

19-21 Market Place, Wokingham

1. The Wokingham Society Executive Committee is grateful for this opportunity to respond to the presentation of plans to re-develop 19-21 Market Place. We welcome the effort made to hold a pre-application consultation.
2. We think it is somewhat grandiloquent to present this scheme as a contribution to the regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre. There is nothing particularly wrong with the current retail element, nor with the residential provision in that area, and it would seem to us to be more honest to present it as a development opportunity rather than a generous act for the benefit of the local community.
3. To that extent, we find the proposal superfluous and contrary to the principles of the conservation area status which seeks to protect the town centre from unnecessary development such as this proposal to demolish usable buildings and to impose an unacceptably large mass of residential buildings.
4. However, we also recognise our obligation to contribute our views on the plan as presented and do so below.
5. While we welcome the retention of the façade of Market House, currently occupied by Edinburgh Wool Mill, and consider the twin gabled design of the frontage of the premises used by Robert Dyas to be acceptable, albeit somewhat ostentatious, we do not find the proposed exterior of the middle section, now housing Lloyds Bank, to be in keeping with the local grain of buildings in this area. It might be argued that there are one or two whitewashed buildings nearby, but these are pleasantly plastered and rough-surfaced. The frontage proposed is largely flat and smooth, with little variety, and topped by an incongruous flat roof, which has no nearby equivalent. We would urge that this design be re-thought to provide a frontage of more harmony and interest.
6. We accept that the rear of these buildings is of no particular merit and might benefit from modernisation, but we think the imposition of four-story blocks housing 60 apartments represents considerable over-massing in an area where premises are relatively small and not over-loaded with residential accommodation. Reducing the provision by lowering the height or lessening the number of blocks in order to deliver half this amount of accommodation would seem to be a more reasonable objective.
7. We are very worried about the implications of access via Howard Road. This is a narrow and in practice (by virtue of parking) often a single-lane route and ill-equipped to deal with the volume of traffic implicit in the proposed development, from construction traffic to residents' and visitors' cars and to delivery and emergency vehicles. Even if somehow your traffic calculations suggest no great increase in usage, this is still more than the local residents should have to bear. Of course our ideal solution would be to have no development, but certainly there is at least a need to minimise new building to a size that does not exceed the amount of access that currently occurs.
8. There is a particular concern about the narrowness of the proposed Howard Place, which would mean that vehicles entering it would need to reverse out of it since there would be no

turning room. This would pose a danger to other vehicles approaching the entrance and be an unnecessarily risky manoeuvre in any case.

9. We note that emergency vehicles may need to access Denmark Square by passing over retractable bollards. We wonder whether this could pose difficulties when the Square is also being used for active purposes such as al-fresco dining, exhibitions or live events.

10. We think a clear management plan is needed to ensure that the Square and associated passageways do not become neglected and thus prone to detritus and anti-social activities.

11. We were saddened that there had been no automatic provision for affordable housing. Rather than leaving it to the Council to come forward with its response, the developers could have given credibility to their claim of contributing to the town centre's regeneration by costing in such provision and including it in their plans. It should be noted that, in approving the Council's own proposals for 55 dwellings at the nearby Carnival Pool site, the Planning Committee "was disappointed that no affordable housing would be provided, and reminded the applicant that in future WBC should be looking to set an example to provide affordable housing to meet WBC's own standards".

10. Finally, we would hope that, as further evidence of their wish to contribute to the local community, the developers could provide a work of art sited in Denmark Place.

Peter Must
Chairman of the Wokingham Society

22 September 2022