North Hertfordshire District Council
Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 18/01351/FP
Date: 06/08/2018
Planning Officer: JMC
Address: Land to the north of The Elms, The Causeway, Therfield SG8 9PP
Subject: Creation of new vehicular access with associated landscaping to new dwelling on the land adjacent to The Elms.

Elm House is now referred to as 'The Elms' and the applicant has used the latter address in planning documents. I have, therefore, referred to the listed building as The Elms rather than the address on the list entry which is 'Elm House'.

I previously commented under appn ref: 17/02020/1 for *'Erection of 1 x 3 bed detached dwelling and detached double garage. Creation of new vehicular access off of The Causeway (variation of permission granted under ref 15/02914/1)'* which was refused. An appeal has been lodged and is currently before the Planning Inspectorate. Since that application was submitted, Heritage and Planning Statements have been prepared to support the current proposal. Prior to the part implementation of the scheme under ref: 15/02914/1 for the erection of a four bedroom dwelling with access off The Elms, the streetscene appeared as shown in the images below from Google Maps in which the hedgerow and well-treed boundary that I have previously referred to, are noted.





I have read the submitted Heritage Statement and I note the opening sentence at 5.23 of that document where it reads *"The poor, insubstantial hedging fronting the new dwelling would be replaced and, together with the new entrance, constitute an enhancement…."*. Where is the evidence to suggest that this is 'poor and insubstantial'?

I note at 4.4 and 4.5 the following:

"However, a map regression exercise from the nineteenth century illustrates more recent alteration and change to both The Elms and its wider locale. Clearly evidenced by an OS extract of 1877, The Elms is shown to be set within a landscaped, highly verdant garden (Figure 9). By the late nineteenth century, an access provided off The Causeway is more

clearly shown; the winding route of which is more definite, as is the thinning and modification of what was previously a heavily treed garden for what is assumed to be primarily aesthetic effect."

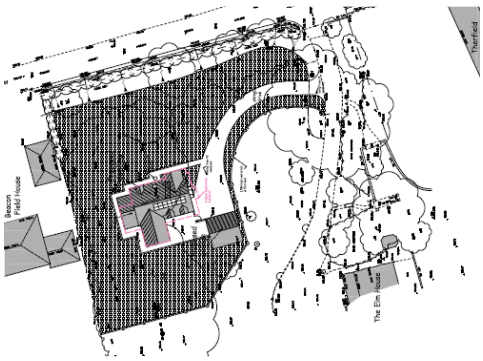
"Where the drive has been made more definite and tree cover substantially thinned, the overall effect has been to alter perceptions of the property from both the main road and the approaching drive. From here the principal, front elevation of the property is effectively unveiled only gradually and only once this winding access has been traversed (Figure 10). This configuration – i.e. the principal, host property framed within a landscaped garden beyond a winding private access – remained intact throughout the twentieth century".

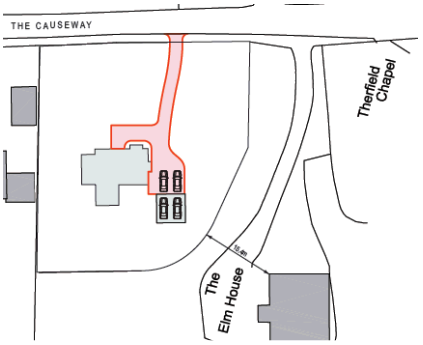
The reasoning behind objecting to appn ref: 17/02020/1 was predicated on seeking to retain the existing verdant frontage and somewhat 'downplaying' the existence of the new house within the grounds of The Elms when viewed from the highway. Whilst I accept the points made at 4.8 and 4.12 of the Heritage Statement that:

i) an associated appraisal is yet to be published by North Hertfordshire District Council; thus no direction presently exists regarding those elements of the conservation area it is deemed desirable to preserve or enhance and

ii) the principle of development and the inherent impingement of this upon the setting of the listed building has already been established as acceptable,

neither of these matters address the fact that the access will have a significantly greater impact upon the streetscene whilst the enlarged garden area will further reduce the landscaped grounds to The Elms as can be seen in the comparison between approved and proposed schemes below.





At 5.9 the Heritage Statement goes on to say *"…. implementation of the currently approved access and its associated removal of a number of healthy mature trees would have equally negative impacts upon the character and appearance of the conservation area; that being where Historic England states that 'local authorities are under a duty to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of conservation areas as a whole. A key part of that character and appearance may be the trees'."* Under ref: 15/02914/1, the case officer wrote the following *"…The grounds of Elm House are essentially laid out as garden and while there would be the loss of three trees, I can not conclude that this would amount to significant harm to the limited ecological value of the area".* No Arb Report appears to have been submitted with that application but I note that tree nos.14, 59 and 61 were down to be removed. The Planning Statement says that *"Proposed access will not require the removal of trees important to the Conservation Area".* Trees 59 and 61 would be removed in both the approved and current scheme so the difference with regard to trees coming

down relates to the loss of tree no.14 and this tree has not previously been regarded as ‘important to the conservation area’ by the former case officer.

Finally, at 5.24, the HS states that:

“Irrespective of this clear lack of harm, public benefit would nevertheless occur in the form of i) the improved boundary treatment and therefore streetscape; ii) the retention and supplementing of trees; and iii) in contrast to that being formerly proposed, the implementation of a safer, far more legible and authentic relationship between new dwelling and its relationship with the wider townscape would be established as a straightforward matter of good design.”

I agree that the access would be more legible for the new build but would it be safer? It may be a subtle point but the Highway Authority has considered that the new access **would not have an unreasonable impact on the safety of highway users passing the site.**

Recommendation
Apart from referencing the Heritage Statement, the circumstances for this application have not materially changed from that currently under consideration by the Planning Inspectorate.

Whilst it is considered that the proposed dwelling itself will neither harm the setting of Elm House or the character or appearance of the Therfield Conservation Area, the more generous allocation of garden land to the new dwelling together with the new access arrangement opening up the landscape frontage and leading to the new access competing with the principal access to the site, it is considered that the proposal will fail to make a positive contribution to local character (Para 192 c of revised NPPF) and will erode the setting of The Elms and the character and appearance of this part of the Therfield Conservation Area. The degree of harm would be less than substantial but this is not outweighed by public benefits even though it is acknowledged locally and by the applicant that there are perceived benefits.

I maintain an **OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal will fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and as supported by the aims of Section 16 of the revised NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016).

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