

GRANDPONT HOUSE PLANNING BENEFITS AND NEED STATEMENT

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document has been prepared by Bidwells to support an application for planning and listed building consent at the Grade II* listed Grandpont House, Oxford.
- 1.2 The purpose of the document is to summarise a significant body of work that has been prepared to demonstrate the compelling needs for the internal and external refurbishment of Grandpont House and associated buildings and structures.
- 1.3 This Statement is structured as follows:
- Section 2: Director's statement which sets out the need for internal and external refurbishment of Grandpont House and the addition of a Boat House
 - Section 3: Summarises the need for refurbishment and the quality of the existing house and facilities
 - Section 4: Provides an account of all the public benefits underpinning the proposals.

2.0 Director's Statement – Xavier Bosch

- 2.1 Grandpont House is a Grade II* listed building used as a centre for educational, cultural and religious formation to people in and outside Oxford since 1959, primarily postgraduate and undergraduate students. Ownership was transferred in 1984 from Trustees of Opus Dei to the Netherhall Educational Association for the management of the estate and house.
- 2.2 Since 1959 Grandpont has been used to provide formational activities for all generations, based on Christian principles, on which the House was founded. The activities are varied academic, cultural, spiritual retreats, professional seminars, a dad's and lad's club, garden parties for neighbours, book launches, carol singing for the elderly in the area, boat-based leisure activities for young people and families. The premises include meeting rooms, a library, a chapel, and residential facilities.
- 2.3 The facilities are in desperate need of refurbishment, and because of the growth in the activities referred-to above, expansion is also needed to accommodate the number of people who wish to benefit from what the House has to offer.
- 2.4 The residential facilities provide permanent accommodation for staff, which includes the director, assistant director and secretary of the centre, and a Roman Catholic priest, as well as accommodation for postgraduate and, at times, undergraduate students of Oxford's universities. Those whose permanent address is Grandpont House run the various activities taking place in and from the House.
- 2.5 There are two factors which make it essential for Grandpont to expand and build new facilities. The first is the altered expectations of students, especially postgraduate and older students, who expect accommodation to be en-suite. None of the bedrooms within Grandpont House provide en-suite facilities and it would not be possible to add these facilities to the existing bedrooms without considerably reducing the number of places provided. The new extension would allow Grandpont to provide en-suite accommodation in keeping with the expectations of students and at the same time to retain those common facilities that are so crucial to the balanced student life and enhancing the overall wellbeing of the students.
- 2.6 A second factor that has driven the application to build the new extension is that just as the total number of students in the university has risen over the years so there is an ever-growing number of students who wish to live in Grandpont.
- 2.7 The provision of accommodation in a setting conducive to personal growth and social engagement is a big part of what the House does too. We are proposing an expansion in the number of bedrooms (from 11 to 17) and upgrading of the existing ones. As a result of this, we will increase the quality of accommodation (all rooms will be en-suite) and we will achieve a long-desired goal of making the building wheelchair accessible within the main areas of the house (dining room, library, chapel, seminar rooms and one bedroom). The refurbishment of the existing bedroom facilities, and the addition of six new bedrooms, will contribute to Grandpont House continuing as a financially sustainable project, which means we will be able to invest more in the preservation of the building and secure its enjoyment for its residents and visitors for years to come.

Grandpont House: Benefit and Need Statement

- 2.8 Grandpont House sits on a beautiful site overlooking the river. For the last few years, we have invested in boating equipment that has proven to be very successful not just with the students, but local families who come to the house regularly to use the boats. Netherhall Educational Association is particularly keen that the alterations to the site being proposed should foster a greater appreciation of that beauty, with the introduction of a boathouse to function as an area to store associated items which allow utilisation of the garden space adjacent to the river by students, staff and visitors.
- 2.9 Overall, the proposals provide a significant opportunity to enhance and expand existing facilities for current and future occupants as well as benefit the wider community through the creation of increased housing capacity, an additional boathouse in a tranquil setting and the refurbishment and restoration of the historic site.

3.0 Need for Refurbishment

- 3.1 Grandpont House has provided educational facilities and accommodation for students for over 65 years. In keeping with other student accommodation provided by Netherhall Educational Association, this accommodation is not simply of a bedsit nature with independent facilities. Grandpont has always fostered a family atmosphere by the provision of ample common rooms, communal dining and the organisation of a range of activities for residents.
- 3.2 The existing bedrooms provided are dated and lack the quality expected by residents. The improvement of accommodation quality will give the building a new lease of life for the future and allow the generation of sufficient income to ensure maintenance of the listed building.
- 3.3 Securing the long-term optimum viable use of the listed building should be considered to be a public benefit of the proposed development.

Chapel

- 3.4 The existing chapel is just under 37 square metres. The chapel is a centre point of Grandpont House and used daily. It is required to have a minimum capacity of 24 people. Present liturgical practice and recommended size of the sanctuary or space around the altar requires a chapel of at least 44 square metres. An entrance lobby with confessional booths and sacristy, also needs to be located adjacent to the chapel. Within Grandpont House, there is no room of that size, therefore, the chapel is required to be moved elsewhere. Fortunately, it can be situated within a purpose built new extension the ground floor thereby restoring the function of the spaces within the main house whilst increasing its accessibility.

4.0 Public Benefits

- 4.1 Paragraph 208 (Securing public benefits) of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that, where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
- 4.2 This section has been prepared to explain the Public Benefits that derive from the proposed development at Grandpont House, with specific regard to the requirements of paragraph 208.

Environmental benefits

- 4.3 The proposed works include fabric upgrades that would significantly enhance the energy efficiency of Grandpont House and associated buildings. The NPPF directs planning decisions to encourage the transition to a low carbon economy and that *“In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic” (NPPF, 164).*
- 4.4 As set out in the Energy Statement, the works will collectively reduce carbon consumption across the site. This represents an important public benefit by improving the sustainability of significant buildings within the city of Oxford as well as contributing to the City Council’s goal of becoming a net zero carbon city by 2040.
- 4.5 The addition of sensitively placed solar panels on the roof will contribute to the improvements to the environmental performance of the building. Because of the roof structure, these panels will not be seen from the ground.
- 4.6 The sensitive inclusion of fabric upgrades to enhance sustainability of a Grade II* listed building also offer public benefit in terms of a precedent example that could provide inspiration and learning opportunities for other heritage assets to upgrade their energy efficiency.
- 4.7 Finally in relation to the environmental benefits, the site is constrained by river channels and is land that is liable to flood. The proposed development will mitigate and manage flood risk more satisfactorily within the site.

Social benefits

- 4.8 By enhancing the optimum viable use of the listed building, the proposed development will enable investment into the listed building and ensure it is properly maintained in the years to come. This is in of itself a demonstrable social benefit.
- 4.9 The works will significantly improve the living, learning and working environments the students of Oxford’s Universities. NEA aims to support students, undergraduate and postgraduate who are involved in academic, cultural, outreach and religious activities and therefore bolster the wider benefits to society that come along with advancements in education, scholarship and research.

- 4.10 The combination of enhanced facilities within Grandpont House that will directly improve the well-being of its residents, with the addition of the boathouse to allow easier access to the river, provides immediate social benefits to those directly and indirectly affected by the proposal. As well as the provision of a larger chapel which can facilitate more attendees.
- 4.11 Through its 65-year modern history Grandpont House has provided cultural and spiritual activities for students and others in Oxford and from further afield. These proposals will allow the future proof of these important social contributions.
- 4.12 The proposals seek to sensitively conserve and enhance the heritage asset on the site and improve its setting and accessibility. In particular, the refurbishment to Grandpont House will help to secure the long-term future of the heritage asset. In turn, maintaining the significant contribution the Grade II* building has to the character and appearance of the Central (City and University) Conservation Area.
- 4.13 As detailed within the supporting Heritage Statement, the proposals would preserve the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and its setting and would enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Economic benefits

- 4.14 Finally, the proposed development will safeguard an existing use which delivers local socio-economic benefit. Residents of Grandpont House are active members of the Oxford community contributing to spend locally within the city.