



Central Swindon South Parish Council

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Dear Sir/Madam

South Swindon Parish Council object to the proposed plans to demolish the former Clifton Street School building, on Radnor Street, and fully support Swindon Borough Council's original decision to refuse planning permission to this effect and their attempts to force the developer to restore the building to its state before illegal demolition work began in 2018.

The former Clifton Street School building was previously a Victorian school serving local residents. For several decades the building has been in active use as offices for a technology company, before it was vacated and acquired by its present owner. The building was, at the time of purchase by the current owner, in excellent condition; structurally sound and well maintained by its former occupant, and due to its use as light offices was not heavily modified internally from its original historic use. The building was not left vacant for a protracted period of time between its former occupant leaving and its current owner purchasing it, and it was not in a derelict state. The current owner had submitted a prior approval application for the building to be converted for use to flats without external or substantial structural modification. These proposals were not considered particularly controversial by the Parish Council, local residents or other local stakeholders. Several other similar buildings in the town (for example the former school buildings on Dixon Street and Euclid Street) have been converted to residential apartments and are generally well regarded by locals as positive uses.

The building is a good example of Victorian architecture of a type that is part of the character of Swindon's Old Town area, and is in a highly prominent location at a junction, acting as a landmark visible from a long distance and a major part of the local street scene and character. Despite being a building style, which is characteristic for the area, there are only few prominent examples remaining due to Swindon's poor record of retaining historic architecture. It should be noted that while the developer indicates that they do not intend to demolish other buildings in the school complex, the part of the building which they are requesting permission to demolish is the only part visible from the street, and is the most ornate and attractive facade of the building. The residential conversion of the rest of the school complex is already nearing completion and it is our opinion that the retention of these other buildings is not in any way dependent on the outcome of this appeal, and nor should the retention of these other buildings be prioritised above the retention of the prominent southern part which forms part of this application.

The preservation of this building is very important to local residents, with very large numbers of public representations made opposing the demolition both to the Borough Council's planning department and to local councillors sitting on this council. A petition against the proposal also gathered over 1200 signatures. The building is an important part of the area's

heritage, with many local residents having been educated there when it was previously in use as a school, and we would note that the developer being unaware of the local significance of the building is a consequence of their complete absence of any public engagement or consultation of their plans at any stage of the process.

We note in the appeal that one of the reasons given for the building's proposed demolition is that the plans originally proposed in the prior approval application did not provide adequate amenity to future occupants, due to small unit size and natural light issues. We do not consider this to be a valid reason for the building's complete demolition as the small unit sizes and awkward shapes for these dwellings was entirely in the gift of the architect; it would be entirely possible to create adequate sized and shaped apartments within the original structure, in some cases trivially so (for example, combining a 25 square metre 1 bedroom flat and its neighbouring 35 square metre 1 bedroom flat into a single 60 square metre 2 bedroom flat in line with the Nationally Described Space Standards). In short, we don't believe that the poor quality of the appellant's original plans justifies the complete demolition of the building. We also believe that based on the evidence of other similar developments in the town, and based on the high density of housing achievable within the existing building even with improved design and amenity, that there is no reason to believe that it isn't possible for a developer to bring forward a viable plan without the loss of the historic building. Therefore, there are no grounds to appeal based on the addition of dwellings to the housing supply referencing Swindon 5 year housing supply targets.

This refused planning application includes the developer's proposal for a new building, and we would note our objections to these plans in their own right. We believe that the building is incongruous and out of character for the local street scene and will significantly deteriorate the character of the local area (replacing as it does a landmark building with a new facade dominated by off-street parking spaces of a sort which are not found in the surrounding streets). While the proposed dwellings are within NDSS guidelines for floorspace, they nonetheless represent very poor living environments, with the ground floor units having a single combined kitchen/diner/lounge/bedroom, with space indicated only for a foldout sofa-bed.

Finally we would like to note that there has been no suggestion made, by either the developer or any other stakeholder, that the building is structurally unsound, in any serious state of disrepair that would prevent its redevelopment, and it does not appear to be in any danger of further decay except through the negligence of its current owner. The only damage to the building's structure was that which was done to the roof of the structure as part of the illegal demolition works. The owner has been ordered to make temporary repairs (such as roof coverings) to prevent further deterioration (although this has not taken place). We do not believe that any arguments on the basis of the current state of the building are valid, and that damage voluntarily and illegally inflicted by a building's owner cannot be used as justification for further planning applications.

Theresa Gordon
Administrative Assistant
On behalf of The Planning & Environment Committee
South Swindon Parish Council (Central Swindon South Parish Council)