

TABLED ITEM FOLLOWING PLANNING WORKING GROUP MEETING ON MONDAY 6TH JANUARY 2020

ITEM 3.2 FROM PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING ON 17TH DECEMBER 2019

APPLICATION 19/504412/FULL - Extension to garage/store to form observatory, Oyster Bay House, Chambers Wharf, Faversham

Following the site meeting on Monday when the applicant suggested that the observatory could be made available to limited public access (perhaps with viewings in the ground floor of the Oyster Bay House itself) I put certain points to the applicant's agent and this is a summary of his response:

- The overall height of the proposed building cannot be reduced as it needs to see over nearby trees and lighting
- Since submitting the application the applicant has looked into using a smaller telescope allowing the diameter of the dome to be reduced from 4m to 3m, with consequent reduction in size of building (**PLANS TO FOLLOW - SEE BELOW**)
- The enclosed staircase could be removed and replaced by a spiral staircase, which would involve loss of one car parking space
- Windows facing nearby houses could be deleted
- The three fruit trees can be retained
- The dome and external boarding could be painted/stained dark green

In terms of public access he says;

- The property could be open by invitation (without charges) only to organisations such as astronomy clubs which might meet once a week, and to schools on a less frequent basis – maybe six visits per year
- Access would mainly be to Oyster Bay House (maybe 12 people at a time) with only a limited number of adults invited into the new building – say 5 at a time
- The applicant has no proposals for enshrining public access to the building, and does not expect to demolish the building if he were to sell the property.
- Principally the project is to allow the applicant to pursue his hobby, and he takes pride in contributing to projects that benefit the local community

AMENDED DRAWINGS

Late yesterday the agent has sent through amended drawings, saying;

The redrawn proposed floor plans and elevations drawings are attached.

The observatory is now completely separate from the garage building and considerably reduced in bulk. It bears a slight resemblance to an early lighthouse, which is a context that may please the conservation officer. I very much hope the application gains approval tomorrow evening.

This morning the agent has sent the following further comments;

It will still operate in the manner that Brian outlined in the site meeting. Most visitors will be able to see what the telescope is trained on displayed on a screen in Oyster Bay House. Small numbers of more specialised visitors will be able to enter the observatory to study more remote distant stars and galaxies.

I worked hard to reduce the impact of the structure and particularly of the access stairs, along the lines of my preliminary answers to your questions. As there was little time available it is possible that further alterations are possible following consultation with yourself.

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICATION

The amendment has separated the observatory from the garage, so the original description of the application as “**Extension to garage/store to form observatory**” is now out-of-date and should perhaps now read as “**Erection of observatory**”.

Conservation Officer comments on revised design

I would still object to the revised scheme. The absence of the stair enclosure does improve it somewhat in terms of the reduction in bulk and a clear separation between the extant garage and proposed observatory. However, the detrimental PV panels remain in the scheme and above all the proposed tall observatory structure remains in the scheme as dominant and overbearing, with all the resulting detriments to the designated heritage assets, were it to be built. Therefore my earlier comments are still as applicable.

ACCORDINGLY - whilst the scheme has been changed, the structure is still likely to be eye-catching and intrusive, and I see no realistic way in which the public access benefits that were discussed at the site meeting on Monday can be secured. As such, my recommendation remains that the application should be refused but with necessary amendments to the wording of the reason for refusal to remove references to alterations to the garage, but retain reference to harm from the solar panels on the garage.

RECOMMENDATION - REFUSE for the following reason:

- (1) The proposals to erect this tall observatory structure and to install solar panels on the existing garage building would, by virtue of the size, design, scale and form of the observatory and the visual impact of a large range of solar panels on such a small building, harm the character and appearance of the Faversham conservation area and harm the setting of the grade II listed Oyster Bay House building contrary to policies CP4, CP8, DM14, DM16, DM32 & DM33 of Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017 Policies and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.