

JOINT PLANNING COMMITTEE – 6 MARCH 2019
UPDATE SHEET

Correspondence received and matters arising following preparation of the agenda

Item A1

WA/2017/0277

LYTHE HILL HOTEL, PETWORTH ROAD, HASLEMERE

Confidential viability reports

These have been made available to members on request prior to this update, for reference the following documents have also been circulated:

- Lythe Hill Hotel Viability Report Final
- Lythe Hill Hotel Appendix F - Valuation Report
- Hotel Solutions (Council's Independent Experts) Review
- Construction Budget Assessment Review

Responses from Consultees

An additional response has been received from Surrey Wildlife Trust making the following comments:

- Current amended proposals do not significantly change the potential impacts of this development as relates to protected species (see original comments on pages 16-17 of the agenda report)
- Proposed guest parking area is located entirely within an area of land identified as both Ancient Woodland and Site of Nature Conservation Importance. While the quality of these habitats may be reduced on the ground due to inappropriate land use, this area has not been formally deselected as an SNCI by the Local Wildlife Sites Panel, nor have the Ancient Woodland boundaries been revised by Natural England. The land therefore retains protected habitat status.
- The formalisation of this inappropriate land use through the creation of gravelled parking is therefore not in accordance with the government's standing advice as it relates to Ancient Woodland, or the NERC Act as it relates to Habitats of Principle Importance. Please see my previous consultation response dated 11th May 2017 for further details relating to the policy and statutory obligations relating to these protected habitats.

- The games lawn is located immediately adjacent to the existing Ancient Woodland boundary. Government standing advice requires retention of a semi natural habitat buffer of at least 15m between development and the boundary of an Ancient Woodland. During our conversation, you noted that the proposal for this parking area may include provision of 'grasscrete' or other similar material. The provision of such infrastructure would not enable a semi-natural buffer and so would be inappropriate in this location.

These comments from Surrey Wildlife Trust support the conclusions of officers as set out in the agenda report in respect of Ancient Woodland (pages 35 – 38 of the agenda report), namely that the proposal would result in harm to Ancient Woodland for which there are no exceptional circumstances such to outweigh the harm, and as such a reason for refusal is recommended (reason for refusal 5).

Additional comments from the applicant/agent

An additional letter from the Haslemere & District Chamber of Trade & Commerce has been submitted by the agent. This makes the following points in support of the proposal:

- The project will not only benefit the local economy but it will also help to safeguard its future.
- The proposed investment signals great confidence in the Haslemere area, and also points to fresh opportunities for the local retail sector. This, in turn, is good for non-retail businesses and the town as a whole.
- Understand the Lythe Hill proposal includes a Green Travel Plan that will transport guests to and from Haslemere station, and additionally provide guest shuttles into Haslemere town centre – which should help to increase footfall in the High Street area.
- The Chamber believes that any significant investment and activity to promote Haslemere as a destination – and as a gateway to the South Downs – will have a significant positive effect on the local economy – and the town centre in particular.

The agent has also submitted the following submission in support of the application

- The applicant has already spent circa £5m investment in repairs and upgrading to the existing hotel and listed building. Works to the listed building were carried out under the supervision of the Council's Historic Building's Officer.
- The existing hotel is currently being subsidised by the Old Thorns Hotel in Liphook, Hampshire which is under the same ownership
- The viability studies undertaken by the applicant have been in accordance with a brief set by officers

- An alternative development of 70 bedrooms would be unviable
- The new bedroom/ accommodation wing would have a grass roof
- Overspill of visitors from parking areas into the Ancient Woodland could be controlled through condition
- Disabled car parking spaces, 3 No. by main reception area
- Mitigation measures are proposed in respect of existing trees on site
- A marquee has been sat on the temporary events parking since 1995
- The Design for Lighting Strategy offers substantial improvements over the existing position

Officer comments:

The above information which primarily relates to financial/viability matters, has been fully considered by the Council's Independent Viability Consultants. Their findings have informed the conclusions within the officer's report.

Some financial information has been submitted by the applicant in relation to an alternative 70-bedroom proposal. This was sent to the Council's Independent Viability Consultants and was considered as part of their assessment. This information lacked any valuation or indication of potential savings from reduced capital works. As such, the information submitted does not provide a fully developed model for comparison and was not considered a robust appraisal of an alternative development option that would support the conclusion that the scale of development proposed was the optimal and least intrusive solution to the sustainable economic future of the hotel operation.

The agenda report acknowledges that lighting is a matter that could be controlled by condition.

There is no existing permission for a marquee on the site. This would have been subject to a limit of 28 days per year.

An arboricultural report was submitted which summarises the existing condition of trees on site, and this was considered by the Council's Tree & Landscape officer in reaching a conclusion on this matter.

In respect of the ancient woodland, whilst it is acknowledged that barriers around car parking could prevent visitors from walking into the woodland, given the car park itself is within ancient woodland this impact could not be avoided. Whilst the applicants have agreed to enter into a mitigation/compensation scheme, this is only appropriate where there are wholly exceptional reasons (the example for this is nationally significant infrastructure projects), this has not been demonstrated for the

current proposal. Is there any comment needed on how successful/possible the replanting of an area that previously accommodated ancient woodland is likely to be?

The additional letter submitted by the applicants from the Chamber of Commerce does not raise any additional material considerations in respect of the economic impacts of the proposal from those set out in the agenda report.

The above submissions by the applicant do not alter the conclusions set out in the agenda report.

The recommendation remains for refusal, for the reasons set out on the agenda report pages 48 – 50.
