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For and on behalf of
Oshwal Association of the UK

2013/0916

PLANNING
DEPARTMENT

03 MAY 2013

JUSTIFICATION, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

**Two-storey extension (to east side) to extend the lower ground hall, improve access to the patio and provide storage at first floor level
Oshwal Centre (Community Centre), Coopers Lane Road, Northaw**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This design and access statement has been prepared by DLP Planning Consultants on behalf of the Oshwal Association of the UK (OAUK).
- 1.2 Government regulations require a Design and Access Statement ("DAS") to accompany most planning applications. The requirements are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010.
- 1.3 As a general guide, a design and access statement is a short report which explains the design process, rather than itself being used as a substitute for drawings. The level of detail required will depend on the scale and complexity of the application in each instance.
- 1.4 The statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the erection of a two-storey extension to a part of the eastern side of an existing community hall building to improve access to the patio at lower level and to provide storage at upper level, at the Oshwal Centre Community Centre, Coopers Lane Road, Northaw. As such, the complexity and length of the document is considered proportionate to the nature and extent of the application, having regard to the above legislation and all relevant associated guidance.
- 1.5 These documents demonstrate that the extension to the existing building is appropriate and justified as it will support and enhance the existing community facilities and are of limited scale in relation to the overall building and its established use.

Background

- 1.6 The Oshwal Association of the UK was founded in 1968 by the first Halari Visa Oshwals to settle in Britain as they saw the need to create an organisation which would mirror the sister Oshwal organisations in India and Kenya and which would establish its own identity in step with the intellectual, cultural and religious ethos of the people it represents. OAUK was established as a charitable foundation in 1972 and today represents over 15,000 members.

1.7 Its Vision is:

"To form a more perfect Community, for the advancement of the Jain religion, the relief of poverty, the advancement of education and the protection of health for Oshwal Members"

1.8 It seeks to achieve this by acting:

"as one large extended family, sharing a common ancestry, history and culture. Its strength and prosperity comes from the diversity of its hugely talented family members working together."

1.9 Its ethos is defined by its cultural heritage and is one of self-support amongst its members, tolerance and inclusion which extends to all races and religions, hospitality, and care and welfare for all living creatures.

1.10 The Association is wholly dependent on its members. It is today a thriving organisation, enjoying the influx of new younger Oshwals volunteering for the many activities undertaken by the Association. In the last two years nearly 1 in 10 of all members have volunteered their time and energies for the advancement of the Association through becoming involved with a range of events and activities which bring benefit to the Community at large.

1.11 The activities of the Association in general include education, young person's activities, healthcare, support for the education and health of women, sports, social and community activities, as well as religious and cultural activities.

1.12 The Association currently has three principal centres – The Oshwal Centre at Potters Bar in Hertfordshire (which is the site which forms the current application site) plus the Oshwal Mahajanwadi in South London and the EKTA centre in Kingsbury which provide local meeting points.

1.13 The Oshwal Centre is headquarters of the OAUK and its administrative nerve centre. It has been occupied by OAUK since 1980. This role bestows upon it certain facility requirements. OAUK are the sole representatives of the Oshwal Community and as such the site is of significant cultural value to the Oshwal people as a centre of community and learning.

1.14 The main objective of the Association is the Advancement of Jainism by the provision of a place of worship. It was with this objective in mind that the elders of the Community purchased the property originally known as Hook House in Coopers Lane Road. The site has become a major centre of religious devotion and is recognised as such by all other principal religions including Anglican and Catholic Christians, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu and Jews, all of whom have regular dialogue and have been formally represented at the Derasar (temple)

Site and Surroundings

1.13 The application site forms part of the larger Oshwal Centre complex and lies a short distance to the east of Potters Bar and to the south of the village of Northaw. The M25 motorway lies to the south. This is best appreciated by way of the aerial photograph extract below.



- 1.14 The Oshwal Centre site is located off the northeast side of Coopers Lane Road, in an area of otherwise open countryside. For planning policy purposes, the site is located within the Green Belt.
- 1.15 On site there exist a range of buildings and community provisions, the main buildings are described in detail below.
- 1.16 The Oshwal Centre comprises almost 80 acres at the heart of which is a Tuscan Style villa dating from 1839 and Grade II listed (listed in 1952).

The Mansion

- 1.17 Since the estate was acquired in 1980 the mansion has been used as the headquarters of the Association and its administrative nerve centre. The mansion now houses offices for the Association, meeting and seminar rooms, as well as a small restaurant for staff and visitors which benefits from recent planning permission to extend. There is also a small flat occupied by the resident priest.

Derasar

- 1.18 The Derasar, permitted in 1986, was opened in 2005. It is the first and also the largest traditional Shirharbandhi Derasar in Europe – a Shirharbandhi Derasar being characterised by its dome.
- 1.19 As such, it is the centrepiece for the Oshwal Community and for practicing Jains. The Jain community's participation in interfaith activities, sharing the Jain values with other faiths and at the same time aspiring to learn and understand the diverse cultures and faiths found in modern Britain, underpins the Derasar which welcomes visitors of all faiths.

- 1.20 In 2010 the Derasar was visited by His Grace, the former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams and in 2012 by The Most Reverend Archbishop Kevin McDonald Archbishop Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark, this visit following from visits made by members of the Institute of Jainism to the Vatican in 2011.

Community Halls

- 1.21 At the heart of the OAUK's daily activities is its Community Halls which were granted permission in the 1980s and constructed shortly thereafter. The Halls comprise a single building complex on a sloping site providing significant community meeting spaces on ground and first floors. The Halls are in frequent use for a variety of the Associations social, cultural and educational activities.
- 1.22 Access to the Halls is at a mezzanine level and planning permission has recently been granted for alterations to the front glazed screen which will facilitate the installation of a lift to make the lower floor accessible to the physically less able. The hall spaces are self-contained allowing multiple activities to be pursued simultaneously.
- 1.23 The Halls also include kitchen and other ancillary facilities but have little in the way of storage for items such as educational equipment, tables and chairs which can serve to limit the flexibility of the space and how it can be used.

Other uses

- 1.24 In addition to the above there are also a number of other specific uses within the overall estate comprising:
- A gatehouse cottage occupied by a permanent caretaker;
 - A children's play area;
 - A hay barn – located towards the eastern boundary of the estate.

Challenges and needs

- 1.25 A number of challenges have been identified by OAUk which can be addressed through making more efficient use of the Community Halls. These are:
- The ability to host more than one event within each hall by facilitating the potential for sub divisible space
 - The provision of either storage or potentially breakout/seminar rooms at first floor level
 - The opportunity to create a more rational server facility in relation to the kitchen space at ground floor level
 - Improved access from the ground floor space to the adjoining external court and to the grounds to the rear of the mansion.
- 1.26 The recent permission to enable the construction of a lift is part of this overall scheme to promote the most effective and efficient use of the facilities that are available to OAUk and as a result of demand from its Members.

2.0 DESIGN AND ACCESS

- 2.1 This design and access statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the erection of a two-storey extension (to part of the east side)

Use

- 2.2 The current use of the site, as has been outlined above, is that of a community and religious centre and headquarters.
- 2.3 There is an extensive planning history relating to these uses at the Oshwal Centre site. This includes permission for a temple and Community Halls in the Green Belt – relevant permissions include S6/0126/80, S6/1988/861, S6/1992/681, S6/1994/751, S6/1998/662 and S6/2003/1587/FP.
- 2.4 Application reference S6/2005/201/FP subsequently approved stone religious objects and statues, as well as ceremonial archways to the landscape.
- 2.5 There is also a notable history relating to the assembly hall, constructed in the late 1980s – permissions reference S6/0503/96/FP and S6/2001/1202/FP also relate.
- 2.6 Earlier this year permission was granted for the erection of a single storey rear extension (S6/2012/2559/FP) at the listed Hook House and the installation of a new glazing façade to facilitate lift installation at the Community Centre (S6/2012/2404/FP).
- 2.7 As noted earlier, the main accommodation comprises two large halls with associated kitchens on both floors.
- 2.8 The Halls are in frequent use, including rental to third party groups and organisations. The upper floor hall within the Community Centre is the main meeting hall and for events when a clear space is required there is currently no storage for chairs, tables and other materials.

Amount, Layout, Scale, Appearance and Access

- 2.9 The existing Community Halls are a modern two-storey building of contemporary style and appearance and is positioned on a slope such that the rear of the building is at the lower ground level. Existing materials consist of brick, slate roof tiles and wooden/aluminium window frames.
- 2.10 It is proposed that the inset section of the existing east wall, as illustrated in the photograph below, will be moved outwards by 6m so as to secure an extension to the lower floor hall and improve the opening for access to the patio. This will bring the current inset section in line with the existing eastern elevation.



- 2.11 At the upper floor, the increased floorspace will provide storage so as to enable a more flexible use of the main meeting hall for functions and other community events. The storage space will consist of three discrete rooms accessed from the upper hall. The area of the rooms is 29.3m², 28.5m² and 32m² and each is lit by a window overlooking the patio area.
- 2.12 The increase in floorspace to the lower hall is 99.3m². In addition a small increase of 20m² to the size of the foyer leading to the internal fire escape staircase is proposed. Currently the staircase is accessed via the side wall, as shown in the photograph below, and would otherwise be blocked off when the east wall is moved outwards. A new door will be positioned on the eastern elevation to access this foyer.



2.13 The fenestration to the new elevation will change on the upper floor. Three windows will replace the current four windows, so as to relate to the three internal storage spaces. The materials will be as existing, and the glazing will be double so as to improve thermal and sound attenuation performance.

2.14 The pair of existing wooden double doors and surrounding fenestration (as illustrated in the image below) will be replaced by a total of four double glazed folding doors and four double glazed windows above. This will provide an increase in the size of the opening and better access to the patio for wheelchair and other users. This increase in glazing will also complement the existing extensively glazed front elevation.



- 2.15 In order to accommodate the external wall being moved outwards by 6m, the hipped roof will be raised by 1.6m. The roof materials will consist of slate so as to match those existing.
- 2.16 The extension, by virtue of the choice of materials, glazing and proportionate scale, will not dramatically change the existing appearance of the building, however the coherence of the building will be improved as a result of moving the wall outwards so as to be in line with the rest of the eastern elevation.

Landscaping

- 2.17 No landscaping will be lost, altered or is proposed as part of this application given the limited scale and nature of the application.

Justification Statement

- 2.18 As such, the above history demonstrates the LPA has consistently permitted development to support this exceptional use and further built development in the Green Belt. The use of the Oshwal Centre for the community and religious uses described in the preceding section has clearly been established as not being inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 2.19 A further minor sympathetic extension to it accordingly should not, therefore, in policy terms be considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 2.20 More critically, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms at paragraph 89 that,

"A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- *buildings for agriculture and forestry;*
- *provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;*

- *the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;*
- *the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;*
- *limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or*
- *limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development."*

2.21 As such, the NPPF provides for the proportionate addition of existing buildings in the Green Belt as being acceptable in principle.

2.22 Paragraphs 214 and 215 of the NPPF state that for 12 months from the day of publication, decision-takers may continue to give full weight to relevant development plan policies adopted since 2004, even if there is a limited degree of conflict with this Framework. However, they advise that where this is not the case, as in Welwyn Hatfield due to the age of the Local Plan (i.e. it not being adopted under the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004), due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans only according to their degree of consistency with this framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).

2.23 The provisions of the NPPF, with regard to development which is not deemed to be inappropriate in the Green Belt, are markedly different to those in 'saved' policy RA1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan 2005. As such, in this instance, as they are not consistent with the Framework, the NPPF policies on the Green Belt are wholly engaged and outweigh the old Local Plan policy.

- 2.24 As such, the correct policy test to apply is the NPPF in this instance, which is permissive of such additions in principle (subject to issues of scale). This notable material planning consideration overcomes reason for refusal of planning application reference S6/2006/1252/FUL for a much larger single-storey rear extension and associated internal alterations to Hook House which was refused by the LPA on principle grounds in December 2006 under the previous policy context.
- 2.25 The purposes for which the extension is sought are material to its consideration. Oshwal House receives a large number of visitors and the extension is required in order to cater for the nature and type of visitors using the facility. The Oshwal Association regularly hosts weekly visits by groups of elderly persons (who arrive by coach, paid for by the Association) for cultural, social and devotional purposes.
- 2.26 No demonstrable harm will arise from the development that would outweigh the wide range of special circumstances that pertain specifically to the Oshwal Centre, having regard to its history, use and cultural and religious significance.
- 2.27 The proposed extension is modest and proportionate to the original building. It would not constitute harm to the openness or setting of the Estate as a whole, including the Derasar (temple). It will not cause a significant increase in the number of visitors or traffic as the development is intended to address existing levels of use as set out above.

3.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1** The accompanying full planning application seeks the erection of a two-storey extension to the east side of the Community Centre to provide storage space to the upper hall and a modest increase in floorspace to the lower hall and better access to the patio.

- 3.2** The Community Centre extension is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt as detailed in the NPPF given the planning history of the site and the use of the existing building, as well as the modest and proportionate scale proposed. It has been demonstrated that the principle of the proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of planning policy, and in particular in Green Belt terms.

- 3.3** The extension will genuinely improve and enhance the community facilities and provision on site given the needs and status of the site as the headquarters of the OAUk.