



Application: Residential Use and Partial Redevelopment of the former Ashdown House School, including 1) partial demolition of existing accretions, and extensions, alteration and conversion of Ashdown House to residential use (total 9 no.units); 2) demolition and partial demolition, extension and replacement of detached free-standing buildings for residential use (total 15 no.units); 3) erection of 13 no. dwellinghouses; 4) retention, refurbishment and reorganisation of existing 11 no.dwellings as 9 no. dwellings. Scheme totalling 47 no. proposed residential dwellings including retained existing dwellings, along with associated hard and soft landscaping and associated works.

LPA Reference: WD/2022/2373/LB & WD/2022/2372/MAJ

Address: Ashdown House School, Hartfield Road, Forest Row, RH18 5JY

Dear Mr Bewick,

Thank you for informing the Georgian Group of the applications for Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission concerning Ashdown House. Based on the information available to date, the Groups forwards the following advice to assist your local authority in determining these applications.

Significance of Heritage Asset

Ashdown House is a grade II* designated heritage asset designed by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, who was commissioned by the then owners Trayton and Anne Fuller in 1793. Ashdown House possesses a considerable amount of Archaeological, Architectural and artistic, and Historic interest justifying its grade II* designation. The Group understands the building is the subject of a listing upgrade application to give it grade I status putting it amongst the 2.5% of listing buildings afforded this status. The case for grade I listing has been proposed by the Latrobe Trust which has been compiled in a document and is valuable source for information on Benjamin Latrobe and Ashdown House.

The architectural and artistic interest of Ashdown House lies in the conscious design of the exterior and interior of the building and the integrity of Benjamin Latrobe's remaining work. Latrobe's work at Ashdown shows a thorough understanding of the Greek revival and one that he would later pursue in his commissions in America. Most notable is the use of the ionic portico on the exterior and introduction of domes within the house. Latrobe has been identified as a key player in the adoption and introduction of the Greek revival's movement and popularity within Britain - alongside well-known names such as James 'Athenian' Stuart and Nicholas Revett.

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The use of Coade stone at the house enhances the archaeological interest related with the building. Coade stone was used both decoratively and structurally in Latrobe's designs and was innovative at the time of construction – this is of particular interest and enhances the significance of Ashdown House considerably. The use of Coade stone is evident in the coffers which make up the dome of the exterior portico on the southern side of the house, along with the capitals and bases of the ionic columns.

The vital role Latrobe played in the adoption and expansion of the Greek revival movement within Britain and subsequently America enhances the associative value of Ashdown House. Latrobe emigrated to America in 1796 where he went on to undertake important works such as the Bank of Philadelphia, where in the words of John Summerson, he 'married English Neo-Classicism to Jeffersonian Neo-Classicism'. Latrobe's close relationship to Thomas Jefferson led to his appointment as Surveyor of the Public Buildings of the United States, in Washington D.C. Whilst in this role he undertook significant works to the interior of the Capitol building after subsequent damage from the War of 1812. Latrobe's work in Britain is scarce and Ashdown House was one of two full works undertaken by him - the other being Hammerwood Lodge. The fact that Ashdown House is one of the last two remaining works of Latrobe in Britain and due to its role in the early history of the Greek revival, its national significance is considerable.

Proposal

The applicant intends to convert the main house and site from its former use as a school into residential use. In order to achieve this conversion, the main house along with the later additions will be used to house 9 no. apartments and the surrounding site will be home to 47 no. houses. A full description of the works can be found at the head of this letter.

The Georgian Group's Comments

After reviewing the full suite of documents submitted by the applicant, there is not enough information available to make a full assessment of the impact the proposed works would have on the significance of Ashdown House and its setting. The Group is particularly concerned over the proposals for the interior of the main house, the introduction of a lift shaft, the alterations to the rear early 19th century wing and the setting of the main house.

There is no doubt Ashdown House is of exceptional interest due to its association with Benjamin Latrobe and the decorative elements of the house. Despite this, there is little assessment of their significance or contribution to the interest of the house. Without this, it is not possible to fully assess the impact of the proposed works. Furthermore, the conversion to residential use will ultimately require adherence with certain building regulations and the Group would request more information on these elements and how they would impact on the interior spaces of the house.

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Regarding the rear early 19th century wing and proposed works within, the applicant has acknowledged that historic fabric will be removed as part of the works in paragraph 5.34 of the Heritage Statement. However, there is no inclusion of the contribution the historic fabric makes to the significance of Ashdown House. The Group requests that further images of the interior of this section of the building be submitted in order to make a full assessment.

The introduction of a lift shaft within the existing lightwell of the main house, along with the residential development surrounding the house both have the potential to harm the setting of the listed building. In order to assess this impact, further visualisations need to be provided to make a detailed assessment.

Recommendation

The Group has concerns over the proposed application at this stage. As the application stands, the provisions set out within paragraph 194 of the NPPF have not been met and subsequently a full assessment of the impact of the works cannot be undertaken.

The Group recommends your local authority request the applicant to provide the information set out within this letter before the applications for Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission are determined. If the applicant is unwilling to provide further information, then the two applications should be refused consent in their current form.

Yours sincerely,

Eddie Waller (Conservation Advisor for London and South East England)