



The Old Manse  
36 Petworth Road  
Haslemere  
GU27 2HX

The Planning Officer  
Waverley Borough Council  
Western Planning Committee  
BY EMAIL

30<sup>TH</sup> June 2021

Dear Sir

Gemini Chapel: WA/2021/01399

The Haslemere Society wishes to object to the above planning application on the following grounds:

1. As Waverley will be aware the Haslemere Society are currently researching and producing a draft list of buildings to be identified as Buildings of Local Merit. The Gemini Chapel will almost certainly be one of our recommendations as it is an historic (former) place of worship. We would therefore recommend Waverley identify the building as a non designated heritage asset at planning stage.

Secondly, we would suggest a Heritage Statement is requested from the applicant. NPPF para 197 will of course be relevant if the building is identified as a Non Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA).

Turning to the scheme itself, finding an alternative use for the building is welcome given its dilapidated state, but must be subject to an appropriate design. Sadly, the current scheme seeks to split the building into too many small units which produces the need for several amenity space areas. The latter is extremely difficult on such a tightly constrained site from all sides and given the traffic on Lower Street such balconies would arguably be unusable.

The main harm from the application is the adaptation of several windows into doorways and the attachment of numerous balconies. These factors are exaggerated by their proposed positioning on highly visible elevations. This will substantially undermine the architectural value of the building and lead to copious areas of historic fabric being lost.

The interior of the building as NDHA would have no heritage protection and it is perfectly possible to design such conversion schemes to utilise existing openings (including doorways) and/or having a communal entrance. If any additional doorways are needed the very secondary western elevation would be the least harmful location for new openings as this elevation makes a lower contribution towards the building's significance.

Conversion schemes should be informed by an understanding of the building's historical alterations and original configuration and the siting of new entrances should be decided upon after the Heritage Statement has been prepared. Consideration of an area of shared amenity as mentioned at 2. above should be considered as alternatives to the proposed numerous unsightly balconies.

2. The site, which is sandwiched between two roads, one being the main road through the town, the other being a busy commuter route and a railway main line is not suitable for residential accommodation. Residents of the proposed flats will be constantly exposed to air born filth, pollution and noise from the constant road traffic and braking trains entering Haslemere station. The road and rail traffic all pass very close to the building and in total create a confined physical space where pollution cannot readily be dispersed.

This should be of particular concern to WBC following the case of Ella Kissi-Debrah's death in February 2013 where the south London Coroner found that she was exposed to high levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter pollution in excess of World Health Organisation guidelines, the principal source of which were traffic omissions. Therefore, we strongly recommend that the WBC Environmental Health Officer must take a close look at this application and satisfies himself that no harm will be caused to residents at this location.

3. The application appears to propose overdevelopment of the site by trying to cram in too many dwellings. On the lower ground floor level, the only possibility for fenestration and ventilation is from the heavily trafficked Lower Street as there is no possibility of achieving this from the Kings Road side of the building. Also, the two windows shown on the west elevation to one of the apartments are impractical because these are at the level of the stepped public accessway. Development of the Lower Ground floor would therefore exacerbate the pollution danger to residents identified above.

One potential solution to this issue, given the very small size of the individual dwellings on the Higher Ground and Upper Floors, is for the Lower Ground Floor to be designated as storage/ utility space for bikes, prams and other storage. It is common practice to provide such basement facilities for small apartment developments in the USA.

4. The application includes provision for a weak timber fence as protection from traffic. Cheap timber fencing should not be accepted in this prominent location because of its lack of durability, longevity and poor appearance as well as, from a health and safety perspective, not providing adequate collision protection.

Aesthetics at this location are an important consideration at this site and cheap timber fencing should not be permitted at such a prominent location in the town centre which is passed by hundreds of people each day, many passing on foot from the station. A more appropriate brick built separation wall is called for to compliment the chapel masonry.

5. On a further issue of aesthetics, the proposal to create a projecting balcony at the higher ground floor level only a small distance from passing double deck buses and high trucks is unwelcome. It is feasible, once again caused by the small size of the proposed dwellings that such a platform could be utilised for storage thereby becoming a very unattractive feature.

We welcome the opportunity to comment again on the application should a Heritage Statement be submitted and the scheme amended however, in the absence of such action, for the multiple reasons explained above we wish to OBJECT to the application.

Yours faithfully

C L R Boobyer  
(on behalf of The Haslemere Society Planning Group)