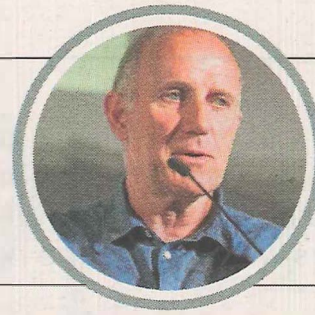


Sudbury Society



Simon Harris

Chairman, Sudbury Society
planning committee

Lazy proposals have no merit so show us something better

Shortly before Christmas, Churchill Retirement Homes lodged a formal planning application for a number of retirement homes on the site of the former swimming pool at Belle Vue Park – arguably the most significant site in Sudbury town centre.

This followed on from outline plans the firm presented at a public exhibition in October, when the community were invited to express their views.

At the time of the exhibition, we fully supported the proposals for the development of Belle Vue House, but challenged the designs for the new residential block on the grounds that:

- It is too large for the site to accommodate.
- It presents a poor addition to the townscape when viewed from the conservation area.
- The architects confessed no knowledge of Sudbury's brick-making history and had merely proposed an adaptation of schemes from elsewhere in Churchill's portfolio.
- The density (42 units) combined with the required parking would leave little outdoor space for residents (the developers said a scheme of 35 units would still be viable).

It is, therefore, very disappointing that we can see no evidence that Churchill has taken any of our comments on board. The application as lodged is unchanged from its original outline.

This is just not good enough for Sudbury, where the new £8 million national centre for Gainsborough, which is now approaching completion, sets the kind of visionary ambition and focus on quality that we need.

Churchill is more than capable of producing higher quality projects that are well adapted to a particular site. It has developed more than 100 retirement properties across the country, many of which have architectural merit. This is not one of them.

Here, they have a corner site, visible from three compass points, but have completely failed to take advantage of it.

What could form an eye-catching landmark at the approach to the town's conservation area will just be a triple-banked four-storey mass. This building could be absolutely anywhere.

I get the feeling the architects have done a straight lift from some other Churchill sites, such as in Christchurch, Dorset, or



Peacehaven



Aylesbury



Bury St Edmunds

Sittingbourne in Kent.

They've clearly followed a very similar, safe style, incorporating red brick with the occasional white rendered panel under pitched tile roofs with minimal detailing.

Now, take a look below at some other examples of Churchill developments in Peacehaven, Aylesbury and, closer to home, a proposal for Bury St Edmunds.

On all three sites, Churchill has exploited corner locations very successfully, with an eye-catching landmark feature. There is no landmark of any description for Sudbury in its submission.

Peacehaven, east Sussex: Rounded corner block flanked by weather-boarded wings with a nautical flavour.

Aylesbury, Bucks: Imposing corner block with a series of balconies to break up the facade.

Bury St Edmunds (proposed): An attractive variety of shapes and colours on a major roundabout.

Any building at this location needs to be sensitively considered; an intelligent architectural solution that takes into account the surroundings, the plans for a new park entrance alongside and the approaches into town on all sides.

To submit plans for a building of this scale with no consideration for the local history of brick-making, the visual impact in a conservation area and the expressed views of local residents does not impress.

We now rely on the planning officers at Babergh District Council, and our councillors on the planning committee to take up the fight and argue for the best standards of architecture for our town. They must refuse to accept this lazy proposal.

They must challenge the developer's architects to come up with a showcase building that still meets their commercial needs.

If, as we have been told, 35 units rather than the proposed 42 are still viable, that's an opportunity to redesign the scheme on a reduced scale with a lot more style. There is still time for this to be turned around.

We want to be positive and supportive of new developments in our town, as we have for the new centre for Gainsborough. Show us something better.

□ If you would like to take a look and offer your comments on this planning application, go to planning.baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk/online-applications and type in DC/21/06519 in the field at the bottom.