



Planning applications RU 17/1164 and RU 17/1166 (40-44 Egham High St)

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Egham Residents' Association objects to the planning applications referred to above.

Our awareness that they would soon be submitted was a salient factor in our decision to write to Runnymede Borough Council's head of planning on August 1st this year bemoaning the apparent absence of a coherent planning strategy for the Egham Town Centre and the definite lack of a bespoke planning policy for it. We ask that this objection be read in conjunction with that letter.

We are happy that the scheme includes the retention of retail uses on the ground floor. On the other hand, we are anything but content with the fact that it also includes the provision of 105 - yes, as many as 105 - student units.

The gravely mistaken decision by Runnymede Council to grant planning permission for Royal Holloway College's 'Masterplan' expansion has (only too predictably) opened the floodgates to a wave of planning applications for student accommodation in Egham. Some have been for the conversion of yet more family homes into houses of multiple occupancy, and others have been for the conversion of office floor space into student accommodation or for the creation of new student accommodation units in the town centre.

Taken together they have generated a widespread feeling in the town that it is relentlessly being turned into Holloway Town or a Holloway East campus. This has caused great resentment, yet, so far, Runnymede Council has been unable or unwilling to see this yet alone do anything to stop it.

As we said in the letter of August 1st, a case can be made for accommodating in the town centre a strong proportion of the extra Holloway students who will need to be housed off-campus. (By the way, Holloway College indicated in its Masterplan that about 1000 of the 3000 additional students it was proposing would have to be housed off-campus. That is a substantially different figure from the one being used in connection with this planning application.) A student influx would bring a younger, livelier feel to the town centre, and – up to a point - that would be good and welcome.

This phenomenon is not so attractive, however, when it involves the loss of office floorspace (as has happened in the case of Prestige House). And although theoretically it can relieve the pressure to create HMOs in the side-streets, we see no evidence as yet that that is actually happening.

There is also a chronic shortage of accommodation for first-time buyers in Egham. And there are many sons and daughters of established Egham residents who would have been interested in buying houses here that are now HMOs for students or, indeed, a flat in a complex like that proposed for 40-44 High Street.

These are issues of great magnitude and controversy in Egham, and we believe they should be covered by an Egham-specific town centre policy in the emerging Borough Plan that can provide greater clarity and coherence. In the absence of such a policy, these planning applications should not be allowed to proceed.

Further to this, we also believe that the 40-44 High Street site should be taken into Runnymede Council's 'Gateway West' plans for the renaissance of the western end of the town centre. If one were looking for the epitome of a 'gateway' town centre site in Egham, one would be hard-pressed to better 40-44 High Street. It stands right at the entrance to the shopping core, and a building of distinction, underlining Egham's history and character, should stand there. The building proposed in these applications dismally fails to match up to that criterion.

When RBC's then planning committee rejected RU15/1017 last year, it specifically recognized that a building of good design and character was needed for the site, which is in a conservation area. We hope and trust that the current committee will similarly do Egham proud by stating that the new proposed building falls a long way short of what is required.

We could not disagree more with TP Bennett about the design of the building. They argue that it is fitting for a conservation area and a

key site. But as we have told them, we see a building that reminds us both of Stalinist architecture and Lego construction. There is too much of this sort of slab architecture in Runnymede already – for example, on Pyrcroft Road (A317) in Chertsey. Not to mention some of the buildings Holloway College is erecting on Egham Hill. We shall repeat a question put in the letter of August 1st: Why is there no Runnymede design guide?

We note that the absence of parking provision from the plans is presented by the applicant as a plus, and from a 'green' perspective we understand that. The fact is, however, that many Holloway students do have cars, and it would be foolish to assume that none of the 40-44 High St students would have. Where are they going to park?

In summary, we object to these planning applications for the following reasons:

1) 40-44 Egham High Street is a key 'gateway' site at the very entrance to the town centre shopping core, and a distinguished building, reflecting the town's history and character, should stand there.

2) These applications propose the provision of as many as 105 student accommodation units. They reinforce fears in the town that it is being turned into an appendix to Royal Holloway College; and they highlight the lack of an Egham-specific town centre policy in the emerging Borough Plan that recognizes the town's unique (in Runnymede) 'student accommodation problem' and provides a clear and coherent framework for dealing with it. In the absence of such a policy, these applications should not be given planning permission.

3) The site should be included in Runnymede Council's 'Gateway West' scheme for Egham, and should not be handled in isolation.

4) The Egham Residents's Association abhors the slab architecture of the proposed development, which reminds us both of Stalinism and Lego construction. It confirms the need for a Runnymede design guide.

5) There is an unrealistic absence of provision for car-parking.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Fisher,

Planning co-ordinator, Egham Residents' Association

PS TP Bennett say in their statement that RU15/1017 was rejected on the grounds that "the proposal does not respect either of the neighbouring buildings nor establish a new ascetic of sufficient quality".... Surely, for "ascetic" we should read "aesthetic".

8 Limes Road, Egham, Surrey, TW20 9QT

chrisfisher143@gmail.com

Phone: 01784-435166 or 07837782012