

Application No: 15/3506M

Location: Mere Court Hotel And Conference Centre, WARRINGTON ROAD, MERE, WA16 0RW

Proposal: Application for full planning permission for additional proposed 24 no bedroom purpose built ancillary accommodation and internal remodelling of existing coach-house. Resubmission of application 14/3121M

Applicant: Ailantus Hotels

Expiry Date: 10-Dec-2015

### **SUMMARY**

The development proposed 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 adverse impact upon the character, appearance 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. Therefore, the development proposed is recommended for refusal.

### **RECOMMENDATION- REFUSE**

### **REASON FOR REPORT**

The application is for the construction of an extension with a floorspace of 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 and Lodge building, which are curtilage listed buildings, 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 for the erection of a two storey guest accommodation building located within the grounds of the Grade 2 Listed Mere Court Hotel. The development would comprise 24no bedrooms to be used as ancillary accommodation to the Mere Court Hotel. Internal and external works are also proposed to the Lodge building and Coach House building, which are curtilage listed buildings. The Lodge building is currently in use as a dwelling and it is proposed to subdivide this building into 2no apartments. The Coach House has permission as a conference centre with no restrictions and it is proposed to enhance the facilities of this building for weddings and other functions in association with the hotel.

Minor internal works are also proposed to the reception area of the Mere Court Hotel, which will be assessed under the Listed Building Consent application reference 15/3507M.

Landscaping of the site is also proposed including the formation of a new footpath to the proposed new building.

This application is a resubmission of withdrawn application 14/3121M. This application was withdrawn due to concerns over the design of the development and its impact on the Green Belt and setting of the Grade 2 Listed hotel.

## **Relevant Planning History**

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

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

99/0767P two-storey bedroom block (19 bedrooms) approved 10-June-1999

14/3170M

Listed Building Consent for proposed 2 Storey bedroom extension to existing grade II listed hotel premises. Internal remodelling of existing coach-house for function use associated with the hotel (within curtilage of listed building)

Withdrawn 27-Aug-2014

14/3121M

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

Withdrawn 12-Oct-2014

## **NATIONAL & LOCAL POLICY**

By virtue of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is repeated in the NPPF (para 2).

The Development Plan for Cheshire East currently comprises the saved policies from the Congleton Borough (January 2005), Crewe and Nantwich (February 2005) and Macclesfield Borough Local Plans (January 2004). The Macclesfield Borough Local Plan is the relevant plan for this application.

### **National Policy/Guidance**

#### **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

The NPPF states that

*The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. (para 6)*

And, at the heart of the NPPF

*...is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. (para 14)*

For decision-taking this means

*...approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay...and*

*where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission unless:*

- a) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole; or*
- b) specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted.*

Sustainable development includes economic, social and environmental roles (para 7)

The sections of the NPPF of particular relevance to the appraisal and determination of the application are:-

- Part 3: Supporting a prosperous rural economy
- Part 7: Requiring Good Design

- Part 9: Protecting Green Belt Land
- Part 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

### **National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)**

The NPPG came into force on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2014, replacing a range of National Planning Policy Guidance Notes and complimenting the NPPF.

### **Local Policy - Development Plan**

#### **Macclesfield Borough Local Plan – saved policies (MBLP)**

Since publication of the NPPF the saved policies within the Macclesfield Borough Council Local Plan are still applicable but should be weighted according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF. The saved Local Plan policies considered to be most relevant are outlined below:

NE11 – Nature Conservation  
BE1 – Design Guidance  
BE2 – Preservation of Historic Fabric  
BE15 - Listed Buildings  
BE16 - Setting of Listed Buildings  
BE17 - Preservation of Listed Buildings  
GC1 - Green Belt – New Buildings  
RT13 - Promotion of Tourism  
Policy RT15 - Hotel Development  
DC1 – Design: New Build  
DC2 - Extensions  
DC6 – Circulation and Access  
DC8 - Landscaping  
DC9 – Tree Protection  
DC13- Noise

#### **Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version (CELP)**

The following policies are considered relevant material considerations as indications of the emerging strategy: -

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**

Environment Agency- No Objection  
  
United Utilities- No Objection subject to conditions  
  
Strategic Infrastructure Manager- No Objection

### **VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

Mere Parish Council - No objection to the proposal regarding the 24 bedroom hotel. They also approve the internal remodelling of the coach house apart from a concern regarding an increase of noise due to the change from a conference room to a function room, raised by a neighbour at Yew Tree Farm.

### **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

Tatton Park- Support of the application.

2no objections have been received on the following planning related grounds:

- Adverse impact on nearby residential amenity as a result of the proposed wedding and other functions proposed in the existing Coach House building
- Proposed accommodation building would be out of keeping with the rural locality and built on a historic garden
- Adverse impact on highway safety due to the increase in traffic generation

### **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Design and Access Statement  
Heritage Statement

### **OFFICER APPRAISAL**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

## **Green Belt**

### **Guest Accommodation Building**

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt. Certain exceptions to this are listed, however none of them apply to the proposed erection of the ancillary accommodation building. Therefore this aspect of the development constitutes inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

In addition to the harm by reason of inappropriateness which in itself attracts substantial weight, the proposed ancillary accommodation building would also have an adverse impact upon the openness of the Green Belt by virtue of its size (over 1,000m<sup>2</sup>), height (up to 8.5m) and associated bulk and massing would have a substantial impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.

There would also be an added impact on the openness of the Green Belt associated with an intensification of the use such as additional car parking, visitors and general activity associated with the use.

Whilst it is noted that this building would to some extent be screened from outside of the site by virtue of the existing protected trees on the site boundary, as has been confirmed by the arboricultural officer this would not be the case in winter due to the deciduous nature of many of these trees in addition to the existing visual gaps that exist between some of these trees.

In summary, the proposed guest accommodation building would 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.

### **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 considerable 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 and Cheshire East Visitor Economy Strategic Framework as referred to in the letter from the Tatton Estate 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 proposed guest accommodation building would 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.

### **Lodge and Coach House Buildings**

The conversion of the Lodge building and Coach House building is considered to constitute appropriate development in the Green Belt. Both buildings are capable and suitable for conversion and the relatively minor external alterations would have an acceptable impact on the Green Belt. These aspects would therefore accord with Macclesfield Local Plan policy GC8, GC9 and paragraph 90 of the NPPF.

### **Heritage and Design**

#### Designated Heritage Asset Impact

The Conservation Officer objects to the proposed guest accommodation building of the proposed development. Mere Court Hotel 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.

Whilst there is no concern from a heritage impact point of view with the principle of a new building on the site, it would need to be designed so that it is seen as a non competing feature in the landscape. However, the current size of the proposed building in terms of footprint, height and massing, and its proximity to the hotel, would undermine the setting of this host Listed building and would not constitute a subservient building within its grounds. The design of the building is also not considered to be sympathetic to the host Listed building, constituting more of a pastiche of the host building as opposed to a building that takes design cues from the host building in order to compliment, not compete with it. The development would therefore have a significant impact on the ability to appreciate the listed building as a country house and its significance as a designated heritage asset.

Furthermore, reducing the amount of pleasant historic garden land surrounding this prominent manor house and replacing it with such a large building would add to the negative impact upon the setting of the listed building.

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

Overall, this element of the proposals would have an adverse impact on the setting of the Grade 2 Listed Building, contrary to local plan policy BE16 and part 12 of the NPPF.

### **Lodge Building and Coach House**

The Lodge Building and Coach House form part of the setting of the hotel building as do the landscaped gardens and trees to the site.

The impact of the works to these buildings on the setting of the Grade 2 hotel building would be limited as they are outbuildings which would continue to remain subservient and retain their historic character.

### **Design**

It is considered in design terms that the proposed guest accommodation building would not respect the character of the Grade 2 Listed hotel building, the site or the wider area. It is also unclear how the proposals would reinforce local distinctiveness.

The design of this element of the proposals 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 and BE1 within the MBLP 2004 and guidance within the NPPF.

### **Amenity**

The concerns from Environmental Health and a neighbour regarding potential noise impact are noted. The Coach House building lies some 37m away from this property, which is the nearest property to this building. The use of the Coach House for wedding functions and also the intensification of the use of the site could result in noise disturbance to the occupants of this property, however suggested mitigation measures are considered to be sufficient to negate any adverse impact in this regard.

### **Highways**

The objection regarding highway safety has been considered.

However, the Strategic Infrastructure Manager raises no objection.

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.

With regards traffic generation, the Transport Statement suggests that the impact of traffic generation on the highways network would be nominal. The applicant has submitted a Traffic Report which indicates that this is an accessible and sustainable location.

The development is considered to accord with local plan policy DC6 and policy CO1 of the Emerging Local Plan.

### **Environmental Health**

The Environmental Health Officer has some concerns regarding the impact of the development on residential amenity in terms of the intensification of use of the site and the use of the Coach House for wedding functions. However they do not object subject to conditions that would seek to mitigate any harmful impact in terms of noise and odours.

### **Nature Conservation**

The Nature Conservation Officer raises no objections subject to a condition relating to the protection of breeding birds.

### **Drainage**

United Utilities raise no objection to the development subject to appropriate conditions regarding drainage.

### **Trees**

The trees on site, of which are protected, make a positive contribution to the character of the site and its environs.

The Tree Officer raises no objections to the proposed development, subject to tree protection and landscape mitigation conditions.

Subject to conditions the development would accord with policy DC9.

### **SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The development would benefit the public interest in terms of offering more choice for hotel accommodation in the area and the associated facilities proposed.

The alterations to the curtilage listed buildings would ensure that their established viable uses would be retained and enhanced, which will secure the longevity of these heritage assets.

## **ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY**

The development will provide economic benefits in respect of a) increasing the economic viability of an established rural business, b) employment during the construction phase, c) use of local services by employees during the construction phase and d) contributions to the visitor economy as a result of customers using the services and facilities in the area.

## **PLANNING BALANCE, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION**

To conclude, 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. Therefore, the development proposed is recommended for refusal.

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/informatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Planning and Enforcement Manager has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

Application for Full Planning

**RECOMMENDATION:** Refuse approval

1. Setting of Listed Building
2. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt
3. Design



