

Unicorn Response to MSV Planning Application for Chorlton Baths

Application 136791/FO/2023


Unicorn Grocery, 89 Albany Road
Manchester M21 0BN

May 2023

Unicorn Grocery Workers' Cooperative is a well-known award winning independent wholefood grocery which has been operating in Chorlton since 1996, and which provides a key service for the local community. We offer decent affordable food and a model of trade that is more just and sustainable than is the norm.

Our site borders the southern area of the baths development and the existing baths building shares a party wall with Unicorn⁽⁵⁾. Therefore we are going to be the area most affected by the redevelopment of the baths.

With recent events and on-going trends, the economy and vitality of the Chorlton local district is brittle and vulnerable. It is crucial for the continued viability of the area that large developments such as the baths are done well, so that they positively contribute to the area, via their sense of community, provision of freely accessible community facilities (for example small gardens and sitting areas where anyone is free to sit and rest, such as our garden outside Unicorn), and enhancement of place. There is a danger that new developments exploit the current reputation of Chorlton but then undermine it.

We are extremely pleased to see high quality social and affordable housing coming to the Chorlton community and have a keen interest in this development. Being at the heart of the community, the continued well-being of Chorlton is such an important issue for Unicorn, and we are keen for MSV to get it right.

In particular, up until later 2022 Unicorn was in negotiations with MSV to rent part of their ground floor as an extension of our shop. At the eleventh hour MSV changed its plans and withdrew from the pending agreement, depriving the development of the main aspect of community function, which would activate the street. We had shared with MSV and MCC how the additional space would enable Unicorn to further deliver on its principles surrounding community, equity and sustainability while continuing to build a stronger local economy.

Unicorn submitted feedback both back in 2021 and in 2023 to the MSV consultations, but we do not think any of our suggestions were incorporated (indeed, concerning the height, an extra storey has been added).

- During demolition and reconstruction we are concerned about the levels of noise and dust created which will affect the Unicorn site and cause us additional expense, loss

of business, and be a detriment to our working environment. We may not be able to continue to use our first floor offices facing the site.

- Because Unicorn shares a party wall, we will need to vacate the adjacent area during demolition and reconstruction, relocate the goods stored in this part of our warehouse to an external storage unit, and then the warehouse structure will need to be rebuilt. The disruption and costs of this will be significant. We assume that MSV will meet these via for example a Party Wall Award.
- During demolition and construction we are concerned about damage to the culvert which runs close to the Southern boundary to the Baths and runs under our site. We also have drainage in that vicinity. Our structural engineer highlighted the risk of damaging the culvert, and recommended that foundations of the baths were not disturbed in its vicinity. If excavation were required in this area then care would be needed to avoid damaging the culvert
- Unicorn has early starts, evening finishes, and deliveries which can arrive at any time (although these go via our carpark entrance on the south of our site, and furthest away from the baths development). We also have an external refrigeration plant continuously running. We operate as considerately as we can to neighbours, however some noise is inevitable, so the development needs to take this into account in its design, and potential residents need to be aware of the noise levels within the urban environment in which they will be living (we note that Unicorn is not mentioned in the Noise Impact Assessment as a potential noise source)

We are raising this now because we have had to spend time and effort responding to a few noise complaints from 2 recent residential developments at Cosgrove Hall Court and 102 Manchester Road, both of which were formerly used commercially, where night-time noise was not an issue. With the change of use to residential, it was clear that residents had not been made aware before they moved in of the existing unavoidable noise associated with Unicorn, especially during the night, despite us raising this at the planning stage.

We would not want this to be repeated with the baths development, especially since there are south facing balconies and windows reasonably close to our boundary.

We have clearly established with Manchester City Council that we have permission to operate overnight deliveries in this way.

- We are concerned that the bin area is located adjacent to Unicorn, with the potential of pollution, unpleasant odours, attraction of rats and other vermin, and littering encroaching on Unicorn. As a food retailer we must be constantly aware of the threat of infestation by poorly managed refuse bins, with the danger that the infestation is adjacent to our food warehouse and shop.
- We would like to ensure that security for the Unicorn site is not compromised due to the demolition of the baths building, which currently provides some protection against intruders.
- We believe that a 5 storey building represents a significant over-development of the site and will be a detriment to the area. It dwarfs our 2-storey site (we have recently invested significantly in enhancing the appearance of our building) and surrounding buildings. The original design from 2021 was for 4 storeys, which was still too high, and still 1 storey lower than this latest design. While the supporting documentation

states that the surrounding area has 2-3 storey buildings, it then claims that this scale is appropriate and sympathetic⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾, which we do not support.

- The design is uninspiring and generic, having little architectural finesse, no recognisable sense of place, while being at the northern gateway to Chorlton centre. It is just another large block of flats, virtually [indistinguishable from other sites](#), with no freely accessible community engagement. In particular the design does not add to the overall quality of the area and establish a strong sense of place⁽²⁾⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾
- We support having a low-car/no-car development with active travel. However we are concerned that the car management plan is not robust and will lead to cars, either from residents or visitors, being parked on-street. Car ownership is still an embedded social norm and while public transport may lead residents to use their cars less, unless there is careful planning it is highly likely that they will still by default own cars which will need parking somewhere. We think that MSV should proactively manage/restrict car ownership amongst future residents, for example making it a condition that residents do not own a car, and making available on-site EV carpools and e-bikes. This was a problem at the nearby Cosgrove Hall Court, where the residents' car park was full and residents parked on the street.
- We are surprised that only 5 car parking spaces are equipped with EV charging, which is not questioned within any of the supporting documents, and we think this is short-sighted. All the spaces should have EV charging points.
- Regarding energy efficiency, we are concerned that electric panel radiators are being used for space heating. Heat pumps would be around 3 times as efficient, cutting bills for residents. We are also surprised that there are no solar PV or batteries planned, both of which would cut heating costs and reduce carbon emissions for residents. Both of these issues are short-sighted. It is again surprising that the associated reports supporting the application do not question either of these, instead for example claiming 'highly efficient electric panel radiators'⁽¹⁾ even though heat pump driven radiators would immediately be 3 times as efficient.

Appendix:

The following references are taken from the 'Planning and Affordable Housing Statement' document supplied with planning application 136791/FO/2023:

- (1) 4.29 4) Heating will be provided by highly efficient electric panel heaters
- (2) 6.18 Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creating better places in which to live and work and helping to make development acceptable to communities. Planning decisions should ensure that new developments will add to the overall quality of the area, are visually attractive, are sympathetic to local character and history, create places that are safe, and establish a strong sense of place (Paragraphs 12 6 and 130).
6.20 b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings."
- (3) 7.51 The proposed development will deliver 2no. five-storey apartment buildings on the Site. Although this exceeds the general height of other buildings in the surrounding area, to soften the mass of the buildings a restrained material palette of buff brickwork and bronze anodised or PPC aluminium has been chosen. The

horizontal brick banding at ground floor level, recessed windows and entrance with vertical glazing above, decked walkways and landscaping would also serve to soften and break up the mass of the development when viewed from Manchester Road. Set in this context, the scale and massing of the buildings combined with their architectural quality ensures the proposed development contributes positively as a landmark building at the northern gateway to Chorlton District Centre and is of a height that this is appropriate and sympathetic to its district centre location

(4) 2.10 The scale of surrounding buildings is typically 2 to 3 storeys.

(5) 2.5 The original building also shares a party wall with Unicorn Grocery to the south.

The following comments are from public contributions on [Place Northwest](#):

(6) Not sure a gated community is the right frontage smack bang in the middle of Chorlton, looks a poor design by all measures. Great to see age friendly living though in the middle of the town, but it's such poor street activation. Why not add community spaces that front to the street? Encourage community interaction.

(7) Chorlton could do with a lot more of this density to bring greater spend to the area. Ground floor commercial to activate the street would have been better than dead space though.