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Development Management
Harrogate Borough Council
PO Box 787
Harrogate
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1 March 2023

Dear Sir

Application No. 22/04808/FULMAJ Construction of annex to provide support facilities for Ripon Cathedral, including a refectory, a Song School and toilets, involving the demolition of a toilet block, outbuildings and a stone wall plus the replacement of trees which will be lost and the enhancement of part of Minster Road. | Ripon Cathedral Minster Road Ripon North Yorkshire HG4 1QT

Objection

Ripon Civic Society wishes to register its objection to this application.

While we do not disagree with the Cathedral's view that a new annex on the north side of the Cathedral will contribute to the sustainable future of the Cathedral and enhance the City of Ripon, we consider that siting an annex on Minster Gardens is unacceptable.

Consultation

We do not consider that adequate consultation with the Ripon community has been carried out, especially as the information was not made available on the Cathedral's website. We believe that sufficient weight has not been given to all the views expressed, including the concerns of the Civic Society. The proposals in the application are unaltered from those we commented on in 2022.

Ripon Civic Society wrote to the Cathedral authorities in July 2022 supporting development on the north side of the Cathedral. We did not consider, however, that the proposed siting recognised the significance of Minster Gardens as an open space for the city, as set out in the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan that was agreed by referendum and adopted by Harrogate Borough Council as part of the Harrogate Local Plan. We therefore suggested the proper examination of the stone yard land for a redesigned building. We set out these views in subsequent meetings with the Cathedral authorities.

Consideration of Options

Any full assessment of the proposals contained in the application should be able to be judged against a Masterplan for the Cathedral Precinct – such a strategic masterplan for this part of the city, prepared by the Cathedral, is envisaged in the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan. Although such a Masterplan is referred to as a significant part of the evidence base in the Options Report it has not been made public, despite our request to see it. The applicant told us that "the Master Plan is not a statutory planning

document and is many years out of date, hence it has no relevance to the current application. It is referred to in the 'Option Appraisal' only because it has some historic interest". This is at odds with statements in the Options Report that it has been updated. The Masterplan, with its long-term proposals for the Cathedral estate, including the stone yard, is cited as a major factor in the consideration of alternative sites in the Options Report, which in turn informs the evidence base for selection of the proposed site.

In deciding on its preferred option, the applicant has ruled out the stone yard because 'it would not have the adjacency or connectivity considered essential to this project and mission'. We do not accept that a building on the stone yard cannot be designed so as to relate positively to the Cathedral and its users. The stone yard has also been ruled out in the Options Report and the Heritage Impact Assessment because it 'was to be developed in the masterplan' for alternative uses that would provide income for the Cathedral. Any development here in the context of this application would conflict with the requirements of Local Plan Policy HP6 *Protection of Existing Sport, Open Space and Recreation Facilities*, in that the replacement open space would be required in perpetuity to meet this policy.

Impact on Listed Buildings and The Conservation Area

We agree with the Harrogate Council Principal Conservation Officer that the proposed building will adversely affect Ripon Conservation Area and the settings of the adjoining Grade II* Listed Courthouse and Old Deanery, contrary to Local Plan Policy HP2 *Heritage Assets*. Criterion A refers to proposals affecting the setting of a heritage asset and criterion C refers to proposals affecting the character of a conservation area, its special architectural or historic interest and its setting. Minster Gardens is a significant greenspace within this ensemble of significant Listed Buildings. We contend that the building is too large and set too far forward in relation to these buildings, as well as to the Grade I Cathedral and the Grade II Old Courthouse. The proposal would adversely affect their setting and views within the Conservation Area. The trees that are proposed to be removed are an important part of the character of the Conservation Area, which would be severely lessened by their removal and replacement with a large building. We consider that a redesigned building in the stone yard would be an acceptable alternative.

Impact on Minster Gardens

Minster Gardens is an historic amenity space owned by Harrogate Council and designated as open space under Policy F1 *Amenity open space and other open land* in the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan. Local Plan Policy HP6 requires the applicant to demonstrate that loss of open space would not adversely affect the recreational needs of the local population and that a satisfactory replacement facility is provided in a suitable location that is at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality. The applicant contends that the existing space, whilst of some communal value, is of 'unsympathetic municipal design' with public toilets 'of poor appearance that do not integrate well into the Cathedral setting' and that the memorial garden and the fountain 'fail to aspire'. We do not agree with the Applicant that the proposed scheme will be 'more in keeping with the special historic setting of the Cathedral' and that the area available to the public in perpetuity will be increased. The current appearance and condition of Minster Gardens are not an argument for building on a valuable greenspace in the Conservation Area. The current greenspace enhances views of the Cathedral and it is difficult to see how the proposed amenity space hidden behind the new building with very limited views of only the upper levels of the Cathedral provides a satisfactory replacement. In addition, if there are longer term proposals for a building here, even this space would then be lost, contrary to Policy HP6.

Loss of Trees

The Civic Society supports the objections to the loss of trees from Harrogate Council's Principal Landscape Architect and from its Aboricultural Manager. The proposal involves the removal of significant healthy urban trees in a public open space in the Conservation Area, including a Veteran tree. The Aboricultural Manager has assessed and upgraded the threatened trees as seven at Grade A1 and two at B1.

The applicant considers that historically there were not large trees here, that it is unlikely they were intended to grow this large when planted and that their removal would enhance views of the Cathedral and be mitigated by new planting elsewhere. Compensatory tree planting is proposed within the Cathedral estate but mostly some miles outside Ripon. This would not contribute to Ripon's amenity and would have no effect in reducing local urban heat island effects, releasing moisture into the atmosphere and purifying the air, all of which are provided by tree cover.

It is also maintained that the enhancement and enlargement of the area of public open space and the improvement of the Minster Road crossing will more than compensate for any loss of trees. We do not agree. Alternative sites, including the stone yard which does not involve significant tree loss, have not been adequately explored. We do not believe that building the proposed annex on Minster Gardens clearly outweighs the loss of these significant urban trees in the Conservation Area. The proposal is contrary to advice on veteran trees in national guidance: *Ancient woodland, ancient trees: advice for making planning decisions*. It also conflicts with Harrogate Borough Council's Local Plan Policy N3 *Protecting the Natural Environment* Criterion D and their *Tree and Woodland Policy 2022-2027*.

Additional landscape documents have appeared on the website. These include exploration of how the building could be raised by 1.34m so as to protect the tree roots and looking at relocating the storage element. Both are dismissed as impractical. No consideration is given to an alternative option of a re-designed building in the stone yard suggested by us and by Harrogate Council's Principal Conservation Officer.

Archaeology

We support the consultation response from the North Yorkshire County Council's Principal Archaeologist in relation to the Scheduled Monument but leave comments to the experts.

Pedestrian Links

The Heritage Impact Assessment refers to improved links with the city. This is promoted in Ripon Neighbourhood Plan Policy C1 *City Centre Quarters*. Some of the documents refer to the merits of a pedestrian link through the stone yard to the car park but the application form and plans do not show this and appear to maintain the existing path around the courthouse. We would ask for clarification of this.

Highway and Servicing

The application refers to enhancement of part of Minster Road, with a raised speed table between the development and the Cathedral. Mention is made in several documents of proposals to close Minster Road to through traffic, which we support, but this is not part of the application. Part of the justification for the site in the Options Report is the pedestrianisation of Minster Road and this is

supported by Ripon Neighbourhood Plan Policy C1. We also support the concerns expressed by the highway authority in relation to the safety of the proposed crossing.

The mass and location of the existing buildings already contribute to increased wind velocities in the area. This can cause wind gusts that sometimes severely affect pedestrians using pavements or crossing the road. We would request evidence that the proposed new building close to the road would not exacerbate this problem.

There does not appear to be any indication on the plans of how the building will be serviced or the location of bin stores etc. The proposed refectory, in particular, will require servicing by large vehicles and access for them could impinge on the remaining open space and block the highway.

Design

Ripon Civic Society is not commenting on the proposed design for the new building until and unless a satisfactory location is agreed.

Conclusion

In view of the above, **Ripon Civic Society cannot support this application**, which is not a sustainable development, and therefore contrary to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, the Harrogate Local Plan and the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan.

Yours faithfully



Richard Taylor — David Winpenny

Co-Chairman — Co-Chairman