HERITAGE IMPACT STUDY

GOODYER HOUSE

CARAVAN LANE

RICKMANSWORTH

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GRANT AUDLEY-MILLER MA Oxf, DipTP, MRTPI, IHBC
Land at Goodyer House, Caravan Lane, Rickmansworth

1. Introduction

This statement has been prepared by Grant Audley-Miller, MA Oxf, Dip TP, MRTPI, IHBC, for KMN (SED). The purpose of the statement is to assess the impact of the proposal for the demolition of Goodyer House and the construction of a new 3-storey residential building with car parking.

My advice is made solely on the basis of the heritage issues. These are the impact of the proposals on the character and appearance of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area.

My competence for undertaking the work required is based on over thirty five years professional experience as Chartered Town Planner and member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. My duties have involved advising on urban design, listed building matters and policies and proposals for a wide range of conservation areas.

2. The site and surroundings

The site is situated at the northern end of Rickmansworth’s High Street on the edge of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area.

The majority of the site is currently a tarmac car park. The boundaries to the site consist of modern utilitarian close boarded fences and chain link security fencing.

Goodyer House, a twentieth century residential building converted to offices, is located to the western end of the site adjacent to which are two utilitarian prefabricated garages.

To the north is a steep embankment on which runs the London Underground.

To the south are the playing fields and tennis courts of the St Joan of Arc Roman Catholic Secondary School.

Immediately to the west is a site which has planning permission for 42 sheltered units for the elderly. The three-storey flat roofed buildings on the site were being demolished when I visited the site. Further west is No 1 High Street, a three-storey converted building (formerly a cinema) with a shallow pitched roof of undistinguished design. Opposite this building is Cloisters Court, a residential four storey apartment...
building under a flat roof. Permission was granted on appeal in 2008 for the demolition of No 1 High Street and its replacement by a four-storey block of flats of modern design under a flat roof of similar design to Cloisters Court.

3. **The Proposal**

A detailed description and justification of the proposal is provided in the Design and Access Statement.

4. **National Policy Guidance on the Historic Environment**

- PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment was published on the 23rd March 2010 together with the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide.

i. Policy GE9.1 of PPS5 states that there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets, and the more significant the designated heritage asset, the greater the presumption should be in favour of its conservation.

ii. The PPS defines a conservation area as a designated heritage asset. Policy GE9.5 states that where an element does not positively contribute to its significance, local planning authorities should take into account the desirability of enhancing or better revealing the significance of a Conservation Area, including, where appropriate, through development of that element.

iii. Policy HE7.5 states that local planning authorities should take into account the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to the character and local distinctiveness of the historic environment. The consideration of design should include, scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and use.

iv. Policy HE10.1 requires that when considering applications for development that affect the setting of a heritage asset, applications 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. When considering applications that do not do this, any such harm should be weighed against the wider benefits of the application. The greater the negative impact on the significance of the heritage asset, the greater the benefits that will be needed to justify approval.
• Building on Context: new development in historic areas (2001)

This joint EH/CABE publication states that:

“Successful architecture can be produced either by following historic precedents closely, by adapting them or by contrasting with them”.

5. Relevant Planning Policy

The relevant development plan policies are those of the Adopted Three Rivers District Local Plan (2001). The relevant 'saved' Local Plan policies are:

Policy C1 Development within Conservation Areas
Policy C6 Demolition in Conservation Areas
Policy CP12 Design of Development

6. Relevant Planning History

APP/P1940/A/07/2051754: Demolition of 1 High Street and erection of three-storey office
APP/P1940/E/07/2051752: Demolition of 1 High Street
10/1276/FUL and 10/1277/CAC: Demolition of existing office buildings and erection of 42 sheltered apartments for the elderly.

7. The designated heritage asset

The heritage asset relevant to this proposal is the Rickmansworth Conservation Area which was designated in 1974. In terms of the guidance in PPS 5 it is defined as a ‘designated heritage asset’.

The Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Character Assessment (RCAACA) was carried out by the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust on behalf of the Three Rivers District Council and published in August 1993. The appraisal and character assessment sub-divides the conservation area into discrete localities, with the application site lying within the High Street East-Northway area. It describes the area in some detail but particularly relevant to the consideration of this proposal are the statements that:

• The area has always been a mixed community of industry and housing.
• The interest and activity generated by the brewery and malt house has unfortunately been lost and replaced by unsympathetic modern development.
• The railway bridge provides a useful boundary but its appearance is marred by security fencing.
• The conservation area boundary ends at the railway bridge which is a very poor focal point, festooned with cables.
• Review all car parks as the majority are unsightly with no attention to landscaping.

It should be noted that neither the Rickmansworth Conservation Area Appraisal and Character Assessment text nor map identify any significant features on the application site. Goodyer House is not identified in that document as a Building of Local Interest.

8. The Character of the Area

The proposal site, which includes Goodyer House and the car park was historically adjacent to the Salters Brewery which operated from the early 18th Century until the 1920's. After its disposal various uses occupied the brewery buildings which were finally demolished in 1972. As a brewery it was characterised by substantial buildings, evidence of which can clearly be seen on the First and Second Edition OS MAPs 1871 and 1898 illustrated in the (RCAACA). In addition, other substantial buildings dominated the streetscape, including the Georgian mansion which now forms part of the St Joan of Arc Secondary School and a malthouse that existed on the west side of the High Street. Historically this gave this part of the High Street a character that was distinctive from the more modestly scaled buildings further west. This marked difference in character is reflected in the Townscape Areas identified in the (RCAACA) which distinguishes between the High Street East-Northway and the Central High Street areas.

From my visit to the site and the surrounding area there is nothing to lead me to conclude that this appraisal of the general character of the area is incorrect. However, since the appraisal was adopted a number of developments have taken place or been granted permission. These developments, which include Cloisters Court and No 1 High Street, consist of high density, large footprint, multi-storey buildings, predominantly under flat roofs. This has resulted in the majority of buildings in the vicinity of the site now having flat roofs. Even the nearest listed building, the Georgian mansion at the St Joan of Arc Secondary School is of substantial scale and its roof is masked by a parapet.
In considering an appeal into the demolition of 1 High Street and the erection of a three storey office (APP/P1940/A/07/2051754) the inspector noted that the majority of the buildings in the vicinity of that site have flat roofs.

**The significance of Goodyer House**

Goodyer House was built as a modest mid 20th century dwelling house. It does not display any originality or innovative design features. The materials are not of the highest quality and the architectural detailing is simply executed.

Any traces of its original curtilage have been comprised by the hardstanding for car parking, the utilitarian shed and garage and the conservatory extension.

The building displays no flair or originality and little competence in its design and the interior is of basic quality and design for the period. In my considered opinion the building is not of architectural or historic interest nor does it meet criteria for adding to the statutory list or a local list.

The Adopted Local Plan Policy C6 ‘Demolition in Conservation Areas’ sets out a range of factors that will be taken into account in assessing whether a building makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area. In assessing the significance of Goodyer House I have considered each of those factors below:

**Has the building qualities of age, style, materials, or any other characteristics which reflect those of at least a substantial number of buildings in the Conservation Area?**

Goodyer House is a plain mid twentieth century rendered building of simple and unassuming design with brick detailing under a tiled roof. It could not be defined as innovative nor is it of a particularly high standard or quality. It is atypical of the more traditional 18th and 19th century domestic buildings that characterize the conservation area to the west along the High Street but also of the more substantial modern buildings in the immediate vicinity.

Unlike many of the more traditional domestic style buildings in the Conservation Area it does not front onto the High Street, instead fronting onto Caravan Lane, from which it is visible.
The exterior of the building has been compromised by a number of extensions and alterations, including a conservatory, modern UPVC windows and various pipes, ducts and services boxes and the curtilage subsumed into the car park. The interior has been similarly compromised by various alterations, including the removal of the original staircase, doors and fireplaces.

**Does it relate by age, materials, or in any other historically significant way to adjacent listed buildings and contribute positively to their setting?**

Goodyer House does not relate in any significant way to adjacent listed buildings. The nearest listed building is the Georgian building of the St Joan of Arc Secondary school but I do not consider that Goodyer House, especially bearing in mind the intervening buildings affects the setting of that building.

**Does it, individually or as part of a group, serve as a reminder of the gradual development of the settlement in which it stands, or of an earlier phase of growth?**

As an unassuming example of a 20th Century dwelling house Goodyer House does not help us to understand the development of Rickmansworth or the growth of the adjacent school, railway and brewery which are the significant features of this part of the conservation area. It is not of a size, scale and design of a traditional brewery building and has no design motifs or signage that would associate it with the former Salters Brewery.

**Does it have a significant historic association with established features, such as the road layout, burgage plots, or landscape feature?**

Goodyer House does not have any significant association with the High Street, burgage plots or any landscape features. Although fronting onto Caravan Lane, from my inspection of the historical mapping, it does not in my opinion, have or reflect, any significant historic association with Caravan Lane.

**Does the building have landmark qualities, or contribute to the quality of recognisable spaces?**

The building is not a landmark building, especially taking into account its position and the height and scale of the adjacent commercial buildings, school and railway embankment.
Does it reflect the traditional functional character of, or former uses within the area?

In my considered opinion this twentieth century building is not significant in reflecting the area as a mixed community of industry and housing.

Has it significant historic associations with local people or past events, or a noted architect?

From my examination of the local records there is no evidence to suggest that the building has any such historic associations.

‘If a public building, does its use and internal public space contribute to the character or appearance of the Conservation Area?’

Goodyer House is not a public building and this factor is not relevant to the consideration of the current proposal.

‘Its contribution to the building’s surroundings and the Conservation Area as a whole.’

Goodyer House has a relatively discrete presence in the conservation area and because of its siting and design makes an insignificant contribution to its surroundings and the conservation area as a whole. This is particularly because of the scale of the buildings in the vicinity and the railway embankment and its position within the car park.

I have taken account of the pre application comments from the Council that Goodyer House ‘is very much visible from Caravan Lane and in my view contributes to the character of the Conservation Area hereabouts’. But for all of the above reasons I do not consider that it is a significant element of the Rickmansworth Conservation Area, the designated heritage asset, nor does it make a positive contribution to its character or appearance. Accordingly I do not consider that there is justification for its retention if it can be demonstrated that the proposals for the development of the site contribute positively to the character, distinctiveness and significance of the historic environment. This is consistent with the advice in PPS5 and policy C6 of the Local Plan.
Appraisal of the proposed new building

The Design and Access Statement prepared by PDP Architects sets out how the design of the proposal will not only reflect its age and utilise modern materials and technology but take account of the architectural emphasis of the surrounding area and the materials used. It is brick faced to acknowledge its neighbours and to lend a contrast in the component scale. Generous glazing is designed to further accentuate the modern approach.

The PPS5 Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide under New Development: design in context advises that a successful scheme will be one whose design has taken account of a number of characteristics of the surroundings as appropriate. It goes on to stress that some or all of the factors may influence scale, height, massing, alignment, materials and proposed use in any successful design.

I have therefore addressed those characteristics appropriate to the proposal as follows:

From my visit to the property and the surrounding area, there is nothing to lead me to conclude that the (RCAACA) assessment of High Street East-Northway is incorrect. Historically there were substantial brewery buildings and malthouses located in this part of the conservation area. But what is relevant to considering the impact of the current proposal is the variety and nature of new development that has occurred or been permitted adjacent to the application site in recent times. The buildings that have either replaced the traditional buildings associated with brewing or now have permission consist of high density, large footprint, multi-storey buildings predominantly under flat roofs. This has meant that the character and appearance of the conservation area has continued to evolve since it was designated in 1974.

The size, height and scale of the proposed new building reflects the scale, height, massing and pattern of development of the buildings that predominate in the immediate vicinity and this leads me to conclude that the proposal would not unacceptably affect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

In considering the impact of the proposed building on the heritage asset I have also taken account of its design. The use of a palette of materials including brick, render and cladding, generous areas of glazing and balconies all add interest to the building as well as reflecting the style and detailing of adjacent developments. The use of a sedum roof for example is an appropriate response to secure sustainable development in historic areas in line with Policy HE1 of PPS 5. I am confident that
the design will result in a sustainable quality building of its time, the design details and materials of which reflect the character this part of the conservation area.

As well as the design of the new building account needs to be taken of the space around it. The space about the building is such that views can be maintained around it so that it will not result in a cramped appearance.

The site is currently dominated by the adjacent commercial buildings and the railway embankment and in my opinion the proposed building can sit comfortably alongside such features without having an adverse impact on views and vistas. Indeed the presence of the high quality building in place of the large car park will be a considerable enhancement of the site, when viewed from the footpath and indeed from passing trains. The space about the proposed buildings also allows for the provision of significant landscaping.

Of relevance in considering the impact of the proposed buildings is land use. The residential use proposed is appropriate for this part of the conservation area which is described in the (RCAACA) thus “This area has always been a mixed community of industry and housing.”

There are a number of positive aspects that should be taken into account when considering how the scheme will preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation. I consider that the positive aspects that need to be taken into account are the removal of the:

- utilitarian prefabricated garages.
- utilitarian boundary treatments.
- extensive and poorly surfaced car park with no landscaping and the parked cars is a dominant and negative feature of the conservation area

Each of the above elements are prominent and negative features of the conservation area when viewed from Caravan Lane but I place particular emphasis on the last point as the (RCAACA) recommends that all car parks should be reviewed ‘as the majority are unsightly with no attention to landscaping’.

The design is appropriate for its context and will make a positive contribution to the appearance, quality and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and I am satisfied that it will sit comfortably with the buildings in the vicinity. This is consistent with the guidance in PPS5 and paras 79 and 80 of the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide. It is also consistent with the advice in ‘Building in context: new development in historic areas’ (2001) which states that successful architecture can be produced either by following historic precedents closely, by adapting them or by contrasting with them. Furthermore it does not conflict with the saved policies C1
Development within Conservation Areas, C6 Demolition in Conservation Areas and CP12 Design of Development of the Three Rivers Adopted Local Plan.

The proposal will contribute to the continuing incorporation of change in the conservation area and with its contemporary design that takes into account its context and the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area will, in my opinion, preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

1. Conclusions

The Rickmansworth Conservation Area has been designated as a conservation area where contemporary development has contributed to its evolving and changing character.

Goodyer House is a pleasant but undistinguished building which in my opinion does not make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

The proposed new building takes into account its context and makes a positive contribution to the appearance, character, quality and local distinctiveness of the historic environment and will make a positive and sympathetic contribution to the continuing change in the conservation area. It takes full account of the advice and guidance in PPS5 and the Historic Environment Practice Guide and policies C1, C6 and CP12 of the Adopted Three Rivers Local Plan.

For all the reasons set out above, it is my considered professional opinion that the proposal for Goodyer House and the adjacent car park can be justified in conservation terms.

Grant Audley-Miller 4 November 2010