

Material planning grounds for objection to application 21/00953/FUL

The core of the Hotel Felix is a magnificent Victorian villa constructed in 1852 for Charles Lestourgeon, an eminent surgeon in Cambridge. Formerly called Howe House, Howes and The Close, it was used as a private house for over a century. In 2002 it was renovated to the highest standard as a luxury hotel. The house captures the exuberance of the Victorian age with an interesting and unusual design, combining Dutch gables with a circular bow window, and is set in spacious grounds.

This site lies outside the Girton village envelope in the Cambridge Green Belt. It is the only substantial building situated in the Girton Gap - the area of land set aside to prevent Girton village from merging with Cambridge City. The site straddles the Girton Gap, making a continuous connection between the village and the city. It was thought that the extensions added in 2002 and 2008 would make the hotel viable as a business and safeguard the future of the Victorian building. A new build hotel would never have been allowed in that location.

I object to the demolition of this important heritage building. Material planning grounds are:

[A] Heritage

The Hotel Felix is not nationally listed as the criteria have been tightened to the point where only the most exceptional buildings can be listed. However, it is locally listed on the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) with number 05482 under one of its former names, Howe House.

It therefore meets the definition of a Heritage Asset as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) p67, which includes assets identified for local listing.

NPPF Paragraphs 184 - 202, including:

184. "Heritage assets range from sites and buildings of local historic value to those of the highest significance, ... These assets are an irreplaceable resource, and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations."

192. "In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of (a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation" etc.

197. "The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."

This is echoed in the Local Plan 2018:

Policy NH/14: Heritage Assets, particularly 2(d) for non-designated heritage assets.
Paragraphs 6.43 - 6.58, including:

6.45 "The district's character is largely shaped by its heritage, including that of its much loved historic villages and countryside."

6.47 "The distinctive character and quality of life given by the historic environment of the area has been key to its economic success."

6.48 "Heritage is an essential component of plans from a village or neighbourhood level to that of the district."

6.51 "Finding viable uses which sustain rather than compromise the significance of historic buildings is fundamental to conservation ... The Council is committed to ensuring the future viable uses of assets within the district. "

6.52 "Decisions on development proposals must be based on a good understanding of how the proposals will affect heritage. ..."

Policy HQ/1: Design Principles, particularly 1(b) which states that proposals must conserve or enhance historic assets and their setting.

Policy DP/1: Sustainable Development

1. "Development will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that it is consistent with the principles of sustainable development,... It should (r) Conserve and wherever possible enhance cultural heritage."

The applicant has not demonstrated that the demolition of the Victorian villa is necessary in order to construct an 80 bed care home on the site. They have not considered the possibility of preserving the villa and building next to it. There are many ancillary uses such as administration, offices, staff or visitor accommodation that it could be used for.

There are many other places in Girton to build a care home, and many other uses for the site that would not require demolition. There is a luxury hotel under construction less than 500m away in Eddington, showing that this is not an inappropriate location for a hotel. The Council should not consider the very temporary and short-term effect of coronavirus in determining that there is need for a change of use at this site.

The NPPF also states:

202. "Local planning authorities should assess whether the benefits of a proposal for enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies."

This shows that Policy NH/9 should not require the care home to have fewer beds if the villa is preserved.

[B] Sustainability

Existing buildings should be re-used wherever possible and not demolished. This is especially the case with Victorian buildings that are not constructed using obsolescent building materials and have a considerably longer useful lifespan than modern buildings.

Sustainable Design and Construction SPD

4.6.1 "The construction industry is the single largest user of materials in the UK. 420 million tonnes of materials are consumed in construction annually. In addition to this, about 10% of national energy consumption is used in the production and transport of construction products and materials."

1.3 "Sustainable design and construction seeks to lower consumption of resources, both in the construction of new buildings and in their use..."

3.10.1 "Historic buildings and settlements often have sustainable forms of construction and design, and they can inform and inspire the best modern, sustainable development. Their survival reflects their success and adaptability."

3.10.2 "Adaptive re-use of a building gives significant carbon savings in terms of embodied energy in the fabric of the building, ..."