

Design and Access and Heritage Asset Statement

Proposed Single-Storey Extension at 'Four Trees', Common Lane, Letchmore Heath, Watford, WD25 8EE

1.0 The Property and Local Context

1.1 'Four Trees' is a detached house of the late 18th or early 19th century. It has a formal architectural style typical of the period. It is a Grade 2 Listed Building. The official listing description is as follows:

“House. Late C18 or early C19, extended and altered c.1850-60. Stock brick, stuccoed. Slate roofs. Originally 4 window front. 2 storeys. Entrance in 3rd bay from right with Tuscan porch. Casements. Ground floor: two 3-light windows to right, 4-light window to left, moulded architraves with slightly cambered heads and bracketed sills. Floating bracketed cornices. First floor: 2-lights to left, 3-lights to right. Cornice to coped parapet with right end corner stack. 1 bay extension to left set back. 3-light casements, segmental head on first floor. Left return stack extruded with decorated pots, similar stack at original left end. Right return: plain brick with a full height canted bay. Flat roofed 1 storey outshut to rear right. To rear: mid C19 extension to left, parapet stepped up at angles. Garden entrance with sidelights and a bracketed cornice. First floor round headed staircase window, ornamented architrave. Stack with 4 decorated pots. To rear right is mid C19 square tower slightly taller than rest of house with round headed windows, stone balustraded parapet, corner ball finials. Octagonal stained glass lantern. Interior not inspected.”

1.2 'Four Trees' stands within a good sized garden plot. The rear elevation of the house is out of obvious public view. It is situated within the context of an obvious settlement but this is not marked by a development boundary in the Local Plan. The site is in-fact within the Metropolitan Green-Belt which 'washes over' Letchmore Heath village but 'Four Trees' self-evidently does not occupy a position of isolation in open countryside. The property is also situated within the Letchmore Heath Conservation Area.

2.0 The Proposal and Relevant Planning History

2.1 This planning application is for the construction of a single-storey rear infill extension in an

‘Orangery’ style with extensive timber framing incorporating generous glazing, all set within painted render masonry walls. It would have a feature cornice detail and a flat roof with centrally positioned glazed lantern feature. The photographs below show existing views of the rear elevation of the house.



2.2 The proposed ‘Orangery’ would occupy the same position and essentially be the same size as a rear infill extension that was recently granted planning permission and Listed Building consent under references 22/1913/HSE and 22/1914/LBC respectively. This flat roofed extension would be in the tradition of an ‘Orangery’ addition but with a higher ratio of rendered masonry to glazing than in the new proposal, and with no lantern feature.

3.0 Relevant Planning Policy

National Level: The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021

3.1 At paragraph 7 of the NPPF it states that: ***“The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.”*** It goes on at paragraph 10 to state that there should be a ***“... presumption in favour of sustainable development.”*** It then states at paragraph 38 it that: ***“Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.”***

3.2 With regard to Green-Belt protection the NPPF intimates that the extension or alteration of a building within the Green-Belt is appropriate development unless it would result in ***“disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building”***. No precise direction is given as to how the word disproportionate is to be interpreted but that phrase appears to indicate that additions can be quite significant in size (this makes sense given that the Permitted Development rules can allow a dwelling to be significantly more than doubled in

size), they just must not be disproportionately so. It is clear though that the general rule is that the lack of prescription implies that there is latitude to apply it on a case-by-case basis with the basic objective being to make sure that none of the five reasons for including land within a Green Belt (these are listed at paragraph 138 of the NPPF) would be undermined rather than to keep extensions at a particularly small size just for the sake of doing so.

3.3 In terms of general countryside protection, the starting point in considering the acceptability of development proposals is indicated at paragraph 174 as **“Recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside...”** This means such as it manifests itself in any given location in relation to a notional quality scale from low to high.

3.4 The NPPF does not directly address matters of residential extension design or residential amenity but at section 12 it does set out some general, common-sense principles providing direction to achieving good design outcomes.

3.5 The NPPF promotes a general presumption in favour of protecting and preserving Heritage Assets such as Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas from change that would diminish their value to society by harming special character, appearance and historic fabric. Less than substantial harm can be justified in certain circumstances but otherwise development or other works should only enhance or have a neutral effect.

Local Level: Hertsmere Core Strategy (CS) (2013) and Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan (SADM) (2016)

3.6 The following policies of the CS and SADM are those most directly relevant to consideration of the planning merits of the proposed development. They have been acknowledged in its conception, with the objective being an acceptable degree of compliance as appropriate, in light of all other specific material considerations and circumstances pertaining:

Policy SP1: *‘Creating Sustainable Development’* (CS)

Policy SP2: *‘Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development’* (CS)

Policy CS12: *‘The Enhancement of the Natural Environment’* (CS)

Policy CS13: *‘The Green-Belt’* (CS)

Policy CS14: *‘Protection or Enhancement of Heritage Assets’* (CS)

Policy SADM12: *'Trees, Landscaping and Development'* (SADM)

Policy SADM22: *'Green-Belt Boundary'* (SADM)

Policy SADM26: *'Development Standards in the Green-Belt'* (SADM)

Policy SADM29: *'Heritage Assets'* (SADM)

Policy SADM30: *'Design Principles'* (SADM)

4.0 Design and General Planning Considerations

4.1 The design philosophy which underlies the proposed development is that of improving the functional quality of the site as a living environment with an inherently attractive and architecturally appropriate addition, whilst at the same time avoiding harm to visual amenity in the wider locality, the value of the Heritage Asset and to the amenity of any nearby property occupiers. The proposed development has been positively conceived in all aspects to accord with the various protection and other functional expectations of national policy guidance and local area policies listed in part three of this statement.

4.2 The proposed 'Orangery' would be an appropriate response to the architectural character and appearance of the house. It would be an aesthetically pleasing design form displaying inherent architectural harmony and with this being further enhanced by external materials of construction compatible with those of the existing house and the village setting. It would not of itself result in disproportionate enlargement of the house and nor would it do so in combination with previous extensions have enlarged the house in the past. The essential scale of the house would be unaffected. The 'Orangery' would complement the essential form and architectural style of the host house and exhibit subordination and intrinsic proportionality in relation to it. The overall size, appearance and character of the altered house would clearly be seen to be just a variation on the theme of and a direct evolution of, the style of the existing. Any change to the character of the existing house would be incidental, within the parameters of the normal and expected and in no way so radical as to harm public visual amenity or any other planning interest of acknowledged importance.

4.3 Assessing the actual effect of the proposed 'Orangery' on the character, appearance and openness of the wider locality requires taking into account the full combination of design, size, discrete siting and general setting—including all permanent and at least semi-permanent features of the locality such as other buildings, walls, distance and orientation to the nearest

Public Highways/Rights of Way, trees and 'layers' of shrubs and hedges which create a complex pattern of screening from different positions and distances surrounding the application site. Taking all these factors into account, it is reasonable to conclude that the proposed development would fit into the setting without changing public perception of the rural quality of the wider locality, much less actually harm the intrinsic character and beauty of the locality or materially diminishing its openness as functional Green-Belt.

4.4 The proposed 'Orangery' would neither be large enough nor sited in proximity to any other residential properties, nor have windows of type or position, such as to be capable of having an adverse effect on the outlook or ambient level of natural light or privacy enjoyed by their occupants. Conflict with policy on this amenity issue would not occur.

4.5 Private amenity-space would be maintained at a level ample to serve the enlarged house. Waste and recycling storage would be unaffected. There is nothing relating to either of these matters for which relevant policies would indicate that refusal of planning permission would be necessary.

5.0 Heritage Asset Assessment

5.1 The relevant Heritage Assets in this situation are the Listed Building and the Conservation Area.

5.2 The heritage value of the building is principally architectural. It is aesthetically pleasing and represent a good example of type and certainly contributes positively to the local scene and sense of place. It is also a building that has maintained it's domestically focussed function over its life and therefore has a living history of alteration and enlargement to suit the needs of different eras. This organic real-life change would be artificially brought to an end if in our own time the building is no longer allowed to be adapted, within reason, to meet modern usage and expectations. The proposed 'Orangery' would involve a sympathetic continuation of this historic process without jeopardising any fundamental architectural features or characteristic of the building or any change that would alter the appearance of the Listed Building in the public domain. No existing architectural features would be removed or harmed and the fabric of the building, which is not especially old or demonstrative of historically significant construction methods, would not be materially affected either. None of the defining characteristics that give the Listed Building and its setting special value to wider society would

be eroded or diminished.

5.3 The value and significance of the Conservation Area as a Heritage Asset lie in its pleasing examples of period architecture and the arrangement of buildings, spaces, topography and natural and managed landscape features, which combine to provide a highly aesthetic composition with a strong and unique sense place.

5.4 The proposed 'Orangery' would be of intrinsically attractive appearance and appropriate size and design and would display architectural compatibility with the host house. It would have no tangible impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and thereby no diminishing of its quality as a unique and valued environment or of its significance as a Heritage Asset.

6.0 Access

6.1 The proposed 'Orangery' would not increase bedroom numbers so the occupancy potential of the house would not rise. It would therefore have no impact on the access/transport sustainability credentials of the enlarged property by comparison with the existing. The NPPF does not impose a need to consider this aspect in relation to domestic residential extensions and nor does the local area policy. The fact that the application site is somewhat remote from any built-up area and realistically can only be accessed by the private motor-car (does not therefore weigh against it.

6.2 The site currently provides ample space to provide parking for all domestic modes of transport to a level comfortably satisfying the requirements of adopted policies. This provision would be unaffected by the proposed development.

6.3 The requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations to allow reasonable access and use to all persons, regardless of disability, age or gender, would be met.

7.0 Trees and Biodiversity

7.1 No trees, hedges, shrubs or other or vegetation of public visual amenity value would be adversely affected or lost as a consequence of the proposed development. The site offers ample opportunity for additional landscaping should it be deemed necessary. There are no protected wildlife species or special habitats that would be damaged or destroyed in the

positioning or execution of the proposed development.

8.0 Flood Risk Assessment

8.1 The application site lies within Environment Agency designated Flood Risk Zone 1 where little, if any, risk of flooding has been identified. No special protection measures are necessary.

9.0 Conclusion

9.1 The proposed development would comply with the objectives of relevant national policy guidance and all relevant local area policies, and no planning interests of acknowledged importance would be harmed by it. This indicates that a grant of planning permission and Listed Building consent, subject to relevant conditions as necessary, would be appropriate.