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Planning (f.a.o. Mr Chris Steuart)
Wycombe District Council
Queen Victoria Road
High Wycombe
Bucks
HP11 1BB

Dear Sirs,

Uplands Hotel and Conference Centre, Four Ashes Road, High Wycombe HP15 6LB
Planning application ref. 13/06423/FUL Planning officer; Mr Chris Steuart.

We strongly object to this application and urge the Council to refuse consent.

Founded in 1847 our Society is the senior body in the county in the fields of archaeology, architecture and local history. Our interest is in the conservation of the historic environment and we are appalled at this proposal which would involve the total demolition of all the buildings at Uplands and the destruction of the designed landscape.

Our honorary librarian, Mrs Marian Miller, has researched the history of Uplands. A pdf version of her report has been emailed to Mr Steuart and the Conservation Officer, Martin Andrew. A printed copy is also being delivered to Mr Andrew. We believe this provides ample evidence that Uplands is an undesignated heritage asset with significance for its historical and architectural interest.

Uplands' historic interest derives from the age of the main house (built 1859) and its association with prominent people. Its architectural interest is based on that of the surviving part of the original house (attributed to the architect E.B. Lamb) and the high-quality of the modern buildings designed by eminent architects Edward Cullinan Associates. The combination of the best of the old and the new in both the buildings and grounds, designed by landscape architect, Georgina Livingston, is, in our opinion, an excellent example of conservation.

It seems to us that Uplands displays all four of the heritage values defined in English Heritage's "Conservation Principles" (2008). Evidential since the house and gardens have the "potential to yield evidence about past human activity (para 35 of the "Conservation Principles"); historical by virtue of the association with prominent people; aesthetic because of the quality of the design of both house and grounds (para 48); communal because Uplands has had a communal function since it became a training centre in 1957. This communal value continues, and has probably increased since Uplands became a hotel which hosts functions such as weddings.

We believe this proposal fails to achieve sustainable development within the NPPF for many reasons including the following:

- it does not contribute to protecting and enhancing our historic environment. Indeed it would involve the total loss of a significant non-designated heritage asset (para. 135 of the NPPF) with no corresponding benefit.
- the applicant has not demonstrated the significance of the heritage asset (as required by para. 128). The historic buildings appraisal prepared by Cotswold Archaeology on behalf of the applicant fails even to attempt an assessment of the majority of the buildings on the site (those designed by Cullinan) or the gardens and grounds. “PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment Practice Guide (March 2010)” provides in para 68: “For example, for a substantial demolition it is reasonable to expect the applicant to provide detailed information on the asset as a whole and a through explanation of the impact.” Based on the evidence of Marian Miller’s report we strongly disagree with the conclusion in the appraisal that the buildings are not worthy of retention, nor with the dismissal of E.B. Lamb as a “minor architect”.
- Uplands is within the setting of nationally important designated heritage assets including Hughenden parish church and Hughenden Manor. The impact on setting in heritage terms has not been assessed.
- para. 9 NPPF provides that “Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment including...replacing poor design with better design”. In our view the current proposal would reverse this principle by replacing buildings of acknowledged excellent design with modern housing of mediocre quality.
- it is contrary to the core planning principle in para 17 NPPF: “conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.”
- there appears to have been no attempt by the applicant to consider how the buildings at Uplands could be conserved; total demolition seems to have been the only option on the table. Even if the current buildings are not viable for continued use as a hotel/conference centre (and the applicant’s own figures appear to undermine their claim of non-viability) surely a feasibility study of options for uses by other operators or conversion to different uses should be provided. The original 19th century building was stabilised and modernised as part of the 1980s works by Cullinan and the modern additions are only 30 years old. Total demolition of such buildings with all their embodied energy is a waste of resources and so contrary to the principle of sustainable development outlined in para 17 “encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings”.

Consequently we trust that the Council will refuse this application.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Marsden
Chairman