

West Leigh Residents Association

The Bell Hotel and Land Adj 20 Leigh Hill, Leigh-on-Sea

Appeal reference: A/07/2042995
Southend Council ref: SOS/06/01027/FUL

*The Association was submitted a comment on **process** on the Planning Inspectorate's website. We will repeat this comment here.*

We are dismayed that it is proposed that this appeal be decided by exchange of correspondence. The reasons why we maintain that this appeal should be dealt with by public inquiry are:-

** The strength of local feeling against both of the proposals is considerable.*

** The proposals are for major flats developments in an area where such schemes are highly contentious.*

** The site is one of great local prominence and any building in this location will have considerable impact on the local area.*

** The development will impact on a Conservation Area which is highly valued by residents and visitors to Leigh.*

** The impact on the townscape will be immense.*

** A very large majority on the Development Control Committee were against the plans.*

In the interests of openness and democracy we ask you to arrange for this appeal to be heard in public so that residents can hear what is being said and make their own verbal contributions to the deliberations.

We strongly object to this planning application for the following reasons:

1) The blocks of flats will be detrimental to the visual aspect within the Leigh Conservation Area.

The site occupies a very prominent position in Leigh Old Town. The vista from Leigh Beach up to Leigh Church is one of the most important in the area and highlights the traditional and historic nature of the Conservation Area; this view is much valued by residents and visitors alike. The tall and massive blocks of flats that are proposed across the width of the site will be seriously detrimental to this aspect. This is particularly the case as there will be little remission from the very high and solid façade presented towards the beach (the small gaps between the blocks will only mitigate when glimpsed from a position directly in front of them).

When viewed from Leigh Hill and Leigh Park Road, the western block of flats will project very considerably to the west of the Bell Hotel resulting in a significant loss of view across the estuary; this projection will also detract from the appearance of the Hotel itself and from the architectural harmony of the road junction. This western block will also dominate and obscure the view from New Road looking east towards the estuary.

The view to the Grade II listed building (28 Leigh Hill) will also be seriously damaged as it will be enclosed and dominated by the blocks of flats.

Rather than reinforcing the historic context, this scheme will subvert it. Indeed, the view of historic Leigh seen from the beach area across the Conservation Area and up to Leigh Church will be completely obliterated.

2) The blocks of flats will be out of keeping within the Leigh Conservation Area.

New buildings within a conservation area must conserve the nature and quality of the area and must be sympathetic in their design and form. The proposed blocks of flats fulfil none of these requirements. The design comments made about "overall morphology", "contemporary twist" and "contextually appropriate" may be clever jargon but should not obscure the fact that the blocks, instead of enhancing the Conservation Area, will, by their inappropriate design, height and bulk, detract from it. They will be far too big and dominating and they will be detrimental to the street scene, townscape and the historical nature of the surrounding area.

3) The blocks of flats will be much too high.

The blocks will be considerably higher than the old buildings that were demolished some years ago and, as the architect's plans show, will even appear above the roofs of existing buildings when viewed from Leigh Hill. As the land drops away significantly towards the railway, alongside which these blocks are to be located, their actual height will be considerable and will appear very dominating to people on the beach and railway walkway. The pre-existing buildings consisted of low cottages and one house built well towards the eastern boundary of the site; to liken the proposed blocks to these is misleading. More importantly, whereas the long demolished house occupied but a small area to one side, the tall blocks of flats will occupy the whole width of the very wide site.

4) The flats will have a negative impact on the amenities of the neighbouring dwellings.

Little notice is taken of the adverse impact the scheme will have on the amenities of existing residents. That there will be over-shadowing of neighbouring properties resulting from the proposed blocks of flats is recognised by the planning officers. However this overshadowing is not in any way comparable to the situation prior to the demolition of the old buildings. A comparison with the situation all those years ago is not only specious but also, aren't things meant to be getting better? This massive scheme is of a completely different scale to the pre-existing situation and we are surprised that this wasn't emphasised in the officers' report.

5) There will be insufficient amenity space.

The amenity areas being provided fall well short of standard requirements. To suggest that this shortfall is mitigated by the proximity of Leigh Beach is a weak justification. Is it seriously being suggested the residents will walk up to Leigh Hill and back over the railway bridge whenever they need a breath of air? This scheme represents a serious over-development of the site.

6) There will be insufficient parking and increased risk to road users at an already dangerous junction.

The parking provision is inadequate especially for the hotel and its staff. Any hotel visitors will most probably be travelling by car. As the hotel provides none of the facilities normally expected at a hotel, there is a high risk that it will become a block of bedsits; this will cause yet more parking problems. In an area of parking stress, the number of vehicles using the site will exacerbate an already bad situation. The inadequate parking and unsatisfactory provision for refuse collection and servicing means that the resulting traffic congestion will pose significant dangers to other users of the public highway. Vehicles will be parked on the street and may well have to reverse on to a busy road. It should be noted that the Council's Highways Department recommend refusal.

7) The levels of civic contributions are inadequate.

The money that is being sought to compensate the community for the negative effects of this scheme is clearly risible. How many teachers and educational facilities can a one-off payment of £27,068.63 buy? What amenity facilities can be bought for £36364.60? No compensation is being sought for the extra load on our congested roads and for other aspects of the Borough's infrastructure. We are talking of a multi-million pound development here and the level of compensation should be commensurate with that; it should not be counted in pennies.

The argument that the affordable housing requirement can be ignored is very surprising. The current rules must be applied just as developers would if the rules worked in their favour! At least two affordable units, units that the Borough desperately needs, must be demanded.

This proposal runs against the very constraints that the Council applied to developments in the Leigh Conservation Area.

We ask you in the strongest terms to reject this inappropriate and damaging scheme.

For West Leigh Residents' Association,

Eddie Cornish, Chairman