



The Hammersmith Society

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Planning and Economic Development
London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

For the attention of Planning Officer Sinead Winship-David
Sinead.Winship-David@lbhf.gov.uk

Dear Sinead

Ravenscourt Park Hospital

Planning application 2023/03130/FUL

We refer to the application for planning consent for the restoration and redevelopment of the Ravenscourt Park Hospital campus, ref 2023/03130/FUL.

The Hammersmith Society has attended a number of pre-application residents' consultation meetings, site visits, and discussions with the architects, and we have studied the key information in the planning application pack.

We would request your careful consideration of our observations and comments set out in this letter and summarised in the action list below:

1 Summary of application issues to be addressed

1.1 Overriding requirement

The original hospital campus is a fine national asset listed Grade2*: the alterations necessary to accommodate the new use should not be permitted if they impoverish the original architecture or compromise the quality, character or beauty of the original building.

1.2 Block A

- (i) the proposed roof extensions would devalue the architecture of the building and should not be allowed.
- (ii) A sustainable, full-time use is required for the first floor rooms and this may require the commitment to public use to be set aside.

1.3 Block B

- (i) further work is required to refine the design of the additional roof storey elevation.
- (ii) the projecting south balconies are a vital element in the elevation composition and should be restored to the original design without any additional planters or other changes.

1.4 Block C and Block D

These are secondary buildings in the campus but will become part of the setting for the new public pathway across the site. The proposals would benefit from further work to refine the design detail.

1.5 Block E and F

- (i) the building appears as an alien form, a singular geometric block which is out of place within the hospital campus and within its neighbourhood setting.
- (ii) the design does not comply with the requirement to '*...respect the historical context and townscape setting of the site, and its sense of place...*', set out in Policy DC2 of the Local Plan.

1.6 Access

Local residents are united in their opposition to the proposed west side vehicular access. An independent review of the vehicle servicing arrangement is required to provide a clear explanation of (i) the current traffic count, (ii) the forecast traffic count, and (iii) the viability of reverting to the east side vehicular access as first proposed by the developer. This review should be presented to local residents *prior* to determining this aspect of the application.

1.7 Ravenscourt Park

Any planning consent should require a financial contribution sufficient to carry out the installation of ground drainage, reseeding and reinstatement of the grassed areas of Ravenscourt Park.

2 Hammersmith Society observations on the application proposals

2.1 Change of use: we welcome the long overdue rescue of this wonderful building. Conversion to residential use creates the potential for a secure future for the buildings on the estate, bringing life and facility to the area and the potential to integrate the campus into the neighbourhood.

2.2 Block A

Block A is a building of striking distinction. It is the public face of the campus, the ambassador for the substantial estate behind, which - until now - has been out of public view. The architecture of Block A is a simple hierarchy of brick volumes, bringing wide expanses of uninterrupted brick surfaces, broken only by singular events of vertical or horizontal sculpted groups of windows. The building is mysteriously engaging, its deceptive simplicity creating a heroic ambience and a welcome to the hospital estate.

Proposed roof extensions The proposed extensions on each side roof would be wholly out of place: they would break the spell of the architectural composition, interrupting the spatial silence of the mass of the uninterrupted brick surfaces below. By day the extensions would be silhouetted against the bright sky behind, by night a dominant, brightly lit box. The extensions would bring unacceptable harm and should not be allowed.

Future use for Block A: Community and cultural use is proposed for Block A, allowing the public to participate in the building interiors - but selection of an appropriate activity is proving elusive. The ground floor has to accommodate the entrance route to the flats passing through, leaving use to be found for the magnificent two large rooms on the first floor. It is suggested that the proposed roof extensions would have provided a useful community facility - but this would not solve the problem of usage for the first floor rooms. Identifying a sustainable use might require the commitment to a public use to be set aside, perhaps maintaining an arrangement of occasional access for public viewing.

2.3 Block B

Block B is the set-piece of the campus. The building employs a restrained and consistent architectural language, with regular geometric brick forms, orderly window perforations, and playful articulation separating the building elements with circular balconies and pavilions. Bringing change or extension to this style of symmetry and formality requires a particular design sensitivity.

Proposed additional storey: the omission of the second roof storey which was in the early pre-application process was an essential improvement. Nevertheless the visual presence of the single storey now proposed remains too strong, bringing an impact which devalues the façade below: it rises higher than the clock panel, the central feature of the building, (as evident on View 02 p97 DAC, but masked in the elevation p82 DAC) and so impoverishes the design hierarchy which is a vital characteristic of the elevation. The brick parapet and projecting canopy which cap the roof storey would create a strong skyline which brings unwanted visual weight to the addition; the parapet design reuses stylistic elements of the existing building, creating a flavour of historical authenticity, which brings misplaced visual credibility and also strays from the Historic England caution to '*ensure a clear delineation of any addition*'. The design needs further refinement to reach the rightful ambition of a '*lightweight addition....which complements the original design...*' as cited in the Heritage Statement (5.20).

Glazing: The pleated glass profiles succeed in delineating new glazing from the existing, but the zig-zag profile creates a busy, eye-catching array of contrasting light and dark reflections (View 02 p97) , where a quiet, recessive quality is needed.

Balcony screening: The balconies have a long established use serving hospital activities, but recreational use by flat residents could introduce problems of overlooking and noise compromising the amenities enjoyed by the neighbouring houses of Ravenscourt Gardens. The planters proposed to limit circulation and outlook are an unsatisfactory response which would spoil the visual fluency of the elevation and would bring a weight which endangers the building fabric. These daring balcony cantilevers are key architectural features, expressing the flow and horizontality of the facade design, and are sacrosanct to the heritage of the building: they should not be changed. The privacy problem has to be dealt

with, but by other means, including possibly the thickening of the boundary planting and fencing, as proposed in the application, and management of the balcony access: this issue should be concluded in the planning determination, and not by a planning condition setting out performance requirements - which could lead to future disputes.

2.4 Block C

This is a less distinguished member of the campus family. The semi-circular ground floor projections, which look more enticing on-plan than as-built, remain largely unchanged in appearance. New extensions of smooth-clad bays project forward on each side of the central brick elevation, rising to the existing brick parapet level. Alterations and additions to the window layout bring a noticeable change to the facade, creating a more utilitarian pattern which departs from the window-to-brick proportions elsewhere on the campus. An additional roof storey uses the pleated strip windows of Block B, this time set within brick framing with a projecting canopy. This is a secondary elevation which does not feature significantly in the heritage composition, and the dilution of the drama and distinctiveness of the existing design is of less importance.

2.5 Block D

Block D has little of the architectural merit of Block B: a simple 3-storey stepped brick form, lacking a straight parapet, framed between brick bookends, with a conventional industrial-style window layout. The proposed design adds two levels, stepped back from the existing face, incorporating the pleated windows of Block B both in strip form within brick framing, and in single pleats between pleated brick panels. The elevation is inoffensive but presents a risk of visual confusion from the mix of architectural elements, and the clean straight edge of the 3rd floor balcony offers a welcome visual datum.

The nearby public path crossing the campus will bring Block D into the public eye.

2.6 Blocks E & F

The care home and residential facilities of Blocks E and F replace the undistinguished (and unlisted) Block E. However the new building is a startling injection of urban reality into the sedate campus environment: simple hard-edged rectilinear forms, with repetitive window openings, create a dominant presence, discordant in the context of the more fragmented and decorative composition of the rejuvenated hospital buildings, and the surroundings of Ravenscourt Square. The design may reflect the reported LBHF preference for '*a simple design*'; but the bulk and hefty presence is far from the LBHF guidance for '*a quiet design*'. Observations in the Heritage Statement note that the proposed Blocks E&F would '*....detract from the character of 19th century suburban residential buildings...and would only increase the scale of existing built form*'.

The proposals disregard LBHF Local Plan Policy DC2: '*...New build development..must be designed to respect the historical context and townscape setting of the site, the scale, mass, form and grain of surrounding development...*'. None of these requirements is achieved by the proposed design.

Irrespective of planning protocols, it is regrettable that the opportunity has not been taken to put right the impact of the north end of the campus on its Ravenscourt Square neighbours, in particular the wholly inappropriate setting created for the delightful fairy-tale castle at No.17, and the Grade 2 listed house at No.11.

2.7 Vehicular access

There is united local opposition to the proposed arrangements for vehicular servicing to the development. The initial pre-application scheme proposed traffic access via Ravenscourt Gardens Road on the east side of the site, which was agreed with local residents, but the principal vehicular servicing is now changed, and moved to the west side of the site. Traffic required to serve 140 residential units, 65 care-home beds and all the associated maintenance and staffing requirements, will drive through Ravenscourt Square, a residential backwater and public highway cul-de-sac. The original proposal to use Ravenscourt Gardens Road would have used a wide, lightly used public highway, where parking spaces are infrequently occupied.

In justification reference has been made to the estimated traffic generated when the hospital was in use: this is no longer relevant - the hospital has been empty for over 15 years, and has not been in full use for over 30 years. Neighbourhood experience of traffic movement is based on, and proved by present day circumstances.

Further consultation with the neighbourhood is required as proposed in Item 1.6 above.

Conclusion

Restoring the Ravenscourt Hospital buildings and bringing the campus into the community is a long overdue realisation of a wonderful asset, and we wholly support this project intent. There has been useful discussion in the pre-application consultation process, and this has brought about some invaluable improvements to the scheme.

The planning application documentation has allowed us to give careful consideration to the overall scheme proposals, and we have identified a number of important points which are listed here. These are serious issues. We would request that you take full account of our concerns in your processing of the application.

We would be pleased to discuss any aspect of our comments with you to provide further clarification.

Yours sincerely

Richard Winterton

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