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28 September 2016

Dear Mr Waller

Repair, refurbishment and conversion of Northaw House, Ballroom Wing and Gardener's Cottage and erection of new dwellings to create a total of 21 residential units Northaw House, Coopers Lane, Northaw

I refer to the above enquiry and our meeting in connection with the above.

As you are aware the application site is located on land which is designated as metropolitan Green Belt as defined in the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan. National planning guidance on Green Belts is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework where it outlines that the construction of new buildings is inappropriate in Green Belt. There are exceptions, however, as you are aware, the proposal does not fall within these. Accordingly the development is inappropriate and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

In this instance, no information has been submitted to seek to demonstrate that there are other considerations that would overcome the harm. However, you are aware of this and our meeting was predominately concerning the design and impact of the proposals to the listed building. Nevertheless you outlined that this information would be submitted with an application where an assessment would then be made.

With regard to very special circumstances, the proposed development would fund the repair of the combined heritage asset of the Principle Grade II listed building (Northaw House), the Stable Building, walled garden, its outbuildings and its setting. Whilst I note that your submitted information does not refer to English Heritage's policy for Enabling Development, I would suggest that this is put forward as a case based upon an argument for enabling development to provide for the restoration of the listed buildings and that will provide the very special circumstances to justify setting aside Green Belt policy.

In terms of assessing the needs for the scale and type of development proposed English Heritage's Policy for enabling development provides a robust and tested method to ascertain whether the development proposed would meet this policy. This policy states;

Enabling development that would secure the future of a significant place but contravene other planning policy objectives should be unacceptable unless,

- It will not materially harm the heritage values of the place or its setting
- It avoids fragmentation of management of the place
- It will secure the long term future of the place and where applicable, its continued use for a sympathetic purpose
- It is necessary to resolve problems arising from the inherent needs of the place, rather than the circumstances of the present owner, or the purchase price paid
- Sufficient subsidy is not available from any other source
- It is demonstrated that the amount of enabling development is the minimum necessary to secure the future of the place and that its form minimise harm to other public interests
- The public benefit of securing the future of the significant place through such enabling development decisively outweighs the disbenefits of breaching other public policies,

It is concluded that if these criteria are met, permission should only be given if the impact of the development is precisely defined at the outset, it is securely and enforceably linked to a planning obligation, the heritage asset is repaired to an agreed standard as early as possible and the planning authority closely monitors implementation.

The English Heritage Policy Statement also advises;

'It is of the essence of proposals for enabling development that a scheme which would otherwise be unacceptable in planning terms, is the only practicable means of generating the funds needed to secure the future of the heritage asset in question. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, to require applicants to provide evidence to the local planning authority in support of such a claim, particularly financial evidence'

In relation to the first criterion of this policy this is considered further on in this letter in relation to the impact of the development on the heritage asset. The second criterion deals with fragmentation of the maintenance of the heritage asset. In this instance given that Northaw House would be divided into separately owned residential units together with the creation of individual residential units within the site, it will be essential to secure a legally binding means of ensuring the long term co-ordinated management of those aspects of the place that are crucial to sustaining its significance.

Subject to repair and restoration works being completed the future of the heritage asset would be secured by beneficial occupation and management. The site's use and the general amenity value of the surrounding area would be a sympathetic use of the site.

The most fundamental criteria relating to the above policy refers to the financial information submitted to demonstrate that the amount of development is the minimum necessary to secure the future of Northaw House. The information that would need to be submitted would need to show that significant repairs are required for Northaw House and an assessment of the existing and proposed operations has been undertaken which has found that the amount of development proposed is the minimum necessary to a viable use.

Furthermore, it would be vital to consider whether the works proposed conform to good conservation practice, involving neither too much nor too little work and whether they are realistically costed. To do so a detailed specification describing the standards of repair, and a schedule of the extents of repair are essential to be submitted.

Please be aware, if detailed information is provided with any application that is submitted, it would be likely that the Local Planning Authority would obtain professional specialist advice on this matter to ascertain whether the information provide an accurate assessment and appraisal. Please be advised that you would have to pay for the Council's costs in this matter.

Impact on Listed Building

Our meeting with Tim Murphy, Conservation Officer, was predominantly associated with the impact of the proposals on the heritage assets. The proposal is for the refurbishment of Northaw House and its surroundings. Northaw House and the adjacent Stable Block at Northaw House are both statutory designated heritage assets in the form of two Grade II Listed Buildings. There are several further curtilage listed buildings and structures within the site.

The proposed development includes the creation of 21 residential units. This would include the;

- conversion of Northaw House into seven units;
- the repair of the Stable Block into a single dwelling;
- construction of a dwelling within the walled garden;
- conversion of the ballroom wing into two dwellings;
- construction of two buildings of a similar form to the ballroom wing to form four dwellings;
- two new gate lodges at the entrances to the Estate;
- construction of a new dwelling on the eastern driveway; and
- conversion of the Gardener's cottage to a single dwelling.

For ease of reference I have separated the discussion below to the separate areas of the proposal.

Repair, refurbishment and conversion of Northaw House into 7 apartments and removal of Edwardian extension at south west corner

As you are aware, the site was granted planning permission and listed building consent for the conversion, alteration and change of use of to a single residential unit, stable block to 1 residential unit, ballroom wing to 3 residences, seven new build dwellings; (3 of which live / work) extension, alterations and refurbishment of oak cottage, plus associated car parking, driveway and access and landscaping, including some demolition.

It is considered that the conversion of Northaw House is a key benefit and would be beneficial if it were to result in a sympathetic and sustainable use which retains and enhances its heritage values and ensures its long term conservation. The information provided as part of the pre-application pack suggests a division of the building along the central axis, which maybe appropriate, retaining the historic divisions of the core double pile, providing 7 individual apartments. The conservatory would be refurbished at ground level. Whilst there is no objection in principle to the reinstatement of Northaw House, further information would be required to assess the potential impact of these interventions on heritage significance, showing the layout of proposed internal partitions. It is advised that this should be submitted for further consultation with a phase/significance plan of the existing building's internal layout. The interventions to the main house should seek to retain all/as much as possible of the original early plan form as well as historic fixtures and fittings.

The building has been subject to alteration and extension during the twentieth century which has been highlighted as part of the proposal and includes buildings adjacent to the conservatory and the link from the main house to the ballroom wing. The removal of these intrusive elements through appropriate design, could potentially be beneficial, enhancing the aesthetic values of the building and better revealing its significance. Further details will be required regarding elements to be removed and the specific junctions of demolition.

However, based on initial information and a site inspection, the loss of what is referred to as the 'Edwardian extension' would potentially result in harm to the heritage asset's significance. Whilst the extension was a later addition to the house, its presence reflects the service needs to the building in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century and forms part of its chronological history and development. This extension is also sited on the approximate location of an earlier building (which formed the original service yard (and now encloses the southern side of the existing service yard). This yard creates an integral character space, contributing to the understating of the building's historic function. The loss of the 'Edwardian extension', would be detrimental to the understanding of the buildings chronological development and would effectively remove all aesthetic discernibility of the service yard. It would also further aesthetically (not physically) detach the ballroom wing from the main pile. As such, and based on initial information, it is considered that the loss of the Edwardian extension would detract from the understanding and appreciation of the overall composition and as such, its retention should be considered pending further information.

Whilst appreciated that this element of Northaw House was granted permission and consent to be removed from the previous applications, it is considered that this new scheme provides an opportunity to retain this part of Northaw House, which as outlined above, provides part of the history to Northaw House.

Ballroom Wing

The Ballroom wing is currently used for offices and this building is proposed to be converted into a pair of semi-detached dwellings. The principle of this is not objected to however further information would be required to assess the potential impact of the division of this building to assess its impact on heritage significance. However, the division of the garden will need to be carefully considered to ensure that boundary treatment is acceptable and in keeping with the setting of the listed building, but also is not detrimental to the wider visual openness of the Green Belt.

Stable Block

The Stable Block, which is listed in its own right, is recognised as being in a very poor state of repair and it is accepted that intervention is needed in the near future to secure the building. It is recommended that further consultation is undertaken when detailed designs are provided.

The stable block is located within its own defined walled enclosure and this should be retained as part of a proposal which would also reuse the historic access. The repair and retention of the boundary wall to the stable yard would be a beneficial element of the proposal. In terms of exterior space the proposal should consider the existence of historic yard surfaces which could be repaired and reused where they remain.

The sympathetic adoption of the former stables to residential use has the potential to have a beneficial effect in that it will secure the sustainable future of the building, ensuring its long term conservation. Interior access to the building was not permitted for safety reasons, however limited views through ground floor windows suggested that there were potentially historic fixtures and fittings (including stalls) within the ground floor. Whilst it is accepted that viable conversion will likely result in loss of some fixtures, efforts should be made to retain as many historic fixtures as possible which can be incorporated into the building's potential new use.

The sympathetic repair and reuse of the dilapidated structure attached to the eastern side of the stable block could potentially have a beneficial impact. The proposed western extension (in place of the existing cart shed) is considered inappropriate in terms of design and will detract from the understanding of the building and the composition presently discernible as a stables and cart shed. A proposal should seek to repair and retain the existing cart shed.

A proposal should also seek to retain the small square plan ancillary building at the north east corner of the stable curtilage (labelled as a store). This could provide the secure parking for the proposal. Should this be proposed for demolition further information will be required as to its historic use as part of the stable yard composition and its heritage significance.

Any new buildings within the walled enclosure of the stable block should be ancillary to the principal (stable) building and be of appropriate materials and design, in order not to detract from the understanding of the significance of the heritage asset or the appreciation of the asset within its setting.

Additionally the residential curtilage of this building should not extend beyond its walled enclosure which would otherwise cause fragmentation of the estate land to the rear, which forms part of the setting of the main listed building.

Walled Garden

Sympathetic development within the walled garden is likely to have an overall beneficial effect on the heritage asset providing an impetus for its repair and sustainable conservation. Additionally the repair of the walled garden is clearly a benefit to the scheme. However, the proposed residential building located in the north side of the walled garden, subject to further details being submitted, is likely to be considered of inappropriate form, mass and scale, resulting in significant change to the character of the heritage asset and its setting. The previous dwelling in this location that was approved was a conservatory house that repeated much of the character of the typical Victorian and Edwardian glass houses, which are to be found propped up against the inner walls of walled gardens in many similar historic settings in the UK.

The walled garden provides a large area of open space and screening from the setting of adjacent heritage assets. There is therefore potential for further new buildings, of appropriate scale and design, to be sited within the walled garden, which would have a lesser impact to the heritage asset than development outside of the walled garden. Further to this, this would also have the added benefit of maintaining more of the openness of the Green Belt. It is therefore recommended that development of more than one house within the walled garden should be explored thereby reducing the amount of development outside the walled garden.

Land at West (Between House and Walled Garden)

Historic cartography has suggested that this area was previously occupied by agricultural buildings, possibly an estate farm. Many of these buildings have been removed, with the exception of inter dispersed structures deriving from various periods. It is considered that the removal of these buildings would be acceptable and provides an opportunity to enhance the site. Although the retention of any historic features in this space should be considered.

A number of dwellings are proposed in this location, which includes three new detached dwellings and two pairs of semi-detached properties. Additionally, the Gardener's Cottage would be renovated and a new extension proposed to create a further dwelling.

The proposed three detached dwellings are located on land which was the former orchard area, and has since been felled, which contributed to the setting and character of the heritage asset. That orchard should be reinstated as part of this proposal. Nevertheless, the proposed new dwellings between Northaw House and the Walled Garden are inappropriate, both in terms of layout, design and character. They fail to respond to the landscape and the context within which they are located.

Whilst the 2004 applications allowed new buildings in this location these included a building that was single storey and a c-shaped courtyard between the walled garden and the southern part of the orchard. That building did not compete with in scale with the main house, the ballroom wing nor the walled garden. Additionally a building was proposed to the rear of the Ballroom Wing, however that was of a reduced scale to the existing ballroom wing and whilst it reflected the design of the existing building it would have been a more simple form and detailing and thus was considered not to compete with it.

It is considered that subject to appropriate design there is potential for new residential dwellings to be located in this location. Appropriate design should consider the type of former buildings which were located here both in terms of character and layout. Although it needs to be confirmed by research, these may have been of an agricultural style. A proposal which is influenced by the former structures and references a regional vernacular will be considered more appropriate for this site. The retention and reuse of any historic features in this space will be beneficial to the character of this area in a new scheme.

Additionally the design of new buildings of appropriate character in this space will also reinforce the connection of the walled garden to the wider composition which, in the current outline proposal, appears isolated by the form of the new buildings that have no relationship in terms of design form.

The retention and repair of the Gardener's Cottage would be a beneficial element of the scheme. Further details of the design will be required for detailed consultation. Proposals for the Gardener's House should preserve or enhance its understated vernacular character.

Dwellings on Eastern and Western Drives

The construction of the large villa style dwelling on the eastern drive is considered to be of inappropriate scale and form. Whilst there may have been a building on this site, any new building should be influenced by what was previously on the site in terms of character and layout and, like above, should also reference a regional vernacular.

Subject to further details, the construction of the two new gate lodges is not considered to detract from the heritage value of the site if they are of appropriate scale and design.

Car Park and Hardstanding

The proposed cut and cover car parking would remove visible parking from the site and has the potential to retain views away from the house. Further details will be required to show that views towards the house from the north are not detracted from, by the new car parking. Any harm to the setting of Northaw House may be mitigated through appropriate landscape design to the north of the proposed car park access.

A number of new driveways are proposed from the main driveway to Northaw House. These have the potential to dominate and detract from the site and the setting of the Heritage asset. The minimum amount of hardstanding should be proposed. Additionally, parking to the front of Northaw House should be avoided with parking only available for the residents of the apartments in the cut and over car parking proposed.

Conclusion

Based on the information provided and a site visit, it is considered that the proposal does make take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of all the heritage assets and will cause substantial harm. However, through taking into account the above comments, it is considered that an appropriate proposal has the potential to sustainably conserve and in some regards enhance the significance of the heritage assets within this site. This will be subject to sympathetic intervention to the heritage assets as well as new building proposals of appropriate scale, siting, design and character. All interventions should consider the significance of heritage assets and their siting.

Additionally, it is also considered that by the retention of the Edwardian wing and an increase in dwellings in the walled garden, would reduce the amount of new development proposed and thereby lessen the impact to the heritage asset. Additionally this would also reduce the impact of the development to the openness and the purposes of including land in the Green Belt as these would be enclosed around an existing built structure.

It is likely that any proposal would cause some harm to the heritage asset, however as a result the proposal could rely on the principle of enabling development, which is outlined above. This should consider whether

the proposal can be justified on the grounds of public benefits that outweigh that harm taking account of the 'great weight' to be given to conservation and provided the justification is clear and convincing. Sometimes harm is necessary to enable change of use of the asset to its optimum viable use. As outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework (Chapter 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment), substantial harm may alternatively be justified if all of the following tests are met:

- There is no viable use of the heritage asset that can be found in the medium term including through marketing to find alternative owners;
- The heritage asset is preventing all reasonable uses of the site;
- Public support for our ownership of the asset is demonstrably not possible; and
- The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefits of bringing the site back into use.

Other Issues

Transport

You are advised to seek pre-application advice from Hertfordshire County Council Transportation Planning and Policy department who charge a fee. However, it is likely that they would require a transport assessment for the proposal together with a contribution towards sustainable transport measures.

Archaeology

Northaw House and its wider setting is within an Area of Archaeological Significance where Policy R29 of the District Plan seeks to ensure that proposal for development within or adjacent to areas of archaeological significance do not adversely affect known archaeological remains. In this case, you are advised that you would be expected to undertake an evaluation of archaeology potential before any permission is given.

Landscaping

The site and its surroundings contributes to the setting of Northaw House, although it is clear that it has degraded overtime. Any future application that is submitted, should include a detailed landscaping proposal, which would be designed to retain existing native trees and to restore the site's parkland setting and which would lead to a setting that would be appropriate for a country house, contributing to its setting. As referred to previously it will be important to reinstate the Orchard previously on site.

Additionally a tree survey would be required which identifies all trees worthy of retention and how they would be protected throughout the course of the development.

Lighting

Any proposed lighting should be sensitively designed and placed respecting the Green Belt location and the setting of Northaw House.

Accessible Homes

Policy H10 of the District Plan refers to accessible housing and expects that developments involving 5 or more dwellings should secure a proportion of dwellings to be built to lifetime homes standards. You should demonstrate on any future application which units would be built to a lifetime home standards.

Sustainable Development

Local Plan policy requires that new development is sustainable. It would be expected that given the number of dwellings proposed a proportion of their energy would be from decentralised and renewable or low carbon sources. Any application submitted should clearly demonstrate how this would be achieved. However, any such scheme should be designed carefully so as not to detract the heritage asset.

Ecology

The development involves the demolition of existing buildings and conversion of dilapidated buildings where is considered that there is a reasonable likelihood of European Protected Species being present on the site. You are therefore advised that an ecological survey will be required to be undertaken to establish if there are any protected species on site and submitted with any application.

Sustainable Urban Drainage

We would encourage early discussions with Hertfordshire County Council as the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Approving Body. Consent for drainage schemes is likely to be required from this body in the future.

Contributions

In accordance with the Council's adopted policies, the development will result in the need for planning contributions to mitigate the impact of the development on the locality. The contributions that are likely to be required will include a financial contribution towards Sustainable Transport Measures to mitigate against the impact of the proposed development and refuse provision. Whilst other contributions may be sought from other statutory consultees during an application, depending on who these are from, financial contributions for schemes off site are likely to lead to the requirement to provide more floor space within the site to fund this. It may therefore be that these are not pursued.

However, please be aware that the Council would require a monitoring charge for the agreement which would equate to 5% of the total value of the contributions. Additionally a fee of £742.15 will be required for officer time taken in negotiating the legal agreement.

Whilst concern has been raised with the current proposals, I am of the opinion that the principle of such a proposal clearly has potential and I welcome the opportunity to work with you to produce a scheme that is appropriate for this site and ensures the conservation of Northaw House, the Stable Building and associated listed structures in a manner appropriate to their significance. I would therefore suggest that to pursue these proposals, a revised scheme with detailed plans is submitted, which is based on the above comments prior to submitting a planning application.

I trust the above information is of assistance, however the above represents my personal professional opinion and is given without prejudice to the decision of this authority in respect of this enquiry or any future application which may be submitted. This advice is given based on the policies/requirements in operation at the date of this letter. These are likely to change in the future.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Smith
Principal Planning Officer