

Edwina Mountbatten House, Broadwater Road, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 8GH

Summary Proof of Evidence

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1. My name is Nick Wright. I hold an MSc in Historic Conservation from Oxford Brookes University, and I have worked for Donald Insall Associates for four years. My current role is as a Senior Heritage Consultant. I am a member of Oxford Diocesan Advisory Committee, and I am also a member of Oxford Architectural History Society, a non-statutory consultee with respect to planning applications in Oxford, providing advice to the Society with respect to the impact of planning proposals and providing written comments to Oxford City Council. I teach building analysis to students of the Oxford Brookes University MSc in Historic Conservation, and Oxford University PG Cert in Architectural History. I have been appointed by Test Valley Borough Council as an Expert Witness in terms of heritage matters for the purposes of this appeal.
2. In considering the impact that the Appeal proposals would have on designated heritage assets, I have identified heritage assets that would be affected, and I have assessed the significance of those heritage assets. The contribution that the setting of each heritage asset makes to its significance has also been assessed. The impact made to the setting of the heritage assets by the Site (the existing Edwina Mountbatten House) has been assessed, and the impact that would be made by the Appeal proposals has been evaluated, using the plans, elevations and VVMs supplied by the Appellants. Finally, the harm to significance that would be caused by the proposals to the designated heritage assets has been assessed, and the degree of harm caused placed on a sliding scale.
3. The heritage assets that would be affected the Proposals comprise 14 Grade II-listed buildings or structures, some of which comprise more than one address. For the purposes of assessment, the listed buildings – with the exception of The Old Manor House and Red Lodge – have been considered as a group. The Old Manor House and Red Lodge have been considered separately. The other designated heritage assets affected are Broadlands Registered Park and Garden (Grade II*), and the Romsey Conservation Area.
4. The Site lies within the setting of all of the heritage assets, and it has been determined that the present building on the site (Edwina Mountbatten House – built as accommodation for the elderly in the 1960s) is a neutral building in terms of impact on the heritage assets. Its response to its context in terms of its size, and the specification and use of its materials, make it an exceptional building for its time.
5. In respect of the 12 Grade II-listed buildings or structures that have been considered as a group, the Site has been found to comprise an important element in their significance, speaking to the historic development of the street on which they are located, and comprising an important component of the kinetic views in which the buildings are experienced. The contribution made by the Site to the significance of the buildings in this group increases with proximity, and the artisan cottages at 30-36 Palmerston Street and 38-52 Palmerston Street have a particularly intimate relationship with the Site, with both the humbleness of the buildings and the historically undeveloped status of the Site being indicators of the ‘ragged edge’ of Romsey, a once semi-rural setting between the town and Broadlands park. I consider that this setting was preserved to a notable extent by the design of the existing Edwina Mountbatten House, which is subservient both to the listed buildings on Palmerston Street, and also to the wooded edge of the town.
6. **The Old Manor House** is an unusual and important building in Romsey, being one of very few timber-framed buildings that still expresses its original form to a great extent. Historically, it marked the beginning of the town to travellers entering from Southampton, and for those leaving the town it once marked the beginning of open agricultural land. The sensitively developed Site, which preserves the relationship between the building and the semi-rural fringes of the town, is an important element of the setting of the building, contributing meaningfully to its significance.
7. The setting of **Red Lodge** on the north side of Broadlands Park encompasses the Site, as it is experienced in kinetic views from the east, and the Site also features in the setting of **Broadlands RPG**. Owing to the low height of Edwina Mountbatten House, and the presence of trees along the Tadburn stream, the Site currently comprises only a minor element in the setting of the RPG, but is sensitive to change.
8. The **Romsey Conservation Area** exists to preserve the character of the historic core of the town, but the specific character that it aims to preserve changes, depending on location. The Site is located in Character Area 4, as defined in the 2020 Conservation Area Appraisal, and my analysis has built on this document to understand the significance of Palmerston Street specifically within the character area. The Site, which was removed from the conservation area in 2020, remains in its setting, and contributes to its significance by

preserving something of the historic character of this part of the Town, and permitting the trees of the Tadburn stream to provide a highly visible backdrop to Palmerston Street, as it is experienced in kinetic views travelling south.

9. I have found that the Appeal Proposals would cause harm to the significance of all of the identified heritage assets. In respect of the 12 listed buildings and structures that have been considered as a group, the scale and bulk of the proposed development would change the setting of all of the buildings in a negative way. An element of the setting of all of the buildings is the kinetic view looking south along Palmerston Street, in which the low rise of Edwina Mountbatten House preserves a memory of the historically undeveloped land in this location, and gives clear visibility of the trees along the Tadburn Stream. By virtue of the scale and bulk of the proposals, this relationship between the listed buildings and their significant edgeland setting would be damaged or destroyed. The harm arising from the harm to significance would (to use the language of the NPPF) be less than substantial. But the degree of less than substantial harm to significance would not be the same for all the buildings in the group. Those buildings closest to the Site would be most seriously affected, with the level of less than substantial harm being assessed as medium. Listed buildings or structures that are furthest from the Site, at the top end of Palmerston Street, would suffer a very low level of less than substantial harm. In between these two points the level of harm should be understood as existing on a gradient between medium (to the south) and very low (at the north). Because of the length of some of the listed buildings, addresses at one end of a row might be considered to suffer a different level of less than substantial harm from those at the other.
10. The significance of the **Old Manor House** would be harmed by the change to its setting brought about by the proposals. In kinetic views to the south, the scale and bulk of the proposed development would interrupt the important visual and historic relationship between the building and the semi-rural edge, which the building marked for many centuries. And in views to the north, the significant dominance of the building in the approach to the centre of Romsey would be lost. I consider that the Appeal proposals would cause a medium level of less than substantial harm to the listed building.
11. Through its bulk and height, and the visibility of the proposed development from the south east, especially in the winter months, the setting of **Red Lodge** would be changed, to the detriment of its significance. This harm has been assessed to be at the very low end of less than substantial.
12. Thanks to the significantly increased scale of the Appeal proposals over the existing building, the setting of Broadlands RPG would also be impacted, especially in the winter months, with the building being very visible through the trees of the Tadburn stream, and disrupting the green setting of the RPG. This harm has been judged to be at the very low end of less than substantial.
13. The contribution made by setting to the significance of this part of the conservation area having been established, it is clear that the imposition on the Site of a building of much greater scale and bulk must harm the historically significant semi-rural nature of this part of the conservation area's setting, which was preserved by the sensitivity of its development in the 1960s. The Appeal proposals have a building line 80cm closer to the conservation area than the existing building and are over 5m higher than the existing, and 5.5m higher than the closest listed buildings in the conservation area. The scale and bulk of the building would decisively change the setting of this part of the conservation area, and interrupt the significant relationship between it and the verdant edge created by the trees of the Tadburn stream and Broadlands. I consider that the Appeal proposals would cause a medium level of less than substantial harm to the significance of Romsey Conservation Area.
14. The scale and bulk of the Appeal proposals have been scrutinised especially on the Palmerston Street elevation, where the proposals would immediately face the conservation area and the listed buildings at the south end of Palmerston Street. The design of the proposals has also been studied, and this is considered in no way to mitigate the harms to significance brought about by the scale and bulk of the proposals. The proposals are not considered to represent contextual design, sympathetic to the specific character and appearance of the conservation area, in a meaningful way.

