

6/2016/1739/MAJ and 6/2016/1740/LB

Email response from Conservation Officer

My comments on the previous applications (6/2015/1997/MAJ and 6/2015/1998/LB) were as follows (in italics)

**From:** Andrew Robley

**Sent:** 13 November 2015 15:14

**To:** June Pagdin

**Subject:** Hatfield, The Comet, S/15/1997/MAJ and 1998/LB

Dear June,

*I apologise for the lateness of my response. The pre-app period was so long and I sent a response on that and modified it to take account of amendments and I must have therefore thought I had done it.*

*The Site*

*I would normally spend some time on site analysis but we have looked at this already and I propose to comment only on where I disagree with the applicant, as expressed in the Heritage Statement.*

*I would agree that the building was designed to make a striking landmark impression on the Great North Road out of and into London and also (possibly incidentally) served to emphasise the importance of the DeHavilland Aircraft factory whose importance was much associated with the original "Comet" racer but also later perhaps more famously with the Mosquito fighter bomber of WWII and the world's first jet passenger plane also named "The Comet"*

*I would agree with the historical setting but also add the remaining aircraft factory buildings which line the west side of the Great North Road to the North as of a similar era ( at least in design terms). What is certain is that the building whilst separately expressed was part of a group of modernist buildings from the mid C20th but now remains a rather isolated one and a rare and significant example of its type. I would agree that the setting has been eroded by the traffic paraphernalia and that the present hotel extension buildings have also eroded it but would emphasise that this is mainly from views to the N, NW and to a lesser extent to the NE, where the low height of the new hotel block ( no higher than the listed building) mitigates the harm to some extent.*

*The Proposals*

*In fundamental terms, The new proposals tend to harm the setting more from the NW, N and NE, aspects because the height of both the hotel extension ( 3 storeys) , the NW wing of the student block ( 4 storeys) , tend to reduce the pre-eminence of the listed building, which was an important component of the original design intention of the Architect of the LB. Furthermore, from the E and SE, the setting would be similarly more compromised by the SE block of student housing.*

*Whilst the western half of the site is at present screened by landscaping, which screens views of the student blocks from the NW, SW and S, there is concern that the views supplied, show the likely appearance in Summer and rely on the future retention of the trees, some of which are not in the site ownership. Indeed the NE view also indicates trees which are not planted. Serving to conceal the 5 storey SE block.*

*To some extent the harm to the NW, N and NE aspect is mitigated by the plain glass façade of the proposed hotel block . However, it is considered that the overall heights of all the new buildings except for the small hotel link would balance towards overall harm.*

*With regard to the listed building itself, there is some disagreement over significance, in that given the relative rarity of modernist/art deco buildings nationally, thee should be a very high significance category that would include the staircases. High Significance would include the external façade and original windows and doors, the original parts of the layout and structure/fabric which contains it, medium significance would then include the rest of the interior which is not in original layout and low would include the later infill and those of the modern fixtures and fittings that are in keeping. None- the modern extensions, modern ceilings, doors, fixtures and fittings that detract.*

*The proposed alterations to the listed building are considered to be not harmful to the character of the building although loss of the inner wall of the high significance the 1<sup>st</sup> floor sitting room is considered harmful even though it is not the original wall shown on an early photograph because it is a significant part of the plan and important in understanding the hierarchal functioning of the building.*

*Several proposals are considered beneficial to the character of the building and these would include- restoration of the former pylon; removal of the modern infill to the space between the front block of the building and the rear service part and replacement with a set back glazed reception behind re-instated screen walls.*

*Conclusion: Notwithstanding the largely acceptable conversion of the listed building and the enhancements thereto, the setting of the building would be harmed by the proposed extensions to it and the proposed new student housing blocks, which are all higher than the listed building, some markedly so, which would challenge the pre-eminence of the landmark listed building, all as advised throughout the pre-application process. The proposals would be contrary to the NPPF 2012 , paras 7, 8, 9 , 131, 132, 134, NPPG 2014, Historic England- “Conservation Principles” and Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Notes 2 and 3, Local Plan R25, D1 and D2, SPG Design Guidance, Emerging Core Strategy CS11. (It is not considered that Local Plan Policy R27 is relevant in this case as the principal building is not to be demolished.)*

*NB the actual difference in height between the LB and the hotel extension is approximately 2.4 metres and not 1.9 metres as suggested in the application.*

## **COMMENTS ON REVISED SCHEME MAY 2016**

**There have been changes to the number, size and placement of the student housing blocks which would seem to be aimed at addressing the concerns re the relationship with the existing housing to the rear and the amenity space between the blocks and this is an area that you will be dealing with. My principal objection to the previous scheme was that the hotel extension was too high ( higher than the 2 storey listed building to which it is attached) and that the main side student housing blocks were also too high in relation to the listed building.**

**In the new proposal, the NW block would remain at 4 storeys but the top storey would be set back perhaps a little more than previously. The SE block would**

be reduced from 5 to 4 storeys although strangely it appears more dominant than before from the main eastern view of the site because the existing trees that partially mask it are shown at a lesser size and if this is now the correct visual , somewhat disappointingly.

The crucial relationship between the listed hotel and its extension is in essence unchanged. The hotel remains 3 storeys and presumably 2.4 metres above the listed building and therefore fundamentally flawed. I have consistently made this point from the beginning of the pre-application meetings.

The change is to the materials and detailing. This is from a simple contrasting plain reflective glass clad building into a more modelled brick clad building. The previous treatment was more appropriate because it allowed the listed building to be seen against a plain backdrop. The new treatment would have the effect of subsuming it into a fussier background and it would therefore lose even more of its pre-eminence. The effect is made worse because the same brick treatment is continued over all of the student blocks as well. The desire to do it in art-deco style would also be a mistake in this case because the new building is so great in comparison to the listed building that it would be seen as an appendage to the new-build rather than the other way round.

In conclusion my concerns have not been met in these new proposals, the changes being mostly to the student blocks. And would remain contrary to the legislation and advice listed previously (above).

Regards,

Andrew