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Village divide on Parade

17 September 2024

Plans to demolish and rebuild a shopping parade in Oxshott, has been met with controversy among locals, with some residents decrying it as a “monstrosity” that would be “entirely out of place in a quaint Surrey village.”

Nearly 240 letters have been written to Elmbridge Borough Council (EBC) with around 190 against and 134 supporting the application. Oxshott locals agree the “tired, old and ugly” Heath Building could do with upgrading but they have opposing ideas about what the development should look like.

Built in the 1960s, the two-storey Heath Building is of a brick, modernist design with a flat roof. It currently hosts five operating retail units and five residential flats, three of which are occupied.

The application is seeking to replace the existing Heath Building parade with nine residential flats, four retail units with car parking and a gym. In redeveloping the site the applicant, Heath Buildings Ltd, hopes the “high quality buildings” will attract more footfall and “ensure the vitality and viability” of the High Street.

Locals support a development of sorts, but not at any cost. Residents argued the size of the building is “ridiculous” and would completely dominate and destroy the street scene, and look “entirely out of place in a quaint Surrey village”.

Comparing the development to the equivalent of a “Marriott Hotel being ‘dumped’ in our high street”, one man argued the development will have a profound impact on neighbouring residents living “in the shadow of this monstrosity”.

But a resident who was in favour said: “Oxshott High Street is the heart of the village but the buildings are ‘tatty’. [This development] would enhance the high street.”

Council officers have recommended the proposal for refusal due to the height, bulk and the architectural design being “incongruous” with the character of the area. They added the style of the development would result in a “harmful” loss of privacy, create an “unneighbourly and overbearing impact” to other properties.

A previous application was refused in December 2023. EBC also rejected the application because it did not fully show it could secure private refuse collection for the residential units or that there would be no loss of biodiversity like trees.

Planning documents detail the applicant’s vision of a “traditional” building which reflects the “imposing and often neo-classical/Georgian style houses” in the area. Responding to the previous refusal of the scheme, the applicant has designed a ‘pitched roof’ slanting from the centre, to lower the overall height of the building.

The three-storey development is proposed to be two metres taller than other buildings on the high street. But the applicant said there would be “no harm” in introducing a “slightly taller building” on the high street as there was not a consistent level.

But people have still taken opposition, one resident said: “The Real Voice of Oxshott has spoken and it’s a ‘NO’”. Others have voiced persistent concerns around the height and overall bulk of the proposal. One resident criticised the plans as “excessive and overwhelming” with “little architectural merit”.

Concerns were also raised about losing trees around the retail parade, some with tree protection orders (TPOs) like the walnut tree.

Although the council’s tree officer made no initial objections to the scheme, a late submission by Midgarth Residents’ Association (MRA) found the proposed development would result in a detrimental impact on protected trees. This is because it is claimed that the building’s height would reduce growing space and harm the survival of the trees. Taking the report on board, officers have added the concerts around tree preservation as an additional reason for refusal.

Those supporting the plans argue the high street and the building is in “desperate” need for renovation and the investment will spur on economic and business opportunities in the village. A resident argued that “as one of the richest postcodes in the country”, the “quality” upgrade plans was exactly what the residents of Oxshott “should expect”.

Others say the building “needs to be updated” and they would rather have a company which has already invested in the community than an outside developer or a national chain. A resident claimed residents will “lose [the] high street” with all the independent shops if the application is not approved, as national retailers or large-scale development will take over.

Councillors debated the proposal at the south area planning sub-committee on September 11, but referred it to be decided at full planning committee later in the year.

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