

## SOUTH EAST OFFICE

Ms Debbie Kirk  
Milton Keynes Council  
Development Management, Planning  
Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East  
Central Milton Keynes  
MK9 3EJ

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Our ref: P00104038

3 January 2013

Dear Ms Kirk

**Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009 &  
T&CP (Development Management Procedure) Order 2010  
PROPERTIES AT COFFERIDGE CLOSE, STONY STRATFORD, MILTON KEYNES  
Application No 11/00143/FUL**

We have received amended proposals for the above scheme. We do not wish to comment in detail, but offer the following general observations.

### **English Heritage Advice**

The revised proposals incorporate a number of welcome changes. The colonnade to the High Street is to be restored, a section of the rear colonnade is retained and the residential garages are to be retained in their entirety. However, the proposals still would entail the demolition of the majority of the Cofferridge Close and its associated landscaping.

We do not agree with the assessment made in the Heritage Statement supplied with this application that the building is at best a neutral feature within the conservation area. This assessment completely fails to take into account the fact that the 1970s were a significant episode in the development of Stoney Stratford, in which a small town was transformed into one of the new local centres of the new town of Milton Keynes. The importance of Milton Keynes in historical terms as the last and most ambitious of the heroic era of town planning is only just being recognised and Stoney Stratford is one of the best of the local centres. Cofferridge Close is therefore of historical interest as the defining building of an important era in the life of the town. The building is also of architectural interest due to the way in which the Meisian forms that characterise the centre of Milton Keynes were adapted to suit a historic town centre. While the development may not fit into the rather mechanistic assessment method used by the Heritage Statement there is no doubt that through high quality landscaping, sympathetic materials and effective massing an unusually successful intervention into the historic townscape was created. Additionally, the way in which car parking and direct pedestrian routes through the site were incorporated into a



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development while retaining the feel of the orchard that once stood here was innovative and effective. That the development as a whole would have been assessed favourably for listing if it had survived intact speaks volumes for its quality, given that the bar for post-war listings is very high.

Very limited weight should be placed on the Draft Historic Town Assessment Report prepared as part of the Buckinghamshire Historic Towns Project. This project took a broad brush approach and we did not contribute any specialist input into the creation of the draft nor comment on it. To my knowledge it was not prepared with the benefit of any expertise in post-war architecture. It therefore should not be considered to represent the view of English Heritage.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Cofferridge Close is of sufficient architectural and historical value to make a positive contribution to the conservation area and its demolition would cause harm to the significance of this area. While this harm is judged to be less than substantial, as the essential character of the conservation area would remain intact, the level of harm is nevertheless material and should not be accepted without sound justification.

The proposed development would also have an impact on the setting of the recently listed 7-23 Silver Street. The Heritage Statement plays down the relevance of the rest of the development to the setting of the listed houses, but this fails to take account of the fact that the two were conceived to be part of a unified whole. The assessment does not give due weight to the fact that the alignment of the colonnade is continued by the face of the office wing right up to the carriage entrance in the middle of 7-23 Silver Street and therefore forms an important visual linkage between the two buildings. The assessment also seeks to reduce the relevance of views from the listed buildings to those that face out over the orchard. This does not take into account the fact that as built the entire landscape was carefully conceived and that the listed buildings as a whole benefitted from looking out onto it. Even in its degraded state this forms a better setting than the much more intensively planned car park proposed. The assessment also fails to take into account that the historical value of 7-23 Silver Street is bound up with the development as a whole, which forms the historical as well as the physical context for the building. This historical value will inevitably be compromised by the loss of a large part of this context.

It is therefore concluded that the proposed development will harm the setting of this particular listed building, though as the building and some of its original context remain, this harm is less than substantial.

This harm could be mitigated by refinements to the design which preserved the key alignment through the site in the form of the colonnade and the original façade of the



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office wing. However, it is understood that the applicants are unwilling or unable to vary either the footprint of the store or the number of parking spaces provided.

In accordance with paragraph 134 of the NPPF, the harm to the conservation area and setting of the listed building need to be balanced against the public benefits entailed. We would expect to see demonstrable evidence that a retail development of this size was necessary to safeguard the ongoing health of the town centre as a whole before this level of harm is accepted.

### **Recommendation**

We would urge you to address the above issues, and recommend that the application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice. It is not necessary for us to be consulted again. However, if you would like further advice, please contact us to explain your request.

Yours sincerely



### **Richard Peats**

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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cc. Simon Peart, Conservation and Archaeology Manager, MKC



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