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Guildford, GU2 4BB

*Please reply to: Dr John Baylis  
Secretary of the Guildford Society Planning  
Applications Team*

Guildford

25th April 2021

Dear Mr Doyle

**Application 21/P/00539 Location: 1 Onslow Street, Guildford, GU1 4YS**

**Proposal: Three storey extension to the roof, roof terrace and external alterations to the existing building including new external elevations and new entrances to Woodbridge Road.**

The Society supports the improvements to the existing building but objects to the application because of the proposed increase in height and mass of the building.

The site is located on a prominent corner in the area of the 'North Guildford Fringe' (as referred to in the Views SPD). The corner site is strategically located on the approach to the town from the north and is located adjacent to a Grade II listed building St Saviours Church. The existing height of the building at 7 storeys is one of the taller bulkier buildings in the town.

**General Concept**

Many of the principles of what is proposed with the upgrading of No 1 are positive especially in that it involves significant investment in a town centre commercial building. Although the demand for office space is unclear due to the pandemic, we can see a demand for a variety of offices in the future as working from home is only viable for some. The continued vibrancy of the Guildford High Tech Sector and Professional services will depend on access to good office space in an attractive location.

We thus support the overall objective to refurbish 1 Onslow Street to create a best-in-class office space in central Guildford, providing all the facilities that modern tenants expect.

Broadly we support the scheme objectives to provide:

- Provides a reception with impact and street presence.
- Increases active frontage to ground floor, improving activity, connectivity, and relationship to the street.
- Produce an atrium providing a space which adds character and interest to the building.
- Replace unattractive rooftop elements with a more attractive and sympathetic elevation to the additional floors.
- Provides high quality flexible office space, enabling a range of office floor sizes.
- Better facilities for cyclists / runners to encourage sustainable transport options.
- Improves the energy performance of the building, which will contribute to its longevity and make it fit for the future.
- Creating a better building, that changes the perception of the building.

We also support the applicant's commitment to re-purpose the existing building and refurbish it in the least polluting manner possible. This is welcomed by the Society.

## **2. Concerns**

The Society's concerns with the application are:

1. Mass and Scale
  - a. Impact on Views across the town
  - b. Street Views
  - c. Impact on adjacent Grade 2 listed buildings
2. Proposed redesign of the building
3. Relationship with the surrounding area, and potential outcomes of the Town Centre Masterplan.
4. Transport
5. Construction

### **2.1. Mass and Scale**

The key reason for our objection is the increase in height and mass proposed to house the 3 additional office floors. These will have a significant visual impact on the surrounding area. The existing building already is taller than its surrounding buildings. Its height impact is slightly reduced by the setbacks of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor and the greater setbacks for the 6<sup>th</sup> plant floor.

We believe the proposal in the application is over development and will be both detrimental to the town centre's local setting and the character of the town from the key surrounding views. It could also set a dangerous precedent for further taller buildings within the tightly planned town centre.

The application does not show the proposals in context of all the relevant views identified in 'Guildford Town Centre Views Supplementary Planning Document' October 2019. It includes selective views. In the Pre Application meetings with the GBC planners the applicant was asked to provide winter views so that the proposals could be accurately assessed when trees were not in leaf. This requirement does not appear to have been followed.

We believe the applicant fails to demonstrate that the proposed development integrates with its surroundings, suitably addresses the key urban gateway approach to the town and does not adversely affect the setting of St Saviour's Church a grade II listed building.

A proposal of this significance should be shown in the GBC VuCity model so the impact could be better observed and considered by the public and all interested parties.

#### **2.1.1. Impact on Views across the town**

We believe the proposed building with 3 additional floors does significantly increase the bulk and mass from the original building and has a serious impact on the local townscape, the surrounding buildings (in particular the listed buildings) and on the Guildford skyline seen from the key views within the town and into the town from the surrounding countryside.

The application should have considered all relevant views identified in the Guildford Town Centre Views SPD to show the revised mass and scale of the development and

demonstrate how the proposed development will impact the roofscape character of the town centre when viewed from the surrounding town, countryside and key areas. (The views identified in 1.0 below are as described and identified in the SPD document.)

The adopted Views SPD highlights in several references the need to

- Ensure new developments blend with the generally muted tones typically found in the town, and are appropriate according to the townscape character area in which they lie.
- Aim to improve the view through future replacement of bulky 'block-like' buildings as the opportunity arises.

This planning application includes the following view AVRs:

- View 01: View from Dapdune Wharf, looking south - winter view (both summer and winter conditions)
- View 08: View from Sydenham Road / Bright Hill, looking north
- View 11: View from Guildford Castle motte
- View A: Woodbridge Road, looking south
- View B: View looking southwest from York Road

It fails to include the important views from the Hog's Back and the Mount, viewpoints 06 and 14 below.

#### **2.1.1.1. River Corridor**

**SPD Viewpoint 01:** Dapdune Wharf, existing looking south (refer to SPD image)

St Saviours Church spire is evident in this view to the left of the Surrey Police Headquarters. 1 Onslow Street is behind the Police HQ building. The proposed increased storey heights should not appear above the Police HQ building and worsen the setting of this view and the setting of the church.



The comparative view below, included in the application, is distant so the impact of the increased height of 1 Onslow St is unfortunately difficult to observe but it is significantly higher than the Police HQ, is visually intrusive and higher than the spire of St Saviour's Church.



Visualisation: Photomontage

|                                 |  |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Viewpoint information:</b>   | Horizontal field of view: 52° (cylindrical projection) | Correct printed image size: 446 x 250mm |
| OS reference: 492231 & 150449 N | Vertical field of view: 23°                            | Camera: 28C-9272                        |
| Ground level: 35m AOD           | Enlargement factor: 90%                                | Lens: 37mm (10-1200mm)                  |
| Direction of view: 150°         | Principal distance: 812.5mm                            | Camera height: 3.5m AGL                 |
| Distance to site: 750m          | Paper size: 840 x 210mm (extended A3)                  | Date and time: 23/02/21 10:59           |

### 2.1.1.2. Approaches to the town

**SPD Viewpoint 06:** Hogs Back, existing view looking north east (refer to SPD image)

St Saviours Church is evident sitting behind the Onslow House with 1 Onslow Street to the right of the church. The increase mass and bulk of the proposed development should be shown in this view to show the impact on this view and the character of the roofscape of the town. As referred in the SPD the proposal at 1 Onslow Street should not worsen the amount of 'detractor buildings' in the town centre.





**2.1.1.3. Town Centre**

**SPD Viewpoint 11:** Castle Motte, existing looking north west (refer to SPD image)  
1 Onslow Street is located on the right of this view.



The comparative view below, included in the application, shows clearly the increased height, mass and bulk of the proposed development which is clearly dominating this view and has a detrimental impact on the town centre and character of the roofscape of the town. It also obstructs the view of the countryside.



Visualisation: Pflanzentage

|                                      |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Mapdaten Informationen</b>        | <b>Geometrische Informationen</b>                     | <b>Technische Informationen</b>                     |
| Geometrie: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Geometrische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Technische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 |
| Geometrie: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Geometrische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Technische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 |
| Geometrie: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Geometrische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 | Technische Informationen: 1000000, 1000000, 1000000 |

**SPD Viewpoint 14:** The Mount, looking east (further up the hill from the SPD viewpoint: see photo below)

1 Onslow Street sits in the centre of this view and the spire of St Saviour's Church is clearly visible behind the existing seven storey building. 1 Onslow Street is already the largest building in this view and dominates the roofscape.

The application does not include this important and significant view. The extended No 1 Onslow Street proposed building with 3 extra storeys, sitting in front of St Saviours Church will significantly impact the setting of the church and the roofscape of Guildford.





## **2.2. Street Views**

In addition to views across the town it is important that the experience at street level particularly on approach to the town is of equal importance. Most people experience the town from street level.

The Planning application selectively only includes 2 street views of the proposals from Woodbridge Road and York Road. To be able to understand the full impact of this proposal there need to be additional street viewpoints from Onslow Street looking north, Laundry Road looking east and Leapale Road looking north west as mentioned below.

**2.2.1. Viewpoint A:**

Woodbridge Road, looking south

Applicant's view as existing:



This view is important as it shows how the proposal addresses the key urban corner--the beginning of the town centre when approaching from the north.

It should be noted that No 1 Onslow Street has become a landmark building that signifies arrival in Guildford town centre, this has been reinforced by the provision of the large clock in the glazed vertical stair core which provided a civic amenity.



Applicant's view as proposed:



|                                 |   |   |  |                     |  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|---------------------|--|
| <b>Viewpoint information:</b>   | Horizontal field of view: 39° (planar projection) | Correct printed image size: 400 x 260mm | Onslow Street, Guildford                                     | Project no. A217382 |  |
| OS reference: 495489 E 150065 N | Vertical field of view: 27°                       | Camera: DMC-FZ72                        | <b>Viewpoint A:</b> View looking south along Woodbridge Road | February 2021       |  |
| Ground level: 33.5m AOD         | Enlargement factor: 100%                          | Lens: 43.5mm (20-1200mm)                |  | AVR.04-2            |  |
| Direction of view: 175°         | Principal distance: 812.5mm                       | Camera height: 1.5m AGL                 |  |                     |  |
| Distance to site: 300m          | Paper size: 420 x 297mm (A3)                      | Date and time: 04/11/20 13:35           |  |                     |  |

This view of the proposed extended building illustrates how it will dominate the townscape and causes significant visual impact on St Saviour's Church because of its increased height and mass.

The proposed North Street development will also impact the view as one travels south down Woodbridge Road. As an extant building No1 Onslow Street will act as the right-hand side of this view. As the Views SPD states "Aim to improve the view through future replacement of bulky 'block-like' buildings as the opportunity arises" this will require views through the North Street Development."

**2.2.2. Viewpoint B:**

View looking southwest from York Road

Applicant's view as existing:



Applicant's view as proposed:

This view which unfortunately is a photomontage on a poor summertime photo, underlines the absolutely major and significant impact the proposed additional height of 1 Onslow Street will have on the surrounding area especially from this area of Guildford. The building if approved would dwarf everything around this vicinity.



**2.2.3. Viewpoint C:**

Onslow Street, looking north

This view, which is not included in the application, should demonstrate the scale of the street and how the proposal sits in front of the listed St Saviour's church.

**2.2.4. Viewpoint D:**

Laundry Road, looking east

This view, which is not included in the application, should show how the proposal closes the view from the surface Bedford Road car park and show how the proposal sits beside and affects the setting of the Grade II listed St Saviour's Church.

**2.2.5. Viewpoint E:**

Leapale Road, looking north west

This view, which is not included in the application, should demonstrate the combined massing of the proposed development at 1 Onslow Street with the new North Street Development proposals. We understand that the North Street development is proposing some higher buildings on Leapale Road at this point and the combined effect on the



streetscape and the adjacent existing buildings and the listed building of Guildford Chambers. It is essential that 1 Onslow Street is considered in context of this future North Street development.

### **3. Proposed re-design of the building**

Although the building is circa 30 years old it carries its age well and in the main has been skilfully designed to be not overbearing despite its height and bulk. It is a simple cohesive design with a well built brick finishes.

Thus we agree with the statement that *The existing facade is well proportioned but the glazing is circa 30 years old, very dark tinted & will have a poor energy performance.*

We don't agree with the statement that the, *The dark plain brown coloured brickwork adds to the negative appearance of the building.* In our view the brickwork is of good quality and the lower façade of the building works very effectively. The proposal to paint the brickwork seems totally unnecessary, and it is unclear what is the driver i.e. what is the building trying to respond too.

The current roof of the building is cleverly designed with a mansard roof and lead covering that reduces the apparent height of the building, particularly from ground level. The plant room area is messy particularly when viewed from Leapale Rd and could be usefully reconfigured.

The proposed new floors, as a design, don't respect the existing design, introducing two new façade styles to the top of the building with little relationship to the lower façade plus a plant and garden area as the top floor. The proposal to add green cladding to add a "a playful twist" rather shows the shallow consideration given to the upper floors, Guildford needs considered architecture that respects the unique situation of the town.

We understand the desire to reconfigure the atrium opening up internal walls to provide more light. It is unclear if the proposed reduction in size of the atrium, which becomes almost a light well, is compensated in terms of light by the revised glazing in what is a deep building towards its southern end.

The north corner stair case has been extended, during this process it seems to have gained a box form on the top of the tower, the design of which appears crude and very much an afterthought to the original.

## **4. Relationship with the surrounding area, and potential outcomes of the Town Centre Masterplan.**

### **4.1. Entrance**

The proposed plan is to move the entrance of the building to be on Commercial Rd just near the junction with Woodbridge Road.

We see little information on how this new entrance gives access to the Town Centre—is it through the bus station or how it relates to the emerging North Street redevelopment proposals.

Also we question the use of the current main entrance which is described as bicycle parking but presumably will also serve as a staff entrance because of its position on Onslow Street and desire line to and from the railway station.

#### **4.2. Active Frontage**

We are supportive of creating an active frontage but both the roads No1 Onslow Street faces Commercial Rd and Onslow Street are not pedestrian friendly being a Bus Station exit and a urban ring road respectively. Installing glazing in place of the air vents would improve things, but it would be useful to understand what plans Guildford Borough Council have to improve the pedestrian realm in both streets as the proposed changes would achieve little without other changes.

#### **4.3. Height of Building impact on surrounding sites.**

Reduction of sunlight and daylight into Onslow Street and Woodbridge Road. The current building already overshadows parts of both these streets as shown in aerial photo below.



A rough calculation is that the overall building will be 10 metres higher but visually the elevations, disregarding the small setback of proposed 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> floors will be increased from 24m to 33m. Noting that Woodbridge Road adjacent to No 1 Onslow Street is just 15.25m wide this additional height will be oppressive and create major shadowing to the

street and to the buildings on the opposite side. Presumably there will be rights of light issues with some of these neighbouring buildings if the height is increased.

- The proposal would increase the claustrophobic, canyoning feel of Onslow Street and trap pollution even more to the detriment of office workers in the various office blocks in the area.
- The increased height also has an impact on the proposed North Street Development where overlooking of dwellings to the south and east of No 1 Onslow Street could be an issue.

#### **4.4. Environmental impact:**

Medium height and tall buildings cause wind disturbance. The higher the building the more likely it will deflect wind forces down to street level. It is likely that increasing the height of No 1 Onslow Street will affect the environment, especially for pedestrians at ground level. We also note that proposed North Street Development will be in the prevailing wind whadow of No 1 Onslow Street, where pedestrian squares are proposed. Guildford. (Note: Wind may be an issue for the proposed entertainment area on the top floor)

#### **4.5. North Street Development**

As mentioned above, although No1 Onslow Street is a stand alone project how it interacts with the proposed North Street Development in regards to mass and scale, transport and pedestrian routes is very important.

#### **5. Transport**

We support the provision of increased cycle parking. It is not clear how No 1 Onslow Street site will link to the emerging cycle network in Guildford.

#### **6. Construction**

We are concerned about the impact of construction on this key area of Guildford. Redeveloping the site will be a challenge with construction probably having to be carefully aligned with work on the North Street site, which will probably include a relocation of the bus station and the possible removal of Dominion House which is adjacent to No1 Onslow Street.

Yours Sincerely

Dr John Baylis

Secretary - Guildford Society Planning Applications Team