



AGM REPORT FROM THE PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE ON APPLICATIONS DATED JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2009

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The team has continued to look at planning applications fortnightly, choosing about half of them for thorough scrutiny over a morning in Ramsay House. The total number of applications registered over the year 2009 was about 2734, (compared with 2703 in 2008; 2912 in 2007; 2661 in 2006 and 2553 in 2005.) We objected in writing to about 87 applications. Decisions on proposals to which we objected were: - 38 permitted; 24 refused; 12 withdrawn and 13 still pending. To illustrate how varied our planning applications can be, a few are selected here for description.

Several large and complex applications have been made by the Universities. In March permission was obtained to demolish most of the old Radcliffe Infirmary buildings between Woodstock and Banbury Roads, while retaining the fine group of 'Listed' buildings comprising the original Infirmary, the Chapel, the Outpatients building and the Triton Fountain. Detailed plans for new buildings were submitted in December 2009. They differed considerably, and disappointingly, from the proposed Master Plan for the site described in last year's AGM Report as freely allowing views of the Observatory Tower in an imaginative plan with radiating alley-ways centred on the Tower of the Winds. Instead four and five storey blocks are proposed, to contain the huge Institutes of Humanities and Mathematics, and they will be daunting, overbearing and rather monotonous. However their large size seems inevitable when they are expected to house so much. Just across the Woodstock Road from this proposal land owned by Keble College is also about to be developed. Much of the former Acland Hospital and other buildings, including No 46 Woodstock Road, would be demolished and replaced by a new Keble College Quad on four and five storeys, with 249 study bedrooms, along with another large building for research and teaching. It is not at all clear how well the Keble College buildings and those on the former Radcliffe Infirmary site will coordinate with one another.

On Headington Hill, Oxford Brookes University has presented plans for a new Student Centre, Library and other facilities on the Gipsy Lane Campus, all to be housed in a vast building over 200m long and about 25m tall. These plans met with refusal, and amendments are now being considered. Ruskin Hall of Ruskin College in Dunstan Road, Headington, has obtained permission for alterations and additions to accommodate more students.

In Cowley Road, proposals for student accommodation have fared less well. To the rear of Nos. 229, 231, and 233, four-storey extensions have been added making 13 bedrooms in each of the terrace houses. Application was made for change of use from dwelling or guest house to student accommodation, 39 study bedrooms in all, with shared kitchens and bathrooms but no common rooms. Close behind these houses, another building was proposed for 9 further bedrooms. All these were refused on grounds that this student provision would be too cramped and inadequate. Six months later, a repeat proposal to convert the rear extension of No. 229 to 13 bedrooms was also refused.

An interesting proposal was put forward by the Churchill Hospital to build a 'Maggie Centre' off Old Road, Headington, and this has been permitted. It is one of a national series of such buildings close to hospitals treating cancer patients, and intended as support centres for patients and their families. A small single-storey building, it has an organic form with a low tent-like roof, standing on stilts on sloping land and enveloped by trees. Its peaceful woodland character should indeed be therapeutic, although regrettably it slightly infringes the important wild-life corridor along the Boundary Brook. Another unusual building is, chameleon-like, about to change its character yet again. Starting life as a (probably) seventeenth century town house, No.28 Holywell Street became Blackwell's Music Shop, an unusual and charming structure which was awarded a 'Listing', with stairs from ground-floor to basement spiralling around a glass-walled well which brought daylight from above. The building changed its use to a Restaurant for some years, but is now about to become part of the Back Quad of Wadham College, accessed from the back. Upper floors will be demolished and rebuilt as student accommodation with external and internal staircases, walkways and pergolas. It is good to know that bookcases will be reinstated.

We continue to try to remain vigilant over several special buildings whose futures are still uncertain. One is 26 Lathbury Road, a house built in Arts and Crafts style in dark-red brick and tiles with low eaves, which give it a 'cottagey' character. It has undergone many alterations, once had a chapel, but it still retains historical interest and charm. Over several recent years a series of proposals for it have been made, which so far have been refused or withdrawn, to demolish, alter, extend or divide the house into two or three dwellings, or to build new modern houses close up beside it. Of rather different concern is the Bartlemas Conservation Area, hiding just off the Cowley Road. Accessed by a country lane, this comprises a group of well-preserved medieval stone buildings in a green setting of trees: a Leper Hospital (now a farmhouse), a Chapel and a second farmhouse. Possible overdevelopment on the site nearby of a former school threatens its unique peaceful and private atmosphere.

Certainly Oxford's planning scene in 2009 has been varied and interesting, and it seems unlikely that it will be any the less so in future years.

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