

Location: Gibson Building Gibson Drive Kings Hill West Malling ME19 4LZ

Proposal: Listed Building application: Proposed demolition of a modern corridor link between Gibson East and the Grade II Gibson West building, with restoration works to reinstate the original appearance of the east facade of the listed building

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1. Description of Proposal:

1.1 The application seeks listed building consent for the following works:

- Removal of the existing single storey corridor link between Gibson East and Gibson West.
- Reinstatement of the façade of Gibson West to its original condition at the junction with the removed corridor link.

1.2 Works to Gibson East only require listed building consent by virtue of the building being attached, via the single storey corridor link (proposed to be removed under this application), to the Grade II listed building of Gibson West.

1.3 A full application has also been submitted (24/01270), which in addition to the works set out above seeks full planning permission for the provision of a new single storey storage building, a timber clad covered refuse store, a cycle shelter (in the same location as existing) and the reconfiguration of the existing vehicle circulation route and (supplementary) parking (to allow the Gibson East to operate as a site independently of Gibson West). These works are also shown on the proposed plans provided in support of this application, but do not require listed building consent.

2. Reason for reporting to Committee:

2.1 Paragraph E8.7, Part 5 (Codes) of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Constitution sets out that:

‘Proposals for development submitted by the Council must be treated no differently to any other application.

To ensure that planning applications submitted by the Council are determined openly and transparently all applications for planning permission submitted by the Council will be determined by Full Council.’

2.2 As the application has been submitted by the Council's Property Service Team the application is required to be determined by Full Council in line with the adopted constitution.

3. The Site:

3.1 The application site is located in Kings Hill, to the south of Gibson Drive and east of Malling Road and host the Council offices. The site comprises the Gibson Building made up of Gibson East and Gibson West, which are adjoined via a single storey link.

3.2 The Gibson Building (Gibson West) was first listed as Grade II in 1999 and the Historic England list description describes the building as an

'Officers' mess, now council offices. 1939, based on a type design by A Bulloch, architectural advisor to the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings. Stretcher-bond brick to cavity walling with hipped plain tile roofs and brick stacks.

PLAN: central entrance/recreation block with services and dining room to rear, flanking accommodation wings attached at right angles and extending to rear.

EXTERIOR: Neo-Georgian style. The front elevation has 3-window fronts of 2-storey accommodation blocks flanking the single-storey central block of 5:3:5 bays, the 5-bay central porch broken forward and with semi-circular arched entries with similar arches over half-glazed inner doors with fanlights; tall 12/16-pane sashes to flanking recreation rooms, their juncture with the hall marked by tall stacks. The 3-window fronts to the accommodation wings, which have 6/6-pane sashes and 13-window outer elevations, each have a central stack with swept flanks set above a similar arched door with tile imposts.

INTERIOR: central block retains original plasterwork, including moulded cornicing, and joinery, including half-glazed doors, to hall and flanking recreation rooms; latter have bolection-moulded surrounds to chimneypieces. Dining room to rear has cornicing to ceiling, which is subdivided into panels. HISTORY: West Malling constitutes one of the stations built for Fighter Command and planned during the latter stages of the inter-war expansion of the RAF. In contrast to the post-1933 Luftwaffe, whose stations at home were solely designed for training purposes and whose principal role abroad was close army support, the inter-war RAF had eschewed temporary fabric and envisaged future wars as being fought from fixed and secure bases rebuilt in permanent materials. The first phase of this scheme, the principles of which were debated and established in the Salisbury Committee of March 1923, took place under the guiding hand of General Sir Hugh Trenchard, who formed the RAF as the world's first independent strategic air force in April 1918 and who ranks, along with America's Billy Mitchell and Italy's General Douhet, as the

most important advocate of the doctrine of offensive deterrence in the inter-war period, and one which was to determine the controversial policy of Bomber Command during the Second World War. His scheme involved the construction of offensive bomber bases in East Anglia and Oxfordshire, sited behind an 'aircraft fighting zone' some fifteen miles deep and stretching round London from Duxford near Cambridge to Salisbury Plain. It was the latter which accounted for the rebuilding of several bases around London which owed their origins to the First World War. Although political and financial factors had prevented the completion of Trenchard's scheme, it was the collapse of the Geneva disarmament talks, in 1933, which prompted the government to embark, from 1934, on its largest inter-war expansion of the air force, phased in order to ensure parity with the Luftwaffe and deployed with training and storage bases sited behind an eastern front facing Germany. A satellite of Biggin Hill within Fighter Command's strategically critical 11 Group, West Malling was opened in June 1940, although a series of raids in August 1940 rendered the airfield unservicable for much of the Battle of Britain. It reopened in October of that year, becoming a nightfighter station with Bristol Beaufighters in 1941, and later used by Mosquitos and Typhoons in offensive operations in northern Europe; it became a key station during Operation Diver' in 1944, the name given to the defence of the east and south-eastern coasts against the V1 bomb. The mess forms part of an exceptionally well-preserved group of buildings on the domestic site which are strongly representative of the neo-Georgian and Art Deco type designs characteristic of the 1930s expansion period. Whilst the design of Trenchard's stations displayed a stark utilitarian architecture which, apart from the Garden City inspiration for station married quarters, owed much to the army background of the designers who worked from the office of the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works and Buildings, it was the need to integrate the fundamental principle of dispersal against air attack which made airfield planning markedly different from the formal and more condensed layouts of naval or army barracks. This is exemplified, for example, in Trenchard's requirement for the crescent as opposed to previously linear planning of hangars, and the officers' mess designs which separated out the functions of mess and recreation rooms and accommodation in order to obviate the risk of a single run of bombs destroying a building and its occupants. It was in this context that Ramsey McDonald, as Prime Minister, had instructed that the Royal Fine Arts Commission be involved in airfield design, and that a process of consultation with the Air Ministry resulted in the creation of the new post of architectural advisor to the Director of Works and Buildings, first occupied by A Bulloch in October 1934, with many of the early (1934-5) building designs being specifically approved by the commissioners; afterwards, liason over layout and other matters was personally handled by Lutyens. The buildings erected for much of the 1930s Expansion Period were, as a consequence, more carefully proportioned than their predecessors, a clear distinction being made between neo-Georgian for domestic buildings and more stridently modern styles for technical buildings. From 1938, and coinciding with Bulloch's replacement by P M Stratton, new buildings and stations, including Middle Wallop and West Malling, made increasing use of concrete and flat roofs in order to

respectively speed up the building process and counter the effects of incendiary bombs.'

- 3.3 The site takes vehicular access from Gibson Drive and has parking surrounding the building. In addition to the main entrance the site has pedestrian access points from Gibson Drive, Forest Way (to the northeast of the site) and Lancaster Way (to the east of the site).
- 3.4 Gibson West comprises the former mess building for the airfield, was built in 1939 and comprises a central single storey block and two linear two-storey (formerly accommodation) wings. The structures are stretcher bond brick clad with pitched plain tile roofs and timber sash windows throughout. The central area has been subject to various small extensions over the years. To the front of Gibson West lies a single storey row of garages, adjacent to Gibson Drive.
- 3.5 Gibson East comprises a more contemporary building (with plant on a reduced third floor) along with a single storey corridor link to Gibson West. It comprises two wings of office accommodation and a central core in an 'L' configuration, the building is brick clad with a profiled steel sheet pitched roof and horizontal strip windows. Both facades of the two wings are overlaid with a galvanised steel structure between ground and eaves level providing maintenance access and solar shading. Stairs located in the central core and at the ends of each wing are articulated and extend above the general eaves line. A number of windcatchers punctuate the building's roofscape providing natural ventilation to the accommodation.
- 3.6 The proposal site lies within a predominantly urban and built-up area with residential properties located to the immediate south and east (along Wellington Way, Lancaster and Tempest Road), an office/commercial building to the north (on the opposite side of Gibson Drive and the A228 (Malling Road) situated to the west. An area of ancient woodland lies within the most southern part of the site and buffers the site from neighbouring residential streets.

4. Planning History (relevant):

Application No.	Proposal	Decision	Date
24/01270/PA	Refurbishment of Gibson East office building, comprising the removal of a corridor link to the grade II listed Gibson West building (and remedial works to the listed facade) minor changes to the external envelope of Gibson East (new external doors / windows and the addition of PV cells to the pitched roof), modifications to site parking and internal circulation, addition of a plant enclosure, single-	Pending Consideration	-

	storey external store, refuse store and cycle shelter.		
15/00873/LB	Listed Building Application: Demolition of 1960's extension constructed of asbestos cement panels, following advice of asbestos consultant regarding deteriorating condition of structure.	Approved	13/03/15
02/03003/LB	Listed Building Application: internal refurbishment of Council Chamber and ancillary areas, plus disabled access to these areas and associated external alterations.	Approved	14/03/03
02/03002/DR3	Alterations to the external appearance of the Council Offices to include provision of new lighting; provision of smokers' accommodation; provision of new front entrance steps; creation of new vehicular access to Bunker and provision of new access ramps.	Approved	25/02/03
00/02950/LB	Erection of demountable partitions within dining hall to form postroom.	Approved	15/02/01
00/02291/LB	Listed Building Application: erection of timber stud partition with new doorway to divide room 9 into 2 no. rooms.	Approved	05/12/00
99/02630/ORM	Amended design of "Link Corridor" to Gibson Building previously approved under application ref: TM/99/00413/DR3.	Approved	10/02/00
99/02624/ORM	Amendment to car parking layout and vehicular and pedestrian circulation routes within the site; including new permissive footpath between Tempest Road and Forest Way pursuant to consent ref; TM/99/00413/DR3 (new office building).	Approved	07/02/00
99/02599/LB	Listed Building Application: construction of enclosed corridor link to new adjacent office building and minor adaptations to create connection with existing building's circulation corridors.	Approved	25/01/00
99/01186/ORM	Amendment to parking provision in respect of consent ref: TM/99/00413/DR3 (new office building): delete 9 car parking spaces	Approved	02/08/99

	adjacent to the south eastern boundary and relocate to extended parking area to the south of the building.		
99/00413/DR3	Two storey office building with associated car parking and external works.	Approved	22/04/99
90/11228/OUT	Mixed use development , comprising business use, with ancillary storage and ancillary distribution (use class B1); residential (C3); Hotel/conference centre (C1); convenience retail (A1 and A3); financial and professional services (A2); Residential education and training facilities (C2) creche (D1) leisure (D2) sports and recreation facilities, open spaces and landscaping, new access on approx 647 acres with ancillary road works.	Approved	12/06/90

5. Consultees:

- 5.1 PC: No objection subject to no works commencing before 8 a.m. and finishing after 6 p.m. No works to take place at weekends and bank holidays.
- 5.2 Historic England: Historic England provides advice when our engagement can add most value. In this case we are not offering advice. This should not be interpreted as comment on the merits of the application.

We suggest that you seek the views of your specialist conservation and archaeological advisers. You may also find it helpful to refer to our published advice.

- 5.3 Conservation Officer: The proposal, in respect of listed building application 24/01268/PA is relatively straight forward. The removal of the link and reinstatement of the façade brickwork and window would be considered to be a significant improvement and therefore I would raise no objections to the proposal from a heritage perspective. However, I would ask for additional information to make the paperwork complete on the application.

- There is no elevation looking from within the modern link back to the listed building to show the existing penetrations through the wall that will be made good when restoring the façade to its original format.
- There is no information on how the interface between the existing modern link and the listed building will be made good, for example, flashing cuts, mastic fillers between glass and wall, mortar between modern and old brickwork walls, floor to wall interface and below ground interfaces (foundations) etc.

This information could be requested during the application process, or conditions placed up on any approval decision notice.

The proposal in respect of the Planning application 24/01270/PA includes new works to the unlisted building along with a number of ancillary structures being constructed. All of these alterations and structures are located in close proximity to the modern office building and will have only a limited impact to the setting of the listed building. This impact will not cause harm to the significance of the listed building and on that basis, I would raise no objections from a heritage perspective.

5.4 Private Reps + site and press notice: 1 letter has been received from a local resident raising the following, summarised, comments:

- The woodland between Wellington Way and the Council offices should be kept.
- The access and gate through the site is important and needs to be maintained.
- Regrettable that the listed building is not to be retained as Council offices and should be kept in the public domain.

**Officers note that this application is for listed building consent only and does not seek to alter the existing woodland, access points, or routes through the site. Ownership is not a material planning consideration.*

6. Determining Issues:

National Policy and Guidance

6.1 Prior to the consideration of the proposal, it should be noted that the Government has concluded a consultation into revisions to the NPPF. These revisions to the NPPF therefore do not carry any weight at this stage and the following discussion is based on the contents of the current December 2023 NPPF as well as policies and guidance listed below:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023 (December)
- National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended)

Background Information

6.2 As a result of changes in working practices arising from the Covid pandemic, the Local Authority plans to consolidate the accommodation it requires in the more modern, Gibson East, building. Removing the corridor link would allow for the separating of the buildings and the creation of separate sites. The purpose of this application is therefore to obtain the necessary listed building consents to allow for the required works to be undertaken.

Impact upon the special architectural or historic interest of the Grade II listed building

- 6.3 Section 16 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (as amended) requires that in considering whether to grant planning permission for a development which affects a Listed Building or its setting or in considering whether to grant Listed Building consent for any works, the Local Planning Authority should 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.
- 6.4 Paragraph 205 of the NPPF states that *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'*
- 6.5 Paragraph 206 of the NPPF further advises: *'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification...'*
- 6.6 The most notable work which require listed building consent is the removal of the single storey corridor which links Gibson East and West. This proposal would result in the removal of a modern extension/addition to the listed building along with the reinstatement of the façade brickwork and window. This would be a significant improvement to the significance and setting of the listed building as it would restore the original character of the building and thus is considered to be acceptable.
- 6.7 The Conservation Officer has assessed the proposal and is in agreement that the removal of the link would restore the appearance and setting of Gibson West to that of the original individual building. The application, whilst showing the removal of the link does not provide specific details of the reinstatement of the listed building fabric will be made good once the demolition has been undertaken. These specific details can though be sought with an appropriately worded condition seeking the details prior to the commencement of the demolition of the link.
- 6.8 The comments of the Conservation Officer carry significant weight in the determination of this application. Their view that the works will not cause any harm to the significance of the listed building and will indeed improve the overall character and appearance of the building is agreed as an overall benefit to restoring the historical fabric of the building.

Conclusion

- 6.9 Based upon the above, it is recommended that listed building consent is granted, subject to a condition to provide additional details of the reinstatement works.

7. Recommendation:

7.1 Grant Listed Building Consent, subject to the following conditions:

- 1 The development to which this consent relates shall be begun before the expiration of 3 years from the date of this decision.

Reason: To comply with the requirements of Section 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:

02851 1000 S2 P07 Location Plan
02851 1010 P06 Existing site plan
02851 1030 P11 Proposed site plan
02851 2302 S2 P04 Proposed elevation
02851 2000 S2 P04 Site sections

Reason: To clarify which plans are approved.

- 3 Prior to the commencement of the hereby approved works, full details and specification indicating how the existing punctuation of the east facing elevation of the Gibson West building will be made good shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The details shall demonstrate how the façade will be restored to its original format and preserve its historic fabric and shall include, but not be limited to details on how the interface between the existing modern link and the listed building will be made good, for example, flashing cuts, mastic fillers between glass and wall, mortar between modern and old brickwork walls, floor to wall interface and below ground interfaces (foundations). Details shall also include material use. The works thereafter shall be carried out in strict accordance with the approved details.

Reason: These details are required pre-commencement to ensure the significance of the listed building is retained and preserved.

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