



Historic England

WEST MIDLANDS OFFICE

Ms Alison Ives
Walsall Council
Planning and Building Control
2nd Floor, Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall
WS1 1DG

Direct Dial: 0121 625 6846

Our ref: P00338690

29th November 2016

Dear Ms Ives

Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2015 & T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

GREAT BARR HALL & REGISTERED PARK, SUTTONS DRIVE, GREAT BARR, B43 7BB

Application No 13/1567/FL & 13/1568/LB

We have received amended proposals for the above scheme. Following a site meeting with you, Shawn Fleet your Group Manager, Planning, me and David Tomback our Development Economics Director, we offer the following advice.

Summary

Great Barr Hall is a Grade II listed building standing in a Grade II registered park and garden. The recent re-grading of the hall from Grade II* to Grade II prompts a re-evaluation of the relative significance of the hall and landscape putting them on a par with each other and placing more emphasis on latter as the setting for the former. The amount of proposed development, put forward as Enabling Development, is very substantial and will cause very serious harm to the registered landscape and serious harm to the listed building. Having reviewed the information submitted in support of the application Historic England is not convinced that it demonstrates that the proposed Enabling Development is the minimum necessary or secures the future of the heritage assets. We do not therefore consider that it complies with our published guidance or with the requirements of the relevant legislation and policy set out in Section 12 of the NPPF.

Historic England Advice

Great Barr Hall has recently been re-graded to a Grade II listed building, it stands in a Grade II registered park and garden and together the assets form an integrated grouping which has special interest. Both are badly neglected and at risk but despite this and unsympathetic alterations made during use as a hospital in the 20th century, they remain significant as examples of 18th century landscape design (by Repton and Nash) and Gothick architecture both modified in the first half of the 19th century, and



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for their association with the Scott family, the Lunar Society and notable 19th century figures from literature and architecture.

The recent re-grading of the hall from Grade II* to Grade II prompts a re-evaluation of the relative significance of the hall and landscape putting them on a par with each other and placing more emphasis on latter as the setting for the former.

The proposal is to convert the hall into a restaurant, conference and functions centre as a first stage followed by further extension to extend these facilities and create ten bedrooms on the first floor. The proposals involve the partial demolition, rebuilding and extension of the remains of the hall including loss of ruinous historic fabric and construction of a substantial amount of new fabric. Elements of the registered landscape will be managed to retrieve their significance, others will be recreated (boat house, gates, lodges etc) to provide a setting for the business and large amounts of new development, principally 57 new dwellings and associated infrastructure will also be constructed.

The amount of development is very substantial and while the proposal has the potential to conserve some aspects of the heritage assets, stage one will cause very serious harm to the registered landscape and serious harm to the Grade II listed hall and stage two will cause further harm to the hall.

Historic England would draw your attention to the following legislation and to policy set out in Section 12 of the NPPF as relevant to the consideration of the application.

Sections 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 require that special regard is paid to the preservation of listed buildings and their setting. Paragraph 129 of the NPPF refers to the need to avoid conflict between the conservation of heritage assets and development proposals. Paragraph 131 refers to the desirability of sustaining and enhancing heritage assets and achieving viable uses for them that are consistent with their conservation. Paragraphs 132 and 134 of the NPPF are clear that harm to or loss of significance requires clear and convincing justification and that there is a balance to be drawn between harm and the public benefits of a proposal. The proposals are put forward as Enabling Development to secure the future of the Grade II listed building and the registered landscape, as referred to in paragraph 140 of the NPPF and defined in Historic England's guidance 'Enabling Development and the Conservation of Significant Places' published in 2008. Enabling Development is a subsidy of last resort because it is an inherently inefficient means of funding a conservation deficit. In considering an application justified in these terms it is critical that there is confidence in the proposed use being the optimum viable use that is compatible with the significance of the asset, the calculation of the conservation deficit and that the benefits of the development will be secured into the future.

Having assessed the information submitted as part of the application, most particularly that provided in September 2016, Historic England is concerned that the options appraisal is now out of date and did not look at a broad enough range of options in sufficient detail before identifying a restaurant and functions centre use as optimal. The 2014 Colliers International report does not convince Historic England that either the proposed first stage or second stage of the business plan are viable. On this basis



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we are concerned that a calculation of conservation deficit based on the costs generated by this business plan may be inappropriate.

In addition to a lack of confidence in the conservation deficit, Historic England is concerned that the development appraisal relies upon costs and values that are also now out of date, do not appear to be substantiated or evidenced and have not been produced with the level of professional oversight we would expect. The appraisal does not include current values for the land and property and does not include an allowance for profit. It is not clear to Historic England that the owners have expertise in delivering an ambitious proposal of this type or that they have identified a business partner to deliver either stage one or two of the scheme.

The most recent development appraisal and proposed phasing of the works by Lapworth Architects (March 2015) setting out the relationship between the implementation of the housing development and the conservation of the hall and landscape relates to stage one of the business plan only. Historic England is not convinced that the 2014 Colliers International report provides reassurance that the conclusion of stage one will provide revenue to secure the heritage assets into the future. The conservation of an historic landscape is a long term commitment requiring on-going funding. The implementation of stage two may provide this, but no mechanism to link the two and secure the benefits is provided. Previous documents have referred to conservation management plans and service charges to secure revenue, it is not clear that these costs have been incorporated into the figures used in the development appraisal or their benefits tied to the development.

The proposal has obviously not yet been the subject of independent financial assessment. Based on the submitted information, however, Historic England considers that the Enabling Development proposal will result in serious harm to the Grade II listed building and very serious harm to the Grade II registered park and garden. We are not convinced by the information provided to justify the enabling development, or that it demonstrates that the benefits will be secured. We do not therefore consider that the application complies with guidance set out in our 2008 document on Enabling Development or the policy set out in paragraphs 129, 131, 132, 134 and 140 of the NPPF. The scope of the project is very ambitious and it is not clear to us that a smaller scale, less ambitious project, more imaginative in respect of the hall, more modest in its aspirations for the registered landscape, without the requirement for so much new infrastructure and with a lower conservation deficit is not a viable or marketable option.

Recommendation

Historic England recommends that the application is refused because, based on our understanding of the submitted information, it does not demonstrate that the amount of Enabling Development is the minimum necessary, that the proposal will secure the future of the designated heritage assets, or that the proposal meets the test set out in paragraph 140 of the NPPF.

Please contact me if we can be of further assistance. We would be grateful to receive a copy of the decision notice in due course. This will help us to monitor actions related



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to changes to historic places.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Lewis

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

E-mail: sarah.lewis@HistoricEngland.org.uk

cc. Shawn Fleet, Group Manager, Planning, Walsall Council

David Tomback, Development Economics Director, Historic England



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