

REPORT OUTLINE FOR AREA PLANNING COMMITTEES

Date of Meeting	3 August 2016
Application Number	16/02433/FUL & 16/02612/LBC
Site Address	The Old Stables, Grittleton House, Grittleton, Wiltshire, SN14 6AJ
Proposal	Proposed Conversion of Stables to form Dormitories for Grittleton House School.
Applicant	Grittleton House School
Town/Parish Council	GRITTLETON
Electoral Division	BY BROOK – Cllr Baroness Jane Scott OBE
Grid Ref	386101 179654
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Chris Marsh

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The applications have been called in by the local Member, in order to consider the wider community benefits of the scheme.

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to assess the merits of the proposal against the policies of the development plan and other material considerations and to consider the recommendation that the applications are refused.

2. Report Summary

The main issues in the consideration of the proposals are as follows:

- Principle of development;
- Impact on the significance of the listed building(s);
- Impact on the setting of the listed buildings and Grittleton House;
- Impact on the significance of the Grittleton Conservation Area;
- Impact on the Cotswolds AONB; and
- Impact on local highways

Grittleton Parish Council has registered its support for the proposals, and no further public comments have been received. No objection is raised by the Highways Officer, whilst Historic England and the Council's Senior Conservation Officer have commented on the applications as detailed later in this report.

3. Site Description

The proposals relate to the historic stable complex on the southern side of the Grittleton House estate, the main house (most recently a school) of which is Grade II*-listed. Sitting some 250m from the main house and accessed separately via the entrance to

the West, the stables are collectively Grade II-listed in their own right (as is the stable lodge at the western end of the access track and historically associated cottage 'Emu Paddock'). Approaching from the West, the complex comprises first an almost enclosed courtyard of decorative single-storey stables, with dual arches providing a direct route through to a further, more loose-knit yard and buildings. The buildings are collectively noted for their formal layout and completeness, including historic internal stable tiling, timber panelling and ironwork.

Citing declining pupil numbers, the school announced on 1 June 2016 that it would be closing at the end of that term. It is understood that at the time of Committee, the school will have permanently closed. The site is located within the Grittleton Conservation Area, which extends to wash over the whole Grittleton House estate, and also the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Planning permission and listed building consent granted in 2009 (08/00876/FUL & 08/00877/LBC refer) enabled the conversion of three of the latter group of buildings to holiday accommodation, in order to provide activities and income outside of term time. Following the discharge of conditions in relation to submission of architectural details and works on site, planning permission was further relaxed with the removal of a condition restricting use/occupancy to that ancillary to the school (10/01060/S73 refers). The similarly-proportioned stables further East have been extended significantly to the rear in order to create new ensuite dormitory rooms for students; an exercise understood to have not been altogether successful owing to a relative lack of borrowed light available to bedrooms. Applications 09/01441/FUL and 09/01255/LBC refer.

4. Planning History

N/08/00876/FUL	Proposed Conversion of Barns and Stables to Include Conversion of Existing Buildings to Field Study Centre – approved
N/08/00877/LBC	Proposed Conversion of Barns and Stables to Include Conversion of Existing Buildings to Field Study Centre – approved
N/09/01724/TCA	Fell 1 Hornbeam, 2 Ash & 1 Horse Chestnut – approved
N/09/01441/FUL	Extension to Outbuilding to Form Dormitory (Amendment To 08/00876/FUL) – approved
N/10/01060/S73	Proposed Conversion of Barns and Stables to Include Conversion of Existing Buildings to Field Stud Centre Without Compliance of Condition 3 of 08/00876/FUL (The Development Hereby Permitted Shall Be Used Only for Purposes Ancillary to Grittleton House & Grounds) – approved but likely to have lapsed

5. The Proposal

Planning permission and listed building consent is sought in respect of the extension, alteration and conversion of the as yet unmodified stable building at the northern side of the main courtyard to provide 13no. ensuite dormitory rooms for resident students, together with an element of associated storage. Having initially comprised the wholesale removal of the rear wall and considerable extension of the building, the scheme has been revised so that the extensions are contained within an L-plan block leading from the building's northwest corner; the intervening space to be used as an outdoor teaching area. The historic stable block is to be divided into individual dormitory rooms with ensuites through a combination of new breakthroughs and stud walls, though maintaining much of the original plan and stable furniture as seen in the earlier scheme.

The proposed extension is to be configured as a series of dormitory rooms leading off of a single corridor, which follows the eastern/southern sides of the block. It is to be composed of single-storey proportions, albeit with a span greater than that of the historic stables, and finished predominantly in stone beneath a pitched slate roof. The eastern corridor is to be flanked by a series of full-height fixed glazed panels and glazed doors, providing access onto the courtyard, which is to be enclosed at its eastern end with a new stone wall. The proportions of the rooms vary, although each benefits from its own ensuite, with separate elements of storage, plant room, circulation and other internal amenity space incorporated into the layout. Although submitted prior to the announcement of the school's imminent closure, the application has been kept live subsequently.

6. Local Planning Policy

Wiltshire Core Strategy; Core Policies 1 (Settlement strategy), 51 (Landscape), 57 (Ensuring high quality design and place shaping), 58 (Ensuring the conservation of the historic environment).

National Planning Policy Framework; Paragraphs 14, 17, 64, 72, 115, 128, 131, 132 and 134.

Sections 16(2), 66 and 72 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

7. Summary of consultation responses

Grittleton Parish Council – support

Conservation – objections, citing the harm to the setting and significance of designated heritage assets

Highways – no objection

Historic England – *“Whilst we consider the level of harm to the historic fabric to have been reduced, we consider there to be moderate harm to the setting of the Grade II listed Grittleton Stables as well as to the relationship between the principal house and ancillary buildings, which Historic England does not support.”*

8. Publicity

The application was advertised by notification letter and site notice. No public representations were received.

9. Planning Considerations

Principle of development

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 require that the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In principle, the extension and enhancement of educational facilities – including private schools – is consistent with the objectives of Paragraph 72 of the Framework. Although

this was the basis on which Officers sought to negotiate the original scheme, in light of the school's recent closure it is considered that this policy cannot reasonably be applied as there is no assurance that any such use will be continued. Moreover, it appears that Grittleton House continues to be promoted for private and corporate events and it is therefore assumed that this offers a more sustainable business model. If this is the case, this would represent an entirely different planning use of the land and buildings.

Optimum viable use

Referring back to the earlier permission, it has been accepted previously that notwithstanding their relatively complete condition, some viable future use is necessary to ensure the long term protection of the listed stables. At the present time, however, the proposed development does not provide any reassurance that it will instigate immediate and beneficial works that will prolong the lifespan of historic fabric, as there appears to be no incoming user to benefit from any conversion. Whilst on first inspection, the scheme offered a more closely-related occupation of the building than the subsequently relaxed approved scheme, thus contributing to a greater extent to the core term-time operation of the school, this is clearly no longer the case and it is unclear what the optimum viable use of the asset would be. An approved scheme with little to no realistic prospect of implementation can be afforded no greater weight than no permission at all and in this regard the proposals present no wider 'public benefit' arising from the development.

Impact on the significance of the listed building(s)

Having made clear that substantial demolition of the rear of the building was not an appropriate approach both at pre-application stage and upon receipt of the subsequent planning and listed building consent applications, it is considered an improvement to the scheme in principle that such works are no longer proposed. These works were met with strong opposition from Historic England and the Councils Conservation Officers due to the hugely disruptive and irreversible loss of historic fabric that would occur. This amounted to 'substantial harm', in respect of which the proposals failed to deliver the compensatory criteria set out at Paragraph 133 of the Framework. Whilst the extent of demolition has now been significantly reduced, however - and despite extensive attempts to negotiate - it is still not considered that the current alternative proposals adequately address many of the issues raised initially.

A defining feature of the building is its traditional proportions and formalised relationship to the surrounding stable yard, former coach house and cottages. Throughout the application, advice provided by Planning and Conservation Officers has sought to reduce the bulk of extensions and loss of historic fabric, in particular by employing a more modest 'link' to the physical fabric of the stables and minimising new openings. This advice has been mostly rebutted however; the extensions to the northwest corner remains of substantial form, with the 'link' of the same considerable span in order to maximise accommodation, and results in the unwarranted loss of fabric.

Notwithstanding the poorer condition of this corner – where some of the rear wall is built over a boundary wall – the opportunity to use a single breakthrough to provide material that could be used to 'make good' the surrounding area has not been taken into account (the normal course of action in these situations would be localised repairs to the fabric concerned rather than wholesale demolition). Instead, the layout is tenuous and includes a standalone bathroom with no internal doorway, another with a fully glazed wall to the adjacent courtyard and the unjustified removal of original fabric from the rear wall of the stables.

It is not considered that the revised scheme has followed elementary conservation principles, resulting in a poor form of development that makes little concession to its historic setting. This comes despite efforts to negotiate improvements, most of the substantive points of which having been rebutted by letter rather than proactively employed as amendments to the scheme. Although the matching traditional materials of stone and slate are to be employed – as has been the case nearby – the widened proportions and overly ‘domestic’ fenestration of the extensions remove any prospect of these being perceived as contemporaneous with the yard, even from a distance. It is agreed that the Historic England guidance on the treatment of agricultural buildings¹ is relevant in this instance; notwithstanding their historic service/equestrian use, the stables are of modest, functional form capable of supporting either small-scale traditional extensions or referential, subservient additions of more modern form – for instance using glazing and timber cladding. In this instance, it is considered that the extensions lack any distinctive quality or design language in their own right and will read as overly domestic additions that detract from the host building.

Impact on the setting of the listed buildings and Grittleton House

Sections 16(2) and 66 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require that the desirability of preserving the significance of listed buildings and their settings is given substantial weight in the consideration of listed building consent and planning applications respectively. Historic England have concerns with the applications both initially due to the substantial demolition of the Grade II-listed stables and latterly due to the impact on the setting and significance of the Grade II* Grittleton House. This is a significant consideration that, aside from any weighting in the planning balance provided by the public benefits of the scheme, clearly indicates that the proposals would not accord with Sections 16(2) or 66(1) of the Act.

Clearly the stable complex is a historically ‘planned’ arrangement, comprising a series of defined spaces and functions associated with the former house and wider estate; a relationship that is continued with the modern day school. Whilst an incidental function would be maintained, the proposed extensions by reason of their bulk and unsympathetic design would detract from the considered hierarchy of the original outbuildings, as well as interrupting the physical relationship between the yard, grounds and main house. The creation of an additional courtyard would, in the view of Historic England, misconstrue the stables’ integrity and historic setting, and would certainly reduce the legibility of the existing arrangement, exacerbated by the extensions’ falling awkwardly between the traditional and modern in terms of form and finish.

Impact on the significance of the Grittleton Conservation Area

It is considered that, as the proposals will have a harmful impact on the grouping and significance of the historic stables, which form an important component of the Grittleton School estate, this harm equates to a wider loss of historic legibility to the Conservation Area. Notwithstanding the relative lack of public views into the affected part of the site, the coherence of the planned estate is clearly valued as a characteristic of that Conservation Area as evidenced by its specific inclusion within the designation. National Guidance makes clear that the value of heritage goes beyond the immediately visible and to this end it is considered that the shortcomings identified above have a wider, adverse impact on the significance of the Conservation Area that fails to conserve or enhance its character or appearance. It is considered that the proposals therefore fail to accord with Core Policy 58 or Section 72 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 for these reasons.

¹ *The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings: a guide to good practice*, Historic England 2006

Impact on the Cotswolds AONB

The proposals will be contained to the area immediately surrounding the historic stable yard, and it is noted that the earlier extensions to the eastern stables already project out into this currently open area. As the land forms part of a wide buffer to the extended estate/sports pitches of the school, it is not considered that the works overall will compromise the openness of the Cotswolds AONB. From beyond the school grounds, the extensions will not be apparent and therefore it is considered that the scheme will conserve the overall character and appearance of the AONB and preserve existing public views intact.

Impact on local highways

The Council's Highways Officer has been consulted on the proposals and has confirmed that no objection is raised in respect of the principle of conversion, proposed use or layout of the site. The Officer notes that there is precedent in this respect and that there are adequate arrangements for parking and turning within the site sufficient for the low and sporadic level of vehicular traffic associated with accommodation of this type, irrespective of the details of the accommodation's practical use. The junction arrangements at the stables entrance with the C-classified highway are to remain unchanged; this is considered an acceptable situation in relation to the proposals.

Conclusions

As discussed above, the substantive scheme represents an improvement upon its predecessor, which would have led to large-scale demolition and substantial harm to the heritage asset(s). However, it is considered that due to a lack of suitable concessions to the importance of the affected historic fabric in terms of the final design, the scheme remains considerably short of demonstrating that the significance and setting of heritage assets can be fully protected. The scheme represents development that is harmful to the character and appearance of heritage assets currently forming an important and legible local resource, contrary to Core Policies 57 and 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

The viable future use of the heritage asset(s) is a recognised public benefit of development warranting consideration, however in light of the school's closure this cannot be assured in any way and no weight can be given to Paragraph 72 of the Framework. Due to the degree of identified harm, albeit less than substantial, it is not considered that any benefits of the scheme outweigh the demonstrable adverse impacts on the listed building, its setting and the Grittleton Conservation Area, the character of all of which will be depleted by the works. Accordingly, it is considered that on balance the proposals fail to provide the justification required by Paragraph 134 of the Framework and are unacceptable in planning and listed building terms.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission is REFUSED, for the following reason:

- 1 The proposed development, by reason of its siting, bulk, massing, design and appearance, fails to conserve or enhance the character of the site or that of heritage assets, resulting in less than substantial harm that is not outweighed by any significant public benefits, including securing a viable use. Accordingly, the proposal fails to comply with Core Policies 57 and 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy, Paragraphs 64, 131, 132 and 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Sections 66(1) and 72(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act

1990.

That listed building consent is REFUSED, for the following reason:

- 1 The proposed works, due to their unwarrantedly intrusive nature in relation to the existing stable building and its immediate setting, fail to preserve the significance or setting of the listed building(s) and will detract from the wider comprehension of the Grade II*-listed Grittleton House. Accordingly, the proposals conflict with Section 16(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

This decision relates to the following plans/drawings:

4097/56 rev F – Proposed Ground Floor Plan, Elevations & Block Plan

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