



STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT AT FORMER
PRINCESS HELENA COLLEGE**

At

**TEMPLE DINSLEY (FORMER
PRINCESS HELENA COLLEGE),
SCHOOL LANE, PRESTON,
HITCHIN, HERTS**



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared on behalf of the landowner of the site, Mr Russell Prince of The Door, hereafter referred to as “the Applicant”, in support of a Full Planning Application and an application for Listed Building consent in relation to a residential development at the Former Princess Helena College, known as Temple Dinsley, School Lane, Preston, Hertfordshire. This application is made to North Hertfordshire District Council (hereby referred to as “the LPA”).
- 1.2 The planning application site lies on the eastern border of the village of Preston and is part-located within the Preston Conservation Area and is entirely within the Green Belt. The site is also within the area subject of the Preston Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3 The site is of particular heritage interest, with the main house and the surrounding parks and gardens both being Grade II* Listed, as well as further buildings and structures within the application site being Grade II Listed in their own right (Icehouse, The Piggery and the Entrance Gate Piers and wall)
- 1.4 In light of the above, the applicant and their consultant team have been working in close collaboration with North Herts Council since late-summer 2023, as well as liaising and consulting with a number of other key stakeholders, such as Historic England, Hertfordshire County Council Highways Authority, Preston Parish Council, Preston Cricket Club and the NHDC Ward Councillor.
- 1.5 Consultation has also taken place with local residents and neighbours of the site as well as with ex-pupils of the Former Princess Helena College, the ‘The Old Girl’s Association and ex-school Governors, as well as the Hertfordshire Garden Trust and the Lutyens Society.
- 1.6 Engagement and liaison has been through written methods (emails and letters), on-site meetings and two public consultation drop-in sessions have been held at Preston Village Hall at the end of May and the beginning of June 2024.
- 1.7 The engagement with key stakeholders and the wider community has played a key role in shaping the proposals and where suggestions have been made, the applicant and their consultant team have sought to include these as part of the proposals.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) forms part of the supporting documentation for the applications for Full Planning Permission and for Listed Building Consent for the residential change of use, conversion and redevelopment of the site at Former Princess Helena College, Temple Dinsley, Preston.

2.2 The applications are for:

Full Planning permission for the change of use of the Former Princess Helena Collage and associated land from a former all-girls boarding school to 69no. private residential dwellings (Use Class C3), including the conversion of the main Grade II Listed House to 35no. new apartments, the conversion of the retained Teaching Block to provide 8 new apartments, the demolition of the existing sports hall building and science block and replacement with 20no. new houses and 2no. new apartments, the conversion of the Tank House and the Pump House buildings to provide 2no. detached dwellings and the erection of 2no. new dwellings located within the 'summer house' plantation. The provision of a new car-park together with domestic storage units and covered parking bays to include solar PV Panels, and waste storage units. In addition, the associated landscaping of the site including provision of new pathways and gates and the reinstatement of Grade II* Listed Parks and Gardens and the provision of a new Cricket Pitch and associated Cricket Pavilion.*

And -

Listed Building Consent for all works associated with the conversion of the Grade II Listed Building from the former all-girls boarding school to 35no. new apartments and the works for the reinstatement of the Grade II* Listed Park and Garden at Temple Dinsley, and all works associated with the conversion of the curtilage listed Tank House and Pump House buildings and the demolition of the existing sports hall.*



3.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 advocates pre-application engagement and front loading to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties (paragraph 39).
- 3.2 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) extrapolates further, explaining that pre-application engagement with the community is only mandatory in the case of certain proposals for wind turbines, but should be encouraged where it will add value to the process and the outcome.
- 3.3 This Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared in consideration of the North Herts Council Statement of Community Involvement – Adopted September 2023. Particular regard is given to Section 9 on ‘Community Involvement in the Development Management’, and paragraphs 9.4 – 9.10 (inclusive) on ‘Pre-application Consultation’ and paragraphs 9.11 – 9.17 regarding ‘Public consultation on for planning applications’.

4.0 CONSULTATION WITH NORTH HERTS COUNCIL

- 4.1 Initial discussions were held with NHDC Officers in summer 2023 and a pre-application submission was made to the Council under reference 23/02156/PRE. Following this, a meeting including a presentation of initial proposals and historical detail was held on-site with NHDC Planning and Conservation Officers in September 2023.
- 4.2 A formal pre-app response letter was provided on 21st December 2023, again providing a positive response to the initial proposals, but at the same time providing valuable feedback and suggestions, on amendments to the proposed scheme, which have been taken on board and implemented as part of the final proposals.



- 4.3 Following the initial pre-application response, the applicant chose to enter into a Planning Performance Agreement (LPA ref. 24/00912/PPA) with the Council, covering both the additional pre-application discussions and engagement and also to cover the application process itself.
- 4.4 This has included a timetable for the submission of updated plans and information on the various elements of the proposed scheme and the subsequent meeting between the applicant, their consultant team and NHDC officers, to discuss the merits of the proposals, the various options available and providing feedback on the proposals, so that the various elements of the proposals could be refined and improved.
- 4.5 An example of this has been the parking strategy of the site, which has evolved throughout the course of the pre-application discussions with Council officers.
- 4.6 Parking is something that is often overlooked but of course is essential. Initial proposals for a part-subterranean car park within the 'West Field' were rejected, due to the prominence this would have within the landscape and from wider views (notwithstanding the huge financial costs involved in implementing this as well). Officers provided very helpful advice and suggestions, in terms of carrying out a site-wide survey of the existing hardstanding on site and to also carry out a thorough review and assessment of the potential options for parking, in seeking to find the most sensitive solution and seeking to minimise the impact on the setting of heritage assets, the parkland setting and the wider landscape.
- 4.7 Through this process the 'East Car Park' (or 'Garden Parking' as it is also referred) has now been developed, providing parking in a discrete location and the architectural team have enhanced the scheme, ensuring the parking is laid out in line with the topography of the site and that it be enclosed with a surrounding wall, to provide screening but also to give the impression of a walled-garden, a feature synonymous with historic estates such as Temple Dinsley.
- 4.8 This is just one example of the positive impact NHDC Officers have had, in assisting the applicant and their consultant team in refining and improving on the proposals and how their suggestions have been taken on board and have shaped the proposals now put forward.



- 4.9 More recently and later on in the PPA and pre-app process, NHDC have also involved their Ecology Officer and have sourced an Arboricultural Consultant to provide independent advice on matters such as tree removal and mitigation replanting and on matters such as ensuring that a Biodiversity Net Gain is achieved on site. All of the advice provided is reflected in the proposals that have been submitted, such as the identification of areas of new woodland planting and the planting of wildflower meadows, in suitable locations around the parkland estate, taking account the historic and heritage sensitivities.
- 4.10 Following 'PPA meetings' (the meeting having either been in person on -site or online over video-conference), the Council Officers have provided a document outlining and listing the subsequent action points and the issues to be resolved. In each instance, all of these have been carried out and completed and the final proposals that have been submitted are as a result of these.

5.0 CONSULTATION WITH ADDITIONAL PUBLIC BODIES & STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 From March 2023, the applicant and the architectural team have been in consultation with representatives of Historic England (HE), under their reference PA01198578 and an initial response letter was provided by HE dated 31st March 2023.
- 5.2 Throughout the formation and the evolution of the plans, on the various aspects of the proposals, HE have provided advice and guidance which has steered the proposals and which has resulted in the details now being proposed. We have also met with HE on site and online, initially for us to provide a detailed presentation of the proposals and most recently to include the NHDC Conservation Officer.



- 5.3 In addition to HE, the applicant and the architectural team have also engaged with and liaised with the Lutyens Society, the Hertfordshire Garden Trust and with ex-pupils and ex-governors of the former school, to gain further understanding and insight to the main listed building and the evolution of the building over the years. This has proved very valuable in the formation of the proposals and identifying historic features of significance.
- 5.4 The applicant has also actively engaged with Preston Parish Council since March 2023, meeting and corresponding with the Parish Chair on numerous occasions over the past 15 months or so keeping them advised and up-to-date on the progress of the proposals. Following this, the Parish Council have used the Parish Newsletter as a medium to keep the village informed of the progress with the proposals.
- 5.5 The applicant has also been in regular contact and engagement with local residents and in particular, some of the neighbours who are closest to the application site. Again, meetings started in early 2023 and have been held on a regular basis since then.
- 5.6 Both the engagement with the Parish Council and local residents has proved valuable, providing feedback and suggestions for the site, some of which have been pursued and are now included as part of the proposals (more on this below).



- 5.7 The engagement with the local community culminated in two drop-in sessions being held at the Preston Village Hall. These were held on Thursday 30 May between 18.00 and 20.00, and Saturday 1 June between 10.00 and 12.00 and both were well attended, with approximately 80-100 people visiting the sessions, and comments received from members of the local community were positive.
- 5.8 Photographs of the events and the plans and display-boards that were provided as part of these are provided at Appendix 1 and 2 of this statement.
- 5.9 Members of the public and the Parish Council were invited to the events. In addition, the applicant and the consultant team also reached out and invited the NHDC Ward Councillor for the area, as well as other stakeholders (such as the Lutyens Society, for example).
- 5.10 The applicant also met with the NHDC Ward Councillor, Mr Joe Graziano, on site prior to the submission of the applications, to provide him with a presentation and an update on the proposals, and to seek his thoughts and feedback.
- 5.11 Since April 2023, the applicant has also been engaging with Preston Cricket Club (initial approach arranged by the Parish Council), as they expressed a very keen interest in the potential to form a new cricket pitch at the site. These discussions have been progressed in a positive manner and the pitch, together with a new pavilion, now form part of the proposals.



6.0 ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES VIA THE PARAMETER PLANS AND ILLUSTRATIVE MASTERPLAN

Community Tennis Court

- 6.1 Through discussions with the Parish Council, it was requested that one of the tennis courts on site be made available to the wider public and for use by the Preston community. The tennis court to the north of the main house (towards The Dower House) is now included as part of the proposals and whilst it would appear that this court has not been used for a number of years, as it is in such a state of disrepair and is overgrown, its refurbishment and reinstatement will be carried out as part of the development, at cost to the applicant/ developer and is being provided as a result of the request by the Parish Council. In addition, a footpath is also to be provided from the gate on the western boundary of the site, which would provide direct access for residents of Preston, from the central village green to this new sporting/ recreational facility (and to the Dower House).

Retention and Enhancement of Permissive Paths

- 6.2 Following requests by the Parish Council, the proposals include for the laying and formalisation of the permissive path across the southern section of the site, linking School Lane across to St Albans Highway. In addition, following comments received by local residents at the two public drop-in sessions, this path is now to also be extended to the south via an additional 'spur' to link to an existing gate on the southern boundary with School Lane and also an additional northern spur at its eastern end, to provide a link to PROW 002 which continues to the east of the site (east of St Albans Highway) and also then on up to the site for the Cricket Pitch, providing pedestrian access to this new community facility.
- 6.3 This path would be in addition to the path mentioned above, which will provide access between the village green and the new tennis court, as requested by the Parish Council. This path would also continue up to the existing dwellings at the Dower House, which do not currently have a means of walking to the village and which are currently somewhat detached and isolated.



New cricket Pitch and pavilion

- 6.4 As noted, the applicant has engaged in constant and positive dialogue with representatives of Preston Cricket Club. This has involved the sharing of technical information, to ensure that the size and orientation of the cricket pitch will be suitable for the needs of the cricket club, while at the same time ensuring other parameters and requirements of the proposals can be met (for example, providing additional woodland planting to mitigate tree loss and to ensure Biodiversity Net Gain is achieved on site). In addition, discussions have also been held with regard to the proposed cricket pavilion, which also makes up part of the proposals.
- 6.5 This provides a clear example of how the applicant and the consultant team have engaged with local stakeholders – in this instance the village cricket club – and this is to result in a significant benefit to the community in providing this sporting and recreational facility, as part of the proposed development.

Garden Open Days

- 6.6 Through discussions with the Parish Council, local community and the NHDC Ward Councillor, the applicant has also agreed to allow for a number of 'Garden open days' each year (perhaps tied to the existing Preston village 'open garden days'), whereby the renovated and reinstated gardens will be open to the community to enjoy. This would allow a greater enjoyment and appreciation of the listed house and the listed gardens by the wider public.

Additional Community Contributions

- 6.7 Through pre-application discussions with NHDC officers and through direct engagement with Preston Parish Council, a number of key community enhancements and contributions have been identified, which the applicant has agreed to and which are to be secured through the Section 106 agreement, which would accompany the eventual grant of planning permission for these proposals.



- 6.8 Suitable and proportionate contributions have been identified towards a number of community projects, such as towards the improvement and enhancement of the Millenium Playground, towards the play area at the Preston Recreation Ground, towards a new 'Multi-Use Games Area' (MUGA) and outdoor gym equipment, both also at the Recreation Ground and towards a new picnic area at Preston Millenium Park.
- 6.9 It is through the considerable engagement with both NHDC officers and with the Parish Council over the past year or so that these projects have been identified and these contributions can be secured as part of the proposed development.

7.0 FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

- 7.1 In accordance with the NHDC SCI, details of the application will be published in local papers, via a site notice and letters to neighbours. As a minimum the statutory requirements in force at the time for engaging the public in planning proposals /applications will always be met by the Council. Public engagement will be carried out in respect of the application by NHDC.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Over the past 15 months or so, since the applicant took ownership and control of the application site, the preparation of the proposals has included a significant level of community engagement, with the information gleaned from it informing and steering key aspects of the proposals
- 8.2 The applicant and their architectural and planning team have actively engaged with the local planning authority through the pre-application advice service and are engaged in an ongoing PPA process. Further targeted consultation and significant engagement has also taken place with key stakeholders, such as Historic England, as well as with the local community, with the Parish Council and local residents, including two public drop-in sessions in May and June 2024. This has been consistent with the requirements of the NPPF and as advised under the NPPG and the NHDC Statement of Community Involvement (Sept 2023).



8.3 The requirements for pre-application community consultation have therefore been met and the outputs from the community engagement have shaped the development proposal for the site.

APPENDIX 1: -

Photographs of Public consultation drop-in sessions at Preston Village Hall





lovely to see what's happening at the
Jay need a suite/sportswear manual
Jaffa hairy - he donated one of
his pictures to the school - which
was sold to save it!
Rick [redacted]

Thank you. Very helpful. Delighted the
permissive park is staying.
Helen & Lisa [redacted]

We have a long association with the 23
parks and 110 years of the pool.
Very excited to see what's happening and
looking forward to seeing the future.
Stanislav and Paul [redacted]

Glad the permissive park is staying
Could we have a small gym for
community use?
Giles [redacted]

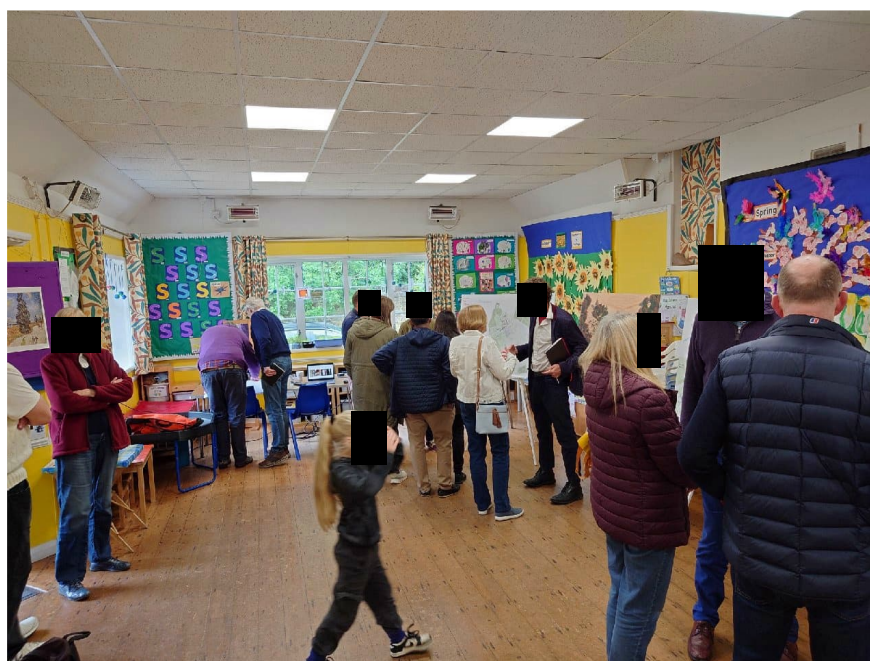
Dan Russell
As residents of Doves House, we would much
appreciate the original footpath from the
duke's park being available for us to use as
it's quite vital trying to get along the
road to the village centre.
Mary Holmes, Shirley, John [redacted]

INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT.
WILL THERE BE A PATH FROM
THE DOWER HOUSE TO THE GREEN
THROUGH THE GROUNDS. I UNDERSTAND
YOU ARE LOOKING AT THIS POSSIBILITY.
IN THE WINTER, USING THE UNLIT
ROAD IS HIGHLY PRECARIOUS &
DANGEROUS!
MANY THANKS. CRAIG [redacted]

Great presentation. Love to see
the video again to learn the history.
Many Thanks [redacted]

Really interesting presentation and really
to see a very innovative approach to the
buildings & grounds.
Thank [redacted] & Dave [redacted]

INTERESTING PRESENTATION one 2 [redacted] [redacted]
NOT TRYING TO FORCE SITE INTO
5 BEDS -
IT TO ACHIEVE WHAT YOU WANT
WILL DO
Leslie [redacted]





John Berry
The Mayor

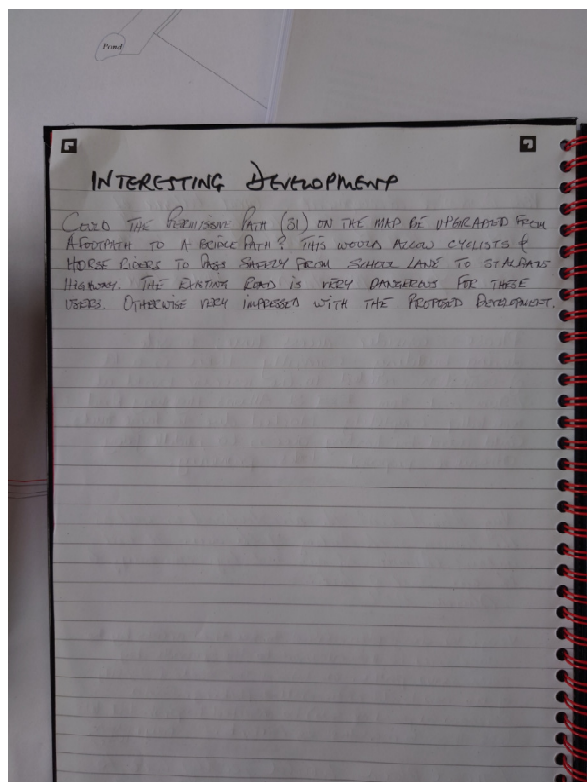
Very impressive development. Great balance of utility and keeping the integrity of the old buildings. Will be a great addition to the community.
Thanks for the presentation.

Please consider access times to site during building. Currently there is a lot of congestion related to the reservoir build at 7-9am and 4pm. ~~St. Albans~~ St. Albans Highway Road repeatedly completely blocked due to large trucks. Could avoid by limiting access to middle of day. Otherwise proposal looks promising.

Very pleased with the new development as well as the future of the village of the area. It will bring business to the area and bring new energy to the area. Best of luck.

Very interesting plan. Glad to see that access by the village will be maintained to the grounds by permissive paths. We liked the scale & density of the new build with walled parking. Can a covenant (or pair of ones) be inserted to prohibit lets less than 6 months e.g. Airbnb. Fair + Near.

Great plan. Would really like to see a Community Forum set up. Important to keep the Village access and involvement.





APPENDIX 2: -

Display Boards shown at Public consultation drop-in sessions at Preston Village Hall