

## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER  
Telephone (01799) 510510  
Textphone Users 18001  
Email [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk) Website [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

Mr Mark Hodgson  
Savills (UK) Ltd  
Unex House  
132-134 Hills Road  
Cambridge  
CB2 8PA

Your ref: PP-07980069

Our ref: UTT/21/2631/PA

Please ask for on 01799 510 462  
email: [REDACTED]

Dear Sir/Madam

### **RE: Former Friends School, Mount Pleasant Road, Saffron Walden.**

I refer to your preliminary enquiry submitted to Uttlesford District Council on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

For your information, officers from both Uttlesford and Essex County Council Place Services have now had the chance to examine your submitted documents and the revised plans, including all indicative drawings which inform the submitted proposal.

We would like to make the following comments in respect to the proposals in their current form.

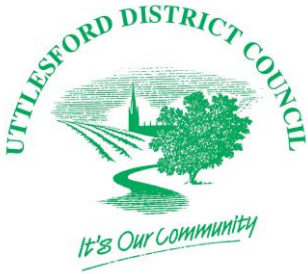
#### **Masterplan**

The conversion of the school buildings to residential provides the opportunity to re-think the site as a whole. The existing school buildings have been developed in a piecemeal fashion responding to the school requirements of the moment, without a clear overarching strategy. Several of the existing buildings do not relate sympathetically to the main school building in their size or location. At present, the proposed site plan largely replicates the areas of existing built form on the site, replacing them with new residential dwellings. It is considered that there is an opportunity to reassess the site as a whole and consider how best a new residential development could be integrated with the existing school buildings of interest which are to be retained (the main school building, the 1930s Assembly Hall and the Croydon building).

We would recommend that the adjacent school field forms part of the masterplan and the application considers the overall site as a whole. Spreading a little to the adjacent field may help ease the pressure on the school site in terms of new built form... however regard would need to be had to UTT/19/1744/OP.

#### **Main school building**

The local authority would need to be satisfied that the school building is surplus to requirements as a school, as this would be the optimum viable use for the building.



## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER  
Telephone (01799) 510510  
Textphone Users 18001  
Email [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk) Website [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

Residential conversion would cause harm to the plan form and understanding of the building by dividing it in separate units. If the principle of conversion is established, more detailed information will be required in order to understand the impact of the proposed changes on the building. A phasing plan, identifying original walls and later insertions, would be helpful. A demolition plan would assist in understanding the extent of proposed alterations to the interior of the building. When more information is provided, a site visit can be undertaken to consider the specific interventions proposed.

### **New three-storey building**

This block is proposed as a replacement for a modern two-storey building abutting the main school to the west. The existing block is of low architectural quality and there is no objection to its removal. It's positioning abutting the main school building means that it has an impact on the appreciation of the architectural quality of the main building, therefore replicating built form on this sensitive location would not be ideal.

The proposed replacement block of flats would be three storeys, increasing its impact on the main building. As discussed on site, the design has been modified to reflect a more contemporary style rather than replicating details from the main building. The massing is largely unchanged, and the fenestration altered to reflect contemporary detailing. It is considered that the proposed fenestration appears rather piecemeal and there is opportunity for further refinement of the designs for this block. The overall design would need to be improved in order to overcome the harm to setting caused by a building in this sensitive location.

### **Assembly Hall**

The proposal to retain the 1930s Assembly Hall and convert it into four residential units is welcomed. The front (east) elevation is the more significant and would be retained largely as existing. The rear elevation is of lesser interest and changes to this elevation to support improved accommodation are reasonable. However, in our view, the proposed gables would be an unnecessary addition. They do not respond to the strong horizontal and vertical lines of the Art Deco building and would provide little benefit while increasing the cost of conversion.

Projecting rear bays to provide increased living accommodation are considered reasonable but are these really necessary? How do they respect the existing materiality and style of the existing building? It is suggested that the design is amended to omit the gables.

### **Croydon building**

There is no in principle objection to the conversion of this building to flats, but at the site visit it was discussed that the proposed internal arrangements could be improved to retain more of the plan form of the non-designated heritage asset and to demonstrate that a sympathetic change of use can be achieved.



## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER  
Telephone (01799) 510510  
Textphone Users 18001  
Email [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk) Website [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

### **Flats by Croydon building**

The design of these flats appears to be referencing the recently constructed new houses facing onto Debden Road with their rhythm of pitched gable ends facing the street. There would be a preference for the proposed Juliet balconies to face inwards into the site rather than outwards towards the road as these are not traditional forms within the Conservation Area and would fail to preserve its character.

For the new flats, glass balustrades and grey presumably aluminium cladding are questionable materials. Brick and presumably reconstituted stone used in a contemporary way are supported, but glass and grey cladding detract from this quality 'traditional' material palette. Contemporary metal railings could be a more appropriate solution for what is a 'traditional' material palette used in a contemporary way.

Windows in gable end of east and west elevations look small and out of proportion with the large gable end, larger windows could alleviate this.

### **Ash houses**

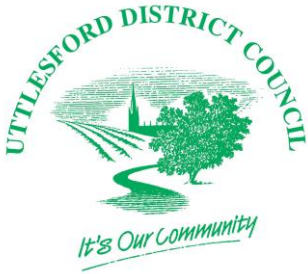
Several options have been presented for the 'Ash' type of house on the site of former gym. There is a preference for design 'D', which is considered the most successful in its handling of the fenestration and facades. Crown roofs are a novel roof form in the Conservation Area and are not considered to preserve its character. The crown roofs on these houses would be quite visible because of their positioning end-on to Mount Pleasant Road. It is suggested that the applicant explore reducing the depth of the footprint of these houses to allow a traditional pitched roof form, while creating a bedroom within the attic space to compensate for the smaller footprint.

### **Oak and Lime houses**

These houses would replace the modern nursery school block at the southern end of the site. While the existing buildings are not of great architectural quality, their recent date of construction means that demolition would be wasteful of resources and it is unfortunate that the existing buildings are not able to be reused as part of the new scheme. The proposed new houses utilise a contemporary design language, referencing the commended new-build estate to the south, which will help to integrate the new development on the Friends' site with the wider townscape.

The clad projecting bays shown on the Oak house type are not considered acceptable for the following reasons:

- Over-dominance of grey cladding (presumably aluminium) the precedent image shown has a predominance of brick with grey elements, rather than the other way around.
- Roof detail not clear for bays and would likely be deeper/more complicated in reality, not enough depth shown to be feasible, and increased depth would worsen over-dominance of grey cladding.



## UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 4ER  
Telephone (01799) 510510  
Textphone Users 18001  
Email [uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk](mailto:uconnect@uttlesford.gov.uk) Website [www.uttlesford.gov.uk](http://www.uttlesford.gov.uk)

The Lime is considered more successful with its less complicated detailing and redominance of brick. Overall, the contemporary approach is supported and considered appropriate - it does not 'water down' the impact of the heritage assets by copying them, and it also sits well with the contemporary and celebrated Avenue next door.

### **Parking**

The proposal to shift the car parking spaces to the south of the site, away from the main school building, while retaining the area of landscape around the pond is welcomed as this provides a more sympathetic setting for the building. Concerns remain about some of the piecemeal proposed parking on the site, including around the main semi-circular entrance drive, where parked cars would detract from the designed setting of the building and views from the Conservation Area.

It was discussed on site whether additional parking could be provided on the existing area of hardstanding to the east of the gym building, although in the revised proposals, this area is shown as rear gardens for the Ash buildings. By providing more parking in this area, the density of parking to the rear of the school could be reduced, providing a more generous garden setting for the main school building.

There is also a concern regarding the location of some of parking in respect to their position in relation to intended buildings in that these appear to be remote or isolated. Parking should be located close to their intended buildings to improve accessibility, and clarity.

The large parking courts should also be broken up with soft landscaping. Presently, the large expanse of hardstanding areas is not ideal and should be revised to break down the perceived harshness of these areas.

### **Summary**

Overall, while the proposals are an improvement on the initial scheme, it is considered that the details would merit further development before an application is submitted. It is likely that there will still be aspects of this development, such as some of the proposed new buildings on site, which would be assessed as causing harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of the non-designated heritage asset. A viability assessment should therefore be submitted as part of the application to allow the planning authority to come to a balanced judgement on the merits of the scheme.

Yours sincerely

Mr Lindsay Trevillian  
Senior Planning Officer