



.20th December 2018

Planning Department,
Waverley Borough Council,
GODALMING. (By Email)

For the attention of Mrs F. Taylor.

Dear Sirs, Application 2018/0408

The Georgian Hotel, Haslemere.

We have been made aware of new information and intentions by the applicant and wish to draw these to your attention together with the Society's comments.

About 20 years ago The Haslemere Society challenged an appeal relating to the proposed conversion of the hotel to residential use, and we now have similar concerns arising from this planning application. In common with other Civic Societies our interest is in preserving essential town assets, businesses and facilities for the local population and to provide vitality to our town centre. Our concerns are summarised as follows :-

1)Following the successful outcome of the appeal in 2001 the new hotel owners, Hollybourne Hotels Limited, operated the hotel for a number of years but the company went into administration due to losses at its other hotels whilst, we understand, the Georgian in Haslemere was still profitable. It was subsequently bought and operated for approximately three years by owners with little experience of hotel management and without the capital to carry



out necessary upgrading/ refurbishment before their company, Lionhouse Hotels, went into administration in 2017. We are advised that hotel rooms require refurbishment about every five years. There has been little if any upgrading for a very considerable time.

2)The current owners, Lannister House, have claimed that they were the only ones prepared to buy and operate the hotel in 2017. We have learned from reliable sources that there were other hotel operating groups interested in purchasing and operating The Georgian with its 43 bedrooms and without any residential development. One of the previous owners of Lionhouse Hotels who went into administration is a member of the consortium that now owns the hotel. The Georgian was sold and bought as a hotel in administration with little, if any, residential development premium.

3)The Society has met the current owners three times to discuss their planning application and future intentions. From these meetings and the form of the application The Society is of the opinion that whilst the owners may like to see a restaurant with a few rooms their main objective is to derive profit from the residential development that this application, if successful, would enable. The credibility of their earlier claims that such development was necessary to pay for the hotel refurbishment has been disproved by their recent indication that a bank loan will now be used to carry out refurbishment. This refurbishment will facilitate the recently announced involvement of Cirrus to manage the pub/restaurant/small hotel business.

4) During our meetings with Lannister House we queried their experience in running a successful hotel and we concluded that they did not have the necessary expertise. Also they are a single hotel operator without the back up and benefits that are derived from a larger hotel operator.

5)Lannister House recently invited The Society to a meeting with Cirrus to explain their proposed involvement in the hotel to compensate for their lack of expertise. Cirrus, we understand, has access to considerable private capital



and has also secured £12m banking facilities to support their expansion and purchase of public houses for upgrading and operating per their well established operating system. Cirrus operate many pubs in London and in the countryside incorporating a restaurant facility and a small number of rooms for overnight accommodation. They are not in the business of operating hotels with a larger number of rooms.

6) From this meeting we understand that Lannister House has undertaken to carry out refurbishment of the Hotel (we do not know to what extent) and that Cirrus will fit out the restaurant and pub/bar area of this listed building. We were told this will be done under a relatively loose agreement without a specific lease and without Cirrus purchasing the hotel. There was reference to a possible future option to purchase but currently there is little financial risk/commitment from Cirrus who would be able to pull out in the future should they wish (possibly releasing the main building for residential development). These arrangements are not referred to in the planning application.

7) From enquiries made from larger hotel operating groups we understand that for financial viability current hoteliers require a minimum capacity of 40 - 45 rooms. Following the expert report by BDO Hospitality Consulting submitted against residential development some 20 years ago, the then room number of 25 was increased to 43 by Hollybourne Hotels Limited. We seriously question the viability of only 12 hotel rooms as Lannister House propose. Proposing this small number of hotel rooms enables the rear block of 31 hotel rooms to be released for private residential development.

8) An **independent** report (not instructed by the applicant) on the trading opportunities and viability for the hotel at its current size of 43 rooms set against a viability report on a 12 room 'boutique' hotel the applicant is proposing would be a necessary/useful comparison.



9) We believe the attractive setting of The Georgian Hotel with its garden to the rear and visitor car parking contributes strongly to its attraction and viability. It is proposed to remove a significant part of the garden to provide private parking for the proposed apartments thus reducing the parking for hotel visitors with further reductions by building three town houses. Such development within the curtilage of this listed building will adversely affect the character, attractiveness and viability of the hotel.

10) The 2002 Local Plan Policy LT2 – Retention of Visitor Accommodation - is particularly relevant to this application including the proposed change of use which the application does not specifically identify. The application does not conform with this policy. Furthermore DM 32 of the new draft local plan LPP2 referring to Tourism, Hotels and Visitor Accommodation states:
any development should increase the range or improve the quality of accommodation or attraction for tourists, day visitors and residents of the borough - and - The Council will seek to retain existing visitor accommodation and when considering development proposals that will result in the loss or partial loss of existing visitor accommodation will take into account the viability of the existing enterprise and the public demand for it, the availability of other similar establishments within the area. There will be a presumption against change of use from existing visitor accommodation or a use that supports the tourist economy unless it can be demonstrated that the existing facility is no longer viable or is incapable of improvement to a good standard.

11) A study commissioned by Surrey CC in 2015 ‘Surrey Hotel Futures’ concluded inter alia that there was a need for upgrading, expansion and development of existing hotel facilities (in terms of adding bedrooms to satisfy demand). The study also showed that there was significant potential and need for hotel development in all parts of the county and it clearly demonstrates that new hotel provision is vital to support the future growth of the county’s visitor economy.



It also refers to the fact than Town Centre Hotels will often struggle to secure sites due to strong competition from residential, office and other commercial uses. In Haslemere's case, with the upturn in the residential property markets the situation is likely to worsen going forward.

There is reference in the study to the hotel demand resulting from the Surrey Hills AONB but no reference to the creation of the South Downs National Park. Given Haslemere's location within the Surrey Hills and its 'Gateway' position to the SDNP this is an additional and important consideration.

12) Parking facilities in the town are currently inadequate and in particular the adjacent Chestnut Avenue car park as well as the main town centre car park are frequently full with drivers circling for parking spaces coming vacant resulting from the continuously growing population who rely on cars for transport. We are particularly concerned at the proposed reduction in parking spaces within the curtilage of the hotel due to the proposed conversion to private apartments and building of three town houses. This will result in more parking pressure on crowded streets and public parking areas that are regularly full to capacity in day and evening times.

13)The planning application makes no reference as to how the major construction work involved in stripping out the existing 31 hotel rooms, alterations and construction of apartments and penthouse flats will be carried out. It will not be possible to access all this work through the low entrance off the High Street. Operating the hotel whilst this work is carried out could also present dangers and difficulties. Access for large vehicles, plant, equipment and materials through the Chestnut Avenue car park and local streets (if permitted) will be very disruptive and would require the closure of numerous parking spaces; exacerbating the current parking difficulties.



To Summarise

This letter is prompted following the applicant's recent public announcement proposing to involve Cirrus in managing the proposed small boutique hotel and restaurant facility incorporating a function facility - ie new and further information not contained in the original application.

The Society is not qualified to determine what size and type of hotel is suitable for this site – 4 or 3 star, budget, aparthotel, serviced apartments or boutique – but we are aware of the value the local population places on having the Georgian Hotel operating with a function room and restaurant facility in the town. Given the profitable operation of the hotel in its significantly run down state The Society believes that an upgraded hotel maintaining its present capacity, and not a reduced 12 room facility, is what the town needs. If the current owners are not able or prepared to provide this it would be in the town's interest for the hotel to be taken over by a large hotel group to provide this. From our enquiries we understand that there are hotel operating companies interested in this hotel of 43 bedrooms.

Having over the past two/three decades lost a considerable number of business premises to residential development the town's economy is now largely based on retail business. Development and broadening the town's economy, and tourism in particular, we feel will be adversely affected by the proposed reduction of hotel rooms from 43 to 12.

Whilst some may have welcomed the proposal to involve Cirrus, The Society's view is that this will not meet the above wider requirements of the town and that these proposals will not provide any long term assurance. We remain opposed to the application. The contents of our letter of objection dated 27 April 2018 to the planning application remain unaltered.

Yours faithfully,

John Greer (Vice Chairman, The Haslemere Society)

