

5d 3/11/0115/FP- Erection of free standing hotel extension to provide 42 en suite guest bedrooms and 5 staff bedrooms at Manor of Groves Hotel, High Wych Lane, High Wych, CM21 0JU for Mr Stephen Hung

Date of Receipt: 25.01.2011

Type: Full – Major

Parish: HIGH WYCH

Ward: MUCH HADHAM

RECOMMENDATION:

That, subject to no objections being raised by the Secretary of State following referral to him as an application involving a departure from the Development Plan, the Director of Neighbourhood Services be authorised to **GRANT** planning permission subject to the following conditions:

1. Three Year Time Limit (1T12)
2. Approved plans (2E10)
MG 684/19, MG 684/20, MG 684/21FMG 684/22B, MG 684/23A, MG 684/24A, MG 684/25B, MG 684/26A, MG 684/27A, MG 684/28A, JCA-01
3. Sample of materials (2E12)
4. Lighting details (2E27) insert '*and to ensure that identified bat foraging areas are not unduly affected*' 'ENV16'
5. Cycle Parking Facilities (2E29)
6. New Doors and Windows -unlisted buildings (2E34)
7. Sample Brickwork Panel- unlisted buildings (2E35)
8. External details of extraction equipment (2E37)
9. Wheel washing facilities (3V25)
10. Tree retention and protection (4P05)
11. Landscape design proposals (4P12) a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j,k,l
12. Landscape works implementation (4P13)
13. Landscape maintenance (4P17)

14. Prior to the commencement of development details of construction vehicle movements and construction access arrangements shall be submitted to an approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The construction of the development shall thereafter be undertaken in accordance with the approved details

Reason: In the interests of highway safety and to ensure the impact of construction vehicles is minimised.

Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and the saved policies of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007), and in particular policies GBC1, ENV1, ENV2, ENV11, ENV16, ENV17, SD1, LRC10, TR2, TR3, TR4, TR7, TR20 and IMP1 and PPG2 , PPS5 and PPS4. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies is that permission should be granted.

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1.0 Background:

- 1.1 The application site is shown on the attached OS extract. The Manor of Groves hotel complex is some 52 hectares in size and is located on the western edge of High Wych a Category 2 Village, within the Metropolitan Green Belt. It is primarily accessed from a long private driveway off High Wych Lane, however additional access to the site is provided from Ruckets Hall Lane a narrow country lane which runs directly behind the main hotel building.
- 1.2 The wider site currently comprises a Grade II Listed building which was converted and extended in the late 1980's for hotel use. Further extensions provide additional bedrooms, a health and fitness centre and large detached golf clubhouse to serve the 18 hole golf course. The hotel currently has 88 bedrooms. 74 surface car parking spaces are available which are sited to the south and east of the main hotel building. To the south of the hotel is relatively open parkland whilst the land to the north and east is wooded with mature trees.
- 1.3 The application under consideration proposes the construction of a T-shaped, detached two and half storey building some 30 metres to the east of the main hotel building on the existing surface car park to

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accommodate 42 additional en- suite bedrooms, 5 staff bedrooms, kitchen and coffee bar. In addition, a single storey flat roof projection on the eastern corner will provide a reception area, breakfast room and roof terrace to serve the coffee bar. Displaced and additional car parking is to be provided in three basement levels under the building. 172 car parking spaces will be provided on the site in the new basement car park and remaining surface car parks. In total 3734 square metres of floor space will be created, excluding the basement car park.

- 1.4 The appearance of the building is designed to reflect the architectural characteristics, scale and rhythm of the existing building. Materials of construction are rendered walls painted off white/ cream, natural slate, powder coated aluminium windows and screens.
- 1.5 The application is supported by a planning statement, a bat survey, a tree condition survey, a transport statement, a sustainability statement, a Statement of Heritage Significance, a statement of community involvement and a Business Case for Expanding the Number of Bedrooms report.

2.0 Site History:

- 2.1 Planning permission and Listed Building Consent were granted in 1988 (LPA Refs: 3/88/0722/FP) for the change of use and extensions of the former Georgian country house and associated outbuildings to an hotel and the provision of a 9 hole golf course.
- 2.2 In 1989 a further application was granted (LPA Ref:3/89/0120/ZA) for an additional 9 holes to create an 18 hole golf course and a clubhouse.
- 2.3 In 2001 planning permission and listed building consent were granted (LPA Ref: 3/99/0453/FP and 3/99/0454/LB) to extend the hotel to provide an additional 25 bedrooms and a health and fitness centre which is open to the public.
- 2.4 In 2001 (LPA Ref: 3/01/0857/FP) and 2005 (3/05/0134/FP) planning permissions were granted to extend the clubhouse which, as well as being used by golf club members, is used for conferences and other events in association with the main hotel and can accommodate up to 400 guests.

3.0 Consultation Responses:

- 3.1 The County Development Unit advises that the County Council seeks to promote sustainable management of waste in the county. Due regard

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should be had to the appropriate policies in adopted Hertfordshire County Council Waste Local Plan 1999 which include Waste polices 3, 7 and 8.

- 3.2 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre acknowledges that no evidence of bats or roosts were found when the bat survey was undertaken however Pipistrelle bats were recorded flying along the tree-lined boundaries of the car park. It is recommended that any external lighting does not illuminate the identified bat foraging areas and landscaping includes native species to support the local invertebrate populations.
- 3.3 County Highways comments that the scheme is acceptable in a highway context. Whilst not ideally located on the edge of High Wych, which has few amenities, it is within recognised walking distances of bus stops which provide a service to the railway station at Sawbridgeworth. It is considered reasonable to seek a financial contribution of £26000 towards accessibility and the further promotion of sustainable transport measures which could include upgrading bus stops in the vicinity to DDA compliant standards and traffic calming measures which are currently being investigated by Herts Highways. Conditions regarding details of construction vehicle movements, wheel washing facilities and the provision of an area for parking, storage and delivery of materials associated with the development are recommended.
- 3.4 CPRE Hertfordshire advises that the site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and therefore the Council needs to be satisfied that very special circumstances exist and that the proposed additional accommodation is no greater than that necessary to meet the identified need. The detailed business case accompanying the application has not been made available for public viewing due to its confidential commercial content and without this information it is not possible to form a view regarding the merits of the case.
- 3.5 The Council's Engineer advises that the site is entirely situated within flood Zone 1, there are no historic flood incidents recorded for the site or surrounding area, the site is situated near to surface water inundation zones and there is a nearby watercourse system and many nearby above ground water features and ponds.
- 3.6 The basement car parking area may displace groundwater within the subsoil and create an increase in the risk of associated flooding within the grounds of the hotel from ground water displacement. It is therefore recommended that in addition to the rain water recovery system outlined in the design and access statement, consideration be given to above ground SUDs drainage systems such as green roofs and permeable

paving.

3.7 The Council's Conservation Officer comments that the proposed development, due to its mass, scale, alignment and location will have a limited impact on the historic and architectural character and appearance of the Listed Building and its immediate and wider setting. It is considered that the mature trees within the immediate setting are retained to assist with softening the introduction of the extension and its impact on the setting of the listed building.

3.8 The Council's Landscape Officer comments that the proposal will result in the removal of 11 trees which will have an adverse landscape impact. It is however noted that the surrounding woodland and trees are to be retained and, with additional planting, these should provide an appropriate landscape setting for both the existing and proposed buildings. There are some reservations regarding the above ground car park layout and service yard arrangements, however these can be overcome with relatively minor adjustments and a condition requiring full details of the landscape design proposals is recommended.

4.0 Parish Council Representations:

4.0 High Wych Parish Council does not object to the proposed development but has made the following comments:

- Careful consideration needs to be given to the capacity and safety of all associated road junctions;
- The additional traffic could impact on the local network;
- Improved refuse facilities need to be provided as there are already existing problems;
- Existing problems with sewerage needs to properly addressed;
- Water supply/ pressure is known be currently inadequate for the existing development and should be addressed;
- Construction traffic, working times and waste must be controlled.

5.0 Other Representations

5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

5.2 One letter of representation have been received which raises the following concerns:

- Manor of Groves is already over developed;
- Lighting pollution;

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- Lack of existing maintenance of hedges and surrounding area;
- Inadequate sewerage system;
- Inadequate water pressure.

6.0 Policy:

6.1 The relevant 'saved' Local Plan policies in this application include the following:

GBC1	Green Belt
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV11	Protection of Existing Hedgerows and Trees
ENV16	Protected Species
ENV17	Wildlife Habitats
SD1	Making Development More Sustainable
LRC10	Tourism
TR1	Traffic Reduction in New Developments
TR2	Access to New Developments
TR3	Transport Assessments
TR7	Car Parking- Standards
TR20	Development Generating Traffic on Rural Roads
IMP1	Planning Conditions and Obligations

6.2 In addition, the following National policy guidance are particularly relevant:-

PPG 2: Green Belts
PPS 5: Planning for the Historic Environment
PPS 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth

7.0 Considerations

7.1 The determining issues in relation to this application for planning permission are:

- Whether the principle of the development is acceptable, and whether very special circumstances exist to warrant a departure from Green Belt policy;
- The size, siting and design of the proposed building;
- The impact of the development on the setting of the Listed Buildings;

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- Highway, parking and access implications;
- The impact of the development on landscaping and ecology;

Principle of development

- 7.2 Both PPG2 and Local Plan Policy GBC1 outline specific types of development that are appropriate within the Green Belt, which includes agricultural related developments and essential facilities for outdoor sports and recreation. Developments involving extensions to hotels are not outlined as appropriate development within PPG2 and Policy GBC1 of the Local Plan. PPG2 states that inappropriate development is, by definition harmful to the Green Belt and that the onus is upon the applicant to demonstrate that the harm that the inappropriate development proposed would cause to the Green Belt would be clearly outweighed by other considerations. It must therefore be considered whether Very Special Circumstances exist in this case to permit the proposed inappropriate development and to justify a departure from local and national policy.
- 7.3 The applicant argues that the 'very special circumstances' in this case relates to the risk of the business failing and the loss of a tourist facility and place of employment. It is the applicant's contention that the loss of the hotel business would be of such significant harm to the local area that the benefits that the development would bring with the retention of the hotel are sufficient to outweigh the harm that the inappropriate development would have upon the openness of the green belt. These 'very special circumstances' are discussed below:
- 7.4 The applicant has submitted a 'Business Case for Expanding the Number of Bedrooms' report. This outlines that the property was purchased by the current operators out of receivership in 1996. Since then the business has been developed and expanded into the complex it is today which currently employs 147 employees of which 66 are full-time. From 1996 to 2003 Manor of Groves recorded trading losses, which was to be expected given the circumstances under which the business was bought and the need to re-establish the hotel's place in the market. From 2004 to 2008 profitability was achieved, however since then turnover and profitability have been declining year on year and since 2009 the hotel has again been operating at a loss. It is projected that on the basis that the status quo is maintained that income will continue to fall to levels that cannot be sustained and which would almost certainly, result in the closure of the hotel.
- 7.5 The applicant has indicated that a range of measures have been

considered, such as reducing staff numbers, increasing room rates, increasing membership numbers and fees and increasing occupancy rates to improve profitability. However, in many cases these would actually have a negative effect on demand levels and/ or service standards.

- 7.6 The applicant states that there are two main reasons identified for the hotel's failings which are interrelated. Since 2004 there has been a major growth both in the number and quality of hotel rooms within a 20 mile radius of Manor of Groves. This has introduced significant competition pressure, in large part due to the scale of the new hotels, all of which have at least 100 rooms. In contrast at Manor of Groves, there is currently a mismatch between the demand for services and facilities provided by the hotel as a wedding and conference venue and the number of core bedrooms available. With only 79 bedrooms and the need to maintain availability for regular business and leisure clients requests for bookings of 20-50 rooms, whether linked to a conference or not often have to be turned down. Likewise, potential conference bookings have been lost due to the hotels inability to host conference delegates on site and a number of letters from potential clients have been submitted in support of this premise.
- 7.7 From the information submitted I consider that, on balance, if the status quo is maintained there is a real risk that the hotel will fail and this will have a significant adverse effect this on the local economy particularly in relation to the number of jobs that would be lost. This in my view constitutes a very special circumstance in this case to warrant a decision that overrides Green Belt policy.

The size, siting and design of the building

- 7.8 The proposed building has been sited on the north east end of the health and fitness suite away from the historic part of the hotel building. Its location ensures that it does not unduly compromise both the short and long views of the front façade of the original 18th century building and its relationship with the fitness centre enables the building to be designed as a visual stop to the existing predominantly linear form.
- 7.9 Turning to the size of the proposed building, during pre-application discussions the number of bedrooms has been reduced from 63 to 42, which the applicant considers is the minimum number of guest bedrooms required. In the Business Case for Expanding the Number of Bedrooms it states that to add 42 bedrooms to the existing stock of 79 would result in a total letting room stock of 121 rooms, much more in line with the capacity of competitor hotels and can be supported by the

existing hotel infrastructure. Furthermore the pure economics of hotel bedroom construction would suggest that to create a free-standing building of less than 40 rooms would probably be uneconomic. It is acknowledged that the building will be substantial in size. However, given the size and massing of the existing buildings I do not consider that this would be out of keeping or detrimental in the context of the wider site.

- 7.10 With regards to the appearance of the proposed dwelling, this has been designed to reflect the architectural characteristics, scale and rhythm of the historic building without mimicking it. In my view this creates a contemporary addition which will complement the existing buildings and will sit comfortably in its setting amongst the trees.

The impact of the development on the setting of the Listed Buildings

- 7.11 The proposed building is of a substantial size and as such the impact that the development would have upon the setting of the Listed Building on the site is an important consideration. The Conservation Officer's comments conclude that the impact that the proposed building would have upon the setting of the Listed Buildings would be acceptable. The Conservation Officer outlines that the mass, scale and design of the hotel extension proposed, whilst not mimicking the principle listed building, reflects its design symmetry. The location of the new building, as well as its mass, scale and alignment will ensure that it will have a limited impact upon the historic and architectural character and appearance of the Listed Building and the retention of the existing trees will help soften its appearance as it is approached.
- 7.12 In line with this advice, Officers consider that the proposed design and siting of the building would be an appropriate option in relation to the setting of the Listed Buildings.

Highway, parking and access implications

- 7.13 In terms of highway safety and access, having regard to the comments of County Highways, I am satisfied that the existing access arrangements are appropriate for the proposal, and adequate visibility exists at the junction with the public highway. Furthermore the site is located within recognised walking distances of bus stops which provide a service to the railway station at Sawbridgeworth.
- 7.14 Regarding parking; an additional 98 car parking spaces and 6 cycle spaces are proposed, which exceeds the maximum number of spaces required as set out in the current Local Plan. I am therefore satisfied

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that sufficient vehicle and cycle parking can be provided for the proposed development.

- 7.15 I have noted County Highways request for a financial development contribution towards sustainable transport measures. In this case, however, no schemes have been specifically identified by the Highways Authority in High Wych which would relate to the development and therefore such a contribution would fail to meet the tests set out in Circular 05/2005 and Regulation 122 (2) of CIL 2010.

The impact of the development on landscaping and ecology

- 7.16 With regards to any impact that the proposal would have on the existing landscaping on the site, it is acknowledged that any development will impact upon its visual appearance and there will be a need to remove 11 trees. Whilst the loss of trees is always regrettable, I consider, in this case, their removal is necessary to ensure that the new building is located in the most appropriate location and does not adversely impact upon the setting of the listed building. Furthermore I consider that replacement planting can be provided to adequately compensate for any loss. It is noted that all the trees which surround the site are to be retained which will ensure that the existing wooded character of the site, and wider visual appearance of the area, is maintained
- 7.17 Turning to ecology, the comments from Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre are noted. In line with these I am satisfied that the proposed development will not adversely impact upon the existing ecology or any protected species. I have however, for the reasons set out by HBRC, included a condition requiring details of any external lighting proposed.

7.0 Conclusion:

- 8.1 Having had regard to the above considerations it is considered that very special circumstances exist in this case and the proposed development is acceptable. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be granted. Given that this application is contrary to adopted Green Belt policies in the Council's Local Plan, it should be referred to the Secretary of State as a "departure" application.