



WHITE HART DEVELOPMENT
Planning application 20/P3807 & 20/P3808
January 2021

1. Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage takes an active interest in the future of the Cricket Green Conservation Area and its environs. We are the civic society for this part of Merton and part of the wider civic movement through membership of the national charity Civic Voice. We have been closely involved in the development of the Merton Local Plan, Borough Character Studies, the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and numerous development proposals in the area. Our approach to development and change in the area is established in the Cricket Green Charter which was refreshed in 2019 with the support of London Borough of Merton and local councillors (<https://mitchamcricketgreen.org.uk/cricket-green-charter/>). The Charter has been acknowledged in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Cricket Green. We have also contributed to production of the Merton Heritage Strategy as a member of the Merton Heritage Forum. We are members of The Canons Steering Group delivering a £5m Lottery funded project and also undertake practical projects, organise walks and run Mitcham Heritage Day and Community on the Green. We ask that these representations are made available online through Planning Explorer.

2. The White Hart is one of the most important buildings in Merton and plays a critical role in Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation area by virtue of its historic significance and prominent location. It is not only nationally listed Grade II but also prominent in the historic townscape at the heart of the Conservation Area and adjacent to the world's oldest cricket ground. Together with the Burn Bullock it provides a connection to the area's location on the historic coaching route to the south coast and the role of these two former coaching inns. It also provides both a local landmark and a focal point at the Jubilee Corner road junction, as recognised in the Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan. It is recognised in this Plan as the only focal point for this part of the Conservation Area (solid arrow below).



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3. We welcomed the refusal of planning permission for the previous plans for development of the car park and significant changes to the listed building. We are encouraged by the engagement with us of the scheme's architects and planning consultants, including a site meeting prior to submission of the application and an online meeting to discuss these representations in draft. It is commendable that the applicants wish only to proceed with a scheme that has local consent and the reduced height of the revised proposals and the commitment to servicing via the rear access are both positive moves. Nevertheless, the revised plans need to go further to address a number of the issues we have raised during these discussions and in earlier representations.

4. We have reviewed the revised proposals in the context of the Cricket Green Charter and current and emerging development plan policies for the area.

5. We support the principle of residential development on the site and restoration of the White Hart which closed some years ago. Our approach to the site is set out in our representations on the emerging Local Plan:

White Hart backland



Current uses – Private car park

Preferred future use – Residential (C3), Car park

Existing planning & other issues – Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation Area, setting Grade II* building (White Hart), Archaeological Priority Zone, Wandle Valley buffer

Future opportunities – Making positive use of unkempt and under-used site including:

- Mews style residential development accessed from Broadway Gardens
- Rationalised parking for White Hart and residences
- Investment to improve condition of Grade II* listed White Hart
- Public realm investment

6. The site allocation Mi17 in the latest draft Local Plan is consistent with our representations and links the scope for residential development to that required to restore the White Hart and re-open it as a "restaurant/café or public house or drinking establishment". Development "will need to improve the condition of Grade II* [sic – the White Hart is Grade II listed] listed White Hart public house and support a viable use of the White Hart pub."

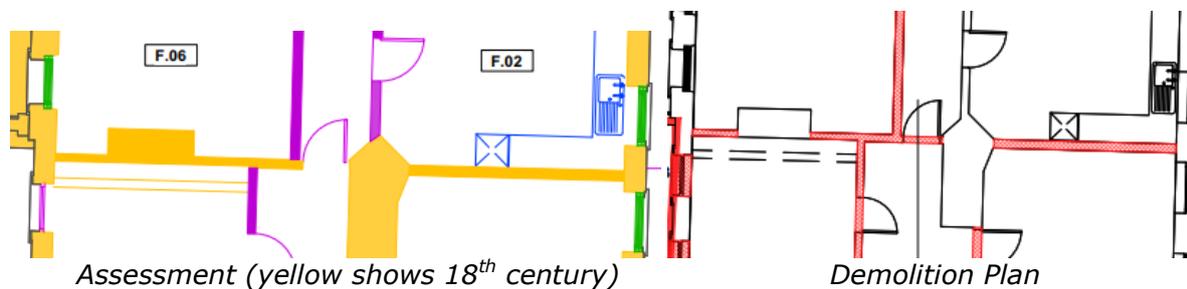
Use of the White Hart

7. The plan to re-use the White Hart for Use Classes C3 (residential) and E (Commercial, Business, Service) is not entirely consistent with this allocation. The plans result in a significant loss in the proportion of the listed building in public use, replacing 620 sq m of public house with just 120 sq m of commercial, business or service use. Our strong preference is for the development to secure the re-opening of the White Hart as a public house. If this cannot be achieved then a larger proportion of the listed building should be in non-residential use. This will ensure more public access and better reflect its historic function. It is also important that any planning consent does not exclude use as a public house (now a sui generis use) by virtue of being restricted to Class E.

Listed Building Consent

8. We support those elements of the proposals which restore the White Hart and do not object to the proposed demolition at the rear and conversion of the buildings to the rear. Demolition of the function room and utility block provides an opportunity to enhance the rear elevation of the listed building (noted for its significance in the listing description) and improve its setting. Given these benefits we are content with the application for Listed Building Consent in relation to the demolitions and the new openings and closing up of some windows, providing it is linked to the viable re-use of the White Hart and secures an improved rear elevation.

9. We are concerned by the loss of so many interior walls in both the service wing and the main public house and object to the application for Listed Building Consent on these grounds. A comparison of the Demolition Plan and the Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment survey of the age of the different elements of the buildings indicates the loss of some 18th century walls in the main public house (first floor) and 19th century walls in the service wing (see below). This loss of original fabric is contradicted by the Assessment's statement relating to the first floor of the main building that *"The modern partition walls will be demolished to create a rationalised floor layout. This will not entail any loss of original fabric"* (para 8.7). We also note the statement that *"the extent of the original fabric in the service wing is unknown"* (para 8.9) and urge a precautionary approach.



10. The loss of so many internal walls also risks significantly reducing the legibility of the buildings – a significance acknowledged by the Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment (paras 4.19 and 8.10).

11. Notwithstanding this objection we welcome the commitment to restoring a viable use to the White Hart. This needs to be secured by a planning condition that requires the Grade II listed building to be in a suitable and viable use prior to the sale of any residential flats

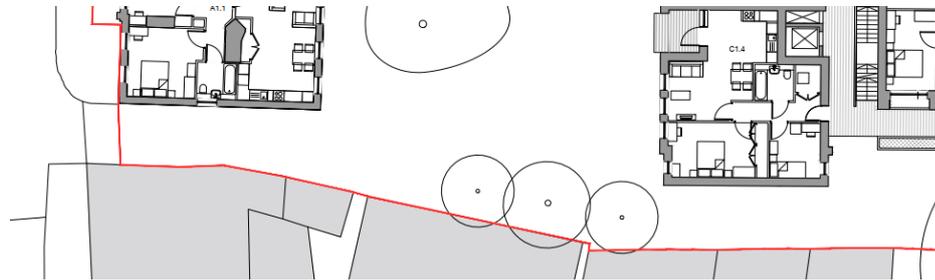
Development of flats in rear car park

12. We object to the rest of the plans as they cause avoidable harm to both the Conservation Area and the setting of the listed White Hart and other designated heritage assets as a result of:

- Substantial harm to the Grade II listed White Hart evidenced by the negative impact on:
 - the key view to the White Hart as a focal point identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan on the approach along Cricket Green road. The Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment confirms the loss of the hipped profile of the listed building as the back land development is visible on both sides (see below – this image is taken from approximately the same point as the key view to the focal point in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan). We dispute the claim that *"this visibility will not affect the primacy of the White Hart Inn and because of its limited height will be read as part of the background of the view"* (View 01) and in the Design and Access Statement that *"there is no impact on the key views within the conservation area"* (para 5.4) not least because of the evident impact on the characteristic hipped roof profile of the Grade II listed building



- erosion of the key separation between the Grade II listed White Hart and the Grade II listed cottages at 346/348 London Road in key views from the front elevation facing London Road (left to right in plan extract below)
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- the negative impact on views from Lower Green West and London Road to the north east of the site, including the sense of open space behind London Box Sash Windows and the associated workshops which are identified as making a positive impact in the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
- Overdevelopment of the site resulting in the loss of open land within the Conservation Area and an excessive plot ratio – the recent expansion of Cricket Green School on adjacent land has already resulted in a significant change in this part of the Conservation Area and there is no historic tradition of back land development, as noted by the Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment that it *“has no surviving historic pattern of tight-knit back land development”* (para 7.13). The visual impact of this is evident in View 4. We acknowledge that were development to be permitted that a contemporary design may be appropriate
- Failure to address the degraded public realm within the site boundary along the main access from Broadway Gardens behind Highfield Court despite acknowledgement in the Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment that *“The access to the car park (from Broadway Gardens) is long and straight, exposing the backlands to view. In its present condition, this part of the Site is an eyesore that detracts from the character and appearance of the MCGCA. In this context, the Site has significant potential to make a major contribution to the character and appearance of this CA by reinforcing local distinctiveness”* (para 4.4) – the development should be required to provide a significant uplift in the quality of this part of the site which supports its use as shared space (including by residents in the adjacent social housing) and provides significant and appropriate planting to offset tree loss elsewhere on the site, resulting in a minimum 10% increase in the tree canopy and an urban greening factor that exceed 0.4 in line with London Plan Policy G5. The planning application should be

accompanied by information regarding the future public realm and landscape as detailed as that provided for the new buildings and not leave these critical matters to be resolved through planning conditions

- An unacceptable net loss in trees and tree canopy arising from proposals to fell all 13 trees on the site and provide only six new ones. We disagree that this *"suitably addresses the proposed tree removals"*, especially given the lack of detail on the CAVAT value of the replacement trees, their size and species, the lack of detail on the loss of tree canopy, the lack of detail on how the proposals meet London Plan requirements for urban greening and the lack of consideration of future maintenance and care. The poor quality of some of the existing trees is also the result of unauthorised lopping and other tree works undertaken in recent years. There are further opportunities to increase the tree canopy on that part of the site linking it to Broadway Gardens
- Poor design details in the proposed new block of flats, including projecting balconies despite the Design and Access Statement claiming that *"most of the balconies are inset, which lends depth and richness to the elevation"* (para 6.2) – they are not mostly inset and the clear implication is that projecting balconies do not lend depth and richness
- Inappropriate justification that development should be supported by *"building on a piece of almost derelict land"* (para 8.20) – the fact that an area of land has been wilfully allowed to become degraded, including through unauthorised uses, is no justification for allowing development to be permitted – reference NPPF para 191 that *"Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of, or damage to, a heritage asset, the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision"*
- Failure to meet the requirement of Local Plan Policy CS8 for a minimum of 40% affordable housing provision for developments of 10 homes or more
- Failure to provide sufficient housing choice in conflict with Local Plan Policy CS8 and DM H2, which requires 35% of homes to be three-bedroom or larger – the plans provide for a single three-bedroom home in an eighteen home scheme, amounting to just 5.5%
- Failure to provide a minimum of dual aspect flats throughout the scheme, contrary to London Plan Policy D6 and emerging Local Plan Policy CC8.16 with inadequate information provided on ventilation and daylight – we do not accept the applicant's interpretation of flats with windows on a single elevation over two storeys in the service wing to being the equivalent of dual aspect

13. We welcome the approach to requiring vehicle access and servicing to be only to the rear. We ask that this is secured in any planning consent by planning conditions restricting vehicle and service access to the rear and safeguarding the historic entrance facing Cricket Green solely for pedestrian use.

Quality of supporting information

14. We are concerned by the variable quality of the information provided in support of the application. Given the scheme's impact on Lower Green West, the failure of the Heritage and Townscape Impact Assessment to be aware of the Grade II listing of the war memorial must undermine its findings. This is the most basic of errors. The Grade II listed milestone on the eastern corner of Lower Green West is also missing from Figure 2 of the Assessment.

15. The Assessment also describes the assemblage of workshop buildings, including that occupied by London Box Sash Windows, in negative terms as a *"visual muddle"* and creating an *"awkward juxtaposition"* (para 5.16). We disagree and support the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan's assessment of them as making a *"positive contribution"* precisely because of this character. This has important implications for the assessment of the visual impact from this part of Lower Green West and along London Road to the north east.

16. The Assessment contains other errors, including references to the "*West Wimbledon*" Conservation Area (para 7.12). The arboricultural report shows a poor understanding of the protection afforded to trees in the Conservation Area where Merton Council does not use Tree Preservation Orders.

Conclusion

17. We consider the proposals to be in conflict with Local Plan policies CS2, CS14, CS20, DM D1, DM D2, DM D4 & DM H2 and London Plan policies D6 and G5 and emerging Local Plan Policy CC8.16 and site allocation Mi17 and to still cause substantial harm to both the Conservation Area and Grade II listed White Hart and other listed buildings and heritage assets. We continue to support appropriate development on this site compatible with its sensitive location and the need to provide a viable future for the listed White Hart. We believe our objections can be readily addressed through further design consideration and would welcome the opportunity to engage with revised proposals. Any future development should be no more impactful than the former 1930s neo-Georgian building to the rear and we have proposed an alternative mews-style development. This would extend the approach adopted for the service wing.