

**REPORT TO THE DEVELOPMENT CONTROL
COMMITTEE**

Report No.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Date of Meeting | 30th January 2008 |
| Application Number | 07/02566/LBC & 07/02567/FUL |
| Site Address | Guyers House, Pickwick, Corsham, Wiltshire SN13 0PS |
| Proposal | Erection of four linked two storey accommodation blocks, single storey lecture theatre, single storey extension to Coach House conference rooms, single storey side extension to main house and external alterations. Alterations to access and boundary wall extension to parking area. |
| Applicant | Donnington Castle Conferences Ltd |
| Town/Parish Council | Corsham |
| Grid Ref | 385694 170818 |
| Type of application | Listed Building Consent and Full application |

Reason for the applications being considered by Committee

This application was submitted to the Committee on 12th December 2007 for decision under the scheme of delegation in force after the 8th April 2002 because Councillors Marston and Tonge requested that the application be considered by committee to consider the impact on the associated listed building. The decisions were deferred at that meeting in order that a revised design for the dining room extension could be prepared and submitted.

Summary of Report

The business at Guyers House comprises corporate business and training facilities together with weddings. This application proposes the substantial expansion of facilities at the Guyers House by the erection of extensions to the current dining and conference facilities, a new 100 seat lecture theatre and a range of four blocks providing an additional forty-seven ensuite bedrooms together with minor alterations to the original buildings. A new entrance would be provided to the car park, which would be reordered, with an additional overspill area extended into the paddock land alongside.

Guyers House is a listed building, lying outside any framework boundary, in the open countryside. The key points to consider are as follows:

1. Implications for DC Core Policy C3, landscape character of the countryside NE15, development involving listed buildings HE4.
2. Design and scale of the development
3. Impact on the listed building and its setting
4. Impact on landscape character
5. Impact on highways

Officer Recommendation

Planning Permission be REFUSED

Listed Building Consent be REFUSED

| | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Contact Officer | Sarah Gostling | 01249 706664 | sgostling@northwilts.gov.uk |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------------|

Proposal and Site Description

Guyers House is a grade II listed building, dating from 17thC with 19thC alterations and additions. It is located just off the A4 approached via a drive through the surrounding farmland.

The character of the property stems both from the nature of the historic buildings themselves, a gradual accretion over time, of varied buildings of a relatively modest scale and proportion and from the landscape setting. The original group is located centrally within its grounds, with gardens to the south front, walled enclosures to the east and more open expanses to the north and west. These grounds in turn sit within and form a continuation of the surrounding, open, agricultural landscape.

The use as a residential conference and training centre was established in 1991. In 1994 a substantial building programme was undertaken to enhance the conference/training use. This doubled the number of bedrooms available and virtually doubled the footprint of buildings on the premises.

The current proposals comprise five principle elements: the residential blocks at the eastern end of the property, the lecture theatre between the 1994 accommodation block and the new complex, the extension to the conference building, the dining room extension to the western end of the front facade and the extension to the car park and construction of a new access track to the residential blocks to the north-east.

- The dining room extension would sit adjacent to the existing dining room, itself an extension of the early 1990s, at the western end of the principal elevation of the building. The current dining room projects slightly forward of the main elevation, as an echo of the 19thC wing at the eastern end. The dining room extension has been redesigned as a rectangular block of a similar design and materials to the existing dining room. It would have a flat roof with a parapet to the front and side and a glazed lantern. The flat roof would extend over a new storage area to the rear, with an enclosed yard adjacent. The extension would be 11.5m wide (existing is 10.3m), which would result in the modern dining extensions more than doubling the width of the original facade (original 20.8m, new extensions 21.5m).
- The extension to the Coach House conference building, a doubled gabled building some 12m by 7.5m would be constructed in matching style and natural materials. It would increase the accommodation in the building by over a third.
- The lecture theatre forms a link between the new accommodation blocks (it occupies part of the ground floor of the southern one) and the 1994 block to the east of the site. It would have a flat sedum roof and glazed facades to the north and south, opening out onto the existing kitchen garden to the south and a new courtyard to the north. It would measure some 14m by 14m by 3.2m high. An open walkway with a glazed roof would cross the garden, linking the theatre with the original buildings.
- The four residential blocks, housing forty seven bedrooms, would be located to the north-east of the site. The blocks are double-pile, of a traditional design detail to be constructed in natural rubble stone with reconstituted stone tile roofs. The blocks drop down the site as the levels descend to the north. The blocks are joined together at ground and first floor levels by two storey glazed links constructed in timber and glass. The blocks vary in size from 9m by 10.5m by 8m high and 10.5m by 30.3m by 7.5m high.
- To reach the residential blocks it will be necessary to construct a new access road across the site to the north of the existing buildings, together with four parking spaces for the disabled. In addition it is intended to construct a new overspill parking area to the west of the existing. No surface treatment is indicated although it is described as "green".
- Additionally minor alterations to the original barn are proposed including the full height glazing of both the original entrance doorways. The one facing the courtyard would form the main entrance into a new reception area.

| Planning History | | |
|-------------------------|--|-----------|
| Application number | Proposal | Decision |
| 89/1256 F | Conversion to office use | Granted |
| 90/0367 LB | Internal and external alterations and conversion to residential training centre | Granted |
| 90/0404 F | | |
| 92/0291 F | Extensions and alterations to training and conference centre | Granted |
| 92/0292 LB | | |
| 93/1849 LB | Remove chimney stack | Granted |
| 93/2060 F | Extensions to conference centre comprising a 21 bed residential unit/fitness centre, training, dining and kitchen facilities and alterations to car park | Granted |
| 93/2061 LB | | |
| 94/0193 DC | Discharge of conditions parking areas | Granted |
| 94/0694 LB | Internal alterations, removal of rooflight and replacement with new window | Granted |
| 99/01481 FUL | Conservatory and stone wall | Granted |
| 99/01482 LBC | | |
| 07/01517 LBC | Erection of four linked two storey accommodation blocks, single storey lecture theatre, single storey extension to coach house | Withdrawn |
| 07/01518 FUL | conference rooms, single storey side extension to main house and external alterations, alterations to access and boundary wall, extension to parking area. | |

Consultations

Corsham Town Council has no objections.

Wiltshire County Council Highways no objection subject to conditions

Environmental Health have no adverse comments

Representations

Corsham Civic Society has grave concerns regarding the potential increase in traffic in the lane approaching the house.

Planning Considerations

Principle of development

The Guyers House complex is outside any framework boundary and lies in the open countryside. The house is listed and the grounds forming the setting to the listed building are in an area where the conservation of the landscape character of the countryside is of particular importance.

The acceptability of any development will depend on how successfully it safeguards issues of acknowledged importance such as the listed building, its setting, the landscape character and highway safety.

Any case put forward for expansion would have to address these issues.

Extensive discussions have taken place between the agents and officers however both the principle and detailed aspects of the development remain of concern.

Design and Scale of Development

The overall scale of the proposed development is very substantial. The amount of building on the site was doubled in 1994 with a view to enhancing the business and safeguarding its future. The resulting accommodation now amounts to 2,086 sq m. The current proposal would see the creation of an additional 1,893 sq m, again almost doubling the amount of building on the site. The creation of this built footprint and the accompanying hard landscaping will effectively cover half the site.

Whilst the broad categories of design idiom chosen are not of themselves inappropriate their individual expression causes particular concern: the size of the accommodation blocks, which simply repeat the same modular design without variation, their linking into a continuous whole, the lecture theatre wrapped around an accommodation block and the dining room with a visually heavy pediment and which projects forward of the principle facade of the building.

There are two aspects of the landscaping proposals which are of concern:

The yard area between the north elevation of the main house and the barn would historically have had a single simple hard surfacing material, a traditional informal treatment appropriate to the character of this side of the house. It is now proposed to introduce a formal landscape layout with grassed and planted areas with axial pathways dividing up the openness of the yard.

In addition, as previously mentioned, there would be a considerable increase in the area covered by drives and parking areas across the site, significantly increasing the area under hard surfacing and allowing vehicular traffic into areas which are not accessed currently.

Impact on Listed Building

The character of the house and its setting, both the immediate and the wider landscape, are interdependent and any new development is required to demonstrate that the quality of the landscape, setting and the listed building will not be diminished.

The dining room extension is on the main, front facade of the principal building. Although its revised design is based on the existing dining room it is still larger and the combined width would be longer than the original facade. This would significantly unbalance the principle facade of the house thereby diminishing its significance and compromising the historic and architectural integrity of the house to a degree which is still considered unacceptable. The rear of the new extension, which would be visible from the rear courtyard, is not finished to the same detail and the open flat roof and large lantern would be clearly seen. It is considered that this aspect would require further re-working if the proposals were felt to be generally acceptable.

The alterations to the barn to introduce glazed screens to the original barn door openings are considered acceptable.

The extension of the conference rooms in the Coach House would allow for an enhanced facility in part of the existing group and it is not considered, of itself, to compromise the listed building or its setting.

The accommodation blocks and the lecture theatre combine to form a very substantial building to be located in an undeveloped, open area of the site. Their scale and massing is significantly greater than not only Guyers House itself but also any other building existing on the site. In developing in the grounds of a listed building it is important to maintain the pre-eminence of the principle building by ensuring that new buildings are subservient in their size, scale and the detailed design. It is considered that the proposed buildings would severely compromise the pre-eminence of the original house.

In addition these buildings would extend the developed area into a previously open part of the grounds, taking the buildings almost as far as the boundaries with the surrounding agricultural land. This, together with the vehicular access and parking, will result in the creation of a built footprint and hard landscaping which effectively cover half the site. This would fundamentally alter the nature of the setting of the listed building which has historically been characterised by open grounds, forming a visual

continuum with the surrounding agricultural land.

A significant diminution in the quality and historic interest of the setting, which is an integral part of the character and quality of Guyers, would result.

Impact on landscape character

In considering landscape character one of the important aspects is the setting of and the relationship between buildings and the landscape. The complex at Guyers House has, so far, retained its historic relationship with the landscape in which the historic building grouping sat surrounded by its domestic grounds, which were, in turn, encircled by agricultural land. To the north side of the buildings particularly the domestic grounds are visually open to the surrounding agricultural land. The current proposals would irrevocably change this relationship and the resultant landscape characteristics to a degree which is considered damaging and unacceptable.

Highways and Access

The applicant has submitted a transport statement which concludes that the proposed development will not result in as significant increase in traffic. The County Highway Authority agrees with this assessment but considers that the improvements to the access and car parking should be completed prior to the occupation of the new development. A condition to this effect is recommended.

Information submitted by the applicants in support of their application

A business case for the development has been put forward by the applicant:

The business consists of residential and day courses, seminars and weddings and functions. Thirty-eight bedrooms are currently available. Sixty people from the Corsham area are currently employed. Guyers House repeatedly has to turn away potentially major clients because of a lack of accommodation. Similarly with weddings many guests cannot be accommodated and the Orangery dining room can only accommodate 56 people so large groups have to be split.

If Guyers House is to thrive it is necessary for capacity to be increased to allow it to cater for the larger conferences, weddings etc whilst enhancing the charm and character of the site.

The additional accommodation required is two conference rooms able to accommodate 80 -100 people, dining for 100-120 and bedrooms for 80. Some existing rooms would have to be converted to staff accommodation. The main house would revert to leisure use and business activities would take place in rooms on other parts of the site.

Comment on submission

Although the importance of economic aspects is fully acknowledged the starting point for any development in an historic setting cannot be based solely on economic considerations. It must take as its basis the capacity of the historic buildings and setting to absorb further development without detriment. The case put forward for expansion would appear to be based on a substantially different scale of operation rather than simply a consolidation. This may be a reasonable business case when looked at in isolation, but this cannot directly translate into a justification for development and, in your officers' view, the case remains to be made.

Conclusion

Guyers House is a high quality environment comprising both the listed house and its grounds and landscape setting. The development proposed is extensive, virtually doubling the built form which, together with the hard landscaping, would result in a very significant proportion of the site being covered. It is considered that this, along with aspects of the detailed design of some elements, would be severely detrimental to the architectural and historic integrity of the listed building and would severely compromise the landscape quality and setting of its historic interest.

Recommendation

In respect of 07/02567 FUL: Planning permission be REFUSED for the following reason:

1. The proposed development by reason of its scale, massing and detailed design would be extremely detrimental to the architectural and historic interest of Guyers House and would severely compromise the landscape quality and the setting of its historic interest contrary to S.66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, guidance in PPG15 and policies C3, NE15 and HE4 of North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011.

Informative

1. This decision relates to documents/plans submitted with the application, listed below.

Drawing numbers:

06.1056.PL1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04 rev A, 1.05 rev B, 1.06, 1.07, 1.08, 1.09, 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, 1.14, 2.01, 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.06, 3.01, 3.02, 3.03, 3.04, 4.01, 4.02, 4.03, 4.5.01, 5.02, 6.01, 7.01, 7.02.

All received by the local planning authority on 24 September 2007.

In respect of 07/02566 LBC: Listed building consent be REFUSED

1. The proposed works by reason of their scale, massing and detailed design would be extremely detrimental to the architectural and historic interest of Guyers House and would severely compromise the landscape quality and the setting of its historic interest contrary to S.16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and guidance in PPG15.

Informative

1. This decision relates to documents/plans submitted with the application, listed below.

Drawing numbers:

06.1056.PL1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04 rev A, 1.05 rev B, 1.06, 1.07, 1.08, 1.09, 1.10, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, 1.14, 2.01, 2.02, 2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.06, 3.01, 3.02, 3.03, 3.04, 4.01, 4.02, 4.03, 4.5.01, 5.02, 6.01, 7.01, 7.02.

All received by the local planning authority on 24 September 2007.

| | |
|---|--|
| Appendices: | NONE |
| Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report: | 1.20, 2.02, 4.02, 4.05, 5.01, 6.03. |