

The revised design for the hotel, in which the entrance is moved to Bruce Road



Premier Inn refuses to throw in the towel

The developers behind a proposed Premier Inn in Barnet Market are pushing ahead with a revised application despite having the first one rejected, writes Nick Jones

However, the new proposals seem to have done little to allay the concerns of residents living closest to the planned hotel.

The council turned down the initial plan in July, saying that the plans were detrimental to local residents, but now the backers, Locate Developments, have come back to the table with new proposals that they hope will pass muster.

Simon Shaw, development director, said the company hoped that the changes would reassure residents in the surrounding area that they were doing all they could to meet local concerns.

But Richard Gardham of Chipping Close said a 100-bed hotel was far too big for such a small site.

The increase in traffic in their road would be horrendous.

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However, Mr Shaw insisted that Locate had taken on board earlier criticisms expressed by residents and changes recommended by

Barnet's planning committee:

- The hotel entrance would now be in Bruce Road. There would be no pedestrian or vehicular access to the hotel from Chipping Close. All hotel deliveries would be via the Spires' service yard, avoiding Bruce Road and Chipping Close.
- Opaque glazing would be fitted to all windows on the ground, first and second floors facing Chipping Close to address residents' fears their homes would be overlooked.
- The pavement alongside the hotel's frontage in Chipping Close would be re-surfaced with an acoustic-friendly material to reduce noise generated by wheelee suitcases.
- A contribution to be made to a review of the local controlled parking zone to address concerns about on-street parking. Hotel guests would be encouraged to pay £3 a day to use the Spires' car park which would be open to guests on a 24-hour basis.

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Mr Shaw said Locate aimed to resubmit its planning application by the end of September and if approval was obtained, work would start early in 2019 and the hotel would be for business by early 2020.

“Our plan is for a town centre hotel, that fits in with the character of High Barnet. It is not going to be the kind of Premier Inn situated alongside motorways.

“The guests we would expect to attract are people doing business in the locality or those visiting families and friends.

“Other possible sites have been mentioned, such as the former High Barnet police station, the former Brake Shear house workshops, or the former Barnet College building at the junction of the High Street and Fitzjohn Avenue, but they are not available, nor do they have secure car parking space nearby.”

Among those supporting Mr Shaw’s argument that High Barnet would gain from a Premier Inn was Ave Vinick of Sebright Road. “A new hotel is just what High Barnet needs. Our High Street shops are teetering on the edge and this would be a big boost.

“I think we all understand the concern of the Chipping Close residents, but the alternative to a sympathetically-designed Premier Inn is probably going to be a block of flats and that will be far less appealing.”

The hotel would be three storeys high facing Chipping Close and this is still far too high in the view of Alan Howard who has lived in the Close since he was a child.

“The hotel is going to be four storeys high facing the Spires and it will block out the sun in our garden.”

His wife Mary Howard also remained unconvinced. She doubted whether hotel guests would spend money in nearby shops and restaurants.

Steven Strudders, another Chipping Close resident, argued that the changes didn’t address their concerns. “We will still get loads of cars doing U-turns in Chipping Close. We just don’t like the scale and proximity of the new hotel – it might have been different with a development that was more respectful to the neighbourhood.”

Anthony Collett, another critic of the plan, said a new hotel on the market place would clog up the area. “If you want to build a new hotel there is plenty of space around Borehamwood.”

Chris Nightingale of Friends of Barnet Market expressed support for the hotel but that was on condition there was evidence of real guarantees that a secure new site would be found for the market.

Robin Bishop, chair of the Barnet Society, said he was concerned about the likely traffic snarl-up around the St Albans Road and High Street junction if Bruce Road was used as the entrance. The revised plans will now be considered by the society’s committee and planning advisers and every effort would be made to consult the society’s membership, and especially those living in nearby roads.

“Once we have looked at these proposals and consulted widely, the society will respond to any fresh planning application made by Locate,” said Mr Bishop.

Locate has organised a couple of ‘open’ forums to run the revised plan across local residents. Opinions varied but the general mood was still one of opposition to the proposed development. It is still unclear what the outcome would be for the exiting Barnet Market, though various scenarios have been mooted.

Why the Barnet Society backed first application



The original proposal for the hotel was turned down by Barnet Council’s planning committee even though planning officials recommended that it be accepted

Some members were disappointed that the Society did not object to Premier’s application. I’d like to respond by making a couple of points, writes Robin Bishop.

First, our decision to support it – subject to stringent conditions – was made after consulting the whole Committee plus two Vice-Presidents and several members with planning, architectural and transport expertise. Only one of them opposed the application.

Secondly, the Committee now recognises that we didn’t fully reflect the strength of local feeling on this issue. We’ve since reviewed how we deal with large and sensitive proposals like Premier Inn, and agreed that we could do more to consult members.

We’ve recently upgraded our membership database and in future, when time permits, we’ll do what we can to consult members directly if they would be particularly affected by major developments.

There’s an alternative, more positive, view about a new hotel that’s taken by people who’ve been striving for years to revive our failing local economy – including long-standing Barnet Society members – and is attracting widespread public support. It’s that a hotel would help to generate new business and employment within our town centre, and a buzz that would extend way beyond Chipping Barnet. If public interest in the Battle of Barnet continues to grow – as the recent highly successful Medieval Festival indicated – a hotel sympathetically designed for the Monken Hadley conservation area would be an additional attraction.

Apparently £3.5M from The Spires’ sale of the present market site will largely be spent investing in further shopping centre improvements. Several major retailers are considering opening – but will only do so if a planning application for the hotel is successful, and soon.