



Planning, Design & Access Statement  
THE COMET HOTEL, ST ALBANS ROAD WEST, HATFIELD

COMET HOTEL

SEPTEMBER 2021



[pearceplanning.co.uk](http://pearceplanning.co.uk)  
[alan@pearceplanning.co.uk](mailto:alan@pearceplanning.co.uk)  
+44(0) 7547 765077

Pearce Planning Ltd  
Woodspring House  
17 Hill Road  
Clevedon  
BS21 7NE



## Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Site & Surroundings.....	4
3. Proposals – Design & Access.....	5
4. Planning History.....	6
5. Planning Policy .....	8
6. Planning Assessment .....	11
7. Heritage Assessment.....	12
8. Balance and Conclusion .....	16



# 1. Introduction

## Background

- 1.1 Pearce Planning Ltd have been appointed by the Comet Hotel to provide planning consultancy services in connection with the proposed installation of a wooden post & rope fence and service yard gates.
- 1.2 The wooden post & rope fence is proposed around the front perimeter of the site and is required help mark the boundary of the hotel and discourage vehicles from trying to gain access onto the site from across the verge/pavement/cycle lane.
- 1.3 The service yard gates are required to make the service area more secure and to protect it from unauthorised persons. They are also required in order to protect and screen what is otherwise a rather unsightly bin/delivery yard from the view of the general public and to make it more in keeping with the main hotel building.



## 2. Site & Surroundings

### Site Location

- 2.1 The Comet Hotel is located on the outskirts of Hatfield and is surrounded by a variety of uses. To the north is Hatfield Business Park, north west is University of Hertfordshire - de Havilland Campus, north east is The Galleria (designer outlet centre), east is Hatfield Lawn Tennis Club and Hatfield football association and to the south west are a number of residential properties.
- 2.2 The site is sustainably located west of the A1001 (also known as Comet Way); just off the A1. Whilst located centrally in Hatfield, the site also benefits from direct access to St Albans (via A1057) and to Welwyn Garden City (A1 and A6129).
- 2.3 Access into the site is via Comet Way A1001 or the A1057. The roundabout east to the site provides an overpass across the A1.
- 2.4 The application site has functioned as a restaurant and hotel since its initial construction, with student accommodation more recently constructed on the western part of the site.



### 3. Proposals – Design & Access

3.1 The Description of Development for the proposed application is as follows:

**Installation of wooden post and rope fence to front boundary and installation of wooden gates to service yard.**

- 3.2 The wooden post & rope fence is proposed around the front perimeter of the site and is required help mark the boundary of the hotel and discourage any rogue vehicles from trying to gain access onto the site from across the verge/pavement/cycle lane. The fencing would be installed in four separate runs between access points as highlighted on the submitted plans. The timber posts would be 1 metre in height, with the height of the rope varying across the length of the fence. This fence could normally be installed under Permitted Development but permission is required in this instance as the building is Grade II Listed.
- 3.3 The service yard gates are required to make the service area more secure and to protect it from unauthorised persons. They are also required in order to protect and screen what is otherwise a rather unsightly bin/delivery yard from the view of the general public and to make it more in keeping with the main hotel building.
- 3.4 The gates would be hung on heavy duty band hinges attached to a timber post, which would be resin fixed to the existing piers. The timber gates would be stained to a chocolate walnut finish. One gate would feature a heavy-duty floor bolt with 'Euro' lock and handles, to be used on the other gate with internal thumb turn. The gates would open internally due to rise in floor level externally.
- 3.5 The proposed design of the gates would be constructed to match and be in keeping existing external doors from the building to the yard (see Fig 1 below). Previous (understood to be non-original) wooden gates were in this location prior to the recent refurbishment works, but they were removed during the works (see Fig 2 below and extract of demolition plan in Section 4 below).



Fig 1 – Existing door to service yard

Fig 2 – Previous gates in situ prior to redevelopment/refurbishment



## 4. Planning History

- 4.1 Following approval of applications ref: 6/2016/1739/MAJ & 6/2016/1740/LB, substantial redevelopment was undertaken. The proposals permitted refurbishment of the existing building, a replacement hotel extension and student accommodation on the western part of the site.
- 4.2 Further to the permission a subsequent set of applications were submitted to request permission for a series of advertisements and signs. These too were permitted, with the exception of 6/2019/3244/ADV and 6/2019/3245/LB, which were eventually allowed at appeal.
- 4.3 All relevant applications have been detailed below:

**Application Ref: 6/2019/3244/ADV & 6/2019/3245/LB**

- 4.4 In 2019 an application was submitted for the following proposal

*Installation of 2x Illuminated signage (2 no. locations)*

Allowed at appeal 25/11/2020

**Application Ref: 6/2019/0953/ADV & 6/2019/0957/LB**

- 4.5 In 2019 an application was submitted for the following proposal:

*Various Signage display:*

*Signs 1 & 2: 2 no. Halo illuminated Fusion Students logo on student accommodation (sign type 1); Signs 3-6: 4 no. Student block identification lettering on student accommodation (non-illuminated) (sign type 2A); Signs 7-12: 6 no. Student block identification halo illuminated lettering on student accommodation (sign type 2B); Sign 13: 1 no. Hotel entrance sign on Comet Hotel (sign type 3); Sign 14: 8 no. Student accommodation glazing manifestation on student accommodation (sign type 4b); Sign 15: 1 no. South east elevation Comet Hotel identification signage on Comet Hotel (sign type 6); Sign 16: 1 no. Restaurant identification sign on Comet Hotel (sign type 5); Sign 17: 2 no. Comet Hotel entrance totem signs (sign type 8); and Sign 18: 1 no. North east elevation Comet Hotel identification signage on Comet Hotel (sign type 7).*

Approved 06/08/2019 & 15/07/2019

**Application Ref: 6/2017/2746/LB**

- 4.6 This application was submitted to bring the proposals in line with the detailed design of the development (further to the below consents).

*Extension and refurbishment of the Grade II listed building (Use Class C1) following demolition of existing rear and side extensions. Erection of student accommodation (Sui Generis) with landscaping and associated works.*

**Application Ref: 6/2016/1739/MAJ & 6/2016/1740/LB**

- 4.7 In 2016 approval was granted for the following development:

*Extension and refurbishment of the grade II Listed building (Use Class c1) following demolition of existing rear and side extensions. Erection of 7,253.7sqm student accommodation (sui generis), landscaping and associated works*



4.8 As part of the above noted applications, the following demolition plan (COMET-STL-01-ZZ-DR-A-ZZZZ-D1001 Rev P1) was approved, which shows the removal of the existing service yard gates – see Fig 3 below.

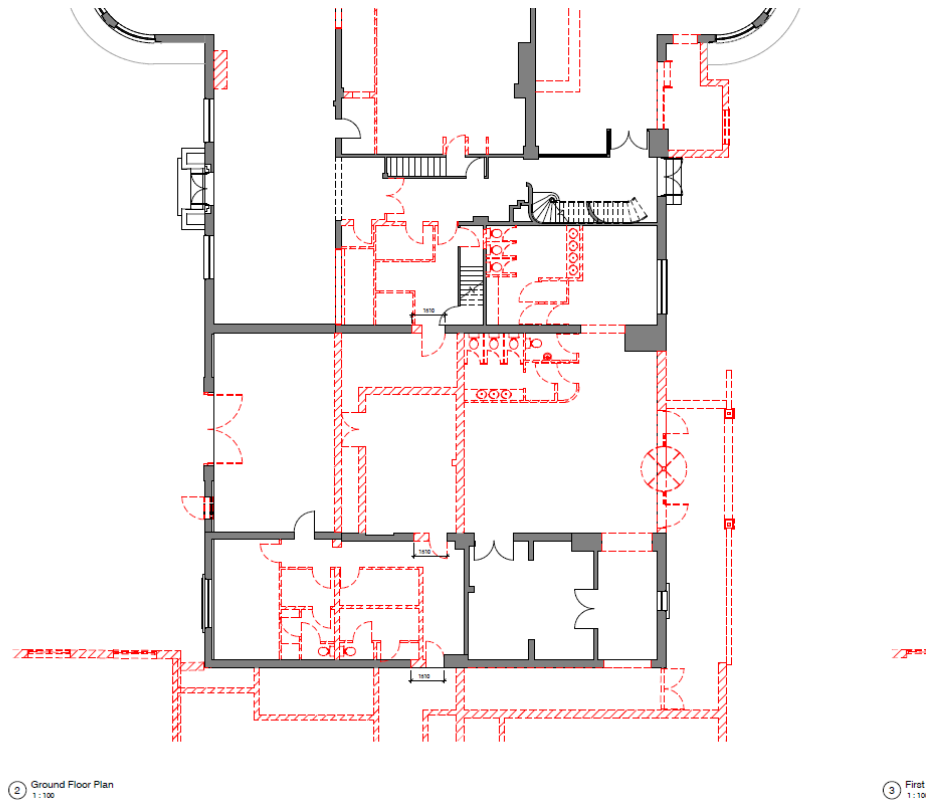


Fig 3 – Demolition plan



## 5. Planning Policy

### Policy Context

- 5.1 Section 38 (6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2014 requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is also reflected by paragraph 47 of the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019.
- 5.2 The Development Plan includes adopted local plans, neighbourhood plans that have been made and published spatial development strategies, together with any regional strategy policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.
- 5.3 The weight to be applied to the Local Development Plan will depend on its conformity with the NPPF which was published February 2019. The degree of importance placed on emerging local policy will depend on how far it has advanced through the process of adoption, the level of objections raised and conformity to the NPPF.
- 5.4 In Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, the Development Plan comprises the following:
  - Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005
  - Draft Local Plan

### Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, 2005

- 5.5 The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan is the current adopted Local Plan and provides a framework for planning decisions in the borough. The Welwyn Hatfield District Plan was adopted in 2005. A number of policies have been 'saved' until it is replaced by a Local Development Framework.

#### *Policy D1 (Quality of Design)*

- 5.6 Applications are expected to incorporate high quality into the design of the proposals.

#### *Policy D2 (Character and Context)*

- 5.7 Proposals are expected to be of good design and respect the local character and context of the area.

### Material Considerations

- 5.8 Material considerations in the determination of any planning application on the site would include national guidance in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), emerging Local Plan documents and any supporting supplementary planning documents.

### NPPF

- 5.9 The NPPF 2021 provides national policy to help guide local plan makers and decision takers in the approach Central Government is taking to development proposals. The NPPF replaces the previous versions and the original 2012 document and promotes sustainable development through achieving social, economic and environmental objectives.





- 5.10 Paragraph 11 provides a presumption in favour of sustainable development for plan making and decision taking. 11c requires decision makers to approve development proposals that accord with up-to-date Development Plans without delay.
- 5.11 Chapter 4 refers to Decision making and requires planning authorities to approach decisions in a positive and creative way. Paragraph 47 restates planning law which requires development proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.12 The NPPF attaches significant weight to proposals that would support economic growth and productivity, on both a local level and in consideration of wider needs (Para 81).
- 5.13 Para 194 states that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 5.14 Para 199 states that, when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. Para 202 then goes on to state that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

#### **Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)**

- 5.15 "What assessment of the impact of proposals on the significance of affected heritage assets should be included in an application?"

*"Applicants are expected to describe in their application the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting (National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 189). In doing so, applicants should include analysis of the significance of the asset and its setting, and, where relevant, how this has informed the development of the proposals. The level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on its significance."*

#### **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (Draft Local Plan)**

- 5.16 The Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Draft Local Plan (the Draft Local Plan) was published in 2017 and was submitted for examination in May. Following on-going Examination, Stage 9 Hearing Sessions were held most recently during February and March 2021. Therefore, it is considered to attract some weight as a material consideration. Relevant policies include:

##### *Policy SP9*

- 5.17 The policy requires proposals to respond to character and context and relate well to their surroundings.



*Policy SADM 15*

- 5.18 Proposals should seek to sustain and enhance the heritage assets in a manner appropriate to its function, significance, character, setting, materials, form and scale.

**Welwyn Hatfield District Plan SDG (2005)**

- 5.19 This Supplementary Design Guidance requires all new development to be of high quality, and respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed.



## 6. Planning Assessment

- 6.1 The above noted policies support additional development, provided it is high quality, of good design and respect the local character and context of the area.
- 6.2 The proposed post and rope fencing is considered to be the minimum necessary to provide a degree of security and to denote the front boundary of the Comet premises. As the posts would be limited to 1m in height, it would be seen as a relatively small-scale feature in the street scene and would be of similar height to the numerous black metal fences that can be seen along the public highway in the locality of the site. Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed post and rope fence would not have a negative impact on the street scene nor the wider character and context of the local area.
- 6.3 The proposed timber gates are again considered to be the minimum necessary to provide suitable security and screening to the bin / service yard area toward the rear of the Comet hotel. The design of the gates has been carefully considered to be in keeping with the current door into the service yard area, as well as the previous timber gates that featured in this location prior to the redevelopment works. It is considered that they would enhance the appearance of the building in the street scene by screening an otherwise 'untidy' part of the site. As such, it is considered that they would have a positive impact on the street scene and the wider character and context of the local area.
- 6.4 With respect to Listed Building considerations, these are covered in the following Section 7.
- 6.5 For all these reasons, the proposal therefore accords with the provisions of the development plan.



## 7. Heritage Assessment

### Listed Building

#### Description

7.1 The building is Grade II listed. The list description notes the following:

*Hotel. 1933. By E B Musman. Red brick with stone dressings on steel frame. The plan is supposedly in the form of an aeroplane. Two storeys. Projecting centrepiece with rounded end, the ground floor projects beyond the first. Wings on either side, also half round, single storey only. Five window side elevations. Largely original steel framed windows, the two modern ones in the front elevations are openings in originally blank walls. Clipsham stone dressings strip above and below windows and to parapets. Flat roofs not visible, the original roof lantern has been removed. The interior has been altered. A pioneer hotel in the modern style.*

7.2 The hotel is understood to have been built and first operated in the 1930's. The building was originally designed to provide a Hotel, to accommodate travellers opting to use motor transport; whilst also providing public house facilities as well.

### Assessing Significance

7.3 The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the NPPF as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The assessment of significance within this report has been undertaken in accordance with the policies and guidance contained in Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (English Heritage, 2008). The significance of a heritage asset (termed 'place' within Conservation Principles) is defined with reference to four areas of value.

- Evidential Value is derived from “the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity” (English Heritage, 2008, p28) and primarily associated with physical remains or historic fabric. This is often associated with unique primary sources which do not need to be visible; evidential value is therefore generally equated with archaeology;
- Historical Value is derived from “the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present” (English Heritage, 2008, p28). This can derive from particular aspects of past ways of life. Illustrative historical value provides a direct (often visual) link between past and present people, while associative historical value provides an association with notable families, persons, events or movements.
  - Illustrative Value - Conservation Principles states  
*‘An historic building that is one of many similar examples may provide little unique evidence about the past, although each illustrates the intentions of its creators equally well. However, their distribution, like that of planned landscapes, may be of considerable evidential value, as well as demonstrating, for instance, the distinctiveness of regions and aspects of their social organisation.’*
  - Associative Value - This is less concerned with the asset physically, but more about what it can detail and illustrate to us about other key developments. Conservation Principles states:  
*‘Many buildings and landscapes are associated with the development of other aspects of cultural heritage, such as literature, art, music or film. Recognition of*



*such associative values tends in turn to inform people's responses to these places.'*

- Aesthetic Value is derived from sensory and intellectual stimulation and including design value, i.e. "aesthetic qualities generated by the conscious design of a building, structure or landscape as a whole" (English Heritage, 2008, p30). It may also include its physical form, and how it lies within its setting. It may be the result of design, or an unplanned outcome of a process of events (i.e. fortuitous). This can also extend to the craftsmanship of an artist's/artisan's workspace. In such cases 'Strong indicators of importance are quality of design and execution, and innovation, particularly if influential.' ; and
- Communal Value derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it relates to their collective experience or memory. It may be commemorative or symbolic in nature, and relate to identity or collective memory (English Heritage, 2008, p31-32).
  - Commemorative Value – These values reflect the meanings of a place for those who draw part of their identity from it, or have emotional links to it. They are important aspects of collective memory and identity, places of remembrance whose meanings should not be forgotten.
  - Social Value - This is associated with places that people perceive as a source of identity, distinctiveness, social interaction and coherence. Some may be comparatively modest, acquiring communal significance through the passage of time as a result of a collective memory of stories linked to them.

## **Assessment of Significance**

### *Overview*

- 7.4 The proposed works intend to install a wooden post and rope fence to front boundary and wooden gates to the service yard. For this reason this heritage statement/assessment is limited to assessing the significance of evidential, historical and aesthetic value of the building.

### *Evidential Value*

- 7.5 Evidential value is associated with physical remains or historic fabric – which in this case would comprise the building itself.

### *Historical Value*

- 7.6 The key historical significance of the building is related to the architect and the expansion of road side services in a post war era. The architect, Ernest Brander Musman; who in his own right exemplified the 1920's, Art Deco, modernist architectural style. Other examples include the Nags Head, Bishops Stortford. The style is typified by strong straight lines, glass, steel frame and sweeping curved features; extruding from the main form of the building.
- 7.7 The Comet therefore provides a key example of modernist architecture. It is noted, however, that it is not a rarity amongst other national examples, but is considered to be one of Ernest Musman's designs; and one that has been well received. It is therefore considered to be of low-medium significance.



### *Aesthetic Value*

- 7.8 The buildings most notable features is its 1920's style and layout, formulating what appears to be, in an aerial perspective, the shape of a plane. Key to this is its symmetrical properties which gives a well-proportioned and balanced appearance.
- 7.9 Whilst there are no strikingly detailed features, in relation to aesthetical elements (e.g. entablature), the key features here are the simplistic approach to design; commonly associated with art deco. Strong lines and sweeping curves that accentuate and ensure the building stands out, particularly in its modern context. Whilst this is a significant feature it is not one that is considered to be of particular rarity or a leading example of such a modernist style. For this reason it is considered to provide low to medium significance.

### **Communal Value**

- 7.10 Not much communal value can be drawn from the building, primarily as the main purpose of the building was as a hotel, therefore would have been subject to a transient clientele. This, however, is not to say that the building would not provide memories for a very limited number of frequenting guests; or perhaps even local residents. For this reason the communal value of the building is considered to be of low significance.

### **Setting**

- 7.11 The building has been the subject of expansion and development over its lifetime. More notably so too has the surrounding context. The immediate setting of the building is dominated by car parking facilities and minor landscaping arrangements. This helps provide a clear view of the building from a close proximity perspective. Further away from the building the setting is drastically impacted. High capacity roads, traffic calming measures and modern buildings dominate the setting, which significantly detracts from The Comet. For this reason the overall setting of the heritage asset is considered to be of low significance.

## **Assessment of Impact**

### **Proposed works**

- 7.12 The proposed works will install a wooden post and rope fence to front boundary and wooden gates to the service yard. In assessing the impact it is worth noting that there is to be no alteration to the form, scale and or layout of the building as part of these proposals.

### **Impact**

- 7.13 The proposed works are minor in nature and have been conceived and designed with a view to comprising the minimum measures necessary to achieve the client's brief.
- 7.14 The proposed timber post and rope fence would be sited between the car park area and the adjacent verge/public pavements. As such, it is considered that it would simply read as a piece of street furniture, in the context of a significant extent of metal railings along the roundabout and various roads leading into it. Such post and rope fences are commonplace at various pubs and restaurants, irrespective of their individual historic significance. For these reasons, it is considered that the proposed fencing would present no harm to the heritage asset.
- 7.15 The proposed service yard gates have been designed to be in keeping with the design of existing doors at the site, as well as the previous gates in this location. As such, they are considered to fit and be in keeping with the character of the building, and would thus preserve the heritage asset.



7.16 It should also be noted that the proposed gates only require fixings to the external wall pillars. This means that should in the future the use change, the works are reversible and can ensure the appearance of the heritage asset is preserved.

**Summary**

7.17 In consideration of the above information, the proposed works are not considered to impact the significant features of the heritage asset or its setting.



## 8. Balance and Conclusion

- 8.1 The application proposals comprise minor scale works which will help to improve general site security and will on balance improve the appearance of the premises in the street scene.
- 8.2 The included Heritage Assessment assesses the impact of the proposed works and concludes that there is no harm to the significance of the heritage asset or its setting. Furthermore, it is confirmed that the works are reversible and adding further credence that the works preserve the heritage asset.
- 8.3 It is considered that the application proposals are in accordance with the current Development Plan and that there are no material considerations that would lead to an alternative conclusion. It is also considered that the proposals are accordance with the aims and principles of the NPPF.
- 8.4 The benefits of the proposal should therefore be afforded significant weight and the Framework confirms that the development should be approved without delay.



