

The Second Application Is In!

Try Homes argued for the past year that there was nothing wrong with their plans for the Campion site. They submitted an application to develop the site in May but that application is now hitting heavy weather (see **Thumbs Down for First Application**).

Now, while still defending their first application, Try Homes have submitted a second application. Why would that be? Everyone will work out their own answer. To us it seems that their confidence in the application being approved by the Planning Inspectorate can't be all that high.

Originally Try Homes proposed 343 homes for the site. When they made their first application they said that they had reduced the number to 273 in order to accommodate residents' views. Having found out that residents didn't like their plans for 273 homes either, they were not inclined to make further changes.

Now Try Homes have submitted a second application. This time it is for 239 homes. This small reduction is a minor victory for residents' activity but it goes nowhere near meeting the objections they raised to the first application.

Think of a number

All of this sounds like a 'think of a number' game in which the developer proposes something outrageous knowing that it will trigger howls of protest. The proposals are then trimmed to something smaller but still outrageous so that the developer can say "We have listened". Now more protests have been followed by more trimming. The result is still far short of what is required.

This is not a line of argument in which we want to get involved. When we assess the second application our first concern is not to compare it to the first one which was plainly unacceptable to the residents, the councillors and the planners. The second application should be judged on its merits.

In other words we will approach the second application as if it were the first application. We will judge it by both the need for new housing and the needs of the area. It is clear that this application addresses some issues that were not addressed by the first. The question for us is, however, does it address *all* the relevant key issues adequately?

Back to square one

As yet, we have not had time to study all the papers and drawings. By the time of the next Newsletter, early in the new year, we will have done so and will

report our findings. Residents wishing to look at the plans for themselves can do so in Osterley Library, in the Civic Centre or by coming to look at our set at 101 Thornbury Road. We have asked the Planning Department if they intend to organise an exhibition to make information on the application more easily available to residents. If they do not do so then we will try to do it ourselves.

Initial impressions

A first reading of the **Planning Statement** submitted by Try Homes is not encouraging.

1. Even by the developer's own calculations there will still be a 10% encroachment on open space.
2. There is an attempt to mask inadequate provision of private amenity space by claiming that residents of the new homes also have access to public space. Planning advice says that private and public spaces should be kept distinct and everyone can understand why.
3. Fictitious public space is offered. The land at the back of the site is said to be publicly accessible. There can be little doubt that this would greatly annoy the new residents and would soon be blocked.
4. The number of homes proposed is far too high at 239 and many of the problems with the application result directly from this.
5. The proposals do not respect the surrounding housing or the Spring Grove Conservation Area since they are based on a large block which is out of keeping with the area.
6. The proposed building is too high and too massive.
7. The developer fails to recognise any positive qualities in the conservation area (since this would constrain the excesses in their proposals).
8. The papers try to undermine the suburban status of the area by giving it an invented "transitional" status.
9. It is repeatedly claimed that the site is within "easy walking" distance of Town Centre and that the transport is good (contrary in both cases to official estimates).
10. There are far too few houses compared to flats (21 houses, 218 flats!).

It is a virtual certainty, given past experience with Try Homes materials, that as we read the papers in detail, we will discover many more problems with this application. The next **Newsletter** will contain the results of this research.

Thumbs Down for First Application

The first Try Homes application to develop the Champion House site was given a strong thumbs down by the Sustainable Development Committee (SDC) at its meeting on Monday 11th December.

Unified opposition

The final SDC motion, with a list of reasons why the Try Homes proposal was unacceptable, was passed unanimously. It therefore had the full support of the members of all the political parties, the planners and the residents.

Mr Jordan, the Director of Planning, explained that there was a lot wrong with the application. He pointed out that some of the grounds for objecting were matters that could conceivably be dealt with by Try Homes within the framework of the application. On the other hand, he said that there were problems that were fundamental and therefore could not be addressed without major changes.

Tribute was paid to Champion Concerns by Councillor Barbara Reid for its painstaking and careful work and the quality of the materials produced. Other councillors clearly agreed.

Residents' views

The high level of residential opposition was clearly reported in the long officers' report on the application. Councillors commented on this. The 150 or so letters sent in were often very detailed and were one of the major achievements of residential activity. This makes it difficult to claim that the application had residential support. Not too difficult for Try Homes, however, who are still claiming that their consultation of November '05 showed that residents were in favour of their application!

The Officers' report is available through our website at <http://championconcerns.org.uk/latest.html>. Go to the notes for 8th December.

Wasting public money

The SDC decision is not yet the end of the story. Try Homes used the time taken by the Planning Department to respond to its application as an excuse to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate who will now make the final decision following a Public Inquiry.

This Inquiry, if it ever takes place, will be an immense waste of public money and is yet another indication of Try Homes' lack of interest in the views of local residents, councillors and planners.

Consultation Period

The letter to residents in the Champion development catchment area says that the 28-day consultation period started on 14th December (until 11th January). Representations will be accepted after that if they are in time for the officers to consider them. To meet the 13-week deadline the application must be considered at the SDC meeting of 26th February.

This means that it will have to go to the Area Committee meeting of either 18th January or 15th February. We assume that it will be the February meeting since otherwise there would be insufficient time for residents to get enough information to make representations on an informed basis.

The new application was made on 6th December which means that the consultation period will straddle the Christmas/New Year period. We imagine that Try Homes were well aware of this. Despite this we will do all that we can to get vital information to residents. Watch this space! (January 07 Newsletter)

Residents' Letters Most Effective

One of the most effective actions during the campaign against the first Try Homes application was the large number of detailed letters sent by residents (about 150 in all).

Individual Letters

We were advised at an early stage that it was better not to use pro-forma letters since that was virtually the same thing as a petition. We were told that letters written to express individual concerns would be much more effective – and so it turned out to be.

Some residents wanted standard letters but we explained that expressions of individual concern were required. Other people wanted help with putting the letters together and we were more than happy to do that. In each case, however, we gave no more than help. From the 100 letters that we saw we can say that the quantity and quality of the letters were something all those involved can be proud of.

Please get ready to write again

And now we are going to have to do it all over again! We hope that residents will prepare themselves for this and be ready to write letters in January. The schedule this time is very tight.

The Fence

Try Homes made a retrospective application to put up the fence along Thornbury Road, having put it up without permission. That application was refused. Try Homes has ignored the refusal. This has now gone on for so long that the Area Planning Committee agreed at its meeting on 14th December that it was time to move to enforcement of its refusal.

