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T +44 (0)20 7198 2000
F +44 (0)20 7198 2001
www.lsh.co.uk

Susanna Bedford
Planning, Development and Regulatory Services
Reading Borough Council
Civic Centre
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

Lambert Smith Hampton
United Kingdom House
180 Oxford Street
London
W1D 1NN

Dear Ms Bedford,

REQUEST FOR 2nd FORMAL PRE-APPLICATION MEETING AND FOLLOW-UP WRITTEN ADVICE LETTER – PARTIAL DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDINGS, RENNOVATION AND CONSERVATION OF LISTED CAVERSHAM HOUSE (TO FACILITATE CHANGE OF USE TO C3 DWELLINGHOUSE USE); AND DEVELOPMENT OF NEW RESIDENTIAL (C3 USE CLASS) UNITS AT THE BBC CAVERSHAM PARK, PEPPARD ROAD, READING, RG4 8TZ

Following on from the initial scoping (pre-application meeting) on 19th December 2016 and further to our recent correspondence, please find enclosed a request for the second pre-application meeting and follow up written advice in respect of our revised proposal for partial demolition of existing buildings, renovation and conservation of the existing Listed Caversham House along with development of new residential (C3) units at the BBC Radio Berkshire facility at Peppard Road, Caversham Park in Reading.

Meeting with you and your colleagues was a positive and useful exercise for the BBC consultant team. The meeting itself along with the comments subsequently provided to us has given us a clearer understanding of the issues that would need to be addressed and overcome to reach a more acceptable development proposal for the site.

Below I set out a summary under relevant headings of how I believe we have addressed the Council's comments made in relation to our first development proposal.

QUANTUM OF DEVELOPMENT

In recognition your own comments where you stated that the quantum of development needed to be “significantly reduced”, rather than “a slightly lesser developed scheme”, this second proposal now achieves a significantly reduced amount of development.

The initial proposal comprised a total of 256 new residential units, whereas this significantly reduced scheme now proposes a total of 189 units, taking up a considerably lesser development footprint to that which was first proposed.

SPORT & LEISURE

Both the Council's and Sport England's Sport and Leisure Officers objected to the initial proposal based on the fact that the development would result in the complete loss of the existing sports (cricket). In response to this, the revised proposal now completely retains the sports pitch along with the pavilion and associated car parking.

ARBORICULTURE/TREES & ECOLOGY

On 17th November 2016 upon receipt of our first pre-application development proposal, the Council made an Area Tree Preservation Order (TPO) covering the entirety of the site noting that the trees on the site are of important amenity and historic value, therefore protection via this means was considered necessary.

The matter was discussed at length our first pre-application meeting (19/12/17), with Sarah Hanson explaining she was not satisfied that arboricultural constraints had been properly considered in the development of the proposed layout.

To address this, it was agreed that the applicant team would commission a detailed Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment so that agreement could be reached on which trees on the site were most valuable (need to be retained), which were of relatively average or limited value (should be retained where possible) and which trees were of lesser value (more acceptable for these to be felled or relocated/replanted elsewhere).

A full Tree Survey has now been undertaken by Aspect Arboriculture and a follow-up meeting on site to discuss the results of the Survey took place with Aspect Arboriculture and the Council's Tree Officer (Sarah Hanson) on 06th March 2017.

The Tree Constraints Plan enclosed with this submission numbers each tree on the site with Tree Retention Categories (in accordance with British Standard BS5837); marking the respective tree canopies, the tree Root Protection Areas (RPAs) and each tree's shading arc.

The full Tree Survey and accompanying Arboricultural Impact Assessment work has now been used to positively inform our revised proposal, with the layout of new residential units now avoiding the conflicting with the RPA's and shading arcs of the Category A trees and most Category B trees.

Taking into consideration the Council's concerns over the future sustainability of trees in relation to shading which could affect the quality of residential amenity enjoyed in new homes and private gardens, this revised layout results in far less tree shading and RPA conflicts with new homes. This is a considerable improvement, significantly reducing the arboricultural harm that the proposal could cause.

Whilst the proposal would require some Category B tree removals, this would be kept to a minimum and replacement planting to mitigate this should form part of any future application proposal that reaches outline and or detailed consent stages.

At this pre-application stage this exercise has been undertaken to establish in principle which trees could be removed. The Tree Survey data confirms that a number of trees on the site are not of sufficient quality or the associated BS5837 Category to warrant protection, therefore these trees which are of relatively limited arboricultural value would not need to be retained where they would impose significant constraint on development.

Further to the above where we have established the relative quality of trees across the entire development site, we took note of the Tree Officer and Ecology Officer's objection to development on the Traditional Orchard. The amended proposal would no longer result in the loss of trees on the Orchard.

The Tree Officer also raised concern with the first-round proposal to develop new homes lining the Caversham Drive ('Gateway') parcel driveway into the estate as this would result in the loss of the traditional tree lined approach that is to be expected at the entrance into a parkland/estate.

To address this, the scheme no longer proposes a 'tunnel' of houses leaving no space of the frontages for any meaningful landscaping. Instead, only two new homes are proposed on this 'Gateway' character zone, with these set back well away from the Drive opening and the settings of the Listed Gateway.

The tree comments also suggested that the proposal should try to accommodate the established, mature trees on the site, particularly those specimens with good future potential such as the semi-mature Oak. The revised proposal achieves this where none of the Category A trees (including veteran trees identified by the Tree Officer to be Category A which were first thought to be Category B trees) are proposed to be removed.

Engaging with the Council's Tree Officer (Sarah Hanson) in relation to the detailed Tree Survey for the site, we have taken the Officer's recommendation to change a trees first categorised as Category B trees to Category A trees and revised the proposed layout in order to avoid encroaching into their respective RPAs.

Officers initially took issue with the claim that proposed development utilises existing open space at the Archive Court character zone, in the sense that it is not devoid of vegetation; it comprises of a number of young trees and several mature trees as well as the hedge on the Peppard Road frontage.

The proposal retains the large Category B tree close to Peppard Road, and our proposal has been revised to avoid encroachment into RPAs of the two Category A trees (one of which is the Veteran Lime) adjacent to Archive Court.

The overall amount of tree and hedge removal proposed has been reduced considerably from our first scheme, retaining far more trees, areas of vegetation and hedges. The associated arboricultural and ecological impacts are therefore significantly reduced.

Enclosed with this submission is an updated Ecological Technical Briefing Note addressing the Council's comments raised in relation to habitat loss and appropriate mitigation measures.

At the meeting Officers sought clarification on the future management and maintenance of the grounds. The BBC intends to dispose of the site to a third party developer, therefore it will fall to the developer to clarify the proposed grounds maintenance and management regime that would apply post development.

I can however confirm at this stage that discussions are underway to secure a farmer tenant to continue the grazing which takes place on the meadow land to the south of the main House.

HERITAGE / DESIGN

The Council's heritage advisor raised concern in principle over the number of units indicated within the main Listed Caversham House due to potential likely knock-on effects of compartmentalisation, requirements for additional services, pressure to upgrade the insulation and energy efficiency of the Listed Building and additional car-parking.

The Council's heritage advisor suggested that a smaller number of units would potentially have less of an impact upon the fabric of the building and its special architectural and historic interest.

At this point in time the Council's heritage advisor has not undertaken a full detailed assessment of the main house to establish a full picture of the value and significance of the key internal features. The specific impacts of any proposed scheme are therefore not known. In any case the scheme has been designed (initial internal layouts) to fit within the confines of the principle spaces.

The provision of services and efficiency of the existing building fabric is yet to be tested or defined therefore again, the potential impact in this respect is not known.

With regards to the parking, the existing supply for office use would be more than ample for the proposed number of residential units.

It has been established that there are no heritage impediments to the principle of a sensitive conversion of the principal Listed Building to facilitate a form of residential use. As pointed out in our revised Heritage Statement; as part of any such conversion, the proposals have the opportunity to address harmful and/or less than appropriate interventions arising from its more recent phases of use.

As also noted in greater detail within the Heritage Statement, the number and layout of the units within this section of the site, particularly within the confines of the Registered Park and Garden (RPG) has been reduced and revised respectively to respond better to the surrounding context and to reduce its impact in any views from the Listed Building.

The potential harm that would result to the significance of the RPG and the principal Listed Building is now measured to be less than substantial and when weighed against the public benefits that can be achieved is considered to be acceptable.

TRANSPORT / HIGHWAYS

Minor clarifications were sought concerning assumptions used to forecast potential trip generation figures in our first Transport Assessment. Clarity was also sought on vehicular access arrangements (including for refuse trucks travelling in forward gear) and on the proposed parking (car and cycle) numbers.

Systra (formerly JMP Consultants) have addressed these points in detail within the revised Transport Assessment enclosed with this submission.

Of note in the Assessment is where under the 'Development Impact' section of the report, the assessment confirms the existing development traffic is and has been previously accommodated on the surrounding highway network and as such it is not foreseen that the proposed development traffic would have a significant impact on the operation of the surrounding network.

Likewise, the existing car parking capacity on the site is in the region of 250 spaces, whereas the proposed development is expected to require up to 291 spaces (with additional 12 visitor spaces). This is a very slight increase overall, albeit the parking will be different to that of the existing site which provides the spaces in two places, whereas the proposed development would have spaces spread across the site primarily with on plot parking.

The overall transport impacts of the revised proposal would lead to reduced trip generation numbers and lessen the associated highways impacts when compared against our first-round proposal, which would itself lead to an improvement on the highways impacts of the existing office use.

CONCLUSION

A considerable amount of work has been done to address the Council's comments in relation to our first proposal.

We consider this revised development proposal to be a substantial improvement to the first submission, with a wholly better outcome in respect of the arboricultural, ecological, transport and heritage impacts.

We now look forward to discussing this second-round, refined submission at the meeting scheduled to take place at the Council's offices at 10:00 on Wednesday 29th March 2017.

Yours sincerely



Thaddaeus Jackson-Browne MRTPI

Senior Planning Consultant

DL: +44 (0)207 198 2096

E: TJackson-Browne@lsh.co.uk