

108 bed purpose built student accommodation at the top of Longbrook Street - Consultation currently underway for planning application 25/0318/FUL

25/0318/FUL New building comprising 8 levels purpose built student accommodation (sui-generis) with 108 self-contained studios, ancillary spaces at ground, first and eighth floor, and ground floor commercial unit (Class E(b)).

If you are thinking this is a case of déjà vu you wouldn't be far wrong!

This is the eighth application submitted since 2017 in relation to proposals for purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) on the combined site of the former King Billy pub and Shepherd's Garage.

However, unlike the four applications submitted in 2023 that successfully sought successive 'tinkering' (with very significant cumulative effect) of the original 2017 application for full planning permission, that had been resubmitted in 2020 to renew the unimplemented consent before it lapsed, **the current proposal is for a quite independent FULL planning permission.**

It is worth emphasising that after the initial submission of application 17/0750/FUL, which had stimulated many objections from individual residents, ongoing discussions not least between the Case Officer, Exeter St James Forum and our city councillors, resulted in the submission of revised plans before the approval decision was recommended to Planning Committee.

The Officer's Report explains: *The original planning application proposed a total of 124 bedrooms within a building of seven, eight and nine storeys but following concerns raised by Members, public comments and the case officer the scheme has been revised.*

When eventually approved, the proposal had been reduced to a mixed-use scheme comprising of ground floor commercial units (a restaurant/bar and retail unit) with 108 bed space student accommodation above over 6 and 7 storeys. A success story for each individual objector!

Hence we would encourage all Trust members, whether or not you made your views count previously, to take this important opportunity to do so now – before the deadline of midnight on Tuesday 29 April. The scale of individual comments and their balance between support and objection, will certainly be taken into consideration again, and at the very least will support the request our councillors have already assured us will be made, that the application be taken to Planning Committee to be discussed and decided by Members.

Below are just a few of the points that you might like to consider for your own response. (Even a single sentence focusing on one issue, will contribute to the all-important number count, but do make clear whether yours is in support or objection to the application!)

- **Appropriateness of large scale student accommodation on this site.**

It is 5 years since the last public consultation over an application for Full planning permission here. Then the view of the planning officers was that in principle this site was entirely well-suited to PBSA development.

Has the situation changed that might lead the LPA to a different conclusion?

- More PBSA have been approved / developed in the vicinity – do you think approval of this application would lead to an over-concentration of PBSA in the area?
- It is not at all clear that existing PBSA (and the one completed co-living development in the city, which advertises as student accommodation) are all at capacity. There are a

number of consented PBSA developments either not yet commenced eg Maximum Motors, or not completed eg Beaufort House.

- There is uncertainty over future numbers of international students, particularly from China, who have tended to show preference for accommodation in PBSA, so how wise is it to tie up sites by granting permission for more student accommodation?
- Even if reliable data were available to show there remains demand for more purpose built student accommodation, should all of the very few remaining development sites in St James answer that need at the expense of the need of other demographic groups such as young professionals, young couples, families, older residents looking to downsize, all desperate to secure residential accommodation where they can settle and call home?
- **Is the design of the proposed development appropriate for such an important and sensitive location, acknowledged as the gateway between Longbrook Conservation Area to the North and the City Centre to the South?**
 - The height, scale and mass even exceeds that which was originally proposed in 2017, but which necessitated revision downwards before the planning officers contemplated recommending approval.
 - Features that ensured the northern end of the proposal would better relate to the adjacent 3 storey Longbrook Street terrace, while at the same time features at the southern end would better complement its adjacent John Lewis and City Centre location, are no longer strong if discernible at all.
 - A feature considered of vital importance to many during the consultation in 2017, was the active frontage afforded by two large commercial units occupying the major part of the ground floor. Thus at street level it would seem a continuation of such uses, carefully scaled to link with the existing adjacent commercial properties either side.

The restaurant with windows of double floor height, designed to sit well next to John Lewis has been downgraded to a small cafe, and this is now the only proposed nod to a commercial unit.

The retail unit has been replaced by a plant room, a cycle store, opening on to Longbrook Street, and a reception/communal area for students.

The application claims that the latter's wide expanse of glass window will satisfy the desirability of an active frontage, but surely this would not have the same effect as shop windows designed to entice passers-by to enter.

If the glass were clear, and not impenetrable to inward gaze, would this be fair on the students using this as the larger of the only two communal social spaces included? Would passers-by appreciate this as an active frontage, or feel too uncomfortable to turn their eyes towards the windows?

It is more likely that the glass would be such that the frontage would present as darkened barriers, obscuring any activity inside.

Comments may be submitted on the Planning Portal or by email to Case Officer, Christopher Cummings, Christopher.cummings@exeter.gov.uk.

Remember deadline is midnight on Tuesday, 29 April!