

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
PLANNING CONTROL BOARD
30 AUGUST 2001
REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER

PCB 30.08.01
PART 1
ITEM NO
FOR DECISION
CPO

S6/2001/0210/FP and S6/2001/0208/LB
EXTENSION TO EXISTING COUNTRY CLUB FOR HEALTH AND LEISURE
FACILITY, CHANGE OF USE OF PART OF THE BUILDING FOR NINE
RESIDENTIAL UNITS, OFFICE AND CONFERENCE USE AT THE OLD CLUB
HOUSE;

S6/2001/0211/OP

SITE FOR ONE NEW DWELLING FOLLOWING DEMOLITION OF EXISTING
COTTAGES (OUTLINE APPLICATION) AT FARM COTTAGES;

S6/2001/0212/OP

OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR ONE NEW DWELLING HOUSE AT THE OLD GAS
HOUSE;

S6/2001/0394/OP

DEMOLITION OF EXISTING EXTENSION USE OF REMAINING BUILDING AS A
SINGLE DWELLING AND ERECTION OF TWO DETACHED DWELLINGS AT THE
SEMINAR HOUSE

BEDWELL PARK CUCUMBER LANE, ESSENDON, HATFIELD

APPLICANT: THE HATFIELD LONDON COUNTRY CLUB

(Hatfield East)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The application site, with an area of approximately 190 hectares, is accessed from the eastern side of Cucumber Lane, close to the junction where the High Road and Kentish Lane intersect (the B158). The site is broadly rectangular in shape and extends from the Lower Hatfield Road (the B158) in the north to Cucumber Lane in the south and comprises the Hatfield London Golf and Country Club, with two 18 hole golf courses (one pay and play at the Old Course and the other a relatively recently constructed Members course); each with its own clubhouse. In addition, the site comprises a number of other buildings set within the extensive landscaped grounds.
- 1.2 The principal building is a Grade II listed country mansion house dating from several periods but mainly the 1860's. This building is now known as The Old Clubhouse. The building is of 2-3 storeys, with the entrance (west) elevation dominated by a four storey tower porch with crenallated parapet and corbelled stone eaves. The building comprises red brick with contrast red brick diaper work, stone windows and cills, below a machine-tiled roof, which has many gables and gabled projections.

- 1.3 To the south of the main building, within a walled former kitchen garden is a two storey Victorian cottage, known as The Seminar House, which is enveloped by a single storey extension dating from the 1970's. To the west of the main building, lies the base of the former Gas House, a building which was removed in 1997, due to its instability and poor structural condition. In the centre of the site is the new clubhouse and to the north of that is a pair of former farm workers cottages referred to as Farm Cottages.
- 1.4 The eastern boundary of the site abuts in part and extends into the administrative boundary with East Hertfordshire District Council and adjoins Bedwell Park Quarry and open countryside. The western site boundary abuts the rear of properties in the High Road and School Lane, while Berkhamsted Road delineates the southern boundary. The southern site boundary and the south-eastern and south-western corners of the site are densely landscaped. Land levels change within the site. Car parking for the existing uses is located to the west of The Old Clubhouse.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 Planning permission and listed building consent are sought for the following works:

The Old Clubhouse, the principal listed building (S6/2001/210/FP & S6/2001/208/LB)

Planning permission and listed building consent are sought for extensions and alterations to the building to provide a health and leisure facility. The health and leisure suite would be housed within the two to three storey section of the building at the northern end. One of the extensions would be for a swimming pool measuring 8.8 metres wide by 18.35 metres long, set within an existing walled courtyard and the other extension would provide changing facilities measuring 14.6 metres wide by 4.35 metres deep.

In addition the upper floors of the remainder of the building would be used to provide nine studio/one bedroom apartments and six small office suites with conference room. This work would involve some internal alterations, including new partitions, removal of existing partitions and a staircase.

An additional 56 car parking spaces would be provided, to be located adjacent to the existing facilities. The remainder of the building would continue to provide golf club house facilities.

Farm Cottages (S6/2001/211/OP)

Outline planning permission is sought for the replacement of the pair of cottages with a single dwelling with new double garage. The siting and means of access are shown with the application, with all other matters being reserved for future consideration. The submitted plans indicate that the floor area of the single dwelling and garage would equal that of the existing cottages. Although within the same curtilage the siting of the single dwelling would be in the centre of the plot. This site can be accessed separately from School Lane or from within the Bedwell Park complex.

The Old Gas House (S6/2001/212/OP)

Outline planning permission is sought for the erection of a single dwelling and double garage adjacent to the site of the former Gas House. The siting and means

of access are shown with the application, with all other matters being reserved for future consideration.

The Seminar House (S6/2001/394/OP)

Outline planning permission is sought for the demolition of the extension, retention of the existing building as a single dwelling, with a single storey side extension on either side measuring 3 metres wide by 4.5 metres deep, plus two new dwellings and garages. The proposal would involve the removal of some conifer trees and the resurfacing of the independent access road from Cucumber Lane. The siting and means of access are shown with the application, with all other matters being reserved for future consideration.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The following applications are of relevance.

- S6/1999/1154/FP – permission for variation of condition of planning permission S6/90/0692 to allow the use of part of the clubhouse for weddings and independent functions, 31/01/00.
- S6/1996/0483/LB – listed building consent for single storey extension to provide new laundry, enlarged ladies locker room and removal of vent, 02/08/96.
- S6/1995/0414/FP and 0539/LB – permission and listed building consent for conservatory
- S6/1993/0709/FP and 0710/LB – permission and listed building consent for single storey extension to golf club house, 16/12/93.
- S6/1990/1017/FP and 1020/LB permission and listed building consent for demolition of maintenance building, external alterations and single storey extensions to enable extended building to be used for hotel, golf and country club, 14/12/91.
- S6/1987/135 – permission for 18 hole public golf course, 3/7/87.

4.0 MAIN RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 4.1 Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1 - 1998
Policy GB3 – Development in the Metropolitan Green Belt
Policy GB4 – Development in Settlements within the Green Belt
Policy GB5 – Extension to dwellings in the Green Belt
Policy GB6 – Replacement dwellings in the Green Belt
Policy BEV15 – Listed Buildings
Policy BEV16 – Alternative Uses for Listed Buildings
Policy CR1 – Landscape Conservation Areas
Policy CR11 – Re-use of Buildings in the Countryside

GEN CRITERIA 1 (Design and Siting of Buildings)

GEN CRITERIA 2 (Landscaping)

GEN CRITERIA 4 (Servicing, Access and Car Parking)

- 4.2 Planning Policy Guidance Notes
PPG 2 – Green Belts
PPG 7 - The Countryside: Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development
PPG 15 – Planning and the Historic Environment

5.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

- 5.1 These applications have been publicised by press notices, the posting of site notices and the direct notification of properties which adjoin the boundaries of the site.
- 5.2 Thirteen letters of representation have been received. Twelve objecting to the schemes and one in support.
- 5.3 Objections were expressed on the following grounds:-
- Form of development not appropriate in the Green Belt. Developments would be contrary to PPG 2 and District Plan policies. Although the extension to the original dwelling at the Seminar House would comply with Policy GB5.
 - If permitted within Green Belt in the absence of proven very special circumstances, a precedent would be set making it difficult to resist similar schemes in the vicinity, resulting in the erosion of the Green Belt and the rural character of the locality.
 - Increase in traffic and vehicle movements, particularly in relation to the leisure and health suite and conference facility at the entrance to the site, the junction with Cucumber Lane, Kentish Lane and the High Road and at the junction of Cucumber Lane and Berkhamsted Lane and along these respective roads. All of these roads and junctions are already dangerous and have been the subject of accidents. The developments will exacerbate an already poor situation to the detriment of highway safety. Junction improvements would be necessary to accommodate the development.
 - Unacceptable loss of trees in connection with the Seminar House development.
 - Existing services – water, electricity, drainage and sewerage, are already stretched beyond their capacity. The schemes will worsen the current situation to an unacceptable degree. If permitted the provision of mains water, drainage and sewerage should be explored.
- 5.4 Essendon Parish Council has no objections to the plans submitted for the renovation and alteration of the Old Clubhouse and establishment of a health and leisure facility, ref 210 nor to the demolition of the existing farm cottages, ref 211 and the reinstatement of the existing dwelling at The Seminar House, ref 294. Concern is expressed about traffic generation and the adequacy of the access at the junction of the B158 and Cucumber Lane. Consideration should be given to access improvements. The case for any of the new dwellings cannot be accepted. These dwellings lie outside the village envelope and in the Green Belt so would

contravene Green Belt policy, be an unacceptable precedent and be out of place in the context of the area.

- 5.5 Essendon Society comment that some of the proposals represent a massive change of use and further dwelling houses mean a great change in the open landscape. Traffic generated by visitors to the leisure centre would greatly increase congestion on the B158 in addition to the dwelling house traffic and proposed development at Essendon Place. Proposals represent overdevelopment in an already overdeveloped area.
- 5.6 The Potters Bar Society consider that it is the responsibility of the owners to keep a listed building in good condition. The additions and alterations to this building are of too large a scale for the Green Belt. Plans of a smaller scale would raise enough money to maintain this building and protect the openness of the Green Belt. The plans will increase the amount of traffic using the site entering and exiting on a dangerous corner. On that basis it is suggested that planning permission should be refused. No objections to the applications for the new dwellings.
- 5.7 County Highway Engineer has no objection to the schemes.
- 5.8 Historic Buildings Advisor of the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust (BEAMS) comments that the proposals for the extensions and alterations to the principal building are acceptable, subject to the imposition of conditions. The new build residential schemes, other than the replacement dwelling at Farm Cottages, are not accepted as very special circumstances to secure the longevity of the listed building.
- 5.9 East Hertfordshire District Council has no objections to the schemes
- 5.10 Thames Water has no objections to the schemes.
- 5.11 Three Valleys Water has no objections subject to conditions relating to drainage.
- 5.12 Welwyn Hatfield Access Group comment that the scheme should accord with the standards and criteria as set out in Appendix A of the adopted District Plan.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF PROPOSALS

- 6.1 The determining issues in this case are (1) whether the proposals are acceptable having regard to Green Belt policy and if not whether any very special circumstances exist to justify a departure from policy; (2) the effect on the character, appearance and setting of the Grade II listed Old Clubhouse; (3) the re-use and adaptation of existing buildings in the rural area; and (4) highway and parking considerations.
- 6.2 Policy GB3 of the adopted District Plan and PPG2 identify those forms of development, which are considered appropriate in the Green Belt. Leisure development plus new residential development, (other than replacement dwellings subject to certain criteria as addressed in policy GB6) are not normally considered to be appropriate unless for agriculture or forestry or small-scale facilities required in connection with outdoor sport and recreation.

- 6.3 The extension to the building to provide a swimming pool and changing facilities to be used in connection with the health and leisure suite at the northern end of the building and the new build dwellings are not required in connection with agriculture or forestry nor do they represent small scale facilities in connection with countryside recreation. The proposals therefore (with the exception of the replacement dwelling for Farm Cottages) constitute inappropriate development and are thereby contrary to PPG2 and Policy GB3. It is therefore, necessary to consider whether there are any very special circumstances of sufficient weight to overcome the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 6.4 The applicant has put forward a case for very special circumstances based upon securing a financial package from the development of the health and leisure facility and the new build dwellings to generate adequate funds to secure essential work and on-going maintenance for the Old Clubhouse, the principal Grade II listed building. In essence a scheme for enabling development.
- 6.5 Taking the new build dwellings (other than the replacement dwelling for Farm Cottages), while it is acknowledged that the condition of the listed building is giving cause for concern, I am not satisfied that this is an adequate justification to permit inappropriate development in the form of new dwellings in this location. The harm to the openness of the Green Belt would be significant and I would also be concerned about the precedent, which could be set for other inappropriate residential development in the Green Belt, the cumulative effect of which would undermine the objectives of the Green Belt.
- 6.7 With regard to the extensions required in connection with the proposed health and leisure suite at the northern end of the building, while they do represent inappropriate development, I consider that there is merit in their securing some funds to carry out essential repairs to the building and provide for on-going maintenance. In terms of the amount of additional floorspace in relation to the existing building, the extensions are relatively modest and would not have an unacceptable visual impact on the character and appearance of the locality and Green Belt. I accept that securing alternative uses for the Old Clubhouse to ensure the long term future of the listed building constitutes the very special circumstances required to permit these additions
- 6.6 The extensions and conversion of part of the Old Clubhouse to nine studio one-bedroom apartments and office suites are considered acceptable in historic building terms. The additional sub division and partitions would cause minimal disruption to the historic fabric and architectural detail of the listed building and would adequately maintain the setting of the building. I consider that this would accord with advice given in PPG15 and Policies BEV15 and BEV16 of the District Plan.
- 6.7 The conversion, adaptation and alterations of the building do not strictly accord with advice given in PPG 7 and Policy CR11 of the District Plan which seek re-use for employment generating purposes. However, given the present use of the building and its listed status, conversion and re-use which includes leisure and residential elements, would have the least harmful environmental impact. The office uses do however satisfy the other criteria of Policy CR11. The proposed uses would not have a materially greater impact than the existing use on the openness of the Green Belt.

- 6.8 The two single storey extensions to the retained dwelling at The Seminar House, following the demolition of the existing extension, are acceptable in principle and subject to the details of design and external appearance being satisfactory would accord with the provisions of Policy GB5 and Res Criteria 22.
- 6.9 In terms of highway considerations, I note the comments of the County Highway Engineer which raise no objections to the proposals nor recommend any modification to the existing junction or access arrangements. On that basis, it would not be reasonable to seek to refuse the proposals on these grounds or attach conditions requiring improvements in these areas. The amount of additional parking to be provided meets the Council's adopted standards and would not result in an unacceptable visual intrusion in this rural Green Belt location, being located adjacent to the existing car parking area and set well back from the road frontage of the site.
- 6.10 The comments of interested parties relating to the implications for the capacity of existing services are noted. However, in the absence of any objections from the relevant statutory undertakers a reason for refusal on these grounds could not be sustained.
- 6.11 Trees are proposed to be removed in connection with The Seminar House development, which I have previously stated is unacceptable. A condition is recommended for additional landscaping and protection of existing trees in connection with the Old Clubhouse development, which will safeguard the landscape value of the site.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 I have carefully considered the arguments put forward by the applicant to justify the erection of the extension to the building in relation to the health and leisure facility, which would normally be considered inappropriate in the Green Belt. I concur that this part of the scheme to secure the long term future of the listed building constitutes very special circumstances which are sufficient to outweigh the limited harmful impact that an additional amount of new building would cause to the Green Belt. I do not accept that a similar justification for new build dwellings, save for the replacement dwelling at Farm Cottages which accords with the replacement dwellings policy, can be regarded as constituting very special circumstances.
- 7.2 Therefore, I recommend that planning permission and listed building consent be granted for the proposals relating to the Old Clubhouse (S6/2001/210/FP and S6/2001/208/LB), subject to a series of conditions as detailed below.
- 7.3 This proposal represents a departure from the policies contained in the adopted District Plan and so the application for planning permission must be referred to the Secretary of State via the Regional Office of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.
- 7.4 I am satisfied that the outline proposal for the replacement dwelling at Farm Cottages (S6/2001/211/OP) is acceptable as it accords with District Plan policy.
- 7.5 I consider that the remaining applications at the Old Gas House (S6/2001/212/OP) and The Seminar House (S6/2001/394/OP) are unacceptable as being contrary to

established Green Belt policy. No very special circumstances exist to permit such development.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 I recommend that planning permission be granted in respect of application reference no. S6/2001/0210/FP subject to the referral of the scheme to the Secretary of State and the following conditions.

1. SCO1- Time limit
2. SC19 – Materials
3. SC09 – Landscaping scheme – full permission
4. SC10 – Landscaping – tree protection
5. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted a Schedule of Works and Repair for the Old Clubhouse shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme as may be approved shall be completed prior to the occupation of any part of the development hereby permitted unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON To safeguard the historic and architectural integrity of the Grade II listed building.

6. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted details of the retention of the stud partitions above the openings to be created within the second floor conference suite shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall therefore be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme prior to the first use of the conference facility unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON To safeguard and preserve evidence of the nineteenth century historic screen.

7. All joinery details for new doors, windows and openings shall match those of the existing building, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON To safeguard the historic and architectural integrity of the Grade II listed building.

8. The development shall be carried out in complete accordance with the details shown on the following plans :

Drawing no BR-14 BR-05 Rev B; BR-06 Rev C BR007 Rev B BR-08 Rev C, BR-09 Rev C, BR-11 Rev A, BR-12 Rev A, BR-20 BR-21, BR-22.

REASON For the avoidance of doubt.

8.2 I recommend that listed building consent be granted in respect of application reference no. S6/2001/208/LB subject to the following conditions

1. SC02 Time limit listed buildings

2. SC19 Materials

- 3 Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted a Schedule of Works and Repair for the Old Clubhouse be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme as may be approved shall be completed prior to the occupation of any part of the development hereby, permitted unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON To safeguard the historic and architectural integrity of the Grade II listed building.

4. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted details of the retention of the stud partitions above the openings to be created within the second floor conference suite shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall therefore be carried out in accordance with the approved scheme prior to the first use of the conference facility unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

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REASON For the avoidance of doubt.

- 8.3 I recommend that the outline proposal for the replacement dwelling at Farm Cottages (S6/2001/0211/OP) be granted subject to the following conditions.

- 8.4 I recommend that the remaining applications at the Old Gas House (S6/2001/212/OP) and The Seminar House (S6/2001/394/OP) be refused for the following reason.

1. The site is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, where new residential development is inappropriate unless it is required in connection with agriculture or forestry. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policy GB3 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No 1 1998 and no very special circumstances of sufficient weight to justify an exception to this policy have been put forward.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Application files S6/2001/210/FP, S6/2001/208/LB, S6/2001/211/OP, S6/2001/212/OP and S6/2001/394/OP

793/21/08/01

