

# Comments for Planning Application 21/00322/FUL

## Application Summary

Application Number: 21/00322/FUL

Address: 24 Rosamund Road Oxford OX2 8NU

Proposal: Alterations to roof to form hip to gable, formation of 1no. dormer to rear roofslope, insertion of 1no. rooflight and 3no. additional solar panels to front roofslope. Demolition of existing rear extension and erection of a single storey rear extension. Insertion of 1no. window to front elevation, removal of 1no. window and door to side elevation, alterations to fenestration and painting of existing render. Demolition of 2no. existing outbuildings and erection of a rear garden outbuilding.

Case Officer: Charles Refson

## Customer Details

Name: Mr Christopher Dawkins

Address: 25 Rosamund Road Wolvercote Oxford OX2 8NU

## Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbours

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on character of area
- Information missing from plans
- Not enough info given on application
- Other - give details

Comment: The architect of this refurbishment is correct in one very important matter: the current building is a mess. The new owner is to be congratulated on investing so much in her aim of bringing the building up to contemporary standards.

There are, however, important issues that are ignored or not disclosed by the architect that relate to the building's context and its relationship to the public space.

Pre-war 1934 Rosamund Road is distinguished from its neighbouring 1939 Home Close by the gentle crescent effect achieved half-way down the road by a number of houses being set further back from the road. The gardens of these houses were also set back, giving a crescent of green sward on the public side of the house fence. On this sward were planted trees appropriate to the area, and the road is still a sight to behold when the May blossom is out. The sward is owned by the County Council, and maintained by the City Council. Trees on the sward are protected.

On a spring day one can stand in Rosamund Road and imagine the intention of the original builders: the houses set back on their plots of land, the green grass as part of the intimacy

gradient from private house to the car-free public street, the trees providing visual rhythm. The new homes in Home Close were advertised in 1939 as 'Sunshine Houses': perhaps the earlier houses in Rosamund Road were designed with the garden city movement in mind: an effect of space for families, for optimism for the future.

The previous owner managed to change an attractive and modest family house into something quite ugly. Following the unlawful act of cutting down the tree on the green sward she was able to obtain County Council permission for a dropped kerb, which also allowed her to apply for the - lawfully, meaningless - white line by the kerb. The loss of the tree and the green sward has meant that Rosamund Road moves one step closer to any other road of English semi-detached houses, houses that could be celebrated but now become despairingly and unimaginatively similar. Summer dandelions give way to black tarmac: the road becomes the drive and the intimacy gradient is violated.

(Some County procedures have now been changed. Officers are now required to at least get out of their vehicles to conduct a road-side inspection, and evidence this with photographs).

This is especially important in the present application because of the way the building sits on the site. The application shows a sketch of Any Semi in Any Town. A generous application would give back the tree, remove some tarmac and offer the community some grass.

More worryingly, the sketch also proposes a new first-floor window in the front elevation. Looking to the sketch of the existing building, the architect has removed (or, perhaps, simply did not notice) perhaps the most distinguishing features of the houses on Rosamund Road, and that is the diamond placed in the otherwise blank wall. In only one of the 76 houses in Rosamund Road has this feature not been preserved. The architect's drawing of the existing building mysteriously fails to show this whimsical embellishment that is obvious at first glance. Instead, it has been replaced by the word, 'Render'.

Residents in Rosamund Road have considerable affection for their 'diamonds'. It is a motif that gives the street character and a sense of identity. And this adornment is perhaps a gesture to an Art Deco imagination in these speculatively-built houses. George Orwell's character in the 1939 'Coming Up For Air' asks if we know the road he lives in: "Even if you don't you know 50 others exactly like it." Rosamund Road tried to achieve some individuality for its residents by way of the diamond fixed to the otherwise blank front of the building. It is clear that in the present application there is no good reason for the loss of this individual and characterful adornment.

Further examination of the proposed drawing shows the replacement of the diamond motif by a window to what appears to be a first-floor landing. There appears to be no reason why, if further daylight is required in addition to the present ground floor window, existing first-floor window, and new second-floor Velux, a window should not be provided on the side of the building - as has been successfully achieved in other properties (including this writer's own house).

It is to be hoped that the architect and applicant will look again at the heritage of Rosamund Road with a sympathetic imagination and restore some of the green verge and plant a replacement tree in place of the black tarmac. Perhaps they will recognise that parking and access in Rosamund Road is a shared resource and that - absent the need for disabled access - there is no requirement for a white line.

It is fervently to be hoped that the applicant, architect and local authority all agree that the loss of the distinctive diamond motif would set a very sad and completely unnecessary precedent. The solution is for the architect to preserve the 1930s character (not 'built in the late 50s', as the architect claims!) by simply moving the window to the side elevation. It is noted that the architect proposes Crittall windows elsewhere in the application. The Crittall Estate at Silver End consisted of clean, modern semi-detached company houses for Crittall workers that are, broadly, well preserved today. It is to be hoped that architects and planners will agree that this unnecessary fenestration would be as wrong on Rosamund Road as on the Crittall Estate.