

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| APPLICATION NO. | P19/V3213/FUL |
| SITE | Crescent House, 21 Park Crescent, Abingdon, OX14 1DD |
| PARISH | ABINGDON |
| PROPOSAL | Demolition of modern side and rear extensions, the remodelling of Crescent House, a new building to provide boarding accommodation and a link corridor to link the new building to Crescent House. (as amplified by amended plans and further information received 28 August 2020; 22 September 2020; 1 October 2020; 6 December 2020 and 9 February 2021) |
| WARD MEMBER(S) | Eric de la Harpe Robert Maddison |
| APPLICANT OFFICER | Mr Justin Hodges Luke Veillet |

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Permission is granted, subject to the following conditions;

Standard conditions

- 1. Full Planning Permission – three-year commencement**
- 2. Development in accordance with the approved plans**

Pre-commencement conditions

- 3. Tree Protection (submission of final AMS and details)**
- 4. Construction Traffic Management Plan**
- 5. Schedule of Materials (Photographs)**

Pre-occupation conditions

- 6. Submitted Landscaping scheme implementation**
- 7. Submitted Drainage scheme implementation**
- 8. Submitted Sustainable Design Features - as approved**

Compliance conditions

- 9. Submitted Ecology Mitigation**

10. Submitted External Lighting – no further lighting with LPA approval

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

1.1 *Introduction*

This application, as a ‘major’ scale development, has been referred to the planning committee as your officers’ views conflict with those of the Town Council.

1.2 The application site comprises a large residential property and its curtilage (Crescent House), which incidentally forms part of the surrounding wider Abingdon School site. Abingdon School is a well-established independent day and boarding school for boys aged 11-18, also with a Prep School for boys aged 4-13.

1.3 Crescent House is currently used as boarding accommodation, along with the adjacent Cobban House and Glyndowr House to the west of the site. Together, these buildings accommodate 56 bed spaces for pupils. It fronts onto Park Crescent and Albert Park, which is a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG) and the application site and school are in the Albert Park Conservation Area (CA). There are two listed buildings within Albert Park; the Grade II Monument to Prince Albert circa 120m to the south west of the application site and the Grade II Conduit House circa 170m to the south, which once fed water to fountain on Ock Street. Within the wider school site, some 220m to the east, is the Grade II Listed Waste Court (known as Austin House and also used for boarding accommodation) and the Grade II Listed Wall and Gate Piers to Waste Court. Outside Albert Park, some 235m to the south-west is the Grade II Church of St Michael. The site is also in a wider area of archaeological interest, being located within Abingdon Towns core (reference DOX16321M). A map of the site and constraints is shown below in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Location and constraints map



Key

1. Crescent House (Application site)
2. Cobban House (School Boarding accommodation)
3. Glyndowr House (School Boarding accommodation)
4. Grade II Waste Court (Austin House) (School Boarding accommodation)
5. Grade II Wall and Gate Piers to Waste Court
6. Grade II Albert Park (Registered Park and Garden)
7. Grade II Listed Monument to Prince Albert
8. Grade II Conduit House
9. Grade II Church of St Michael
10. School House (School Boarding accommodation)

1.4 **Proposal**

Abingdon senior school currently has just over 1,000 boys from age 11-18, of which around 140 are boarders (comprising 110 full boarders and 30 weekly boarders). This total number of boarders has remained static in recent years and represents the capacity. Boarders are housed in three boarding houses: School House (53 boarders), **Crescent House (56)**, and Austin House (29). As mentioned, Crescent House consists three separate buildings - Glyndowr, Cobban House, and Crescent House. Each boarding house also provides pastoral care for several dayboys, such that the total number of boys (day + boarding) in each boarding house is c.100. There are 6 other purely dayboy houses in the school plus a Lower School division for the first and second years. The mixing of dayboys and boarders helps aid integration of boarders into school life more generally and vice versa.

1.5 Abingdon School has been subject to expansion of their facilities in recent years. Most notable are the large three-storey 'Yang Science Building' (P12/V2373/FUL), which is located directly behind Crescent House to the

north and the three-storey Beech Court Sixth Form Centre located to the south-west of Austin House.

- 1.6 The proposed development follows on from several pre-application enquiries starting in 2017, which have sought to explore the potential to extend the existing boarding accommodation of both Crescent House and Austin House. The latest enquiry in 2019 (P19/V1099/PEM) was supported by an updated site wide ‘Masterplan’, which detailed future development of the school, as well as articulating the rationale for selecting Crescent House and Austin House as being the most appropriate to extend. The 2019 Masterplan is **attached** at Appendix 1.
- 1.7 Therefore, this specific application seeks to demolish modern side and rear extensions and build a new large three-storey linked extension to the rear of the building. The extension will include three separate, but linked sections, leaving Crescent House mostly in its original state. Extracts of the key proposed plans are **attached** at Appendix 2.
- 1.8 The scheme has been amended since its original submission in response to officer concerns. The scheme has removed a further fourth two-storey building section, which proposed to link to the ‘Coach House’, located to the north-west of the site. The ‘Coach House’ is located outside the curtilage of Crescent House and within the curtilage of Cobban House.
- 1.9 Finally, it important to note that this application has been submitted in conjunction with applications to extend Austin House (P19/V3211/FUL and P19/V3212/LB), which also seek a three-storey extension to consolidate boarding accommodation on the eastern part of the school site. Whilst this is a separate application under consideration (thus considered on its own merits), it is part of the wider masterplan to upgrade the schools boarding facilities. Neither applications are seeking an increase in the number of pupils attending or boarding at the site but seek to consolidate existing accommodation which are scattered amongst different buildings. The schemes propose to not materially change the number of boarders from the current 140 but even out the number of boarders in each of the three main houses to around an optimum level of 50 beds per house. This will enable the future proofing the sites accommodation, better management and improve pupil cohesion. It will also free up existing buildings for other school activities. The applicant’s rationale for the accommodation is **attached** at Appendix 3.

2.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 2.1 Full comments are available on the application pages on the council’s website, www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk . A summary of comments submitted, and main issues highlighted are shown below;

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Abingdon Town Council | Original submitted scheme <i>No objections</i> |
| | Amended scheme |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| | <p><i>Objection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After reconsidering, the council has several concerns and concurs with comments by the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society • Overdevelopment in terms size, scale, bulk and massing • Harm to the Conservation Area and Historic Park/Victorian Villas • The harm to the Heritage assets is deemed to substantial |
| <p>Conservation Officer</p> | <p>Original Submitted Scheme <i>Holding objections</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed development would result in a very large extension to the existing house on Park Crescent and would link it to the coach house block to the rear of the neighbouring plot of Cobban House • This will fundamentally alter the character of the Crescent House site by significantly increasing the massing of the buildings on the site and altering the relationship of the two historically separate plots • The development will result in less-than-substantial harm to the designated conservation area and I consider that further steps to mitigate the harm should be explored before considerations of how this harm could be outweighed are made <p>Amended scheme <i>Comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amended plans have been submitted which have altered the proposed layout of the extensions at Crescent House and no longer connects the extension to the coach house to the rear of Cobban House, helping to retain the sense that these two plots remain separate within the wider park character • The proposed development will result in a very large extension to the existing house on Park Crescent. This will fundamentally alter the character of the Crescent House site by significantly increasing the massing of the buildings on the site. Steps to mitigate this harm by reducing the connection between neighbouring plots has reduced some of the harm. • The revisions reduce the visual impact of the proposal on the experience of the park from certain angles. From within the park itself the glimpsed views towards Crescent House are improved as the |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>separation between Crescent House and Cobban House is much better retained.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed design of the extensions reflects the more institutional appearance of new development across the school site, rather than the Victorian domestic character of the houses on Park Crescent. I have no objection to this architectural approach. • However, the development does not enhance or better reveal the Victorian layout of the park that forms the Conservation Area and will result in less-than-substantial harm to the designated conservation area |
| <p>Drainage Engineer</p> | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>No objections, no conditions required</i></p> <p>Amended scheme <i>No objections, no conditions required</i></p> |
| <p>Oxfordshire County Council Single Response</p> | <p>Original submitted and amended scheme</p> <p><u>Highways</u> <i>No objection, subject to conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No increase in staff or boarders, so no highway impact • CTMP required for construction <p><u>Local Lead Flood Authority</u> <i>No comments</i></p> <p><u>Archaeologist</u> <i>No objections</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An archaeological evaluation has not indicated the presence of archaeological features within the application area. As such there are no archaeological constraints to this application |
| <p>Forestry Officer</p> | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>Holding objection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed development will require the removal of several trees shown as T10, T11, T12, T13, T14 and T17 as shown within the submitted Arboricultural Report. These trees are of low arboricultural value and should not be considered a constraint to the proposed development, their loss can be mitigated with replacement planting • Landscaping scheme is suitable • Some conflict with drainage and T15 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AMS has not considered demolition works with root protection areas (RPA) of T8 and T9, 2 high quality Wellingtonia Adjustments required due to conflict with some tree RPA's and services plan required to check whether there are conflicts with infrastructure. <p>Amended scheme <i>No objection, subject to conditions</i></p> |
| <p>The Gardens Trust</p> | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>Comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gardens Trust (GT) is a Statutory Consultee with regard to proposed development affecting a site included by Historic England (HE) on their Register of Parks & Gardens. Surprised that the online documentation regarding the new buildings for Abingdon School did not mention the Grade II registered Albert Park (RPG) which lies directly across the road from Crescent House Since Albert Park and the houses around it are part of a conscious piece of urban design/town planning of the late 19th century it is important that any proposals for modification or new build maintain the overall design aesthetic. These need to preserve or enhance the setting of the RPG or better reveal its significance. We would therefore have expected photomontages of the views from within the RPG both towards Crescent & Cobban Houses and back towards the Park We would suggest that if your officers are minded to approve this application, careful attention is paid to the size, detailing and materials appropriate to preserve and enhance the setting, character and appearance of the RPG and Park Town conservation area <p>Amended scheme <i>***No response received***</i></p> |
| <p>Countryside Officer</p> | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>No objections, subject to conditions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecological surveys have concluded that the existing structures are unlikely to support roosting bats and that the proposed works are unlikely to impact any other protected species. Habitats on site are not considered to be a constraint. Mitigation measures are proposed. |

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| | <p>Amended scheme <i>No objections, subject to conditions</i></p> |
| <p>Urban Design Officer</p> | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>Holding objection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the current application, its design, built form vernacular along with architectural detail work well relating to the scheme’s architectural context. • The link between the main development and the Coach House within Crescent House’s curtilage removes the discernible plot pattern, one which has historically framed Albert park and defined the area. This link also removes a key distinction between the curtilages of Crescent House and Yang Science Centre <p>Amended scheme <i>Supports</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst the extension to the existing boarding school is considerable larger than the existing building, including scale and massing, its visual impact on Park Crescent and any glimpsed views from the Park its self are kept to a minimum, as demonstrated by the superimposed imagery provided as part of the application. • This increased scale and massing of the new build in comparison to the exiting House must also be read in the context of the new Sciences building of Faringdon Rd, which sits as the backdrop to the development as viewed from Albert Park, which itself has a unobtrusive presence. • As per previous comments the proposed design for the extension to Crescent house has a good and applicable, built form vernacular material pallet, detailing and overall composition |
| <p>Historic England</p> | <p>Original submitted and amended scheme <i>Comments</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the basis of the information available to date, we do not wish to offer any comments. We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers, as relevant. • This does not mean that we consider the proposals to be acceptable or unacceptable, simply that we are content for the application to be determined by the LPA following their own specialist conservation advice. |

| | |
|--|---|
| | |
| Environmental Protection | Original submitted and amended scheme <i>No objection, subject to conditions to limit construction times, noise and dust</i> |
| Thames Water | Original submitted <i>No objections, the water and waste network has capacity in the area for the development.</i> |
| Chief Fire Officer | Original submitted ***No response received*** |
| Friends of Abingdon Civic Society | <p>Original submitted scheme <i>Objection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale of building is far too large, 3 times size of Crescent House • Cut off all long-distance views from the well-used public footpath of Roysse’s Alley towards the north-west • Damage historic layout and curtilage • Harm would be caused to the character and appearance of the Albert Park Conservation Area by this proposal would be substantial • Site area has been downgraded from an area of ‘high-conservation’ in the applicants 2011 appraisal to ‘neutral’ due to development of the MUSA. This has resulted in ‘creep’ development. • Impact of views from the Park Crescent and the Park. • Accept that there are benefits to the town arising from the presence of the School, although we do not believe, for the reasons stated above, that they outweigh the strong presumption against permission in this case <p>Amended scheme <i>Objection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The changes proposed in the amended application are cosmetic and in no way address the points made in our comments on the original application • Abingdon TC are producing a draft Conservation Area appraisal and the application should consider this. |
| Local residents and neighbours (12) | Original submitted scheme <i>Objections</i> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site is not a higher education facility, thus policy CP30 does not apply. • A private school is not a community facility. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harm to conservation area, registered park and historic environment due to scale and design• Application contradicts arguments made for science centre – which was justified based on distance to the park• No public benefit• Erode Victorian setting of park and villas• Does not ‘preserve’ or ‘enhance’ the Conservation Area <p>Amended scheme</p> <p><i>Objections</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The site is not a higher education facility, thus policy CP30 does not apply.• A private school is not a community facility.• Harm to conservation area, registered park and historic environment due to scale and design• Application contradicts arguments made for science centre – which was justified based on distance to the park• No public benefit• Revised plan for 21 Park Crescent seeks to respect the historic curtilage of the adjacent villa, (Cobban House, 20 Park Crescent) while totally failing to do so for Crescent House, 21 Park Crescent• Erode Victorian setting of park and villas |
|--|--|

3.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

3.1 [P19/V3211/FUL](#) – (not yet determined) Demolition of a modern flat roof extension to Austin House, the remodelling of Austin House, a new building to provide boarding accommodation and a link corridor to link the new building to Austin House.

[P19/V3212/LB](#) – (not yet determined) Demolition of a modern flat roof extension to Austin House, the remodelling of Austin House, a new building to provide boarding accommodation and a link corridor to link the new building to Austin House.

[P18/V2481/FUL](#) – Approved (10/01/2019)
Erection of a three-storey education building to accommodate a lodge, house rooms, computer science and economic teaching space

[P16/V2529/FUL](#) – Approved (03/01/2017)
Demolition of existing building and erection of a new three storey building to accommodate a sixth form centre, centre for independent learning and art

department and external storage building. Minor changes to cafe and new pedestrian access to Roysee's Alley to the north.

[P16/V1480/DIS](#) - Approved (05/07/2016)

Replacement of grass tennis courts, laying artificial multi-use sports pitch (MUSA), with associated fencing and access. P16/V0741/FUL Conditions(s) 4 - Arboricultural Method Statement.

[P16/V0741/FUL](#) - Approved (12/05/2016)

Replacement of grass tennis courts, laying of a new artificial multi-use sports pitch (MUSA), with associated fencing and access.

[P12/V2374/CA](#) - Approved (24/01/2013)

Demolition of existing school building (Medical Centre).

[P12/V2373/FUL](#) - Approved (24/01/2013)

Demolition of existing school building (Medical Centre). Erection of a three storey Science Centre and the reconfiguration of the existing coach park, including alterations to the points of ingress and egress.

3.2 **Pre-application History**

[P19/V1099/PEM](#) (18/06/2019)

Erection of boarding house accommodation.

[P18/V2568/PEM](#) (16/11/2018)

Erection of two storey extension to boarding houses and ground floor link between Crescent House and Cobban House.

[P17/V2872/PEM](#) - (14/12/2017)

Erection of two storey extension to boarding houses and ground floor link between Crescent and Cobban House. Science building extension. Rowing tank and pavilion

3.3 **Screening Opinion requests**

None

4.0 **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

4.1 Screening is not required and the development does not constitute EIA development. It does not involve development over the thresholds for urban development projects under Schedule 2, 10 (b). The site is not in a 'sensitive area' defined by the Town and Country Planning Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2017.

5.0 **MAIN ISSUES**

The main issues to consider in context of this scheme is discussed in section five below;

- **The principle of development**
- **Layout, Design and Impact on Heritage Assets**
- **Residential amenity**
- **Traffic, parking and highway safety**
- **Environmental matters**
- **Other matters**

5.1 The principle of development

5.2 Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that the local planning authority shall have regard to the provisions of the Development Plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires where regard is to be had to the Development Plan, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the most relevant parts of the Development Plan are the adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (LPP1) and Part 2 (LPP2).

5.3 LPP1 policy CP01 broadly reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF. Policy CP03 then sets out a settlement hierarchy, which is one of the policies which underpins the districts overarching spatial strategy for development. This policy defines Abingdon-on-Thames as one of the Market Towns, which given its size and services, has the ability to support the most sustainable patterns of living. It notes the Market Towns have the greatest long-term potential for development. Abingdon School is firmly located within the built-up area of the Town.

5.4 The development plan does not have any specific policies which guide development on its established school sites in the built-up areas of the Towns. However, LPP2 policy DP8 does recognise schools to constitute community facilities, which play a key role in creating and sustaining healthy and inclusive communities. Policy DP8 notes that extending community facilities will be supported in the built-up areas of settlements. The fact Abingdon School is an independent school, in your officers' view, does not exclude it from being a community facility. It is still a school which serves the local community and beyond, both for education and use of its sports and leisure facilities to the wider public. Indeed, appeal decisions have confirmed that private facilities can be considered as community facilities (such as an Osteopathic Clinic, for example - appeal ref: APP/D1780/C/19/3222884).

5.5 It is also noted that Paragraph 20 (c) of the NPPF recognises education facilities to constitute 'community facilities. Paragraph 94 then recognises the importance of having , *'a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing and new communities'* and at 94 (a), it notes that Local Authorities should give, *'great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools through the preparation of plans and decisions on applications'*.

5.6 Therefore, having regard to the development plan and above policy context, your officers consider that the principle of extending the school facilities in the manner proposed is acceptable, supported by LPP1 policy CP03, LPP2 policy

DP8 and national guidance. This would of course be subject to consideration of the detailed issues and other material considerations examined below.

5.7 **Layout, Design and the Impact on Heritage Assets**

5.8 It is evident that the layout, scale and design of the scheme in context of the various impacts on the historic environment, is one of the main issues raised. As identified, the site is constrained by several designated heritage assets. It is located within the Albert Park Conservation Area (CA) and opposite the Grade II Albert Registered Park and Garden (RPG). Within the RPG are two Grade II listed buildings, the Prince Albert Memorial and Conduit House. The Grade II Church of St. Michael is south of the park.

5.9 In context of these constraints, there are two main sub-issues to consider. These are the impact on the character and appearance of the CA and non-designated assets, and the impact on the setting of the RPG and relevant listed buildings. These matters are considered below;

5.10 Impact on the Character and appearance of the Conservation Area and non-designated heritage assets

LPP1 policy CP37 requires that all new development is of a high-quality design and responds positively to the character of the area. The design should also conserve and enhances historic character and reinforce local identity.

Policy CP39 seeks to ensure new development conserves, and where possible enhances, designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets and their setting in accordance with national guidance and legislation. LPP2 policy DP36 then sets out the general approach in assessing the impact on heritage assets, broadly reflecting the policy guidance in the NPPF.

5.11 LPP2 Policy DP37 specifically address's conservation areas. Proposals for development within or affecting the setting of a conservation area must demonstrate that it will conserve or enhance its special interest, character, setting and appearance. It also sets out several criteria for consideration. These include ensuring development takes into account important views, sympathetic to building curtilages, open spaces and respect local distinctiveness through its design. This policy sits alongside the duties set out in the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Section 72 details that the Local Authority has a duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of appearance of that area.

5.12 Turning to the National policy guidance set out in the NPPF, Paragraph 190 of the details that the LPA should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise.

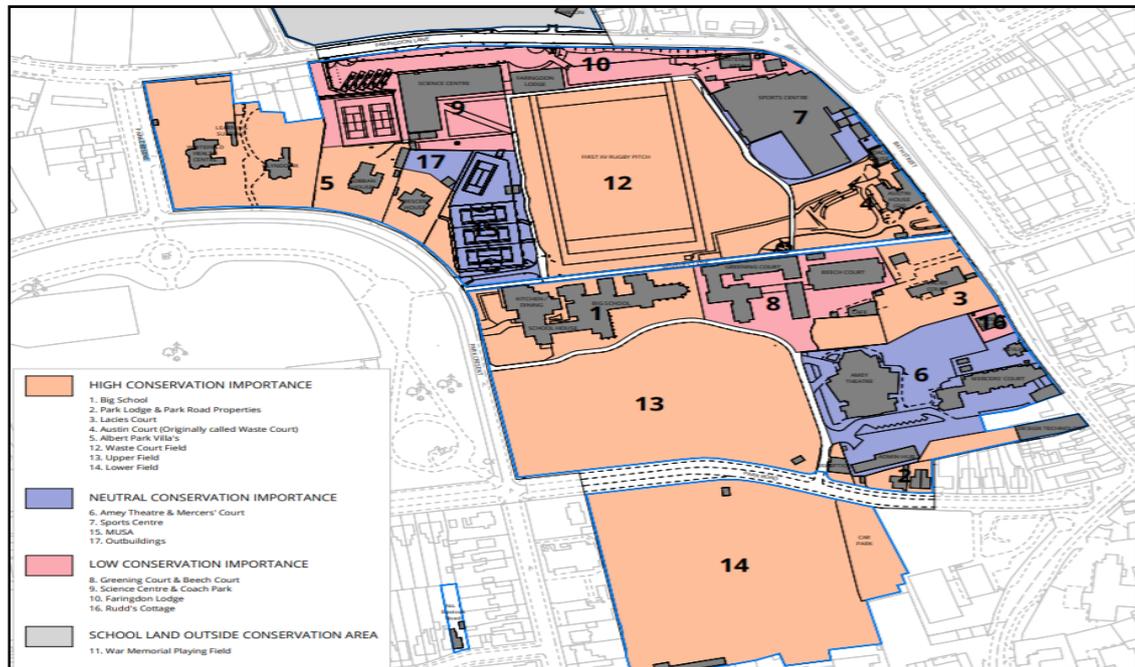
5.13 Paragraph 193 of the NPPF details that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. 'Significance' is defined in the NPPF as, *'The value of a heritage asset to this and future*

generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting'.

- 5.14 Paragraph 194 details that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.
- 5.15 Paragraph 196 requires where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
- 5.16 Paragraph 197 notes that the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.
- 5.17 Paragraph 200 details LPA's should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance.
- 5.18 Paragraph 201 details that not all elements of a Conservation Area or World Heritage Site will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 195 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 196, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.
- 5.19 In this case, there is no formal CA appraisal for Albert Park. It is acknowledged that local parties, on behalf of the Town Council, are currently producing one. It is the Districts Council's responsibility to review CA's and produce appraisals where necessary and is subject to a formal process (including review, and public consultation). This can involve community collaboration and input, but at this time, it is understood has not commenced. As such, limited weight is attached to this appraisal at this time. Notwithstanding, the draft document circulated on the internet highlights the importance of Albert Park and its formal layout, the Victorian Villas adjacent to the park, and the pressures arising from development of the school.
- 5.20 The pre-application submission contained a supporting Conservation Appraisal, which sought to identify the important assets within they area, the area's history and significance, but mainly focussed on the school site. It identified the school as a distinct 'zone' within the conservation area, with 'sub-zones' of varying significance. The appraisal identifies the application site has having a 'high'

level of significance, with a small portion of the garden being 'neutral' (area '17' Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Conservation Appraisal 2019 - Asset Heritage Consulting



- 5.21 The application is then supported by a specific Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), which assesses the significance of the relevant assets. It identifies Crescent House as a late Victorian Villa, part of the Albert Park Villas, an area of 'high conservation importance'. Both documents broadly highlight the important contribution the formal historic park and the Victorian architecture of older parts of the historic school site make to the significance of the CA as well as Crescent House, as non-designated heritage assets facing onto the park. The HIA ultimately concludes and acknowledges that there will be a small degree of heritage harm as a result of the scheme but would be considered to be 'less than substantial', a matter I turn to later.
- 5.22 In terms of development proposed in the application, there is no doubt that it is a very large extension to Crescent House. As pointed out by the Conservation Officer, this will fundamentally alter the character of the Crescent House site by significantly increasing the massing of the building. However, the applicant has worked positively with the council over the last few years to respond to concerns by concentrating the development to just Crescent House, leaving the other Villas intact. During considering the application, improvements have also been made to ensure that the development does not stray into the neighbouring Villa's curtilage, broadly preserving its historic layout. The design of the linked extension is also of a very high quality and works hard to break up the massing with separate linked blocks. The blocks closest to Crescent House will be two-storey, with a larger three-storey block at the north. The fact the extension first extends from the rear via flat roofed glazed walkway goes some way to ensure there is separation between 'old and new' defining the non-designated asset as the primary building along the Park Crescent frontage.

This is further assisted by the layout, which curves the built form around and away from the main building (in a curvature which is opposite of that around Park Crescent), with the largest element settling amongst the large and established science centre. This helps retain some sense of space between the villas and perception of the development being part of the more developed Science Centre backdrop. With the linked buildings to the 'Coach House' removed, plot separation and sightlines from views along Park Crescent and within the park itself are better preserved. This is demonstrated in the photomontage of the proposed scheme from in front of Crescent House (*Figure 3. Below*)

Figure 3. Photomontage from Park Crescent (applicant)



- 5.23 Notwithstanding, there is no question that to some extent, from different angles and long-range views from the park, between gaps in the trees and hedges, one will see other parts of the extension (*Figure 4*), albeit they will appear smaller in context, the further one is away from the site, inside the park.

Figure 4. View between Cobban House (left) and Crescent House (right) from within the park (Officer)



- 5.24 Having regard to the policy context and legislation identified above, your officers are of the view that the development, whilst being of a high-quality design, given the layout and scale, will have an impact on the significance of the CA and on Crescent House itself (as a non-designated asset). Given the applicant's assessment of the site, it is evident the Victorian and spacious character of the buildings make a positive contribution to the historic character and appearance of the area. The villa's well-preserved domestic curtilage, its layout, and the gaps between the buildings, will be eroded to some extent, causing some harm to the assets and how their significance is experienced. However, given the changes made to the scheme and the backdrop of the already established large modern buildings, your officers consider that the harm to the designated asset, the CA, is "less than substantial" in context of the NPPF. The site makes a positive contribution to the CA, but when viewed as whole, officer consider the assets, and their significance overall, will not be lost. Key elements of the proposed development, its careful, high quality design, the improved layout, and the removal of existing poor-quality extensions, go some way to mitigate the impact, avoiding substantial harm. It can also be said that, given the long-standing school use of the building, and that it is the one closest to the school spatially, Crescent House is seen as being more closely associated with the school, unlike other private villas around Park Crescent. Whilst your officers are of the view the harm to the CA is "less than substantial" when viewed as whole, and towards the lower end of this category of harm; it is clear harm will be caused. As such, the character and appearance of the CA will not be preserved or enhanced, contrary to policy DP37. The NPPF advises that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated asset, even where harm is considered to be 'less than substantial'. Therefore, the NPPF makes it clear this harm is required to be weighed in the planning balance, against any public benefits arising from the scheme. Any harm arising to the significance of a non-designated asset also has to be weighed in the

balance in the context of the scale of harm and the significance of the asset, I will turn to these matters later.

5.25 The setting of the RPG and Listed Buildings

RPG's are not subject to protection under the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, but The Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 (1) authorises Historic England to compile a register of "gardens and other land" situated in England that appear to be of special historic interest. Nevertheless, in a planning context, they are considered as 'designated heritage assets', thus afforded the same considerations as CA's and listed buildings under the NPPF.

5.26 In this case, whilst not in the designated park, the application site forms part of the RPG's and mentioned Listed Buildings wider setting. The NPPF defines setting as, '*The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral*'. Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act details that the local planning authority has a duty to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

5.27 In terms of the setting of the RPG, your officers are of the view that the application site does make a positive contribution to the setting of the RPG. As mentioned above, the historic villas set around the formal park, being well spaced and of a similar architectural period, all contribute to the historic significance of the park and form part of its setting. Eroding this space within the assets setting, similar to the harm identify to the CA as a whole, would not preserve or enhance the asset. The harm is considered to be 'less than substantial' and given the distance and some intervening features, likely at the lower end of the scale in this category. Great weight is attached to this harm and again, a matter to be considered against the public benefits later. In terms of the three listed buildings within/around the park and Waste Court, on the east of the school site, your officers are of view there will not be any harm to their significance. This is based on their distance from the application site and intervening features diluting their connection to the school and application site. There will not be any harm to these assets by developing as proposed, within their wider setting. The scheme will not alter how these listed buildings are experienced.

5.28 **Residential Amenity**

5.29 LPP2 policy DP23 seeks to protect neighbouring resident's amenity from adverse impact of new development in context of loss of privacy/daylight, visual intrusion, noise, vibration and external lighting (amongst others). LPP2 policy DP24 seeks for proposals to be appropriate to their location and should be designed to ensure that the occupiers of new development will not be subject to adverse effects from existing or neighbouring uses.

- 5.30 In this case, the school and application site are an established residential institution and there will be no material increase in the number of boarders. The scheme will simply consolidate the boarding accommodation across the villas into Crescent House, which is the closest of the villas to the main school grounds. Neighbouring buildings are in the school's use, with private neighbouring dwellings some distance away, further west, around Park Crescent. Therefore, it is not expected the development will have any adverse neighbour impact. Elements that may cause noise (such as air source heat pumps) are located on the eastern elevation, thus facing only into the school. However, given the scale of scheme, there will likely be some noise and disturbance during construction, but conditions can secure a Construction and Traffic Management Plan to mitigate the impact. The scheme would comply with policy DP23.
- 5.31 In terms of outdoor space for the students, the scheme will retain communal outdoor areas, as well as being adjacent to the other outdoor school facilities (the Multi Use Sports Area). There will be no adverse by on the students by neighbouring uses, complying with policy DP24.
- 5.32 **Traffic, parking and highway safety**
LPP1 policies CP33 and CP35 expect the council to work with Oxfordshire County Council to ensure new development links well to facilities and services and supports sustainable transport methods. This is reinforced in LPP1 policy CP37 which in requiring good design, seeks sites to be well connected to provide safe and convenient ease of movement by all users. LPP2 policy DP16 requires development to demonstrate adequate provision will be made for loading, unloading, circulation, servicing and vehicle turning on a site.
- 5.33 In this context, again, given there will not be a material increase in students or staff, there will be a very limited impact on the highway network, safety or parking. The site is also clearly in a sustainable location. The existing access is retained, providing vehicular access in an emergency, but on the whole, no further parking or access is required. The Local Highways Authority (OCC) are content with the scheme, subject to securing a CTMP by condition. As such, the subject to this, the development would accord with policies CP33, CP35, CP37 and DP16 in this context.
- 5.34 **Environmental matters**
- 5.35 There are few key environmental matters, which require consideration in the sub sections below. These pertain to the impact on biodiversity and potential protected species; trees; the drainage system and building sustainability;
- 5.36 Biodiversity and potential protected species
LPP1 policy CP46 sets out how the council will approach important areas which contribute to the districts natural environment, biodiversity, habitats and species. Development that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in the district will be permitted and opportunities for a net gain in biodiversity will be sought. Harm to habitats and species will require mitigation. In this case, the application is supported by an Ecological Appraisal and biodiversity calculations. The former has concluded in a Phase 1 habitat survey that only

amenity habitats of low ecological importance are identified on the site. The calculations show a small net loss of this habitat but given their low value and overall increase in biodiversity (across both proposed schemes), there is a net gain. The buildings are not expected to be habitats for bats, although there is potential for bats and birds in the wider environment. Mitigation (bat/bird boxes) is proposed in the appraisal, which can be secured by condition. The council's Countryside Officer has not raised an objection. The development accords with policy CP46.

5.37 Trees

LPP1 policy CP44 details that key features in the landscape will be protected, such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies. The site has numerous trees in and around the site. Some are of a low quality and proposed to be removed and some which contribute positively to the character of the area are of a high quality (the Wellingtonias along the frontage) are to be retained. In any event, all trees are protected due to their location in the Conservation Area. The application has been accompanied by a variety of assessments, tree protection plans and services plans, which have been submitted to respond to initial concerns from the council's Forestry Officer. Your officers are now satisfied that the development can be brought forward without damaging important trees on the site to be retained, but some further information is required, particularly on how the area around T8 and T9 will be addressed during demolition of western outbuilding. Subject to conditions to secure the detail in the final Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) and tree protection, the development is considered to be acceptable.

5.38 Drainage

LPP1 policy requires that all development provides a drainage strategy, which includes sustainable drainage systems. In this case, the scheme is supported by a drainage report which demonstrates feasibility of suitable foul and surface water drainage facilities. The scheme and connective works around the site's constraints and trees, avoid root protection areas. The council's Drainage Engineer is content with the scheme. Subject to conditions to secure its implementation, the scheme is acceptable in this context.

5.39 Building sustainability

LPP1 policy CP40 encourages developers to incorporate climate change adaptation measures to combat the effects of changing weather patterns. The application in this case is supported by a sustainability statement, which highlights numerous measures (air source heat pumps, building fabric, air tightness), which will mean the scheme will result in a significant improvement above building regulation baselines, to reduce carbon emissions. This is a positive benefit of the scheme, raising design standards and development accords with the mentioned policy.

5.40 **Other matters**

Archaeological Impact

The application is supported by an Archaeological Evaluation. Whilst the site is in an area of archaeological interest, the County Councils archaeologist is

content the scheme is unlikely to result in any material impact. The archaeological evaluation has not indicated the presence of archaeological features within the application area. As such there are no archaeological constraints to this application

Water infrastructure

Thames water has confirmed that the water and foul drainage infrastructure has capacity to support the scheme

Waste

The scheme will not materially change how the school deals and processes with its waste, as there will be no material increase in pupils.

Pre-commencement conditions

Where applicable, pre-commencement conditions have been agreed with the applicant.

6.0 PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

- 6.1 It is evident from analysis of the proposed scheme, there are several issues to consider in the planning balance. As detailed, planning law requires that applications for planning permission are to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2 It is evident that there are several benefits to this scheme. The school is a large established community facility and well located in the Town. Such facilities are encouraged to expand to accommodate future schooling needs and provide choice for the local community and beyond. Indeed, the NPPF notes that '*great weight to the need to create, expand or alter schools*' should be applied to decisions. The proposed building is of a high quality and sustainable design, which has explored the constraints of the site and the most viable locations that could feasibility accommodate expansion of this nature. Throughout the application, the design has evolved to significantly improve the layout to limit the harm to the heritage assets as much as possible, whilst balancing the commercial and functionality needs of the school. Your officers are of the view that supporting the enhancement of this community facility in principle and the quality and care in the design of the new building attracts some weight; the latter raising design and sustainability standards for development in the district.
- 6.3 Notwithstanding these benefits, in your officers' view, the development, by virtue of its scale, will cause a degree of harm to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of the Registered Park and Garden, both of which are designated heritage assets. As such, the development will have an adverse impact on these assets' significance, which is largely derived from the relatively well preserved Victorian formal park, the spacious villas facing onto it and surrounding Victorian architecture. Spatially, the development will erode the spacing between the villas to some extent (although not significantly) and consequently, views and the experience from inside the Conservation Area and park. Whilst in your officers' view, this harm to designated assets is 'less than substantial' in context of the NPPF, the starting point is that, alongside the statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or

enhancing the character of appearance of a Conservation Area, great weight must be given to these designated assets' conservation. There will also be some harm to the significance of non-designated assets. Therefore, the development is contrary to development plan policies CP39, DP36 and DP37. However, the PPG does note that, '*within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated*' (Paragraph: 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723). In this context, as discussed at paragraphs 5.22 and 5.24 above, the careful design of the scheme has gone some way to ensure the impact is not significant and the level of harm within this category would be at the lower end of the scale. Similarly, the harm to non-designated assets would be moderated.

- 6.4 In identifying the harm as 'less than substantial' to the significance of the designated heritage assets, it is necessary that this identified harm, and the harm to the significance of non-designated assets, is weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. As described in the PPG (Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 18a-020-20190723), this could be anything that delivers economic, social or environmental objectives. In this case, your officers are of the view that the great weight attached to the harm to the designated heritage assets on one hand, needs to be balanced against the great weight also attached to the need to the expand and alter this school on the other.
- 6.5 The school, a community facility, clearly has wider social benefits and to consolidate and modernise its boarding accommodation demonstrates a reasonable plan to future proof this facility. This is likely more critical than ever, given the pandemic and the impact on how schools have had to operate. Whilst the future of this issue is uncertain, it seems reasonable to assume that to operate safely and efficiently and attract students to stay in these schools in the short and medium terms, schools like this will likely require more space and higher standards of accommodation. Therefore, in the round, securing this community facilities medium to long term viability by developing in the manner proposed, is a clear public benefit. In this context, it is also evident from the site's masterplan and constraints there is limited capacity to do this, thus the site proposed (in addition the application at Austin House) seemingly make the most appropriate choice. There is limited scope elsewhere around the school site, due to likely loss of open space and playing fields.
- 6.6 The applicant has also put forward other beneficial aspects which would flow from the development, which they consider public benefits. The school estimates, based on a 'calculator' by Oxford Economics and the Independent Schools Council, that directly and indirectly the school supports over 650 jobs locally; contributes over £23m of GDP to the local economy (0.35% of the area's total); and saves the UK taxpayer over £7m a year by reducing the number of pupils in state education.
- 6.7 The school also has many established local community partnerships, where students and staff build relationships with a wide variety of other local schools, charities, leisure and arts facilities in and around the town, all contributing to social cohesion. This has resulted in contribution to Air Quality Monitoring

projects, for example. The latter has received the recognition of professional scientists, who are considering the potential for engaging schools in further research nationally and internationally. The school also shares its leisure facilities with the local community, such as the sport centre; theatre; swimming pool etc. In your officer's view, securing the future viability of the school's income by attracting students via the higher quality accommodation, contributes significantly to sustaining and increasing these wider public benefits.

- 6.8 Having regard to all these identified public benefits, the development will ultimately secure more modern accommodation for students, and the enhanced functionality and management of the schools boarding accommodation. It will provide a high quality and environmentally aware building; of a high-quality design, which some weight is attached. From these benefits, this will aid in future proofing the school and attract students securing its long term economic commercial viability. In turn, this will ensure that significant public benefits from the school are enhanced and continue to flow from the site. Whilst your officers give great weight to the conservation of the identified heritage assets, the combination of the public benefits of the proposal and the great weight attached to expanding and altering the school as a valued community and educational facility, would outweigh the identified 'less than substantial harm' to the designated heritage assets and the harm to the non-designated assets.
- 6.9 It is also acknowledged there is some conflict with the development plans heritage policies. Overall, however, your officers are of the view that the principle of development of the school would accord with the development plan when taken as a whole and the public benefits and other material considerations identified outweigh the heritage harm identified. Therefore, it is recommended that the application is approved, subject to the conditions noted at the start of this report.

7.0 The following development plan planning policies have been taken into account:

7.1 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 policies (LPP1);

- CP01 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
- CP03 - Settlement Hierarchy
- CP08 - Spatial Strategy for Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area
- CP33 - Promoting Sustainable Transport and Accessibility
- CP35 - Promoting Public Transport, Cycling and Walking
- CP37 - Design and Local Distinctiveness
- CP39 - The Historic Environment
- CP40 - Sustainable Design and Construction
- CP42 - Flood Risk
- CP43 - Natural Resources
- CP44 - Landscape
- CP45 - Green Infrastructure
- CP46 - Conservation and Improvement of Biodiversity
- CP47 - Delivery and Contingency

7.2 Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 2 policies (LPP2);

CP08A - Additional Site Allocations for Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub-Area
CP47A - Delivery and Contingency
DP08 - Community Services and Facilities
DP21 - External Lighting
DP23 - Impact of Development on Amenity
DP24 - Effect of Neighbouring or Previous Uses on New Developments
DP25 - Noise Pollution
DP26 - Air Quality
DP28 - Waste Collection and Recycling
DP31 - Protection of Public Rights of Way, National Trails and Open Access Areas
DP36 - Heritage Assets
DP37 - Conservation Areas
DP38 - Listed Buildings
DP39 - Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments

7.3 Neighbourhood Plan (NP)

It is understood that the Town Council has started the process of creating NP, but it is at a very early stage. The formal process has not yet started (i.e. Stage 1 – designation of the plan area), as such, carries no weight at this time.

7.4 Supplementary Planning Guidance/documents

Vale of White Horse Design Guide 2015 (VoWHDG)

7.5 Other relevant guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF)

Historic England guidance notes

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- Historic Environment

7.6 The following legislation and case law has been taken into account;

- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (amended)
- The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (amended)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act) 1990
- Community & Infrastructure Levy Legislation
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010
- Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- *Barnwell Manor Wind Farm Limited v East Northamptonshire District Council and Others* [2014] EWCA Civ 137
- *R (on the application of Forge Field Society) v Sevenoaks District Council* [2014] EWHC 1895 (Admin)

Case Officer: Luke Veillet – Senior Planning Officer
Email: planning@whitehorsedc.gov.uk
Tel: 01235 422600