

Delegated Report

Grange Court, 72 High Road, Chigwell, Essex, IG7 6PT

EPF/3367/16 and EPF/3362/17 & PL/00583

Description of Site:

The application site is a detached Grade II* listed 3 storey mansion house, with single storey side wings which was last in use as part of Chigwell School and is now empty since being sold by the school. The site is within the Chigwell Conservation Area, the property dating from the late 18th Century, originally built as a single dwellinghouse and part of the building is known to have been partly remodified by Lutyens. The main building is set some 33m back from the road edge with an informal parking area to the front and a 30m deep rear garden which slopes down to the south east. The application site is surrounded on three sides by residential properties, which would have originally formed part of the wider plot of Grange Court and is located on the south east side of the High Road within the built up area of Chigwell. The site is not within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

Description of Proposal:

The application seeks planning permission and listed building consent for conversion, partial demolition and extension of the existing building to provide 14 x 2 bed flats with associated parking and landscaping. The proposal includes mansard extensions above the existing single storey wings, demolition of a later addition shower block/changing area and addition of a three storey 20m deep extension to the rear of the existing cupola building which will house 6 of the 14 proposed flats. The proposal will provide 24 parking spaces to the front, with a bicycle store and refuse store located at the front boundary.

The scheme has been revised since first submission altering the design of the extensions and changing the car parking layout and a re-consultation process took place following the revised submissions.

Relevant History:

Various historic applications the most relevant of which:

EPF/1406/10 - Conversion of Grange Court, Chigwell School from a boarding house to a Pre-Prep School, including a new single storey extension, internal and external refurbishment and associated landscaping works. (Revised application) – Refused and dismissed at appeal

EPF/1408/10 - Grade II* listed building application for the conversion of Grange Court, Chigwell School from a boarding house to a Pre-Prep School, including a new single storey extension, internal and external refurbishment and associated landscaping works. (Revised application) – Refused and dismissed at appeal

Policies Applied:

Epping Forest District Local Plan and Alterations

CP2 – Protecting the Quality of the Rural and Built Environment

CP3 – New Development

CP5 – Sustainable Building

CP6 – Achieving sustainable urban development patterns

CP7 – Urban Form and Quality

DBE1 – Design of New Buildings
 DBE2 – Effect on Neighbouring Properties
 DBE3 – Design in Urban Areas
 DBE8 – Private Amenity Space
 ST1 – Location of Development
 ST4 – Road Safety
 ST6 – Vehicle Parking
 H2A – Previously Developed Land
 H4A – Dwelling Mix
 LL8 – Works to preserved trees
 LL10 – Adequacy of provision for landscape retention
 LL11 – Landscaping schemes
 HC6 – Character, Appearance and setting of Conservation Areas
 HC7 – Development within Conservation Areas
 HC10 – Listed Buildings

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been adopted as national policy since March 2012. Paragraph 215 states that due weight should be given to relevant policies in existing plans according to their degree of consistency with the framework. The above policies are broadly consistent with the NPPF and should therefore be given appropriate weight.

Draft Local Plan Consultation document (2016):

DM5 Green Infrastructure: Design of Development
 DM9 High quality design
 DM10 Housing design and quality
 P7 Chigwell
 SP4 Place Shaping
 SP6 The Natural Environment, Landscape Character and Green Infrastructure

At the current time only limited material weight can be applied to the Draft Local Plan, however the Draft Plan and evidence base should be considered as a material consideration in planning decisions.

Summary of Representations:

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL: The Council has NO OBJECTION to this application, subject to and providing that planning officers thoroughly investigate the serious concerns regarding the possible loss of light to residents along King's Mews and Barton Close. Also the appropriate landscaping and screening must be implemented to minimise any adverse effects towards the amenity of adjacent residential properties.

28 Neighbours consulted and a site notice posted:

1 KINGS MEWS – SUPPORT – Provided sufficient off-street parking is provided, extension replaces ugly buildings, will allow refurbishments to listed building.
 3 KINGS MEWS – SUPPORT – as building will be restored with a modern extension
 GRAYLANDS, 74 HIGH ROAD – SUPPORT- Building should not disintegrate further, residential is an appropriate use, extension fits well, flats laid out well, no concerns regarding overlooking.
 24 MEADOW WAY – Comment – concern regarding retention of rear wall and loss of trees
 24A MEADOW WAY – STRONG OBJECTION – No objections to conversion but objection to new extension, overlooking, loss of privacy, loss of light.

28 MEADOW WAY – OBJECTION – Extension out of character, detrimental visual impact, loss of outlook, privacy and overshadowing.

4 BARTON CLOSE – OBJECTION – overlooking issues not addressed by revised plans. Extension is still too high and too big and completely out of character with the listed building. Revisions have not overcome concerns.

5 BARTON CLOSE – STRONG OBJECTION – Extension too high and out of character with the listed building, objection to new extension, loss of light, and privacy, even with the revised angled windows.

4 KINGS MEWS – OBJECTION AND COMMENT – Bicycle rack too close to Kings Mews, concern over refuse management, extension should be single storey, gravel should not be used, concern regarding external lighting, concern regarding pest control.

5 KINGS MEWS – OBJECTION – Location of dustbins, gravel driveway, location of bike racks, extension is too high, concern re: lighting and refuse collection arrangements, extension out of character with listed building, loss of privacy, revisions do not overcome objections.

6 KINGS MEWS – OBJECTION – Loss of privacy, increase in noise, loss of light, location of car parking, and refuse, external lighting, revisions have not overcome concerns even with angled windows.

Issues and Considerations:

The main issues with this proposal relate to the principle of the proposal, design and the Listed Building, impact on amenity, Highways issues and Trees and Landscaping.

Principle of Development

Notwithstanding the Grade II* listed status of this building (discussed in further detail below), the site is located within the built up area of Chigwell and is within 1km of Chigwell Underground Station and the shops and services of Brook Parade area and is considered a relatively sustainable location. The site itself is a redundant school premises and there is no policy to specifically restrict the conversion/extension of such a building subject to compliance with other policy.

The proposal will result in residential development adjacent to, and to the front of other residential properties and therefore the use is acceptable within this residential character.

The proposal provides an ample communal garden for 14 flats which is located to the rear and is well screened from surrounding neighbours by an existing garden wall.

Although the site is included within the Draft Local Plan as a possible site for housing (approximately 9 homes) (SR-0898), as stated above, as the Local Plan is only at 'draft' stage this only carries limited weight at the present time. In addition the need for new homes within the District is not sufficient to outweigh any harm to the Grade II* Listed Building (assessed in detail below).

Design and Listed Building

Grange Court was built in 1774; it has a handsome Georgian façade of classical design. Internally the majority of the principal rooms survive without subdivision and with important architectural features like panelling and chimneypieces. The buff brick house with red brick and stucco dressings is thought to have been refurbished by Sir

Edwin Lutyens for his friend Sir Charles Baring (the owner at the time) in the early 20th century. The grand status of the house is reflected by the large drive at the front. The site has a long and complex history and has played a prominent part in the history of Chigwell settlement. As a Grade II* listed building it is within the top 5.5% of listed buildings.

The proposal was the subject of extensive pre-application discussions and Officers have provided feedback and comment throughout the application process some of which has resulted in amended plans being submitted. Throughout the application process it has been suggested, at site meetings, within the revised design and access statement and most recently by the Applicant's Historic Buildings Advisor, that the extension has been required as a form of 'enabling' development – to help towards the cost of refurbishing, converting and bringing back into long term use the main building to a high level. However, despite requests for further information on this issue no substantiated evidence has been submitted and therefore the Council can only presume that this is not the case. Clearly such information could add weight in favour to any decision, particularly with regards to the addition of such a large, contemporary extension to the rear. Without this information the Council can only assess the proposal on the information which has been submitted.

The best use for any historic building is the one for which it was originally intended; in this case a single dwelling house. Often these uses become redundant and, in the case of Grange Court, the substantial curtailing of its original grounds, along with the large size of the building itself, have rendered its use as a single dwelling house unlikely and impractical. It is accepted that its sensitive conversion into smaller units could provide a viable new use for the building if sufficiently justified. Given the building's national significance as a grade II* listed building (top 5.5% of all listed buildings), the conversion scheme has to be clearly and convincingly justified and great weight afforded to the building's conservation as per paragraph 132 of the NPPF. Part of this justification is evidence that the building has been actively marketed as a single dwelling for an adequate length of time. Evidence has been provided in the form of an email from the estate agents stating that the building was marketed for a period of 6 weeks. In their November 2016 letter, Historic England suggested a marketing period of 6 months. The 6 weeks has therefore fallen far short of the suggested time frame and the submitted marketing information is not acceptable to justify this harm.

Upgrading and services

The conversion of the building into flats will require works to upgrade the fire-proofing, sound and thermal insulation between units. A general approach to this has been outlined across pages 6 and 7 of the Design and Access Statement where suggested interventions could include the use of intumescent paint, veneers and membranes, the removal of lath and plaster finishes and replacement with fire-proof boarding (including the removal and reuse or recreation of architectural detailing), lifting floorboards and laying fire-proof matting, the upgrading of doors (intumescent paints and strips, addition of fire-proof panels, building up doors with fire-proof materials and recreation mouldings etc.), and the replacement of doors to match the existing.

The suggested approach is one of least intervention (i.e. using intumescent finishes wherever possible), however, the levels of intervention required and where within the building the works will take place are an unknown entity. The highest level of intervention (i.e. the replacement of doors, the removal of lath and plaster and replacement with fire-proof boarding, the removal and reuse, or recreation, of architectural detailing), which would be damaging to the significance of the listed

building, may be required throughout the building in order to meet fire safety standards. If this was the case then the level of harm internally would be substantial. Due to the lack of information on the upgrading works a fully informed decision cannot be made on how the conversion of the building will impact on its significance. It is not acceptable to reserve all these details by condition as there are too many variables, including works which could fundamentally undermine the special interest of the building, and, therefore, without this information the conversion of the building to flats cannot be approved.

Similar issues arise with the additional pressure on the building to incorporate more services to serve the 8 flats to be accommodated within the historic building (including the duplex flat in the cupola addition). This same concern was raised by Historic England in their initial pre-application response of November 2016. The Design and Access Statement outlines an approach of minimal intervention and reusing existing voids where possible, but there is still a risk of compromising historic fabric where the ideal of minimal intervention is not possible.

Internal division

The proposed division of the existing building into individual flats largely follows existing rooms, spaces, and natural divisions within the layout. However, in some cases it does also involve the further subdivision of rooms through the introduction of bathroom 'pods' which will stand short of the existing ceiling heights (flats G-1, G-3, and two within 1-2). The Design and Access Statement explains how the pods are intended to preserve historic cornicing and ceilings, however, they will still have a notable impact on the appreciation of the size and space within the rooms to the detriment of their spatial character and architectural quality. The design of these pods is also unclear (other than being constructed of timber stud walling) and they could appear very incongruous within the rooms in which they stand. The Heritage Statement suggests that, due to the substantial alterations the building has been subjected to, its significance internally derives from individual features and rooms as opposed to any original cohesive layout. This is a valid point given the Lutyens alterations to the original Georgian plan form, but the introduction of pods into rooms (and the unknown extent of upgrading works discussed above) undermines this significance by interfering with the space within rooms.

Roof works (removal of joists and creation of vaulted ceilings)

Substantial works to the roof are proposed as part of the application. Some of these works are required to improve the structural stability of the roof and to rationalise additional supports and props which have been introduced in the past, as well as repairing or reinstating roof cladding. To this there are no objections. However, the works also include the removal of the loft joists to create vaulted ceilings on the second floor. This will involve the installation of a steel frame at loft level running around the inside of the walls with beams running front to back to provide the support lost by removing the loft joists. There appears to be no justification for the removal of the loft joists; there is no discussion on the age or condition of the timbers or any benefits arising from creating vaulted ceilings. The extent of intervention in inserting a new steel frame and the potential loss of historic fabric is, in the absence of justification, considered to be unacceptable.

Some of these works, particularly repairing the roof cladding and necessary structural strengthening, along with the rebuilding of the severely leaning chimney, are fully supported as these are clearly justified and necessary for the structural safety of the building. It has been suggested that these works are made subject to a separate listed building consent application so they can be agreed and work undertaken rather

than being delayed by other issues within the current application but this advice was not followed.

Additions to existing building

The proposed additions to the historic building itself, including a two storey side extension to the cupola addition, a first floor front extension, and first floor mansard roof rear extensions, are considered to be acceptable. They have been sensitively designed drawing on the architectural style of the existing building and will provide additional internal space for three of the flats.

Design of rear extension

The demolition of the existing rear range of 20th century buildings raises no objections. They are of no architectural merit and very little historic merit so their replacement with a sensitively designed extension could enhance views of the rear of the listed building. The current design for the rear extension was the subject of lengthy discussions, both at pre-application stage and during the life of the current application, but it has not addressed all of the concerns previously raised. As it stands it is considered to be an unsympathetic addition to the building which would detract from its character and appearance.

The height and bulk of the extension is considered to be largely acceptable (subject to appropriate justification as outlined above) and there are design features, such as mirroring the heights of architectural divisions within the existing building (string courses, coping stones, etc.), that provide some continuity between the two buildings, however, the roof profile and elevational treatment are considered to be unsympathetic. It has been agreed that a more contemporary design approach is preferable over a 'pastiche' mock-Georgian design but the current design is not considered to be a successful addition to the building, particularly given its status as a grade II* listed building and the architectural quality of its Georgian elevations.

The flat-topped mansard-style roof is a dominant feature which does not complement the existing building, particularly when combined with the protruding lift overrun. The fenestration design including angled, zinc-clad bay windows and large openings with glass-fronted balconies, neither enhances the quality of the extension nor complements the main building. A glazed strip has been introduced between the cupola addition extension and the main body of the rear extension to provide a break between old and new, however, this could benefit from being even more pronounced. In addition, the glazed strip to the rear to match, along with the central raised section of wall, are considered to be unnecessary details as they do not enhance the design, particularly as the glazed strip is off centre to the raised section of wall.

The use of zinc, buff brick, red brick, and white stucco largely reflects the use of materials and colours found within the main building, however, the contrasts between the grey, buff, orange/red, and white may make the extension more pronounced than it ought to be. It should remain subservient to the main building and so its material palette should be simplified.

Due to a lack of information and justification for several aspects of the scheme, and the roof design and elevational treatment of the proposed rear extension, all as outlined above, the Council's Listed Building Officer has objected to the proposal. The proposals are considered to be contrary to Local Plan policy HC10 as the works will detract from the building's architectural character and appearance both internally (upgrading works, division of rooms with pods, loss of loft joists and new steel frame) and externally (unsympathetically designed rear extension). The harm caused to the significance of this building at the core of the Chigwell Village Conservation Area also

harms the significance of the conservation area itself, contrary to policies HC6 and HC7.

Furthermore, it is considered that the proposals have not been accompanied by the "clear and convincing justification" required by paragraph 132 of the NPPF and therefore a fully informed decision cannot be made. As per paragraph 134, the harm caused to the significance of the listed building (which could potentially be substantial harm once the required upgrading works are realised) is not outweighed by public benefits. Bringing the building back into use is an accepted public benefit but the current scheme to do so is considered to cause too much harm to the building's significance. The views of the Council's Listed Building Officer echo those of Historic England.

Archaeology

The initial heritage assessment of the site has raised the possibility that it contains remnants of an earlier building. The site formed part of the historic settlement of Chigwell (EHER 45841). It is therefore important that a record is made before any conversion or building work takes place; in view of this the Historic Environment Officer has requested a full archaeological condition inline with national policy which is considered reasonable.

Amenity

The proposed conversion of the main building is considered to result in limited harm to neighbouring amenity, particularly as the previous uses included use as a school boarding house. Although the proposal will result in the building returning to use it is not considered that there will be any excessive loss of amenity in terms of noise or disturbance above that of the previous uses of the building as part of a school. Neighbour concerns with regards to the location of the bicycle racks, the material choice for the driveway and the location of the refuse store (and the subsequent amenity issues involved in these issues) have been addressed and can be covered by condition to ensure correct materials/locations are implemented.

Side windows on the main block are to be retained, however these appear to serve en-suites or bathrooms and therefore could be conditioned to be obscure glazed to preserve or enhance the existing levels of privacy.

The first floor extensions over the existing single storey wings are well set in from the shared boundaries and therefore no loss of light or outlook issues are raised from these elements. No side facing windows are proposed on these new elements.

With regards to the three storey extension this will be located within 2m of the shared boundary with 6 Kings Mews and 5 Barton Close. At this point the extension will have a maximum height of 8.5m. Although separated by a brick wall/fencing and some mature landscaping, the proposal given the height and proximity will be clearly visible from the within the rear gardens and from within these two properties. However there will be a minimum separation distance of some 18m (rear wall of the dwellings to the side wall of the extension) so this will avoid the extension appearing excessively overbearing on to these properties. In addition the top floor of the extension will be slightly recessed behind a parapet wall, which will increase this minimum distance at the full height.

The plans have been revised following Officer concerns regarding loss of privacy to those properties siding onto the development (within Kings Mews and Barton Close) and this has resulted in the addition of angled projecting bay windows. This revision

is considered to alleviate Officer concerns with regards to overlooking (notwithstanding the design issues raised above) to the properties to the north west (3, 4 and 5 Kings Mews) as the windows are orientated away from these properties.

The angled bay windows are not shown as part of the coloured up floor plan and the windows are not full height and on this basis it is presumed that access will not be possible into the bay itself, (i.e. a large window sill is formed) which will avoid direct looking out of the window. However, it is still considered that there is still a strong perception of loss of privacy to No. 6 Kings Mews, 5 Barton Close and on to the neighbouring Barton Close properties as the windows are angled so that they directly overlook the rear gardens of these properties and therefore it is considered that this would result in an unacceptable harm to existing amenity.

The extension is located to the south west of the properties in Kings Mews and Barton Close. Although close to the boundaries it is not considered the proposal will result in such an excessive loss of light, particularly sunlight to the neighbouring properties at this boundary to justify a refusal. As stated above there is a minimum distance of 18m to 5 Barton Close which does reduce down to 12m to the corner of No. 5 Kings Mews, but given these distances, the orientation of the extension compared to the existing residential buildings and the existing built form any loss of light is not considered excessive.

To the rear of the site is Meadow Way, and the extension will be located within 7m of the rear boundary of 24A Meadow Way with a resulting back to back distance of some 19m. Again, although the extension will be clearly visible (although there are limited rear facing windows on the properties in Meadow Way) it is not considered to be so overbearing given this distance to justify a refusal.

There is a full length glazing detail to the rear part of the extension facing onto Meadow Way but this serves bathrooms and therefore this can be conditioned as obscured glazed to avoid any overlooking concerns.

The proposed extension includes balconies on the south west facing elevation these raise privacy issues for both the properties in Meadow Way and the proposed flats within the converted building given that they can be stepped out onto and would provide views towards both the north and south but this could be overcome by a suitable condition requiring screening to the balcony edges which would also preserve the amenity of future occupiers of the extension element.

Highways and Parking

The parking for the proposal has been revised since first submission so that it provides 1 space per a dwelling and 10 visitor parking spaces. Although below the required 2 spaces per a dwelling, in this location, this is considered acceptable given the sustainable location of the site and the generous visitor parking provision.

The revised plans show the provision of a gate but no detail or location is shown. The Highways Officer would object to a gate within 6m of the front boundary, but as no details have been shown this would have to be the subject of a separate application to agree the design and location and therefore is not considered a significant issue at this stage. An informative could be added to any approval stating that approval has not been given for an entrance gate for the avoidance of any doubt.

In terms of highway safety the Essex County Council Highways Officer has no objection to the proposal subject to conditions. The proposal will not generate

significant vehicle movements above that of the previous use and there is turning within the site. Furthermore given the accessible location the parking provision is considered to be more than sufficient for the development and there will be no detriment to highway safety as a result.

Trees and Landscaping

The Tree and Landscape Officer objected to the original scheme and raised particular concern with regards to the car parking layout. The revised parking layout has not adequately addressed the concerns although the car parking spaces have been reduced in numbers. However, the revisions have relocated the large cycle parking area and the refuse store to the front of the site so that these elements would impact on the highly visible and prominent trees and landscaping along the front boundary and would need to be removed which would be detrimental to the character and appearance of the surrounding Conservation Area and the setting of the existing building. In addition the proposal fails to provide satisfactory space for tree replacements for those that will be removed and therefore the proposal is contrary to local policy LL10 and HC6.

Other Issues

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

An ecological report was submitted with the application. The Countryside Team have assessed this report and have requested conditions based on the recommendations concluded within this report and this is considered reasonable.

Refuse Collection

Notwithstanding the Tree and Landscape Officer's concerns regarding the loss of the trees the refuse collection point in terms of size and location is acceptable in terms of collection by the Council's Refuse Contractors.

Conclusion:

Given the assessment outlined above the proposal is recommended for refusal due to the outlined harm to the historic building and conservation area, insufficient information submitted, harm to amenity and harm to trees.

Plan Nos:

FNC-001, FNC- 201, FNC-202, FNC-211 Rev A, FNC-212 Rev A, FNC-213 Rev A, FNC-214 Rev A, FNC-215 Rev A, FNC – 216 Rev A, FNC-221 Rev A, FNC-222 Rev A, 12811/L/2, 12811/B/2, 12811/B/3, 12811/B/4, 12811/B/5, 12811/B/6 and 12811/B/7