



Historic England

Ms Clare Howe
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
The Campus
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 6AE

Direct Dial: 01223 582751

Our ref: P01343350

3 March 2021

Dear Ms Howe

**T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**BIOPARK, BROADWATER ROAD, WELWYN GARDEN CITY, AL7 3AX
Application No. 6/2020/3420/MAJ**

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2021 regarding further information on the above application for planning permission. On the basis of this information, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Historic England Advice

Historic England note the submission of the Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment Addendum following our previous comments. This document has assessed the views from Hatfield House and the southern approach to the house from the grade I registered park and garden. The existing and proposed mass has been drawn on the photographs which assists in understanding the impact of the scheme upon the significance of these highly graded heritage assets. As the photographs were taken in February, this has met the requirement for the scheme to be shown in winter.

The existing and proposed mass lines show that the proposed development would be slightly shorter in height but would be wider. Although it is appreciated that a wire diagram cannot show articulation within the mass, it is clear that the footprint of the development is larger.

The existing development, with its white cladding is visible within the setting of Hatfield House and within the wider setting of the registered park and garden, indeed the avenue of trees leading from the north front of the house appears to lead the eye directly towards the site. The increased wider mass of the proposed development would creep taller built form towards this sightline and further erode the generally open character of the view along the avenue. This is noticeable from Figure 1 which is taken from the roof of the building. Although the document notes that this is not a currently accessible view for the public, it would of once been a view that was accessible to guests and formed a historic viewing point over the parkland. Impacts upon this view



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are therefore important to significance of the building.

Figure 3 shows the impact of the existing and proposed masses upon the designed views from the southern approach to the house, where the land gently rises and views over Hatfield House towards the industrial zone and Welwyn Garden City are possible. The wider building mass is appreciable from this angle and while individual buildings may not be possible to discern from this distance, the increased size of built form is visible and would have a direct impact upon longer range views from the Grade I listed building. The site sits between the central clock tower and the slightly raised end extension blocks where the roof is at its lowest. The protrusion over the historic roofline of the current Biopark building still allows a degree of open space to be appreciated on either side of it however, the proposed increase in mass of the new development would entirely fill this gap in the architectural form of the historic building with modern built environment thus having the effect of enclosing the historic building form and loss of a through view.

Policy Context

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development upon the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the assets conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater that weight should be)

Paragraph 194 states that any harm to, or loss of, significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting) should require clear and convincing justification.

Paragraph 196 of the NPPF states that where a development will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Paragraph 200 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development...within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Historic England Position

Historic England consider that the LVIA addendum has shown the increased building mass to be of concern to the setting and significance of the grade I listed building and, the designed views and vistas from the grade I registered park and garden at Hatfield Park. Figures 1 and 3 indicate that the site is within an important vista and to increase the visibility of it by increasing its size would make modern built form more dominant within the historic environment and detract from the significance of Hatfield House and park and garden. The proposal would not therefore be in accordance with paragraphs 193, 194 and 200 of the NPPF.



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Historic England do not object in principle to the redevelopment of this Biopark site however, at present we still have concerns relating to the scheme and consider that the development would cause less than substantial harm, low in scale to the highly graded heritage assets. We therefore consider that it is for your local authority to carry out the planning balance as required by paragraph 196 of the NPPF.

We consider that through the careful reduction of massing to the new development and a careful use of materials to make the site more recessive in these views from highly graded heritage assets, the proposal could reduce the visibility of the site and therefore reduce the impact upon the setting and significance of the heritage assets. We therefore consider that revisions should be made to the massing and materials to address these concerns.

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 193, 194, 196 and 200 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.

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

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Inspector of Historic Building and Areas

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