

Good evening. My name is Julian Smart and I'm a local resident.

Regarding the 5 Palace Street East applications, the demolition of these Edwardian huts and their replacement with two large buildings is nonsensical, when there is a perfectly satisfactory, cheaper and much less risky alternative.

Not only are the old buildings rare and worth preserving in their own right – as the Victorian and 20th Century Societies both maintain – but they are part of the history of Berwick, and protect the openness of the site, as noted by both Historic England and the conservation officer. By replacing them with taller, far bulkier buildings, this part of the site would be greatly compromised, affecting the conservation area and the views from the Town Walls.

Please remember that the use of and funding of the main building are not affected by the new builds in the back yard: they are independent. So it is categorically wrong to say that demolishing the huts will preserve the old Grammar School, and therefore wrong to deduce that the public benefits outweigh the harms.

These harms include: the destruction of two historic buildings, damage to the conservation area, reduction in quality of life for local residents, a loss of a large part of the site to the charity, a loss of amenity for visitors to the Town Walls, and a risk to Berwick's reputation for preserving its beauty.

Now you may worry that the project would be abandoned if the applicant didn't get his storage and other facilities exactly on his own terms. This seems extremely unlikely, especially as the site would be hard to sell. Therefore because benefits don't outweigh harms, applying either paragraph 201 or 202 of the NPPF must lead you to conclude that consent is impossible, even if, like me, you are sympathetic to many aspects of the plan.

You might as an alternative consider recommending consent with a condition that preserves the huts in situ.

On the subject of harms, carbon is strangely missing from deliberations thus far. Appendix B of the agenda, a report on Berwick's conservation areas, emphasises the desirability of low-carbon development, refurbishment and sustainability. Recently the town council declared a Climate Emergency. And yet, in addition to generating landfill when the huts are demolished – at a cost of some £20,000 – the new builds will release an unnecessary 100,000 kg of CO₂. That's quite an example to set for the Project's young clients, and a kick in the teeth for the planet and for Berwick's green aspirations. To offset these emissions, someone would have to take cold showers for the next 170 years.

In conclusion: if the application is approved, the optics will be appalling for the town. It's far easier to damage a reputation, than it is to restore it; and once we have thrown away our heritage, there's no going back.

Thank you for listening.