RIPON CIVIC SOCIETY

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Development Management
North Yorkshire Council

20th May 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, Ripon Cathedral Minster Road Ripon North Yorkshire HG4 1QT

Ripon Civic Society wrote to you on 1 March 2023 to register its objection to this application. Since this date a number of significant documents have been added to the website in support of the application. We are therefore submitting further comments relating to these matters.

The Civic Society is concerned that a number of very technical documents have been submitted by the applicant which are difficult for non-experts to comment on. North Yorkshire Council will need to have assessed these before it goes to committee and may need to get expert advice, which may take some time. Otherwise, we cannot have confidence in any decision.

We are also of the view that the decision should be taken by the Strategic Planning Committee and not the Area Constituency Planning Committee. This is probably the most significant planning application in Ripon for many years and is of national importance because of its historic setting. This is reflected in the level of public interest both in support and opposition. We consider that the application meets the criteria for referral to the Strategic Planning Committee as listed in Schedule 1 of the North Yorkshire Council Constitution in that it raises significant planning issues.

The Society has the following comments to add to our submitted objection:

Use of Stonemasons' Yard

In our original letter we expressed our concern that we have not seen a full assessment of the proposals against a Masterplan for the Cathedral precinct, as envisaged in the Ripon Neighbourhood Plan. This latest document simply superimposes the proposed building in the Stonemasons' Yard with no serious attempt at redesign or breaking down the different elements to fit. We therefore do not consider that the applicant has demonstrated satisfactorily that a quality building of a different design cannot be set back into the stone yard. We also disagree with the assertion that the existing area of public open space, including Minster Gardens is "less meaningful" than the replacement area proposed and suggest that the Yorkshire Gardens Trust are invited to comment on this.

Revised Transport Statement

We await further comments from North Yorkshire Highways on this document. We have the following comments.

It is noted that two further parking surveys have been carried out with the conclusion that additional cars can be 'mostly' accommodated in existing car parks. We question whether this is sufficient.

We have already raised concerns in our comments on the Listed Building application about the potential impact of construction traffic on listed buildings and walls. We consider that the construction methods in the vicinity of the walls and retained trees should be agreed as part of this application if it is approved.

We raised the issue of how the building will be serviced in our original objection, since access for service vehicles could impinge on the remaining open space or block the highway. This is not adequately addressed in this document.

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal v3

This is a detailed report which concludes that 21 new trees in the grounds of the Cathedral will compensate for the loss of 11 semi-mature and mature trees, with I acre of wood pasture/parkland off-site proposed as compensation for the loss of the veteran tree. We note that the Principal Ecologist has maintained his objection in relation to loss of the veteran tree. We maintain our original objection that we do not believe that the proposed annex on Minster Gardens clearly outweighs the loss of significant trees in the Conservation Area, including the veteran tree.

North Yorkshire Council has recently been consulting on its draft Climate Change Strategy which sets out how the Local Authority will respond to the climate emergency. The Council gives a commitment to work with partners to achieve the ambition to be a carbon negative region by 2040 and to encourage residents, businesses, and visitors to take climate responsible actions linked to Mitigation, Adaptation, Supporting Nature, North Yorkshire Council becoming a Climate Responsible Council. This is an early opportunity for the Council to demonstrate climate responsible action through the planning process by assessing how far the approach and scheme delivers on North Yorkshire's climate responsible actions and the Church of England's own commitments and standards in this regard : https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/eco-church and https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk.

Appraisal of Foundation Impact on Archaeology

This report is very technical. It concerns the impact on archaeology of the proposed use of ring beam foundations because of gypsum issues in Ripon. We have been sent the comments of Historic England and note that they consider that the loss of archaeological material would represent considerable harm to the heritage significance of the site. We are, however, concerned that they then conclude that this serious loss is only moderate because it is balanced by the delivery of "notable public benefits for both Cathedral and City", which is a subjective rather than a technical assessment. We also consider that the views of the North Yorkshire Council archaeologists should be sought.

Ground Investigation Reports

These are also very technical and address the requirements of Local Plan Policy NE9 in relation to gypsum deposits in Ripon and the use of ring beam foundations. The Society is

of the view that the planning authority needs to be certain that the specific requirements of this policy have been met, given the sensitivity of the site in close proximity to historic buildings of greatest importance.

The response of Building Control to these reports is inadequate in that they have avoided commenting on the reports but continue to ask for a condition requiring boreholes rather than commenting on those already carried out. The Society notes that the inadequacy of Building Control is referred to in the recent appeal decision at the site of former North Yorkshire Timber. The Inspector dismissed the appeal because there was no adequate assessment of the ground investigation report to enable the Council to determine whether the requirements of policy NE9 had been met. We consider that North Yorkshire Council needs to ensure there is an expert opinion on the adequacy of these reports before a decision is made.

Conclusion

In view of the above comments and those made in our original objection, Ripon Civic Society still cannot support this application, which is not a sustainable development, and therefore contrary to national, local and neighbourhood policy.

Yours faithfully

Rachel Wigginton

Planning Lead
Ripon Civic Society