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## BEESTON COMMUNITY FORUM

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1<sup>st</sup> September 2016

Dear Mr Cook

RE ASPIRING COMMUNITIES- MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT COMPRISING SPORTS HALL ,  
TEACHING, PRAYER AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND ASSOCIATED OFFICES AND  
ANCILARY FACILITIES AND CREATION OF BASEMENT CAR PARK; CHANGE OF USE OF  
OFFICE BUILDING FOR TEMPORARY COMMUNITY USE DURING BUILDING WORKS-  
REFERENCE APP/N4720/W/15/3138176

We are taking this opportunity to reaffirm our previous objections to the above mentioned planning application. We hope that following the public inquiry which will take place in due course, you will reject the application

**We believe that the infrastructure of the area, which is residential with narrow streets, will not sustain a development of the size envisaged by the plans.**

### Traffic

The area cannot cope with the traffic which will be generated from this development. Indeed, Barkly Road has already had a number of traffic calming measures put in place (notably speed humps and chicanes) specifically to reduce the amount of existing traffic in the area. Also ,the new Asda store on Old Lane, and new traffic crossing on Old Lane have had an additional impact on congestion in the area around Barkly Road.

We continue to believe that there is a substantial risk that the development would be likely to lead to an increase in the level of on street parking and congestion. Owners of cars would, in our view be

more likely to use cars than public transport to travel to and from the development. We note that an important feature of the proposed development is an underground car park. We believe that motorists would be more likely to park on local streets than take the time and trouble involved in entering and leaving an underground car park.

We believe that the underground car park will not provide a solution to any issues which would be created by cars travelling to and from the proposed development, it will add to them. There is the substantial risk of congestion in the area resulting from cars entering and leaving the underground car park at the same time. In addition, there are a number of issues arising from the construction of any underground car park; steps will need to be taken to ensure that the structural soundness of adjacent buildings will not be undermined. No reassurance about these issues has been given

We believe the increase in traffic will threaten the safety of children attending St Anthony's Primary School which is situated almost adjacent to the site and Hugh Gaitskell Primary School some 500 metres away.

### **Pollution**

The increased traffic will cause higher levels of pollution. The level of pollution in Beeston is already significantly higher than the city wide average and has a high proportion of residents with respiratory dysfunction. Any further increase is unacceptable. The applicant has done nothing to address these substantial concerns

**We believe that the Local Community does not need, does not want, and has not been consulted in any meaningful way about the Development**

### **No Local Need or Demand**

Although the applicant has stated that the facilities will be for the local community, they have not demonstrated local need or demand. Indeed, considering the hostility of sections of the local community to the proposed development (as clearly demonstrated by the number of local objections to it), it is difficult to believe that the development would be used extensively by the local community. At several community meetings residents have voiced their opposition to the proposed development. We would also point out that the vast majority of the supporters of the application do not live in the Beeston area.

### **Duplication of Existing Facilities**

We believe the development would be likely to duplicate existing business or leisure facilities and hence threaten their viability. There is already an overprovision of office space in the LS11 postal area. With regard to leisure, we note that the Multi Use Games Area facilities at Hugh Gaitskell Primary School are underused; and that South Leeds Sports Centre was closed by Leeds City Council on the grounds that it was no longer viable.

### **Lack of Community Consultation and Engagement**

We must emphasise that though we wholeheartedly applaud efforts to bring people from different communities together, we believe that this facility should not be sited here, in the middle of a residential area.

We believe that the applicant's actions, since they submitted their first planning application for this site, has alienated many local residents. It is our view that the applicant has basically given up on

community consultation.

No representative of the applicant has attended our monthly meetings for a considerable amount of time (for the record, despite our strong differences with them over this matter, we have always offered a warm welcome to representatives of Aspiring Communities).

Some indication of the lack of community consultation can be found from the objection of Lisa Leonard, Head Teacher of St. Anthony's Primary School (posted on Public Access on 26th December 2014) that the applicant had not approached her about the use by the school of the facilities which would be provided by the development, which is virtually adjacent to the school

The applicant has not provided reassurance that the development will actually incorporate sporting and community facilities, as claimed in the planning application.

Indeed, we note that fund raising leaflets produced by the applicant and circulated in areas distant from the development emphasise the religious aspects of the development, but not the sporting and community facilities.

### **We are concerned that Aspiring Communities may not have the financial resources to complete the development**

#### **Lack of Funding**

We also feel that the applicant needs to give assurances that if planning permission is granted, they have the necessary financial resources to complete the development. In the absence of such assurances, the development will be left half completed, or the building of the development will take longer to build as a result of the need to raise funds whilst the development is being constructed.

### **We believe that the Local Authority will be unable to enforce restrictions on the use and numbers at the Facility**

#### **Lack of Clarity and Enforceability about the Use of the Facility itself, and the Numbers of People Using the Facility**

There has also been a lack of clarity about the number of people who would use the development, whether users of the development would be local people, or whether they would be travelling from further afield (which would only compound the problems of congestion and pollution referred to above). Although it is stated that the Islamic Learning Centre will attract 250 people for Friday Prayers, We understand that it is envisaged that the Sports Hall will be closed during Friday Prayers. This has led to concerns that the sports hall will be used by family members during Friday prayers. It is therefore difficult to accept the applicant's assertions about the maximum patronage at the development. Critically, the Leeds City Council Highways Department has said, in a comment posted on Public Access that 'I have reviewed the revised drawings submitted by the applicant and uploaded on 18 May 2015. I have no further highway comments on the layout changes which are relatively minor internal amendments. My concerns about the ability to restrict prayer room attendance to 250 people and the associated problems regarding highway safety and capacity remain.' There has been no additional information submitted on this issue. We are deeply concerned that the appropriate authority will not have the resources to enforce the maximum attendances as set out in the planning application.

Moreover, the applicant held a large scale event, reported on the South Leeds Life website; [www.southleedslife.com](http://www.southleedslife.com) with an attendance of around 600 people. How can we be certain that the

applicant would not seek to hold such events at the proposed development, with inevitable consequences for congestion and pollution?

Additionally, , we understand that another community organisation has evidence indicating that the actual purpose of the building would be to serve as the National Headquarters for a branch of Islam. In our opinion, it is not unreasonable to expect the applicant to provide a detailed rebuttal of these claims and also give local residents the confidence that the development would indeed be multi faith, as the applicant claims

### **We believe that Aspiring Communities went to 'Appeal' to avoid Leeds Planning Department rejecting the Application**

#### **'Non-Determination' caused by Complete Failure to Answer Questions about the Application from the Leeds Planning Department**

The applicant has of course appealed to yourselves on the grounds of non-determination, rather than have the planning application determined by Leeds City Council. We find their action very bizarre and believe that the non-determination of the application has mainly been caused by the failure of the applicant to answer reasonable questions from Leeds City Council and other organisations. Indeed, Leeds City Council generously agreed to extend the deadline for the determination of the application from 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015 to 1st April 2015, then again to 31st May 2015 and again to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015 in order to enable the applicant to answer a number of important questions, but the applicant nevertheless failed to do so. We believe that Leeds City Council would have been fully justified in taking the application to a plans panel meeting, and seeking the rejection of the application on the grounds of lack of information.

The communications between the applicant and Leeds City Council provide substantial evidence of the applicant's failure to answer reasonable questions as follows:-

1. The Planning Department's letter of 16th October 2014 to Zareen Rahman, Aspiring Communities' Architect requested responses to six specific points
  - 1) please provide a plan showing existing and proposed levels (all to be shown on the same plan for ease of comparison) in those areas where levels are proposed to change. The plan also needs to include spot levels off-site, particularly to the rear of the building, to allow comparison.
  - 2) Sections through the site from front to back, across the site from side to side are required, as well as a section through the building showing all floors including the basement.
  - 3) An elevational drawing is required showing the proposed building and neighbouring properties.
  - 4) please clarify the proposed use of the basement below the sports hall and ground floor circulation/equipment store area. It is not clear if these are to be dug out and what, if anything, they are proposed to be used for if so. Sections through the building showing these basement areas would be helpful.
  - 5) On plans PL-03 and PL-04 there are windows missing from the rear circulation core which are shown on the corresponding elevation drawings. Please amend these to show the windows.
  - 6) Some of the floor plan and elevation drawings have been labelled as both proposed and existing and proposed. Please re-label the plans as it could cause confusion for members of the public

2. Phil Crabtree's e mail of 18th December 2014 to Zareen Rahman states that 'At this stage, despite the lengthy discussions you refer to, we still do not consider that the information you have submitted to date provides sufficient clarity to allow this assessment to be made, as identified in the requests for further information which have been raised by Jill and colleagues in highways.
3. Jillian Rann's letter of 12th January 2014 to Zareen Rahman refers to a number of matters which were still outstanding, including highways and design issues, information relating to the proposed underground car park, and the sequential test. She proposed an extension to the deadline for the determination of the planning application to 1st April 2014
4. Leeds City Council then extended the deadline for the determination of the planning application from 1st April 2014 to 31st May 2014 to allow the applicants further time to submit revised plans and allow a sequential test to be made (as explained in iii above) this sequential test had been identified as outstanding on 12th January
5. An e mail of from Andrew Dmoch of Leeds City Council (12th February) refers to the 'significant risk' that worshippers at Friday Prayers will exceed 250 and that no mechanism had been identified in planning terms that would address the situation if 400 worshippers arrive, with many arriving by car
6. An e mail dated 9th February from Andrew Dmoch to the developer states that 'your assertion of how the 400 worshipper limit was derived does not accord with my understanding, having gone through the previous application documents and correspondence'
7. An email dated 27th March 2015 from Ian Cyhanko to Zareen Rahman states that 'we are still awaiting the submission of the sequential test and revised and additional plans which address the issues raised at a meeting you had before Christmas'
8. A letter from Ian Cyhanko to Chris Weetman [planning advisor to the applicant] identifies number of outstanding issues including highways, the travel plan, design and underground car parking. The letter also refers to reservations about using planning conditions to restrict uses and occupancy of the building
9. An e mail from Steven Butler of Leeds City Council to Chris Weetman , [planning advisor to the applicant] (15th June) states that 'I consider from the outset that there has been a lack of clarity from the applicants as to how this proposal will operate'

Moreover, Leeds City Council's letter of 28th October to Chris Weetman, makes a number of points; notably:-

1. "what is clearly needed is clarity about the proposed use, how it will be brought about and what the benefits and impact will be on the local community".
2. "What is not so clear to me is who this centre is for and where people will be drawn from to use it".
3. "it is also clear that groups from outside the local area and across the city have been engaged"
4. "do you have any calculation as to the likely volume and the number of lorry movements needed to remove excess materials from site?"

The applicant chose to make an appeal, rather than answering the outstanding questions, and thus enabling the planning authority to come to a decision about the application.

We believe that the applicant is seeking to impose a development which is neither wanted nor needed by the majority of local residents, or the local community. The overwhelming majority of people in the local community see no need for this development and see that they will only suffer from negative consequences if it goes ahead. We note that most of the key figures in Aspiring Communities, and their advisors, come from the Greater Manchester area, not from Leeds or Beeston. We believe very strongly that for the reasons given in this letter, the applicants have chosen the wrong area for a development of the type which they propose. Moreover, their haphazard and inept community

consultation has alienated local residents. We therefore urge you to reject this application

Yours sincerely

ROBERT J.W. WINFIELD