Mr Hamish Laird Direct Dial: 0117 975 0685

West Dorset District Council

South Walks House Our ref: P01007836

South Walks Road

Dorchester

Dorset

DT1 1UZ 9 January 2019

Dear Mr Laird

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015**

**& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**ST MARTINS, QUEEN STREET, GILLINGHAM, SP8 4DZ**

**Application No. 2/2018/1437/FUL**

Thank you for your letter of 7 December 2018 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

**Historic England Advice**

Gillingham is North Dorset’s largest settlement, just north of the meandering River Stour in the Blackmore Vale. The village was established in Saxon times and prospered as a farming centre in the medieval era with the silk weaving industry being central to the area’s fortunes from the mid-late C18. With the arrival of the railway in 1859, Gillingham flourished as a small industrial and agricultural centre, exporting goods to London.

The early settlement was laid out in a grid pattern around the church and evidence of this remains to this day, albeit dissected by the modern Gillingham relief road. The Conservation Area extends around the church and to the south west along Wyke Street and is characterised by predominantly 18th and 19th century buildings as most of the medieval structures were lost in fires during the 17th and 18th centuries. Only two remain - including the Grade I listed 14th century chancel and chapel of St Mary’s church. The centre of the settlement has a strong, historic character and a tight urban grain with buildings of a generally consistent scale and widespread use of local materials such as brick, limestone rubble and greensand ashlar.

This application seeks to develop a 59-bed residential care home on a site to the north of the parish church. The site is currently occupied by a detached, Victorian red-brick building to the south and a two-storey 1960s care home building to the north. Between the two structures, the land is open at present. The application site lies on the boundary of the Gillingham Conservation Area, which was designated in 1985 but which has been on Historic England’s Heritage at Risk Register since 2011 and is considered to be deteriorating. As the site is outside the Conservation Area boundary, Historic England’s remit will be focussed upon the impact of the development on the setting of the Grade I listed church.

At present, views through St Martin’s Square, from the church and churchyard are of attractive, historic detached houses with front gardens. Whilst height and materials vary to some extent, the resulting streetscape is of a consistently high-quality and historic character. The construction of a very large, heavily massed and monolithic structure directly to the north and east would therefore run entirely counter to the character of this part of the Conservation Area and therefore would harm the setting of the Grade II\* church and views from the churchyard. The proposed care home building appears of an overtly suburban character and dominant scale in this sensitive, highly prominent location. Whilst the Victorian building on the site at present may not be of immense historic value (although it is clearly of local interest), it contributes to the varied and characterful streetscape and it is therefore regrettable that consideration has not been given to its retention within a more sensitive development of the wider site.

Central to our consultation advice is the requirement of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in Section 66(1) for the local authority to “have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of architectural or historic interest which it possesses”. When considering the current proposals, in line with Para 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the significance of the asset’s setting requires consideration. Para 193 states that in considering the impact of proposed development on significance great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation and that the more important the asset the greater the weight should be. Para 194 goes on to say that clear and convincing justification is needed if there is loss or harm. When considering development that has the potential to affect setting Historic England’s Advice Note 3, the Setting of Heritage Assets should be referred to.

While Historic England does not wish to question the principle of some development on this site, we believe a more sensitive and considered architectural solution is required in order to preserve the historic and distinctive setting of the Grade I listed church and the character and appearance of the neighbouring conservation area. We therefore encourage your authority to seek significant design modifications.

**Recommendation**

Historic England has concerns regarding the application on heritage grounds. We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the application to meet the requirements of paragraphs 194 and 196 of the NPPF.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess, section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards or further information as set out in our advice. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely



**Eve** **Van der Steen**

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cc: Jen Nixon, Conservation Officer, NDDC