SITE ADDRESS: St Martins, Queen Street, Gillingham SP8 4DZ

APPLICATION REF: 2/2018/1437/FUL

PROPOSAL: Erect care building, 59 units, communal areas, ancillary facilities, modify accessed, form pedestrian accesses, parKng, servicing, courtyard and landscaping and demolish existing buildings.

**CONSERVATION OFFICER CONSULTATION COMMENTS**

CASE OFFICER: Hamish Laird

SITE: Yes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | No Comment |
|  | Support |
|  | Support subject to conditions and or modifications (please set out below) |
| x | Unable to support (for reasons set out below) |
|  | No objections |

**CONSERVATION COMMENTS:**

**Significance**

Gillingham, although now vastly expanded, is likely of Saxon origin with a tight knit historic core centred around the church, and historic development radiating out along the narrow arterial links in a ribbon development form. A large area idenitified as a Site of Archaeological Importance emanates from the church and extends east and north. There is a strong medieval and post medieval character to the centre with rubble stone, ashlar and brick dressings being predominant and buildings generally of one to two storeys creating an intimate human scale. The site lies within the core but along one of these radiating routes, immediately outside of the Conservation Area boundary on this eastern side of Queen Street, (although the CA extends far more northerly on the western side, including the building group opposite, known as St Martin’s Square’s and the present draft CAA proposes a boundary extension, which will set the site well within the new designation). As such, the site presently forms one of the key gateway entries to the Conservation Area and can be clearly seen on the approach from the north access off the B3092 relief road. Views along the street from the north show the important inter-relationship of the site with the landmark Grade I church tower, while views form the town reveal the repetition of relatively small scale gable ends processing along the street and leading to a focal point occupied by the unlisted Tower House, a further undesignated heritage asset. The site at present is occupied by a substantial C19 detached brick villa, recognised in both the Gillingham NP and by Historic England, as a building worthy of undesignated heritage asset status, due to its local importance for having been constructed by a local builder to demonstrate all of the building materials produced by the town, Gillingham brick being a key local industry. This townscape villa is set within a spacious plot and although some is utilised as car-parking, the rest laid to lawn, provides an area of green open space visible from the public domain with the gaps to either side allowing through views to the backdrop of trees, which contributes positively to the streetscene. A such, this is characteristic of the street which is noted for the clearly visible churchyard area (an IOWA), gardens glimpses visible via gateways and lush planting interspersed with the built form along its route.

The site also has in part, (to east and south) historic walls, the latter (likely listed) forming the party boundary with the Grade II listed Lime Tree House and views over provides a visual inter-relationship between the listed building curtilage and St Martins’ plot. A physical and visual relationship also exists between the site and the historic St Martins Square, its three sides enclosed by historic cottages sandwiched between listed No.2 and Church House to the south and Broadhayes to the north, key features which reinforce the overall important historic character and appearance of the streetscene.

**Proposal**

The proposed scheme for a residential home, in contrast to the present low key form of the villa set within a spacious garden setting, comprises of a single large scale massing of two and half to three storey form, occupying the whole of the site and resulting the demolition of the existing villa. The scale of the development takes no reference from the surrounding relatively small scale built form and despite the attempts to break up the façade with the use of integrated gable projections and slightly lower level ridgelines with dormers, results in an overly dominant development, which appears completely out of context with its setting . The density of the development is also overly intensive, resulting in the loss of all through views and as a consequence the inter-relationship between the built and natural environment formed by the backdrop of trees, green open spaces and sightlines to neighbouring garden, which is as important characteristic of the streetscene and adjacent CA. As such, this cannot be considered to preserve or enhance the setting of the neighbouring heritage assets. The proposed loss of the undesignated townscape villa is also considered to undermine the significance of the present streetscene and contribute negatively.

As regards the neighbouring listed buildings, there appears to have been no consideration as to their significance and subsequent impact of such a scale of development visible from their outlook, which is further exacerbated by the monolithic and brutal execution of the side and rear elevations, which make no attempt to respect their surroundings or safeguard the settings of the listed building. Such uninspiring elevations will be clearly visible on the approach from the north and be further detrimental to the significance of the town’s historic core.

The Gillingham NP seeks to maintain, protect and enhance heritage assets which aligns with the NPPF which requires proposals to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area, demonstrating high standards of design and detailing that reflect scale and distinctive character of the area.

Similarly the NPPF states, great weight is also required to be given to the conservation of listed buildings and their setting as they are irreplaceable. The present scheme fails to take into account the importance of this gateway location and the inter-relational views between site and church, and the character, materials, scale and detailing of the of the historic streetscene.

Although some reference is made to the similarity of height of Tower House, the latter relates well visually to the location and consists of a far more low key massing, which relates well to its corner plot which dilutes the intensive impact of its presence.

**Summary**

The scheme fails to relate to the special character and appearance of the location and so does not contribute a development that respects the immediate scale, massing, form, and detailing that safeguards the immediate heritage assets. The proposed design neither preserves and enhances or reinforces the local distinctiveness as required via the NPPF but instead contributes an overly dominant and imposing massing that is completely out of context with the setting and visually compares with the historic focal buildings in the street and contributes less than substantial harm to the neighbouring listed buildings contrary to the NP and HE Conservation Principles.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Unable to support.

In determining the proposals due consideration has been given to Section 16 (Paragraphs 190,192,193,194,195,196,200) of the NPPF, Section(s) 66/72 of the 1990 Act and Policy 5 of the Local Plan

**Conditions:**

**Informatives:**

OFFICER: Jen Nixon

TITLE: Conservation Officer

DATE: 10/1/18