



Planning Department,  
Waverley Borough Council,  
GODALMING. BY EMAIL

Dear Sirs,

7 April 2019

Georgian House Hotel, Haslemere

Application no. 2018/0408

As The Haslemere Society has previously stated it considers that a hotel with circa 40 rooms is a benefit to Haslemere, to support local businesses and the economy of Haslemere and to provide a local focus, amenity and social function facility as well as preserving the historic hotel and character of this conservation area. This application to reduce the hotel size, remove 70% of its parking spaces and carry out residential development within the confines of the hotel grounds will be detrimental to this requirement.

The Information recently placed on the WBC Planning web site dated 15 March 2019 further convinces The Haslemere Society that this application should be refused, as we have consistently maintained in our previous letters dated 27 April, 20 December 2018 and 17 January 2019.

The Reports by Fleurets and Carter Jonas, instructed and issued by the applicant to support his application, are so flawed, subjective and biased that we consider they should be discarded as evidence. Please refer to the Appendices to this letter which deal in detail with these reports. We also find aspects of the Adams Integra report prepared for the Council to be contentious which is referred to in a further Appendix.

After a year of careful study of this application and all the submitted information we clearly conclude that the Georgian Hotel has been bought by two committed property developers with little or no experience in hotel management for the purpose of profiting from residential development on the



site of this historic conservation area listed building without any consideration of the economic, social and amenity requirements of Haslemere.

Mr. McVeigh after completing a profitable property development in Sydney, Australia returned to the UK and through Lionhouse Ltd., bought the Georgian House Hotel from administrators in 2015. After only two years of allowing it to deteriorate, he placed it into administration, only to repurchase it from the administrators in 2017 through Lannister House, along with others including Mr R. Angel, a passionate real estate developer according to the CV he has placed in LinkedIn. After a further two years of neglect they are now applying for permission to carry out the residential development suggesting that this is necessary to provide finance for a hotel upgrade. Via their several public and press releases they have misled the public to believe they were passionate about saving the Hotel whereas we believe their main interest was to profit from residential development.

Visitors' comments/reviews in Hotels.com, Expedia, Booking.com etc., whilst making favourable comments about the staff and the ideal location of the hotel, also indicate the dreadful standard of accommodation and service. Please refer to examples of visitor comments in the Appendix bearing in mind that the current principal shareholder has owned the hotel since 2015. These are indicative of a lack of interest and expertise in hotel management and/or a wilful running down of the hotel to try to demonstrate the 43 room hotel was not commercially viable.

The applicant wishes to reduce the number of hotel rooms from 43 to only 12 with a pub and rooms facility to enable them to fulfil their residential development intentions. ***The application fails to meet the requirements of Local Plan Policy LT2, despite unconvincing attempts by a retained consultant to prove otherwise.***



An unconvincing attempt to demonstrate that a 43 room hotel is not viable refers to its recent trading history without investigating why trading profit was low but stating that there are various reasons that cause a business to fail (without examining the reasons in this case) but merely stating that they were not informed of the specific reasons in this case. We suggest – lack of expertise, allowing considerable deterioration to continue and residential development ambitions. Also occupancy rates of only 66% are referred to but Fleurets suggest this is within their expectations. This level of occupancy in such a run down state should indicate a very viable business after necessary refurbishment.

To address their lack of hotel and catering experience the applicant has latterly announced that Cirrus, a significant pub with rooms operator will be running the proposed hotel and restaurant facility. Reference to the appendix comments on the Carter Jonas Report shows that Cirrus and other pub and hotel operators require large numbers of car parking spaces to make their businesses commercially viable – an essential requirement for the modern catering pub. ***Clearly the proposed Cirrus Pub, rooms and restaurant with only 12 parking spaces will definitely not be a commercially viable venture and an approval would thus increase the likelihood of the Georgian facility closing.*** We would point out that there is a town parking crisis in Haslemere, a concern of the Town Council, with public car parks regularly being used to their full capacity, evenings as well as daytime and Cirrus should not rely on these. The problems due to the proposed reduction of onsite parking from 43 to 12 will provide a considerable difficulty when large functions are being held.



There are business, cultural, entertainment and social meetings held at the hotel; all important to the town. Recently such meetings resulted in 41 rooms being used on one night. Where would these people sleep if there were only 12 rooms? None of the consultant's reports, intentionally we suspect, make any reference to the business potential for the 43 room hotel from the Gateway position of Haslemere to the South Downs National Park. The spin off for local traders and employment is urgently required. The £500,000 benefit from a 12 room hotel referred to is totally unsubstantiated and should be disregarded.

A 12 room instead of a 43 room hotel facility is not what Haslemere requires and it does not comply with Waverley Borough Council's policy LT2 for preserving existing hotel facilities to increase economic activity.

Although it has now been withdrawn from the website, we considered that the Planning Case Officer's report provided for the 30 January Southern Area Planning Committee was inadequate as it did not sufficiently acknowledge or reference evidence submitted by The Society and others objecting to the application. There was no consideration of the extension of the Conservation area some years ago to include this site to preserve its unique character. We disagreed with the report's overriding of the Landscape & Tree Officer's expressed concerns about the negative impact of the proposals on the conservation area. We note the recent placement on the WBC web site of the 1999 Appeal Inspector's Report and his decision and comments which are still material evidence relating to this conservation area aspect. The withdrawal of the report for the 30 January meeting due to its inadequacies was appropriate and we hope that the next planning case officer's report will give adequate and necessary consideration to **all the reliable** evidence presented.



The allocation of 19 residential units to the site of The Georgian House Hotel in the Draft (unapproved) Local Plan is totally speculative and would not have been made for this protected site if this application for residential development had not been lodged. This so called allocation should therefore be disregarded relative to this application.

We understand that possible demolition of the annex has been suggested by the applicant – a typical developer’s ploy to provide a fresh start and in some circumstances avoid VAT. In this case it would remove the 31 hotel rooms whilst exacerbating the requirements for heavy access across the public car park in preparation for a residential development. The building is only about 16 years old, built to last much longer, and built to comply with Building Regulations and probably certified by WBC Building Control Department. Given that there has been absolutely minimum maintenance carried out since it was built a major refurbishment of this commercial building is now due as opposed to demolition, unless there is some fundamental deficiency/fault which should be unlikely. The presence of considerable brickwork efflorescence and moss makes the building look in poor condition but these can be readily dealt with. Internal redecoration should have been carried out approximately every 5 years but hasn’t been. To check and justify any demolition suggestion a totally independent and impartial engineering survey and report should be commissioned under the direction of WBC Building Control and not by the applicant.

After the Appeal failure in 2000 the hotel was quickly sold. After Hollybourne Hotel’s administration in 2015 the hotel was quickly sold. After the Lionhouse administration in 2017 the hotel was quickly sold with up to 20 bids being received (albeit some unsatisfactory) and sold in the best interests of the creditors. It is reasonable therefore to assume that the hotel could be attractive to an experienced hotel operator and readily sold or leased.



## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Assessment of Fleurets Report

Appendix 2 - Assessment of Adams Integra Report

Appendix 3 - Assessment of Carter Jonas Reports

Appendix 4 - Examples of Hotel Visitors' Comments/Reviews

Yours faithfully,

John Greer, Haslemere Society Planning Group