

**Consultation Response Form**

<b>Reference Number:</b>	21/00953/FUL
<b>Proposal:</b>	Demolition of existing buildings and erection of a care home (Use Class C2) with external amenity space, access, parking, landscaping and other associated works.
<b>Site Address:</b>	Former 'Hotel Felix', Whitehouse Lane, CB3 0LX.
<b>Conservation Officer:</b>	J.Hurst
<b>Case Planning Officer:</b>	Mary Collins
<b>Date:</b>	2 July 2021

**Comments:**

See also comments on 20/51137/PREAPP of 30 July 2020.

Existing

The 'significance assessment' submitted contains a history of the site and building and gives an estimate of how & when the building changed over time, leading to its current incarnation as an hotel.

The building is not an LB [and has immunity from Listing; see certificate from Historic England submitted] and does not lie within a CA [SCDC does not have BLIs] but does have a certain modest level of design and presence but has had a catalogue of change and alteration over the years. A very extensive range of indifferent extensions to form the hotel were built in the C21. As a fairly typical Victorian suburban villa it should be categorised as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) with its setting compromised by modern works.

It is for the LPA to determine whether a building is an NDHA and this can be during the consideration of a development proposal as stated in Historic England's Advice Note 7 (second edition) in paragraph 27. The significance of the building can be assessed against the published criteria for designating BLIs from the adjacent LPA, Cambridge City Council [and, hence, relevant as part of Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP)]. This indicates that some of the criteria are met [for example, quality design, use of materials and aesthetic appeal] and is a typical example of a villa of the well-to-do professionals building houses in this period. It also has some historic interest in that it had locally notable owners/occupants and was in institutional use by the County Council for some time and will be remembered by users. This modest significance indicates that it can be categorised as an NDHA.

The location of the historic part of the building lies in an important 'green finger' [the so-called Girton Gap] that clearly separates the edge of the city from the suburban part of Girton and, by

historic chance, visually blocks that gap. In townscape terms, maintaining this gap is important and in terms of the evolution of both settlements it should be important that they are not seen as merging or the one subsuming the other.

### Proposed

*Demolition* – The agents have noted that there were structural reports undertaken in the past but the comments suggest that the problems were not beyond repair. They also suggest that there were problems associated with damp and lack of compliance with the DDA. None of these sound to be insuperable or impossible to remedy.

Current thinking is that the most sustainable building is an existing building and there needs to be a judgment as to whether the NDHA could be repaired, retained and converted to a new use or, with selective demolition of insignificant elements, it could be repaired, retained and extended to better fulfil the needs of its new use. The submission describes various ‘concept designs’ looking at retaining the ‘existing building’ and converting it to the proposed use; four of the concepts involve retaining the modern extensions and one demolishing the modern extensions and retaining and extending the NDHA. The four versions have no real conservation merit in that the historic element would not be given an improved setting. The fifth version has conservation merit as an idea and it should be possible to produce a design that provided the accommodation required as well as improving the setting of the historic element. The rejection of this concept as worthy of taking forward seems to be based entirely on perceived problems with levels. It is not shown why this appears to be such a problem and it seems improbable that this is an insurmountable design difficulty.

*New build* – The design submitted is for a ‘hollow square’ plan form consisting of four substantial blocks of brick construction with pitched, hipped, slated roofs with flat areas with glazed link blocks. Some blocks are of two storeys and some of two-and-a-half storeys. It is a ‘historicist’ design with some glazed link blocks that are intended to break up the visual bulk of the scheme. Whilst repetitiveness can work well in some neo-classical designs [the terraces of Edinburgh or Bath, for example] these are usually in an urban setting whereas here that repetitiveness would be seen in an edge of suburban setting. Without any photomontages or CGIs to show a three-dimensional, more realistic view, an impression of rather barrack-like blocks is given. Whilst there is no objection to this architectural approach, it does feel – given the size of the proposal – like it could do with more vivacity.

*Site layout* – If the demolition of the existing is accepted, then there seems to be no valid reason for putting the replacement building right in the middle of the site. This site forms part of an important ‘green finger’ separating Girton from the city and it is by historic chance that the existing building now rather links the two and dilutes that separation.

As the city expands onto the NIAB site, Whitehouse Lane tends to have become the delineator with the fringe of city suburbs to the South and the C20 suburban expansion of Girton to the North. If the historic building is to go, then it seems preferable that any new development is firmly located in one part of the site or the other, not ‘floating’ in between and diluting the effect of the ‘green separation’. There appears to be no architectural or practical reason why the care home block should not be – for example – pushed well towards the back of the site and be seen as clearly part of Girton and its built fabric. Or the block could be pushed forwards towards Whitehouse Lane so that it fronted the lane more formally and be seen as part of the Northern edge of the city. Thus the ‘green finger’ [the gardens of the overall complex] would be re-established more clearly and that sense of separation would be stronger.

The proposals will not comply with Local Plan policy NH/14. This is because the scheme fails sustain and enhance the significance of the NDHA, including its setting, appropriately to its significance. NH/14, Section 2, part d.

With reference to the NPPF and the effect on the significance of the heritage asset, paragraph 197 would apply. This is because the scheme would cause substantial harm in the case of complete demolition and loss of the NDHA.

**Conditions:**

Should this gain consent, then the usual Conditions relating to external materials and detailing would be necessary in order to get a decent building.