



Heritage Statement

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Erection of 26 dwellings and associated access
Firs Wood Close, Northaw

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1.0 This statement has been prepared to support planning application reference 06/2019/1370, for 26 dwellings and associated access at Firs Wood Close, Northaw. Specifically, it has been prepared in response to the comments received from the Gardens Trust as a result of the application consultation exercise.

1.2.0 The comments are as follows;

'The Hook was an early 19th century gentlemen's country house with a garden terrace and with park-like grounds including some meadow land and a small wood. The development of the Oshwal Centre and Firs Wood Close has destroyed some of the detail of the estate and its setting but the area to which this proposal pertains is part of the original wooded grounds and lawns of this historic site. HGT consider that enough remains of the grounds, and the tree planting to be included on our List of Locally Important Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest. We consider that development within this remaining area of the former pleasure ground of The Hook is contrary to national policies on heritage assets (NPPF 184 'These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance . . .') and to the WHBC policies in the emerging Local Plan (SADM15).'

2.0 ASSESSMENT

- 2.1.0 The Gardens Trust asserts that the application proposal will result in the loss of the remaining evidence of the pleasure grounds attached to 'The Hook', a former gentleman's residence, built in 1839, now Oshwal House. The Hook is a grade II listed building and as such has to be considered as a designated heritage asset. The application site is now in separate ownership from The Hook. The Garden History Society considers that the remaining gardens associated with the listed buildings should be included in its 'List of Locally Important Gardens of Historic Interest' which would indicate that it should be considered to be a non-designated heritage asset.
- 2.2.0 The historic land use in the vicinity of The Hook can be discerned by comparing the existing land uses, disposition of roads and access with historic map evidence. On the 1873-80 OS 1:2500 sheet, The Hook can be clearly identified with a curving access to Coopers Lane Road adjacent to the existing Lodge. The path of this access remains today in the eastern path to the car parking for the Oshwal Centre. The map indicates that an area to the west of the house was partially enclosed by trees, having the appearance of formal gardens. The land to the south of the house and formal garden, which now contains the application site and the parking for the Oshwal Centre was an area of open grassland encircled by trees. There was a particularly dense belt of trees on the western edge of the site partially separated from the whole site by a path that provided access to Hook Cottage to the north.
- 2.3.0 The pairs of semi-detached dwelling on Hook Lane were built in the early 1930's by the Greyhound Racing Association (GRA). By this time a footpath has been created which crosses the centre of the 'parkland' running north from the Lodge. The open land to the east of this footpath has been divided into three numbered parcels of agricultural land.
- 2.4.0 The GRA operated on the site from the early 1930s to the mid-1980s, employing some 400 members of staff. Following the closure of the GRA, the site was partially redeveloped for housing and the remainder (including The Hook) was sold off to the Oshwal Association and is now used as the Oshwal Centre.
- 2.4.0 The extent and pattern of the former estate of The Hook can still be clearly identified in the local landscape. The house and route of the driveway to the former Lodge remain as does the route of the footpath north of the Lodge under the existing driveway, these enclose the parking to the Oshwal Centre. The eastwards extent of the open meadow with fringing trees remains in the application site and the route of Firs Wood Close which was the meadow boundary.
- 2.5.0 The consultation response from Hertfordshire County Council in respect of the Archaeological implications of the planning application are provided in a letter dated 15th July 2019. This response is based on a thorough search of the County Historic Environment Record (HER). It records the presence of The Hook but states clearly that there are 'no heritage assets of archaeological or historic interest relating to the site'. One would normal

expect that the HER would include all known or relevant information about heritage assets in the county including the park surrounding the country house. Local HERs are the starting point for the accumulation of the information for the clear understanding of heritage assets.

- 2.6.0 Welwyn Hatfield District has been the subject of a Landscape Appraisal Study published in April 2005. The application site falls within the Northaw Common Parkland Landscape Appraisal Area 53. The area lies between the settlements of Potters Bar, Brookmans Park and Cuffley. The appraisal describes the area as having parkland features throughout and being typical of the south-western part of Hertfordshire where the influences of London on the history and culture of the area are strongly felt. The landscape is characterised by enclosed pockets of parkland framed by trees such that visibility in the area is limited.
- 2.7.0 The nature of the remaining estate attached to The Hook and what can still be discerned in the landscape, is consistent with the descriptions of the wider landscape appraisal area. Wooded areas remain enclosing the remnants of the former open parkland. Given the established and recognised pattern of landscape development in this part of the district one could have reasonably expected that if the landscape associated with The Hook had some significance that it would have already been recognised, if only being included in the local register of historically important parks and gardens, but this has not been the case.
- 2.8.0 The statutory list description of The Hook is an early one, dating from 1952 and is silent with regard to the surroundings of the house. The setting of a listed building often makes a positive contribution to its significance and understanding. Historic England provides extensive advice on the assessment of setting. The application of the policies of the NPPF requires a thorough understanding of the contribution of setting to the significance of heritage assets. In this instance The Hook has lost a considerable part of the character of its original context and the setting has been severely compromised by C20th development.
- 2.9.0 The loss of historic context and adverse impact on the significance of the designated heritage asset, The Hook, does not mean that there should be any lack of sympathetic consideration of the content or appearance of development in the locality. Nor does this mean that the insight provided by the specialist knowledge of bodies such as The Gardens Trust should be treated with anything but respect. However, the history of the site and surrounding area must be balanced with the nature of the application proposal in the light of both policies of the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan.
- 2.10.0 The Gardens Trust refers to paragraph 184 of the NPPF i.e.

‘These assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance’.

It is considered that the significance of the remaining grounds of The Hook is relatively limited due to the alterations and erosion of the original estate over time. Furthermore no information has been forthcoming from The Gardens Trust to indicate what has made this estate particularly special and worthy of preservation. The application proposal is confined to the development of the open meadow land, the existing woodland will be retained and conserved. As indicated above, the former layout of the parkland in terms of boundaries and extent, will be conserved in the landscape, so the extent of an estate attached to a modest gentleman's residence will be capable of identification. This could be regarded as conservation 'in a manner appropriate to its significance.'

- 2.11.0 It is important to recognise that the application site is not a designated heritage asset neither has it been formally recognised by the Council as a non-designated heritage asset. It is appreciated that the thrust of the historic environment polices of the NPPF seek both to protect heritage assets and to ensure their productive future use, but equally the policies recognise that there will be circumstances where any harm to a heritage asset,

'should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal'.

This point in paragraph 196 is framed to relate to 'less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset' but it is equally applicable to the development that is the subject of the current application, i.e. the provision of 26 units of affordable housing where the applicant is a Housing Association.

- 2.12.0 The fact of the remains of the parkland surrounding The Hook is not discounted but it is suggested that any loss resulting from proposed development can be mitigated by the recording of the landscape before development. This can be achieved by mapping and photographs with the resulting material being made available for inclusion in the Historic Environment Record. The County Council in responding to this application has advised that if planning permission is granted then the permission shall be subject to a condition requiring the submission and approval of a Written Scheme of Investigation, together with a programme of archaeological works as necessary. It should be feasible to extend this recording to include evidential remains of the former parkland.

- 2.13.0 In conclusion, the application site is neither designated heritage asset nor has it received formal recognition as a site of local heritage interest. It is recognised that the site does form the residue of a modest estate attached to a grade II listed building, The Hook, but the context and setting of the listed building have been altered and compromised over recent years. The application proposal will result in the loss of the remaining meadow land of the estate, but the wooded areas will remain as will the historic boundaries of the estate. In the

circumstances it would not be reasonable to restrict the propose development of 26 affordable housing units. There will be an opportunity to mitigate the impact of the proposal by establishing a record the extent of the former estate for inclusion with the Historic Environment Record.