



The Planning Inspectorate

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your ref:
SB/MDS/153/95

our refs:
T/APP/A1910/A/95/251426/P7

~~T/APP/A1910/E/95/811561/P7~~

PLANNING DEPARTMENT
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Date: 22 JAN 1996

Ack.

Print

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Dear Sirs

received 23 JAN 1996

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 SECTION 78 SCHEDULE 6 AND
PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS) ACT 1990
SECTION 20 AND SCHEDULE 3
APPEALS BY: STOCKS HOTEL AND COUNTRY CLUB
APPLICATION NOS: 4/1116/94 + 4/1117/94LB**

1. As you will be aware, I have been appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to determine these appeals against the decisions of Dacorum Borough Council to refuse planning permission and listed building consent for the extension of the hotel, the erection of a swimming pool, the laying out of car parking, the demolition of a barn and stable and various ancillary works at Stocks Hotel, Stocks House, Stocks Road, Aldbury, Tring, Hertfordshire. As you will know, I held an inquiry into the appeals on 19 October and 19 December 1995. At the inquiry, an application for costs was made against the local planning authority and this is the subject of a separate letter.

2. On the basis of my inspection of the appeals site and its surroundings and my consideration of the evidence given and submissions made at the inquiry and in writing by your clients, the local planning authority, the Aldbury Parish Council, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (HBMC) and other interested parties, I have decided that the key issues raised by these appeals are as follows:

- (1) Whether and to what extent the proposed development and works of extension, alteration and demolition would secure the future preservation, both visually and in an economic sense, of the listed building.
- (2) Whether and to what extent the proposed development and works would serve to enhance the curtilage of Stocks House or its wider setting within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

3. At the inquiry, it was argued that the application for planning permission should be treated by me as a renewal of that permission granted on 14 November 1989 (appn no: 4/1536/88) for virtually identical development and works of alteration and extension. It was also argued that the permission should have been renewed because there had been no change in planning circumstances since that time. I see that the planning application form makes no explicit reference to a renewal of permission. However, both the subsequent decision notice and appeal refer to the application as relating to such a renewal. I shall treat the first appeal in a similar way. However, I must necessarily now consider it and the other appeal in the manner prescribed by sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

4. The local planning authority's view is that the extension of the listed house fails to meet the relevant national and local policies which relate to design proposals affecting such buildings. They point to the fact that the new building would amount to about 76% of the existing building's floorspace. It is felt that the mass, external appearance and siting of the new hotel extension would adversely affect the character of the building and its setting. Your reply is that a virtually identical design obtained planning permission in 1989, having been the subject of scrutiny and eventual approval by the specialist architectural panel appointed by the Hertfordshire County Council for this purpose. You add that the later (1994) views of the HBMC in relation to the listed building consent application may be construed as being generally favourable.

5. Several aspects of the submitted designs and the degree of detail shown in the submitted plans cause me much concern. Firstly, the 1989 permission was qualified by no fewer than 32 conditions, 17 of which refer to building design or landscape deficiencies as perceived by the local planning authority. Secondly, the two and identical sets of drawings which were submitted in support of both listed building consent and planning applications in 1994 appear to me to be very substantially the same as those put forward in 1988. Given the authority's significant reservations at that time and given the more stringent requirements for listed building consent applications in section 10(2) of the above 1990 Act, I find it very difficult accurately to assess the precise architectural impact of the proposals on the immediate and wider settings of the listed building.

6. As far as the architectural quality of the extension design is concerned, I cannot improve on the word "mundane" which you will recognise as having been used not only by HBMC in their written observations to the authority but also by the expert witness for the appellants in his evidence at the inquiry. The witness, who had no part in the original planning submission, had been asked to rectify some of the apparent design deficiencies, especially as regards the main elevations, during the month preceding the opening of the inquiry. My own view is that his very brief and late contribution to the design of the extension building is startling in its enhancement of the quality of the work. This suggests that a satisfactory solution to the considerable architectural problem of significantly extending the listed building would be found by the seeking of suitable professional advice, as is indeed enjoined by paragraph 3.25 of PPG15 (Planning and the Historic Environment).

7. As was discussed at the inquiry, it seems to me that the local planning authority intended to use the word "massing" rather than "mass" in their decision notices relating to both applications. In view of their 1989 acceptance, in principle, of the scale of added bedspaces and ancillary accommodation, the largely unchanged planning circumstances since then and

indeed the more favourable terms of policy 85 of the emergent Dacorum Borough Local Plan (DBLP)(as contained in the Proposed Modifications of 1993), substantial conformity of the proposals with the plan, as regards need and extent, appears amply evident. It occurs to me that the word "massing" more accurately conveys the design objections of the authority. In this regard, the critical test is set out in policy 85(B) where the design and scale of the extension falls to be considered relative to the listed building and its setting.

8. This I have defined as part of the first key issue. I accept that the design is "mundane" in that the proposed extension attempts to echo the window patterns and roof outline of the listed building. The new building has no coherent or visible identity of its own. This is the more unfortunate in that the listed building is essentially an amalgam of various additions. The evidence suggests that the 1773 house was added to in about 1834, 1884 and 1910, to say nothing of much more recent twentieth century additions. To add a very substantial building of no special architectural identity, quality or flavour in such proximity to the old seems to me to be likely to reduce its special character and to make it more of an amorphous grouping set in a very fine rural landscape.

9. To that extent I accept the authority's reservations which relate to massing, appearance and siting (or "location" to use the word which actually appears in the notices of refusal). As far as the first issue is concerned, I conclude that the submitted design is inadequate relative to the need to secure the listed building's preservation in an aesthetic sense. On the other hand, I am satisfied that the building's future preservation, in a purely economic sense, would be met by the additional bedrooms over and above the present 18. This seems to be the view of the authority and would also derive considerable support from policy 85 of the DBLP, as proposed for modification. I attach considerable weight to this policy in view of the late stage it has reached in the process of adopting the district-wide local plan.

10. Turning to the impact of the submitted design upon the local landscape and the Chilterns generally, this is an aspect of the proposals which is almost impossible to judge, given the paucity of drawings. This is not merely a matter of presentation. Design drawings are not only the medium of architectural thinking and intention; they also provide tangible evidence that certain design matters have been fully evaluated and taken into account. It is a clear requirement of the emergent local plan and there is also a policy requirement in PPG 7 to conserve the appearance of the AONB. The matter has not been explicitly addressed by the local planning authority. I find this wholly unsurprising given that there is inadequate evidence of topographical or landscape analysis, notwithstanding the building's prominent setting in an AONB.

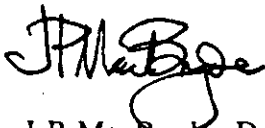
11. I attach much significance to this second issue, that of landscape impact and enhancement. The listed building dates from a period which is celebrated for its country houses in extensive landscape settings, often chosen for their quality. The rural panorama as seen from Stocks House is expansive, which conversely implies that the house is a prominent feature in the landscape. Since much of the immediate setting has been lately affected by the recent laying out of a golf course, it is of some considerable concern that the extension of the house and its inevitably altered outlook and prospect should be the subject of most careful environmental impact assessment. Not only is the extension design of a mundaneness which has attracted comment from two authoritative sources but the distinct paucity of the material available to me suggests that no rigorous approach to landscape design has taken place.

12. My overall conclusion is that there is no objection to the development in principle. Neither would there appear to be any objection in principle to the concomitant internal alteration or significant, and architecturally subordinate, extension of the listed building. The works of demolition also appear to be welcome in that later and unworthy structures would be removed and the building's setting enhanced. What is before me is a listed building consent application for all these works which is inadequately supported by architectural and landscape detail. These inadequacies render it inexpedient for me to grant consent on appeal, notwithstanding the set of largely agreed conditions. Since my decision is largely dictated by my consideration of section 16 of the 1990 Act, it logically follows that the concurrent planning appeal must fail as a result of my applying section 66 of the same Act.

13. In arriving at the above conclusions, I have considered all the other matters raised by the parties and the various representations but find them of less weight than those which have finally led to my decision. In particular, I have looked at the various representations relating to road safety and access. This looks to be a problem which concerns the parish council and some residents of Aldbury more than it does the local highway authority. No evidence on this matter was available at the inquiry. However, my own site inspection leads me to the view that the available road width and horizontal alignment, together with the pattern of public footpaths in this favoured part of the Chilterns, are such as to invite the further attention of the local authorities in the event of a future application for planning permission to extend Stocks Hotel.

14. For all the reasons which I have just given and in exercise of the powers which have been transferred to me, I hereby dismiss both appeals.

Yours faithfully



J P MacBryde DA(Edin) DipTP(Lond) ARIBA MRTPI MCIT
Inspector

ENC

T/APP/A1910/A/95/251426/P7
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APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANTS

Mr Russell Harris of Counsel, instructed by Franks, Charlesly & Co,
Solicitors, 161-166 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2DY.

He called:

Mr S J Brooker DipT&CP MRTPI Principal Consultant, Cliff Walsingham & Co.

Mr W D Haslam DipArch ARIBA Principal of DHP Architects Limited.

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY

Mr Paul Brown of Counsel, instructed by Mr Pugsley, Director of
Legal Services, Dacorum Borough Council.

He called:

Ms Yvonne Lee Bsc(Hons) Dip Conservation Officer, Dacorum Borough Council.
Bldg Cons ARICS



TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Ref No. 4/1116/94

Stocks Hotel
Stocks Road
Aldbury
Nr Tring
Herts

Goodall Partnership
4 Five Acres Fold
Briar Hill
Northampton

DEVELOPMENT ADDRESS AND DESCRIPTION
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Stocks Hotel & Country Club, Stocks House, Stocks Road, Aldbury

RENEWAL OF APPLICATION TO 4/1536/88: EXTENSION, SWIMMING POOL, CAR PARKING AREA,
BARN, STABLE AND ANCILLARY WORKS

Your application for *full planning permission* dated 24.08.1994 and received on
25.08.1994 has been **REFUSED**, for the reasons set out on the attached sheet.

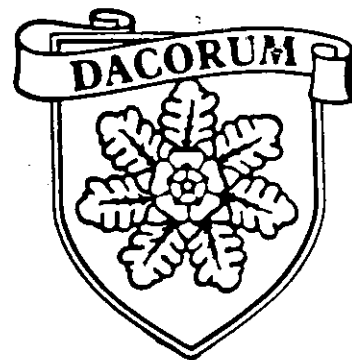
Director of Planning

Date of Decision: 20.10.1994

(ENC Reasons and Notes)

REASONS FOR REFUSAL
OF APPLICATION: 4/1116/94

Date of Decision: 20.10.1994



The design of the proposed extension, by reason in particular of its mass, external appearance and location, is inappropriate in relation to the design of the existing listed building, and will have a seriously harmful effect on the character of that listed building and on its setting.