

APPLICATION NO.	<u>P21/V3388/LB</u>
SITE	Old Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JD
PARISH PROPOSAL	ABINGDON Part demolition of rear of building, replacement extension and other internal alterations to create a hotel (As amended by plans received 15 February 2022)
WARD MEMBER(S)	Cheryl Briggs Helen Pighills
APPLICANT OFFICER	Ede Holdings Ltd Martin Deans

RECOMMENDATION

Listed Building Consent subject to the following conditions:

Standard

1. Commencement three years - Listed Building Consent
2. Approved plans

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

- 1.1 This application has been called to committee by ward councillor, Helen Pighills. The site of this application is Old Abbey House, a grade II listed building that lies in Abbey Close, Abingdon. The building lies within the Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area, at the west end of Abbey Gardens. The application site contains no part of Abbey Gardens, but does include the car park in front of the building, together with the existing cycle/bin stores, the stone walls and the lawn to the north-west of the building.
- 1.2 Old Abbey House was most recently used as offices and meeting rooms for Abingdon Town Council. It is currently vacant. In May 2021 a planning application was submitted for change of use of the building to a hotel (P21/V1498/FUL). The building was listed on 12 October 2021, after which this listed building application was submitted to run in parallel with the planning application. The proposal involves a first floor extension on the north-east side and external and internal alterations. The location plan is below, and the application plans are attached at Appendix 1.



- 1.3 The application has been amended once. The original and amended proposals can be summarised as follows

Original Proposal

- A first floor extension on the north-east part of the building with a modified roof and significant internal changes to allow 30 bedrooms to be provided, including four in the main roof

Amendment

- The size of the first floor extension is reduced and is to be built on existing ground floor walls that are to be retained
- The amount of internal change in the north-east part of the building is substantially reduced to allow for retention of much more historic fabric
- A significant amount of information on proposed works is included on the plans
- The number of bedrooms is reduced to 27

- 1.4 The amendments were subject to re-consultation on 15 February 2022, and any responses received after the completion of the report will be reported to the committee meeting.

2.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS

The full version of all comments received is on the planning application pages of the council's website, www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk

2.1	Abingdon Town Council Original – concerned about the amount of change that is proposed to approximately one quarter of the building, and how this relates to the listed status of the building
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	Amended – any comments received will be reported to the meeting
Local Residents and Groups	<p>Original – 3 submissions raising the following concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent of proposed change is excessive and the loss of fabric harmful to the listed building • Excavation is likely which has implications for archaeology • Removed historic fixtures and fittings should be offered for display or storage elsewhere • A public use for the building would be preferable <p>Amended - any comments received will be reported to the meeting</p>
Conservation Officer	<p>Original – more information is needed and more justification for the removal of historic fabric rather than its retention</p> <p>Amended – no objection subject to the detail on the plans being executed. The level of harm to the significance of the listed building is at the lower end of less than substantial</p>

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 [P04/V1815/DA](#) - Approved (16/02/2005)

Resurfacing of roads and pavements on land at Abbey Gateway between Guildhall and St.Nicholas Church, High Street and Abbey Close car park and front of Old Abbey House including new access ramp.

[P97/V1313/DA](#) - Approved (16/02/1998)

Erection of new cycle shelter.

[P90/V1756/CA](#) - Approved (15/03/1991)

Demolition of part of boundary wall fronting Abbey House.

[P91/V1704](#) - Approved (07/03/1991)

Construction of new road and new boundary walls. Complementary hard and soft landscaping. Erection of bollards to close Abbey Archway to regular vehicular traffic.

[P89/V0081/DA](#) - Approved (19/04/1989)

Construction of new district council offices including alterations to Abbey House, Abingdon.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 The scale of the proposal is too small to qualify for an EIA.

5.0 MAIN ISSUES

5.1 Impact on the Listed Building

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires a local planning authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Policy CP39 of LPP1 (Reviewed) requires new development to preserve and where possible enhance designated heritage assets and their setting in accordance with national guidance and legislation. This includes ensuring that vacant historic buildings are re-used as soon as possible to prevent deterioration. Policy DP38 of LPP2 requires that development which alters or extends a listed building must preserve or enhance its special architectural or historic interest and significance.

5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contains advice on decision-making involving heritage assets in paragraphs 194 – 208. Paragraph 200 states that any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification. Paragraph 202 states that where a proposed development will lead to less than substantial harm to significance, the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including securing its optimal viable use.

5.3 Old Abbey House became a grade II listed building on 12 October 2021. The listing was made for three reasons:

- The architectural interest of the surviving elements of the early- and late-C18th phases of construction of the principal west front of the building, integrating earlier fabric of possible C16th origin, as well as the rich and varied range of high-quality decorative features throughout the building acquired from the C18th through to the early C20th.
- The historic interest of an important and prominent building within the historic precinct of the Abbey which includes within its structure and its associated walls salvaged masonry from the demolished Abbey
- The group interest associated with other listed buildings in the Abbey precinct.

5.4 As part of the parallel planning application, and during the assessment of this listed building application, there has been a considerable amount of discussion between officers and the applicant regarding the impact of the proposal on the historic fabric of the building. Officers appreciate the need to find a use for the building to secure its future, particularly in light of the concern that exists regarding rainwater ingress into the building and the potential for damage to occur.

5.5 Under the original plans for this application, significant external and internal changes were proposed to the north-east part of the building to allow for a first floor extension and the creation of standardised modular rooms on both floors. Significant lengths of existing walls were to be demolished with significant uncertainty about the fate of important internal decorative features. These plans drew criticism from the Conservation Officer, the Town Council, and local

residents and groups regarding the amount of change and consequential loss of historic fabric. Following further discussions with the Conservation Officer, amended plans were prepared and were submitted on 15 February.

- 5.6 The amended proposal has scaled back substantially the degree of change to the north-east part of the building. The first floor extension has been reduced in size, so that it can sit on existing ground floor walls, which are to be retained. Existing room divisions and room layouts are to be largely retained. Much more historic fabric will be left in situ.
- 5.7 The amended plans have also provided considerable detail by way of annotation regarding the repairs, alterations, and finishes that are proposed, as the applicant wishes to avoid pre-commencement conditions to allow the project to proceed more quickly. The Conservation Officer has carefully assessed the latest plans and is content that they show sufficient detail to avoid the need for pre-commencement conditions.
- 5.8 The amendments that have been made mean that the level of harm to the significance of Old Abbey House as a listed building is considered to be at the lower end of less than substantial. This needs to be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal. Crucially, the proposal will bring about an optimum viable use for the currently vacant building. Officers consider this public benefit is sufficient to outweigh the degree of less than substantial harm that will be caused. Other public benefits are considered in the parallel planning application report.
- 5.9 Therefore, there is no objection to the proposal on listed building grounds subject to the detail on the plans being executed. As in law a listed building consent has to be implemented in accordance with the approved plans, officers consider the plans themselves provide sufficient control over the approved works to ensure they are carried out.

5.10 **Other Issues**

Consultation responses have raised two other issues that are not relevant to the consideration of the listed building application. One is the need for any archaeological works. This is a matter to be considered purely under the parallel planning application. The amended plans have made clear there will be no invasive ground works, and the County Archaeologist has no objections to the proposal. One response has also questioned whether the building should be put to public use but, as members are aware, possible alternative uses are not material to the consideration of an application for listed building consent.

6.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Old Abbey House is a grade II listed building. The proposal involves an extension to the building, and external and internal alterations to create a hotel. The proposals are considered to cause harm to the significance of the building, and the harm is considered to be at the lower end of less than substantial. Great weight is attached to this harm, as required by national policy. The proposal will provide an optimum viable use for the currently empty listed building. This is considered to amount to a significant public benefit that is sufficient to outweigh

the less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset. Consequently, the recommendation is for approval.

The following planning policies have been taken into account:

Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 Part 1 (LPP1) (Reviewed)

CP39 - The Historic Environment

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

DP38 - Listed Buildings

National Planning Policy Framework, 2021

Equality Act, 2010

The application has been assessed under Section 149 of the Equality Act. It is considered that no identified group will suffer discrimination as a result of the proposal.

Human Rights Act, 1998

The application has been assessed under the Human Rights Act, particularly Schedule 1, Part 1, Article 8 and Schedule 1, Part 2, Article 1. The objections of individuals have been weighed against the public interest and the recommendation made by officers is considered to be proportionate.

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