



FAO: Planning Department,
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

Ref: 6/2023/2418/OUTLINE
Date: 11/04/2024

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.

This is the second consultation within this application.

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 initial advice letter (12/01/2024) was based on a desk-based review of the application. A site visit was carried out on the 14/02/24 and this advice letter follows the site visit.

As identified within the previous advice letter, much of the listed building's historic context and setting has been lost across the site. However, the land to the east/ northeast remains undeveloped.

Immediately surrounding the listed building to the north and northeast is an open grassed area and a children's playground, beyond the grassed area and playground is a belt of mature trees. The existing trees do provide some screening between the listed building and the application site. However, on site it was observed that there are glimpsed views of the application site through the existing tree planting. The existing site is verdant with some tree planting and remnants of the former kennel fences meaning that where there are glimpsed views they are mostly of soft landscaping (the tennis court can be seen in these glimpsed views). The existing character and



appearance of the site is therefore more akin to the listed building's historic context. Historic England's guidance 'The Setting of Heritage Assets: GPA3' identifies a list of (non exhaustive) attributes that may contribute to an asset's setting. Considering the attributes of setting included in the checklist, the following are considered relevant: green space, trees, vegetation; openness; landscape character; land use; and views from, towards, through, across and including the asset. These attributes contribute to an appreciation of the listed building's significance as a mid-nineteenth century country house in an isolated, rural landscape.

It is noted that the proposed development would be located slightly further north than the tennis court which would likely work to reduce the visual impact of the development. However, there are still concerns that the proposed development would be visible in these glimpsed views, and the presence of development would likely be more prominent when compared to the existing soft landscaping. It cannot be guaranteed that the additional planting would entirely mitigate the potential visual impact of the proposed development, particularly through diurnal and seasonal changes.

During the site visit, access to the listed building was not possible. However, when stood within the application site looking back towards the listed building there were views of the upper floors of the listed building, particularly the northeast corner of the listed building. Therefore, it is likely that there are also views out from the upper floors of the listed building across the application site. There are no photographs/ visualisations taken from the upper floors of the listed building looking across the to the application site. Therefore, the full impact of the proposed development upon the significance of the listed building cannot be understood at present. The development would encroach modern development further into the remaining open/ rural landscape which could remove 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.

Furthermore, the parameter plan indicates that the single storey dwellings would be approximately 7m above ground level (which is comparable with the height of a two-storey dwelling), the two storey dwellings being 10.5m and three storey dwellings being 13.5m in height. There are concerns that the proposed development may still be visible above the height of most existing trees.

As observed on site, the land levels of the application site slope quite steeply away from the listed building and utilising the topography of the land to minimise the visual impact (as proposed to have the lowest buildings closest to the listed building and the taller buildings further north where the land levels drop). However, no site sections have been submitted or indicative wirelines of building height parameters. This makes it difficult to understand how the development would sit within the landscape.

The proposal would result in the listed building being almost surrounded by modern development, divorcing the listed building from the wider rural landscape. However, there is not enough information submitted to ascertain how the proposal would impact the way in which the listed building is experienced. There are concerns regarding the cumulative negative impact. Historic England's GPA3 states 'Where the significance of a heritage asset has been compromised in the past by unsympathetic development affecting its setting, to accord with NPPF policies consideration still needs to be given to whether additional change will further detract from, or can enhance, the significance of the asset. Negative change could include severing the last link between an asset and its original setting'.

The proposals would fail to preserve the significance 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 is considered to be 'less than substantial' as per paragraph 208. 'Great weight' should be given to the heritage asset's conservation as per paragraph 205.

Yours sincerely

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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