

12A Spring Grove
Chiswick
London W4 3NH
020 8994 4772

9th June 2010

Brendan Tinney
Environmental Planning Dept
London Borough of Hounslow
The Civic Centre
Lampton Road
Hounslow TW3 4DN

Dear Mr Tinney

Ref: 00657/2/P3 & Planning: P/2010/1174
Utell House, 2 Kew Bridge Road, TW8 0JF

The Planning Inspector has judged that, because Spring Grove is on the edge of the Strand on the Green Conservation Area, where there are some more dominant buildings, the proposed development of 4 storeys on Utell House Car Park is acceptable. He refers to Spring Grove as a 'discreet' corner, i.e. of no particular significance, and judges the proposed development against the 9 storeys of Rivers House (which went up on the old Q Theatre site in the sixties and would not be acceptable in a Conservation Area today) and the 4-storeys of Utell House (until the 1980s, a traditional corner inn servicing the old Brentford market) both of which face onto the South Circular, rather than against the small 2-storey cottages opposite the site on Spring Grove. As it turns out, the lower floors of Rivers House are also going to be adversely affected by this building.

In the news recently Zac Goldsmith was reported as saying that the powers of government inspectors and ministers to reverse local planning decisions would be curtailed. "You have local authorities trying to make decisions on local development issues being overruled, on a routine basis by central government", he added. English Heritage has also put out a request to save historic areas from infill and new developments. (see attached)

Perhaps at last it is being recognized that people need breathing space instead of being crushed by concrete. This site was a pub garden and has never been built on. However, if the plan had been to build three or four small houses residents might have viewed the proposal more sympathetically.

MGL talk about the loss of integrity in the area with a mixture of different building types and it is true that a lot of mistakes have been made, but do we need to add to them? The proposed building is the same height as the side of Utell House and the Maltings, which, although 4 storeys, was built in a warehouse style which fitted in with the light industry still going on in the neighbourhood at that time. Neither of these buildings overlooks any other residence.

With regard to the new proposal I should like to make the following comments. In some respects it is an improvement on the earlier application, but it is still unsuited to this plot.

Design

The building is set a few feet further back from the street which is a good thing, but it is still a hugely dominating building for such a narrow domestic road. The four-sided square pitched roof with dormers make it look even bigger and bulkier. The peak of the pitch adds unused height and I don't understand the logic of the knob on top. Or is it a reference to the water tower? A mansard roof like Utell House might reduce the height, but I realize that this is a matter of taste.

The so-called 'classical' façade is better. MGL say the building should be seen as an extension or outhouse to the existing Utell building, 'the two buildings to have a direct physical association and a material dialogue'. Since materials will be of the essence, perhaps the windows could have stone mullions and transoms like Utell House and also the same superior brickwork instead of the proposed yellow multistock.

The parking grills at street level are unsightly and do nothing for the landscape even if they are arched like the 'voussoirs' of Utell House and the arches of Kew Bridge. Nor do they allow for casual neighbourly street meetings. And I don't see that the corner grills/balconies have anything to do with stone quoins or the railway bridge along the Strand. They are a just a way of dealing with very limited amenity space and are designed to suggest an oblique view rather than directly overlooking Spring Grove which is misleading. Trees are not going to be providing cover in winter. I also note that the 4th floor dormers also have a balcony which will overlook the cottages on Spring Grove. Again, I have to point out that balconies were not acceptable on Rivers House which is considerably further away

Landscape

I was glad to see from the Landscape Report that all the trees on the site are in good shape, although it would appear that two are likely to come down. As I understand it the more mature trees will probably suffer considerable root damage during the building operation and crown reduction will be necessary. I note that the younger trees on Spring Grove are less likely to be affected in this way but it is recommended that they be thinned out and two lime trees planted that will take 25 years to mature. These trees and shrubs are absolutely essential now, as well as in the future, to screen this building from its diminutive neighbours on Spring Grove and from the lower storeys of Rivers House.

Vehicle Movement

I'm pleased to see that there is no longer a plan to widen the proposed exit onto Spring Grove, although it is suggested that there should be a 3 metre exclusion radius to accommodate vehicles leaving the site, at the expense of valuable parking space for the residents of Spring Grove. And the cars exiting will still have to manouvre round parked cars and the bollards protecting the cottages even if CPZ is introduced. I see

that this is still to be a gated community which is antisocial in a village environment and I believe Rivers House has a right of way across the site. There is also the question of security lights going on and off at night which could be disturbing for the residents of Spring Grove..

Service Area

The plan for the new entrance and service area at the junction of Spring Grove and Strand on the Green is confusing. As well as being the entrance for all vehicles to the site, MGL say this area will facilitate deliveries and refuse collection and 'most' service vehicles will be able to enter and leave using a forward gear from Strand on the Green, thereby obviating the need for trucks and vans to pass along Spring Grove. They also suggest a 'slight' adjustment of the kerb line which could lose another car parking space. Assuming this manouvre can be achieved, it would mean that trucks approaching from Strand on the Green would have to negotiate their way round two 'keep left' bollards in the middle of the road and would be crossing in the face of traffic approaching the Strand from Chiswick roundabout. Equally, on leaving trucks would have to cross to the base of Kew Bridge with no site line on traffic coming round the corner from Chiswick Roundabout. And it can come at quite a lick. This will add to the dangers of the already hazardous junction. It would also seem from the diagram that some vehicles may have to back out into Spring Grove. The bins themselves will take up quite a chunk of the turning area and I see on the plans that there is also a Disabled Entrance into Utell House at this point, which doesn't seem like a good idea.

Amenity Space

I understand that there is inadequate amenity space available on this site, which in itself is an indication of over development, and that MGL are suggesting making a contribution to a play area elsewhere in the Borough. Since it is the proposed development that would be deprived of amenity space presumably it would have to be provided in the immediate vicinity. I can't think where this would be since every inch of land is being built on.

Building & Maintenance

The site will need very close management during the building operation if the trees are not to be lost. And it will be necessary to make sure that building trucks do not pass along Spring Grove.

And on completion arrangements will have to be made for the maintenance of the site. At the moment the site is attached to Utell House. What happens to the allotment of parking if the two sites are sold separately at some future date?

Parking

The fact that there are fewer parking spaces for the office block inevitably means that cars will be forced on to Spring Grove and Strand on the Green. Not everyone will be persuaded to use public transport.

The Inspector concludes that the development would make a contribution to the Borough's housing stock. I would dispute the need for nine more flats in a Conservation Area when there are huge blocks all along the Brentford riverside, round the canal basin and near the Great West Road, as well as the vast new block planned for the St George site at Kew Bridge, not to mention the proposed Barrat's site off Lionel Road, Wheatstone House and the Waterboard site by Kew Bridge Pumping Station recently sold for development.

The London Plan may encourage the efficient use of urban land to maximize housing opportunities, but I believe this is a case of gross overdevelopment in a Conservation Area already overwhelmed by new build. I don't believe the plan promotes high quality inclusive design in terms of function and impact and I don't believe it will in any way improve or enhance the character and quality of this Conservation area or add to its charm.

I sincerely hope this development will not be allowed to go ahead.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Leadlay