

For and on behalf of
Oshwal Association of the UK (OAUK)

**REPLACEMENT BUILDING FOR THE PURPOSES OF PROVIDING
AND RATIONALISING OPERATIONAL STORAGE**

**APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION
PLANNING STATEMENT**

**Oshwal House
Coopers Lane Road
Northaw
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement is submitted in conjunction with a Planning Application for the construction of a replacement building for the purposes of providing storage space in connection with the operation of the adjoining Community Halls and the management and maintenance of the Oshwal Centre, its temple and grounds. It is located on the site of an existing building presently used for storage and will allow the removal of a number of unsightly shipping containers which are presently also used for operational storage.
- 1.2 The purpose of this Statement is to provide the context in which this application should be considered, in relation to the programme of works intended by OAUk which have been subject to various planning permissions issued by Welwyn-Hatfield Council and to the preparation of the Oshwal Strategy, which was submitted to the Council and has been subject to formal discussion and public consultation.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 The Oshwal Association of the UK (OAUK) represents some 20,000 Oshwals resident in Britain, more than half of whom are active members of the Association. The Oshwal Centre at Coopers Lane Road is both the headquarters of the Association and also its spiritual centre. The *Derasar*, or temple, at the Oshwal Centre is the focus for all those who practice Jainism, and the OAUK welcomes visitors from all religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

2.2 The OAUK was founded in 1968 as a need was seen to create an organisation which would mirror sister 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 became a charitable foundation in 1972. 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.”

2.3 The ethos of the Community 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.

2.4 The OAUK is wholly dependent on its Members. It is a thriving organisation, enjoying an influx of new younger Oshwals volunteering for the many activities it undertakes. In the last three years nearly 1 in 10 of all members have volunteered their time and energies through becoming involved with a range of events and activities which bring benefit to the community at large.

Activities

2.5 The activities organised by the Association include:

- **Education**
- **Young persons activities**
- **Health care**
- **Women’s health and wellbeing**
- **Sports, social and community activities**
- **Religious and cultural**

- 2.6 All the OAUk's activities, its properties and its plans are funded by subscription and donations from its members, from the fees it is able to charge for events using its facilities and from other fund raising activities such as lotteries and raffles.
- 2.7 The Association has four centres. The Oshwal Centre at Coopers Lane Road near Potters Bar is the headquarters of the organisation and the hub of its activities. It is supported by three other local centres: the Oshwal Mahajanwadi in South London, the Oshwal Ekta Centre in Kingsbury, North West London and the Oshwal Shakti Centre in Hounslow. Whilst allowing greater access for many to weeknight activities, none supplant the importance of the Oshwal Centre to the whole community.

Oshwal House

- 2.8 One of the main objectives of the OAUk is the advancement of Jainism by the provision of a place of worship.
- 2.9 It was with this objective in mind that the elders of the community purchased the property known as Hook House in Coopers Lane Road, Potters Bar (Northaw) in 1980. Renamed Oshwal House, it is a Tuscan Style villa dating from 1839 and Grade II listed (listed in 1952), set in some 80 acres (about 32 hectares), around which OAUk has subsequently constructed the *Derasar*, Community Halls and associated carparking, and ancillary uses such as a children's play area.
- 2.10 Following its original acquisition, initial renovation of Oshwal House took place to provide office accommodation, meeting and seminar rooms and a small restaurant for staff and visitors, as hospitality is at the core of the Oshwal tradition. It also contains a flat, occupied by the resident priest.
- 2.11 In recent years OAUk's priority has been the renovation of the Community Halls and permission was granted for a small extension and other alterations in 2013 (ref S6/2013/0916/FP).
- 2.12 These schemes were completed and the renovated Community Halls were officially opened by HRH Prince Charles in January 2015.

- 2.13 Following this OAUk has been able to refocus its attentions on renovations to Oshwal House and this is the subject of planning and listed building applications.
- 2.14 The final element in the core of the complex is to address the issue of storage. This comprises a range of items, ranging from the chairs and tables that are used for certain events in the Community Halls, surplus catering equipment required only when large scale events take place, educational materials to the equipment and materials used for the maintenance of the grounds and the buildings – everything from grass cutting equipment to ladders to paint and sundry items. To date these have been stored in a poor quality building which pre-dates the first occupation of the estate by the Association and was a remnant of the former equestrian business.
- 2.15 As the need for storage has grown over the years so this building was supplemented by a pair of double height shipping containers located between the building and the boundary to the north west and two further single height containers, initially installed adjoining the building to provide temporary additional space but which have now been in place since work on constructing the *Derasar* started in the early 1990s.
- 2.16 A plan showing the respective location of the storage building and containers is submitted with the application but can be seen clearly in the photograph below taken from the rear façade of Oshwal House, with the double height storage to the immediate rear of the Community Halls.



- 2.17 In addition to the enclosed storage the photograph also shows that some items – mainly associated with outdoor activities at Oshwal Centre - are stored in the open given the lack of internal space.
- 2.18 Neither the original building, nor the additional container storage, is fit for purpose. Storage of items outside these structures is unsightly and undesirable. The opportunity now arises to replace the existing storage volume with a purpose built building, appropriate to the future needs of the OAUk and complementary to its location and setting.

3.0 THE OSHWAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 The OAUk has carefully considered how it should respond to the social and cultural challenges that it may face over the coming years. It has recognised that it must make the best of the physical infrastructure that it has. It has begun to put that programme into place with the refurbishment of the Community Halls and works it is now proposing to carry out to Oshwal House.
- 3.2 As part of this strategy OAUk has put together a Strategic Vision which has been discussed with Senior Officers of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and was formally presented to a Development Forum held in Welwyn in November 2015. The presentation included the proposals for the renovation of Oshwal House and for the replacement and rationalisation of operational storage which is now the subject of this application.

4.0 THIS PROPOSAL

- 4.1 This proposal seeks permission for the erection of a building of about 314m² gross. The total footprint of the existing storage is 278m² gross on a footprint of 297m² which has regard to the unusable space between the containers and the brick building. Accordingly the proposed gross footprint is considered to be appropriate and meets the future needs of the OAUk as it provides significantly more useable internal space within the same overall area.
- 4.2 The existing building and containers lies to the rear of the Community Halls and are located in a small salient of land effectively surrounded on three sides by the estate boundary. They are approached by a tarmacked access road which runs along the south western façade of the Halls, providing access to the lower level and service access for the kitchens. Due to the change in ground levels, the existing storage building sits well below the prevailing land level – as illustrated by the accompanying cross section drawings - and therefore appears subservient to the principal buildings to which it is related. In contrast the double height container can be seen above the roof height of the permanent building albeit that for the most part they are screened by the Community Halls and the existing boundary planting.
- 4.3 The estate boundary gives onto the neighbouring residential development at Firs Wood Close from which it is separated by mature trees and hedge which form a robust permanent visual screen. This mature hedge continues south eastwards forming the boundary to a number of residential gardens and therefore also provides screening for the various shipping containers which are located to the south east of the permanent building.
- 4.4 The storage building, and in particular the additional shipping containers, whilst operationally well located in relation to the Community Halls, are visible from them and also from Oshwal House, which is a listed building. Their location and appearance detract from the setting of both buildings given the high levels of use that arise from Members of the OAUk and also their visitors and guests.

- 4.5 Notwithstanding the location however, the existing hedgerow means that neither the building, nor the containers, are visible from the residential properties to the north, their gardens or the carparking and other public areas to the west.
- 4.6 The proposal is to replace the existing building in its present location and to permanently remove all the additional storage containers so that all future storage is fully contained within the new building.
- 4.7 The scheme continues to occupy the greater part of the salient of land within the existing hedge boundary and is designed to provide separate internal areas for different sorts of materials – so that for example, the grounds maintenance equipment can be kept completely separate from domestic and catering storage - things such as chairs and tables used indoors. It is therefore provided with a range of openings facing south west, directly onto the access road with only firedoors and no other openings facing the boundary to Firs Wood Close.
- 4.8 The roofscape has been designed to keep the overall height of the building to a minimum whilst providing sufficient internal height and adequate natural lighting without requirement for glazing in the walls, which might increase the vulnerability of the building to criminal entry. Given the change in levels, the maximum height of the building is only approximately 2m above the ground level of Oshwal House and so the new building will be read as *de minimis* in the landscape – indeed the setting of the listed building will be significantly improved by the removal of the shipping containers and other extraneous items which have accumulated along the estate boundary – particularly the double height containers which are visible above the roof of the main storage building.
- 4.9 Overall, this proposal represents a rationalisation of what is presently on site. It represents a significant improvement in the operational quality of the storage from a functional and from a visual perspective. The functional improvement arises from maximising the useable space within a similar footprint whilst the visual improvement is derived from the provision of a suitable building in which all storage needs can be accommodated thereby eliminating the use of shipping containers and allowing materials presently left outside to be properly housed.

- 4.10 It will also ensure that local amenity is also properly maintained Whilst there is no history of disturbance to neighbouring residential properties and no history of complaint – and the OAUk seeks at all times to be a good neighbour to all – the construction of a new building as proposed should minimise any risk of disturbance through ensuring that adequate provision is made in a well-designed, properly constructed building to accommodate all the Association’s future needs
- 4.11 As such, in terms of the land use, this remains unaltered and therefore the use should be deemed wholly acceptable in the context of Green Belt policy, having regard to the principle of replacement of an existing building where the use remains the same and does not result in a disproportionate addition over the size of the original, having regard to the rationalisation of all the adjoining structures presently used for storage. Therefore, the principle of the proposed replacement meets the obligations of national planning policy and is in full accord with the Oshwal Centre Strategy as submitted for consideration by Senior Officers and Members.

5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The accompanying planning application seeks to provide for a replacement storage building at Oshwal Centre to enable the removal of extraneous shipping containers and other structures by enabling the rationalisation of the Oshwal Association's storage needs into a single, fit for purpose, building.
- 5.2 The proposed development is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt as detailed in paragraph 89 of the NPPF which allows the replacement of buildings for similar uses providing that the scale of the replacement is not disproportionate to the original. The proposed development is proportionate to the current storage needs of the Association and to the cumulative storage capacity presently available. The principle is therefore acceptable in terms of planning policy, and in particular in Green Belt terms. Moreover, the scheme lies within the wider context of the Oshwal Centre Strategy which has been provided to the Council as a means of establishing the wider context of individual proposals and which has been subject to consultation through the means of a Development Forum.
- 5.3 The extension is of design and detailing which is appropriate to its purpose, is subservient to the adjoining Community Halls and Oshwal House, is appropriately and conveniently located in relation to operational needs and its design will have no greater impact on the adjoining residential properties. Indeed, we consider likely that it will reduce any future potential for impact on amenity arising from potential noise intrusion, given the design of the building and the ability it affords to ensure that future storage needs can be accommodated within it.
- 5.5 In light of the above, it is respectfully considered that planning permission should be granted for the proposed development.

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