



St. Mary's Island Residents' Association Ltd.

**Chris Butler
The Planning Service
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham
Kent ME4 4TR**

13th January 2015

Dear Mr Butler.

Outline Planning Application for 270 dwellings and related development at Colonial House: Ref MC/14/3631.

We understand that the current planning use for this building is commercial and that it sits prominently and spaciouly within an area that residents think of as a commercial and recreational component of living in Chatham Maritime in general and upon St Mary's Island (SMI) in particular. The commercial component providing jobs locally with limited traveling and the recreational component being that it lies within the area, adjacent to Basin 2, where residents can regularly and increasingly enjoy relaxation and festive entertainment.

Although it is a pleasant building it is obvious that, in it's current form and because of it's bespoke nature, it is not currently attractive to multi-commercial or a combination of residential and commercial usage.

St Mary's Island Residents Association Ltd. (SMIRA), on behalf of SMI residents, continually engage with Chatham Maritime Trust (CMT) and other local stakeholders to not only maintain but to increase the recreational activities on Basin 2 as well as the attractive Dock Square, complete with bandstand, where the CMT Food and Drinks Festival and Charity Dragon Boat Race is now an annual event. In addition, SMI residents increasingly enjoy and use the water training and pleasure activities that Arethusa bring to the basin and we have urged them to increase these activities.

There is of course a general feeling that the current building is a white elephant and currently adds nothing to residents vibrant but peaceful way of life and the Chatham Maritime experience and that, if to change this requires a different planning use and perhaps a mixed development, there would not be a fundamental objection.

However, we cannot stress the need for this to be a balanced development that embraces Basin 2 and sits comfortably alongside the existing commercial buildings and street scene within the existing commercial sector. Therefore, we would not be adverse to a balanced development of commercial, with limited retail and residential in principal and we would rely on your professional experience and judgement to approve such a proposal.

We understand that developers seek to maximise the intensity of any proposal but we are generally very unhappy with what is currently proposed. We have worked constructively with Countryside Maritime, the developers of the final "build out" of SMI, and Medway Council have also taken our thoughts and comments on board. We are, therefore, hoping that you will do the

same in this instance. Whilst we accept that the two sites do not compare, the “build out” on SMI is for approximately 300 homes but, clearly, on a much larger site

Based on our experience of life on SMI we are particularly concerned about the following aspects of this application:

1) Good Quality Generous Landscaping:

The density of 270 dwellings on this relatively small site means that this can only be achieved by taller apartment blocks, some of which sit on the extremities of the site with minimal incorporated landscaping, which is an important feature of developments in Chatham Maritime. The proposed siting of the five story block shown immediately on the boundary with Dock Square and the detrimental effect that this would have to it’s recreational use by residents is a major concern. We think this block in particular should be a maximum of four story’s in height and should be generously set back from the boundary with Dock Square.

We would also ask that the ongoing maintenance of any landscaping within the site but in the public domain, including any car parks controlled by the retail incumbent, be tied to an independent management agreement paid for by the freeholders or lessees as a condition of the sale or lease.

2) Parking:

Unfortunately, our experience of the basic parking requirements laid down for the existing developments on SMI has shown that these are well below the basic needs of modern life and we understand that the Council has recently revised it’s policy on this by increasing the number of spaces required per dwelling to a minimum of two. We understand that this revision has been applied to the Island ‘build-out’ and we would therefore ask that the Council apply this as a condition on this application.

3) Density:

We are concerned that so many dwellings packed into a relatively small site achieved only by over high apartment blocks is detrimental to both the immediate area and the Chatham Maritime “Flagship” development of SMI and it’s surrounds that the Council often quote in their literature and presentations.

There is an increasing need for community and ownership delegated to residents by developers and taken up and encouraged by the Council. It is a concern that, should this proposal be allowed in it’s current form, it could result in a “Ghetto” style development so typical of those built by the London Boroughs in the 1960’s and 70’s in response to housing pressures and needs and which became so very anti social crime hotspots and eventually had to be demolished. We would ask you, therefore, to please be minded of this potential if there is not sufficient open spaces with generous landscaping incorporated within the site and the obvious over density is not addressed. We would ask that the maximum height of any building be limited to four story’s.

4) Traffic flow to and from the site:

If the application for the 270 dwellings, together with a small retail outlet is permitted, as the building has been empty for many years, traffic in the area has undoubtedly increased enormously. If this site now starts to generate large volumes of traffic we would question whether the local roads, and particularly the junctions, could cope with such an increase. The sight lines onto the roundabout on Maritime Way are particularly poor. You will have projected figures for such combined usage but we would request that you consider whether the local roads could accommodate this and, in particular, the effect that rush hour usage could have on the traffic control system that is currently in place over the Medway Tunnel approach, which is already a source of confusion and frustration for residents, and the commercial occupiers.

5) Materials of Construction:

Chatham Maritime is a windy and dusty environment and the experience of SMI has shown that white finishes do not work and have the effect of premature aging to the externals of the buildings. It may be that detailed design is not a consideration of this application but we would leave this thought with you whether for now or the future.

6) Who we represent:

Finally we would advise you that, whilst we do not and could not represent the views of all of our 800 plus members on SMI, we are generally and regularly in contact with them through our six weekly meetings, various activities and associations within our community and we seek to reflect both a general but positive view on their behalf by engaging with all the local stakeholders involved with Chatham Maritime.

Yours sincerely,

**David Taylor
Chair.**