

Historic England comments on current application for 69 units 18/02171/OUT

Historic England

Comment Date: Tue 13 Nov 2018

Comments on 17/00710/OUT, dated 30th October 2017

Thank you for your letter of 28 September 2017 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Historic England does not support the principle of development on this parcel of land. We consider the open green space to contribute significantly to the setting of the Grade II* listed Ashley Manor.

Historic England Advice

The villa at St Edwards School, known most recently as Ashley Manor, was built for Nathaniel Hartland (the single most important lender of money to builders in the Pittville development in Cheltenham). Its list description describes it as 'One of the finest villas in the Cheltenham area, its internal plasterwork is a particular feature for its diversity, depth and quality of composition.' The original approach to the house is from London Road to the south; the sinuous tree-lined drive remains largely unaltered. The Grade II listed boundary walls and gate piers (marking the entrance from London Road), and further into the grounds, the Grade II summerhouse and drive piers to the surviving carriage sweep are all remnants of this high-status, grandiose villa-house ensconced within its generous parkland setting. Indeed, the topography of the site is significant; the land rises markedly from south to north, which would have been a conscious motive for siting this 'villa' style dwelling overlooking the town. This 19th century revisiting of ancient Classical-inspired villas was heavily influenced by Andrea Palladio's work of the 16th century. Palladio's villa suburbana (country houses purely for residential or leisure as opposed to agriculture), in particular the Villa Rotunda, gave rise to a vast tradition in villa architecture; these formative dwellings were conceived with a close relationship to their location. Of Villa Rotunda, Palladio wrote 'the site is as pleasant and delightful as can be found; because it is upon a small hill?it is encompassed by the most pleasant risings?and therefore?enjoys the most beautiful views from all sides'. The building rises out of the landscape and so does Ashley Manor in this very nature. So, whilst the principal elevation faces southwards, the siting of this villa, within its extensive, rising grounds is of, arguably, equal significance.

The outline application is for a residential development of up to 100 dwellings in the parcel of grassland to the north of Ashley Manor. The site forms an important green backdrop to the principal villa, rising northwards, and contains ancient trees, deer, and, as corroborated by the Archaeological Statement, the presence of a former ice house, taking the form of a tree-covered mound, undoubtedly ancillary to Ashley Manor. The site is therefore clearly associated, historically, with the villa - grounds of this extent would be expected with a high-status property.

Having visited the site, we are aware that significant modern additions (large school-related buildings, as well as landscape features such as the blue-topped playing surfaces) have eroded the historically isolated setting of Ashley Manor. Notwithstanding, the house (and associated school buildings) remains positioned within the extent of its historical grounds and the application site forms a key green buffer between the villa and later development to the north.

Central to our consultation advice is the requirement of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in Section 66(1) for the local authority to "have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of architectural or historic interest which it possesses". In line with the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, planning authorities should look for opportunities for proposals within conservation areas and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Significance can be harmed or lost through development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm to their setting should require clear and convincing justification (para. 132). Only proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably (para. 137). Additionally, the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets is paramount when determining this application, whilst new development must make a positive contribution to local character recognising the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to communities (paras. 131). Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (para. 134).

As we have acknowledged, recent school additions to the site have eroded the villa's setting to a degree. Nevertheless, the proposal will push development uncomfortably close to Ashley Manor. When approaching the house from its historical drive, the experience of the house set upon the slope of Battledown Hill remains appreciable, with this unspoilt land rising visibly beyond. Replacing this parkland behind with development will completely eradicate and undermine the significance and appreciation of the villa's historical relationship and siting within its conspicuous topographical setting and wider grounds. We therefore do not agree with the Heritage Statement (4.2.2) that the 'significance of the asset is principally derived from the architectural and special interest of the building?rather than from the wider setting and indeed the Site.' Loss of half of the villa's grounds - which form an important contribution to the original architectural and aesthetic design conception - will adversely affect the significance of the heritage asset. As such, we do not support the application.

Recommendation

Historic England objects to the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the application does not meet the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 131, 134 and 137. In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If you propose to determine the application in its current form, please inform us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.

Please contact me if we can be of further assistance.

Comment Date: Tue 13 Nov 2018

Thank you for your letter of 30 October 2018 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Historic England maintains their objection to the principle of development on this parcel of land. We consider the open green space to contribute significantly to the setting of the Grade II* listed Ashley Manor.

Historic England Advice

This application is a revised scheme following the refusal of application ref. 17/00710/OUT. Of the five refusal reasons was the 'significant impact on the setting of nearby listed buildings, particularly Ashley Manor, an important grade II* listed villa of more than special interest'. The less than substantial harm was afforded great weight in the planning balance as prescribed by paragraph 132 of the NPPF (the National Planning Policy Framework has since been revised and paragraph numbers have altered).

This resubmitted proposal has a reduced density but nevertheless remains a substantial housing development on grounds which contribute positively to the setting of Ashley Manor. It therefore does not alter or address our concerns as set out in our previous responses, and as such we maintain our objection to the principle of development on this parcel of land.

We remind the authority that Ashley Manor is Grade II* listed, making it a heritage asset of the highest significance (as set out in the revised NPPF, 194). In line with NPPF policy 193, the asset's II* listed status must be given great weight in the planning balance, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

We attach our initial response to application 17/00710/OUT, dated 30 October 2017, for clarification.

Recommendation

Historic England objects to the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the application does not meet the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 193, 196 and 200.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If you propose to determine the application in its current form, please inform us of the date of the committee and send us a copy of your report at the earliest opportunity.

Please contact me if we can be of further assistance.