



ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY Charity no 269308

Planning Sub-committee: Chris Amery
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Head of Planning
Test Valley Borough Council
Duttons Road
Romsey SO51 8XG

Dear Madam

Application TVS.00515/43 (Old Brewery site) – Abbey

I write on behalf of the Romsey & District Society to comment on this application.

Our general reaction is favourable, but we feel that that the density has been slightly overdone, and that a relatively minor reduction could bring substantial improvements.

This is a vastly better scheme than the previous one. We like:

- the variety of the architecture, and the way it reflects the Malthouse and other styles characteristic of Romsey.
- the treatment and landscaping of the Fishlake stream, pedestrian linkages through the development and alongside the stream, and the access from the Horsefair.
- the principal ideas underlining the pattern, layout & variety of spaces
- the scale, massing and proportions of the dwellings, including the design of units which emulate the roofscape of the Malthouse.
- the general mix of dwelling types.
- the integration of the Malthouse and its parking area into the scheme, the detail of which we think is an improvement on the former plans.

However, we are concerned about the very high density of the proposals – we believe it to be about 72 dwellings per hectare. This level of density has consequences for the quality of the built environment being created and more particularly the living conditions. Whilst there are examples of much higher densities than the 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare recommended for housing in PPG3 being accepted elsewhere, such as in city locations, we believe such an intense development is not entirely compatible with a market town.

The size of the streets gives cause for concern. We believe that 10 metres between the frontages of opposing dwellings along each street is too narrow. This particularly applies to South Avenue and Malthouse Lane that perform the function of being the main thoroughfare through the development. Such an arrangement feels tight and congested bringing with it the problems of overlooking.

It is appreciated that one of the consequence of high density is to impose this type of close town centre living, but there remain questions about the living conditions where the back of the dwellings are equally constrained by the car parking courts. Most of the properties have very little amenity space at the rear (some as small as 3.5 metres deep), with some very awkward shapes, and such an arrangement does not reflect the town centre living conditions in the rest of Romsey where reasonably-sized gardens are common.

From a traffic management point of view we believe there should be the ability to access the entire development from both Station Road and Princess Road (the danger of a 'rat run' seems negligible).

The Design Statement refers to 'squares' and 'nodes' at each intersection and changes in direction of the street system. Again the density of the development has reduced these incidences to appear tight and mean in size and out of scale with some of the taller dwellings. We feel that as currently laid out they do not really serve to emulate the idea of a square in an urban setting, nor give the impression of an adequate space: take for example The Horsefair which widens and narrows to create a 'sense of place' in scale with the buildings that enclose it. Some of these 'squares' even have blank flank walls, instead of fenestration focusing on the square.

The architecture of the development is safe but we are disappointed that there are not more contemporary design examples, or 'statement' buildings, that would raise the delight factor. The introduction of a curved crescent has great merit but we would question whether the convex layout is appropriate to its location overlooking an amenity space.

The open spaces at either end of the Malthouse will provide a pleasant and necessary lung for all these new dwellings with such small courtyard gardens, some of which are no more than 3.5 metres deep. Therefore we consider the block of houses (E9-12) which impinge on the southern open space to be very unfortunate, and would like this space opposite the crescent to be enlarged. Similarly we are unhappy with the siting of block F8-9, which we think sits very uncomfortably with its neighbours, in particular the crescent, and gives the impression of having been unacceptably crammed into the overall development.

We are concerned that there are only 18 parking spaces for 28 affordable homes, and that there may be inadequate parking for occasional visitors (no lay-bys).

We also want to make an important point about the landscaping and planting. We think that great rigour is needed in specifying exactly what will be planted where, then in carrying out the works to a high standard, and finally in making robust arrangements for maintenance. There is a real danger that if high standards are not insisted on at the outset, the landscaping will slowly deteriorate and thus reduce the attractiveness of the site overall. This is particularly important at the boundaries, both highways and stream. Parts of the canal are a dreadful example of neglect in this respect, and nothing like it must be allowed to happen here.

Yours sincerely

Chris Amery
Chairman, Planning Sub-committee