

**WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE**  
**19<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2003**  
**REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING &**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER**

**PCC 19.11.03**  
**PART 1**  
**ITEM NO**  
**FOR DECISION**  
**CPEHO**

**S6/03/380/FP**  
**CONVERSION OF EXISTING ACCOMMODATION BLOCK AND**  
**HANGER, TO TWENTY FOUR RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND CAR PARKING**  
**ASTWICK MANOR, COOPERS GREEN LANE, HATFIELD**

(Hatfield)

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This application relates to the listed Astwick Manor. In the past the building has been used as an aeronautical training establishment and, as a result, additions to the original building include an accommodation block (providing additional on site residential accommodation for students) and an aircraft hanger.
- 1.2 The buildings and site are located in the Green Belt to the west of the former Hatfield aerodrome site.
- 1.3 This proposal is for the conversion of the both the hanger and the accommodation block to provide 24 self contained apartment units, and the provision of car parking on the site.

**2.0 THE PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The accommodation block is a three storey building, with the third storey being provided within a mansard roof. At ground floor it has an open plan former dormitory or teaching space. At first and second floors the building is divided up into bedroom spaces.
- 2.2 Internally the building would be divided into 6 apartments, two on each floor and each being a one bed unit. Externally a new and extended frontage entrance would be provided. One flat each at first and second floor would be provided with a balcony to the rear and new access to the ground floor flats would be provided to the rear. A second floor link with the manor house would be removed.
- 2.3 The hanger building mostly comprises a large internal space with the front part of the building divided into two floors. This space would be divided fully into two floors and a third floor would be provided within the roofspace. All of the 18 units created would be two bed. Externally a number of 'lean to' type additions to the hanger would be removed and new door and window openings created.

Grouped entrance features would be provided at the north and south end of the building.

### **3.0 RELEVANT HISTORY**

- 3.1 02/1302/FP this proposed the demolition of the hanger, accommodation block and other outbuildings and the conversion of the manor to 6 units. 15 new dwellings and 8 apartments were proposed. This was refused on the basis of green belt reasons and the impact of the new buildings on the setting of the listed building. This refusal is the subject of an appeal which is currently planned to be heard at an inquiry in January 2004.
- 3.2 02/1325/LB this was the listed building application associated with the above planning application and proposed the conversion of the manor house only into 6 units. This was granted consent.
- 3.3 03/0308/FP Following the refusal of the above planning application, this related only to the conversion of the manor house and was granted.
- 3.4 03/1116/FP This proposes the demolition of the accommodation block and various outbuildings. A new building is proposed which will comprise four residential units, and a further 'folly' building containing one unit. This application is currently undetermined.

### **4.0 MAIN RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES**

- 4.1 Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, Alterations no 1, 1998

GB3	Green Belt
BEV15	Listed Buildings
BEV16	Alternative uses for listed buildings
BEV 18	Archaeology
CR2	Landscape development area
CR6	Countryside trees, woodlands and hedgerows
CR7	Community forest
CR11	Reuse of buildings in the countryside

Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Review, Second Deposit Draft, June 2002

R2	Contaminated Land
R13	Protection of species
R14	Trees, woodland and hedgerows
R23	Works to Listed Buildings
R24	Alternative uses for Listed Buildings
R26	Historic Parks and Gardens
R27	Archaeology
RA1	Development in the Green Belt
RA12	Watling Chase Community Forest
RA19	Reuse of Rural Buildings

### **5.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED**

- 5.1 County Highways Officer – comments have not yet been received but with regard to application 02/1302 above (in which 29 units were to be created, 6 in the

manor house and 23 new units) the Highway Authority did not raise any objection subject to junction improvements. Discussions indicate that the same approach will be taken with regard to this application which proposes 24 units in the accommodation block and hanger and 6 already permitted in the manor house, total 30.

- 5.2 BEAMS comments are as follows: the main concern with regard to the various development proposals at this site has been to retain and improve the listed building, whilst enhancing its setting. Some disappointment is expressed then that these proposals anticipate the retention of the buildings which have damaged that setting. The practicality of converting the hanger building is questioned but no objection is raised in principle, whilst there is some concern with regard to the detailed design aspects.
- 5.3 A less formalised car parking arrangement is suggested and some design modifications should be sought to address the detailed concerns with regard to the treatment of the buildings.
- 5.4 The Environment Agency has no objections in principle and suggests conditions be applied with regard to the investigation of ground contamination, drainage systems and surface water source control.
- 5.5 Thames Water has no objection.
- 5.6 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre has commented on a submitted bat assessment report and notes that the development will impact on bat species present at the site. Mitigation measures will be required, including those proposed in the report, such that the site remains one of favourable conservation status.
- 5.7 Comments were also made on a subsequent protected species assessment report. No additional investigative or assessment work has been requested.
- 5.8 The County Archaeological Officer initially recommended that further assessment work be undertaken prior to a decision being made on the application. On the submission of additional information from the applicant this position was reassessed. It remains that case that additional recording of the structures is recommended prior to a decision on the application.
- 5.9 One representation has been received from a residential occupier in the area raising the following issue:
- concern that foul water drainage issues not properly addressed by the developer in that treated discharge to the Ellenbrook is likely to be permitted.

## **6.0 DISCUSSION**

- 6.1 The issues raised by this application are as follows:
- acceptability of the proposals in terms of Green Belt policies;
  - traffic and highways impact of the proposals;
  - impact on the historical character of the manor house;
  - archaeological impact;
  - impact on trees on the site;
  - impact on protected animal species;
  - land contamination and drainage issues.

## Green Belt

- 6.1 National and local policies seek to prevent development that is contrary to the aims of green belt policy. When we are dealing with new buildings it is clear that they will reduce the openness of the green belt, the preservation of which is one of the main aims of green belt policy.
- 6.2 In this case however conversion works are proposed to existing buildings, some ancillary outbuildings are to be removed and some areas of hardstanding are to be taken up. With controls over the subdivision of land and permitted development rights, I do not consider that much weight can be given to the argument, in this case, that the proposals will lead to a reduction in the openness of the site.
- 6.3 In some cases an issue is raised that 'domestication' of the site, with the introduction of the normal structures associated with residential areas, has an impact on the character of the green belt. In this case however, given the previous use of the site would have involved activity and vehicles visiting the site, I cannot see that the modest change in character that will be caused by residential conversion should be a basis on which these proposals are resisted.
- 6.4 Green belt policies also require that attention is paid to the ability to convert the building – in that it is not unfeasibly expensive, and that conversions for commercial and business reuses should be favoured over residential ones.
- 6.5 With regard to the ability to convert, the Councils Head of Building Control has considered the proposals and is of the view that a conversion is feasible. This is on the basis of a structural report submitted by the applicant. There remains some concern however that the requirements of the regulations with regard to noise and sound insulation may be difficult to meet. The applicant however remains of the view that appropriate products are available on the market to ensure that the necessary requirements can be met.
- 6.6 The uncertainty that remains with regard to the possibility of conversion needs to be weighed in the balance in this case. The applicants have been put to some additional work to demonstrate their claims that conversion is possible and are aware of the degree of uncertainty that remains. The implication, of course, is that if this proposal is supported and the conversion subsequently proves unfeasible, that the applicants will seek then to pursue an equal level of floorspace through new build.
- 6.7 Members will be aware of instances where this has occurred. I am of the view that the circumstances are different in this case. Often conversions relate to small and more visually pleasant buildings. In those cases, replacement with new build of the same or similar visual character is a powerful and compelling argument to allow it to proceed. In this case however, new build of what is otherwise an incongruous building is unlikely to be acceptable and I consider that it would be reasonable for the Authority to stand firm against any subsequent application for the rebuild of this floorspace. The applicants have been advised of this position.
- 6.8 Given that background I am of the view that this issue is not so compelling that the proposals should be refused on this basis.

- 6.9 Whilst national policy favours business and commercial reuse of buildings, the aim of this policy is to ensure that the rural economy is strengthened. The weight that can be attached to that policy aim should be minimal in this case. Whilst located 'in the countryside', that is in the green belt and outside of a settlement, the site is almost adjacent to the redevelopment taking place on the Hatfield aerodrome site and is not located in remote countryside where job opportunities are scarce. Significant employment generating development is taking place on the aerodrome site.
- 6.10 It is considered then that in green belt terms the proposals are acceptable.

### **Traffic and highways**

- 6.11 It has been set out above that considerable traffic would have been generated by the site when it was in operation as a technical centre. It is considered that the residential traffic associated with 24 units would not be excessively different, even when the permission that has already been granted in relation to the main house and which allows a further 6 units, is taken into account.
- 6.12 In terms of amenity impact, the existing residential use affected will be Astwick Lodge, situated next to the junction of the access road to the site and Coopers Green Lane. This property is set some distance away from the access road however, and it cannot be considered that the impact would be greater than any conventional residential environment where dwellings are adjacent to roads serving 30 or more dwellings.
- 6.13 Of potentially greater impact are the works required to the access to bring it up to an acceptable standard. These works require the realignment of the Coopers Green Lane here pushing it slightly to the north to allow adequate visibility to be created. This will involve the cutting back and potential loss of some of the trees to the opposite side of the road.
- 6.14 Whilst this is regrettable, there are significant numbers of trees and substantial hedges in the general area of the site (such that few views of it are possible). This is in contrast to the more open nature of the land to the east around the former aerodrome. It is in this context then that the loss of some tree planting, or the cutting back here, is not considered unduly harmful.
- 6.15 Members will note that the comments of the Highway Authority are still awaited, although discussions indicate that only matters of detail, rather than of principle are to be resolved. With regard to the previous scheme, which would have permitted 29 residential units, the Highway Authority was content subject to junction improvements. It does not appear that the addition of one further unit will change that position. Members will, of course, be updated at the meeting.

### **Character of the Manor House**

- 6.16 The manor house itself is a listed building. Its setting and character was compromised to a certain extent when the hostel building was erected. The architecture of the hostel building is certainly 'at odds' with that of the main house and cannot be considered to be a sympathetic addition to it. The hanger building is more remote from the main house, but has certainly further compromised its setting.

- 6.17 However this is the situation which now exists. The conversion of the buildings, in principle, will not further detract from the setting and character of the building. There are some minor works proposed to the hostel building to accentuate the new access, but the hanger building will remain largely unchanged to appearance. There will be the loss of some of the present 'lean to' type outbuildings.
- 6.18 BEAMS comments are noted, particularly with regard to the desired outcome, which would be the removal of the additional and incongruous buildings. It is also noted that, notwithstanding that, there is no objection in principle to these proposals.
- 6.19 I am of the view that all parties would agree that the removal of the additional buildings would enhance the setting of the manor house. However, if the proposals are acceptable in all other respects then desirability of removing the additional buildings cannot, in my view, lead to a position where these proposals should be resisted. The comments of beams with regard to the detail of car parking and the design of the new entrance feature for the accommodation block can be dealt with by conditions, if an approval is forthcoming in this case.

### **Archaeology**

- 6.20 The building is in an area of archaeological interest. In this case the proposals involve conversion and limited areas of ground disturbance. A new parking area is to be created to the rear of the existing hostel block. As a result there is no further requirement for ground archaeological investigations prior to a decision being made on this matter.
- 6.21 The County archaeologist however refers to the modern historical interest of these buildings, and the dwindling numbers that they remain an example of. It is clear that the accommodation building and the hanger are not listed structures – although they are within the cartilage of the listed manor house.
- 6.22 In discussion it has been established that the need for further recording has been put forward on the basis that, if the buildings are of some particular special interest and example of their type (that is modern pre and wartime buildings), then it may be deemed that they should be retained unaltered.
- 6.23 I have taken the advice of the expert advisor into account. I feel that I cannot share however the weight that is being attached to the importance of potentially retaining these buildings intact, particularly when other experts promote their removal altogether. In my view the imposition of a condition requiring further recording, if an approval is forthcoming here, will adequately cover the measures necessary when the interest of the buildings are considered.

### **Trees**

- 6.24 I have yet to receive comments on the proposals from the Councils arboricultural officers. The proposals involve the removal of some trees on the site to allow the creation of the car parking area (which may be subject to change in any event – see section above in relation to the character of the building) and to allow a better living environment in the converted accommodation block.

- 6.25 The buildings and site will predominantly remain one which has a tree and landscaped setting in contrast to the aerodrome site to the east, and of which there will be few views from outside the site. I will update Members with the comments of the arboricultural officers at the meeting, including any comments on the works necessary to obtain junction improvements. I am of the view however, that the works which will be necessary to trees are not so significant that the proposals should be resisted on this basis.

### **Protected Animals**

- 6.26 Planning and Listed Building consents have been granted for the conversion of the manor house. The bat survey report submitted was based on the premise that the manor house was to be retained and the other buildings were to be demolished. The measures that are necessary to accommodate the bats within the manor house are already being implemented.
- 6.27 Bats were found within the accommodation block. The mitigation measures proposed were put forward to deal with the proposed demolition. As that is not now the case, alternative remediation measures will be required and which can be secured by condition. No protected animals were found within the hanger.
- 6.28 There are no other species for which protection measures are required as a result of these development proposals.

### **Land contamination and drainage**

- 6.29 The only land disturbance required as a result of the proposals is the creation of the new parking areas. The possibility of land contamination has been raised as a result of the use of the site for aeronautical purposes (fuel and other materials used at the site). There appears to be no question in principle, with regard to the residential use of the site and indeed this has already been permitted with regard to the manor house.
- 6.30 Land contamination reports submitted on behalf of the applicants are being assessed and any additional conditions required as a result will be put forward to the meeting.
- 6.31 With regard to drainage issues the Environment Agency has raised no objection subject to the imposition of conditions. It is considered that this matter is adequately addressed.

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

- 7.1 The proposals involve the reuse of two substantial buildings in the Green Belt. The site is one which is enclosed in visual terms and of which few views are possible. It is considered that its reuse is not harmful to the character of the area or of the Green Belt in either visual impact, or the activity on site that will result. It is considered that there are no other significantly harmful implications of the development which lead to the situation where the proposals should be resisted as a result.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

8.1 That the proposals be approved subject to the following conditions:

SC01 Standard time limit

SC24 Parking and turning space

8.2 Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of the improvement works to be carried to the junction between the access road to the site and the Coopers Green Lane. Those works, shall be implemented as agreed (or as subsequently agreed to be amended) prior to the commencement of the development involving the conversion of the existing buildings on the site.

### **REASON**

In the interests of highway safety.

8.3 Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of the sound and thermal insulation to be provided in the converted hanger building.

### **REASON**

To ensure that it is certain that a conversion can be undertaken that will meet current building regulation requirements prior to work commencing. (Note- this condition does not require the submission of a Building Regulations application to the Local Authority or other organisation)

8.4 Notwithstanding the details of the design of the new entrance feature for the accommodation block, shown on drawing no 4274/55A, prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of a revision to the design of that feature. Once agreed the proposals shall be implemented as such.

### **REASON**

In order to secure a detailed treatment of the building which is not incongruous with its existing design and given the proximity to the listed manor house.

8.5 Notwithstanding the details of the car parking layout on the site, shown on drawing 4274/52, prior to the commencement of development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA a revision to those details which shall show a less formalised approach to the car parking provision. Once agreed the revised car parking details shall be laid out as such and made available for use prior to the occupation of the buildings. The car parking provision shall subsequently be retained and made available for use at all times that the buildings are in use for the permitted purpose.

### **REASON**

In order to ensure the provision of car parking in a less formalised form, bearing in mind the proximity of the proposals to the listed manor house and to ensure its provision and retention in the longer term.

8.6 Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of mitigation and other measures that will be



implemented to ensure that the accommodation block (and area) remains a suitable habitat for bats both during construction works and thereafter. Once agreed, the measures shall be implemented as such.

REASON

To ensure that the habitat for the protected bat species is not harmed and is retained in the longer term.

- 8.7 Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to, and agreed in writing by the LPA, details of a scheme of recording of the historical interest of the buildings proposed to be converted, including the details of the production of the record of that recording. Once agreed, the scheme shall be implemented and the record produced as agreed.

REASON

In order to ensure that any historical interest in the buildings which may be lost as a result of the conversion works, is recorded.

- 8.8 Prior to the commencement of development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of a scheme for the investigation of land contamination on the site. Once agreed the scheme of investigation shall be implemented as such and subsequently details of any measures necessary to ensure prevention of pollution to the water environment shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA. Those measures shall be implemented as agreed prior to the occupation of the development.

REASON

In order to avoid pollution to the water environment.

- 8.9 Prior to the commencement of development there shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA details of the means of foul and surface water drainage from the site. Once agreed those details shall be implemented as such and be made available for use prior to the occupation of the development.

REASON

In order to avoid pollution to the water environment and in the interests of public health.

Notwithstanding the details set out on drawing number 4274/52 no railings shall be erected to the west of the new element of the driveway to be created until the location of them has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the LPA. Once agreed the location of the railings shall be as such.

REASON

In order to ensure that the location of any railings does not jeopardise the health of the existing trees on the site located to the west of the new driveway.

