

## Mount Radford Lawn – Heritage officer's comments

### Background

Mount Radford Lawn is an area of grassed open space, bordered by mature trees and stone walling on some sides, surmounted by railings. It is located within the St Leonards Conservation Area, and is identified in the current Conservation Area Appraisal (adopted in 2008) as a positive space and an area of important treescape (Plan 3). It also forms part of the immediate setting of the Listed buildings of Nos 1 – 4 St Leonards Place (particularly of No. 1) and of Claremont Lodge (all Grade II), and of the setting of St Leonards Church (Grade II).

The conservation area and the listed buildings are all designated heritage assets in terms of the NPPF, as well as being subject to the statutory duties in the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, as reflected in saved local plan policies C1 & C2.

The site, due to its location immediately next to Topsham Road and relatively close to the city, also has the clear potential to contain buried archaeological remains, which although they may be undesignated heritage assets, are still a material planning consideration under the NPPF and are covered by local plan policy C5. Buried remains may include those of Roman date, as it is increasingly clear that much of the Exeter – Topsham corridor was occupied by military installations and compounds during the 1st century, and locations alongside roads outside settlements were also favoured for cemeteries throughout the Roman period. There is also the potential for buried remains of 17C English Civil War date, as Mount Radford House was fortified then as a major redoubt during the two sieges of Exeter, and it is likely that outworks belonging to this extended away from the house itself, in the area of Mount Radford Lawn and across Topsham Road to the steep slope above the Exe. Mount Radford House was located to the NW, under Cecil / Barnardo Roads, and was demolished in the early 1900s; Mount Radford Lawn represents the last remnant of the original open landscaped approach to the house.

### Planning context

The policy background is

- a) The duties set out in the 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act to *“have special regard to the desirability of preserving the (listed) building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses”* (s. 66(1)), and *“pay special attention ...to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that (conservation) area”* when making planning decisions (s. 72).
- b) The duties above, and the thrust of the NPPF policy below, as reflected in saved policies C1 & C2 of the Local Plan First Review.
- c) The policies in the NPPF Chapter 16 with regard to the significance of heritage assets (designated and undesignated), what impact a proposal may have on that significance, including on setting, what degree of harm if at all the proposal may cause to that significance, and whether this harm is justified in terms of public benefit of various kinds.
- d) The above as reflected in saved policies C3 (locally listed buildings) and C5 (archaeological remains) of the Local Plan First Review.

### Proposals

These involve the construction of 7 large detached houses with enclosed private gardens over around half of the open space, with the remainder consisting of access roads and paths, a new oval pocket park on the eastern side of the site alongside St Leonards Road, a small pocket public open space at the western corner across from the church, and a vista view of the latter from a sculpture feature within the new oval park.

### Heritage planning issues

These include:

1. Potential impact on buried archaeological remains (as a non-designated heritage asset);
2. Impact on the settings of the nearby Listed Buildings, principally Nos 1 – 4 St Leonards Place, Claremont Lodge, and St Leonards Church (all Grade II listed and designated heritage assets), i.e. do the proposals preserve the settings of these listed buildings;
3. Impact on the character and appearance of the St Leonards Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset), i.e. do they preserve or enhance this.

#### Appraisal

I have appraised the application and the supporting documents, including the D & A statement and the Heritage Statement, and comment as follows against each of the four main heritage issues set out above.

There is no supporting documentation, not even a desk based study as part of the Heritage Statement, that identifies what buried remains may survive on the site and what the impact on them of the development may be. The potential impact of a development on buried remains, and whether or not this is acceptable and can be mitigated, has been a material planning consideration since the publication of PPG 16 in 1990, and continues to be so within the NPPF and local plans.

However, notwithstanding this, I have made my own assessment from the information in the city historic environment record, and based on recent discoveries and previous discussions about this site. This is that

a) Topsham Road represents the line of the main Roman and later road running SE from the main gates of the legionary fortress and later city at Exeter down to probable port facilities and settlement at Topsham. Very significant Roman military remains from the period immediately after the conquest have been found within the city itself, at Topsham, and on the road in between at St Loyes. Given the location of the present site so close to the fortress and city, alongside the main road and in a defensible position (with the valley of the Shutebrook on one side and the slope down to the Exe on another), it clearly has potential to contain similar remains, as well as possibly later Roman civil ones.

b) Mount Radford House was a documented strongpoint or redoubt in both sieges of Exeter during the 17C civil war. It would have denied an enemy/attacker the use of the high ground overlooking the Shute Brook valley and was also sited to command the approach from the south up Topsham Road. As the Civil War saw the use of firearms and artillery/cannon, defences of that period usually included extensive and substantial works (ditches, ramparts, artillery batteries) around and outside the strongpoints being defended, whether an older city wall or castle, or a fortified point such as Mount Radford House, and in positions to command the line of approach. As one of the main Royalist strongpoints defending Exeter against Cromwell's New Model Army, one would have expected such works to be present here, most probably forward of the house within what is now Mount Radford Lawn and across Topsham Road.

c) Previous geotechnical borehole surveys, and the present ground levels, indicate that there is a considerable depth of fairly modern fill present in the southern edge of the site along Topsham Road, which decreases in depth across the site towards St Leonards Place. This masks any remains below it, rendering geophysical survey of little use. The only method therefore of establishing what remains may be present and at what depth, would be through an extensive set of machine dug archaeological trial trenches across the site – field evaluation as per NPPF para 128.

d) However, given the nature of this site, its significance as an open green space within the Conservation Area, and the other planning issues that are likely to result in the refusal of the application, and the public concern that is likely to arise from large machines digging up the open space for whatever reason, I do not think in this particular instance that it is necessary

to require the applicant to undertake an archaeological field evaluation prior to determination.

e) Instead, should this or a similar proposal eventually gain planning permission, the impact of a development on this site should be managed by the standard conditions requiring a) the completion of an approved programme of archaeological work, including an initial phase of trial trenching early on and further excavation where the impact cannot be mitigated by foundation design, and b) approval of foundation designs before implementation, to enable the use of raft foundations for example where necessary to preserve important remains undisturbed.

## 2. Taking each listed building in turn:

a) St Leonards Place. Originally, as is clear from the historic mapping (plates 10, 11, 13, of the Heritage Statement), all four villas would have looked out on to open, albeit with some trees and probable planting, landscaped grounds in front, in the form of the earlier extent of Mount Radford Lawn. Subsequently the area of the latter has been incrementally reduced, first by the construction of the houses along the NW side of Barnardo Road, then by the more recent construction of No. 5 St Leonards Place, the substation and the houses along the SE side of Barnardo Road. As a result, Nos 2 – 4 St Leonards Place have already lost their original open setting across the road at the front. No. 1 however still retains this open setting at the front, and it is still possible to appreciate and understand the original locale within which these villas were designed and built.

The effect of the new development as proposed will be to remove this remaining open setting to No. 1, by the construction of a new large house side on in front, new boundaries to the garden, and the provision of several formal bays of public on street parking opposite, rather than the informal on road parking as at present.

The proposed development will therefore not preserve the setting of No. 1, and will harm it in the sense of no longer being able to appreciate the original setting of the listed building.

b) Claremont Lodge.

The current setting of this will reduce in the sense of the amount of open area in front being reduced and formalised as an oval enclosed pocket park. It is arguable whether or not this change preserves or harms the setting of the lodge, but the change is less harmful than replacing open green space with a building and parking, as with that of No. 1 St Leonards Place.

c) St Leonards Church.

Currently the church spire can be seen from several locations within the site and around it. The proposals will restrict this to one narrow vista view from a particular point within the new oval park.

As with any church tower or spire, its presence is meant to advertise the presence of the church and to visually dominate the surroundings, as a constant reminder as to its presence and what it represents. As such, the church and its spire have a rather wider and more extensive setting than domestic scale listed buildings. Development that severely reduces and cuts down the places from which the spire can be seen or glimpsed, as an ever present reminder of the presence of the church within the neighbourhood and community, is therefore clearly not preserving its setting, and is causing harm to it, as it will reduce the ability to appreciate and understand the significance of the church and its spire.

## 3. Impact on the conservation area.

The remaining open space of Mount Radford Lawn is specifically identified as a positive space in the adopted CA appraisal, and as such is integral to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. Conservation Areas are an area designation, and are a sum of their parts, including trees, open space and street scape as well as particularly significant buildings, listed or unlisted.

It is difficult to see therefore how building new houses, enclosed private gardens, and access roads and other infrastructure over at least half of the remaining area of the Lawn, and

reducing the remaining open space to two separate, smaller pocket parks, can be considered to preserve the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. With regard to enhancement, if the open space does merit some improvement, in terms of some selective planting and the way in which it is used and managed, then there are other less damaging ways of achieving this by building private houses over more than half of it. In NPPF terms, building over much of the open space and formalising the remainder in two separate pocket parks or gardens would clearly cause significant harm to the particular significance of this part of the conservation area, given that the Lawn is identified in the appraisal as a key element of the latter.

#### Conclusion

My conclusions are that the proposal should be refused because

1. It does not preserve the settings of the listed buildings of No. 1 St Leonards Place and of St Leonards Church, and indeed causes harm to them. As such it does not comply with the test under the 1990 Act nor with saved policy C2.
2. It does not preserve, nor enhance, the character and appearance of the St Leonards Conservation Area, by virtue of covering more than half of what is a significant open space within the CA with buildings and concrete and other hard surfacing. As such it does not comply with the test under the 1990 Act nor with saved policy C1.
3. It provides not even the minimum of supporting information about what buried remains may be present and what the potential impact of the development on them may be.
4. The harm caused to the significance of the listed buildings and conservation area needs to be outweighed by a sufficient amount of public, not private, benefit to be acceptable in NPPF policy terms. Although public benefit is mentioned in the supporting statements, no analysis is provided of what the public benefit of providing 7 luxury detached houses would be in this case, other than the addition of 7 units to the housing supply. In other cases, including those involving harm to heritage assets, inspectors have concluded that the avowed public benefit of adding to the housing supply has not been sufficient to outweigh the harm caused.
5. In terms of enhancement, there are other far less harmful ways of enhancing the space with planting and appropriate access other than substantially reducing its area and building over the rest.