

Response by the Conservation Area Advisory Group (CAAG) to application 17/02774/FUL- Land at St Aidan's House, Palace Green

This application is almost identical to application 17/01852/FUL to which CAAG has recently responded. There is one small difference between the two applications namely the replacement of render with 'Stone with Art'. Since it is not clear what this means it is doubtful if this will significantly improve the appearance of the three houses and therefore CAAG's previous comments are still relevant. It is surprising that there has still been no consultation between the developer and the Conservation Team.

The renovation of St Aidan's House is to be applauded. Although not listed St. Aidan's is considered to be a building of local importance playing a significant role in this part of the Conservation Area. The proposed development, therefore, should be considered in the context of the renovation of St Aidan's itself together with the additional effects on the surrounding listed buildings and the Scheduled Ancient Monument, namely the Mediaeval/Georgian Wall. CAAG still does not consider this application addresses these parameters.

The plans presented with this application are minimal but it is immediately obvious that the height of the proposed buildings is inappropriate. At least two of the three storeys would protrude above the Walls, not only obscuring a major part of the rear of the renovated school building but also affecting the setting of very significant listed buildings, namely the houses of Wellington Terrace and Bower's Villa and The Old Whaling House. Views across the Tweed to and from the Tweedmouth and Spittal Conservation Areas would also be affected. Placing three houses in the schoolyard would reduce considerably the land to the rear of St Aidan's making any form of landscaping unlikely.

The design of the three houses bears little relationship to surrounding dwellings. Fenestration is inappropriate with south facing balconies appearing incongruous in this setting. Chimneys, conspicuous features in this locality, are absent. The phrase 'Stone with Art' needs clarification. The Block Plan gives very little information about foundations and service trenches.

The Design Brief does not consider archaeology to be an issue in spite of the comments from the County Archaeologist. Experience in the Governor's Garden indicates that this cannot be assumed. Site monitoring during building, as suggested, would necessitate the presence of an archaeologist throughout the laying of foundations and service trenches. Builders cannot be expected to identify significant archaeological remains. Garages and other buildings approved for the yard in Application 12/00144/FUL would not require foundations, would be much more appropriate to the site and could be removed if necessary. These essentially 'garden' buildings would sit so much better in the leafy surroundings of Bower's Villa and the Old Whaling House.

Building houses in St Aidan's schoolyard would detract from the good work in progress on the house. If this development proceeds the outlook of the St Aidan's flats sanctioned in application 16/04185 would be a car park and the garages and windows at the rear of the proposed development. In CAAG's opinion this would be an unfortunate outcome and one to be avoided.