a single spokesperson, I have tried to coordinate and represent the views of all concerned residents but I hope you can appreciate the challenges given the various Covid restrictions that have been in place up until very recently, plus the fact that comments have not been made public on the planning portal. For the avoidance of doubt, emotions are running high and the only reason we don't have a room full of people this evening is we are following this Committee's stated Covid safety measures.

Appendix A to today's published Agenda reveals that out of a total of 73 representations made to date, 71 are in opposition to the proposed development. Individual objections are varied, wide ranging and nuanced, but broadly fall under the following **seven points of planning consideration**, each of which I will explore in greater detail –

1. Demolition
2. Size and Appearance
3. Loss of Daylight, Sunlight and Privacy
4. Increased Road Congestion and Inadequate Parking Provision
5. Environmental Concerns
6. Fit for Purpose
7. Precedent Setting

1. Demolition

This planning application is for the **complete** demolition of an existing heritage asset. 1-3 Adelaide Rd is a remnant of Victorian Surbiton, built as a pair of villas sometime between 1842 and 1868. Its location at the start of Adelaide Rd serves as a visual link to other Victorian Villas along this residential road. While 1-3 Adelaide Rd has not been classified as a **Building of Townscape Merit** by Kingston Borough Council, which is arguably an omission given similar style properties in the area have been so classified, its historical significance to Surbiton together with other remaining Victorian built Villas on both Adelaide Rd and Claremont Rd is in no doubt.

As Adelaide Rd is situated within the **Claremont Road Conservation Area**, any complete demolition must be held to a higher standard of planning scrutiny than a modification or extension for example. Indeed the last 20-30 years have seen some insensitive over-development to the rear of the building, but the frontage remains very much in keeping with the character of the original building.

2. Size and Appearance

The sheer scale and massing of the building proposed to replace the existing heritage asset is totally inappropriate, and lacks the requisite architectural design quality, resulting in an entirely overbearing and incongruous building in the context of its residential low-rise surroundings. As Adelaide Rd is situated within the Claremont Road Conservation Area, any redevelopment should be sympathetic to the conservation area as a whole. Section 72 of the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act states that **any new building will need to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area**. Kingston Council's published Core Strategy (2012), specifically Policy S1 Surbiton Neighbourhood, talks of "ensuring that future development in Surbiton neighbourhood relates to the existing character... in terms of **design, scale, massing height, density, layout, materials and colour**." This proposal does nothing of the sort.

Application document T302_DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT PART2 has a section entitled “APPEARANCE-FAÇADE STUDY” which purports to “address the relationship between the proposed scheme, the boundary and the neighbouring properties” but despite the text alleging a relationship between old and new, the images show no such resemblances in proposed architecture or materials used.

Furthermore at a proposed six storeys, the development will tower over the immediately adjacent properties. However in a pitiful attempt to blend the height differential, it is proposed that the building step down in height just before it meets the adjacent property at No 5 Adelaide Rd. Note the step down is less than 15% of the frontal width of the building. Yet still the developer has proposed that the entire flat roof of this lower section be an outside terrace. Whether you look from immediate, mid or long range view, the visual impact can only be described as a sudden / abrupt change in height.

3. Loss of Daylight, Sunlight and Privacy

The proposed tall and bulky development will have a detrimental effect on light and privacy for the flats and houses on both Adelaide Rd and Claremont Rd. Windows at all levels on all sides of the building create multiple new vantage points, as does the aforementioned lower level roof terrace next to No 5 Adelaide Rd, noting that this lower level roof terrace is still higher than No 5 Adelaide Rd. With respect to 5 Adelaide Rd, the Sun-Path Analysis included in application document T302_DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT PART2 shows significant loss of sunlight for much of the year for both house and garden.

It should also be noted that there is a very substantial hill slope between Adelaide Rd and Claremont Rd, which may not be appreciated by anyone unfamiliar with the private land between the two roads - with Claremont Road estimated to be approximately 14 feet lower than Adelaide Road. One only has to look up the driveway of the Veterinary Hospital when standing in Claremont Road to see how even the existing low frontage building towers over the back of buildings on Claremont Road. A significantly higher new structure built out even closer to its land plot boundaries will massively augment this overbearing looming effect.

4. Increased Road Congestion and Inadequate Parking Provision

There are currently 10 well-used vehicle spaces at the front of the premises, all of which are to be removed to be replaced with 20 cycle spaces. Only one bay has been allocated for an emergency vehicle. There will be no car parking for staff, visitors, deliveries and tradespeople, all of which will necessarily increase with the larger scale care home – with staff increasing from 23 to 32, beds from 44 to 60. A business this size will require many different suppliers who cannot come via foot, bike or train. That staff and visitors will only use bikes or public transport is fanciful. The reality is that people will drive and simply park wherever they can. As is already the case. Mini buses and delivery vans will have nowhere to access the building other than by parking on Adelaide Rd, putting further strain on Adelaide Road and St Mark's Hill in terms of parking, traffic, pollution and noise nuisance. South access to Adelaide Rd is frequently blocked by delivery vans.

Mindful that a key objective of the Kingston Plan is to promote and improve sustainable forms of travel, nonetheless this must be balanced against existing residential needs. Adelaide Road has multiple dwelling properties which require street parking for their residents. Evening parking is already at a premium as the road is a popular parking spot for visitors to the pubs, clubs and restaurants on St Mark's Hill and Victoria Road.

5. Environmental Concerns

First of all it is generally environmentally better to retain and refurbish structures than to demolish and redevelop.

It is not clear from the submitted application documents whether there will be any excavation for a new lower basement level, or whether basement level simply refers to the current lower ground level. Whatever the case, the 1930s houses next door and nearby have very shallow foundations and have already had subsidence issues which have required structural repair. As such, any heavy construction work requires significant financial considerations pertaining to insurance.

I would like to understand better the environmental credentials of the new building. Other than the installation of solar panels, is the final result going to be a carbon neutral building? Are sustainable building materials being specified? When fully operational, the significantly larger care home will require more energy to run, while its larger footprint has reduced green space in an area that is already in deficit.

Finally we need to consider the impact on nature. I refer to application document PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL V1.0 in which the Ecology Consultancy reports that while there is a low potential for roosting bats to be present on site, nonetheless a further survey is required to establish their presence or otherwise, bats being a protected species in this country. The report also acknowledges that being carried out in February is "outside the optimal survey season" for such an appraisal. So this suggests a need for further ecological investigatory work.

6. Fit for Purpose

For the avoidance of doubt, no one objecting to this planning application is opposed to a good quality care home. However many are questioning whether this demolition and redevelopment will provide one. The plot of land is in fact quite small, which is why the applicant has submitted to build an unimaginative box upwards and as close to the plot's outer boundaries as dare be proposed. The garden will be meaningfully reduced in size. Indeed the Sun-Path Analysis included in application document T302 DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT PART2 shows this new smaller garden almost entirely in the vast shadow of the new building almost all year round, bar a few hours in the afternoon in the height of Summer. I make no claim to be a medical or indeed a care expert, but common sense tells me that a stimulating environment with bright uplifting outdoor space must be a desirable element of treatment and care. However this proposal conjures up a rather uninspiring, depressing vision of a cold yard with high walls on all sides, borne down upon by a grim industrial looking structure. Certainly not the warm inviting look and feel most would associate with a care home, which begs the question if commercial gain is being solely prioritised over good quality care. Indeed if I were to take a very cynical stance, could the plan in fact be to convert the building to a more profitable use at a later date, to extract the greatest value from this redevelopment, be it a private hospital or indeed a budget hotel?

7. Precedent Setting

We should always be mindful of the power and persuasiveness of precedent. Indeed the Heritage report commissioned by the applicant makes this very argument that the existence of multiple high-rise buildings on St Mark's Hill and Adelaide Rd simply paves the way for another – which if granted will underline the precedent and pave the way for the next high rise after that, and so on.

If this development is allowed to go ahead in a conservation area, it will be **open season for developers** looking to cash in on **every Victorian building throughout Surbiton**. For a very long time any development in Surbiton - for example, the Waitrose building (which was an improvement on the original cinema), or the rear reception of the veterinary hospital - these were appropriate to their location in scale and design, and did not involve the demolition of a building of character or merit. During the 1960s and 1970s it seemed that it was planning policy to demolish Victorian buildings and redevelop. Now that we are more mindful of preserving history, can we really afford to lose another remnant of Victorian Surbiton and open the flood gates for further such demolition?

Separately, I understand from some neighbours that there used to be a structure in the Willow Grange garden which some have described as a "small Gothic chapel" that was demolished sometime in late 2020, which begs the question whether this was a quiet demolition during a time

of limited access to the care home, perhaps a deliberate attempt to remove a possible obstacle to this redevelopment proposal?

Conclusion

I understand that the process of granting or refusing planning permission often comes down to a 'net gains' / cost vs benefit analysis, an overall assessment of whether any contentious planning considerations are outweighed by the perceived merits of a proposal. It is the collective view of at least 71 concerned residents that any perceived benefits of redeveloping Willow Grange Care Home are indisputably far outweighed by the certain negative impacts that would result from this ill-considered poor quality development proposed to deliver any such benefits.

Surbiton will lose a heritage asset
to be replaced by an eyesore, entirely out of keeping with the conservation area
which will breach neighbouring residents' rights to privacy and light
and cause significant road and parking congestion.
It may damage foundations and impact the existing ecology.
It will not provide a nurturing environment of care for its residents
and it will sound the death knell for Victorian Surbiton.

As such we respectfully ask that this planning application be refused.

I finish with a description of the **EXISTING** Willow Grange Care Home which I found online –
“Located in the highly popular Thames-side town of Surbiton, [this] beautiful Victorian home dates back to 1840. Featuring beautiful, light and spacious rooms which have retained many of their original period features and high ceilings, visitors often comment on how lovely and welcoming the home feels”.

It sounds like we already have a warm and inviting quality care home, made so by heritage features of the building itself.

And for those interested where I read this –
www.willowgrangecare.com





Learn More About Willow Grange

Located in the highly popular Thames-side town of Surbiton, our beautiful Victorian home dates back to 1840. Featuring beautiful, light and spacious rooms which have retained many of their original period features and high ceilings, visitors often comment on how lovely and welcoming the home feels

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APPEARANCE- FACADE STUDY

These drawings address the relationship between the proposed scheme, the boundary and the neighbouring properties.



