
LAPWORTH ARCHITECTS



‘TOUCHED BY GENIUS’ ¶

A statement of the community benefits accruing to the restoration of Great Barr Hall

‘This is a highly-valuable heritage asset of international importance as the “favourite meeting place” of the much-celebrated Lunar Society of Birmingham. This constellation of superior minds (Boulton, Watt, Wedgwood, Darwin, Priestley, Withering and others) has been described as “...the most remarkable group of thinkers and inventors in the eighteenth century-which had a more potent effect upon civilisation than that of any other society in history.” The true role of Great Barr Hall in Lunar Society history (members met here between 1785 and 1797 when Samuel Galton Jnr FRS took a lease) has only recently been properly explored. This research has been written up in a series of papers which you can download from www.greatbarrhall.com to explore at your leisure. Having read these papers you will better understand why this much-ailing building *must* be restored for posterity.’

PETER ALLEN

CHAIRMAN: Barr & Aston Local History Society

SECRETARY: Great Barr Hall Action Committee

¶ Download the document *Touched by Genius: Great Barr Hall and the the Lunar Society* from www.greatbarrhall.com

The timing of the Great Barr Hall planning application . . .

seems to have caused unnecessary distress in some quarters. That is very unfortunate and we would like to set the record straight so that misperceptions do not persist.

The application was actually submitted by Lapworth Architects as long ago as 8 November 2013. Further complex information was requested by Walsall Council on 26 November, including a full-blown Environmental Impact Assessment. All the additional information was supplied by 13 December. The application was validated five days later. At their absolute discretion Walsall Council chose to send out consultation letters on 23 December, over the busy festive period. All these facts can be verified from the Council website.

We are most anxious that everyone should have an opportunity to respond to this application in an unhurried manner. A statement from David Elsworthy, head of planning and building control for Walsall Council, confirmed to the Great Barr Observer (10 January, 2014) is reassuring in that respect. Mr Elsworthy says that residents will be able to express their views for much longer: “This is a very significant and complex application that is undergoing an extensive consultation process. The application is still at an early stage and the council welcomes all representations which will be taken into account up until its meeting on March 13.”

Please contact us if you have further concerns.

LAPWORTH ARCHITECTS
www.lapwortharchitects.com

10 January, 2014

A link with the Lunar Society era . . .

has been introduced into this document. John Baskerville (1706-1775), a revolutionary type-designer and printer, was based in Birmingham and well-known to members of the Lunar Society. His typefaces were greatly admired by Benjamin Franklin, who took the designs back to the newly-created United States. His exquisite productions are highly collectable and his typeface is still a firm favourite of book designers. A recently-formed Baskerville Society celebrates his many achievements.

Lapworth Architects

The practice has a wide client base involved in housing, education, retail, commercial and industrial buildings. We also work on many period buildings including carrying out grant-aided work for Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council and English Heritage. Our experience on working on listed building projects range from the restoration of the Grade I Listed Rotunda and Red Wing at Croome Court in Worcestershire to numerous Grade II* and Grade II buildings utilised for all kinds of uses including retail, restaurants, hotels, day nurseries, office and residential accommodation.

We have completed a number of successful and award-winning schemes in the region and elsewhere in recent years. We have won a number of design awards and indeed a project by this practice has now been included in the government's By Design (CABE) document as an example of good design. The design awards include best 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses and executive home and special category design in the Birmingham Post Housing Awards. We were also the winners of the Regional and National Green Tree Award for Sensitive Building in the Environment. Recently it has been confirmed that the practice has been awarded the CABE, 'Building for life gold award', for a project completed in the World Heritage site in Broadway, Worcestershire.

Introduction

Following the recent submission of the enabling development application in November 2013 for the Grade II* Great Barr Hall and Grade II Registered Park there has been a call by some to make clearer than hitherto what benefits (if any) the restoration will bring to the local community. This document attempts to set out the direct benefits which will stem from the enabling development restoration application.

Additionally, the report intends to demonstrate the commitment held by the current owners and custodians of Great Barr Hall to the principle that it is right that those who benefit when planning permission is granted should share some of that gain with the community which granted it.

At this stage it may be useful to point out that at any time, historic buildings and heritage assets including landscapes are at risk from neglect. The loss of the built heritage in this way not only constitutes an unnecessary waste of environmental and material resources, but also represents a failure by all to protect the heritage asset for future generations to enjoy.

Great Barr Hall is currently on the English Heritage Buildings at Risk Register, as is the Grade II Registered Park. The Halls condition is described as 'very bad' and because of this it is granted the highest priority category. As Conservation Architects we advocate that that heritage assets are a non-renewable resource' and that where a building is seriously at risk from neglect as a result of the inability of all concerned to stabilise its decay or to find an appropriate new use and that it is wholly justified for planning authorities, English Heritage and interested parties to consider the merits of some new development.

Our belief is also supported by the National Planning Policy for the Historic Environment policy document which directs that 'there should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets and the more significant the designated heritage asset, the greater the presumption in favour of its conservation should be'. As Great Barr Hall is Grade II* it is a particularly important buildings of more than special interest; and matched by only 5.5% of all the approximate 374,081 listed building entries across England.

However whilst here is a presumption in favour of the preservation of listed buildings and other designated heritage assets, it does not automatically over-ride all other considerations. One of the key considerations is that there 'the value or benefit of the survival or enhancement of the heritage asset outweighs the the disbenefits to the community of providing the enabling development'. We believe that the application does and this document will now set out why we believe this to be the case under the following headings::

- Conservation Benefits
- Landscape Benefits
- Ecological and Wildlife Benefits
- Retention of Estate
- Economic Benefits
- Crime Reduction Benefits
- Improving Access and Inclusion For All
- Allowing for Public Access
- Flood and Drainage Benefits

Conservation Benefits

The Great Barr Conservation Area is an important district designation and falls on the borders of three local planning authorities.

Great Barr Hall and the Registered Park covers approximately one fifth of the Great Barr Conservation Area. The restoration will not only enhance the Hall and direct landscape but will enhance the Conservation Area as a whole and act as a catalyst for future heritage-led investment / improvements across the Conservation Area.

In addition, the enabling development application will provide a significant sum of money which will substantially contribute to reducing the Conservation Deficit of this nationally important heritage asset.

The proposals also offer the opportunity to restore an historic landscape, which has been greatly neglected over the last century. The present owners and custodians of Great Barr Hall are also committed to living on the estate and this commitment has been significant in helping shape the proposals. The commitment from the current owners and custodians is positive and supported by English Heritage policy which has long advocated that when communities are helped to develop their own sense of what matters for them, and why, the results can transform a neighbourhood and act as a catalyst for further private and public-sector investment.

Landscape Benefits

Great Barr Park is listed Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens and has also been subject to a prolonged period without management. It is therefore on the English Heritage Registered Park and Gardens at Risk Register.

However, importantly, the English Heritage Enabling Development Guidance sets out the need to not harm the heritage value of the place and its setting and the need to resolve problems arising from the inherent needs of the place, rather than the circumstances of the site owner or the purchase price paid. Here lies the dilemma for any consultant reviewing this site: in terms of heritage landscape issues, to what extent is development justified in the registered park, in order to see the key heritage assets, the Hall and park, preserved for future generations?

To help address this and ensure that proposals have the least amount of impact as possible on the heritage setting, BCG Lakes Limited commissioned Adrian Wikeley, principal landscape architect at Land Use Consultants (LUC). Adrian has over 25 years' experience of working on heritage landscape issues, and in particular on eighteenth-century picturesque landscapes. He has worked for a variety of clients from private landowners, the National Trust, English Heritage, the Royal Parks and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Adrian has led design teams on the restoration of major registered landscapes, undertaken significant enabling development proposals and, acting as a consultant landscape architect, he has also written guidance for English Heritage on minimising the impact of golf courses on eighteenth-century landscapes.

Land Use Consultants have been a pivotal lead consultant in helping formulate the landscape objectives and in assessing and helping mitigate the likely impact of the proposed development within the registered landscape at Great Barr on the character and appearance of the Park and the setting of the listed building, Great Barr Hall.

LUC's input has helped ensure that the current proposals have been robustly challenged by some of the country's leading landscape experts. This has directly helped to minimise the harm to heritage setting and where possible made a direct and positive contribution to maintaining and enhancing bio-diversity. A prime example of this is through the development proposals exploiting the natural contours of the landscape to reduce the visual impact of the proposals.

The management of the historic parkland has been poorly executed for the last 100 years. This lack of management has resulted in degradation of woodland composition through establishment of invasive and dominant species such as Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Sycamore.

The current proposals seek to minimise harm to natural heritage and where possible make a positive contribution to maintaining and enhancing bio-diversity. A brief selection of the work includes:

- Restoration of the lakes to the alders that complement historic design
- De-silting the lakes
- Re-stocking the lakes with fish
- Woodland management to improve and extend the life of the remaining veteran trees

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- Planting in excess of 5,000 native trees along the M6 motorway boundary
 - Improving perimeter fencing to help prevent trespassing
 - Habitat enhancement measures to encourage bird breeding
 - New areas of habitat creation, restoration and a conservation management plan for the Park to enhance habitats for its all rich and diverse wildlife
 - The removal of invasive species
 - Creation of visual links from new housing to historic parkland

The Detailed Landscape Proposals from Lapworth Architects generate a number of significant landscape benefits including:

- Reinstatement of historic views and vistas
- Improving vistas into the parkland down Suttons Drive
- The removal of diseased Horse Chestnut trees from Suttons Drive.
- The re-planting of species to echo historic woodland compositions
- The enhancement of biodiversity and improvement of the overall amenity value of the registered park
- The ecological assessments and surveys have been used to inform the most suitable location and layout of the proposed development
- The visual impact assessment has been used to determine the proposed development areas and where the impact is considered to be high mitigation measures incorporated within the design
- Additional landscaping is proposed which would add a buffer between the edges of the development and surrounding land.

Ecological and Wildlife Benefits of the Proposals

The ecological surveys and mitigation and enhancement measures have been based on detailed and well scoped discussions with Walsall Council's Ecologist and the Black Country Wildlife Trust. A 'no expense spared' approach has been taken.

The proposed ecological works have taken into account entirely the findings from previous surveys and reports, as well as commissioning a comprehensive set of up-to-date ecological surveys by licenced ecologists. These surveys include an extended Phase 1 Habitat survey the other surveys carried out include a detailed Bat Assessment for Great Barr Hall and the Park, Great Crested Newt Surveys, reptile, badger and bird population monitoring surveys.

The direct ecological and wildlife benefits which flow from the proposals can be summarised as follows:

- A positive contribution to the protection, enhancement, creation and management of biodiversity.
- Enhancement and improvement of the nature conservation aspects of the area and the habitats of protected species.
- Promotion and conservation of biodiversity through educational means.
- Reduction of light spill by the installation of low-level and cut-off lighting within the development.

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- Creation of dark corridors for nocturnal species.

Walsall Council's ecologist has expressed concerns about likely predation from domestic pets, particularly cats. As a consequence a development-free buffer zone will be put in place between existing woodland and the house gardens. In addition to the above, a wide range of ecological mitigation measures are being proposed and these can be summarised as follows:

- Reptile translocation and habitat enhancement.
- Species rich grassland, creation and enhancement (SLINC).
- Woodland retention, creation and enhancement.
- Construction of a bat barn and installation of several bat boxes.
- Removal of invasive species Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Rhododendron, from Gilberts Wood.
- Construction of new waterbodies, creation of wetland habitat and relocation of one existing waterbody.
- Badger monitoring/ mitigation as appropriate.

Tree Protection

- The proposals acknowledge the Tree Preservation Orders which protect the trees on the estate and have ensured that the minimum number of trees are affected by the proposal
- A root perimeter zone has been calculated for trees close to build development to afford additional protection.
- The proposals have catalogued the condition of all of the estates trees. This is considered to be the most comprehensive tree recording exercise carried out since they were planted.
- Where trees are likely to be affected a tree survey in accordance to BS5837 has been commissioned.

All of the proposed landscape and ecological benefits will be achieved through works being carried out in accordance with an agreed Conservation Management Plan. The plan has been tailored to meet the immediate, medium and long-term needs of the Park.

Retention of the Estate

The guiding principle for any enabling development project relating to historic entities is that the contributory assets, such as the setting, should be kept together. To restore a building at the expense of its setting would be counterproductive in terms of public good. In particular we note risks to historic gardens and designed landscapes, as they are extremely vulnerable to deals of this kind.

Despite several changes in ownership in the past recent decades, the Hall and Park thankfully remain in the same ownership. Thus, thus these two unique heritage assets can be restored, conserved and seen as one, as originally intended since the eighteenth century. The current proposals would allow for the Estate to be kept as an 'historic entity'. This would include the Grade II* Hall the Registered Park and archaeological remains.

Current proposals also ensure that the acknowledged heritage asset will be retained by one legal owner and one management regime. The benefit is further echoed by the fact that development in the Park will also remain in single ownership, with one freehold covering all of the heritage assets.

As developers driven by a sense of fairness and community benefits we believe the current proposals commit the owners to oversee the restoration works and be responsible for securing both immediate and long term maintenance of the Estate.

Through the implementation of a binding Section 106 Agreement all interested parties can be re-assured that the proposals provide a future for the immediate and long term maintenance and restoration of great Barr Hall and Park.

Economic Regeneration Benefits

Impact of tourism on the local economy:

The proposals will provide an exceptional and unique tourist attraction of international, national and regional importance, particularly through associations with the world-renowned Lunar Society of Birmingham. It is anticipated that the restoration will boost revenue for local tourist attractions, accommodation providers and businesses within the local vicinity. In addition, a range of new local employment opportunities in the tourism, hospitality and construction industries will be generated.

Short, medium and long term local job creation:

It has been calculated by Messrs Walker Cotter and specialists from English Heritage that the total restoration project will be valued at in excess of £15 million.

Restoring the historic environment creates jobs and helps underpin local economies. Work by English Heritage demonstrates that initial heritage investment in heritage-led regeneration projects levers in significant amounts of other capital and helps to sustain and create jobs.

The effect and number of jobs which will be created on the back of the application being granted should not be underestimated by any party, regardless of their views on other elements of the application. In addition, the owners have made a commitment to work collaboratively with Daniel Cairns of Think Walsall which is Walsall Council's initiative to promote Walsall businesses into the supply chains of private and public investment in Walsall and elsewhere.

This collaborative approach has already seen the awarding of nine contracts to local companies based within an 8-mile radius of the site. This commitment is a very important direct community benefit.

Crime Reduction Benefits

Reducing Crime on Netherhall Estate:

One of the design vulnerabilities of the Netherhall estate is that the western boundary of Netherhall Avenue and Horseshoe Crescent backs onto large un-managed open space, which includes the Great Barr Hall Estate. This area is routinely subjected to trespassers, so much so that the current owners have been forced to invest in a 24 hour 7 day a week security team to help address the problem. Despite this measure anti-social behaviour and trespassing continues to occur.

It is a well-known fact that the majority of domestic burglaries are commissioned through entry by a rear door to the target property. The currently unmanaged open space allows offenders to use the un-maintained vegetation and woodlands to gain direct access to the rear perimeter of Netherhall properties.

The redevelopment of the Park will help deter intruders and anti-social behaviour on the Registered Park which is a very important benefit to residents of Netherhall Park.

Wildlife Crime Prevention:

Wildlife crime has become such a national problem that in 2006 the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) was established and is made up of analysts, intelligence officers and investigative support officers from the Police, Defra and HMRC.

It is accepted that the Great Barr Estate has a number of protected species which are known to be targeted by offenders nationally.

The proposals would provide direct community benefits by helping reduce the risk of criminality as the residents of the proposed housing would act as a deterrent and be able to report offences swiftly.

Improving Access and Inclusion

Inclusive design principles in accordance with the CABE 2006 published guidance has been embedded into the development proposals from the outset. This has been done by BCG Lakes commissioning an access audit survey to assess how user-friendly Great Barr Hall will be to future users.

Following the audit survey an access plan has been produced which has assessed and documented the barriers to access which exist within Great Barr Hall and Park. The access plan further considered:

- The requirements of wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility, sensory impairments, and learning difficulties.
- The needs of families with young children.
- Intellectual access which, is as important as physical access for some disabled people.

In addition the proposals comply with the current requirements of the Building Regulations Approved Document Part M. The design has also been influenced by the British Standard, BS 8300:2009+A1:2010, a source of best practice guidance for architects.

The Need to Limit Public Access

The present owners of the Great Barr Hall Estate wish for the general public to share in its abundance of delights. But please remember that this is a magnanimous gesture: it is a privately-owned facility and they are under no obligation to provide public access.

It is firmly recognised by Walsall District Council, English Heritage, the current owners and other stakeholders that public access to the Great Barr Hall Estate must be very carefully controlled. The elements which make up this spectacular site are extremely fragile and will quickly degrade with unfettered public access. Although it has not previously been afforded its rightful status (largely an historical accident due to its former use), we are dealing here with an estate which has many of the attributes of places such as Attingham Park and Hagley Hall. We are most certainly NOT dealing with something akin to the likes of nearby Red House Park or Perry Barr Park, which are places for general recreation. The Great Barr Hall Estate is most certainly not a place which can accommodate dog-walkers and those taking daily exercise. Any visit must be regarded as a privilege rather than a right.

However, community access to the Hall and Registered Park is demanded by the high degree of enabling development. The current planning application therefore supports a wide range of public access options, which are detailed below.

- Guided tours for larger groups around the estate including the parkland and the historically important French garden. This will allow a proper appreciation of the intertwined relationship between all the various elements which make up this unique area.
- The holding of two charity garden open days per year to which the general public will be invited. These would be coordinated by the Red Cross (or similar organisation), with one event in the spring and another in the summer. Proceeds would go to charity and provision would be made for farmers' markets, craft fairs and other attractions.
- Two house "heritage open days" per year. These would form part of the national scheme, but visitors would be asked to make reservations for the guided tours. Display boards and handouts would be provided detailing the historic and architectural significance of the Hall and its Estate.
- A signboard, constructed of natural materials and located at the entrance of the site, to provide historical, landscape and ecological information. It would include a map clearly showing designated pathways and amenities within the area.
- Access to the extensive grounds, including the French gardens and the registered parkland, as part of wedding and conference facilities at Great Barr Hall.
- Unlimited daily public access for people attending the hotel/ conference event centre.
- The dining room will serve lunches and evening meals to hotel guests and be open for general public use.
- The extensive grounds, including the French gardens and the registered parkland will be fully accessible to members of the public using the hotel.
- There will obviously be daily unlimited access to all of the residents on the site, their families and visitors.

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- The possibility of fishing on the lower lake is being explored. This would be restricted to permit holders. Income from the permits would be used towards the maintenance of the landscape and lakes within the park.
 - Educational tours for youth organisations, local and county schools, historic and wildlife societies.
 - Access to members of the St Margaret's Church to conduct an annual Easter and Christmas service at Great Barr Hall.

In addition to the public access detailed above, it is also proposed to make special arrangements for Netherhall residents. It is envisaged that public access would be granted to these residents on a half day basis on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of the months March to August, and on the 3rd Saturday of each month from September to February.

The approach taken to provide public access has been designed to accord to Policy ENV 8 (f) whereby Developers must demonstrate how schemes will provide for controlled public access to the Estate without detriment to the nature conservation interest, landscape quality and amenity of the site.

It should be noted that these arrangements have subjected to detailed discussions between the applicants, their agents, English Heritage and Walsall Council.

As this is an ongoing document other opportunities for accessing the site will continually be developed from a widespread gathering of opinion. Access may have to be restricted at times due to weather conditions or for operational reasons.

Flood and Drainage Water Management Benefits

A detailed Flood Risk Assessment considering all sources of flooding, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and the Black Country Validation Checklist (2012) validation number V20 and Black Country Core Strategy policy ENV5 (2011) has been carried out. This is perhaps the most detailed report of its kind which has ever been produced for the site.

Following detailed discussions and meetings the proposals have been given consent under section 23 of the Land Drainage Act (1991) as amended by the Flood and Water Management Act (2010) from the Walsall Council as Lead Local Flood Authority.

The report has identified known flooding issues in the Chapel Lane area and downstream at Queslett Road over into the administrative area of Birmingham City Council. Proposals offer improvements to the known flooding problems.

The current proposals will see the replacement of the trash screen at the south of the site as the watercourse passes southwards towards Queslett Road with a modern design. This trash screen is known to have contributed to flooding at Queslett Road in the past. Its replacement is a significant community benefit.

Ancillary Community Benefits not considered in this document

- The Statement of Heritage Significance produced by Lapworth Architects has identified the exceptional evidential, historic, aesthetic and communal value that the historic fabric holds. The conservation of this fabric will allow these values to be retained and enjoyed by current and future generations.
- Restoration of the hall will ensure these values are better and more widely understood and appreciated. This will enrich the lives of the residents and visitors to both Great Barr Hall and the registered parkland, young and old alike, and build local pride in the quality of the historic and natural surroundings.
- The current proposals will allow Great Barr Hall and the registered parkland, once subsidised via the current application, to be sustainable on an on-going basis.
- The owners have agreed within the proposals to the withdrawal of permitted development rights to ensure future control by the Local Planning Authority over the housing estate.

- The current proposals would leave all known or perceived archaeological areas of interest intact. This approach has been agreed with Mike Shaw the County Archaeologist.
- The current proposal ensures that the contaminated land left by the current owner is dealt with appropriately for the benefit of the registered park and Great Barr Conservation area.
- Walsall Council are likely to take full advantage of Planning Conditions if the application is granted to ensure that the scheme is brought to fruition. This is particularly so where it is important that the commercial element of a scheme is built to a certain standard and level of detail. Planning conditions are also likely to be used to specifically requiring adherence to certain approved drawings unless the local planning authority permits otherwise.
- In addition to committing to a legal framework to secure the benefit the owners have expressed to Walsall Council a commitment to part taking in a post project evaluation. The results of the evaluation, including any experience to be reported to the planning committee, and hence made available to the public. This respects the public, community interest in enabling development schemes, and fulfils the need for accountability and transparency inherent in the nature of enabling development agreements.

COMMUNITY DIS-BENEFITS ARISING FROM THE PROPOSALS

Sustaining heritage assets is a high priority, and statutory designation imposes a presumption in favour of their preservation. However, this does not automatically justify doing so through enabling development. This is particularly relevant when the disbenefits are out of proportion to the heritage and other public values of the asset.

The presumption in favour of preservation should however require decision makers not to be overly pessimistic in assessing applications. All decisions should take into account the consequences of refusing an application, particularly where the heritage asset is rapidly deteriorating, and whether there is any other likely source of subsidy (public or private) available to secure its future.

The report will now examine a number of points which have been highlighted by interested parties as representing key dis-benefits to the local community. In addition analysis will be provided as to why each point continues to form a part of the current enabling development application.

1. The loss of vistas from Chapel Lane into the park.
2. Demolition of former farm buildings.
3. Noise and disturbance from construction work.
4. Increase in traffic.
5. Impact on schools and doctors' surgeries and other local amenities
6. The health risk of electricity pylons.

The loss of important vistas into the park

The only public view into the park is via Chapel Lane. It is accepted that the proposal will have an impact on the openness of the Green Belt but the application proposal offers a well-considered balanced approach and is a big improvement on other previous planning applications.

Whereas past applicants were minded to fill the entire gap between St Margaret's Church and Coronation Road, the current proposals are a substantial improvement and ensure that the open views are retained to the greatest possible extent.

This approach affirms that the site plan is bespoke and takes advantage of the topography. It is a sympathetic response to a special place.

Demolition of former farm buildings

The current proposals include an application to demolish the former farm buildings to the west of Handsworth Drive. Local residents have contacted our offices and raised concerns about demolishing these buildings on the basis that they

are buildings which form part of the setting of the listed building and may provide a refuge for wildlife. The facts are that these were always intended as temporary structures. They were built in the 1930s as part of the small-scale farm set up for patients from the Great Barr Park Colony. They have nothing whatsoever to do with the old Great Barr Hall Estate and have no architectural merit. After their last use in the mid-1950s they were considered as an eyesore to be removed at the first opportunity.

Based on these reasons we continue to seek permission for their demolition. We also believe that as these structures are of low intrinsic significance, and of little historic and no architectural value the application accords Policy ENV4 which provides a site specific policy for Great Barr Hall and Estate, as the policy supports the removal of features which detract from the character of the estate as do the derelict farm buildings. It is advocated that the clearance of these buildings would enhance the heritage setting of Great Barr Hall.

Noise and disturbance from construction work

It is accepted that construction works have the potential to create noise and disturbance to local residents. The applicants are however committed to mitigating wherever possible the likelihood of substantial noise and disturbance.

It is advocated that any development or restoration on this site will have an element of noise associated with it. This being an agreed position between all interested parties it is advocated that noise and disturbance to local residents can be reduced by way of planning conditions which restrict the hours and days of work on site and also perhaps the delivery times for materials.

This being an agreed position between the parties it is advocated that noise and disturbance to local residents can be reduced by way of planning conditions which restrict the hours and days of work on site and also perhaps the delivery times for materials.

Increased Traffic

The existing site consists of the derelict building of a Grade II* Listed building and an unmanaged Grade II registered landscape. It therefore generates no traffic of note. Local residents' groups have previously advocated that an increase in traffic is a dis-benefit to the local community.

However we feel that this concern must be measured against the backdrop of current traffic safety and flows for the effected roads. The current application has submitted a number of detailed Highways reports which demonstrate that Chapel Lane has a good safety record. For example, no accidents resulting in personal injury have occurred at the signal controlled junction of Chapel Lane with the A34 in the last three years. In addition the reports demonstrate that the A34 has flows of over 26,000 vehicles per day so the increase from the proposed development even when taken at its highest is relatively small.

Additionally a Transport Assessment in accordance with Black Country Core Strategy TRAN 2 and UDP Policy T4 has been produced which is in accordance with the DFT Guidance on Transport Assessments.

A key community benefit arising from the assessment is that the current proposals are expressly orientated towards discouraging use of the private car and encouraging the use of walking and cycling, or public transport. Furthermore due regard has been given to ensure that there is adequate access for emergency services appliances to the new dwellings. Roadways have been designed to be able to take 15 tonnes and have a width of at least 3.7m. Furthermore the footprint of each property has been designed to be within 45m reach of a pumped fire brigade appliance.

It is for these reasons that the proposals cannot be construed to have a 'severe' impact as defined by the National Planning Policy 2012.

Impact on schools and doctors' surgeries.

All development proposals for new residential amenities have the capability to put additional constraints on public facilities such as schools and medical facilities.

However in order to help forecast the capacity of local schools discussions have been held with Nick Gill from Education Services. Based on these discussions it is evident that there is sufficient capacity within the local schools.

Concerns have also been raised by some that the proposals are highly unlikely to require additional capacity in local medical facilities. It should be noted that the development of the former St Margaret's Hospital, which proposed 445 dwellings, only led to a requirement for 1 additional GP in the area therefore the impact of a further 57 houses is not considered to be high particularly as there is in excess of 7 Doctors surgeries within 1 miles of Chapel Lane and 15 Doctors surgeries within 2 miles of Chapel Lane.

Health risk of electricity pylons

Concerns have been raised about the proximity of some of the houses near Chapel Lane to high-voltage electricity pylons. As a result the proposals have been amended to increase the distance from the proposed dwellings to the pylons.

Western Power have also visited the site and surveyed the voltage generated from the pylons. Following this exercise they have confirmed that the proposals comply with Statutory Policy and that they have no objections.

Conclusion

The principal purpose of enabling development should be to rescue historic buildings from imminent collapse or further decay. If ever there was an example of a building at risk of imminent collapse then it is Great Barr Hall.

Enabling development by definition goes against established policy. However it is an established and legitimate planning tool. At the heart of enabling development is an 'exchange' whereby the community accepts some dis-benefit, as a result of permission being granted for development which would otherwise be unacceptable, in return for a benefit funded from the value added to the land through the consent granted. This report has demonstrated how this 'exchange' provides much greater benefit to the community than the disadvantages that are born out of the proposals.

It is the opinion of the author that where a heritage asset is seriously at risk from neglect, as a result of the inability of all concerned to stabilise its decay or to find an appropriate new use, then it is vital for a planning authority and all interested parties to consider the merits of some new development to fund restoration works.

The public dis-benefits are not considered insurmountable or significantly adverse in this particular case due to the individual characteristics and location of the site itself and the careful consideration that the proposals have been given. Therefore it is advocated that the public benefits of allowing the development are paramount and must supersede any disadvantages associated with the proposal.