Dear Char

Re: Rowden Park - 14/12118/OUT

This response is in addition to the one provided by Sarah Gostling on the 21st January 2015.

Rowden Park area is located to the south of Chippenham between the hospital (formerly the workhouse) and the road leading towards Showell Farm, Lackham and Lacock (A350). The land slopes down from the hospital and levels off to give a series of open fields bounded by hedgerows. There are a number of farms and buildings located in the area, some are listed, one is scheduled, some are undesignated heritage assets and others are modern. Currently, the central area between Chippenham, Showell Farm and Lackham is a conservation area and the only buildings in that area are Rowden Farmhouse (grade II*), the grade II listed stable and barns at Rowden Farm, and the Scheduled moated site with fishponds at Rowden Farmhouse. Chippenham town more or less ended at the hospital until after WW2. Prior to that, the Rowden to Patterdown area and along to Showell Farm and Lackham was largely undeveloped with just a few detached buildings dotted across the landscape.

The Rowden Conservation Area was originally designated in 1989 and included the land immediately around Rowden Manor. In 1996 the conservation area was enlarged to include a wider area around the manor, as this better reflected the historical ownership of land by the manor and controlled the topographical and visual enclosure of manor lands around the house and to the river valley.

The outline proposals are to build up to 1000 houses infilling the area between the A350 and edge of the conservation area, starting from just next to the current development at Rowden Lane and extending as far as the nursery opposite Showell Farm. In addition, paths will be created in the conservation area on the land currently used for pasture and haymaking. The proposal is to create a Country Park, although it is not entirely clear what the use of the land will be. The scale and density of this development would considerably alter the character of the area and setting of the heritage assets. As the small quantity of buildings in this area currently are mainly farms and cottages and mostly two to two and a half storeys high, enveloping them in urban development will harm their setting by removing the land that they were built to be associated with. The proposals would also affect views to and from the heritage assets, which are currently across fields and hedgerows but will be obscured by new buildings or at best seen in a sea of masonry rather than vegetation. The proposals would harm the setting of the heritage assets, albeit less than substantial harm. The addition of such a large quantity of housing may have a public benefit in the form of providing additional opportunities for house ownership. Whether the loss of the green space and rapid bloating of Chippenham town is a public benefit will be a decision for the planning officer. To that end, I would draw the officer’s attention to paragraphs 17(10), 131, 132, 134 and 137 of the NPPF. The emphasis is on new development affecting the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance (para 137). Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clear that in considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Furthermore, Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that that with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. The indicative layout of the proposed development appears not to comply with the NPPF or the Act on this point and it is suggested that the layouts and densities are reviewed in order to create more views to and from the heritage assets and soften the approach to any new development.
If you would like to discuss these points further, please let me know.

Regards

Caroline

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