

MEMORANDUM

From:	Built Heritage Officer		
Service	Green Infrastructure	App No:	243125
Address:	Thamesfield Retirement Village, Remenham, RG9 2LX		
Proposal:	Full application for proposed part demolition of existing building and replacement with a three-storey extension to provide extra-care units, with associated soft and hard landscaping works; provision of additional vehicle parking, bin stores and ancillary structures; and alterations to existing basement.		
Heritage Assets:	Thamesfield – non-designated heritage asset. Remenham Bridge Conservation Area (WBC) Henley-on Thames Conservation Area (SODC) Setting of other heritage assets identified below		
Site Visit Made:	Yes		

Summary Of Recommendations

Objection – Refusal Recommended

Comments On Proposal

The application proposes the redevelopment of Thamesfield, a retirement home, which includes the demolition of existing elements with the subsequent construction of a three-storey addition.

The application site is located wholly within the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area and within the direct setting of the Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area. Furthermore, the application site lies within the wider setting of the Grade II listed Bird Place, Bird Place Cottage, The Little Angel, Henley Royal Regatta Headquarters, The Angel, 18 Thameside, Rectory and Coach house on Thameside, 11-12 Thameside, The Old Granary, Baltic House, River Terrace and Obelisk, the Grade II* Church of St. Mary and the Grade I listed Henley Bridge. The site also lies within the setting of the Grade II* Registered Park & Garden of Park Place and Temple Combe. All of which, to a greater or lesser degree, draw significance from their setting and context.

In addition, the application site is within the setting of a number of non-designated heritage assets, which include, but not limited to, the 18th-19th century cottages of

Wargrave Road, Century House on the Berkshire side and the Royal Mansions, numerous 19th and 20th century boat houses along Boat House Reach on the Henley side of the river. Whilst not of historic interest, having been built in the late 1990s, the proposals impact upon the direct setting of Remenham Row, which by virtue of the sympathetic design and material usage, positively contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Further to the impact upon the setting of the numerous heritage assets as noted above, the proposals affect the host, Thamesfield, a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). Thamesfield is a Victorian riverside mansion, of c1870, which was altered and enlarged in the late 19th century. The building was further altered and extended in the 20th century including changing function from a single residential dwelling to first a youth centre and subsequently a nursing home and retirement complex, of which it stands today. Whilst the building is altered and the site developed, the original white stuccoed Victorian mansion is still very clearly read and is highly prominent on the Berkshire bank of the river with landmark quality. By virtue of its age, architectural and historic interest as well as the positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area, noting particularly the views from the Oxfordshire side, Thamesfield is identified as a non-designated heritage asset. It is, however, important to note the extent of the NDHA is limited to the 19th century element, and does not extend to the 20th century extensions on the site. The submitted heritage addendum has argued Thamesfield cannot be considered a NDHA. This position is not agreed with, as the LPA has consistently identified Thamesfield as NDHA throughout the process based upon sound evidence. As per the NPPF and NPPG it is for the LPA to identify heritage assets, not for an applicant whose interest lies in the adverse impact upon them.

The proposed three-storey accommodation block would seek to replace an existing modern single-storey range – identified as ‘Block C’ – understood to predominantly date from 1993, part of the rear of ‘Block B’ which dates from the late 20th century, and – importantly – part of the rear of the 19th century element of the mansion. The application does not make clear what – if any – historic fabric would be lost through these proposals. The submitted heritage does not appear to identify the impacts and assess the consequences of such proposals upon the significance of the NDHA. The submitted heritage addendum has failed to provide additional information and assessment of the building but instead has continued to argue on the point of the NDHA status and thus, in that respect, the application is lacking in terms of the requirement of para. 207 of the NPPF (Dec 2024).

Notwithstanding the concerns over the loss of existing fabric, the proposals would seek to effectively triple the height, scale and massing of the existing built-form. They would also result in a significant increase of plan-form density on the site. The proposed development would deviate from the established built height and scale of the site, and seek to introduce a divergent form and appearance. Whilst of distinctly of a contemporary ‘honest’ appearance, the proposed form would undoubtedly be at odds with the extant and remaining form of the site and seek to introduce a great urban character. The blocky ‘roof’ form, that is the third storey, differs remarkably from all of the other existing elements on the site, which, no matter of their age, have sought to reflect the shallow pitched slated roof of the original 19th century building. Indeed, some elements of the 20th century

development of the site are reasonably successful – for instance the form of ‘Block D’ fairly reflects the form of a low-rise 19th century villa, and whilst the materials betray any authenticity, it has sought to appropriately settle into the historic context.

The Remenham Bridge Conservation Area is, in part, characterised by a low density, with a gentle built character and verdant context, which provides a contrasting setting to the directly related neighbour of Henley town on the other side of the river. Unlike the town, greater space and thus openness, (arising from both topography and land ownership) allows for a number of historic buildings to be set within their own grounds, Thamesfield being one of them. This is a sensitive location, betwixt the 18th century vernacular cottages of the Wargrave Road and the rolling banks and river beyond. It is this openness and verdant character which strongly contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and thus its significance as a designated heritage asset.

As can be noted from the applicant’s AVR document, the proposed development would have significant visual impact upon the vicinity, notably from the junction of Remenham (White) Hill and the Wargrave Road and from Thameside in Henley. It also important to note the strong visibility of the development which would occur from the upper level of buildings such as Royal Mansions and the Grade II listed River Terrace, which whilst not in the public realm, command fantastic views across the river, over the bank and up to Park Place RPG. Whilst visibility is a good indicator of the impact to setting, as Historic England’s *The Setting of Heritage Assets, Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 (Second Edition)* advises: “*Setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may therefore be more extensive than its curtilage. All heritage assets have a setting, irrespective of the form in which they survive and whether they are designated or not.*” And that: “*The extent and importance of setting is often expressed by reference to visual considerations. Although views of or from an asset will play an important part, the way in which we experience an asset in its setting is also influenced by other environmental factors such as noise, dust and vibration from other land uses in the vicinity, and by our understanding of the historic relationship between places.*”

Setting, therefore, is not just the visual link between buildings and environments, but in part the way in which they are experienced. Detachment through vegetation and trees, either extant or proposed, can provide a visual distinction between environments, however a landscaped boundary, or buffer, cannot always shield against non-visual atmospheric characteristics, such as noise and presence. Landscaping can also easily be subject to future change. Trees can easily be felled, hedging lost and thus there may not always be such detachment between buildings. As such, whilst the visual aspect plays a part of the character of the setting, it is the encompassing environment which truly defines how the assets are experienced.

The application’s proposal of a replacement residential block in a contemporary language drastically contrasts with the host’s (immediate and wider) architectural forms, that of a traditional 18th, 19th and early 20th century polite and domestic revival vernacular. The highly modernistic aesthetic introduces a bellicose form to the established architectural language with conflicts with traditional appearance the host setting. Whilst a contemporary approach could be considered to represent an

'honest' tact to building philosophy, it is clear in this instance the jarring nature of the architectural form is at odds with the contextual historic significance. These proposals present an antagonistic style of design which has a degree of outrecuidance. The resulting incongruity would be highly notable in the historic context and relationship to nearby heritage assets. The third storey of the proposed element is particularly problematic, and whilst the dark colouring is purported to reflect the slate roofs of Thamesfield, the black-grey block form seeks to dominate and overshadow the host and vicinity. The amendments as submitted in September of this year have not sought to address previously identified concerns, and, if anything, sought to decrease the quality of the design through a contrived and award roof appearance.

Furthermore, to the architectural language employed, the proposed development seeks to introduce a built-form which has a great 'townscape' quality as opposed to the extant 'villagescape' character of the Remenham side of the river. As the Henley CAA notes: *"The River Thames is one of the most important features of the conservation area and intrinsic to the establishment and evolution of the town. At Henley the Thames is broad and has a green setting beyond the limits of the relatively compact urban area."* It is the contrast between the "compact urban area" and the low-density and lower built form of the Berkshire bank which strongly contributes to not only the setting of the Henley Conservation Area but to the character and appearance of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area, which in itself derives significance from the contrasting urban grain from the town. The proposals would undoubtedly seek to introduce a greater urban character to the Thamesfield vicinity.

As such, the proposals would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Remenham Bridge Conservation Area through the introduction of a conflicting form which would seek to erode the established character and appearance of the designated heritage asset. Due to the considerable impact upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, including taking into account the cumulative impact upon the setting of other heritage assets, this harm would be identified at a moderate level in terms of the accepted 'less than substantial' scale. The proposals would also result in less than substantial harm to the significance of the Henley-on-Thames Conservation Area, of which part of its significance is drawn from the setting. Through the contemporary architectural form and appearance, the proposals would seek to alter the traditional outlook from Oxfordshire bank and further erode the established context. The less than substantial harm would be articulated as towards to the lower end of the scale due to the impact upon the setting which contributes to the designated heritage asset's significance. The proposals would also seek to negatively alter, and thus harm, the setting of a number of identified NDHAs, including the host Thamesfield. (Section 16, NPPF).

Through the unsympathetic size, form, and appearance of the development, the proposals would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (S72, P(LBCA)A 90).

Given the identified harm, the proposed development would conflict with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy and Policy TB24 of the Managing Development Delivery local plan.

As such, an objection is maintained to the application as the additional information and amended plans have not sought to address previously raised concerns.

Conditions			
N/A			
Date:	03/10/2025	Signed:	Roderick McDonald Built Heritage Officer