



Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee
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Swains Lane Interim Objection

This isn't a scheme anyone in our community looks at and says 'this is what I pictured for the future of Swains Lane'.

For many, including many actively involved in the work of Advisory Committee, the buildings are still too obviously mostly three stories and remain unacceptably bulky given the context.

A bare majority of the Advisory Committee considers the basic architecture is, with tweaking, sufficiently improved to make it 'just tolerable' if, but only if, the scheme proposed offers a tangible assurance of a vital and viable future for our long blighted neighbourhood centre and community hub.

As the current proposals stand we are not convinced that it does.

Whilst the building design and mass has improved, the offer in relation to the absolutely crucial enhancement of the public realm has deteriorated significantly.

Throughout the current application process the developer's architect has stoutly defended the gap between the two proposed buildings and the schemes have included a significant area of public realm between and to the full depth of the buildings. In the current proposal this has been reduced to a token area backed by an unsightly wall/fence with the bulk of the area being used for private parking or to facilitate private parking and which is now entirely enclosed/gated.

As bad, the failure to make adequate provision for both deliveries and refuse will significantly compromise the enhanced pavement as an attractive, useable and used area of public realm.

In particular, the shops have very limited internal storage and the claim that it will be possible to retain waste (and recycling?) on site within the shops before it is briefly transferred to the pavement for collection is a recipe for disaster and will inevitably result in a substantial loss of enjoyment of the public realm. On top of this, the refuse bins (unacceptably there doesn't appear to be any provision for recycling) of the residents (particularly those in the east block) will also have to be taken from their somewhat remote locations onto the pavement for collection. Even if policed/serviced by an employee these arrangements will inevitably result in significant gaps between the deposit of refuse on the pavement and its collection as will variable opening times of the shops. The fact that Centres across the Borough are afflicted in this way is no reason to replicate the problems here.

These problems will be compounded by the making deliveries to the shops from the highway across and along the pavements.

Worse, allocation of two on-street delivery bays will unacceptably limit parking for shoppers and this will, in turn, aggravate the problem of spillage into parking intended for existing residents particularly outside the hours of 10am and 12 noon. We are entirely unimpressed with the reply that this is how it doesn't work now when only some of the shops are in use. Plainly, everything

possible must be done to encourage pedestrian based use, and this includes ensuring that the pavement is attractive and much used and not cluttered with refuse bags, wheelie bins and supplies, but it is unrealistic not to make some provision for vehicular access. Some of the justifications for this arrangement, eg noise from deliveries from the rear, apply equally to current proposals.

In our view these proposals cannot be made acceptable until the scheme is entirely car free ¹, with the possible exception of disabled parking if specific residents require such provision, and the primary use of the 'yard' is for servicing the shops and flats. We would prefer that the shops are entirely serviced from the rear but accept that this might require a more radical change than is practicable at this stage. The area between the buildings needs to be restored to public realm with limited, timed/planned access, including vehicular access, to a service area behind. ²

We welcome the public commitment to attracting the right shops and, in particular, the community Forum to guide shopping policy and will look for some entrenchment of this in the permission or the S106 agreement.

Returning briefly to some of the unresolved design issues. We share the view that what is now proposed is a significant improvement.

Finishing the third floor vertical wall in zinc offers only limited benefit. The modest setback is helpful but falls short, at least at roof level, of being sufficient to seriously attenuate the impact of the third floor even when viewed from Swains Lane. Even if proper provision is made at the outset for the maintenance of shrubbery we think such provision is incapable of effective enforcement by condition and have discounted it although accept that if it is and can in perpetuity be well maintained it is desirable. ³

The main architectural device used to attempt to mitigate the visual impact of the unwelcome third floor, the metre high brick parapet wall, has the highly undesirable consequence of substantially increasing the impact (height) of the more significant brick second floor. A modest rebalancing is required ⁴ possibly including increasing the rendered cap by one course of bricks. The adverse visual impact of the increased height of the brick second floor could also be reduced by delineating the second floor wall from the parapet wall with a single decorative course of bricks. ⁵

The 'punched' windows do less to 'break-up' the brick wall than they should. It would help if the window reveals are rendered. This would also better delineate the bronze window frames from the brick. We see no obvious objection to wider windows on the corners.

Finally, on the matter of the shade of brick colour, we share the general reaction, but what people have reacted to may be a mere artefact of printing and note significant differences in the drawings. It would be normal to make approval of materials a condition of any permission. In the present instance we think it would be sensible to allow local people sight of actual brick samples over a narrow colour range ahead of the decision.

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¹ At least to the extent that the zone's parking arrangements permit this.

² Passage of vehicles through the 'yard' should be practicable if the large refuse bins are moved. Making this area attractive would also obviate the need for the corridor from the pavement to the access to the flats in the west building.

³ This is, though, a site which is particularly appropriate for a brown roof.

⁴ We accept this might require a low impact metal railing around the terrace. We suspect this is probably anyway necessary.

⁵ Opposition to previous proposals along these lines was a reaction to the use of render.