

**APPEAL BY CAREBASE AGAINST THE REFUSAL OF PLANNING  
PERMISSION FOR DEVELOPMENT AT 2-8 DANSON ROAD,  
BEXLEYHEATH**

**SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF STEVEN HANDFORTH  
IN RELATION TO HERITAGE MATTERS**

**INSPECTORATE REF: APP/D5120/W/22/3293225  
LPA REF: 19/03072/FULM**

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## 1.0 Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1 I am Steven Handforth BA (Hons), MSc, IHBC. I have a Master's degree in Historic Building Conservation with distinction, and I am a full member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation. I run my own heritage practice having worked previously for over sixteen years' in the public, private and charity sectors. I have direct experience of working as a conservation officer, having previously worked at Walsall Council and Westminster City Council. I have extensive experience of providing heritage advice in the historic environment and have acted as an expert witness at many Hearings and Inquiries.
- 1.2 The purpose of my evidence is to demonstrate, in accordance with the original heritage statement submitted with the planning application, that the proposals would not harm the significance of any identified heritage assets.

## 2.0 Introduction and Scope of Evidence

### Introduction

- 2.0 I was commissioned to undertake an independent heritage assessment of the appeal scheme by Carebase Ltd. in September 2022 following the London Borough of Bexley's (LBB) decision to refuse planning application reference: 19/03072/FULM. The description of development for the appeal proposal reads as follows:

*Demolition of the existing dwellings and erection of a part 1/2/3 storey building to provide a 70 bedroom nursing home, with associated access alterations, car and cycle parking, landscaping and amenity space.*

- 2.1 The application was reported to the Planning Committee in November 2021 with an officer's recommendation for approval. The report concluded that:

*On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing character and appearance of the locality.*

- 2.2 Notwithstanding this, the application was refused and six reasons for refusal were provided. My proof of evidence focuses on reason number 4 which specifically relates to heritage matters.

### Scope of Evidence

- 2.3 My evidence focuses on the main heritage consideration in relation to whether the appeal scheme will preserve the significance of the Grade II listed Registered Park and Garden (RPG). It addresses the Council's fourth reason for refusal, which reads as follows:

*The proposed development, by reason of the position, height, bulk and scale would harm the setting of and result in less than substantial harm to, Danson Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden and designated heritage asset. It is not considered that this harm would be outweighed by the public benefits required by paragraph 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021). The proposed development is therefore contrary to policy HC1 of the London Plan (2021), CS07 and CS19 of the Bexley Core Strategy (2012), saved policies ENV39 and H3 Bexley Council Unitary Development Plan (2004) and Paragraph 199 and 202 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).*

## 3.0 Heritage Legislation, Policy and Guidance Summary

3.0 In addition to relevant council local planning policies, the key material considerations relevant to this appeal in relation to heritage include:

- The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- The National Planning Policy Framework
- The Planning Practice Guidance
- The Setting of Heritage Assets: Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 (2nd Edition)
- Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets, Historic England Advice Note 12.

## 4.0 Historical background

- 4.0 The appeal site is located adjacent to Danson Park, a Grade II Registered Park and Garden, which has a long and varied history dating back to the 13th century. The size of the park has altered considerably overtime, and has had multiple owners, many of which have left their own mark on it. The key architectural features within the park are the grade I listed mansion house which dates to circa 1762/1763 and the grade II\* listed stables, approximately 1800.
- 4.1 During the 1920s the historic appearance of the park changed considerably when the council took over its management. The council had been keen to promote areas of the park for sport, and in turn constructed a football pitch, tennis courts, a bowling green, and athletics facilities. An open-air swimming pool was built to the south in 1936. Between 1944 and 1963 part of the stable block was used as a sports changing room.
- 4.2 Today, almost all the original ornamental buildings have been lost, including William Chamber's bridge and Grecian temple. None of the original gate lodges that were constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have survived. The only ancillary historic structure that remains is the Chapel House, which is now located outside of the site and has been physically separated from it by the A2 road.

## 5.0 Identification of Heritage Assets and Significance Assessment

- 5.0 In the council's reason for refusal, they allege harm to one heritage asset through impacts on its setting:

1. Danson Park Registered Park and Garden, Grade II

### Significance

- 5.1 In my professional view, the elements of the park of most significance are the listed mansion and stables, their relationship to one another and the lake to the south. Although the significance of these elements can be appreciated from a number of viewpoints around the park, many of these have been disrupted by modern interventions. The tennis courts to the north of the park for example are not a typical feature of an 18<sup>th</sup> century country estate and give this section of the park a much more municipal feel.

- 5.2 The Council acknowledge this within their committee report in paragraph 2.30:

*The committee report for the proposal notes that the most important features identified within the listing are located either centrally within the site or further south (i.e., Danson House; Danson Stables; the main (eastern) entrance; the old English garden; and the lake).*

- 5.3 The RPG is considered to be of architectural and historic significance for its retention of highly Graded listed buildings by named architects and for the surviving elements of its Georgian landscape, namely the gently sloping topography of the land that leads to the substantial lake to the south.

### Contribution of Setting to Significance

- 5.4 The current setting of the RPG is mixed, and largely either neutrally or negatively contributes to its significance. In terms of the site's specific contribution to the significance of the RPG, it is located along a busy thoroughfare and flanks the southern edge of a narrow, funnel like entrance designed in the 1920s and features buildings of no architectural or historic interest with run down structures to its rear. The site overall contributes neutrally to the RPG.

## 6.0 Proposals and Assessment of Impact

### Proposals

- 6.0 The proposals seek to demolish Nos. 2, 4, 6 and 8 Danson Road and replace them with a part 1/2/3 storey building to provide a 70 bedroom care home with associated access alterations, car and cycle parking, landscaping and amenity space. The proposed building is a bespoke design which has been developed to specifically address its location.

### Impact

- 6.1 The council's officer report provided comments on the scheme:

*The massing of the proposal has been designed to break up the visual mass along Danson Road. The frontage, while a single building, would be well articulated and reflect the residential character*

And:

*On balance, it is considered that the proposal would deliver a high quality contemporary design which would provide a meaningful contribution to the street scene without harming the existing the character and appearance of the locality*

- 6.2 The appeal proposal will involve a change to the setting of the RPG, but this change should not be considered harmful unless it has a negative impact on its heritage significance. Given the small nature of change when contrasted to the much larger heritage asset, and its remoteness from the most significant element of the RPG, it is my professional view that the appeal proposals would not harm the significance of the RPG.

### Response to Reason for Refusal and Officer's Comments

- 6.3 It is my professional opinion that the proposals would not cause any harm to the significance of the RPG. As such, there should be no conflict with any of the policies mentioned within the Council's reason for refusal.



## 7.0 Conclusion

7.0 The RPG is of varying quality, with the northern section having a much more municipal character. The setting of the RPG has been considerably changed since its early origins, now having a completely urban character, that does not contribute to the significance of the RPG.

7.1 The proposed appeal scheme has been sensitively designed to ensure it introduces a high quality development within the setting of the park, whilst ensuring the key significance of the RPG is maintained. As such, it is my professional view that the appeal scheme would cause no harm to its significance and would not be in conflict with the local heritage-related policies cited in the council's reasons for refusal of planning permission.