

RESPONSE BY HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY TO THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO APPLICATION 3/17/0392/FUL: BIRCHERLEY GREEN

1. The proposed amendments are to be welcomed, particularly the redesign of the pedestrian link between the bus station and the Mall. However the changes proposed do not respond significantly to our criticisms of the scheme and we therefore rely on our previous comments. We would add one or two further points arising from the comments made by others and the proposed amendments.

SERVICING

2. We previously said that the proposed servicing solution is a compromise which devalues the quality of the whole development for users, but accepted that the proposed arrangements could physically be made to work. Since then:

- The Council's own Landscape Officer has commented that the Mall is not wide enough to accommodate street trees of any significant size as well as providing for delivery access and refuse collection.
- The 'swept path' diagrams for large vehicles using the Mall indicate they would take up the whole width to the very edge of the proposed tree pits, so that the foliage of the trees would be at risk.
- The officers responsible for refuse collection have stated that their vehicles could not be constrained by the time limits proposed for use of the Mall by vehicles. The applicants have also discussed, in their recent 'Servicing Note', how arrangements might have to be made to meet specific requests for 'out-of-hours' servicing if deliveries arrive at unexpected times owing to traffic congestion etc.

3. No doubt the applicants will argue that these problems are over-stated or could be overcome, but if permission is granted we foresee several possible consequences:

- Once building has started an application will be made to vary the landscape drawings to permit the planting of smaller, fewer, or no trees in the Mall; it would be difficult or impossible for the Council to resist such an application.
- The Centre Management will be faced with frequent requests from leaseholders for vehicle access outside the agreed hours for reasons beyond the leaseholders' control, and the Management would find it hard to resist such requests because of the extra costs leaseholders would otherwise suffer.
- An application will be made to vary the agreed hours of permitted vehicular access, and the Council would find it difficult to resist such a request, for fear of jeopardising the success of the scheme.
- There would be unauthorised infringements of the agreed hours which would be difficult to prevent, and cause friction between leaseholders, shoppers, the Centre Management and the Council.

THE RIVERSIDE

4. The details now proposed for the riverside are disappointing, effectively showing a resurfaced 4m wide access route with a row of benches on one side and single external tables on the other. Almost anything would be an improvement on

what is there now, but these disappointing proposals inevitably reflect the constraints imposed by the decisions to retain the car park on its present footprint and not to set back the north-west corner of Block B. The suggestions made by the Canal and Rivers Trust and the Council's own Conservation Team for lowering the bank level or creating wide steps down have not been taken up (probably because such changes would be incompatible with vehicular use of the space for servicing), and trees are still proposed in locations which the CRT advise could compromise the stability of the river wall.

5. From the point of view of the developer, these may be seen as matters of ancillary landscaping, but from the public point of view the achievement of an attractive riverside is a major objective and even the *raison d'être* of the redevelopment. The present proposals fail to achieve that objective.

CONCLUSION

6. In conclusion, we acknowledge that the existing centre is unsatisfactory, and that the departure of Waitrose calls for action. The redevelopment of Bircherley Green presents an opportunity to make changes in the face of Hertford which could improve residents' and visitors' enjoyment of the town in the long term. The present proposals may be an improvement on the present situation, but we believe they miss that opportunity and should not be accepted.