

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
PLANNING CONTROL BOARD
10TH JUNE 2002
REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER

PCB 10.06.02
PART 1
ITEM NO
FOR DECISION
CPO

S6/2002/98/FP

ALTERATION TO LISTED FLIGHT HANGER FOR USE AS A MEMBERS CLUB PROVIDING A RANGE OF SPORTS LEISURE AND SOCIAL FACILITIES TOGETHER WITH ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING AND LANDSCAPING (RESERVED MATTERS PURSUANT TO OUTLINE PLANNING CONSENT S6/1999/1064/OP)

S6/2002/97/LB

DEMOLITION OF MODERN ANNEXE BUILDING TO THE WEST OF LISTED FLIGHT TEST HANGER AND WORKS OF ALTERATION AND REFURBISHMENT TO RETAINED BUILDING

FORMER COMET HANGER, HATFIELD AERODROME, COMET WAY, HATFIELD

APPLICANT: ARLINGTON PROPERTY DEVELOPMENTS LTD

(Hatfield)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The flight test hanger building is located in what was formerly the Hatfield Aerodrome site and is a Grade II* listed building. The hanger is of a steel, concrete and aluminium construction and was used to house 8 Comets during maintenance operations. The building dates from 1952 and the main structure comprises of twelve portal frames at 30ft centres and a distinctive saw tooth roof design. The innovative design of the hanger is stated as being one of the most significant examples of aluminium used in building construction. The building measures approximately 100m by 74m and is roughly 5 storeys in height.
- 1.2 The building continued to function as an aircraft hanger and workshop until the closure of the Hatfield Aerodrome in 1994. Following this it was used as a temporary distribution centre. The building was listed in 1998 to a Grade II* and in 1999 the outline planning application for the redevelopment of the former aerodrome site established that the hanger building would be part of the proposed district centre and was to be converted to a recreational use. The main distributor roads are situated to the north and west boundaries of the application site whilst a major pedestrian link between the district centre and the nearby residential areas pass across the southern boundary of the site. The supplementary planning guidance for the former aerodrome site specifically requires that the hanger forms part of an active part of the district centre as it is seen as a key 'nodal' point.
- 1.3 A member of the board has requested that Planning Control Board determine this application.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 2.1 This application envisages the conversion of the listed flight test hanger for use as a private sports and leisure club.
- 2.2 The main focus of the club will be as a tennis and racquets centre, however, there will be a mix of facilities within the building including a swimming pool, fitness suite, lounge and restaurant, aerobics studio, squash courts and a health and beauty spa. In addition there will be offices in the old control tower section of the hanger. Within the grounds of the building there are to be further tennis courts, a basketball court, a beach volleyball court and an outdoor pool.
- 2.3 There will be 250 parking spaces provided within the application site alongside 50 covered and 50 uncovered cycle parking spaces. Vehicular access to the site is to be taken from the access road to the District Centre, which connects to roundabout 7 on the Spine Road through the Aerodrome site. Security fencing to the external facilities is to be set within the landscaping to the southeast section of the site.
- 2.4 As part of the application key works to the structure of the building are proposed to ensure that it will meet with current building regulations, including the removal of asbestos fire screening. These works include the introduction of twelve posts to support the principle roof trusses to strengthen their snow loading abilities and which will work to strengthen the aluminium structure generally.
- 2.5 There are also some external alterations proposed as part of the scheme. The main alterations include the opening of the hanger doors to the south elevation and infilling this end with a glazed wall and keeping the hanger doors to the north elevation closed. The former fire station to the hanger (which is situated adjacent to the control tower) will be retained, however, the sliding folding timber doors to the station are to be replaced with a glazed wall as the original walls do not afford sufficient environmental protection for the use proposed within this space. Finally the profiled aluminium cladding to the main hanger are to be replaced and similarly cladding panels and other materials to other parts of the building that contain asbestos will have to be replaced or removed.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 Former Hatfield Aerodrome - Outline permission S6/1999/1064/OP.

4.0 PLANNING POLICIES

- 4.1 The British Aerospace Inset contained within the adopted Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No1, 1998.
- 4.2 Hatfield Aerodrome, Supplementary Planning Guidance 1999.

5.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

- 5.1 English Heritage raises no objection to the proposed scheme and considers that the projected conversion of the building would provide it with a new use that should secure the future of the hanger. Furthermore English Heritage consider that the scheme has been devised in such a way as to be broadly sympathetic to the architectural character of the building such that the original character of the hanger would remain very clear.
- 5.2 The Twentieth Century Society raises no objection to the proposed conversion of the hanger building although would favour the retention of the former fire station to the building as a single space.
- 5.3 The Environment Agency raises no objection to the development and recommends that an informative with regards to rainwater disposal be attached to any grant of consent.
- 5.4 Hertfordshire County Council (Highways Officer) is satisfied with the level of parking (including cycle parking) that has been provided within the site and advises that a Green Transport Plan must be prepared for the development that is consistent with the provisions of the Section 106 Agreement to the master plan for the site.
- 5.5 Thames Water raise no objection to the scheme but recommend that conditions be added to any grant of consent that relate to foul and surface water sewerage.
- 5.6 Getting Around (Welwyn Hatfield Access Group) requests that the application be considered subject to the standards and criteria outlined in the District Plan.

6.0 DISCUSSION OF PROPOSAL

- 6.1 As previously noted the principle of the change of use of the building has already been accepted through the approval of the outline consent for the aerodrome site. Therefore the main issues for consideration are the potential impacts of the conversion on the fabric/character and setting of the listed hanger and the general design, layout and proposed management of the site.
- 6.2 English Heritage has been party to discussions prior to the submission of the application where the proposed alterations and works to reinforce the structural stability of the hanger building were outlined. As a result the main concerns and points raised by English Heritage have been worked through and the submitted scheme is as a result of these discussions.
- 6.3 Of primary concern is the fact that the roof structure has to be upgraded in relation to snow and wind loads in order to meet modern regulations. Whilst the building is a listed structure it is to be used by members of the public and therefore has to meet current safety regulations. The measures proposed to safeguard the continued use of the building include the use of secondary roof trusses, the erection of new columns to prop each of the main portal frames at suitable locations and the strengthening of bolted and riveted sections where necessary. Engineers working on behalf of English Heritage have confirmed that the proposed strengthening is necessary and accept that whilst these supports will entail significant alteration to the existing structure these would not, however, entail any loss to the historic fabric of the building.

- 6.4 Furthermore it is recognised that the external appearance of the building is in need of enhancement. The original aluminium cladding to the building has become worn and will have to be treated to extend its serviceable life as well as improve its appearance. Several options were considered including painting or grit blasting the existing panels, however it is finally proposed to replace the cladding panels and fixings wholesale. This can be achieved using the appropriate materials as the fixings and panels are still manufactured. English Heritage acknowledges that whilst there is normally a preference for repair rather than renewal, the case made by the applicants is accepted, as this would secure the building for a further fifty years. However, the replacement cladding must be of the same type, dimensions and finish as the original.
- 6.5 The proposed layout of the fitness club is accepted by English Heritage and it is now considered that the location of the entrance to the club in the control tower would not compromise the towers' interest. The fitness/tennis club will operate within new first and second floor decks, which are to be provided within the envelope of the hanger. The internal structure proposed will still allow much of the hangers' cavernous interior to be appreciated. The removal of certain poor quality ancillary buildings is considered to enhance the appearance of the building and the scheme will also allow the retention of the main doors to the southern elevation, which was described as English Heritage as vital to the character of the building.
- 6.6 Obviously the setting of the building has altered substantially through the redevelopment of the Aerodrome. The proposed scheme includes a lawn with a marked out tennis court to the southern elevation of the building and this is considered by English Heritage to be sympathetic to the buildings original setting in the Aerodrome site. It is therefore considered that the proposed scheme has addressed the concerns raised by English Heritage with regard to the new use of the building and it is accepted that the remedial works proposed to secure the hangers' future will not detract from the fabric, aesthetic character or setting of the building and will allow for its continued use.
- 6.7 The level of parking (250 spaces plus 100 cycle parking spaces) proposed has been assessed with regard to the supplementary planning guidance for the site. It should be noted that these standards work on a calculation related to floorspace figures and due to the size of the building the notionally required levels of parking are far greater than that which is proposed. However, these standards are given as maximums and given the location of the hanger building adjacent to the district centre it is considered by the County Highways Engineer that this level is acceptable
- 6.8 It is acknowledged that there are very few alternative uses for the listed hanger building and it has already been identified that its use as a recreational centre is appropriate. The proposed scheme has been designed to minimise the impact on the fabric, character and setting of the listed hanger and the scheme is considered to be one which is able to allow for the continued use and retention of an important listed building.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 In the light of the policies contained in the adopted District Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance I am satisfied that the proposed development is acceptable. Therefore I recommend that planning permission be granted subject to the conditions detailed below.

7.2 Because this building is listed Grade II* the Council's resolution to grant listed building consent will need to be referred to the Government Office for the Eastern Region for notification.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted in respect of S6/2002/98/FP, subject to the following conditions;

1. SC1 Time limits – full permission
2. Before construction works commence on site, full details of the materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted, including of the surfacing materials to be used in any external areas of the application site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter only the approved materials shall be used unless agreed otherwise in writing with the Local Planning Authority in advance.
Reason: To protect the character and appearance of the Listed Building.
3. Prior to the commencement of development full details of any floodlights or other means of artificially illuminating any part of the site shall be installed and/or operated and their hours of operation, whether or not in association with the use of the site hereby permitted shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter any such scheme shall be implemented, used, retained and maintained in the approved form.
Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to retain adequate control over such illumination in the interests of residential amenity.
4. Prior to the commencement of development full details of any amplified speech/music or other form of public address system to be broadcast or operated on any part of this site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter any such scheme shall be implemented, retained and maintained in the approved form.
Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to retain adequate control over such amplified speech or music, in the interests of residential amenity.
5. No development shall commence before plans and particulars showing precise details of any gates, fence, walls or other means of screening or enclosure to be erected within the site have been submitted and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter any such agreed details shall be implemented, retained and maintained in the approved form and notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any Order revoking or re-enacting that Order) the provisions of Part 2, Class A of Schedule 2 shall not apply to any part of the application site.
Reason: To protect the setting of the Listed Building.

6. The use of the building may not commence before the access arrangements, parking spaces, cycle parking spaces and service arrangements as shown on the approved drawing 664 PL017 Rev E have been laid out and constructed in their entirety and made available for use. Thereafter the said parking areas shall be retained and maintained in their approved form and used solely for the parking of vehicles and for no other reason which would impede vehicle parking.
Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to secure satisfactory provision for the parking of vehicles in the interests of highway safety.
7. Prior to the commencement of development full details of any CCTV equipment or signage to be installed and/or operated, whether or not in association with the use of the site hereby permitted and the feature tennis court to the southern boundary of the site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter any such scheme shall be implemented, retained and maintained in the approved form.
Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to retain adequate control over such details to protect the character and setting of the Listed Building.
8. The bedrooms permitted in the first floor of the building as indicated in drawing no 664 PL039 shall be used only in association with and ancillary to the sports and leisure facilities permitted and shall at no time be used, let or occupied for other independent commercial, business or leisure purposes.
9. Prior to the commencement of development full details of the services strategy (inclusive of any extract ventilation system) and the proposed remedial works to the listed hanger building as well as a scheme of methodology for their implementation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works shall be carried out in accordance with any such agreed programme.
Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to retain adequate control over such details to protect the character and setting of the Listed Building.
10. No development shall commence until a detailed landscaping scheme relating to the proposed access road to facilitate the permitted development, as indicated on the approved plans 664 PL017 Rev E and 6763/479, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority in accordance with Condition Nos. 1 and 6 of planning permission reference S6/1999/1064/OP. The scheme shall show:
- i) which existing trees, shrubs and hedges are to be retained or removed.
 - ii) which new planting is proposed, together with details of species, size and method of planting.
 - iii) what measures are to be taken to protect both new and existing landscaping during and after development.
- The scheme approved shall be implemented and completed in all respects by not later than the planting season following completion of the development, and any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from completion of the development, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased, shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species, unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.
Reason: To enhance the visual appearance of the development.

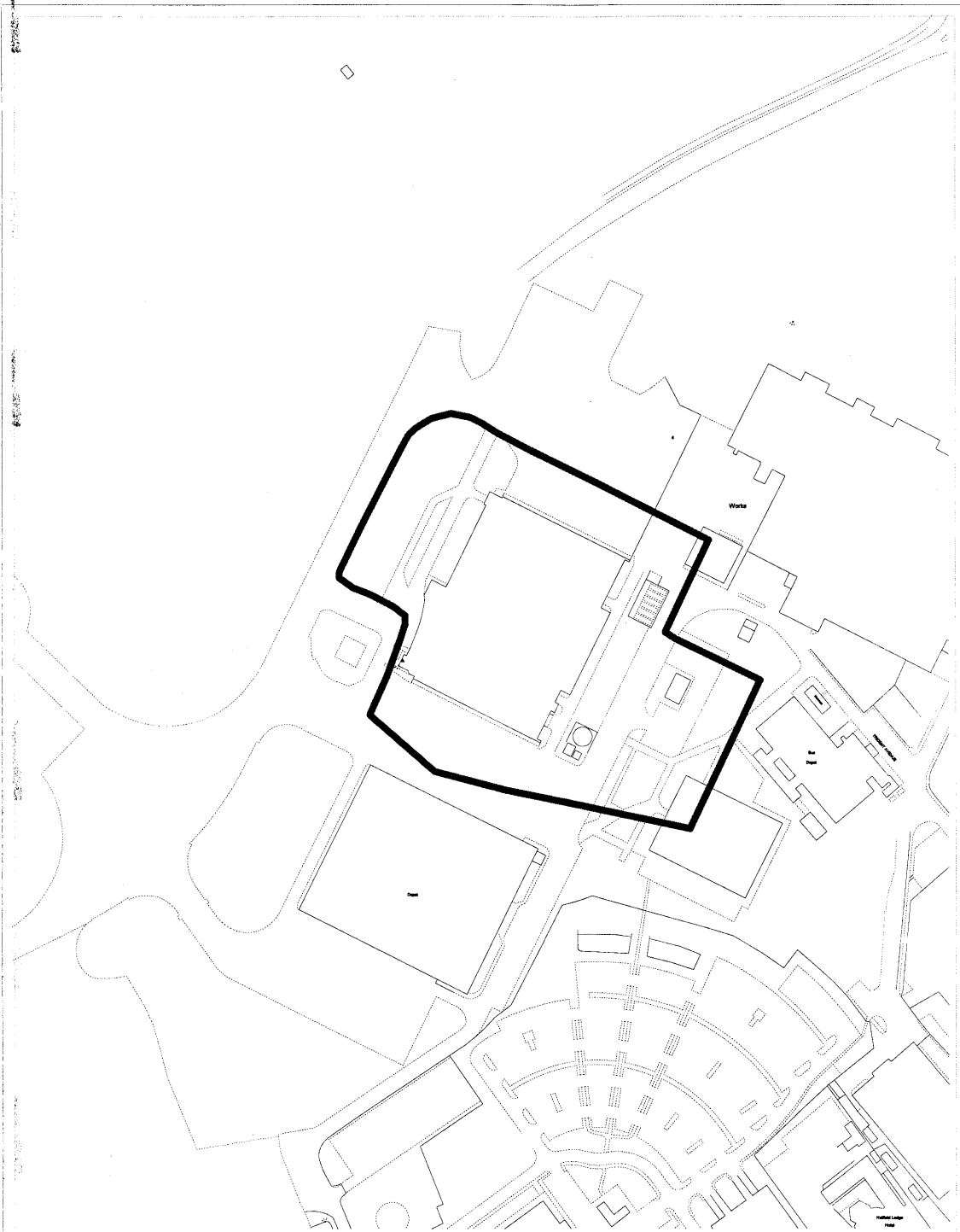
8.2 I therefore recommend that planning permission be granted in respect of S6/2002/97/LB, subject to the following conditions and referral to the Government Office for the Eastern Region.

1. SC02 Time limits full permission – Listed Buildings
2. Before construction works commence on site, full details of the materials to be used in the construction of the development hereby permitted, including of the surfacing materials to be used in any external areas of the application site shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter only the approved materials shall be used unless agreed otherwise in writing with the Local Planning Authority in advance.
Reason: To protect the character and appearance of the Listed Building.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning application S6/2002/97/LB

Planning application S6/2002/98/FP



**WELWYN
HATFIELD
COUNCIL**

HATFIELD AERODROME

SCALE: 1:2500

DRAWN BY: LIZA WREN

DATE 27th May 2002

Drawing No. 2002/98

Council Offices, The Campus,

Welwyn Garden City, Herts. AL8 6AE

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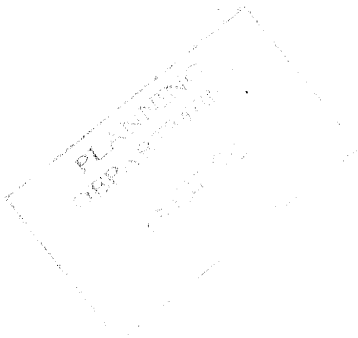
Vb CTC



ENGLISH HERITAGE

EAST OF ENGLAND REGION

C. J. Conway,
Chief Planning Officer,
Welwyn Hatfield Council,
Council Offices,
Welwyn Garden City,
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE



25 March 2002

Your ref.s S6/2002/97/LB & 98/FP

Dear Mr Conway,

THE FLIGHT TEST HANGAR, OFFICES, FIRE STATION & CONTROL TOWER, HATFIELD AERODROME

Thank you for notifying English Heritage of applications for listed building consent and planning permission to alter the Flight Test Hangar at Hatfield Aerodrome and convert it into a sports club. As you know, I have discussed these proposals with the applicants on two occasions prior to their submission, and the scheme has been modified in response to some of my observations. I make the following comments on what is proposed.

1. The importance of the Flight Test Hangar as both a pioneering and monumental aluminium structure and the home of the Comet was recognised by its inclusion in the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest at grade II*.
2. It is not obvious to think of suitable uses for such a structure, but the proposed use of is a good one. It would enable the building to be repaired and would preserve much of the spatial quality of the interior. Few other uses would be likely to achieve so beneficial a balance between economic viability and respect for the special interest of the building.
3. The proposed strengthening of the aluminium structure would be achieved by the introduction of twelve posts, one to support each of the principal trusses, and various further works to the subsidiary trusses. It would entail significant alteration to the existing structure – which is the most significant part of the building, and would compromise to some degree the open span of the interior. It would not, however, entail any loss to the historic fabric of the building, and would not seriously detract from the aesthetic character of the interior. I have had the proposed strengthening looked at by English Heritage’s engineers, and they are satisfied that it is necessary.

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4. The wholesale replacement of the hanger's aluminium cladding causes me some concern. As you know, if the historic interest of a building is to be preserved for the future, it is generally accepted that it is best that its fabric should be repaired rather than renewed. The hanger retains its original aluminium cladding and this would last for another 25 to 30 years. Its fixings and seals have failed or are in poor repair, but these could be renewed. The applicants acknowledge this in their supporting statement, but nevertheless argue that it would be more practical to replace the cladding in its entirety.
5. Their grounds for this are several. It might prove very difficult to refit the panelling if it were removed. Were it to be repaired in situ the new sealing might not be reliable. The appearance of the panelling is considered by the applicants to be unsatisfactory, but to clean the panelling by grit-blasting would shorten its life. In addition to these largely technical arguments, the applicants suggest that the provision of an entirely new cladding to the building is important to the viability of the proposals, both in order to facilitate the funding of the scheme and to protect the club's operations from future disruption caused by the eventual failure of parts of the existing cladding were it to be repaired.
6. With some hesitation, I accept the force of these arguments. Although a case could be made for the repair of the present cladding, the present redundancy of the building coupled with the proposals for its reuse means that now is an opportune time for thorough-going works that would secure the building for a further fifty years or more. If the cladding is to be replaced it is imperative that the new cladding should be aluminium sheeting of the same type, dimensions and finish as the original. On the other hand it would be sensible to use improved sealing methods and stainless steel fixings as the applicants suggest, in order to make the new cladding as long-lasting as possible.
7. The location of the entrance to the sports club in the control tower would not compromise the tower's interest, and the simple modern design of the entrances is acceptable. I understand the need for the removal of the asbestos cladding to the tower, and provided that this is replaced with panelling of matching dimensions and appearance, it would not be objectionable. Within the tower the only elements that make a significant contribution towards the interest of the whole are the staircase, which has a good balustrade, and the control room, whose fittings are mentioned in the list description but have been partially dismantled. Whatever the circumstances in which the latter work was carried out, the room cannot now be recreated. The staircase would not be altered in any significant manner, and the re-planning of the remainder of the tower would be unobjectionable.
8. The principal alteration to the exterior of the hanger would be the creation of a new south elevation, set back from the south doors. The preservation of the doors is vital, but the creation of this new elevation set back from them is a sympathetic

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