



27 April 2018

Planning Department,  
Waverley Borough Council,  
The Burys,  
GODALMING. BY EMAIL

Dear Sirs, Application 2018/0408  
The Georgian Hotel, Haslemere.

The Haslemere Society's primary interest and objective in submitting comments on this application are:

***To ensure the viable long term continuation and upgrading of the historic Georgian Hotel, restaurant and public function facility for the town.***

As well as having this historic hotel as a focal point in the town centre conservation area Haslemere requires a hotel to provide vitality to the town centre to attract tourist visitors and as a facility for business visitors, visiting technicians and trades people so necessary for the running of the town with its expanding population and which is now effectively a dormitory town to London. This necessity is increased due to the very significant loss of business and employment facilities in the town to residential development pressures which has occurred in recent decades, (See attached appendix for list of these losses). Consequently the town's businesses and population have to employ companies from around the country and not just locally.



Some 20 years ago The Society engaged Counsel, commissioned a hotel viability report and worked hard with a lot of public support to overcome efforts by a developer to convert The Georgian into flats.

Since that time a block containing 31 motel type rooms, a spa and swimming pool was constructed by Hollybourne Hotels at the rear of the Georgian to increase the hotel capacity to a viable level. When Hollybourne Hotels, which owned five hotels went into administration in 2014 we learnt that at that time the Georgian was a profitable hotel. Its subsequent owner, Lionhouse Hotels Ltd. with no recognisable hotel management expertise failed and went into administration in 2017. This lack of hotel and restaurant management experience and the deteriorating facilities due to lack of refurbishment investment we believe were significant factors in the necessity in 2017 to put the hotel into administration again.

The Haslemere Society is of the view that the new owners are motivated by the opportunity to carry out new residential development within the town centre conservation area and curtilage of the hotel for personal gain. Of the two leading figures in the current consortium of owners one is an experienced residential property professional and the other the previous failed hotel owner.

The current owners held public consultations to explain their proposals for the hotel when they indicated that their bid to purchase the hotel was the **ONLY** one that guaranteed the continuance of the hotel and restaurant. To achieve this they said that they needed to carry out residential development to pay for the upgrading of the hotel and restaurant which was clearly necessary. The Society has consulted with several hotel operating groups and has learnt that this is not the case. We are aware that at least two hotel groups bid to buy The Georgian and to upgrade and operate it ***without carrying out any residential development.*** Clearly a bidder with residential property development ambitions was able to offer a higher bid for the hotel.



The **future viability** of the hotel and restaurant is of crucial importance to the town and of concern to The Society.

The applicant has indicated an intention to reduce the number of hotel rooms from 43 to only 12, in order to facilitate his proposed residential development intentions. The applicant is maintaining that a 12 bedroom boutique type hotel is a viable proposition. Other hotel operating groups we have consulted indicate that in today's market a hotel needs a capacity of about 40 rooms to be financially viable, to enable regular upgrades and to generate an adequate return on investment. More specifically our research indicates that the 31 motel type rooms plus the 12 higher priced rooms in the main hotel building need to be retained. The attraction of a spa facility was also viewed as an important added facility for the hotel.

Currently there are 45 parking spaces within the hotel curtilage. The proposals allocate 12 spaces for the hotel, none for the restaurant, 22 spaces for the proposed residential development, none for visitors and 11 will be lost due to residential development. ***This poses a distinct risk to the commercial viability of the hotel and restaurant.***

This significant reduction in parking facilities will lead to residential visitors using allocated hotel spaces and more street parking especially when the Chestnut Avenue public car park is full which is increasing in regularity. The access to all the proposed new residential development for owners and service vehicles will be via the existing constricted covered way under the hotel building as well as this being the access for hotel users. The Society considers that the parking space provisions are inadequate and will exacerbate the existing shortage of town centre parking facilities.

The application effectively requires a ***change of use from hotel/restaurant to residential use to which The Society objects most strongly.*** The future viability of the Hotel and Restaurant is particularly questionable because of the vastly reduced number of hotel rooms and parking space availability and the further



reasons described below. If a change of use was to be allowed it would result in the loss of 31 motel type rooms. If, for resulting viability reasons, new owners had to be sought for the hotel and restaurant it is highly unlikely that another hotel group would be interested in buying a hotel encumbered with so much private residential property. ***There would be NO TURNING BACK once the conversion had taken place and the complete loss of this hotel facility together with the restaurant and function facilities would be a very likely consequence.***

A listing of local hotels which have closed down since 2010 indicates that many of these are small units of 10 to 15 rooms and also single hotel operators not belonging to a larger group of hotels. Larger hotel groups have a significant commercial advantages over small single hotel operators such as:- the ability to cross market hotel rooms, assign staff to other hotels in the group dependant on respective activity levels, economies in buying food, materials and services, the ability to install comprehensive IT reservation systems and employ competent operators over several establishments. Also the larger groups can attract, recruit and retain high calibre managers, chefs and waiters. The application proposals are for a single operator which cannot benefit from these advantages.

The consortium of new owners of the hotel has no proven record of successful hotel and restaurant management (experience only in residential development and bed and breakfast services). This poses a significant question regarding future viability. The decision to operate a 'boutique' type hotel which requires particular expertise is also questionable. The applicant has indicated that he has contacted other external hotel management organisations (due to lack of in house expertise) re management agreements or sub leases.



Such management agreements with outside parties are unlikely to be signed before a planning approval is secured. We believe that these outside organisations are generally only interested in the management of larger hotels. There is no guarantee that an agreement would be concluded after planning approval thus creating a major risk to the future viability of the hotel and restaurant.

It has also been indicated to us that it is intended to use the restaurant facilities for the community functions ( family reunions/birthdays, weddings, wakes, operas, organised dinners etc). This would conflict with the regular use of the restaurant and possibly not be acceptable to a restaurant operator under a sub lease.

There could be operational difficulties due to building private flats in close proximity to the rear of the hotel due to music and external dining and drinking in the grounds of the hotel. Careful consideration should be given to allowing the construction of private residences so close to an established hotel and restaurant.

The proposals involve the stripping out of the 31 motel rooms, spa and swimming pool and constructing 16 flats including penthouse flats in the resulting shell. These will be provided with 8 new parking spaces next to the flats and an access road on land which is currently green space contributing to the special ambiance of this conservation area space. Several trees will be lost. As a local Civic Society we oppose this.

Also as a Civic Society we are particularly concerned that building three, three storey town houses each with four bedrooms and a parking space (referred to as mews cottages !! ) in this town centre conservation area and also accessed via the covered way off the High Street will be out of keeping with surrounding buildings and detract from the character and charm of this area.



There is no reference in the application to guarantees such as a Section 106 Agreement (appropriately worded) that profits from residential development would be properly assigned to the very necessary refurbishment and upgrading work to the hotel and restaurant.

Local Plan Policy TC1 seeks to encourage and retain retail and other commercial and community uses. It also seeks to promote the provision and retention of hotels and other visitor attractions. ***This application proposes to significantly reduce the number of hotel rooms and thus does not comply with this policy.***

The proposals to construct eight new parking spaces and an access road to these spaces within the garden of this historic hotel with the loss of trees and the building of a three storey block of three town houses in the curtilage of this historic building adversely affects the character and ambience of this location within the conservation area and ***does not comply with policies HE5 and HE8.***

It is noted that an application for Listed Building Consent has not been made and ***Policy HE5*** makes specific reference to works within the curtilage of a listed building with the requirement to show why such works having an affect on the character of a listed building are desirable or necessary. ***The Society considers that the creation of 16 flats and three town houses in the curtilage of this listed building within the conservation area will have an undesirable adverse affect on the listed building and its environs.***

The intensification of traffic from the residential development using the single access under the covered way and across the High Street footpath ***does not comply with policy D9***



Attention is drawn to **Policies LT2 and LT3** relating to the retention of visitor related facilities, changes of use and visitor accommodation which are relevant to this application.

The Haslemere Design Statement Guidelines state that green spaces within Haslemere are part of the character and charm of the town and these should be retained. ***These proposals result in the loss of green space.*** The Guidelines also state that designs should preserve and enhance the character of the town centre Conservation Area by ensuring that the scale, design and proportions of new buildings responds to and respects the existing historic features and space around development is of as much significance as its architecture. ***The proposed three storey town houses do not comply with this Guideline.***

***For all the above reasons The Haslemere Society has to register its objection to this planning application in the interests of assuring the long term continuance of The Georgian Hotel and Restaurant.***

***An application by a Hotel Group with proven expertise and greater financial resources and not requiring to encumber the hotel with private residential development would be a far better prospect for Haslemere.***

Yours faithfully,

John Greer ( Vice Chairman, The Haslemere Society)

