



FAO: Planning Department,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Ref: 6/2023/2418/OUTLINE
Date: 12/01/2024

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION ADVICE

Dear Sir / Madam,

RE: Former Hook Estate and Kennels, Coopers Lane Road /Firs Wood Close, Northaw EN6 4BY

This application is an outline planning application with all matters reserved except for primary means of access for C2 (extra care) dwellings, ancillary community facilities, landscaping, and access from Coopers Lane Road.

The application site located within the setting of Oshwal House (also known as The Hook House, list entry: 1173884). The property is a Tuscan-style villa constructed in 1839. Oshwal House historically occupied an isolated position within a rural landscape. The former, rural landscape has been eroded over time by development, including the residential development to the north (outside of the site), the large community building to the north-west (replacing former farm buildings and walled garden), and the large car park with lighting to the south. The temple to the south-east has also had an impact on its setting as a prominent building which now forms the focal point of the site.

The agrarian landscape to the northeast of the house was altered due to the changes made in association with the former kennels use, including alterations to the field pattern and erection of the kennels but the east and northeast remained mostly as undeveloped open fields as shown on in Figure 4 of the Heritage Statement. However, since the use of the kennels ceased, the kennels have been removed and the land to the east is now characterised by the open area of lawn and woodland beyond. The existing character of the application site remains indicative of the listed building's former isolated/ rural setting.

Pre-application advice relating to a similar scheme highlighted that the views of the remaining rural landscape are of importance because they provide insight into its original intended landscape setting and still provide the building with a sense of remoteness within the wider landscape. Views back towards the house from within the landscape are equally as important in understanding its significance as a rural country house. The rural landscape permits a continued understanding and appreciation of the listed building's historic (and intended) setting and therefore positively contributes to the significance of the listed building.



Pre-application advice also stated that the survival of the landscape setting to the east is heightened in importance because of the loss of the building's historic context and setting across much of the rest of the site. It is considered to make a high positive contribution to the appreciation of the building's significance.

The proposal would remove one of the remaining views from the listed building out towards a rural landscape and conversely back towards the listed building which has been found to contribute positively towards significance. The proposal would result in a fundamental alteration to the landscape character of the application site from an undeveloped, heavily treed site to an urbanised residential development. This change cannot be considered to have a beneficial or neutral impact on the listed building as it results in the loss of a positive element of its setting.

The proposal would result in the listed building being almost surrounded by modern development, divorcing the listed building from the wider rural landscape. Pre-application advice stated that the east of the house should remain undeveloped, and the current scheme has not adopted this advice. I acknowledge that the buildings closer to the listed building would be one storey in height which would go some way to reducing the visual impact, but there remain concerns about the extent of development proposed. The existing development does not set precedent for further harmful changes; the proposal would encroach modern development further into the rural landscape which would have a cumulative negative impact on the significance of the listed building (as per page 4 of Historic England's *The Setting of Heritage Assets*).

Planting could not mitigate the harm completely due to the fundamental change to land use and landscape character. There would be wider environmental changes as a result of the proposed development which could not be mitigated by new tree planting. In any case, it is likely that existing trees would need to be removed to accommodate the proposed development and the managed character of the planting on the illustrative masterplan would be vastly different to the more naturalistic character that exists today.

The proposals would fail to preserve the setting of the listed building, and Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 should be considered. With regards to the National Planning Policy Framework the level of harm to the significance of the listed building is considered to be 'less than substantial' and paragraph 208 is relevant. 'Great weight' should be given to the heritage asset's conservation as per paragraph 205.

Yours sincerely

Seren Wilson BA (Hons) MSc
Built Heritage Consultant
Place Services

Note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter