

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	250478
Address:	Glebelands, Woolf Drive, Wokingham, RG40 1DU		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed installation of a new passenger lift, partial demolition of the existing Link Wing and construction of new ground and lower ground floor link accommodation, plus external alterations including repairs, installation of roof level PV panels and changes to fenestration.		
Heritage Asset:	<p>Glebelands – listed building with Grade II status since 1985.</p> <p>Setting of: Glebelands Stables and Cottage, both individually listed Grade II.</p> <p>Listed buildings are classed as designated heritage assets under the NPPF (2024) and in the Council's Local Plan policies</p>		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – amendments required

Comments On Proposal

Glebelands is a former country house designed in a free-Tudor style by Sir Ernest Newton – a pupil of Richard Norman Shaw – for Alfred Nicholson, a Director, and later Chairman, of the Linoleum Manufacturing Company. Completed in 1897, the building was subsequently altered and extended in the 20th century, notably by Harry Weedon in the 1950s with a large wing to the north, having been converted for use as a rest and convalescent home in the 1930s. The latter part of the 20th century saw further development with residential buildings of Acorn Drive built within the parkland, Academy House constructed immediately off the main drive and the Broccoli Cloister built and linked to the main house (via the 1950s element) to the north. In addition to the main listed building, the former stables and cottage as well as the lodge are all separately listed as Grade II. Despite all the 20th and 21st century development, Glebelands can still be read and appreciated as a large late Victorian country house set within a verdant and open setting.

The application proposes the demolition of a modern link building which connects the 1950s wing of Glebelands to the Broccoli Cloister and subsequent replacement as facilitate additional bedrooms for the care home. Also proposed as part of the application is the creation of a lift tower, the installation of PV solar panels to the

flat roof of the 1950s wing and additional related changes, such as windows and doors.

Link Building

From a heritage perspective there is no overriding concern over the principle of redeveloping this link structure. It is evidently 'under used' and offers little benefit to both the functionality and viability of Glebelands, and – importantly – does not overtly positively contribute to the setting of the main house nor the immediate context of the stables and cottage. Whilst there is no concern over the principle of a replacement structure, there is absolute concern over the proposed scale, massing and appearance.

The existing link, whilst not of any great architectural interest, does have something about it – the materials are broadly appropriate, but the oversized boxed dormers are clunky, however the veranda element does have its charm (and practicality). The materials and form are fairly recessive – but overall, the building is nothing special, but nothing particularly bad either. The context here is very important, particularly as being read as a continuation and almost conclusion to Glebelands rambling plan, but – and crucially – for the setting of the former stable block. It is important to remember this is a listed building in its own right, and thus the change to its setting will impact its significance. And so, whilst the principle of a structure in this area is acceptable (given the extant), any replacement should seek to retain the limited positive characteristics (fairly recessive, black timber etc.) but also seek to improve the existing situation (going from a fairly neutral aesthetic to one which would enhance the setting of the Stables). Given this, regrettably, the proposed building fails on all counts.

The proposed replacement is too generic in style, failing to reflect the host and context (other than, perhaps, the use of red brick). The proposed could be anywhere in the country, on any site, certainly not within a sensitive historic context with a wealth of architectural interest to provide inspiration. Whilst the Broccoli Cloister can be read 'very much of its time' it does aspire to fairly reflect Glebelands – the roof pitches broken up with the flatted dormers, the stone detailing, the black painted time etc. And of course, the Weedon's 1950s wing runs directly off Newton's original style (albeit in a slightly more inflated and less nuanced fashion). Given this context – and crucially the immediate setting of the Stables - the proposed contemporary addition would be strikingly conspicuous, for the wrong reasons.

The requirements and constraints of specialist retirement and care home accommodation are fully understood and acknowledged, but should never be used as an excuse for a lacklustre design. Sites such as Harbour Lights Court in Weymouth have demonstrated how high-quality traditional design can work hand in hand with contemporary requirements and actively enhance the area's character and appearance.

There is a missed opportunity here. There is absolutely a real opportunity to produce something interesting, something that will not only compliment the host(s) and context but also actively enhance – based upon the extant – the setting of the

Stables. As this area was (as originally designed) a service yard – and arguably this ‘yard’ or ‘court’ type plan has been increased in essence through the construction of the Weedon wing, the link and Cloister – inspiration should be taken from this service/stabling/garaging/mews style appearance.

- The proposed building should be traditional in character, to reflect and sympathise with the context. A universal contemporary aesthetic would not be acceptable.
- Consideration should be given the inclusion of large ‘stable/garage’ door style openings on the ground floor facing the Stables. These could be either be timber planked doors, ‘opened’/‘adapted’ with glazing or perhaps something along the lines of a Crittall style glazing (means of escape/other regs etc. are of course acknowledged).
- A brick plinth, as to match the context, would be appropriate, however the primary facing material should be recessive and traditional, almost ‘secondary’ in nature (as compared to the primary fine brickwork of the host). A black weatherboard would work well, under a shallow pitched slate roof.
- Alternatively, a deep, strong mansard roof form may be applicable – to give the accommodation of a two-storey, but the impression of a one-and-a-half.
- In terms of the first floor facing the stables, this arguably tricky to achieve. A balance must be struck between fenestration size and form with an appropriate external appearance.
- The proposed overall massing is too bulky, too boxy in form, this needs to be greatly reduced so the element is read as a ‘link’ or just an end of line subservient structure.
- A veranda as an architectural feature is welcomed. Some form of veranda could be appropriately introduced either in part or all of the way across as to allow for a ‘galleried’ type aesthetic with the windows/doors set behind.
- Whereas the ‘courtyard’ elevation can be seen as a service/mews style aesthetic, the southern elevation is sensitive for different reasons. This area can be seen and appreciated in direct conjunction with the main house – for example when standing on the lawn, both the main house and link can be appreciated within one vista. Therefore, the architectural treatment of this elevation is just as important. A black weatherboard may be a way to go, however the host is very ‘polite’ and the introduction of weatherboard in the same glance may not be appropriate. It is likely a brick is the best option, however this depends on the fenestration ratio proportion – these again should be traditional in approach and rhythm.
- For inspiration, see:
 - The Spitalfield’s Trust’s work on Varden Street (particularly the rears).
 - The Huguenot lofts/mansards of Spitalfields (Fournier Street etc.) for example fenestration proportions.
 - The various mews streets of London.
 - The stables at Waddesdon Manor (ignoring the embellishment ornamentation)
 - The coach house and stables at Saltram.

Furthermore, the following question is raised:

- The existing attachment to the Broccoli Cloister is acknowledged, however this was designed and constructed as such at a time when a physical internal link was required for access between the buildings. It is understood this link through is no longer required and therefore this rationale falls away. Other than – it is presumed – maximising every square inch of the available freehold, and possible construction ease/costs, what are the reasons for attaching to the Broccoli Cloister? The reason this is raised, is that Glebelands has been extended a number of times, as a result the overall planform rambles from extension to extension. It would be far preferable for the proposed extension to be the final stop of the elongated plan form and for the Broccoli Cloister to be seen as its own, separated, structure.

Lift Tower

The need for an additional and larger lift at Glebelands is fully understood and indeed the creation of such will further allow for the viability of the building which in turn allows for the continued maintenance. It is also noted the principle of an additional lift has previously been accepted. Lift towers within the historic environment are often tricky things, given the scale, height, need to connect to the various floors etc. However, in this instance, the site of the proposed lends itself well to the insertion of a tower. Given the land topography, being set behind and to the side the main vistas with limited fabric impact, the proposed lift tower is well considered and thus no concerns are raised to this element of the application. As ever, materials and details are crucial, and thus it is important to best match that of the host. Such details will be controlled by condition.

PV Panels

There is no objection to the principle of PV panels of the roof the 1950s wing, however these should be set as flush as possible to the roof as to avoid any visibility from ground level. Whilst it is appreciated positioning them with a 30° rake improves the productivity, the number of proposed panels would only ever provide limited a contribution to overall electricity consumption rather than depend upon the PVs. If it can be proven that a lower rake of say 10° to 20° would not be visible, that would be acceptable. It is also noted in the submitted Heritage Statement that the roof and parapet arrangement would change as a result of the installation of insulation. This alteration may require listed building consent and no further reference can be found to this as part of this application. As such, clarification is requested.

For clarity, the 20th century alterations undertaken by Harry Weedon and Partners form part of the listed building and must be treated as such. The 1950s wing et al. where not specifically excluded at the time of listing (1984) and thus including under the statutory protection. A ‘curtilage’ listed building within the site is identified differently, for example if the stables were not listed in their own right, they would have met the test of being a curtilage listed building (age, ancillary association and ownership).

In conclusion, whilst the principle of a replacement 'link' building is acceptable, the design, form and massing raise an objection. This objection can be overcome through a suitable and sympathetic design utilizing the guidance noted above.

Conditions

N/A

Date:	07/04/2025	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer
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