

Guildford cathedral appeal dismissed

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Plans to build 124 new homes around Guildford Cathedral have been thrown out by an inspector as the proposal would cause a negative impact on the distinct character and history of the building. Developers Vivid appealed after Guildford Borough Council refused the application in March 2023.

The government’s planning inspectorate has dismissed the plans, which was said would financially support the cathedral. Tom Bristow, the inspector, concluded the proposal would result in a “clear adverse effect” to the historical and natural setting and significance of the Cathedral’s “lofty, dominance” and “imposing” character.

Concerns were raised that of the 124 new homes, including 94 flats, Vivid intended to build, they “would have little affinity with the prevailing characteristics of the area”.

Mr Bristow gave great benefit to the community value of the Grade II listed grounds as locals said it was a “well-used public space”. He added that the “semi-natural and rugged state” of the cathedral grounds was “distinct and rare” in comparison with more formally landscaped, maintained land in the area.

Tristen Samuels, Group Development and New Business Director at Vivid Homes, said: “We remain proud of the proposals we put forward to deliver highly-sustainable new homes in Guildford – including 40% affordable which is so desperately needed. We will consider the findings of the Inspector’s report in the coming days.”

The inspector also found the money generated from the development would bring in just over a third of the £3,570,000 the cathedral needs for building repairs. Mr Bristow said: “Irrespective of the outcome of the scheme, the Cathedral will continue to be predominantly reliant on other sources of funding for upkeep.”

Interim Dean, the Venerable Stuart Beake, said the way forward is “challenging” and cast doubt on if the cathedral would be able to “operate in the same way”. He said an additional £150,000 was needed each year to cover the shortfall in day-to-day costs at the cathedral.

Mr Beake added: “Whilst naturally disappointed by the outcome, the cathedral chapter is determined to carry on delivering the mission of the cathedral in the community.”

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