

Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Mr W. Myers
Development Control
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
Campus East
Welwyn Garden City
Herts. AL10 6A

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

6th March 2019 (by email)

Dear Mr. Myers,

Application No. 6/2019/0217/MAJ

Conversion of Northaw House to form 11 apartments (including refurbishment of existing single caretaker's flat) and underground parking area, the Ballroom Wing to form 2 dwellings, the Stable Block to form 1 dwelling, refurbishment of existing dwelling at Oak Cottage, construction of 2 Gate Lodge dwellings, 3 dwellings within the Walled Garden, 7 dwellings within the Settlement Area, refurbishment of the Walled Garden, refurbishment of access routes and reinstatement of old route, provision of hard and soft landscaping, car parking and supporting infrastructure
At Northaw House Coopers Lane Northaw Potters Bar EN6 4NG

CPRE Hertfordshire welcomes proposals to refurbish Northaw House and we note that a substantial element of this application is enabling development to allow that refurbishment to proceed.

The construction of the 2 Gate Lodge houses, the 3 dwellings in the walled garden and the 7 dwellings within the 'settlement area' represents inappropriate residential development in the Green Belt contrary to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework, the current Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan and the emerging Local Plan. As such, the applicant is required to demonstrate very special circumstances which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. The case put forward for very special circumstances is premised on the need for enabling development to fund the refurbishment of the historic structure.

As the applicant rightly points out, enabling development should be no more than the minimum needed to facilitate the work. Unfortunately the information contained in the Financial Viability Assessment Executive Summary accompanying the application is insufficient to form a judgement as to whether or not that is the case. The applicant states that full costings have been provided to the Council. It is therefore incumbent on the Council to determine the validity of the quantum of housing being proposed.

We note that in their pre-application advice, officers stated that there was a need "to provide a robust justification in line with English Heritage's policy for enabling development." We can find no reference in the Heritage Statement that any approach has

been made to English Heritage to obtain their views on the proposals, and we urge the Council to seek those views before determining the application.

On the relationship between the proposed new development and the heritage assets, we have some concerns. While we appreciate the attempt to preserve the integrity of the garden wall itself, the slight off-setting of the proposed buildings from the wall results in narrow passageways, which will receive little sunlight and consequently become sterile spaces. The highly glazed design of the three properties is incongruous in the context of the proposed 'vernacular' nature of the overall development.

We do not accept the view expressed in para. 84 of the Heritage Statement that the 'settlement units' will effectively appear to be a farm layout providing "a series of high quality agricultural buildings of modern interpretation " which will create "clear visual and physical links to the walled garden." What is proposed is essentially a small cul-de-sac of fairly standard detached and semi-detached housing which has been interposed between the walled garden and the main house. Rather than enhance the links between the heritage assets, it reduces them. Calling the new houses 'The Farm House' and 'The Dairy' etc. does not make them into a farm complex, nor does the layout lend itself to that interpretation.

Consequently, while accepting the principle of refurbishing Northaw House and the need for enabling development to do so, we have reservations regarding the design of the scheme as presented.

Yours sincerely,

David Irving