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**Sent:** 21 July 2022 19:16

**To:** Section 62A Applications <section62a@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>

**Subject:** S62A/22/0000002 Former Friends' School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden CB11 3EB

Thank you for the opportunity to add to this debate. I hope that I am not too late! I am writing to voice my objection to the proposed development of the Friends' School site in Saffron Walden. My fundamental issue is with the superficiality of the Heritage Statement. The document was commissioned by Chase Homes. It is keen to point out that the buildings are not statutorily listed. It does, however, recognise that the buildings are of local architectural and historical interest. Indeed, the report goes as far as to say that the proposals will ensure a viable future for this 'heritage asset'.

My point is that this report deliberately, through omission, undervalues the historical importance and heritage value of the property.

Firstly, the report fails to recognise the role of George Stacey Gibson in the decision to build a Quaker school on this site. My understanding is that he gifted the land for *the purposes of education*. This proposed development insults his generosity and intention. I do not understand how a proposal for an alternative use is being considered. George Gibson served the community with faithfulness and great energy. Surely his wishes still hold weight today! To agree to these proposals would be an abandonment of his principles. It would be to ignore the wishes of a key servant of the town.

Secondly, to merely view the central building as a school opened in 1879 ignores the fundamental, historical value of Friends' School. My point is that this building needs to be understood as part of a rare history and chronology. Please bear with me. In 1702, John Bellers, a Quaker and cloth merchant, philosopher and member of the Royal Society set up an establishment in Clerkenwell to serve poor children. He insisted that they learned practical skills as well as reading and writing. They had 'a suitable education'. Karl Marx describes Bellers as a "veritable phenomenon."

In 1786, the school moved to Islington. It was now called Friends' School. In 1825, it moved once more to Croydon. Games were encouraged, including cricket and football. When Croydon became too unhealthy due to an attack of typhoid, the committee explored various alternatives. It was George Gibson's offer of a site "beautifully situated upon a hill above the town" that clinched the move to Saffron Walden.

All previous sites have now been destroyed and their use changed. The only remaining artefacts of the school's previous incarnations are the gates from Croydon and the clock that greet all-comers at the end of the Avenue. Both are essential in understanding the weight of historical continuity. This message is totally ignored in the so-called Heritage Statement.

Ultimately, my point is that the heritage and significance of these buildings must be viewed beyond their brick façade. To interfere with their interior damages their rich heritage. Moreover, the main buildings should be viewed within the context of the games fields that surround them. All of this was Gibson's gift and his legacy.

Many Thanks,

Tom Plant