

DEPARTMENT FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

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04 January 2023

Re: WD/2022/2372/MAJ and WD/2022/2373/LB

To the Wealden Distric Council,

Benjamin Latrobe's architectural practice has long been considered of preeminent importance as a material manifestation of the cultural connections between Britain and the United States. Leading architectural historians, from Sir Nikolaus Pevsner to Sir John Summerson, have emphasised the significance of his two English houses, not only for this Anglo-American link, but for the innovation and creativity they display in their own right.

Benjamin Latrobe, though born an Englishman, was the first professional architect to work in the United States. He designed a number of the young nation's most important buildings and engineering projects. He was the primary architect of the Capitol at Washington DC, and he designed Baltimore's Roman Catholic Cathedral, which had the country's first load-bearing stone dome. He engineered the cutting-edge Philadelphia waterworks and built the Bank of Pennsylvania, setting the standard for half a century of American civic buildings. No other architect, except perhaps Thomas Jefferson, was so important for establishing America's architectural culture.

Latrobe's Ashdown House is a perfect Greek Revival villa and features an important technical innovation in the dome of its Coade Stone porch – the largest such self-supporting dome. Coade Stone was the greatest technical innovation of late 18th-century English architecture and helped lay the groundwork for the architectural transformations of the Victorian age.

There is no question that the current plan to chop the house into flats would cause significant harm to the house and its setting. The serene interior proportions, interior ornamental features, and carefully arranged sequence of spaces are essential to the house's integrity. The addition of a tall lift shaft and of additional storeys to the wings would muddle its massing.

I therefore wish to make a strong plea that the Latrobe-designed core of the house be preserved as a single unit and that as much of the setting as possible be saved. I have worked at the intersection of British-American cultural exchange for my entire career, at American universities, at the Yale Center for British Art, and now at the University of Oxford. This house is prominent in the story of the United States and Britain, and its modification would be a loss to the cultural heritage of both nations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David F. Lewis'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Frazer Lewis

Associate Professor of Architectural History and the Historic Built Environment

Fellow of Kellogg College