

To / Ian Ansell
From / Frederique Caillat
Date / 2nd January 2020
Your ref / EPF/2501/19(LB) & EPF/2502/19
Our ref /
File ref / 000583



Epping Forest District Council

ADDRESS // GRANGE COURT, 72 HIGH ROAD, CHIGWELL, ESSEX IG7 6PT

PROPOSAL // VARIATION OF CONDITION 2 'PLAN NUMBERS' OF EPF/3275/17 (GRADE II* LISTED BUILDING CONSENT FOR CONVERSION, EXTENSION AND PARTIAL DEMOLITION OF EXISTING BUILDING TO PROVIDE 14 FLATS WITH ASSOCIATED PARKING AND LANDSCAPING. CHANGE OF USE FROM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BUILDING (USE CLASS C2) TO RESIDENTIAL (USE CLASS C3)) - ALTERATIONS TO LAYOUT WITHIN LISTED BUILDING, AND TO LAYOUT AND ELEVATIONS IN THE EXTENSIONS

The significance of Grange Court

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. The buff brick house with red brick and stucco dressings was refurbished by Sir Edwin Lutyens for his friend Sir Charles Baring 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 played a prominent role in the history of the settlement of Chigwell.

It is the completeness of the plan form, quality of the architecture and the building's clear legibility as a fine example of its Georgian type, overlaid with Edwardian work that makes it deserving of its grade II* listed status. This places it in the top 5.5% of buildings in the country.

Sir Edwin Lutyens

Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) was initially an Arts and Crafts architect, who became known for being able to imaginatively adapt traditional designs to the requirements of his clients. He is responsible for many country houses, public buildings and war memorials and has been described as equal to that of the best domestic architects of his time.

Relevant planning history

The current owner purchased the site from Chigwell School and sought pre-application advice from Epping Forest District Council in 2016 regarding the change of use to residential, including the possible subdivision of the house into apartments. Subsequently, applications were submitted, ref. LB/EPF/3372/16 & EPF/3367/16 and although the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and Historic England (HE) understood the need for a viable new use for the building, the resulting scheme was found too harmful and the applications were refused.

Subsequently in 2017, a revised scheme, ref. LB/EPF/3275/17 & EPF/3264/17 was submitted and granted for the conversion of the listed building and rebuilding of a large extension to the rear, to provide 14 flats with associated parking and landscaping. This approved scheme was the result of comprehensive and cooperative discussions between the applicants, the LPA and HE in order to find a viable use of the listed building and the wider site, which would secure its

m e m o

future. The construction of a large rear extension aimed to provide an additional six apartments on site with modern facilities and standards. This would enable the conversion and conservation works needed to the listed building to be undertaken. This balance was struck so that, despite the conversion of the listed building, the level of harm to its significance could be controlled to a greater degree.

Alongside this planning permission, conditions were added to ensure the proposed works preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the building, in accordance with the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and policy HC10 of the adopted Local Plan and Alterations. Condition 7, required “*A schedule showing the retention of doors and doorcases, fire surrounds, decorative plaster work, panelling and other similar features, shall be approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works, and thereafter completed only in accordance with the agreed details.*” As witnessed as part of a site visit with Andrew Martindale (HE) on the 25th July 2019 a high level of strip out of the buildings had been undertaken. Although justified by “*enabling and investigative works*” this has not been accompanied by any recording schedule or photographic records, as per requested by Condition 7.

On the same site visit, interventions to the roof were observed. As part of the 2017 scheme, substantial works to the roof were approved, these comprised of removal of loft joists and creation of vaulted ceilings, works to improve the structural stability of the roof, rationalisation of supports and props, repairing and reinstating roof cladding and finally the installation of a steel frame at loft level with front to back beams to provide support, lost by removal of loft joists.

These works did not include removal of any part of the external roof cladding nor the removal of part of the roof frame, both of which were witnessed on site. The works which have been carried out to remove parts of the roof clearly lie outside of the consent granted, and cannot be considered to be “*enabling and investigative works*”. Interventions to this extent would clearly have required a new application and consent.

Following our visit of the site, the LPA requested the cessation of the unlawful works and the submission of a schedule of reinstatement works, which has not been provided so far.

In 2019, pre-application advice, ref. EF\2019\ENQ\00330, was sought on revisions to the approved 2017 scheme which included both internal and external interventions to the fabric of the listed building; insertion of a passenger lift, the creation of a roof terrace and resulting modifications to the building layout. These drastic interventions, which were not supported by any clear and convincing justifications, as required by para. 194 of the NPPF (2019), were found to be in contradiction with the original approach of the granted scheme and the collaborative work achieved so far. In our response, we raised strong concerns about the unacceptable level of harm it would cause to the grade II* listed building and stated that such a scheme would not be supported at formal application stage.

The following comments are based on the submitted plans and associated documentation, information in the Heritage Statement (including the Addendum) and the historical analysis of the ground, first and second floor layouts (provided as part of the granted Listed Building Consent application of 2017). The assessment of the impact of this scheme, without supportive information of a “level of detail [which is] proportionate to the assets’ importance” (para. 189 of the NPPF, 2019), is challenging. There is a real risk in not being able to assess the impact of the proposal onto something that is no longer there. The significance of the rooms and spaces which no longer contain their original features is very difficult to appreciate.

The current scheme

Prior to commenting on the content of the scheme we feel we should highlight the wording of the proposal statement “*Variation of condition 2 “Plan Numbers” of EPF/3275/17*”. In our view this wording does not reflect the extent of the proposed interventions to the listed building and how the resulting scheme would depart, both in intention and level of harm, from the granted 2017 scheme. This scheme should be considered as a new proposal which introduces interventions which go beyond the level of harm previously agreed to secure the future of the site.

m e m o

As per the pre-application scheme, this proposal includes internal and external interventions to the fabric of the listed building, to which we have previously raised strong concerns. Internally, this consists of the insertion of a passenger lift through the central core of the listed building with resulting changes to the building layout and alterations to its historic fabric. Externally, the main proposed alterations will affect the roof form to provide a pair of terraces linked through a communal hallway and lift access.

THE INSERTION OF A PASSENGER LIFT WITHIN THE LISTED BUILDING

The HE guidance *Easy Access to Historic Buildings* (2015) gives guidance to all those own, manage or occupy buildings and is the document used as source material in the Heritage Addendum of this scheme. We acknowledge that the insertion of a lift into a historic building allows for much greater access to all parts, the harm that this may cause should be weighed against the benefit that it can bring to the public. In the case of Grange Court, the listed building is proposed to be converted into private apartments, which greatly lessens the wider public benefit that the insertion of a passenger lift can add. Only four of the proposed eight apartments to be created in the listed building could benefit from access to the lift, whereas the impact of its insertion would affect the whole three storeys.

Resulting Impact on the historic fabric

The principle of the insertion of a lift into the listed building has previously been discussed and discounted by both the LPA and HE due to the unacceptable level of harm it would cause to the significance of the grade II* listed building. The whole approach of the consented 2017 scheme was, as previously stated, to minimise the level of harm to Grange Court. This explains why the rear extension has been designed to meet modern standards, including a lift, to give greater access to the whole site.

As part of HE guidance *Easy Access to Historic Buildings* (2015), the location of a lift into a historic building should be considered carefully. The guidance states that:

“Passenger and platform lifts are best located in the less-sensitive parts of historic buildings, for example secondary staircases and light wells or in areas that have already been disturbed or altered. Pits and openings for lift shafts should be carefully located to avoid loss or damage to significant timbers, archaeological remains or decorative surfaces.”

The intended location of the passenger lift in Grange Court is through the central core of the historic building, and therefore cannot be considered to be “located in the less-sensitive” part of the building. The proposed insertion of the passenger lift and the resulting changes to the layout configuration will cause irreversible loss of historic fabric. “Significant timbers” and “decorative surfaces” in the form of original floors, ceilings, cornicing and panelling will be lost over the full three storeys. This is contrary to the more considerate approach that had been taken in the approved 2017 scheme where, for example, bathroom “pods” standing short of the existing ceiling height to preserve historic cornicing and ceiling, had been agreed.

The level of harm resulting from the loss of interior features and structural elements is considered to be unacceptable as it would irreversibly diminish and erode the significance of the building.

Resulting impact on the historic layout

Grange Court has undergone several phases of development which are still readable today. This is due to the fact that these successive architectural interventions have respected and worked with the building to add to it, increasing the building’s significance over time. This historic layout is particularly vulnerable to inappropriate changes.

The consent granted in 2017 ensured that the layout of Grange Court, as a typical Georgian mansion, was still readable after its conversion. As a compromise, it was agreed to lose the line of sight (front to garden circulation) and to insert a door (at a natural break point) between the Lutyens staircase and corridor. This allowed the creation of self contained

m e m o

apartments, of decent size, while retaining the spatial integrity and completeness of the principal rooms and the Lutyens areas.

The insertion of a passenger lift, as proposed in the current scheme, will cause changes to the historic layout that will result in the loss of significant plan forms. Amongst these changes is the creation of a new communal entrance hall through the partitioning of the original entrance room. This will distort the reading of this historic entrance room and sense of space, eroding its status. Evidence for the entirety of this room is demonstrated through the heights of the dado around the room. The height of the dado to the left of the entrance door (on entering) is the original (Georgian) height. The dado to the rest of the room, which is higher, is a later replacement fitting. This is confirmed through the photographs in the document "*Ground Floor Historic Analysis*".

Although we acknowledge the argument to reinstate the Georgian entrance as the main way in to the building, we feel that on balance, this would cause further harm due to the fragmentation of the internal layout and therefore, should be resisted.

A further impact of providing access to the passenger lift, is the division of the Lutyens corridor and staircase which will diminish the appreciation of their presence and completeness. This will prevent these significant areas, designed by Lutyens, from being fully experienced. In our view, these areas are the additional contribution, that makes Grange Court of more than special interest and designated at grade II*.

An additional change to the historic layout is in the NE extension, a room that has been designed by Lutyens (Ground Floor Historic Analysis). Rather than being retained as an entire room as in the approved 2017 scheme, this has been split into two spaces with a staircase inserted into one half. This would result in further fragmentation of the internal layout through partitioning and loss of historic fabric harming the original intention of the room, its volume and completeness.

ALTERATIONS TO THE ORIGINAL ROOF TO PROVIDE A TERRACE

As part of the current proposal, it is proposed to create a pair of terraces connected through a communal hallway and lift access which will also create a new structure on the roof. The proposed changes will give the roof an uncharacteristic and unexpected form for a building of this type and status which, despite not being visible from public view, will irreversibly alter its significance.

In addition, as raised at pre-application stage, clear and convincing justifications for these major changes to the roof form, have not been provided as part of the supporting information, as required in para. 194 of the NPPF (2019).

CHANGES TO THE APPROVED DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED EXTENSION BUILDING

As part of the approved scheme for the redevelopment of the whole site and to achieve the financial viability of the project, evident compromise has been made to the scale and massing of the granted rear extension to provide an additional six apartments. In order to lessen the visual and spatial impact of the large rear extension onto the listed building and its setting, careful attention had been given to its design. The proposed changes to the granted scheme, which are detailed below, are considered to be contrary to the approved design approach. The cumulative impact of these changes is considered to increase the overall bulk of the extension and its dominance over the listed building.

- The proposed new hipped roof form rather than the approved flat roof increases the height and dominance of the new extension over the listed building. This roof form does not follow the modernist design approach that was agreed.
- The glazed link connecting the original building and the new extension has an increased number of glazing bars going against the intention of a minimalist design approach. This creates an unwanted greater closeness between the listed building and the new extension and reinforces the dominance of the extension over the original building and the rear façade. This is a particularly sensitive location as the part of the listed building where the link is attached, stands lower. A

m e m o

much clearer separation was supported by the Conservation Team and Historic England with a frameless link, denoting the old from the new and reducing the pressure on the rear façade.

- On the North East elevation, the massing is increased through the reduction of the bays from four to two which are significantly larger than the approved scheme.
- On the South façade, it is unclear whether the approved channel that divides it will remain. The retention of the channel is important to break the bulk of the façade, especially as it fronts the listed building.
- We do welcome the new glazing elements in the façade composition which reference the rhythm of the listed building.
- The inset elements around the windows have been overly enlarged in height and width and are no longer in line with the adjacent openings, which results in a less neat façade composition.
- Finally, there has been an increase in the number of dormers which adds to the bulk of the roof.

Recommendations

For the reasons expressed above, we raise strong concerns and OBJECT to the current proposal and recommend this listed building consent and planning application to be REFUSED.

The proposed interventions, which have not been supported by any clear and convincing justifications, are found to be in contradiction with the original approach of the granted 2017 scheme, which promoted a balance between enabling development and the conservation of the listed building. It is considered that, as it stands, the proposal, would cause an unacceptable level of harm to the significance of the grade II* listed building, irreversibly eroding its significance through the loss of its historic layout, building form and historic fabric.

These comments should be read in conjunction with the comments from Andrew Martindale (Principal Advisor, Historic England) who has raised strong objections to this current application due to the degree of harm that will be caused to the grade II* listed building.

This is supported by policy HC6, HC7, HC10 and HC12 of our Local Plan and Alterations (1998 and 2006), policy DM7 of our Submission Version Local Plan (2017), and paragraphs 181, 184, 189, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195 and 196 of the NPPF (2019).

m e m o