

**30 Carlton Road
Caversham
Reading RG4 7NT**

24th January 2024

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Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
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**OBJECTIONS to Planning Application Number 231590
2 Conisboro Way, Caversham, Reading RG4 7HT**

We are writing in connection with the new plans submitted for the development of the above site which is situated at the back of our property and 16 metres from our principal living rooms.

The Design and Access Statement concludes on page 37 by stating:

*The proposals, as submitted, represent a high-quality form of development. Whilst the design is a departure from the surrounding housing, **this is not harmful to the visual or built character of the area nor would there be any loss of amenity to neighbouring residents.***

We and many of our neighbours disagree fundamentally that the application “is not harmful to the visual or built character of the area”. We understand this aspect is being referred to Reading Borough Council’s Design Review Panel and wish to assure them that in our respectful opinion the proposals are certainly most *harmful to the visual or built character of the area* and give rise to a material *loss of amenity to us as neighbouring residents* because of the building’s omnipresent bulk.

Reading Borough Council refused planning permission for the original plans for the dwelling and annexe by reason of their excessive scale, extensive footprint and prominent siting not responding positively to its local context contrary to CC8 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (hereafter referred to as The Plan).

No changes have been made to the size and dominance of the annexe (now rebranded as the garden room) in the new application and this is what we object to most. It is far too large and the applicants have not considered reducing its impact in line with the reasons RBC gave for refusal of the previous application.

The Garden Room (known as the Annexe in the first application)

The proposed garden room is situated immediately behind our property and its overbearing size and mass has the most significant impact on the continued enjoyment of our property. The revised plan 2202(21)010 E states that the area is 41m². This is **grossly misleading** because the external area is 50.2m² for the main room and a further 10m² for the veranda which is largely enclosed.

The mathematical proof of area and the external dimensions for the building are:

Room back dimension 9.26m. Front dimension 10.82m, Width of room 5m.

Area $\frac{1}{2} (9.26 + 10.82) \times 5 = 50.2\text{m}^2$

Veranda

Area Width 2m x Length 5m = 10m²

This makes the foot print 60.2m² which is 47% larger than disclosed in the plan. The external footprint of the proposed garden room is 18% larger than:

- The existing bungalow at 51m² (see CIL Form 1)
- 46 Geoffreyson Rd at 51m² (see page 19 of Design and Access statement)
- 44 Geoffreyson Rd at 52m² (see page 19 of Design and Access statement)

Visual dominance of the Garden room

In our opinion the garden room does not meet the requirements of **CC7 and CC8** of The Plan regarding **size, dominance and character** because is excessively large and overbearing when viewed from our property.

The 7m side of the garden room stretches half the width of our garden and the back of the garden room stretches across the back gardens of both 43 and 45 Hilltop Road. The height of the garden room rises from 2.86 metres at our boundary to 3.67 metres on the Geoffreyson Road side. To put that into perspective our detached double garage has a flat roof not exceeding 2.5 metres in height and a footprint of 25.5 m². So, the footprint of the proposed garden room is 2.36 times the size of a double garage and up to 1.47 times the height.

Whilst all planning applications are decided on their own merits it is interesting to note that the Planning Inspectorate recently rejected Colin and Hannah Ingram-Moore's appeal against Central Bedfordshire Council's decision to refuse planning permission for a garden outbuilding otherwise known as the "Captain Tom Spa." (Application Number: CB/22/00805/FULL at The Old Rectory, The Green, Marston Moretaine, Bedford, MK43 0NF.) The deadline to mount a challenge passed without a claim being made so the spa will have to be demolished. The second paragraph of the council's decision reads

"The proposed development, by reason of its scale, footprint, siting, depth along boundaries and appearance, will appear out of keeping with the character of the area and disproportionate to the scale of the existing dwellinghouse, and will result in an unacceptable overbearing impact on adjoining residential occupiers."

We consider that there is an **unacceptable overbearing impact on adjoining residential occupiers** in this case.

Proposals to address the overbearing impact and protection of our tree and shrubs

- The height of the garden room should not exceed 2.5m
- Area of the footprint reduced to 25m²
- It should have a flat roof planted with living sedum so that it is camouflaged.
- Width on our boundary reduced from 7m to no more than 5m
- Distance from our boundary should be increased to 4m (so 20m from our living rooms).
- Rain water should be directed to a soakaway that is in the middle of the applicant's plot and nowhere near our boundary where excavation would damage the roots of our Acer and waterlog other shrubs in our borders.

Proposed use of the Garden Room

We are not reassured by the applicant's statements regarding use on page 18 of the Design and Access statement.

The annexe to the rear of the site will be entirely ancillary to the main dwelling house. This space is intended to contain a single room to be used as a garden studio for exercise or work. The layout of the site means that the annexe building cannot ever receive the benefit of its own independent access or garden space. Access will always be required via the main house and therefore there is no potential for this building to be used independently of the main house. Regardless, we welcome the application of any condition the local authority may consider appropriate to provide further reassurance of the annexe's ancillary relationship.

The stated intentions have no legal binding and do not prevent them changing their minds at a future date and using it for residential or commercial purposes. It is quite possible for the garden room to be reached by the garden path without going through the main house. If services such as electricity, water and foul water drains are installed at the outset it would, with minor modification, be *capable of operating as a separate dwelling which could be let separately or used by family members as a residence*. The fact that it cannot be sold separately does not affect potential misuse in contravention of H9 and H11(4).

The refusal to the earlier application cited that use of the annexe as temporary accommodation during the building of the main dwelling poses a risk of harm to the amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of disturbance, contrary to Policy CC8. This prohibition should be maintained and the local authority should impose conditions to prevent the annexe being used as residential accommodation.

Whilst we accept an electricity supply is reasonable for a garden room, it is not necessary for water and foul drainage to be installed. The planning application is silent on these matters and water supply and foul drainage should be prohibited.

We strongly object to the current proposal because:

- the sheer size of the garden room does not comply with The Plan with regard to size and mass,
- ignores the grounds for refusal of the previous application,
- and has the capacity to become a separate dwelling or tandem development.

In summary we have no objection to a garden room or exercise room which is of a size and character required for the reasonable enjoyment of the occupier's residence.

The Main Dwelling

The cosmetic and inconsequential alterations to the design and construction of the main house do little to aesthetically enhance what can only be described as a large, intrusive, and overbearing building. Whilst it may be largely screened from the adjoining roads by our neighbouring properties, we are the residents forced to look at it 24/7. We still consider it goes against the requirements of The Plan

CC7: DESIGN AND THE PUBLIC REALM

All development must be of high design quality that maintains and enhances the character and appearance of the area of Reading in which it is located. The various components of development form, including: -

- *Scale: height and massing.* The house is a huge and overbearing assembly of clad box shapes and totally inconsistent with any other building in the vicinity. It has a dominating effect on its surroundings.

will be assessed to ensure that the development proposed makes a positive contribution to the following urban design objectives:

- *Character - a place with its own identity and sense of place,* It certainly has its own identity but that does not mean to say it fits in with the existing vernacular of the surrounding residences and hardly has a sense of place by any reasonable yardstick. Grand designs may be acceptable in roads with large secluded plots but they are out of place in a confined area in plain sight of fifteen other properties.
- *Respond positively to their local context and create or reinforce local character and distinctiveness, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment of the Borough and providing value to the public realm;* It fails on all counts. I cannot see how it is positively responding to the local context.
- *Are visually attractive as a result of good high quality built forms and spaces, the inclusion of public art and appropriate materials and landscaping.* During the previous application not one neighbour overlooking the development supported the proposal or considered the building attractive. The same level of objection applies to the current proposal.

CC8: SAFEGUARDING AMENITY

Development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties or unacceptable living conditions for new residential properties, in terms of:

- *Visual dominance and overbearing effects of a development;* It self-evident from any site inspection how dominant the building will be.
- *Harm to outlook;* Sufficiently unpleasant to spoil the enjoyment of what has been a secluded garden and setting for the past 35 years.

Boundary and reinstatement of Hedgerow and Trees

The previous submission was compliant with BNG requirements however we were not given the opportunity to submit a report demonstrating this. A BNG calculation is included with this new submission demonstrating a biodiversity gain (Page 15 of the Design and Access statement).

Cathy Holwill (RBC Ecology Consultations) issued a report dated 19th December 2023. The report concludes by stating that “the applicant should be asked to submit an updated net gain calculation, using the DEFRA 4.0 metric to demonstrate how a net gain in biodiversity units will be achieved. **The baseline will need to be the site before the trees were removed and other clearance carried out.**

We agree with that approach and trust that the applicant will be required to reinstate the boundary trees.

The current application indicates that a fence will be erected along the western boundary so how that does that contribute to a net gain?

The dwelling is being built hard up against the applicant’s boundary so where do they propose to site the fence and dead hedge?

The applicant’s site plans are inaccurate with regard to the western boundary. Their title plan shows it is a straight line and they do not own the strip of land between their boundary and the land in the back lane owned by the residents of Geoffreyson road (See detailed submission from 48 Geoffreyson Road dated 17th July 2023 on the previous application.

Are they intending to place the fence on the strip of land they do not own?

CIL Form 1

We would also like to point out that section 7 of the CIL Form 1 has been incorrectly completed for the second time. It asks “*Was the building or part of the building occupied for its lawful use for 6 continuous months of the 36 previous months*” and “*When was the building last occupied for its lawful use? Please enter the date (dd/mm/yyyy) or tick still in use.*” The applicant has declared that the building has been occupied in the past 36 months and that it is still in use. The previous resident, Miss Pauline Collins died on 26th April 2019 and the property has remained unoccupied since her death and derelict for the greater part of that time. It is not currently used.

J and G Plows