

Helensburgh Community Council (HCC)



"Helensburgh - Be Better : Be Excellent"

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Local Review Body
Argyll & Bute Council
Kilmory
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26 February 2010

To : Argyll & Bute Council Local Review Body

PROPOSED HELENSBURGH AMBULANCE STATION
Review Reference Number : 09/0002/LRB
Reference Number of Planning Application : 09/00790/DET

HELENSBURGH COMMUNITY COUNCIL - FINAL WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The HCC warmly welcomed the planning application for a new, purpose built Ambulance Station located on the site of the Victoria Infirmary in Helensburgh. In the eyes of local residents this is long overdue. A modern, well equipped and purpose built Ambulance Station on an integrated health service site would only sustain and enhance the provision of efficient and effective health care for residents in Helensburgh and the surrounding area.

1.2 The HCC understands that even a modest change to the position of the proposed building within the Victoria Infirmary site would necessitate going through the planning process again. The submission of revised plans would obviously mean a short delay in the building of the new Station. However the HCC does NOT understand why this should result in its loss to Helensburgh - a claim raised by Councillor Freeman on a number of occasions following the refusal of planning permission by the Argyll & Bute Council Development Services Department in Blairvadach in 2009. But : so far a claim not publicly made by the Scottish Ambulance Service itself. Is the Ambulance Service now in a

position to support or deny this implied threat? Is it right as Councillor Freeman seems to be saying that the requirements of the Scottish planning system should be discarded in face of an implied threat?

If a second planning application has to be submitted, the HCC would hope that the planning system could be sufficiently flexible to allow the plans to be fast tracked.

1.3 The HCC is disappointed that the SAS has not adopted a more constructive approach at a much earlier stage in the application process when sitting down with Argyll and Bute Council planners. It is difficult to understand why the applicants could not have arrived at decisions regarding a position on the site which accords with their operational requirements but where it would not obscure the original Grade B Listed building and also the need for a good, imaginative building design. In fact a letter of 18 September 2009 from the acting chief executive of the SAS to the HCC Chair could be read (and was read by the HCC) as a willingness to sit down with the Council planners to arrive a mutually satisfactory solution.

The HCC therefore continues to have strong reservations about important aspects of the proposed Ambulance station and believes that any difficulties they might present can be overcome.

2. THE SITE POSITION OF THE PROPOSED AMBULANCE STATION

2.1 The HCC objects strongly to the positioning of the proposed building some 20 metres directly in front of the late 19th century Victoria Infirmary, a Leiper designed Grade B Listed Building. In this proposed position the new building would obscure the lower half of the Infirmary from East King Street, making it largely invisible.

2.2 The proposed building does not sit well with the surrounding local urban landscape and is not sympathetic to it. The Leiper building stands towards the north and top end of an open space with an attractive garden immediately in front. Its position within the overall local landscape of the site shows the Infirmary to its best advantage. Its placing has rightness about it and has the added advantage that everyone accessing the site from East King Street has the benefit of an unrestricted view of both the Infirmary building and its fine setting.

2.3 The proposed new Ambulance Station does not compliment, nor is it in harmony with the other buildings on the site, particularly the old Infirmary building. Argyll and Bute Council Policy LP COM 1 (Community Facility Development) clearly states that there is a presumption in favour of new or improved community facilities provided they *"respect the landscape/town landscape character and amenity of the surrounding area"*.

2.4 The Infirmary site has seen considerable development in recent years but with remarkably little degradation of its overall landscape setting and the positioning of the fine Infirmary building within it :

- Apart from the conservatory attached to the Jeannie Deans Unit little has changed to the view from East King Street. Most of the Infirmary can still be seen
- The view from the west remains unchanged in that the Infirmary can only be seen from the access road and not before
- While the recent clinic and the Jeannie Deans Unit occupy most of the east part of the overall site the view of them is blocked by houses further along East King Street. And ; in former days there was a 2 storey children's unit which would have blocked the view from the east.

The HCC wishes to see the new Ambulance Station kept within the Victoria Infirmary site, but moved from its proposed location so that it does not obstruct the view of the Infirmary building itself.

2.4 The HCC suggests there are three possible locations within the Victoria Infirmary site which could satisfy the Ambulance Station's need for efficiency and yet not compromise the view of the Listed Building:

- (i) Immediately to the west of the main access road and between it and the site boundary. The proposed building could be slightly offset from East King Street leaving some hard standing for ambulances between it and the road. If necessary, the proposed building could be a two storey structure (as with fire stations), leaving the ground floor area as parking for ambulances. This has the major advantage of allowing fast, direct access onto East King Street which the SAS have said is of key importance when responding to "blue light" emergencies.
- (ii) It could be placed between the Jeannie Deans building and the clinic towards the north east corner of the site. The resulting loss of car parking space could be made up by converting some of the green space in the lower centre of the site to a landscaped car park with a permeable surface and a good quantity of green shrubs and small trees to enhance its appearance.
- (iii) The long site between the Jeannie Deans building and East King Street. While this would necessitate the loss of some trees again it would allow direct access on to East King Street

All of these solutions would allow for the Infirmary building to continue to be viewed from East King Street.

3. PROPOSED BUILDING

3.1 The proposed Ambulance Station looks more suited to an industrial estate than to be co-located in an enviable local landscape and next to a building designed by a famous architect whose work adorns other parts of Helensburgh. Policy LP ENV 13a (Development Impact on

Listed Buildings) outlines that development affecting a Listed Building or its setting shall preserve the building or its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses. Where development would affect a heritage asset or its setting the developer will be expected to satisfactorily demonstrate that the impact of the development upon that asset has been assessed and that measures will be undertaken to preserve and enhance the special interest of the asset.

3.2 The poor appearance of the proposed building is partly down to the finishing materials specified in the planning application which include a brick clip cladding and a grey plastisol insulated panel roof. These materials totally lack distinction and are not in harmony with the fine listed building of the Victorian era immediately behind it. Or indeed with the other buildings on the site.

Suggested improvements include :

- **Walls of reconstituted sandstone**
- **A glass frontage facing East Clyde Street**
- **Facing materials similar to those used in the new Lomond School Pavilion and the new clubhouse for the Helensburgh Sailing Club**
- **Roofing materials which compliment the slates used on the Infirmary building**

3.3 The HCC position is based on its recent Helensburgh Design Statement (a copy was enclosed with the previous HCC Written Submission dated 10 February 2010) which describes the building characteristics it wishes to see in all significant developments in the town. Of which this is one. The Statement is soundly based on what has been written in recent years on the subject by the Scottish Government, Argyll & Bute Council and others and applied that to Helensburgh. The Statement is NOT therefore a list of the likes and dislikes of the Community Council or individual Community Councillors.

4. ACCESS AND PARKING

4.1 From a memo sent on 4 February 2010 to Stephanie Glen, Argyll & Bute Council Planning Officer, by Campbell Divertie, Council Technical Officer, the HCC understands that improved vehicle access is possible at different locations within the Victoria Infirmary site :

- (i) The main access road could be re-aligned
- (ii) The existing east vehicle access could be improved and a link could be constructed into the north east corner of the site. This could allow for a one-way perimeter road around the whole site.

4.2 As regards parking, from Mr Divertie's memo of 4 February, the HCC understands that adjustments to the placing of the proposed new building would not result in any loss of parking places.

If additional parking has to be provided and has to encroach on the current green space, the space should be sympathetically landscaped with shrubs and small trees.

5. SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

5.1 The HCC is most disappointed that the Ambulance Service architects do not appear to have anticipated the opposition to, and criticism of, their proposals in what is mainly a residential location. We just do not understand why its proposal has been ignored for the applicant and Council planners to meet face-to-face and resolve their clear and obvious differences. Planning in the 21st century is about engaging with the community, the exploration of options and producing buildings which respect and enhance the local landscape. The old top down approach will just not do any more.

Throughout, the HCC has aimed to secure an Ambulance Station in Helensburgh but one that is worthy of the site, the town in general and which does not obscure the fine old Victoria Infirmary Building, a Grade B Listed Victorian Leiper building. We do not believe it is too late for such a meeting of minds to take place before the LRB hearing on 11 March.

6. CONCLUSION

Helensburgh Deserves Better!

I confirm that the Helensburgh Community Council wishes to appear at the scheduled LRB Hearing on the 11th March at the Victoria Halls, Helensburgh.

Yours sincerely

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Enclosures:

- Memo from Campbell Divertie to Stephanie Glen, Argyll and Bute Council and dated 04 February 2010
- Argyll and Bute Council Policy LP ENV 13 (a) - Development Impact on Listed Buildings
- Argyll and Bute Council Policy LP COM 1 - Community Facility Development
- Letter from Scottish Ambulance Service to HCC, dated 18 September 2009

