North Hertfordshire District Council
Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 18/00164/FP
Date: 26/04/2018
Planning Officer: SD
Address: 21 High Street, Baldock SG7 6BD
Subject: Change of use of former office building to provide 6 flats (2 x 1-bed and 4 x 2-bed) on the ground, first and second floors with basement level storage, associated internal works, staircase works, removal of front entrance ramp, front railings, car parking, rear mechanical gate, landscaping and ancillary works.

My comments regarding the listed building are to be found under ref: 18/00165/LBC.

Firstly, if this proposal is for the whole scheme as a resubmission, we do not have all the plans i.e. upper floors.

According to the submitted DAS,

"…. The additional flat would cause the division of the garden to the building but with a low fence and cultivation of the existing plating [sic] this division would not unduly damage the outlook as the patio to the large doors to the ballroom already act to divide the garden….."

One of the key reasons for resisting a separate unit at Flat 6 is that the curtilage to The Manor House has been significantly reduced in the past and is now to the extent that its further subdivision would be considered harmful to the building's setting. To reduce the garden curtilage to arguably the most prestigious unit to an approximately 4m deep patio would occasion harm to the listed building. If the rear garden area is maintained as a single space this would maintain an approximately 11m depth of rear amenity space to Flat 1. If Flat 6 were to be supported, this would lead to direct overlooking into this garden unless openings in this elevation are either bricked up or obscure glazing or opaque film is introduced to openings, neither of which is to be encouraged.

In addition, although there is basement storage allocated for each unit, I suggest that it would be impractical to have items, such as a lawn mower, stored in the basement which would then have to be taken up a flight of stairs, through the communal entrance hall and around to the rear of the property. A single garden area to Flat 1 would, at the very least, allow for a modest storage facility to be located in the garden grounds which compromising the building's setting. Two gardens would effectively compound this practical problem.

In addition, the new parking arrangement at the rear is poorly arranged with a parking bay set at an angle and not accessible if a car is parked alongside and what was a single metal sliding gate is now shown as two gates, which it is considered, would cumulatively erode the setting to the Manor House.

Suggested conditions.
First and foremost, the applicant has stated that *"….work has commenced on the conversion…".* It should be noted that Conditions 3 & 4 of planning permission ref: 17/00173/1 are pre-commencement conditions. To date, no 'Approval of Details' applications have been submitted to the LPA. I am objecting to the current scheme,

therefore, I am not suggesting carrying conditions onto a new consent unless there is an alternative scheme submitted that I can support.

Recommendation
The Manor House is grade II* listed, the curtilage to which has been significantly reduced over time. The building is also located within the Baldock Conservation Area. Historic England and the Local Planning Authority have been pro-active in seeking a long term use for this heritage asset and the approved 5-unit scheme was considered a suitable conversion. Although the part of the building that would receive the internal alterations to facilitate the creation of Flat 6 is not considered to possess high significance and the works would not result in the loss of historic fabric, the additional unit would lead to an unnecessary and further intensification of the residential use and would result in the unnecessary subdivision of the rear garden curtilage. The subdivision of the curtilage would harm the garden setting to what would be a prestigious ground floor flat and would result in an overly close arrangement between the use of the gardens to proposed Flats 1 and 6. The proposed rear boundary treatment i.e. the metal gates would occasion further harm to the setting of the listed building and to the appearance of the conservation area.

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF requires 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. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting…"* It is considered that the intensification of the residential use will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset and this has been weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use. With regard to the latter, no clear and convincing justification has been provided to confirm that Flat 6 is necessary form a viability point of view or that the approved Flat 1 is not marketable.

I am unconvinced that conversion to 6 units would be the optimum viable use that would outweigh the less than substantial harm. It is considered that the proposed additional unit would not enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation or preserves its significance, therefore, the scheme fails to satisfy the aims of Policy HE1 a. of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016). The proposal would also fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and would not satisfy the aims of Section 12 of the NPPF. I, therefore, conclude that the scheme is **OBJECTIONABLE**.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer