



MALDON RIVERSIDE ASSOCIATION
maldonriversideassociation@gmail.com
34 Market Hill, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4QA

Development Control,
Maldon District Council,
Princes Road,
Maldon, Essex, CM9 5DI

Application 14/00590/FUL Planning Application For The Demolition Of Existing Buildings And The Construction Of Residential Development (19 Apartments Within Two Blocks) Together With Vehicular/Pedestrian Access From Station Road, Car-Parking, Landscaping.

Comments on the application

The application site is situated within the Fullbridge area which is a very important part of Maldon. Maldon Riverside Association takes this application seriously and expects Maldon District Council to take all the comments noted below fully into account before making a decision.

Use

The site is located on the northern side of the River Chelmer, to the east of Fullbridge, part of the Great Potman Marsh. The importance of the maritime sector for Maldon's economy was recognised for the first time in the early 18th century and from that time this area started to become populated with buildings and structures that included quays, wharfs, cranes, storehouses, granaries, warehouses, and later on timber yards and saw mills.

The industry in the Fullbridge area has had its ups and downs. For instance the construction of Chelmer and Blackwater Navigation Canal in the late 18th century reduced the importance of the area, but the construction of the Eastern Railway in 1847 and its terminus in Station Road, initiated the revitalisation of port activities with new granaries, waterhouses and a steam mill. As the commercial use of this north side of the river has waned over the last few decades, with the departure of Sadds' timber yards, and with the shift from sea to road transport of grain to the mill, the value of river transport has been forgotten. The use of Sadd's Wharf has been lost to maritime activity, as has The Granaries area too.

Presently, there is TS Rigging and Heritage Marine which occupies the most of the application site on a rental base. This business makes an important contribution to our national maritime heritage at the highest level. Over last few years it has undertaken the complete re-rigging of the "Cutty Sark", constructed the luxury houseboat "Vega IV", carried out work on classic yacht restorations, and has provided maritime themed film sets. This work has employed a large number of local people, raised skills relevant to boatbuilding and the maritime industry and most importantly increased Maldon's popularity and reputation across UK. This business represents a significant continuity of historic maritime activities that existed over the centuries within the area. It is expected that Maldon District Council to recognise the significance of these current business activities and support them.

The proposal is to replace the existing industrial buildings with a residential development. It is fully understood that a land owner is a decision maker about the future of his own property, but we would like to note that in this case, the local authority has a duty to make an effort and explore all opportunities for this site, including a possibility of a mixed use, and to present and discuss these options with the landowner, before a final decision about the future use of the site has been made.

Historic values

Maldon is a port and also the lowest crossing point of the River Chelmer. It is these two factors that brought about the existence of the place and they are central to its identity. A ship is depicted on the borough coat of arms that is derived from designs found on either side of the earliest known heraldic seal of Maldon, which dates from the mid-14th century.

The application site is located just below the historic river crossing and on a stretch that features in the earliest depictions of Maldon as a port. It is within the town's conservation area; it could hardly be more sensitive and any proposals to re-develop it should be of the highest calibre if they are not to detract from the historic quality of the town.

The proposals involve demolition of a number of buildings, including a prominent 1930s granary tower and an earlier timber clad granary, and then change of use from port related or industrial use to housing. Both of these existing structures are important to the conservation area (a heritage asset) and to the character of the town as a port. The river frontage on the north side is characterised by a pleasing hotch-potch of buildings and materials entirely suited to their utilitarian purpose. The granary tower is an important landmark within this, and its weather boarded neighbour is one of only a few surviving early structures to give a clue as to the character of an earlier era. At present the land is in use for industrial purposes.

The loss of these structures would clearly represent substantial harm to the conservation area.

National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 133 states that:

“Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- *the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and*
- *no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and*
- *conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and*
- *the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use”*

Design

The proposed application site sits within one of the most beautiful areas of the town. At this point, the buildings are wonderfully mixed in style and scale - where the industrial and

maritime heritage meet the grander houses of Market Hill. This juxtaposition is unique and incredibly precious to the character of Maldon. Within this context, any riverside development should be considered very carefully and nothing less than design excellence should be sought in any proposals.

The chosen style is a pastiche of Victorian industrial building forms. The affect is not convincing and bears no relation to the industrial forms that dominate the river frontage. The replacement buildings also fail to respond to the scale of the existing granary tower and will form a weak replacement. They would certainly do nothing to improve the quality of the area.

The National Planning Policy framework states in paragraphs 63 and 64:

“In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area.”

“Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.”

In the past the District Council has sought to protect the riverside sites so that they remain available for port related uses and this stance should be maintained. Although Maldon has only a very low level of port related activity at present, it is not possible to anticipate future trends. Once this land is taken for domestic use it seems certain that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for it ever to return to port related uses. In the interests of sustainable development the option of maintaining the land for port uses should be defended.

The Planning Policy Framework states in paragraph 137:

“Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably”

There should be a serious effort on this site to carry out an analysis of the structures that contribute to the conservation area and that analysis should not be one that pre-supposes demolition. It is quite likely that it is possible to utilise all or part of the existing structures and in so doing preserve an important link with the past and improve the understanding of Maldon as a historic port. For any development to be successful on this site, imagination, creativity and a high standard of design will be required.

In the event that it is decided to take down the existing structures then the District Council should encourage a good quality of contemporary architecture that is sympathetic in scale, materials and form to this very important conservation area setting.

At The Maldon Conservation Area Review and Management Plan in 2006 it was stated:

“Since the original designation of the conservation area, the local planning authority has consistently sought, through the development control process, to gain an appropriately high standard of new building and extension design. However, with some notable exceptions, new building quality has rarely risen beyond the bland or inoffensive. It is essential that the Council succeeds in implementing the design objectives and principles which are to be found securely embedded in the local plan.”

If the current planning application for this site is approved then the outcome will be bland at the best. To allow mediocre housing development in one of Maldon's most precious locations can only set a precedent for worse on lesser sites.

It is important to note that should all three of these proposed developments (Aquila, Sadds Wharf, Lidl) would go ahead, the combined effect could be over-powering, not just architecturally but on the very eclectic, in fact wonderfully diverse, nature of the waterfront.

Height and bulk - There is no contextual analysis submitted as part of this application. It would be appropriate to see a river elevation to justify height/mass/bulk of the proposals and also the materiality. We are concerned about the proposed height of the eastern, tallest part of block A. As shown on drawings this part would be 5 storeys high which is different to what is noted in Design Statement, Paragraph 4. The length of the eastern part of the block A - which stretches in the north-south direction and is supposed to replace the 1938 mill - is excessive as it is one and a half time longer than the existing structure. As a result, the proposed building looks bulky and out of proportion.

In the Design Statement it is noted that the proposed block A has been designed in such way to mimic the existing dilapidated 1938 mill structure and to create a feature which would successfully replace this landmark building. When looking at the drawings it is clear that this has not been achieved. A desired effect could have been achieved only by way of creating a really innovative architectural solution, by way of carefully addressing the design elements of the existing structure in its entirety.

Building materials - Design and Access Statement includes only one line of text with regard to building materials, and there are no pictorial examples or mood boards attached. We question here whether this is acceptable approach for a development in the heart of a conservation area. The choice of facing materials and colours in principle is acceptable as these address the facing materials and colours and textures applied on the elevations of neighbouring buildings. However detailing and the ways of how the facing materials change on elevations are not of acceptable quality.

Regarding the quality of living space in the proposed flats, there is a concern about a single aspect of several two bedroom units which does not represent a successful design given the fact that this a 'blank canvas' site.

Regarding the size of flats, there is a question of would the proposal for one and two bedroom units satisfy the need for housing, bearing in mind that there is a shortage for three and four bedroom units.

There is no allocation for affordable housing shown on the drawings.

Access

It is crucial that both planning authorities and the councillors as decision makers understand the wider context of the access to the boatyards in Maldon. There is a difference between the access available at this site, as compared with those on the south side of the river. All the boatyards on the south side of the river, with the exception of David Patient's boatyard at the Fullbridge, (which is understood to have a limited future due to Mr Patient's approaching retirement) suffer from very poor road access. Articulated lorries delivering or taking boats away by road, as well as mobile cranes, have encountered severe difficulties in negotiating the narrow roads, steep gradients, and tight corners that lead from the High Street down to the waterfront via Butt Lane, North Street, and Church Street. The High Street itself has

awkward turns, and the exit via Mill Road is very narrow. This is important because Maldon is a very active centre for the restoration of old boats, which do not necessarily arrive by water.

In addition, none of the yards on the south side has good river access, in the form of substantial quay-heading and deep water at high tide. These elements - good road access (both level and wide) in close proximity to the Ring Road, flat ground in the working area adjacent to the river, and substantial quay-heading with the deep channel adjacent, - are only available on the north side of the river.

Noise

If developed, the residential units would eventually suffer from impact of the mill next door which is the last industrial complex in Maldon. Also there is a boatyard located on the opposite side of the river which is noisy at times.

Moorings and light

It is staggering that there is not even a stipulation in the planning consent for Sadd's Wharf that ladders or bollards be positioned on the quay for use by visiting craft (let alone for safety reasons). Exactly the same complete lack of provision is apparent in the current planning application. We believe there is a similar lack of stipulation that lighting be designed to avoid dazzling those navigating the river at night. Normal flood-lighting can be a dangerous hazard to navigation. Awareness by the Council of the contribution of maritime activity in Maldon to tourism and the economy might at least run to addressing these issues.

Public realm and its maintenance

As this scheme is also an urban infill proposal, it would be normal to expect the application to pay greater attention to the public realm and how the buildings meet the street level. This has been given little thought, particularly on the river frontage. It is also a question of great interest to us (as a rate and tax payers) who would be responsible for the maintenance of the quay heading, and whether the developer is obliged to make sure it is in good order.

Safety

In case the proposal goes forward and is approved, we would like to receive assurances from the Maldon District Council that the asbestos sheet clad 'Farming Supplies' building is demolished with water spay as required. Half of the building was taken down with no regard for health.

Public engagement

There is a concern in the Association that there was no possibility for local residents to have any input and to discuss issues with architects prior the application has been submitted.

To conclude, we think that it is necessary for the applicant and the Council to rethink about all redevelopment options taking into account a variety of uses – residential, maritime, light industrial, moorings and other - and on the basis of a detail study, to design a proposal which would offer an innovative and quality architectural solution that Maldon would be proud of.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of Maldon Riverside Association:

Annabel Brown, RIBA; Jamie Clay, Boatbuilder; Ben Downie, RIBA; Anastasia Fuller, RTPI; Richard Evans, RIBA; Nancy Harrison; David Patient, Shipwright; Geoffrey Vale, Chartered Architect; and Belinda Worsley, Illustrator.