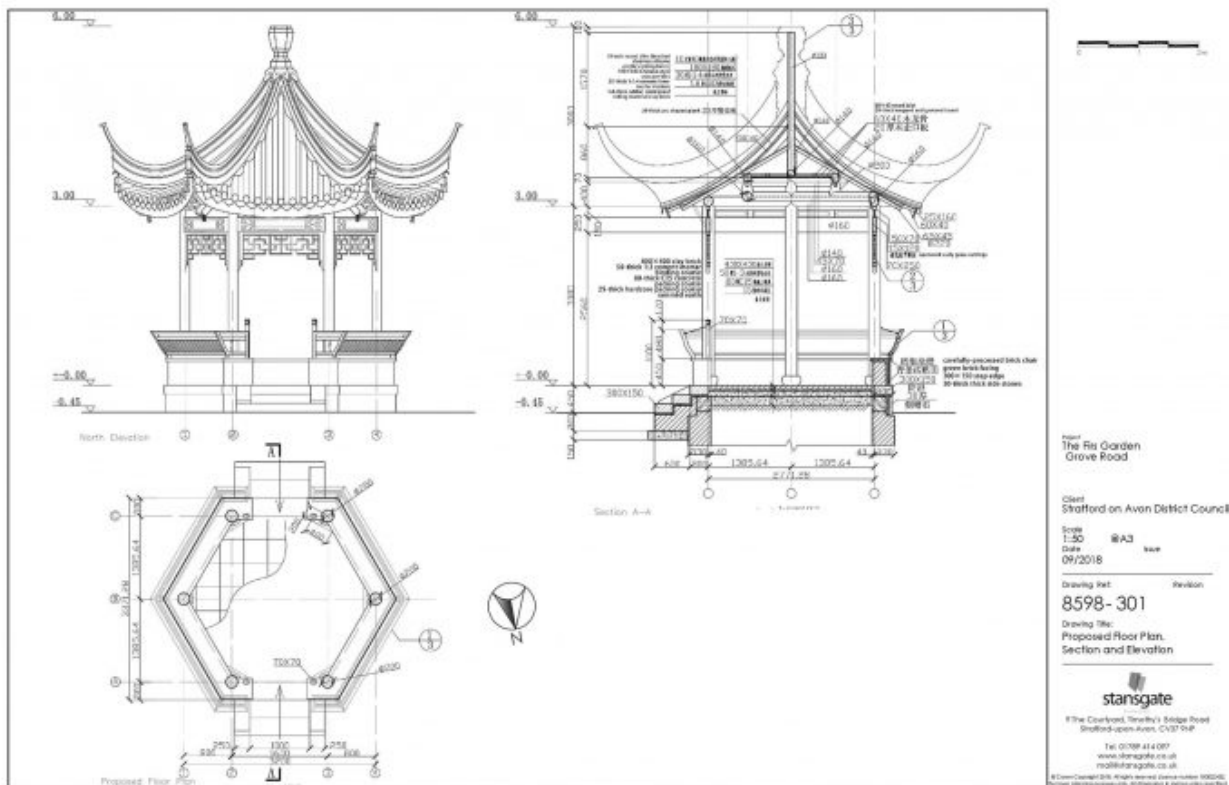# Pavilion plan provokes opposition

Gill Sutherland   Stratford Herald, 16th November 2018

A planning application for a Chinese pavilion on a conservation area in Stratford-upon-Avon town centre is being met with a chorus of disapproval.

It is proposed that the 'Peony Pavilion' be built on Firs Gardens, which is a small park next to the police station on Rother Street, and overlooked by houses on Grove Road.

The Oriental structure is a gift to Stratford from our twin town in China, the Fuzhou Municipality – where they are currently building a replica Shakespeare's Birthplace and other landmarks from Stratford.

In its application on behalf of Stratford District Council, Stansgate Planning explains that the painted wooden structure, which stands at 6.75m high and with a floor space of 11 square metres, is a "classical symbol for Chinese culture". The original Peony Pavilion is immortalised in a play by Tang Xianzu, a playwright of the Ming Dynasty who is held in the same esteem by the Chinese people as we hold Shakespeare, and who also died in 1616.

However, what is meant to be a symbol of harmony and China-UK cultural exchange is already causing ripples of disharmony from Stratford residents who have voiced strong objections to the placing of the pavilion.

Mr Richard Mallison, of Banbury Road, echoed many others' concerns in his objection posted on the district council website, he said: "I have always found Firs Gardens to be a quiet refuge, one the few remaining spaces in Stratford which is guaranteed to be free of tourist/visitor traffic and its associated bustle. The pavilion should be sited where visitors attend in large numbers."

So far there have been 11 complaints against the proposed plan logged on the 'planning portal' on the website; and Mr and Mrs Satchwell, who own two houses on Grove Road, have also lodged a petition signed by an additional 16 objectors.

Concern that the pavilion could be a magnet for anti-social behaviour has also been raised as an objection.

Mrs Satchwell said: "There has for many years been a problem with people congregating during all hours within Firs Gardens involved in heavy drinking, drug taking and sleeping rough, over which there seems no control by the authorities. The erection of the pavilion would be another meeting point for such people. This causes severe stress and uneasiness for many of the local residents."

Ward Councillor Jenny Fradgley backed residents' doubts over the placement of the pavilion. Although she hailed the pavilion a "splendid gift" she was concerned about the negative impact the building would have on "a small, green space full of trees". She added: "I also have a concern that such a structure will have an impact on traffic here, with people looking at it at one of the most dangerous confluences in the town. There have been a number of accidents here and this could well contribute to more difficulties."

Under planning law, permission will only be granted to the new build if it is deemed that it meets with Stratford's Development Plan. Special attention must also be paid to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a Conservation Area.

Firs Garden was purchased by the well-known Victorian writer Marie Corelli in 1910 "to preserve the open space for the benefit of the town" (according to the district council's own website).

Michael Dain, who lives off Alcester Road, points out that the proposal to build on Corelli's bequest seems contrary to its intended purpose. He said: "This small area of greenery is a tranquil oasis, on my walking route from my home to the river. The erection of a pavilion, designed to be viewed by large numbers of visitors to the town, goes against the whole concept of the use of this space and, as it is nowhere near the other tourist attractions in town it is doomed to be a failure and an eyesore, that would quickly become neglected."

The deadline for comments about the planning application is tomorrow (16th November). These will be reviewed and a decision made at a later, as yet unknown, date.