

68 Crescent Road  
BRIGHTON  
BN2 3RP

14th April 2016

Jeanette Walsh  
Planning and Building Control Manager  
City Planning and Development  
Hove Town Hall  
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Dear M/s Walsh

**Application No** BH2016/00862  
**Applicant** Just Developments Ltd  
**Site/Property** 28 & Land rear of including 28B 28C and 28D  
Crescent Road Brighton

**Description** Full Planning and Demolition in a Conservation Area - Part demolition and conversion of existing commercial buildings and erection of two new buildings to provide 3no two bedroom houses and 1no three bedroom house (C3) with associated landscaping.

**This letter contains our strong objection to approval of the above planning application. I shall be arguing the case for this conclusion below emphasising the impact this development would have on an important conservation area and the effects of the kind of negative changes it would wreak on existing and new residents alike.**

As have many other neighbours surrounding this site, we (i.e. my wife, Penny Morley and I) sent in a letter of objection last September regarding this developer's planning application (BH2015/03013). This month's new application seeks to address points made by Planning Officers in their letter of refusal to this earlier application. The question that we want to pose is - do the changes made in the new application sufficiently address points made by ourselves, our neighbours and Council Officers for us to change our minds on acceptability? The Council Officers under Paragraph 3.4 of their Letter of Refusal of the 28 November 2015 stated that :

- **The proposed development fails to provide an acceptable standard of design, detailing, form and materials.**
- **The character of the historic backland site in Roundhill Conservation Area is not reflected.**
- **The new development would lead to increased noise disturbance, loss of privacy and overlooking of neighbouring properties on Crescent Road and Belton Road.**
- **The lack of outlook for the new units and insufficient sunlight / daylight levels for proposed basement level accommodation.**

And *this* is the framework I shall be following in this letter. In addition, I shall be looking again in my Postscript at the question of loss of existing commercial use given comments in the Marketing Report from Fludes for the applicants.

## **1. Design, detailing, form and materials**

Roundhill's characteristic construction and materials are brick, rendered brick, stone (including flint) or bungaroush walls, woodframed sash and casement windows and tiled roofs. Whilst, originally, rendered walls were mostly unpainted - now they tend to be painted in variety of colours.

The applicants *have* made some changes to the design of the buildings on the site. The first design was denounced as 'overly modern', and, in another place, not contemporary enough. Various facings included vertical timber cladding (a reminder of 1970s suburbia) have been replaced in the second design by buff brick (a facing certainly not prevalent in Roundhill) and white render (a facing at least familiar locally) and window frames reduced in size and said to be of a Crittall steel variety. I see that a Belton Road neighbour calls the changes to the upper end of the site to be of 'a type of 1930s Art Deco appearance'. If so, this would be a strange interloper indeed against the backdrop of largely Victorian terraces.

These changes are no improvements to the earlier 2015 design - the same Belton Road neighbour called these a 'hotch-potch' and I would not demur from this with the 2016 design either.

At least, with all its failings, the original buildings have the form of simple commercial buildings of the twentieth century.

The applicants want to introduce Sedum-blankets as green roofs on the site. In principle this is a convenient and lightweight method but I note that the Ecology Consultancy advises there are hidden problems involved with its installation. Also, I understand that many London Boroughs will not accept sedum blanket roofs. These points need to be checked.

The amendments to the replacement building of 28D at the lower end of the site include the removal of the proposed curved roof from the old plans and that is welcome - this roof has been called 'incongruous'. The roofline of this building as changed might be less complicated but would still be a dominant feature at the end of gardens in both Belton Road and Crescent Road. In total 28D remains a large building filling and choking the southern end of the site - for other comments on 28D see below.

## **2. Contexts of historic backland site and conservation area**

We welcome the council officer's reference to this situation as a *historic backland* site within a Conservation Area. Roundhill is the first major piece of downland as one travels northwards from Brighton City Centre. For a great deal of late 19th and early 20th Century history Roundhill was synonymous with the laundry trade. Once the glamorous tower windmill which stood for many years to the north of Roundhill Road had been demolished (1913) and the development of domestic housing had continued over the hill, the major

commercial workplaces were laundries. In Roundhill there were ample potential staff living nearby and the small remaining areas of grassland at hand were ideal as drying fields. These laundries ranged from the very small operating from private houses to medium sized laundries on backland sites such as the Tivoli and Primrose in Crescent Road and to the larger, street-facing laundries such as the Mayo in Mayo Road and the Brighton and Sussex in Upper Lewes Road. The Mayo was the last professional laundry in Roundhill to close - in the 1970s.

The sole evidence left of Roundhill's part in these enterprises are the now empty buildings on Crescent Road's own historic backland site, the very faded painted sign for the Primrose Laundry above the carriageway to No. 22, and the associated grassed area previously used as drying grounds. Apart from a very limited glimpse of part of the buildings on the site from the carriageway of No. 28 from Crescent Road, the only way to view the backland site will be as residents and their visitors of houses overlooking the site - primarily, Crescent Road and Belton Road or, if the proposed buildings are completed, the new occupants of 28B, 28C, 28D and 28E.

This site has been referred to by the applicants as a 'tight site' and throughout the period of these two applications they have been at pains to reassure councillors and present residents alike that their development would be 'sympathetic to the surrounding residential use'. However, looking at the plans and drawings for the site it is difficult to give credence to their enthusiastic assertion. The new buildings will not complement either the inner or outer face of the Victorian terrace surrounding them. As I said in my letter re. the earlier Planning Application, BH2015/03013, 'Fundamentally this would be a development that is in a conservation area but not part of it'. And the same could be said of the 'historic backland site'.

The planning officer's request for new gates to the Crescent Road carriageway is a nice gesture with its bolection mouldings so admired by Christopher Wren, but in terms of the proposed development inside, so unsympathetic to its surroundings, they are alas, of little relevance.

### **3. Noise disturbance, loss of privacy and overlooking**

All areas of the site are likely, to a lesser or greater extent, to cause problems of this nature to existing occupants of neighbouring properties. In spite of attempts by the applicant to alleviate these by reducing window sizes, planting hedges etc., nothing can significantly militate against a site of only some 12 metres width.

- The old drying grounds or grassed area (or 'managed meadow') is still referred to as common and not under the control of any one resident. Possible use of this area by residents has not been made clear. As they would be paying for its management, access would certainly be an issue raised. And if it was used for leisure purposes or even parties, residents in surrounding properties would raise their own objections.
- The sunken courtyard (28D) immediately behind the boundary wall of 64/66/68 Crescent Road is, effectively, a concrete block container, about 8m long and 3.7m high from the underground/basement floor to the top of the boundary wall. Whilst the applicant's agents seek to stress the distance between the courtyard and the rear of the relevant houses as the key distance involved, no credit is given to use by

neighbours of their gardens and patios, anything between 2 / 6 metres away from the courtyard. These spaces and the courtyard would both be likely to be in use in fine weather. Increased levels of sound from this deep concrete block container is an issue not addressed by the applicant.

- The terrace with access from the the ground floor rear bedroom of the new building 28D would overlook a 4m section of the end of the garden of 68 Crescent Road as well as the whole of the garden of 20 Belton Road. The latter is particularly disadvantaged by this terrace. Even with an additional element of walling here there would still be an unholy proximity between the terrace and residents seeking to use their carefully decked small garden below.
- Many neighbours have taken up other matters in their letters to you. I would not wish to let these issues pass without my own comments. For instance, altering the size and configuration of windows in 28E facing the rear of properties in Belton Road will have but marginal effect on overlooking and loss of privacy. There is also the question of the pathway to 28D at the back of gardens of properties in Belton Road. In the earlier application this pathway was shown as being sunken like a 'ha-ha' - I see no such feature in the present application; only a hedge along this length. Either way, I am not satisfied that these 'barriers' will evidence sufficient screening for the residents of Belton Road without making their own gardens more like stockades.

#### **4. Lack of outlook for new units and sufficient sunlight / daylight levels for proposed basement level**

- Arguments juggling for and against barriers whether fences, hedges, brise soleil, additional walls etc., are all examples of the applicants' attempting to squeeze more habitable space at the ends of this narrow site than it is capable of entertaining.
- I have read all the applicants' submissions relating to this. However, given the applicants' attempts to alleviate the effect of overlooking, and loss of privacy for neighbouring properties, would there not be an inevitable counterbalance ensuring the loss of at least some of the outlook and natural daylight for the new units?

#### **5. Conclusions**

Whilst there *have* been some changes in this planning application, generally, our overwhelming reaction must be that this application is basically the same as the earlier application with a little tinkering. See below my general comments.

- ***We have shown above how confused designs, lacking imagination and initiative could permantly damage the quality of life in an historic backland site within this important conservation area. Suffering for this would be not only the present residents occupying nearly 40 houses in Crescent Road and Belton Road but also some of the new residents living in tired and patched up buildings at the top end of the site and others living partly underground at the other end with a questionable amount of natural light and a 12 ft deep pit for exercise.***

- ***Unfortunately, for this application there has been no attempt by the applicants to contact or discuss the changes with residents of this concerned and conservation-minded community***
- ***Our unaltered conclusion is that this present application should be refused.***

## **6. Postscript**

### ***The loss of existing commercial use***

*The applicant's Commercial Agent, Flude, state that they have 'marketed the property to let for 15 months without success between July 2012 and October 2013', concluding from this that the property is no longer 'an appropriate location for commercial use'. Fludes state further that 'considerable investment is required to bring the property up to a standard and layout acceptable to modern day office occupiers'.*

*The 'Argus' reported (2/6/2015) that - 'Office Space is failing to satisfy business demand' and that a leading consultant, Stiles Harold Williams, advised that 'we are having to turn potential occupiers away because of the shortage'. I find it confusing that Fludes are saying in November 2015 that on the basis of marketing the site between 2012 and 2013 there is no interest shown by prospective clients; that considerable investment is required to provide accomodation for modern day office occupiers. But at the same time another commercial agent, Stiles Harold Williams (no less expert than Fludes) tells the Argus that they are having to turn away potential office occupiers in Brighton.*

*The applicants of planning application BH2016/00862 are floating a scheme to improve the existing premises for potential domestic occupation - there is no way, of course, that these potential domestic occupiers would be the least bit interested, no more than their commercial equivalents were, if they were presented with accomodation in a condition no longer suited to modern day house occupiers.*

*At the very least the council should have required an up-to-date marketing report on these matters and to explore why no attempt seems to have been made to up-date these premises acceptable as modern offices.*

Yours sincerely

**CHRISTOPHER MORLEY**

(NEIGHBOUR REFERENCE NO. 1840495)