

Application No: 14/3121M

Location: Mere Court Hotel And Conference Centre, Warrington Road, Mere, Knutsford, WA16 0RW

Proposal: Proposed 2 Storey bedroom extension to existing hotel premises. Remodelling of existing coach-house for function use associated with the hotel.

Applicant: Edgeman Limited

Expiry Date: 01-Oct-2014

Date Report Prepared: 20 August 2014

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE

MAIN ISSUES

- Green Belt
- Very Special Circumstances
- Heritage & Design
- Highway Safety
- Drainage
- Trees

REASON FOR REPORT

The application is for the construction of an extension with a floorspace over 1000 sq.m and under the Council's Constitution, it is required to be determined by the Northern Planning Committee.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site measures 26,004.85 sq. m and comprises Mere Court Hotel And Conference Centre— a large Manor House originally called Meadowlands, built in 1907 in an Arts and Crafts style with a detached coach house located to the entrance set within extensive grounds associated with this country house.

The site is accessed from Warrington Road in Mere and is surrounded by fields to the sides and rear. The hotel is a Grade II listed building and located within the designated Green Belt.

All trees on the site are covered by a Tree Preservation Order.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission to construct a two storey extension containing 12 additional bedrooms with a link to the side of the hotel and alterations to the Coach House towards the front of the site.

The Coach House has permission as a conference centre with no restrictions and therefore it is only the physical alterations to the external elevations of the building which require planning permission.

Planning History

23527P Installation of fire escape staircase Approved 13-Aug-1980

27573P Extension to existing stable block Approved 25-Sep-1981

59830P Conversion of garage to lounge and coffee area Approved 4-Oct-1989

64162P Refurbishment of lecture room to include a new mezzanine floor within the existing building. building then to be re-roofed removing existing glazed areas and replacing with roof lights - 6 number. Approved 12-Sep-1990

73667P Relocation of sewage treatment works approved 28-Apr-1993

76527P Gas fuel server meter and dryer on concrete plinth with retaining wall Approved 14-Feb-1994

96/1571P Extensions & change of use from training college to private hotel Refused 13-Jan-1997 Appeal Withdrawn

97/0137P Alterations, extensions & change of use from training college to hotel, and additional parking Refused 07-Apr-1997 Appeal Dismissed

97/0139P Change of use from training college to hotel Appeal Allowed

97/0613P Change of use of residential training college to private hotel with single-storey extension for 16 bedrooms Refused 02-Jun-1997

97/0615P Change of use of residential training college to hotel with single-storey extension for function room, gymnasium & swimming pool Refused 18-Jul-1997 Dismissed

97/0617P Change of use of existing buildings (house, coach house lodge) from use as training college to hotel and erection of approved dormitory H block for use for hotel purposes Refused 18-Jul-1997

97/1049P Change of use of training college to hotel, and erection of single-storey building with 16 bedrooms Approved 15-Oct-1998

97/1050P (1) Change of use of existing buildings (house, coach house & lodge) from use as training college to hotel, and (2) Erection of previously approved dormitory 'H' block for use for hotel purposes Refused 06-Oct-1997

98/1743P Two-storey bedroom block, and change of use of coach house into a residential conference centre; all in connection with hotel use on the site Refused 17-May-1999

98/2082P Single-storey extensions and corridor link Approved 1-Mar-1999

99/0003P Single-storey extensions and corridor link Approved 9-Feb-1999

99/0374P Glazed atrium above courtyard and new glazed entrance screen to coach house building Approved 9-Jun-1999

99/0377P Car parking (revised scheme) Withdrawn 12-Apr-1999

99/0389P Two-storey bedroom block (amended scheme with 24 bedrooms) Refused 12.4.99
Appeal Withdrawn

99/0767P two-storey bedroom block (19 bedrooms) approved 10.6.1999

99/0772P Formation of new car park within curtilage of the site (revised scheme c) Approved 10-Jun-1999

99/1046P Continuation of use of coach house as conference centre, with associated car park Approved 28-Jun-1999

99/1541P 22 Bedroom block (amended dormer scheme) Approved 4.10.99

99/1962P Retention of 3 dormers to the wrenshot lane elevation Approved 01-Nov-1999

99/2300P Single-storey kitchen extension & covered walkway Approved 5.1.2000

99/2304P Single-storey side extension to coach-house conference centre building Approved 05-Jan-2000

00/0813P Single-storey extension to lake elevation to provide dining room facilities Refused 24-Jul-2000 Appeal Dismissed

02/1348P Erection of a rear conservatory/dining room and single storey side extension. Approved 4-Jul-2002

05/0994P Single storey extension to provide storage area for kitchen and staff accommodation. Refused 3-Nov-2005. Appeal Dismissed.

06/2069P Single storey side extension. Approved 18-Oct-2006

07/0265P Single storey side extension- amendment to approval 06/2069p (part retrospective) Approved 11-Apr-2007

POLICIES

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan – Saved Policies

NE11 – Nature Conservation
BE1 – Design Guidance
BE2 – Preservation of Historic Fabric
BE15 - Listed Buildings
BE16 - Setting of Listed Buildings
BE17 - Preservation of Listed Buildings
Policy GC1 - Green Belt – New Buildings
Policy RT13 - Promotion of Tourism
Policy RT15 - Hotel Development
DC1 – Design: New Build
DC2 - Extensions
DC6 – Circulation and Access
DC8 - Landscaping
DC9 – Tree Protection

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version

Paragraph 216 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise, decision-takers may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

- The stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
- The extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and
- The degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the NPPF (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).

In view of the level of consultation already afforded to the plan-making process, together with the degree of consistency with national planning guidance, it is appropriate to attach enhanced weight to the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy - Submission Version in the decision-making process.

At its meeting on the 28th February 2014, the Council resolved to approve the *Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version* for publication and submission to the Secretary of State. It was also resolved that this document be given weight as a material consideration for Development Management purposes with immediate effect.

The relevant policies are as follows:

MP1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
PG2 – Settlement Hierarchy
SD1 – Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD2 – Sustainable Development Principles
EG 1 – Economic Prosperity
EG 2 – Rural Economy
EG 4 – Tourism
SE1 – Design
SE2 – Efficient Use of Land
SE3 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity
SE4 – The Landscape
SE5 – Trees, Hedgerow and Woodland
SE7 – The Historic Environment
SE9 – Energy Efficient Development
SE12 – Pollution, Land Contamination and Land Instability
SE13 – Flood Risk and Water Management
CO1 – Sustainable Travel and Transport

Other Material Considerations

Ministerial Statement – Planning for Growth
National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Environmental Health – no objections, recommend condition in respect of construction hours.

Highways – no comments received.

Environment Agency – no comments received.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

No objections

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Letter of objection from Yew Tree Farm and Meadow View as follows:-

- Impact on farming activities
- Concerns regarding noise and disturbance
- Concerns regarding complaints associated with farming activities
- Concerns regarding drainage
- Concerns previous conditions not complied with
- Concerns regarding highway safety
- Impact on listed building and grounds
- Design not in keeping

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The following documents have been submitted on behalf of the applicant:

Design & Access Statement

This statement provides details of the thought process surrounding the proposals and details of pre-application discussions which have informed the final scheme.

Arboricultural Assessment

Trees worthy of retention would be retained and protected throughout the course of development. Those scheduled for removal have limited amenity value or are of poor condition.

Transport Assessment

The site is accessible, a sustainable location and the highways network can accommodate the increase in vehicle movements. The proposed access and internal access road would be suitable to serve the development and would not have an adverse impact upon highway safety.

Heritage Statement

Provides an analysis of the impact on heritage assets. It concludes that because the main body of the extension is detached and connected only by a glazed 'link' this would visually detach the extension from the listed building. As the extension proposed is a contemporary design, this too is more appropriate than the pastiche design of previous extensions. On that basis the report concludes that the proposals are not harmful.

Planning Statement

Provides an analysis of planning policies and a case for very special circumstances. Considers proposals to be appropriate in the Green Belt with no additional harm to openness, but puts forward a case for VSC's should the LPA dissent from this view. VSCs include benefits to tourism, competition and choice, pressure from competitors and need to improve facilities, lost revenue due to insufficient capacity, job creation and associated benefits to the local economy.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Green Belt

The proposals relate to alterations and extensions to a hotel within the Green Belt. Para 89 of the NPPF states that extensions to existing buildings will be permitted provided that they do not constitute a disproportionate addition to the original building.

The building was constructed in 1903 however the 'original building' is that which existed on 1st July 1948 – in this instance, there have been significant extensions and alterations to the building however these have been undertaken in the late 1990s – 2000s and are, therefore, not original.

As the property has already been extended in a disproportionate manner, these further extensions which are substantial in their own right would constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness which in itself attracts **substantial weight**, the proposals would also have an adverse impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.

The Planning Statement does not consider that the development would impact upon openness. The application is not supported by a Landscape Visual Impact Assessment, however the extension would be located in the most exposed part of the grounds of the property highly visible from public vantage points in a location surrounded by open fields – the proposals are therefore bound to have an adverse impact.

In addition, the Town and Country Planning (Consultations) (England) Direction 2009 indicates that developments of over 1000 sq. m within the Green Belt would have a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt for the purposes of referral. It therefore stands to reason that such developments should also be treated as having a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt in the application of planning policy. These proposals are in excess of 1000 sq. m and would therefore have a significant impact upon the openness of the Green Belt notwithstanding the impact associated with an intensification of the use such as additional car parking, visitors and general activity associated with the use.

In summary, the proposals represent an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt which by definition is harmful and which in itself would attract substantial weight. In addition, the proposals would have a significant adverse impact upon the openness of the Green Belt in this location and would have an adverse visual impact upon the landscape.

This level of harm alone is a compelling reason for refusal - very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations (Para 88 of The Framework). The onus is therefore on the applicant to demonstrate that any other considerations would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt identified above.

The alterations to the Coach House would not increase its floor area and are therefore acceptable in Green Belt terms.

Very Special Circumstances

Employment

The Planning Statement estimates that an additional 17 jobs would be created, some of which would be part time. It is unclear how many actual FTE jobs the proposals would generate. The Planning Statement indicates that significant weight should be given to this material consideration. It is duly acknowledged that supporting economic growth is one of the core principles underpinning the planning system. It is also acknowledged that in addition to the direct jobs created, the proposals would create some temporary construction jobs and there would be wider economic benefits to the construction industry supply chain.

In addition to the jobs created during the construction period, the proposals would bring the usual economic benefit to the shops in Mere during the construction period and there would be some economic and social benefit by virtue of tourist's spending money in the area and using local services.

The Cheshire East area has approximately 79,000 unemployed people and therefore the proposals would only make a small contribution towards reducing unemployment in the Borough. Notwithstanding this, any commercial development within the Green Belt would create jobs but this does not override the presumption against inappropriate development.

Moderate weight is attached to this as a consideration.

Viability of the Business

The hotel's capacity based constraints mean that £209,655 of prospective bookings, for 2014-2016 have been lost from the business. For a business operating in a hugely competitive sector, this is a massive loss of revenue. It should be noted that of the reasons cited, not all were exclusively because of inadequate facilities and of the £209,655 at least £5824 of this was for reasons other than those associated with insufficient facilities.

In addition, the hotels within the vicinity of the site cited within the Planning Statement such as Cottons (108 rooms), The Mere (81 rooms) and Mottram Hall (120 rooms) have significantly greater amounts of hotel rooms available –even if the proposals were to be permitted. The type of hotel and experience at a small hotel such as Mere Court would be completely different to that at The Mere or Mottram Hall and therefore are unlikely to appeal to the same market.

Nevertheless, additional bedrooms and enhanced facilities would benefit the existing business and therefore moderate weight is attached to this as a consideration.

Tourism

Guidance within The Framework and policies within the Local Plan also seek to promote tourism in the countryside however policy RT13 makes it clear that this should not conflict with Green Belt objectives.

The Framework considers tourist attractions to be a main town centre use but also considers sustainable rural tourism operations to be appropriate to rural areas. Again, there is no inference that this would outweigh Green Belt policies.

Whilst the Rural Issues Summary Document, Cheshire East Visitor Economy Strategic Framework are material considerations, the NPPF and the Development Plan are the starting point and they both include policies in support of the protection of Green Belts, which strengthens the presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

The Cheshire East Visitor Economy Strategic Framework seeks to promote visitor attractions in Cheshire. The visitor economy is an important contributor to businesses and communities in Cheshire East, generating over £600m per annum to the local economy. The Strategic Framework seeks to increase this to £818m by 2015 with an additional 1271 jobs provided in the same period. The development would contribute towards this objective, however in light of the adopted and emerging policies within the Development Plan which seeks to steer new tourism development either towards town centres or, where it is proposed in connection with

rural tourism, to sites outside of the Green Belt, moderate weight is given to the contribution towards achieving objectives within other Council Strategies.

In summary, the proposals constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt the harm of which attracts substantial weight, The proposals would also have an adverse impact upon openness and the character of the landscape both of which also attract substantial weight. Moderate weight is attached to the benefits to the economy, tourism and the viability of the business, and if the proposals had less of an impact to openness/ the landscape this may outweigh the harm noted above. However, as it stands, the harm identified above is a compelling reason for refusal and the benefits identified would not clearly outweigh the harm. There are, therefore, no very special circumstances to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

Heritage & Design

Designated Heritage Asset Impact

In terms of the extension, it is the impact upon the setting of the listed building and its character rather than the impact upon historic fabric which is the key consideration here. The analysis of the impact on the listed building is set out in greater detail within the report on the accompanying listed building consent application (14/3170M).

In a nutshell, this is a Grade II listed building constructed in 1907 located in a rural location- the property has the appearance of a country house built in an Arts and Crafts style, with a country house setting.

The Heritage Statement infers that the extensions previously permitted have been harmful to the existing character and that the proposals would have less of an impact than these extensions as the design is not a pastiche and therefore would not dilute the character of the original building.

Whilst there is merit to the argument that a modern design would be appropriate, it is unclear how the design complements the listed building, represents a high quality design and reinforces local distinctiveness in terms of its fenestration. The extension would have a significant impact on the ability to appreciate the listed building as a country house.

Turning to scale and massing, whilst a large modern wing to the North West of the building has been constructed, and this is dominating on plan, it is heavily screened by mature planting. By leaving views of the listed building within its ground exposed and unaltered, this preserves the setting of the listed building and respects the historic integrity of this former country house and its gardens/ grounds.

Unfortunately, the proposed extension would build upon those views that the previous extensions have left unaltered as a consequence, the loss of the garden setting will erode the significance of the house, making it appear cramped and overdeveloped.

Whilst officers are very supportive of the economic justifications for the development, and the intention of maintaining the use of the building long term and providing jobs, there is clearly harm created to the setting of the building which would adversely affect the special interest of the building. There is no overriding evidence provided in the supporting information with either

application which states the option proposed is the only way to achieve the objectives noted as special circumstances, or public benefits to outweigh the harm caused to the setting of the heritage asset.

Turning to the alterations to the Coach House, the Conservation Officer has indicated that there is insufficient information to determine whether or not the alterations would be harmful to the character of the building, which is curtilage listed. In addition to this the Conservation Officer has expressed concerns regarding the amount of alteration proposed to the North West elevation given the prominence of this elevation, however there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate whether it would or would not be harmful either way.

Harm to the Setting of the Asset

The Coach House forms part of the setting of the building as would the landscaped gardens and trees to the site.

In terms of the impact to the Coach House, this would be limited as it is an outbuilding which would continue to remain subservient and retain its historic character.

The impact to the gardens, is however, a different matter. Whilst no trees would be directly affected by the proposals (which is welcomed as they make a positive contribution to the setting of the listed building) the grounds in general are an integral part of the historic use of this building and important to its original function. The encroachment of the extension within these grounds to this extent would undermine the historic co-dependence of this former Manor House and its gardens. Reducing the amount of pleasant historic garden land surrounding this prominent manor house and replacing it with such a prominent extension would have a negative impact upon the setting of the listed building.

Design

It is unclear within the submission how the proposals would respect the character of the host building, the site or the wider area. It is also unclear how the proposals would reinforce local distinctiveness.

The design fails to take the opportunities available to improve the character of the area and instead would actively detract from the existing pleasant character of the site, contrary to policies DC1, DC2 and BE1 within the MBLP 2004 and guidance within the NPPF.

Highways

The applicant has submitted a Traffic Report which indicates that this is an accessible and sustainable location.

The existing point of access at the site is fit for purpose, on that basis it is considered that the resultant impact on highway safety would be the same.

The proposals would meet the maximum car parking standards as set out within the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan. The point of access is to an adoptable standard and therefore acceptable to serve the development.

Turning to traffic generation, the Transport Statement suggests that the impact of traffic generation on the highways network would be nominal.

Whilst the comments of the Strategic Highways Manager are awaited at the time of writing the report, based on the submitted information, the proposals would not appear to have an adverse impact upon highway safety in accordance with policies DC6 within the MBLP and guidance within chapter 4 of the NPPF.

Drainage

Concerns from residents have been raised in respect of existing drainage problems and the desirability that this development does not compound the problem.

In light of the comments from residents, conditions could be imposed requiring the submission of a drainage scheme that ensures the surface water does not discharge onto adjoining land and that foul and surface water is dealt with satisfactorily.

Trees

All the trees on the site are covered by a Tree Preservation Order – these trees make a positive contribution to the character of the site and its environs.

The location of the extension has been chosen carefully to minimise the impact upon trees – the Arboricultural Report submitted indicates that there is not an adverse impact upon the protected trees and that these can be protected during the construction of the development. The Council's Forestry Officer has no objections to the proposals, subject to conditions.

Other Considerations

The proposals do not raise any concerns in respect of amenity and whilst the concerns of neighbours in respect of conflict between the proposals and adjacent farming activities are duly noted, the two uses have happily coexisted so far. Any disturbance associated with farming activities would be expected in a rural location and a matter for consideration for patrons when determining whether or not they want to stay at the Hotel.

Conditions recommended by Environmental Health would be imposed in the event of approval.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The proposals would have a significant adverse impact upon the special qualities of the listed building with particular regard to the adverse impact on its setting and the public benefits associated with the proposals would not outweigh this harm. The proposals would also be unacceptable in design terms. In addition the proposals consist of inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would also have an impact upon the landscape and openness of the Green Belt. All of these considerations would attract substantial weight. Whilst moderate weight can be attached to the benefits to the existing business, visitor economy and job

creation, the moderate weight attached to these considerations would be insufficient to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Planning and Enforcement Manager, in consultation with the Chairman (or in his absence the Vice Chair) of Northern Planning Committee to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse for the following reasons

1. adverse impact to listed building
2. inappropriate development in the Green Belt
3. Design fails to reinforce local distinctiveness and would detract from the character of the area

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