

Appeal by Churchill Retirement Limited

Site at 24-26 Denmark Road Gloucester GL1 3HZ

Appeal Reference: APP/U1620/A/09/2106651

Proof of Evidence of Councillor Jeremy Hilton

Gloucester City Council

1.0 Qualifications and experience

- 1.1 I am the local City Councillor for Kingsholm and Wotton, which is the area of Gloucester in which 24-26 Denmark Road is located.
- 1.2 I am a member of the Planning Committee and have previously served as the chair of the Committee. I have been a Councillor for a total of 18 years. I currently lead the Liberal Democrat group.
- 1.3 I was at the Planning Committee on the 9th of June 2009 when the Committee unanimously refused the planning application (09/00344/FUL).

2.0 9th January 2007 (06/01321/FUL)

- 2.1 The original planning application by Churchill Retirement Limited (“Churchill”), that proposed the building of 48 sheltered apartments, came to Committee in January 2007. The proposal was rejected by members following detailed discussion. There was opposition from local residents, who were concerned about the size of the development and the loss of two attractive buildings.
- 2.2 The Committee resolved that planning permission be refused on grounds that it constituted overdevelopment of the site and was out of keeping with the character of the area.

3.0 29th May 2007 (07/00358/FUL)

- 3.1 A revised application came to Committee in May 2007 that saw improvements to the external design and to the street frontage. There was also a reduction in massing of the rear of the building.
- 3.2 The Officers originally recommended refusal because the contribution to affordable housing was inadequate. I believe the original sum identified was in the region of £2m.
- 3.3 The report stated that Churchill had only offered £300,000 and that the application was recommended for refusal. However, on the night the committee

was informed that Churchill had increased their contribution to £600,000 for affordable housing. This was a clear improvement on their original offer and I believe the committee was informed it was based on the value of the land. I consider this new offer secured the planning permission by making a reasonable contribution to affordable housing.

3.4 I recall that Churchill said it was inappropriate for any affordable housing to be provided on site and that the financial contribution was the appropriate way of dealing with the matter. Officers, and Committee, agreed to this based on an adequate contribution to off site affordable housing. £600,00 was deemed acceptable.

3.5 The officers changed their recommendation and the Committee approved the planning application.

4.0 9th June 2009 (09/00344/FUL)

4.1 A revised planning application was proposed that made minor changes to the internal layout of the development from 31 x 1 bed and 15 x 2 bed apartments (approved 29/05/07 reference 07/00358/FUL) to the proposed 29 x 1 bed and 19 x 2 bed apartments.

4.2 This revised application did not materially change the external aspects of the building in what is now a conservation area.

4.3 The application was turned down because the Committee felt the dramatic reduction (71%) in the financial contribution to affordable housing to £174,665 from the previously agreed £600,000 was unacceptable.

5.0 Summary

5.1 It is widely accepted that the Affordable Housing need in Gloucester is high and that Gloucester has several wards with some of the worst poverty in the country. The Council has a policy of aiming for a 40% contribution to affordable housing

on developments of 15 or more to try and address the need for social housing. This is normally by on site provision.

- 5.2 The planning application (09/00344/FUL) was for 48 apartments and if the 40% provision was on site that would have meant Churchill providing 19 units at 24-26 Denmark Road. It was accepted by Members that, due to the particular nature of the development, a reasonable contribution towards off site provision was acceptable. If the provision had been on site I am sure it would not have been decreased.
- 5.3 Given the minor changes made on this application, I would probably have given my support if Churchill had maintained their reasonable £600,000 contribution to affordable housing.
- 5.4 The changes were minor and did not in my mind warrant a 71% reduction in the contribution to affordable housing merely to improve their profitability on the development at the expense of the homeless of Gloucester. House prices in Kingsholm & Wotton have held firm and we have not seen a 71% reduction in sales prices since 2007 and indeed we are now seeing a recovery in prices which undermines further any justification for a reduction.
- 5.5. It is not the Planning Authority's job to protect the profit margin of a commercial company but our job to ensure that all developers of sites with 15 properties or more contribute fairly to affordable homes, either on site, or with a cash contribution for off site provision.