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CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

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Mr Scott Houston
West Berkshire District Council
Council Offices,
Market St,
Newbury
RG14 5LD

Our ref: 9330

05 July 2019

Dear Scott,

19/00806/HOUSE - 24 Donnington Square, Newbury

In light of the late acceptance of third party comments, which we understand has been confirmed as a procedural error, we write on behalf of the applicant in response to the new information submitted, specifically to respond to the letter from HDA (addressed to Ms Charlotte Hawkins, dated 28th June 2019) and the sketch elevation drawing which accompanied it. We trust that, in the circumstances, the applicant is entitled to the right of reply.

The updated letter from HDA is disappointing in that it gives limited justification for the conclusions reached therein and largely ignores the Heritage Statement prepared by James Weir. It is assumed, therefore, that HDA could find no real fault with the independent heritage advice provided by James Weir and so chose not to address this matter. The letter therefore only serves to provide a conflicting opinion presumably commissioned in an attempt to stifle the planning application.

In essence, the letter from HDA now only raises two perceived main issues; (i) the loss of spaciousness; and (ii) the roof form which HDA consider to create a somehow unacceptable silhouette of the building. We have purposely not gone into exhaustive detail in responding to these matters because to do so would repeat ground already covered by the Planning Officer, the Conservation Officer and the matters covered in the Heritage Statement from James Weir, however the applicant's response is provided below:



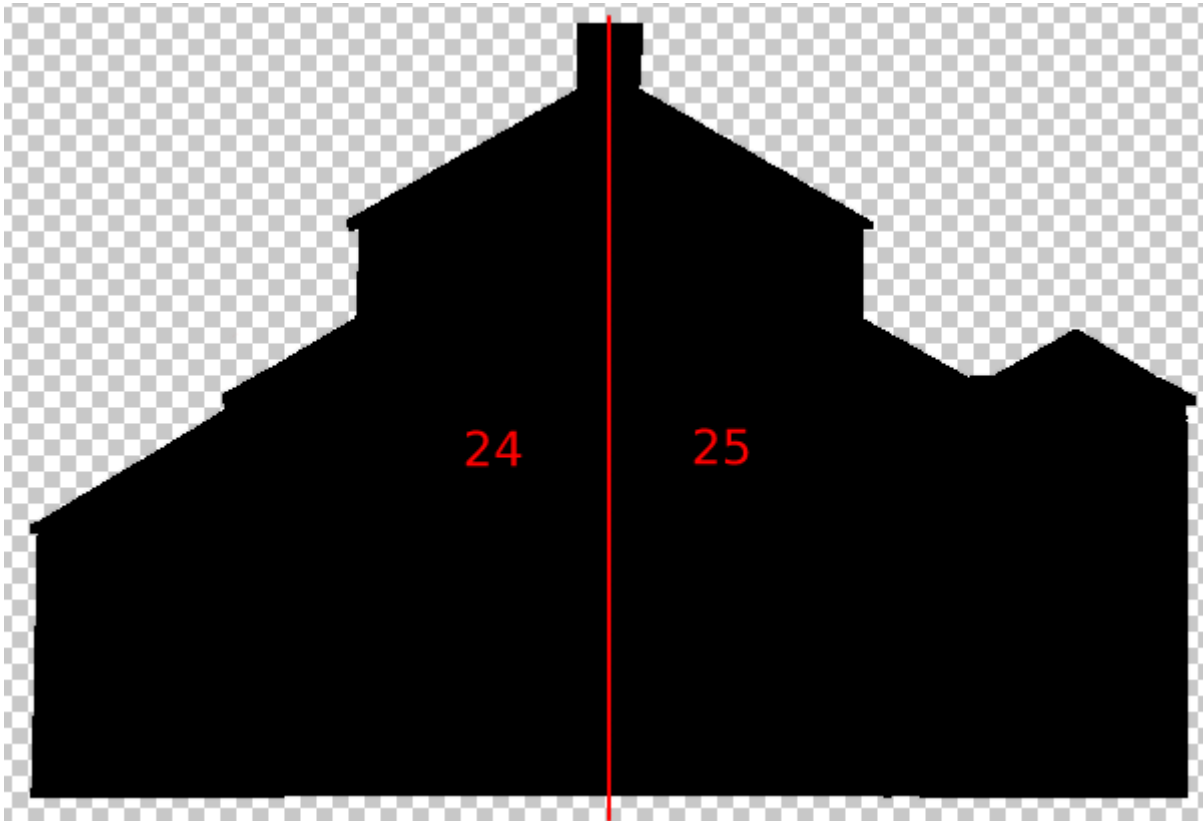
Visual Spaciousness

With regard to the perceived impact on visual spaciousness, the letter from HDA fails to recognise the historic significance of this part of the Conservation Area, which is of course pivotal to any conclusion in this regard. It is therefore paramount to note that the more recent semi-detached pair comprising Nos. 22-23 are mid-twentieth century properties which, in both design and positioning, are incongruous with the Conservation Area, serving to dilute the historic significance. The presence of the gap created by the unusual position of these neighbouring dwellings cannot, therefore, be said to be an important part of the Conservation Area that should otherwise be given any significant weight. The original building which stood on the site was positioned close to the highway, the same as all of the other historic buildings which positively contribute to the historic character. The re-balancing of the historic semi-detached pair (the application property and No.25) is therefore a genuine enhancement which addresses the historic environment and more than outweighs any perceived loss of the gap, with the gap itself not being a historic feature that might otherwise be positive.

That said, the gap in question is vast, created by the semi-detached pair comprising Nos. 22-23 being set far back from the highway. The gap in the street frontage therefore spans the entire width of these plots. Accordingly, the notion that a narrow 3.6m wide extension, designed to be both subservient to the main house and set back significantly from the main elevation, would in any way materially alter this visual gap is, with respect, nonsense. We consider that the proposal cannot possibly be said to materially change the visual appearance of this large gap within the street scene.

Silhouette

Turning to the second issue, the letter from HDA suggests that the proposed roof design would create a 'silhouette' that would be out of keeping. Instead, a sketch elevation has been submitted alongside the letter from HDA showing the objectors recommended approach. A true silhouette of both the proposal and the sketch now provided with the HDA letter is provided below for ease of reference. As can be seen, the proposal creates an attractive and balanced silhouette, whilst the suggested approach would be considerably unbalanced, introducing a new type of extension to the pair which would only serve to dilute the character of both. Accordingly, we also find this objection to be without foundation and find that the sketch elevation submitted by the objector demonstrates the flawed nature of their objection.



Silhouette of the semi-detached pair including the suggested extension drawing which supported the HDA letter – note the lop-sided / imbalanced appearance that would result

Summary

The applicant's consider that, the fact that the revised letter from HDA now only raises two rather weak concerns is indicative of the fact that no true fault can be found with the submitted Heritage Statement (prepared by James Weir) and the conclusions reached by the Council's Officers. The proposal clearly does, therefore, comply with the relevant development plan policies and permission should be granted accordingly.

It is disappointing that such a modest proposal has been escalated in this way, however, we hope that the Committee now have confidence to support the proposal. The nature of the objections and the delays that have been experienced by the applicant's has been most distressing for them given that the proposal is essentially a very modest and sympathetic side extension.



The applicant's has been extremely neighbourly, consulting with Ms Hawkins throughout the application process and already amending the proposal to meet previous requests. The proposal which is now before the Council seeks to conserve the appearance of the dwelling and rebalance the semi-detached pair and also achieve enhanced family accommodation allowing Gareth and Lenka to remain living in Donnington Square which they so cherish. The extension would achieve a new nursery on the second floor with a new separate bathroom next to the master bedroom, a separate study on the first floor to provide a place for flexible working and separate dining room on the ground floor. The extension is entirely proportionate to the house and, as highlighted throughout, would be significantly smaller than the existing extension at No.25 but importantly achieve balance.

Finally, we understand that a special Western Area Planning Committee has been scheduled for 10th July. Whilst Gareth and Lenka are very appreciative of the efforts to arrange this meeting, they did explain before the meeting was organised that they are on leave next week. Accordingly, they politely request that the date is changed to the following week.

Yours sincerely,

BELL CORNWELL LLP

MTaylor

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SENIOR PRINCIPAL PLANNER

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