



Devon Gardens Trust

East Devon District Council
The Knowle
Sidmouth

5 November 2012

Your ref : 12/1847/MOUT

Dear Sirs

Outline planning application proposing the demolition of existing buildings (retention of building B), residential development of up to 50no dwellings, 60no bed graduated care home (Class C2 use) and access (All matters reserved except access) Council Offices, The Knowle, Sidmouth, EX10 8HL

The Devon Gardens Trust has considered the revised planning application documents on your web site and maintains its strong objection to this application by the East Devon District Council.

The Devon Gardens Trust, formed in 1987, is one of the earliest county gardens trusts to have been established and has considerable knowledge, expertise and experience of developments affecting historic designed landscapes. One of its roles is to help safeguard the heritage of historic landscapes within the County of Devon by advising local planning authorities on statutory and non-statutory parks, gardens and designed landscapes of importance and ensuring that planning policies provide adequate protection for these sites.

The Devon Gardens Trust works in partnership with The Garden History Society to utilise our detailed local knowledge to ensure that your Council, as the local planning authority, receives authoritative specialist advice on planning and conservation matters regarding development affecting historic parks and gardens and their setting.

The Knowle is on the Devon Local Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest which means that this historic designed landscape is a heritage asset.

The Government published the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework on the 27th March 2012, to be taken into account by Local Planning Authorities as a material consideration in planning decisions. All previous national Planning Policy Guidance, including PPS 5 Planning for the Historic Environment (published in March 2010), is now superseded. The National Planning Policy Framework states a presumption in favour of sustainable development in both plan making and decision taking, but recognises that there is a need to balance any adverse impacts against the benefits. The NPPF sets out 12 core planning principles that should underpin both plan making and decision making, the 10th of which is that planning should “conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.”

The National Planning Policy Framework, Para 126 states that “heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource...and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance..”. It reiterates the



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previous PPS5 advice that LPAs, in determining applications, should require the applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

Good conservation practice indicates that where a planning application affects the historic environment, the applicant must demonstrate a clear understanding of the significance of the affected heritage asset, and that the proposed development will not adversely affect its historic significance. We would suggest that the East Devon District Council, as the applicant, has not satisfied this criteria, as there is no meaningful analysis of the historic significance of The Knowle; at the very least we would expect to see early OS Maps and historic photographs of the site. The heritage statement does not provide an analysis of the historic significance of The Knowle ; at the very least we would expect to see early OS Maps and historic photographs of the site. The heritage statement does not even mention that The Knowle is on the Devon Local Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The Knowle was once one of the most famous houses in Sidmouth. The once renowned cottage orne was built in 1810 under the personal supervision of Lord L.E. Despenser and subsequently rented to the Marquis of Bute. It was owned by the collector and connoisseur T.L. Fish from 1836 to 1861 who added picturesque improvements. In 1850 it was described as 'the delightful marine villa is an elegant and tasteful residence surrounded by about 11 acres of ground, divided into lawns, gardens, and conservatories, containing rare and choice specimens of botany, as well as many fine specimens of foreign birds and animals.'

But later rebuilding has not left any of the early features; the office building is rather nondescript and the council car parks are an intrusion into the landscape. The Devon Gardens Trust does not have any objection to the principle of redevelopment on the footprint of the existing Council offices.

The original Lodge still marks the entrance to The Knowle and some garden structures survive in the gardens of the C20 houses in Knowle Drive. A substantial area of the original parkland remains, containing some magnificent trees particular specimens of cedar, Wellingtonia and Monterey pine. These mature trees are covered by a TPO made in 1956 by Sidmouth Urban District Council, which gives protection to the most important trees on the site.

The parkland of The Knowle forms part of the attractive approach to Sidmouh, providing an important contribution to the overall historic character and landscape of the town. In this respect the development proposed would have a significant detrimental effect upon the setting of the conservation area and views into and out of it.

It would appear that the planning application proposes that several of the mature trees which are protected under the blanket TPO of 1956 would in fact be felled as they would be affected by the proposed development.

The Trust is most concerned that the application proposes housing development on areas which are an integral and important part of the existing parkland. Whilst the area round the southern entrance (Zone E) is not planted with mature trees, this is nevertheless part of the original parkland and should not be a site which East Devon District Council considers to be a development opportunity.

The Devon Gardens Trust is surprised that the East Devon District Council, as a responsible local planning authority is proposing that substantial area of the valuable parkland should be developed.



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We understand that East Devon District Council wish to maximise the development value of the site but would have expected the Council to act in a responsible manner and protect the parkland from development; we understand that The Knowle was given for the benefit of the residents of Sidmouth.

We consider that it would not be acceptable, in terms of the historic designed landscape, to build on any of the existing parkland. We suggest that the East Devon District Council should withdraw this application as, if approved, the proposed development would detract from the character and appearance of the historic designed landscape of The Knowle and the town of Sidmouth.

Yours faithfully

John Clark
Conservation Officer