

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL
PLANNING CONTROL COMMITTEE
16TH JANUARY 2003
REPORT OF THE CHIEF PLANNING OFFICER

PCC 16.01.03
PART 1
ITEM NO
FOR DECISION
CPO

S6/2002/1320/FP & S6/2002/1325/LB
DEMOLITION OF OUTBUILDINGS, AIRCRAFT HANGAR AND ACCOMMODATION
BLOCK, CONVERSION OF LISTED BUILDING TO 6 RESIDENTIAL UNITS AND
CONSTRUCTION OF 15 DWELLING HOUSES AND 8 APARTMENTS
ASTWICK MANOR, COOPERS GREEN LANE, HATFIELD

APPLICANT: CITY & COUNTRY RESIDENTIAL (SARBIR)

(Hatfield North)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The application site is located in the north western corner of the former Hatfield Aerodrome site and is in the Green Belt. The site is also within an area of archaeological significance as designated in the adopted development plan. It is accessed by a long drive from Coopers Green Lane and comprises Astwick Manor itself, which is a Grade II listed building, a modern accommodation block beside the Manor and a large modern workshop to the west. The site was most recently used as an aeronautical training centre but has been vacant for some time. The site is screened along its boundaries by mature trees and established landscaping, separating it from open land to the west and east. There are numerous trees on the site ranging from mature specimens to lower value self-seeded trees. The nearest residential property is Astwick Manor Lodge at the northern end of the access drive.

2.0 THE PROPOSAL

2.1 These applications propose the conversion of the listed manor house to 6 apartments and the demolition of the residential block and aircraft workshop. In their place, it is proposed to construct a U-shaped block of 14 dwellings and 4 apartments on the site of the workshop and a smaller block of 4 apartments on previously-undeveloped land to the north of the listed building. It is also proposed to construct a detached dwelling with an octagonal footprint, named The Folly, in the open area to the south of the listed building. The separate listed building application has also been submitted for the residential conversion of the manor house.

2.2 The proposed scheme would utilise the existing access from Coopers Green Lane and car parking would be spread informally around the site; no garages are proposed. The block of dwellings and apartments on the western side of the site would have minimal private amenity area with a communal garden area provided on the land enclosed by the footprint of the building.

3.0 MAIN RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

3.1 Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1 - 1998

Policy GB3 Development in the Metropolitan Green Belt
Policy CR11 Reuse of Buildings in the Countryside
Policy BEV15 Listed Buildings
Policy BEV16 Alternative Uses for Listed Buildings
Policy BEV18 Archaeology

GEN criteria 1 Design and Siting of Buildings
GEN criteria 4 Servicing, Access and Car Parking

4.0 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED

- 4.1 The applications have been advertised by the direct notification of adjoining properties and the posting of a site notice. A letter of objection has been received from Astwick Manor Lodge. Concern is expressed that the number of new dwellings is excessive, leading to considerable traffic on the access road and the main road. They also consider that the proposed North building will overlook their property and is out of keeping with the manor house.
- 4.2 A number of letters have also been received from residents in the Ellenbrook area of Hatfield, all concerned that the sewage from this development will be discharged into the Ellenbrook. This correspondence has all been forwarded to the Environment Agency
- 4.3 Hatfield Town Council object on grounds of impact of the increase in traffic on local road network and lack of social housing.
- 4.4 Environment Agency has no objection subject to standard conditions.
- 4.5 Thames Water has no objections.
- 4.6 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre have made an assessment of the applicants' preliminary Landscape and Ecology Study and are generally satisfied with its contents, but require more information regarding bat, bird and amphibian surveys.
- 4.7 County Highway Authority originally recommended refusal on grounds that the proposal represented an intensification of the use of a sub-standard access and because of sub-standard sight lines. The applicants' have now submitted a transportation study which is being assessed by the Highway Authority. Any further comments will be reported to Members.
- 4.8 English Heritage has no comments subject to the Council seeking the views of BEAMS.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Policy GB3 of the adopted development plan identifies those forms of development which are appropriate in the green belt. These proposals incorporate both the conversion of the existing listed building and new residential development on this site. Policy CR11 of the district plan outlines the criteria under which

existing buildings in the countryside may be re-used. However, the proposal to construct 15 new dwellings and 8 apartments represents inappropriate development which is directly contrary to green belt policy. Therefore, it is for the applicants to demonstrate that exceptional circumstances exist that would justify why permission should be granted for inappropriate development in the green belt. The applicants consider that the replacement of the existing bulky workshop and residential block with their proposed form of development would reduce the total amount of building on the site and would result in a development which is more sensitively designed in relation to the listed building. It would therefore bring an environmental improvement to the site. I cannot dispute that the existing workshop and hostel block are very unsympathetically designed and do not enhance the setting of the listed building. However, I do not consider that the replacement of one inappropriate form of development with another constitutes the special circumstances which would justify an exception being made to green belt policy. While there may be scope for some very limited form of development to replace the large workshop as this would represent an environmental improvement, the proposed residential block is substantial in size and almost replicates the footprint of the existing building. Therefore, I consider that it would have an equally adverse impact on the openness of the green belt. The proposed 'barn' block of 4 apartments to the north of the listed building and the Folly proposed within the garden are totally new development which is wholly inappropriate in the green belt. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the openness of the green belt and so cannot be supported. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy GB3 of the adopted development plan.

- 5.2 I have assessed the proposal to convert the manor house into 6 apartments against policy CR11 which allows for the re-use of existing buildings in the green belt. I am satisfied that this conversion would be in sympathy with its surroundings and would not substantially increase the intensity of the use of the site. Notwithstanding my concerns about the other aspects of this proposal, I am satisfied that this element accords with policy CR11. Similarly, I have taken the advice of BEAMS who are satisfied that the building can be successfully converted without adversely affecting the historic form and character of the building. Its re-use for this purpose would also result in its continued preservation. Therefore, this element of the application accords with policies BEV15 and BEV16 of the adopted development plan.
- 5.3 However, in addition to the green belt issues already identified, I am concerned about the impact of the proposed buildings on the setting of the listed building. While the design of the western residential block is more sympathetic to the character of the listed building, I consider that it is out of scale with and so swamps the historic setting of the manor house. This adverse impact is compounded by the addition of the northern block in a previously undeveloped area. Therefore, I consider that these elements of the proposal adversely affect the historic character and setting of the listed building and are directly contrary to policy BEV15 of the adopted development plan.
- 5.4 The applicants have submitted a study of tree, landscape and ecological issues arising from the proposal. The Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre have assessed the report and are satisfied with its general findings. However, they have recommended further surveys of bats, birds and amphibians within the site. Given my recommendation of refusal to the planning application, I have not required the applicants to carry out this further work at present. However, I have imposed a bat survey condition on the conversion of the listed building and I am satisfied that, in

the event of any future proposals on the site that were considered acceptable, these important issues could be addressed to the satisfaction of myself and HBRC.

- 5.5 The proposed scheme utilises the existing access from Coopers Green Lane. The Highway Authority considers that this is sub-standard although the applicants have now had informal discussions to investigate what improvements could be made. On this basis, the Highway Authority considers that a design solution could be found. Therefore, I have not included this issue in my recommended reasons for refusal. They have also expressed concern at the low car parking provision as the site is only accessible by car. In this instance, it is recommended that parking be provided at a higher level. I have no doubt that this could be accommodated on site but would be concerned about the visual impact of this additional parking in the green belt.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 I am satisfied that the manor may be converted to 6 apartments without harming the character of this listed building or the openness of the green belt. However, the construction of two additional residential blocks represents inappropriate development which is directly contrary to green belt policy and harmful to the character and openness of the countryside. I do not consider that the demolition of the workshop and residential block represents special circumstances sufficient to outweigh the harm that would result from this development.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 I recommend that planning permission be refused in respect of application no. S6/2002/1320/FP for the following reasons;

1. The application site is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt wherein there is a general presumption against new development except that defined as appropriate under the terms of policy GB3 of the Welwyn Hatfield Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1 1998 or unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated which justify an exception being made to this policy. The proposed residential blocks to the west and north of the Manor represent inappropriate development under this policy and the Local Planning Authority do not consider that very special circumstances have been demonstrated sufficient to outweigh the harm that would be caused to the green belt by this development. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy GB3 of the Welwyn Hatfield Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1 1998.

2. The residential blocks proposed to the north and west of the manor house would, by reason of their scale and siting, adversely affect the historic character and setting of this listed building. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy BEV15 of the Welwyn Hatfield Welwyn Hatfield District Plan Alterations No.1 1998.

- 7.2 I recommended that listed building consent be granted in respect of application no. S6/2002/1325/LB, subject to the following conditions;

1. SC02 Time Limit Full Permission – Listed Buildings

2. Prior to the commencement of this development, details of all new external materials to be used shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local

Planning Authority and all work shall be carried out only in accordance with these approved details.

REASON To protect the character and appearance of the listed building.

3. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, a written procedure designed to protect bats visiting the site which shall have been agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

REASON To protect the existing bat habitat around the listed building.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Application file(s) S6/2002/1320/FP
S6/2002/1325/FP



ASTWICK MANOR.

SCALE: 1:2500 DRAWN BY: MARGARET WALKER DATE: 23rd December 2002

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