

**Submission from:
Gillian Williamson.**



**Section 62A Planning Application: S62A/22/0000002
Former Friends' School, Mount Pleasant Rd, Saffron
Walden CB11 3EB**

Dear Sirs,

I do not have any fundamental objection to the change of use of this site to residential, nor to the conversion of the main Victorian former school buildings to flats.

I am, however, concerned that the application is only for a part of the entire former Friends' School site, leaving the future of the large area of playing fields extremely uncertain. You will be aware of course that an application to develop this part of the site was refused permission by Uttlesford District Council. The whole site is extremely important one in the context of the town and deserves better than a piecemeal approach.

I am also of the opinion that this application is of an insufficiently high standard of design and lacks crucial details. There is no similar large-scale site that could come forward to meet housing need in such a central and accessible location, It is therefore absolutely critical that this site is developed to the highest possible standards to safeguard the future of the community and the amenities of Saffron Walden and the surrounding area, to avoid exacerbating existing traffic problems, and to ensure ecological balance and sustainability. I do not consider that the current application as it stands at present meets these criteria.

I have serious concerns about the detail, and indeed lack of it, in the application. I believe these need to be addressed by revisions before permission, if granted, and by conditions attached to any permission. I list these briefly below:

1. There is no affordable housing. Saffron Walden is an area of high house prices with many younger people and those in low wage employment locked out of the market. This has a knock-on effect on the ability of employers to recruit staff in many sectors. Saffron Walden already has a fairly elderly population (I myself am over 60) and this is not sustainable without a younger population to provide vital services.
2. The vehicle access points to the site have not been stress-tested. The applicant is merely relying on the existing access points used by the former school. These were problematic at the time with vehicles making a potentially large number of different manoeuvres close to the busy Mount Pleasant Road/Borough Lane/Debden Road junction - a busy one with traffic lights. 96 dwellings will result in a very large number

of day-long vehicle movements. It is not reasonable to expect other residents in the immediate area (a Conservation Area) area to bear the brunt of these in terms of access or further unattractive traffic control measures.

3. The proposed layout of the site is dominated by hard-surfaced car parking. This should be amended. There should be secure cycle parking. This is a site close to the amenities of Saffron Walden and travel other than by car should be strongly encouraged by its design.

4. A site of this size should contain high-quality areas for children's formal and informal play. This is especially important as so many of the 96 units are flats. Even if the occupants do not have children, there will be visitors such as grandchildren.

5. There is no guarantee without conditioning/s.106 agreements that the leisure facilities will be retained and improved as claimed, nor is there any detail of how their availability for public use will be ensured. The sports facilities of the former school were available for some public use and their loss has been keenly felt.

6. The design of the new housing is pedestrian and does not include the latest energy-saving measures. The proposals for landscaping and planting are vague. On a site of this nature, it should be the aim to create an award-winning development rather than an adequate one. The adjacent The Avenue is an example of the sort of standard we should expect. An important condition would be the removal of PDRs to prevent piecemeal alterations to the overall scheme and protect the environment of the site.

7. I believe the conversion of Croydon House into four flats to be over-development. Although not listed Croydon House is one of the oldest houses on Mount Pleasant Road, predating the Friends' School by some 40 years. Built in c. 1840, and originally known as Belle Vue, it is an attractive early Victorian brick and flint villa that sits neatly in its plot and with the grain of the late Victorian houses on the street. The best future for this building and the surrounding Conservation Area would be to return it to use as a single dwelling. The 'next best' alternative would be no more than 2 flats in order to retain its appearance and that of its wider setting.

I hope you will take these points into consideration in reaching a decision.

Yours faithfully,

