

DELEGATED FILE NOTE

CASE OFFICER: ...Mark Simmons.....

APPLICATION REFERENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT	APPLICATION SITE
24/02114/LBC	Take down tower chimney to the lower string course (or less if stable) prior to reconstruction	The Cloisters Barrington Road Letchworth Garden City Hertfordshire SG6 3TH

Submitted Plan Nos

253-115 21298 R1 Existing photos and justification for works 235/100 Rev A 253-114

1.0 Policies

HE1	Designated heritage assets
HE2	Heritage at risk
SECN16	Conserve + enhance historic environment

2.0 **Site History**

- 2.1 **22/00248/LBC** - Take down tower chimney to the lower string course (or less if stable) prior to reconstruction.
CCON 01.04.2022

3.0 **Policies**

- 3.1 Policies HE1 and HE2 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 are relevant as are the following paragraphs of Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024):

- ☐ **135 c)** *(sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment),*
- ☐ **207** *(local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)*
- ☐ **210** *(desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),*
- ☐ **212** *(great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),*
- ☐ **213** *(clear and convincing justification), and*
- ☐ **215** *(harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).*

4.0 **Representations**

- 4.1 **Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation** – No representations received but actively involved with The Lawrence Cloisters Trust leading to this application being submitted.

Historic England – No objection to the application on heritage grounds in principle but would recommend the Council place conditions on any consent issued to establish the full extent of the works, the materials used and methodology.

National Amenities Societies – No comments received.

Press & Site Notices – No comments received.

5.0 Planning Considerations

5.1 Site & Surroundings

- 5.1.1 The Cloisters was added to the statutory List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest at grade II* on 7th September 1979. The list description reads as follows:

1906-7 by W H Cowlshaw. Built for Miss Annie Lawrence as a residential School of Psychology. Later converted for use as a preparatory school, then a concert hall. By 1948 it had become a masonic lodge. Romantic composition with an octagonal, high tower and 2 open turrets with spiral staircases rising above the cloister garth, an open semi-circular court, which was later roofed with a rotunda when used as a concert hall. Other features originally included cubicles for dressing purposes linked to an open swimming bath. Tiled roofs. Grey brick with diaper work patterns and Purbeck stone dressings. The rich, symbolic carved work (doves and bats for example) was mostly uncompleted before the building project in its original form came to a halt in 1907. Interior of painted brick with mass concrete vaulting. Windows of 2-light mullioned casement with leaded lights and arranged as enormous mullioned key windows around the central court. Entrance in north-west corner approached by flights of steps leading to arched portico. The cloister garth has an arcade with columns of Swedish green marble and a central fountain in Art Nouveau style around the central support of the tower. Modern additions to the rear.

- 5.1.2 The Cloisters has been on the Heritage at Risk Register since October 2013. The Heritage at Risk Assessment is that the condition is 'very bad' and a priority A building. Priority A being in immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric. Historic England describe the building in their consultation response as *"a remarkable building designed in a somewhat fantastical arts and crafts style by W H Cowlshaw and built for Miss Annie Lawrence in 1906-07 as a residential School of Psychology before finding life later as a preparatory school, concert hall and masonic lodge"*.

5.2 Proposal

- 5.2.1 The proposal is to ***'Take down tower chimney to the lower string course (or less if stable) prior to reconstruction'*** and the applicant is the Lawrence Cloisters Trust.
- 5.2.2 The proposed works include the construction of a scaffolding to provide access to the tower to enable the tower to be dismantled. Prior to dismantling the chimney will be recorded using a 3d laser scanner to produce a 3d computer model of the chimney and using digital photography to provide a 1:1 detail drawing of the tower. Following recording, the tower the intention is to carefully dismantle the stack, course by course, to understand how the structure of the chimney is tied together. This process will be recorded by digital photography and annotated with sketches to explain the detailed construction. This will allow the rebuild of the chimney on a like for like basis in the future.

5.3 Key Issues

- 5.3.1 The main issue is to consider the impact of the works on the special character of The Cloisters and upon the character & appearance of the Letchworth Conservation Area.

5.3.2 On 10th May 2021, I received an email from Claire Pudney (Heritage Advice Service Manager, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation) stating that

".... The Lawrence Cloisters Trust with the help of the Heritage Foundation has been able to secure AHF funding for a feasibility study as well as a condition survey of the building....."

The condition survey is being carried out by James Mackintosh, James Mackintosh Architects

The feasibility study is being carried out by David Geddes of Fourth Street."

5.3.3 An inspection of the chimney was undertaken by Hockley & Dawson on 29th November 2021. Specific issues raised were:

- ☐ *The mid feathers of tiling and brickwork were loose to the top of the chimney*
- ☐ *Lightning conductor fixings are decaying and causing the chimney to jack*
- ☐ *The corbelled head to the chimney is loose and moving away from the stack*
- ☐ *Significant loss of pointing*

5.3.4 Following this high-level inspection, a meeting was held on site on 16th December 2021 with myself and Domenico D'Alessandro (Architect, Historic England) to look at the tower with a follow up meeting by zoom on 17th December to discuss options available. A further inspection was made by Historic England's structural engineer, Alasdair Massie with a drone on 7th January 2022. The result of the survey was a consensus that the chimney required removal.

5.3.5 On 26th January 2022, Claire Pudney (LGCHF) emailed the following:

"..... We are currently applying for a Project Development Grant from HE which will help fund the works to repair the tower and the horseshoe flat roof. The application will not be considered until April and we are aiming to have the urgent works also covered by this. We will as such be tendering for a professional advisor as well as for the scaffold enclosure to the tower. We are hoping that if our grant is acceptable that the scaffold can then be erected in April/May time.

We are about to submit our application for Listed Building Consent to take down the stack, record it and then it will be rebuilt as part of the larger project to repair the tower and the horseshoe roof. It's anticipated that this will take place this year – subject to getting a contractor on board.

In the meantime, the LCT have erected a cordon around the tower in line with advice from our Structural Engineer.

We are also applying to AHF for a Project Manager grant which hopefully will be successful....."

5.3.6 As stated in the supporting Heritage Statement under the subheading 'SIGNIFICANCE':

The chimney is an important focal point to the Tower and its current condition needs to be addressed to ensure against loss of further fabric and any impact on the tower and building itself.

It forms an intrinsic part of the overall design ethos of Cowlshaw with the eccentric use of creasing tiles as a decorative and structural corbel course. The photographs below, show the fragmentation of the tiles.

This forms part of a larger strategy of repairs and refurbishment that The Lawrence Cloisters Trust are working towards with Historic England grant support.

5.3.7 Historic England has advised that:

“..... The chief proposal in the current application is the dismantling and reconstruction of the chimney stack. This is extremely unstable with loose/broken and friable brickwork which are at risk of falling. We have therefore accepted that in order to successfully repair the chimney it will need to be dismantled to a level of sound material as illustrated in the application and reconstructed with appropriate materials and methods.

We would note the application (Impact Assessment, sections 2 and 4 and other documents) repeatedly refers to the “tower” being dismantled, even though this appears in captions for the chimney stack. This appears to be a discrepancy as the chimney stack, not the overall “tower” is affected. However, we understand a more extensive repair project is being developed for the tower as a whole. As far as we are aware there is no need to dismantle the tower in its entirety. Should this in fact be proposed as part of this application we would recommend it is not determined at this time, further justification sought for this more extensive demolition and Historic England reconsulted. However, on the basis that only the chimney is affected we would not oppose the application in principal although conditions should be placed on any consent issued to establish the full extent of the works, the materials used and methodology”.

- 5.3.8 Considering that this is effectively a renewal of application ref: 22/00248/LBC, it intended that the conditions imposed under that consent are reapplied to the current application and cover matters such as recording (Condition 2), use of handheld tools (Condition 3), extent of dismantling work (Condition 4) and any deviation from the submission (Condition 5).

5.4 **Alternative scheme**

- 5.4.1 Not applicable.

5.5 **Pre-Commencement Conditions**

- 5.5.1 Not applicable.

5.6 **Conclusion**

- 5.6.1 It is acknowledged that the works will cause harm to the listed building, albeit less than substantial, but are considered necessary to protect the historic structure from collapse and deterioration, as there will be an unavoidable delay in the final repairs being carried out due to funding.
- 5.6.2 The works will allow the structure to be properly recorded and scaled drawings of the chimney to be reproduced and its construction to be recorded whilst carefully dismantling. It is noted that such information would not be possible to record carrying out the work in any other way. It is considered that the proposals are in the long-term interest of The Cloisters and will allow the chimney to be re-constructed on a like-for-like basis when funding becomes available.
- 5.6.3 Although not satisfying the provisions of Section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, in accordance with the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF the less than substantial harm is outweighed by the public benefit of securing the long-term preservation of this high value, grade II* listed building. In accordance with

Policy HE2: Heritage at risk of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 it is considered that by granting listed building consent this proposal will conserve this designated heritage asset which is identified on the national register and the works are justified and appropriate to the significance of the asset to maintain it with a beneficial use. The benefits clearly outweigh the harm. The asset's significance and importance has been considered and all feasible solutions to avoid and mitigate the harm identified have been fully assessed.

6.0 **Recommendation**

6.1 That listed building consent be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. The work to which this consent relates shall be begun by not later than the expiration of the period of 3 years from the date of this notice.

Reason: To comply with the provisions of Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. The chimney stack shall be recorded using a 3d laser scanner as stated in the application submission and the results of the 3d computer modelling together with any associated photographs and metric scale drawings shall be submitted to the Local Planning Authority, prior to the commencement of the dismantling works.

Reason: To secure and safeguard the provision for inspection and recording of matters of architectural and/or historical importance associated with the building that may be lost in the course of works.

3. Demolition work shall be carried out by hand or by tools held in the hand other than power-driven tools unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All materials capable of being salvaged and reused in the reconstruction of the stack shall be stored securely on site prior to reuse.

Reason: In the interests of ensuring that no damage is caused to the part of the grade II* listed building which is to be retained and to ensure that what fabric can be salvaged is set aside for reuse in the reconstruction under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

4. The extent of dismantling works shall be no greater than that identified on approved drawing no. 253-115 unless otherwise agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. If, however, during the course of the dismantling works the extent of dismantling is less than that suggested on approved drawing no. 253-115 then further details as to the intended extent of dismantling shall be agreed and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the full extent of dismantling being reached on site.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II* listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

5. In the event that the reconstruction is proposed to deviate in design/materials from the existing stack, full details of the design change(s) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the works commencing on the rebuild.

Reason: To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the grade II* listed building under Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and Policy HE1 of the Local Plan.

Signed  Anne McDonald	Development Management North Hertfordshire District Council Council Offices Gernon Road Letchworth Herts SG6 3JF
Determining Officer Date: 22 January 2025	