

**TWENTIETH
CENTURY
SOCIETY**



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Pooja Kumar
Case Officer
Wokingham Borough Council

By email: pooja.kumar@wokingham.gov.uk

06 June 2017

Dear Pooja Kumar

Planning application reference: 171171

Site: Pool Court, Thames Street, Sonning, RG4 6UR

Proposal: Demolition of existing dwelling and replacement with new dwelling with basement and garage annex.

Our ref: 17 06 02

Thank you for consulting the Twentieth Century Society on the above application. The Society **objects** to this application, which causes substantial harm to a non-designated Heritage Asset and to the Sonning Conservation Area. The Society considers that the loss of this distinctive building, designed in 1975 by the important nationally renowned architect Francis Pollen, will detrimentally affect the appearance and character of the Conservation Area. The house is identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal as a Positive Building Enhancing Character and is therefore a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. We consider that there has been insufficient assessment in the applicant's Design and Access Statement of the impact of the loss of this building and a total failure to assess or understand the significance of the building itself. Apart from the clear indication of its importance in the Conservation Area Appraisal, the house is listed in the entry for Sonning in Pevsner's Building of England series for the County of Berkshire, which is the first and most basic

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indicator of the significance of a building of this age. It also features in the Twentieth Century Society's Journal 4 which lists important architect-designed houses of the century and Alan Powers' monograph on Frances Pollen. This should have indicated to the applicant that more research to understand the building was required.

Pollen is known for his church work such as Worth Abbey in Crawley and more locally St John Bosco, Woodley and St Peter, Marlow. He was also well known for applying his contextual modernism to commercial and residential commissions. Having met Lutyens as a child and having worked on the Lutyens Memorial volumes for Country Life, Francis Pollen was the ideal choice of architect to design a contextually appropriate house for Sonning, on the same road as Lutyen's Grade I listed masterpiece Deanery Garden. As Alan Powers notes in his monograph on Pollen, at Pool Court he deliberately employs a 'Lutyen's-like roof form, steep with sprocketed eaves and glazed tablets' in deference to its context. This roof, the distinctive corner window detailing and the low single-storey plan emphasise the care that Pollen has used to create a modern building which fully responds to its surroundings whilst using modern architectural language.

The loss and replacement of this non-designated heritage asset should be resisted as causing harm to the conservation area without any corresponding public benefit. The council should be mindful of clause 132 in the NPPF (2012) which considers the impact of proposed development designated heritage assets such as conservation areas and the effect of development within their setting:

"132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification."

The council should be mindful of clause 135 in the NPPF (2012) which particularly commends the careful consideration of the effect of development proposals on non-designated heritage assets:

"135. The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset."

The Local Policy supports the NPPF in Policy TB24.2 where it states that it will require 'works to or affecting heritage assets or their setting to demonstrate that the proposals would at least conserve, and where possible enhance the important character and special architectural or historic interest of the building, Conservation Area, monument or park and garden including its setting or views.' This application fails to conserve a non-designated heritage asset or conserve and enhance the conservation area. The existing house is of an attractive design which blends well with both its built and natural surroundings in a way which is not achieved by the proposed replacement.

The council should resist demolition in a conservation area unless substantial public benefit outweighs the harm or loss caused and convincing justification should be required for demolition of unlisted structures of historic or architectural merit. There are no identifiable public benefits associated with this application. Houses of this era are adaptable and can be sympathetically refurbished without any loss of significance. There is no adequate reason to doubt that it remains fit for purpose. The justification for its replacement by the applicant fails to consider the value of this non-designated heritage asset and the sustainability of adaptation and continued use. It has consistently been shown that refurbishment, extension and adaptation of existing buildings is a more sustainable solution than replacement as it preserves the embodied energy in the building. Demolition and reconstruction not only causes the loss of that embodied energy, it uses considerable quantities of new resources unnecessarily.

The Twentieth Century Society urges the council to resist causing harm to the conservation area and this non-designated heritage asset by refusing this damaging and unjustifiable application.

I hope these comments are useful to you in your deliberations regarding this case, I would be extremely grateful if the Society could be informed of the Council's decision.

Yours sincerely

Clare Price

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Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in *ODPM Circular 09/2005*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.

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