

Chairman – Steve Speakman
Secretary – Rob Hardman
Treasurer – Serge Njegovan

Manchester Civic Society



4 February 2021

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Dear Mr Griffin

129020/FO/2020 | Erection of 1 no. 13 storey building and 1 no. part 4 and part 5 storey building to form purpose built student accommodation | Oakley, 188 Wilmslow Rd, Fallowfield, Manchester M14 6LJ

Manchester Civic Society OBJECTS to the above proposal, on the following grounds:

1. Harm to the Character and Appearance of the Area

Fallowfield originally, alongside Rusholme and its Conservation Area of Victoria Park, housed a choice selection of grand villas, inhabited by the great and good of Manchester. The archive <https://rusholmearchive.org/>

includes the Fallowfield Brow and Oak Drive localities, (adjacent to Oakley) as component element of the whole development. The historic photographs in the archive confirm this status.

Sadly, many of the Fallowfield villas, including one on Oak Drive, occupied by the architect of the Town Hall, Waterhouse, were lost before Conservation Areas were established. Almost all of the villas along Wilmslow Road, and those on immediately adjacent developments, have gone.

Nikolaus Pevsner observed that Oakley was 'a large early c19 Gothic house in its own grounds, one of the only survivors of a number of large, detached villas of this date in the area.' Thus, although Oakley is a non-designated heritage asset, it is at the upper end of this category.

It is thus even more important that, Oakley, the principal remaining villa along Fallowfield's Wilmslow Road, should not be demeaned and overshadowed by the collection of large and unsympathetic buildings envisaged here.

What is proposed is well-illustrated in a CGI at page 15 of the Applicant's Drainage Strategy Report. I append a copy. Despite its understating of the height of the 13 storey tower, it shows well how it dwarfs Oakley, large though that villa is.

The image also identifies how the setting of Oakley will be utterly compromised by the collection of tall buildings massed behind it. These again are huge in comparison with the villa, and also with the 1937 extension which is to be demolished. That is sympathetic in height and appearance, with its three storeys ending, in a flat roof, at a height below the gable peak of the two storey villa. In contrast the four and five storey buildings, with pitched roofs on top, dominate the villa.

The footprint of these three towers removes most of the setting to the rear of Oakley.

In addition, the 13 storey tower will dominate the surrounding parkland and built environment in a manner totally unsympathetic to the appearance and character of the area.

2. Environmental Damage

Oakley occupies a site bordered on two sides by Platt Fields. We agree with the comments made by the Rusholme and Fallowfield Civic Society, at page 3 of their submission, on the vulnerability of many of the sycamores, within Platt Fields, but at the boundary with the Oakley site, should this proposal be built out. Many could not survive.

Loss and damage to the green environment of Fallowfield reduces the opportunity for wildlife and wildlife corridors.

3. Tall Buildings

It would be a sad departure if the Council changed stance over its current practice of concentrating tall buildings in the city centre, albeit with choosing to treat Hulme as a city centre area in this respect.

The nearby 'Toast Rack', the former Hollins College on Old Hall lane, is a mere 7 storeys. A 13 storey building is totally out of place on the edge of Platt Fields and would mark a departure from the council's attitude to building tall in the suburbs.

4. Rusholme and Fallowfield Civic Society's Objection

Manchester Civic Society is in full agreement with the very comprehensive objection to this scheme made by the Rusholme and Fallowfield Civic Society.

5. Future Uncertainties

This proposal has surfaced at a time of flux in planning, both in general, with significant post-pandemic changes in society likely to bring a flight to the suburbs and beyond as city centre working declines.

Within Greater Manchester, uncertainty also reigns. The GMSF is still undecided, with new challenges facing a third vision for the conurbation. Meanwhile, Manchester's Local Plan is in part constrained by the GMSF uncertainties.

The overarching changes to planning (mainly housing) envisaged in the White Paper add to the uncertainty.

At a very local level, the plans for the Toast Rack's renovation for residential use, and the proposed residential block in a corner of that site have not been proceeded with.

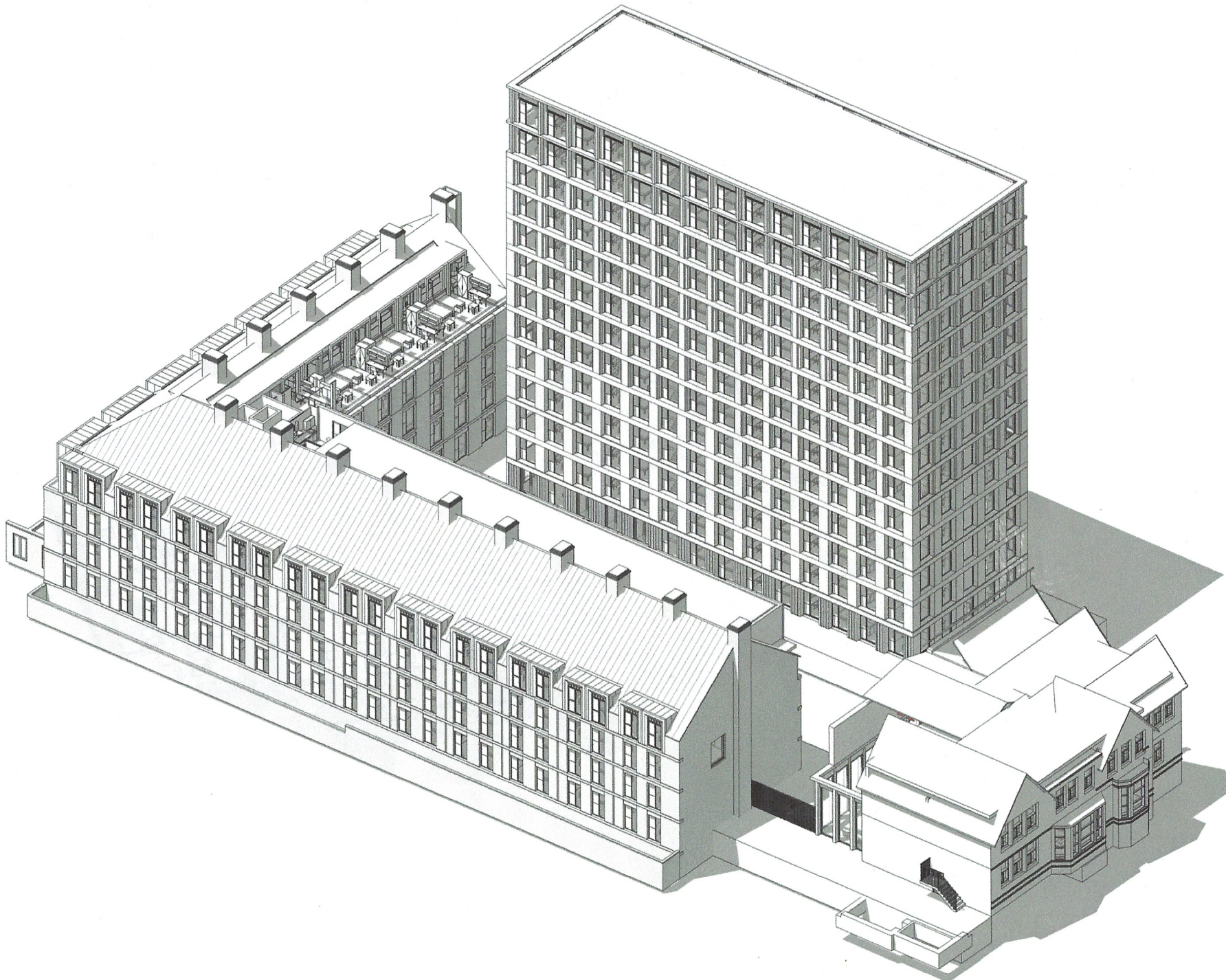
Manchester Civic Society believes that this is the wrong time to give the go-ahead to residential apartment buildings of such massing, concentration and dominance in a suburban setting which still retains much of its ambience, despite the loss of most of its villas.

We hope that the Officers and Elected Members will see fit to refer this proposal back, for a radical rethink.

Yours sincerely,

(Dr) M M F Collier
Vice Chairman





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