

From:

Sent: 02 June 2020 14:15

To: Matthew Diamond <Matthew.Diamond@exeter.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Comments for Planning Application 19/1556/FUL

Dear Mr Diamond,

In all the photographs you attach I think it is self evident that the height of the modern buildings has a substantial and negative impact upon and detracts from the setting and significance of the of the city wall. I am not clear why you have included a picture of St Catherine's Almshouses, but the disparity of scale there between the remains of the almshouses and the Martin's Bank building is also unfortunate; however, this was a mistake made during post-war redevelopment and there is little that can be done about it now, other than to try not to perpetuate it elsewhere.

The new buildings in 'Roman Walk' are only five storeys high but they completely dominate the city defences as seen from the rear of Broadwalk House. In the case of the eastern angle tower, at the upper end of Princesshay, the new building completely overbears the surviving tower. Its attempt to reference some sort of tower structure really does not help, but reduces the genuine historic tower to a toy-like scale. This is further exacerbated by the raising of the ground levels outside the wall by several metres. This has buried a large part of the original external face of the defences which, even in my own childhood, retained something of their former impressive height. The wall has thus lost nearly all its former prominence and strength. The proposal for seven-storey buildings at Paul Street is likely to be even more destructive than this, as the developers drawings show and as should be evident if you mentally add two storeys to your photographs of the Princesshay buildings.

The pedestrian route at the rear of the city walls in Princesshay also fails to acknowledge historic form of the defences. Prior to post war development, the rear face of the wall in the St John's Hospital gardens and at the rear of Bedford Circus was covered by a sloping earth bank to within about six to eight low courses of the wall walk at the summit of the wall (As it still is in the Bishop's garden and on both sides of the Castle). These banks were integral with the Roman walls and formed a crucial part of the city defences. The present 'presentation' of the rear face of the wall in 'Roman Walk' as a narrow passage between the rear face of the wall (not originally visible) and the new flats does not, therefore, reflect any sort of authentic 'experience' of the wall, but presents the wall as a free standing object without any of its historic context and exposes fabric which was never intended to be visible. Again, the loss of the banks in Princesshay is mainly the fault of the post war redevelopment, however the proximity and height of the modern buildings in Princesshay undoubtedly have a negative effect on the integrity of the wall and its comprehensibility as part of a complex system of Roman and Medieval city defences involving both stone and earth structures.

The rear face of the wall in Paul Street was also not formerly visible and exposing it by the removal of much of the remaining earth banks, as has happened when Harlequins was built, has created a conservation problem for the core of the wall, which is deteriorating. The developers provision of an open area along the inside of the wall does not therefore enhance the experience of the wall in any way that reflects its historic appearance or function.

As I think I said in both of my previous letters of objection, although it is in many respects a disastrous building and has never been an artistic or commercial success, the one thing for which the present Harlequin Centre may justly be admired is for the way in which, by careful management of its height and roofscape, it sought to reduce its own impact upon the wall and upon Northernhay Street. The Harlequin Centre buildings are all but invisible from Northernhay Street and the wall is thus able to dominate. I have recently been to see this for myself and append photographs here. The

present design of the Harlequin Centre also minimises the effect of the concrete ramp to the Guildhall centre by completely enclosing it. Its effect upon Paul Street is grim, but not so grim as that of the Guildhall shopping centre, which is probably one of the worst architectural mistakes ever made in this city. The varied roofline of the Harlequin Centre does help- a little- to reduce the impact of this truly awful building. The current proposals will dominate even this, compounding the error.

The current rage for building high is bound to have a deleterious effect on the historic townscape. This will be familiar to you if you approach the Cathedral Close from the top of South Street, or indeed from almost any point near the west front of the Cathedral, where the new Debenhams building and other structures in Princesshay really do damage the setting of the Grade 1 listed buildings along the north eastern side of the Close. We cannot afford to make mistakes like this too often. Although in the area around the Bus Station, tall buildings might be acceptable (though I think the design of these has also been very poor) In the historic centre of the city we really do need to insist upon much lower rise structures and much more careful management of rooflines if we do not wish to repeat these mistakes. The fashion for adding extra storeys to existing buildings, which utterly destroys their original rooflines- a crucial part of their design and historic integrity- is also deeply regrettable. If we wish to look after our historic environment responsibly we will not permit such things to impinge upon our remaining historic townscape. I live in hope that changing patterns of commerce in city centres will one day rid us of structures like the Guildhall Shopping Centre altogether. In the mean time we should not let the bad design and inappropriate scale of these buildings be used to justify similarly disastrous schemes.

With regards,

Richard Parker



regrettable effect of overscaled buildings on The Close



cantilevered or jettied end impacts on wall, but not greatly



greatest impact of harlequin- still negligible by comparison with 7-storey proposals



harlequin all but invisible, wall dominates, 7 storey building would detract



Northernhay buildings impact of harlequin 3



Northernhay buildings impact of harlequin 4 greater impact but wall still dominant



Northernhay buildings impact of harlequin



site of proposed 7 storey structure 1



wall from Northernhay 1



wall near 17th-century house at foot of Northernhay

From: Matthew Diamond <Matthew.Diamond@exeter.gov.uk>

Sent: 02 June 2020 11:25

To:

Subject: FW: Comments for Planning Application 19/1556/FUL

Dear Dr Parker

Thank you for your comments. You state that in your professional judgement the proposals will have a substantial impact on the scheduled wall and other heritage assets. The developer's heritage specialists state it is less than substantial. As a comparison to aid my understanding would you say that the relatively new buildings shown in the images below have a substantial or less than

substantial impact on the scheduled monuments? NB. The bottom two images show visualisations of the proposal. I'm interested to know the subjectivity of this.









Regards

Matt

Matthew Diamond

Principal Project Manager (Development)

City Development

Exeter City Council

01392 265214

From: planning@exeter.gov.uk [<mailto:planning@exeter.gov.uk>]
Sent: 26 May 2020 14:55
To: Matthew Diamond <Matthew.Diamond@exeter.gov.uk>
Subject: Comments for Planning Application 19/1556/FUL

Planning Application comments have been made. A summary of the comments is provided below.

Comments were submitted at 2:54 PM on 26 May 2020 from Dr Richard Parker.

Application Summary

Address: The Harlequin Centre Paul Street Exeter Devon EX4 3TT
Development of a Co-Living (Sui Generis) accommodation block and a hotel (Class C1) including bar and restaurant, following demolition of existing shopping centre and pedestrian bridge, change of use of upper floors of 21-22 Queen Street to Co-Living (Sui Generis), and all associated works including parking, landscaping, amenity areas, public realm improvements, new pedestrian bridge and provision of heritage interpretation kiosk. (Revised)

Proposal:

Case Officer: Matthew Diamond

[Click for further information](#)

Customer Details

Name: Dr Richard Parker
Email:
Address: 11 Toronto Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 6LE

Comments Details

Commenter Type: Member of the Public
Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application
Reasons for comment:
Comments: Dear Sir or Madam.

Further to my previous objections to both the original and the revised schemes for the proposed replacement of the Harlequin Centre, I have since met with some of the local residents to discuss their concerns about the current proposals and about the documentation submitted in support of the proposed development, particularly the documents prepared by Triskelion Heritage, including the Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment Vol.3 Non-technical Summary and Consultation Responses April 2020. I also took the opportunity to examine personally the impact of the existing Harlequin Centre buildings upon the City Wall, as seen from Northernhay Street and from other viewpoints in the city. I wish to reiterate and

to reinforce my objections to the proposed redevelopment.

Triskelion Heritage have gone to great lengths to justify their assessment that in their 'professional judgment' the proposed development would not cause 'substantial harm to the significance of any heritage asset' and that 'this disengages any heritage-related presumption against the proposed development' (Triskelion Heritage 2020, 4). In my own 'professional judgement', as an historic buildings consultant, this is a quite extraordinary statement given the scale of the proposed new development in comparison with, and its direct proximity to, the city wall, a Scheduled Monument, and the many listed buildings of Queen Street, Northernhay Street and Ironbridge Street. The impact of high-rise buildings, rising to much greater heights than the already over-dominant Guildhall Shopping Centre, and rising to as many as seven storeys within the immediate vicinity of the city wall and the listed houses of Northernhay Street, cannot, surely be interpreted in any other way than causing 'substantial harm' to the setting of these heritage assets. The Georgian Society, the Victorian Society and Historic England among others all regard the present proposals as productive of substantial harm and I submit that this objection still remains.

The increase of height of the revised proposals closer to Queen Street will, as the developers visualisation drawings clearly show, have a very significant and deleterious impact upon the setting of historic buildings in views to the south east down Queen Street, particularly the listed Exeter Dispensary building in the upper part of Northernhay Street, and the very fine early 19th-century Providence Chapel. The proposed new buildings are shown as towering over and completely dominating the historic structures, replacing a richly varied and interesting roofline with one of unrelieved monotony. This overbearing character would also be significant in more distant views of the city as a whole.

Triskelion Heritage also appear to have lost a realistic perspective in their assessment of the negative contribution to the streetscape of the existing Harlequin Centre.

Although there is no question that this structure is one of a number of 'vast new buildings' that 'have obliterated most of the historic street pattern and conflict with the scale, form and materials of the many historic buildings which surround the modern development' (ECC Central Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan; Triskelion Heritage 2020. 5), Triskelion Heritage do not address how the replacement of this admittedly egregious building with one still larger, taller and also in 'conflict with the scale, form and materials' of the many historic buildings in the area could ever be considered an

improvement.

It is very evident from an examination of the streetscape that the Harlequin Centre was carefully designed, as a relatively low-rise structure with an irregular roofline of pitched, slated and glass roofs, to be barely visible from Northernhay Street and, in longer views of the site, to be subordinate to and blend with the existing cityscape. This low-rise design has allowed the city wall to remain the dominant feature in all views towards the site from Northernhay Street, which would have been the principal elevation of the wall, the rear elevation having been buried in a succession of earth banks. In only one place does the existing Harlequin Centre seriously impinge upon the setting of the wall (at its south-western corner) and here, the pronounced cantilever of the corner of the shopping centre was probably considered an exciting feature by its architects. From any other angle, the shopping centre building is barely visible in Northernhay Street, and almost completely so from residents gardens close to the city wall.

Although it is undoubtedly a terrible building, particularly in its impact upon Paul Street, in its relationship with Northernhay Street and with the city wall the Harlequin Centre is clearly far less damaging to the setting of these heritage assets than the high-rise structures proposed by the current developers. I submit that this is not just a 'professional disagreement about the levels of impacts' but that it is an unequivocal fact.

I therefore once again urge you to refuse this application and to use every power you have to persuade the developers that their design philosophy for this important city centre site is in desperate need of revision- that high rise tower blocks will simply never be a suitable development model for this part of our city.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Richard Parker.

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