

Ref: S/1862/08/F

Site Location: Red Lion Hotel, Station Road East, Whittlesford

This note sets out our response to the comments put forward by Philip Walker, English Heritage's Inspector of Ancient Monuments, in his letter of 19 December 2008, in regard to the revised planning application for a new hotel accommodation building at the Red Lion Hotel, Whittlesford.

Having carefully considered the comments set out by Philip Walker we are very disappointed at the reasons given for English Heritage's recommendation for refusal of the application. It has been continuously emphasised that from the very beginning of the planning of the proposed development every effort and regard has been made to respect and to be sensitive to the heritage assets and their settings on/adjacent to the site. Ultimately it has been always been central to the planning application that the proposed development does not have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the heritage assets and their settings. The case for this has been set out in a number of supporting documents which accompanied the revised planning application including the Planning Statement, Heritage Statement and Assessment of the Proposed Development on the Heritage Significance within Views.

During the development of the scheme the applicant and project team have worked closely with officers of South Cambridgeshire District Council and English Heritage to ensure that an optimum scheme was developed for the site and the application shows how this will harmoniously co-exist with the existing historic buildings. At our last site meeting the case made for the proposals appeared to be fully supported by English Heritage and thus his formal objection has come as a surprise. Despite the views of English Heritage it is still strongly felt that the revised planning application will not result in an unacceptable level of harm, both materially or visually, to the heritage assets and their settings. The Heritage Impact Analysis has clearly illustrated that the impact of the proposed development on the setting of either the chapel or the hotel will be minimal and none of the identified 'key views' will be harmed.

The height and mass of the development has been amended to meet such concerns and to present a development which is able to both secure the future economic viability of the current existing business and respect the historic nature of the site.

The proposed development must be seen as a form of enabling development which will allow the applicants to secure the future of their business and in turn invest in and improve those historic buildings on the site and the wider landscape setting of the historic assets.

In direct response to English Heritage's reasons for objection to the application it is particularly important that the following points are taken into account:

- Philip Walker states that it is the view of English Heritage that the "mass of the proposed new building and its height (in part to four storeys) would have an adverse visual impact on the setting of the chapel."

It is considered that the proposed development will not have an unacceptable visual impact on the setting of the chapel. Full regard has been given to the reasons for the refusal of the initial planning application submitted in June 2008 and this resulted in a series of measures being undertaken to address these concerns. These measures have been set out clearly in paragraph 1.2 of the Planning Statement.

In particular response to English Heritage's comment in regard to the proposed development being up to four storeys attention must be given to the design advice offered jointly by South Cambridgeshire District Council and English Heritage, issued after the refusal of the first planning application. This advice, presented in Appendix 1 of the Planning Statement, suggests that the development could possibly be 4.5 storeys in the area adjacent to the A505. In the revised

planning application the height of the proposed development in this area would be 4 storeys and then decrease in height towards the historic buildings.

English Heritage makes reference to viewpoints from the different corners of the site. It should be stressed that the 'public realm' is only Station Road East and any viewing of the chapel from the Red Lion or station car park areas is on private land. Public access to the chapel is currently restricted to the door to the road frontage and not to the rear of the building. Its objection focuses on the impact of the development on the southern elevation of the chapel which is within the Red Lion site. It must be stressed that the principal elevation of the building is to the road frontage and this will be unaffected by the development – as previously accepted in the previous letter of English Heritage dated 24 April 2008.

- A particularly disappointing comment made by English Heritage is that they are “not opposed in principle to new build in the area proposed, but feel that this particular scheme is inappropriate.” A number of alternative schemes have been carefully considered as outlined in the Design and Access and the Planning Statements. The revised proposed development is demonstrated to be the most appropriate for the site and careful consideration has been afforded to the setting and scale and mass of the development. It is felt that English Heritage’s comments fail to take into account the following factors:

- The proposed development is sited at the opposite corner of the site, at the greatest possible distance from Duxford Chapel and the Red Lion Hotel;
 - The proposed building is well articulated with step backs in two dimensions and the materials selected aim to reduce the visual mass of the building. It is considered to be important that visually there is a break in the building form between the rear of the existing Red Lion Hotel and the new hotel structure. This break in the building would be viewed from the area to the rear of the chapel;
 - Its presence on the site has been minimised as far as possible by compacting the building footprint, reducing the height of building to bring it more in line with the existing ridge line of the Red Lion, lowering the level of the site and removing the roof terrace and lowering the parapet height; and
 - The area must be viewed within the wider context of the site which is semi-urban/industrial in nature.
- English Heritage notes that “There is currently a harmonious relationship between the simple form of the chapel, the Red Lion Hotel to its west, and the “dovecote” (both of which are Grade II listed buildings)...The mass and height of the proposed new hotel would have an adverse impact on the setting of the chapel when viewed from the exterior south wall of the chapel, and from the area to the south of its south-east corner.”

The view that the relationship between the Red Lion Hotel, the ‘dovecote’ and the chapel is ‘harmonious’ at present is challenged, given these buildings are separated by a vehicular access and car parking area. Vehicles and refuse storage intrude on the setting and appreciation of the group. The application proposals will significantly improve this setting by relocating the car parking adjacent to the southern boundary with the A505 embankment. The hard and soft landscaping proposed will emphasise the relationship between the buildings and create a far more appropriate and safe setting with which to view the buildings. There is potential to create an alternative rear access to the chapel using an existing door which could improve disabled access to the site. The relationship between these three buildings has always been carefully considered and noted when developing the proposals.

It is noted that English Heritage welcome these improvement works. These works are part of the total package for the site and cannot be implemented without the new hotel development which facilitates such improvements to the site as a whole.

- English Heritage comment upon the measures taken to reduce the scale and mass of the proposed development but add "We do not, however, feel that these amendments significantly address our concerns regarding the adverse impact of the bulk, height and scale of the proposed building on the setting of the chapel."

It is argued that the alternative building proposed by South Cambridgeshire District Council and English Heritage (see Appendix 1 of Planning Statement) is far greater in scale and mass than the building presented in the revised planning application. By referring to Section 8 of the Design and Access Statement it is clear to see that such an alternative building would have a far greater impact on the setting of the chapel. It is felt that the proposed building set out in the revised planning application is the optimum scheme for site as it respects the historic characteristic of the site and does not have a negative impact upon the setting of the chapel. It also allows the applicants to secure the future of their business so allowing them to continuing running it.

- English Heritage has significantly changed their design requirements relating to the height of the building from April 2008 where it was stated that the new building should have 'a roofline no higher than that of the Red Lion' to one where the 'third floor parapet wall height (should be) no higher than the eaves height of the adjacent wing of the Red Lion..' This is impossible to achieve without significantly digging the building into the ground by at least one storey. This would significantly raises costs and also affect issues such as archaeology, disability access and drainage of the site. This is not considered to be practical and this requirement has not been tabled in any of the extensive pre-application discussions to date. It is argued this constraint is unreasonable and the need for lowering of the building to this level is not bourn out by the visual impact analysis undertaken for the scheme.

This response sets out our concerns in relation to English Heritage's response. Having worked so closely with officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council and English Heritage it is disappointing to receive such comments from English Heritage. The applicants' and the project team have always considered the impact of the proposed development upon the historic buildings on/adjacent to the site, particularly Duxford Chapel.

It is hoped that the Local Planning Authority will give the appropriate weight to the objections raised by English Heritage and consider the proposals in the context of the various benefits and improvements the scheme will provide including the benefit to the local economy and tourist facilities. It should be noted both the Accordia development in Brooklands Avenue and CB1 resulted in objections being raised by English Heritage. These schemes were never the less approved by Cambridge City Council as when weighing up the considerations the benefits of the scheme were held to outweigh these objections. The Accordia development has recently won a national RIBA award. It is argued the proposed development on the Red Lion site would also result in a high quality architectural scheme and thus should be supported.

Scott Wilson
15 January 2009

