

Planning Committee: 29 January 2019

Item Number: **12**

Application No: [W 18 / 2146 LB](#)

Town/Parish Council: Offchurch
Case Officer: Helena Obremski
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Registration Date: 07/11/18

Expiry Date: 02/01/19

Offa House, Village Street, Offchurch, Leamington Spa, CV33 9AP

Listed Building Consent for refurbishment and restoration of main dwelling including internal alterations, single storey extensions and demolition of the 1960's and 1980's additions, window and door alterations, re-roofing and new roof lantern; extensions and alterations to the Coach House. FOR Mrs L Hartog

This application has been requested to be presented to Committee by Councillor Doody and is being presented to Planning Committee because more than 5 expressions of support have been received, and it is recommended for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Committee is recommended to refuse listed building consent for the reasons listed at the end of this report.

DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The application seeks listed building consent for the redevelopment of the application site to provide three dwellings. In summary, the works which require listed building consent are as follows:

- Refurbishment and restoration of the existing main property (Offa House), including internal alterations, single storey extensions, window and door alterations, two front facing dormer windows, re-roofing, new roof lantern and removal of modern extensions and fire escape.
- Proposed alterations to the existing ancillary Coach House including minor internal and external alterations to the existing Coach House (windows and doors), and a two storey extension, with glazed link. Aluminium windows are proposed both to the existing Coach House and its extension.

This is a resubmission of withdrawn application ref: W/18/0882/LB. The following amendments to the scheme which have relevance to the listed building consent application are as follows:

- Reduction in proposed area of hardstanding.
- Alterations to boundary treatments.
- Demolition of more of the "Johnson Wing" than previously proposed to increase separation between Offa House and new dwelling, and overall reduction in size.
- Proposed balcony and additional second floor doorway to Offa House removed from the plans.

- A Heritage Impact Assessment has been provided as part of the current scheme.

THE SITE AND ITS LOCATION

Offa House is a former Diocesan retreat house situated within the village of Offchurch. The property is a Grade II listed building situated within the Offchurch Conservation Area. There is a Grade II listed ancillary coach house to the west of the site, with high level wall which attaches to the property. The site is within the Green Belt, with open countryside adjoining the site to the north and west. The Grade II* listed St. Gregory's Church is situated to the east of the site and the Lodge to Offa House is situated to the south in separate ownership. The next nearest dwellings are situated further to the south, on the opposite side of Village Street.

There is a vehicular access and driveway to the site from Village Street. This leads to a parking area to the front and side of the property. There is also an existing separate vehicular access from Village Street further to the west of the main access, which is not currently in use.

The premises was granted planning permission for short term refuge accommodation for refugees for a period of 5 years from November 2015 but this use was not implemented. Planning permission was granted in December 2017 for a change of use from the retreat to a single dwellinghouse, however, this permission has not yet been implemented. The site remains vacant (although the applicants are carrying out repair works and clearance of the site), and therefore the current lawful use remains as a retreat.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

W/18/0881 & W/18/0882/LB - Refurbishment of main dwelling, including internal and external alterations, demolition and extensions; detachment of existing wing of main dwelling and extensions to create a separate dwelling; extensions and alterations to the existing coach house to provide additional new dwelling, and associated works including new access and landscaping - Withdrawn 14/08/2018

W/17/2104 - Change of use from retreat (Sui Generis) to dwelling (Use Class C3) - Granted 19/12/2017

W/17/0903 - Change of use from short term residential accommodation for refugees (for a temporary period of up to five years) - to permanent residential residence for private ownership – Withdrawn 09.06.2017

W/15/1738 - Change of use from Diocesan retreat house to short term residential accommodation for refugees (for a temporary period of up to five years) – Granted 16.11.2015

RELEVANT POLICIES

- National Planning Policy Framework

- The Current Local Plan
- HE1 - Protection of Statutory Heritage Assets (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029)
- HE2 - Protection of Conservation Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029)
- HE4 - Archaeology (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029)

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Councillor Doody: No objection, the proposal will improve the site and update the 1950's buildings.

WCC Archaeology: No objection, subject to conditions.

Conservation Area Forum: Objection, the proposal has not addressed concerns raised by CAF and the Conservation Officer. The scheme still appears as very intrusive to the landscape and particular concern was noted in relation to the proposed conservatory on the west elevation. The proposal includes harmful extensions and alterations to the main dwelling, and development in the garden of the listed building which would harm its setting. The extensions to the Coach House are considered to be very harmful and the size of the new dwellings and quantity of hardstanding around them are considered to be harmful to the Conservation Area and setting of the listed buildings.

Historic England: The proposed extension to Offa House would be damaging to the significance of the building. The benefits to the listed building are not considered to outweigh the harm as a result of the proposed extension.

Public Response:

A door to door survey conducted by the applicant in the village of Offchurch has been provided with 65 signatures which states that they support the development and asks that committee members approve the application.

ASSESSMENT

The main issues relevant to the consideration of the assessment of this application are as follows:

- Impact on Heritage Assets
- Archaeology

Impact on Heritage Assets

Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) 1990 imposes a duty when exercising planning functions to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of a Conservation Area. Section 66 of the same Act imposes a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting when considering whether to grant a planning permission which affects a listed building or its setting.

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage assets, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

Policy HE1 of the Local Plan states that development will not be permitted if it would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. Where the development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The explanatory text for HE1 clarifies that in considering applications relating to Conservation Areas, the Council will require that proposals do not have a detrimental effect upon the integrity and character of the building or its setting, or the Conservation Area. Local Plan Policy HE2 supports this and states that it is important that development both within and outside a Conservation Area, including to unlisted buildings, should not adversely affect its setting by impacting on important views and groups of buildings within and beyond the boundary.

Officers identify a number of significant concerns regarding the proposal, which are as follows:

Offa House

There is no objection to the principle of restoring and making alterations to Offa House, such as the proposed internal restorative work, installation of dormers, removal of modern wings and removal of the intrusive fire escape. However, there are reservations regarding the proposed single storey side extension.

The proposed removal of the majority of an historic load bearing wall to the north elevation amounts to an unacceptable loss of historic fabric and adverse change in original plan form. It is claimed that this addition would symmetrically balance the principal elevation, however, an integral aspect of this elevation is the architecturally significant bowed wing, which also holds historic merit and value by association as the archaeology report highlights that it is in fact initialled HW (Henry Wise, the vicar of Offchurch between 1805 and 1850), adding greater weight to its significance; this is testament to the site's historic usage as a rectory and vicarage. The wing also includes impressive original Georgian windows which undoubtedly contributes towards the overall impression, dominance and architectural significance of the Listed building. It is asserted in the independent HIA that an additional structure may have existed here historically due to patches of white and outline of a small archway on the external face. However, it is likely that the presence of an arch indicates an historic window and white markings may suggest the use of render. In addition, a previous extension here is not evidenced or substantiated in any historic maps, photographs, documentary evidence and, most importantly, a building here is not highlighted in the archaeological report. Furthermore, the retention of 'two short wall nibs' does not sufficiently reflect the historic plan form of the Listed building, which forms part of the site's special architectural and historic interest, indicating how the building was experienced historically and how it functioned.

The need for a 'commodious family kitchen' and natural light does not outweigh the Council's statutory responsibility under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to protect the special architectural and historic interest of Listed buildings and any elements that contribute towards its significance, reflected in HE1 of the Local Plan. Paragraph 193 of the NPPF also requires Council's to afford great weight to the heritage asset's conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance. It is also identified that the one storey extension is recognised to cause some negative affect in the HIA's 'Development effect: score chart', seemingly contrary to the consultant's own claim in the same report that 'at worst these changes are neutral.

Officer's concerns are supported by the assessment made by Historic England following a site visit. Historic England note that the proposed extension in this location would be damaging to the significance of the building and that the benefits to Offa House offered by the proposal are unlikely to outweigh the harm caused by the proposed single storey side extension.

Officers also have concerns regarding the proposed single storey rear extension. The need to accommodate greater family usage, in what is already a substantial house, and 'natural light values' is not a material consideration in weighing up the public benefit against harm caused to the heritage asset. Whilst the removal of the existing fire escape and associated doors are welcomed, the proposed conservatory overall gives the north elevation an inappropriate emphasis and reduces the grandeur of the principal façade and its architectural value, particularly with this coming in line with the 1 storey addition. Dating from the C19, this elevation is still part of the building's historic evolution and arguably how the site grew in importance as a Rectory and Vicarage. A projecting conservatory here cannot be supported, nor can the addition of balconies which are not characteristic of this type of early C18 building (particular ones that encompass approximately half the width of a façade). It is noted that the reference to Fig. 2 (1919 property plan) does indeed show a historic extension here, but importantly this is marked as a store extension and likely comprised of a small one storey structure, accessible only from the garden (the plan does not seem to indicate this was accessible from the house itself) and it is disputed this is of a similar scale and footprint to the proposed conservatory. In addition, the plan evidences that the construction of the store did not result in the demolition of an external wall and a store building attached to this elevation suggests further the ancillary nature of this elevation.

The Johnson Wing

Officers have concerns regarding the proposed Johnson Wing and proximity to the nearby listed building. Whilst it is noted, as it has been previously, that there are clear benefits in the removal of inappropriate modern additions to the rear of modern house leading to the offshoot, referred to as the 'Johnson wing', the creation of a two-storey structure, increasing the overall height and massing, close to the principal Listed building is considered to increase the sense of urbanisation on the site and impression of competing dwellings. The angled form of this does little to address the issue. Although the proposed use of sympathetic materials is welcomed, this again does not reduce the dominance and impression

of the dwelling in the landscape. As stated on several occasions during pre-application discussion and during the course of the previous applications, what is essentially a replacement dwelling should remain modest in size and design, ideally single storey, to retain the wing's ancillary nature to Offa House. This element of the scheme is clearly contrary to Policy BE1 of the Local Plan, as the increase from one to two storeys does not respect the form of Offa House, and contravenes HE1 due to its overall detrimental impact on the principal Listed building and its setting. Negative impact is once more identified in the HIA's 'Development effect: score chart', but is not addressed in the HIA itself, although if mitigation measures were to include sympathetic materials and 'angling' the new dwelling, this would do little to reduce the overall sense of mass and bulk. The scheme put forward has also changed little to what was proposed initially, despite communicating similar concerns which resulted in the withdrawal of the applications.

The Coach House

Officers have concerns regarding the proposed extensions to the Coach House. The highest level of harm identified in the proposed scheme is undoubtedly the extension to the Coach House. Advice provided during a meeting at Riverside House on 8th August 2018 was to recommend the construction of a new dwelling in a private courtyard on a much smaller plot, away from the Coach House, as opposed to constructing a large overbearing structure adjacent to the curtilage of the listed building. However, what is proposed is similar to the original scheme in terms of overall footprint and massing, with the absence of 1 dormer and a lower roof ridge. In addition, a negative impact (two levels higher than the impact on the Johnson wing and extension to Offa House), is once more identified in the HIA's score chart and this is interpreted as a unanimous agreement that harm caused amounts to substantial. It is also conceded by the consultant that '*...the Coach House extension is unusually large and could thereby be deemed harmful in NPPF terms*'. It is nonetheless claimed that the proposed extension is an imaginative design with contemporary flavour. However, Officers do not consider the design to be outstanding or innovative, necessary to give the scheme greater weight under paragraph 131 of the NPPF. Moreover, it is considered that it would fail to assimilate into the overall form and layout of the surroundings, thereby also contravening Policy BE1 of the Local Plan (the extension is after all at the very least 4 x larger than the Coach House). In addition, the scheme is considered contrary to Policy BE4 (Converting Rural Buildings), as the scheme would dramatically change the building's appearance, including its quintessential rural character and architectural and historic attributes as a well preserved surviving example of an agricultural structure. Furthermore, the notion that the extension would result in beneficial use and increased use of garden space does not demonstrate the substantial public benefit required to outweigh substantial harm caused, contrary to para. 195 of the NPPF. It is evidenced in the HIA that the Coach House historically formed part of a large agricultural courtyard, comprising of various outbuildings, 'used for the husbanding and processing of livestock' which in itself adds greater significance to its original purpose as an agricultural outbuilding. However there is no evidence indicating an outbuilding of a similar size to what is proposed currently. As noted above, Officers were not adverse to the construction of a new dwelling in a private courtyard which would arguably enhance the Coach House's agricultural character and setting. Officers conclude that the proposed

extension to the Coach House would adversely change its character, appearance and special architectural and historical interest, and would thereby be contrary to Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. In addition, combined with the addition of a further storey to the Johnson wing, this again would create the impression of competing dwellings and urbanisation, reducing the overall dominance and grandeur of the principal Listed building.

General

With regards to the splitting of the site, whilst it is recognised that there is evidence of historic hardstanding in the grounds, the consultant's claim that the site was physically divided in the C19 lacks any tangible evidence, as the archaeological report presents no evidence that substantiates this and the tithe map relates to the division of title/ land, as opposed to the marking physical boundaries associated with this division. Officers therefore dispute that this period saw the garden diminished via a 'tripartite freehold subdivision'. As explained before, dividing the site with masonry walls and estate railings further relegates the setting's contribution to Offa House, which requires a substantial open garden to protect its special historical interest and significance. A substantial garden with open views of the surrounding land and wider countryside is integral to Offa House's historic character, identity and status in the village. Historic England have reflected upon this previously, stating that the proposed subdivision would detract from the main house and would 'diminish the presence of a substantial house in extensive grounds'. Section 66 also requires to pay special regard to the desirability of preserving the setting of Listed buildings and the contribution they make to their special architectural and historic interest.

It is considered that the proposed development would have a harmful impact on both heritage assets located within the site boundaries and that there are limited public benefits which do not outweigh the harm caused. The applicant states that the fact that their Heritage Consultant and Historic England raise no objection to the extensions to the Coach House and the Johnson Wing means that the development should be considered as acceptable and should be approved. However, Historic England were consulted in relation to the impact of the proposed development on the listed church which neighbours the site. Whilst their comments on the proposal have been taken into consideration, as stated within the comments from Historic England, it is the duty of the Council's Officers to weigh the balance of the scheme as a whole and come to a planning judgement based on all of the information provided. The Council's Conservation Officer has provided a detailed and well-justified case in relation to the harm caused to heritage assets, and also identified anomalies and conflict in the details provided in the applicant's Heritage Assessment, which casts doubt on their assessment. From the information provided, Officers have not been presented with any additional information to justify a departure from Officers' professional views. Whilst Officers recognise the benefits offered by the proposal such as the removal of incongruous and harmful features to Offa House and securing the future of the listed buildings on the site, for the reasons detailed above it is considered the level of harm caused outweighs these benefits. CAF have also expressed significant concerns regarding the scheme, including the alterations to Offa House which they consider to be very harmful. CAF state that

the splitting of the site would be harmful to the setting of the listed building and Conservation Area and that the alterations to the Coach House would also be very harmful to the buildings special significance.

Therefore, it is considered that when taking all of the above information into consideration, the proposed development would have a harmful impact on the listed buildings and their setting. The harm identified is considered to be less than substantial, however, the public benefits, such as providing additional housing are considered to be limited owing to the fact that the Council has a 6.2 year housing land supply and are not considered to outweigh the significant harm identified above. The proposal is not considered to have a harmful impact on the Conservation Area. The development is therefore considered to be contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan policies BE1, BE4 and HE1.

Archaeological Impact

WCC Archaeology have assessed the application and note that the application site lies within an archaeologically sensitive area, within the probable extent of the medieval settlement of Offchurch and is adjacent to the Church of Saint Gregory a Grade II* listed building, probably dating from the 11th or 12th century. There is a potential that the proposed development could disturb archaeological remains relating to the medieval occupation of Offchurch, such as structural remains, boundary features or rubbish pits. They therefore recommend that a condition is attached requiring the provision of a written scheme of investigation and an Archaeological Mitigation Strategy document. This is considered to be reasonable and the condition could be added if the application were being approved.

The proposal is therefore considered to be in accordance with Local Plan policy HE4.

Other Matters

WCC Ecology have commented on the application, however, only the impact of the proposed development on heritage assets can be considered as part of this listed building consent application. WCC Ecology's comments are considered under the associated full planning permission application W/18/2145.

CONCLUSION

The proposed development is considered to have a significant harmful impact on heritage assets and there are considered to be no public benefits identified which would outweigh this harm. The development is considered to be contrary to the NPPF and Local Plan policy HE1, and should therefore be refused.

REFUSAL REASONS

- 1 Policy HE1 of the Local Plan states that development will not be permitted if it would lead to substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset. Where the development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

The proposed development would result in substantial harm to designated heritage assets within the site boundaries, by virtue of a loss of original fabric with historic significance and reducing the grandeur of the principal façade of Offa House and its architectural value by introducing a large extension which is uncharacteristic of its time. The extension to the Coach House is not considered to be in keeping with the overall form and layout of its surroundings and would detract from the special rural and architectural character of the existing building. Finally, dividing the site is considered to detract from Offa House and diminish the presence of this substantial house in extensive grounds, which is integral to the historic character of the listed building, and identity and status of the property within the village.

The proposal is thereby considered to be contrary to the aforementioned policy.
