

Meeting Note

Subject: Reigate Priory – Pre-application Proposals

Location: Microsoft Teams

Date: 9 October 2020

Time: 11:00

Attendees:

- Michael Parker – Reigate & Banstead (Planning)
- John McNally – Reigate & Banstead (Conservation)
- David Jones – Reigate & Banstead (Property Services)
- Paul Roberts – Historic England
- Alma Howell – Historic England
- Nasir Khawaja – Department for Education
- Lee Mainwaring – Architecture Initiative
- Jeff Field – Strutt & Parker
- John Cutler – Strutt & Parker
- Paul Sutton – PS Planning & Heritage

At the start of the meeting, it was explained that Surrey County Council is reviewing the prospects for relocating Reigate Priory Junior School to the former Canon Woodhatch site on Cockshott Hill. Feasibility work is currently being carried out in that respect and Reigate & Banstead Borough Council (R&BBC) will be approached in due course.

Notwithstanding the above, the pre-application approach here was to assess R&BBC and Historic England (HE) views on

- the proposals as a 'fall back' option, should the Cannon site not be feasible;
- the land use and design parameters for another school; and,
- alternative uses for the Priory building and curtilage land.

The Council's starting point was that the proposed scale and mass of the new school at three storeys would potentially be inappropriate in heritage terms, as it would not be subservient to the main Priory building. Subject to detailed design, the Council indicated that a two storey development at the location of the 1950s block could be appropriate.

HE suggested that further 'views' should be provided from the top of the ridge so as to understand the full impact of the three storey element.

The Council accepted that the school space requirements dictate the need for a three storey building assuming that the 1950s site is the preferred and only location for a school.

However, by the nature of the scale of development there would be either less than substantial harm, or substantial harm caused to designated heritage assets (Priory Building and Conservation Area). Assuming that the Priory School is relocated to the Cannon Site, (and therefore removing the argument on need), the Council's position was that the 'public benefits' would be reduced, and might not be sufficient to outweigh any such harm to the heritage asset.

Similarly, the Council considered that in Green Belt terms, the proposal would result in inappropriate development (impact upon visual openness), and in the absence of a need for a replacement school (or demonstrably a new school), very special circumstances would not exist to outweigh any harm.

Other school use - these heritage and Green Belt considerations could potentially be addressed for instance if proposals were for a Special Educational Needs school, in which case building heights could also be reviewed (possibly two storey). This would (subject to evidence) address a particular need but also be appropriate in terms of scale and mass, based on the LPA comments to date. Consideration would need to be afforded as to whether the proposed bridge element would be appropriate in safety terms in this scenario, as well as parking considerations.

Alternative Uses for the Priory - the Council and Historic England also considered that some of the proposed interventions to the Priory building (subdivision of rooms etc) required additional level of assessment. There was a concern that potential future uses of the Priory building could be limited if the site were split (with northern part of the site used as a school, for instance). The Project Team stated that there was interest for the Priory Building as it exists but recognised that further design development would be needed.

In respect of other matters, the Council's planning officer indicated that due to the location partly within Flood Zones 2 and 3, any application would need to address Sequential Test and Exceptions Test requirements.

Pre-application would need to be carried out with Surrey County Council as the Highways Authority before any application.

Given the circumstances, we have agreed to request that the pre-application request is held in abeyance for the foreseeable future.