



Historic England

Sir/Madam  
Planning Inspectorate  
3J Kite Wing  
Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Bristol  
BS1 6PN

████████████████████  
Our ref: P01489694

17 May 2022

Dear Sir/Madam

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

**FORMER FRIENDS' SCHOOL, MOUNT PLEASANT ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN,  
ESSEX CB11 3EB  
Application No. S62A/22/0000002**

Thank you for your letter of 27 April 2022 regarding the above application for planning permission.

On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

**Historic England Advice**

Significance of the historic environment

The Friends' School is principally of red brick; was constructed to the designs of Edwards Burgess and opened in 1879 as a Quaker day and boarding school. The building has a prominent central tower to the front, tall chimney stacks and elaborate fenestration. Overall, the principal features of the Victorian school are still extant and are indicative of late Victorian styles that integrated elements from earlier periods.

Whilst not statutorily listed, it is included in Uttlesford DC's Local Heritage List of buildings of architectural and historic interest and also makes an important positive contribution to the Saffron Walden Conservation Area, which was designated in 1968. The former school is therefore a non designated heritage asset.

The application site is located within the southern section of the conservation area. It is described in the Conservation Area Appraisal as one of the defining features within



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this section.

Within 500 metres of the site are 20 grade II listed buildings.

### The proposals and their impact on the historic environment

The application site extends to 3.28 ha and is bounded by Mount Pleasant Road to the north, Debden Road to the west and The Avenue to the south.

The proposals are for conversion of buildings and demolition of buildings to allow redevelopment to provide 96 dwellings, swimming pool and changing facilities, associated recreation facilities, access and landscaping.

The scheme comprises conversion of the existing main school building to provide 52 residential apartments with communal library/drawing room; re-use of existing swimming pool with new changing room facilities; conversion of the Assembly Hall building to provide four new houses and conversion of the Croydon Building to provide four new apartments with a new block of six flats to the south; together with the demolition of other buildings on the site and their replacement with an additional 34 dwellings.

The impact of the redevelopment proposals will be to bring the vacant and vulnerable locally listed Friends' School building and the wider application site back into a viable use that will preserve and/or enhance the conservation area.

### The policy context

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve sustainable development and that protection and enhancement of the historic environment is an overarching objective in this (paragraphs 7 and 8).

The significance of locally listed buildings can be harmed by development in their setting and the significance of conservation areas can be harmed by major development within them or their setting, as may happen here.

Our advice reflects guidance in the good practice advice notes produced by Historic England on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum in GPA 2; Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment and GPA 3; The Setting of Heritage Assets.

The NPPF at paragraph 197 encourages local authorities to sustain and enhance the significance of heritage assets consistent with their conservation and asks that they



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take into account "the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness."

It establishes that great weight should be given to an asset's conservation and the more important that asset, the greater that weight should be (paragraph 199). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

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 200).

Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (paragraph 202).

Setting is then defined in the Framework as 'the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve.

Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset and may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral'.

### Historic England's position

We are concerned that we were not consulted by the applicants at pre-application stage regarding this major redevelopment site within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area, in view of the likely impact of the proposals on the significance of non-designated heritage assets within the site itself, on numerous designated assets within the vicinity of the site and on the wider conservation area.

Nevertheless, in this instance, having considered the documentation submitted with the application, including the *Design and Access Statement* produced by Chase New Homes, the *Heritage Statement* produced by Savills and *Townscape and Visual Appraisal* produced by the Landscape Partnership, we are of the view that the scale, massing and detailed design of the scheme overall would be contextually acceptable in relation to the setting of the locally listed former school building and the character or appearance of the conservation area.

We acknowledge that the retention of key buildings, trees and boundary vegetation would have a beneficial impact on townscape character.



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We are satisfied that the proposals would not cause an unacceptable level of direct harm to the significance of the Friends' School building itself as a result of the conversion works. We also consider the scheme would not cause harm to the significance of the locally listed building as a result of the impact on its setting or to significance of the conservation area.

## **Recommendation**

Historic England have no objections to the application on heritage grounds.

We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph number 200 and 202 in relation to the significance of the conservation area.

In determining this application you should bear in mind the statutory duty of section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas.

You should also bear in mind section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

**Sheila Stones**

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

