

Consultee Comments for Planning Application

2/2018/1437/FUL

Application Summary

Application Number: 2/2018/1437/FUL

Address: St Martins Queen Street Gillingham SP8 4DZ

Proposal: Erect extra care residential building comprising 60 No. residential units, shared communal areas and ancillary facilities. Modify vehicular accesses, form pedestrian accesses, parking, servicing, courtyard and landscaping, carry out associated works.

Case Officer: Mr Richard Temple

Consultee Details

Name: Ms Jen Nixon

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On Behalf Of: Conservation Officer South

Comments

CONSERVATION OFFICER COMMENTS ON AMENDMENTS

COMMENTS:

Following former consultee comments objecting to the original proposal, a revised scheme has now been submitted which has amended the design of the building but sadly still involves the loss of the undesignated heritage asset, known as St. Martins House.

As stated previously, the plot is located immediately to the existing Conservation Area, so as to be surrounded by the heritage asset on two sides -west and south, (although it should be noted that a draft Conservation Area Appraisal is in production which would propose to include the site within it). The site is also significant as it sits at one of the prime gateways to the historic core, the open green spaces and former garden, now car park surrounding the plot buildings, provide important views eastwards towards the treed flood plain of the Mill Stream and Shreen Water (draft CAA). Such relationship between the built and natural environment reflects the historic connection Gillingham historically had with its rural setting. The site in addition, forms the eastern side of St Martins Square, a historic medieval site, enclosed by a characterful building group, encompassing two prominent listed buildings, with a number of others in close proximity, populating the street. Views along Queen Street from the north, show the important inter-relationship of the site with the landmark Grade I church tower, while views from the town reveal the human scale of the buildings processing along the street and leading to a focal point occupied by the Tower House, another undesignated heritage asset.

Revised scheme

It is acknowledged that DWG. PD002/D now shows a revised layout with the central section of the

proposed building façade set back from the original building line, creating a new focus to the front elevation framed by the side wings and softened by the roadside planting, which takes reference from the historic relationship with green spaces. As such, the change in wall planes succeeds in breaking up the former designs linear appearance and roadside concentration and responds to the sites key position opposite the approach in from the relief road. However, the consistent three storey height and solidity of the building throughout, still results in an imposing streetscene presence, which unfortunately is not mitigated by the overly dominant and imposing dimensions of the four forward projecting gable ends and their relative blandness, though lack of detail and features (ie: recessed eaves line, surface plainness and windows). Furthermore, the scheme proposes a mix of GRP dormers, UPVC windows, concrete tiles and grey stock brick detailing, none of which are representative of the historic setting

The side elevations, although much improved from the flat roofed monolithic appearance of the initial scheme, are still unrelenting in height and massing with their long ridge lines and the overall overwhelming mass and scale, taking no reference from the human scale noted as a characteristic of street.

Any scheme in this location, so immediate to heritage assets, should be driven by the assessment of significance and subsequent assessment of impact, as was advised at pre-app stage ref: PRE/2015/0274/PREAPP, which recommended retention of St Martins, due to its local interest and respect for the various heritage assets and streetscene. However, although there has been an attempt to create some separation between neighbouring buildings via provision for parking and a driveway to the sides of the plot, both the position of Owl Cottage, a exceptionally small scale bungalow to the north and Lime Tree House to the South, a listed building, set tight to the site boundaries, results in an all too obviously conflict of scale and appearance. Similarly, the two storey slack hipped form of the listed buildings opposite (Broadhayes) will be seen juxtaposed across the narrow bottleneck with the towering three storey projecting gables of the proposed development.

Summary

It is acknowledged that the revisions have addressed some concerns and that the brief is not an easy one to meet on this particular site, however the overwhelming mass of the development fails to safeguard the significance of the neighbouring heritage assets and their settings and does not uphold the guidance within the Gillingham Town Design Statement, which identifies the character, pattern and materials of Queen Street and its environs and advocates through its guidelines (5,6,8,10,11 and 12) the importance of development reflecting the height and massing of the existing buildings, density and streetscene, the use of high quality materials and design, and protection of green spaces. Subsequently, the scheme does not uphold the Policy 24 of the towns Neighbourhood Plan which takes much of its reference from the above GTDS, as well as identifying the area as being of historic importance and St Martins and Tower House, as buildings of local interest.

As regards the NPPF, it supports the management of change but with the proviso that great weight be given to the conservation of listed buildings and their setting, which are of national merit and irreplaceable heritage assets. As such, the present scheme fails to take into account the importance of this gateway location and the inter-relational views between site and landmark church, and the character, materials, scale and detailing of the historic streetscene.

Therefore, the previous conservation objections still stand due to the proposed design neither preserving, enhancing or reinforcing the local distinctiveness of the area, as required via the NPPF but instead contributing an overly dominant and imposing massing that is completely out of context with the setting and visually competes with the historic focal buildings in the street and contributes less- than- substantial harm to the neighbouring listed buildings contrary to the NP, GTDS and HE Conservation Principles. Although some public benefit may exist in terms of its proposed use, this is not considered to be sufficient to outweigh the level of harm in this specific situation, as there appears to have been no consideration for former pre-app guidance or evidence of an options appraisal to demonstrate that an assessment of alternative designs or sites for this purpose (ie: potential form land swaps or other) that could mitigate the pressure of such a scale of development, had been undertaken and so provide justification for the proposal.

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, GTDS and GHP.

Conditions

Informative

OFFICER: Jen Nixon

TITLE: Conservation Officer

DATE: 4/9/19