

Planning Department
St Albans City & District Council
Civic Centre
St Peter Street
St Albans
AL1 3JE

20 July 2016

Objection to Planning Application Reference 5/2016/1566, for one 5-bedroom dwelling, one 3-bedroom dwelling and five 4-bedroom dwellings at 1 Mount Pleasant.

We write to support objections to this proposal by APRA members and many other residents in Old Garden Court and Welclose Street. These objections are well explained in their individual comments, the main concerns being over-crowding, visual intrusion, inadequate access for both construction and subsequent occupation, the lack of proper prior archaeological investigation, and unsympathetic building design. We consider that taken together the development as proposed would represent a significant loss of amenity to existing residents and that it should not be allowed to proceed as such.

A few salient points are:

Cramming a luxury house and six town houses on the site of an existing bungalow represents insensitive overdevelopment and yet further in-fill of an ecologically valuable green space in part of the St Albans Conservation Area. Moreover, the ‘communal garden’ at the far end of the site behind a low run of two-storey cottages in Welclose Street, and the removal of trees to allow pedestrian access to it, seem a scarcely veiled attempt to reserve this plot for yet further development.

The height of the town house row (three and a half storeys) is excessive. The views from both Old Garden Court and Welclose Street properties will be interrupted to a far greater extent than admitted in the proposal. Claims that they are shielded by existing mature trees belie the fact that the trees behind Nos. 19 & 21 Welclose Street (and the proposed new planting behind 17 and 17A) and all of those on the Old Garden Court boundary are deciduous and will offer minimal or no shielding for half of the year. On the latter side the trees are supplemented by a 5-metre high cypress hedge which will be breached along much of its length to allow motorised access to the exposed new buildings.

The design of this block is a strange mixture of a mock-Edwardian gabled frontage and confused late 20th century blandness at the rear (with full width bi-fold doors at ground level and Velux-style windows in the roof that make it look like a poor-quality conversion or afterthought, for the sake of squeezing in a further bedroom). These aspects of the rear elevation will be a visual eyesore as seen from some of the Welclose Street properties.

The award-winning Old Garden Court development is spacious and well landscaped. It does contain some three-storey buildings (Nos. 2 to 10), but these are quite low and set at the lowest topographical point in the area, so they do not appear overbearing, as the proposed block certainly would be, set as it is half-way up the rise towards Welclose Street.

The road entrance to Old Garden Court, which will serve as the only traffic access to the town houses, is in a potentially dangerous part of Mount Pleasant – opposite ‘The Brickie’ playing field and within a few metres of traffic-calming build-outs and the junction with New England Street. It is not suitable for commercial traffic. The only reason for this use of the driveway is to preserve a private frontage for the ‘luxury 5-bedroom dwelling’ behind which the town house block is situated.

St Albans needs more houses but up-market 4- and 5-bedroom houses are not the most urgent requirement. We suggest that the current design be rejected and the developer invited to submit a more modest scheme for lower density two-storey buildings with access through the recently opened entrance to the present bungalow at 1 Mount Pleasant.

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