



Historic England

Mr Peter Bull
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Our ref: L01580503 &
P01580501
19 August 2024

Dear Mr Bull

**Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2021
& T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**TEMPLE DINSLEY (FORMERLY THE PRINCESS HELENA COLLEGE), SCHOOL
LANE, PRESTON, HERTFORDSHIRE, SG4 7RT
Application Nos 24/01605/LBC & 24/01604/P**

Thank you for your letters of 31 July 2024 regarding the above applications for listed building consent and planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the applications.

Significance

Temple Dinsley is a multi-phased designed landscape centred an early 18th century country house substantially remodelled and enlarged in two separate phases by the renowned architect Edwin Lutyens alongside contemporary redevelopment of the formal gardens adjoining it to the west and north, potentially with input from Gertrude Jekyll (although no planting plans are known). The current house replaced an earlier 16th century house which was located roughly behind the eastern wing, and of which archaeological remains survive below ground. Much of the earlier historic building fabric survives along with architectural features, and fixtures including panelling, staircases, and fireplaces from the significant building phases.

This formal core is set within an early 18th century landscape park that was further embellished from the mid-18th century and as part of early 20th century investment by the estate's owners. From 1935, it became a private girls' school, Princess Helena College, which closed in 2021, resulting in the site's being put up for sale. The house is listed at grade II* (NHLE list entry 1307766), attributing more than special interest and representing just 5.8% of all listed buildings. The gardens and parkland are included within the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at



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grade II* (NHLE list entry 1000611), which places it within the top 30% of all registered parks and gardens.

Also within the site are four other structures of national significance which are designated as listed buildings: the gate, gate piers and park wall facing School Lane (grade II); the Piggery by Edwin Lutyens (grade II); the icehouse (grade II); and the Dower House (grade II – now in separate ownership). The house and gardens are included within the Preston Conservation Area designated by North Hertfordshire Council in 1970. Additionally, various structures are recognised as non-designated heritage assets, including: the pumping station and barn in the parkland south of the mansion; the agricultural building in Summerhouse Plantation; the Lodges on the park's southern boundary; the barn at the Dower House; and the walled garden adjacent to the Dower House.

We note the applicant's Heritage Assessment which provides a full and detailed account of the estate's history and evolution, as well as detailed analysis of each heritage asset and their significance.

Proposal and Impacts

The proposal seeks planning permission and listed building consent for change of use and conversion to a residential scheme comprising:

- Repair and conversion of the House including Art Block and the Pavilion, Teaching Block, Pump House and Tank House into 45 new dwellings.
- Replacement of the late 20th century detached school buildings including Sports Hall, Stores, Science and Residential Block with 24 new dwellings.
- Demolition of the agricultural building in Summerhouse Plantation and erection of two new detached houses.
- A new walled parking court.
- Repair/making good of other ancillary structures including the entrances, gateways and boundary walls, Belvedere, Piggery (former Well House), Icehouse and other historic garden features including terraces, steps, arches and ponds.
- Restoration of formal gardens and wider landscape park

Main House

Whilst the house retains much architectural and historic interest, it has also undergone various unsympathetic interventions from its use as school which has had a negative impact upon its overall significance. A lack of regular general maintenance in recent years has also resulted in degeneration to some areas of the building. We therefore recognise that the proposed change of use and conversion is an opportunity to address the physical issues and to bring the building back into a viable use to secure its long-term conservation.





The proposed scheme works with the extant historic plan-form and internal volumes to achieve a series of single-level apartments of varying sizes, that are accessed via the three historic ground floor entrances and internally via the existing historic staircases. Original (historic) room dimensions and arrangements are therefore retained, and in some cases reinstated where they have been sub-divided by the school. Where bathrooms cannot be readily accommodated in existing rooms, free-standing pods are proposed.

We are pleased to note that fabric and features from the Lutyens phases and earlier are largely unaffected other than where they are repaired, refurbished or reinstated, and the only fabric that is removed or substantially adapted is later 20th century fabric from the school era that is of no significance – such as flooring, wall finishes, lighting, sanitary ware, modern partitioning, etc.

We note the accompanying Heritage Impact Assessment which is presented in tabulated form with photographs and provides an item-by-item analysis of each work and its effect. We confirm that this is a full assessment and that we are in broad agreement with the conclusions that it reaches.

We therefore conclude that whilst the proposed conversion would result in some limited impact in terms of form and fabric it would also deliver a range of conservation benefits that would help to 'better reveal significance' and would ultimately help to conserve the heritage asset in a manner that is appropriate to its significance.

Conversion of 1970s art block/pavilion

We have no objection to this element of the scheme and support the re-use of this part of the building. We recognise the heritage benefits that would result which includes the removal of late C20 accretions, and general restoration and repair of the pavilion. The conversion involves minimal alterations to historic fabric and are concentrated to the north side leaving the south elevation facing the rose garden free of any new interventions.

New build

The group of late C20 detached buildings on the north-east side of the house which include the Sports Hall, Stores, Science and Residential Block are proposed for demolition. These structures are of limited architectural and historic interest and have a negative impact on the setting of the house and the registered park and garden, and we therefore have no objection to their removal.

A total of 5 No. replacement building are proposed that emulate traditional farm buildings or ancillary buildings typically found on country estates.

Whilst these will be sub-divided to provide a total of 22 houses and apartments, we understand that the design intent is for each individual buildings to give the general impression that it is a large, single building that has been converted by way of minimal, restrained expression and detailing. We note also that the exterior spaces





have also been designed so that they read as a cohesive whole rather than individual domestic curtilages, although we recommend that design details are agreed prior to the commencement of development via a planning condition.

Whilst this group of new buildings will not be entirely without visual impact and extend built development slightly further east into open parkland, we recognise that this element of the scheme would deliver heritage benefits – first and foremost the removal of the poor quality and uncharacteristic 20th century structures from the registered park and garden and the setting of the listed house. In addition, we consider that the simple architectural form, traditional proportions and roof profiles of the proposed buildings would be more sympathetic to the form and character of the main house. We note also the intention to use high-quality traditional natural including handmade brick, clay tiles and slate which should help to assimilate the new development within its context and to mitigate any potential visual impact.

New Houses in Summerhouse Plantation

A pair of detached 5 bed houses designed in a contemporary architectural style are proposed with the early 20th century woodland at Summerhouse Plantation to the east of the house. Although this would result in the introduction of new built form within the woodland and a fundamental change to its planning use and character, this will occur in what is considered to be one of the less sensitive areas of the estate in terms of heritage significance. We consider that by virtue of their location – a significant distance from the main house and where they would be largely concealed by well-established tree planting – these proposed new dwellings are unlikely to have any significant visual impact in terms of either the wider historic landscape or the setting of the house.

Parking Court

A new 50 space car parking structure is proposed just south-east of the house on sloping ground running gently uphill from the existing pond towards the icehouse. It comprises a series of covered car-ports which have solar panels incorporated within their roof planes. These are contained within a curved 2.2-metre-high wall that is designed give the appearance of a walled garden. The north-west corner is screened by way of a new hedge. There are also bin stores and small storage sheds contained within. Presumably it will also contain charging points for EVs?

We note the elevational drawings which give some indication of its form. We also note that the Design and Access Statement claims that the visual effect would be mitigated by the trees and the wall which would screen the cars. It is somewhat regrettable however that this is not accompanied by any visualisation or photomontages to demonstrate the likely effect in views towards the house and across the parkland.

We appreciate that other alternative options for parking provision were considered but assessed as more harmful. We nevertheless have some concerns that the proposed solution is likely to have a particular presence and visual impact due to its





size, materials and appearance. In particular the appearance of the solar panels which will be seen above the line of the perimeter wall and are likely to have a reflective quality which could draw the eye, as too might security lighting.

The proposed parking court would be a sizeable and noticeable new intervention within the designed landscape for which there is no historic precedent and in close proximity to. It would result in the permanent loss of an area of the historic parkland to development, which would fill-in the open space south of the approach drive between the important landscape features of the pond and icehouse. In our view, this would have a negative visual impact upon the character of the registered park and garden. We do however appreciate that parking provision is an inevitability in a residential development of this scale and therefore accept that it is justified within the context of the overall scheme.

Conversion of Pump house and Tank house

Both of these buildings are in a poor state of repair and we therefore welcome the proposed repair and refurbishment and have no objection in principle to conversion to residential dwellings. The works are sensitive and sympathetic to the historic form, function and general aesthetic of these buildings, and other than a small section of infill to create a link extension of the pumphouse with its existing outbuilding, new cart lodges for parking/storage and a few additional windows and rooflights the exteriors will retain their original outbuilding character. The interiors of course will undergo a greater level of change although there is little of significance that will be affected other than some 20th century agricultural equipment that will be recorded.

The way that the curtilages are treated in terms of boundary treatment, landscaping, etc., has the potential to impact upon the parkland setting, particularly if it is allowed to take on a private domestic appearance. We therefore recommend that these details are subject to pre-commencement planning conditions, and that permitted development rights are removed by way of condition to control extensions, outbuildings and other domestic paraphernalia. Related to this, we welcome the proposals for restrictive covenants requiring residents to gain permission from the proposed management company before they could make any alterations, extensions or erect outbuildings.

Repair to Icehouse, Piggery, and Belvedere

We have no objection to the sympathetic restoration and repair of these ancillary structures as this will benefit the integrity of the registered park and garden.

Restoration of formal gardens and wider landscape park

The landscape and gardens have suffered from neglect in recent years. Some of the garden's hard landscape features, such as the Magnolia garden paving and the north terrace, have become eroded. Much of the soft landscape and carefully planned planting has been lost. We therefore support the principle of restoring this very important heritage asset and recognise that this is an opportunity to enhance the





historic setting of the house and to 'better reveal the significance' of the registered park and garden as a heritage asset.

We note the supporting research and documentary evidence that has been produced to inform the proposals, which includes primary sources such as original Lutyens drawings, . This should ensure a sound conservation-led approach and authenticity to the 'full reinstatement' of the gardens, including sensitive and pragmatic interventions for communal use and to improve access.

We support this element of the scheme, and recommend that detailed design and specifications should be secured by way of pre-commencement planning conditions. We also support the proposed improved management of the grassland, woodland, and waterbodies forming the wider landscape park for both heritage and nature conservation benefits. Comprehensive management and maintenance plans for the gardens and wider parkland should also be secured by way of planning conditions.

We welcome the plans to open up the large parts of the landscape to residents as well as granting ongoing public access via permissive routes to the cricket pitch and tennis court and to the former gardens on selected 'open days'. We note however that it is not clear from the proposed land-use site plan and the key which areas are private and which are public. The application also makes clear that the plan is 'informative only' and not for approval'. As increased public access is being offered to help off-set the harm, we believe that it will be necessary to secure this public benefit by way of a section 106 legal agreement.

Policy Context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that the protection and enhancement of the historic environment is an overarching objective of sustainable development (paragraphs 7 and 8).

Paragraph 195 advises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance...

Paragraph 205 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be).

Paragraph 206 builds on this - any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 208 then states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.





Historic England's Position

We have considered the proposals in accordance with the NPPF guidance and conclude that in principle we support a scheme that would put these highly-graded heritage assets to a new viable use - thus securing their ongoing conservation. We note that in order to achieve this there are certain necessary compromises that would impact upon significance, as we have set out above. We consider that this would equate to harm to significance, that in the language of the NPPF would be 'less than substantial'.

However, we also recognise that the proposed scheme would deliver a range of meaningful heritage benefits that would better reveal significance and which in turn could contribute towards mitigating the harm, as also described above.

We therefore recommend that it would fall to your authority to carry out the weighing exercise in accordance with paragraph 208 of the NPPF, and if minded to approve these applications, be satisfied that the proposal would deliver sufficient public benefit to outweigh the harm, which may include securing its optimum viable use.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the applications on heritage grounds. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the applications to meet the requirements of paragraphs 206, 208 of the NPPF.

In determining these applications you should bear in mind the statutory duty of sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

Yours sincerely

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