

APPLICATION WEB COMMENTS FORM

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Location : Coombe Park Coombe Park Road Whitchurch On Thames RG8 7QT

Proposal : The erection of a replacement dwelling and associated works (as per existing and proposed uses across the site clarified by amended plans and supporting information submitted 27 April 2022.)

Application Reference : P22/S1324/FUL - 34

Please complete

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Date :	17 May 2022

Use the space below for your comments

I wish to object to this planning application. My reasons for this objection are as follows. It is interesting to note the fate that history has played in Coombe Park and its companion across the river Basildon Park. In 1792 Samuel Gardiner bought the Manor of Whitchurch and set about building Coombe Lodge between 1794-5. His friend Francis Sykes had already built Basildon Park in 1776. Both houses were then utilised during the Second World War and both were damaged as a result. Thanks to the foresight of Lord and lady Iliffe, Basildon Park was restored to its former glory. Coombe Park on the other hand was in part demolished rather than restored. An error in judgement by all concerned.

The architect of Coombe Lodge was James Wright Sanderson (1770-1813) who was a pupil of James Wyatt. Sanderson also designed other well-known buildings in the local area including the Grade II listed Mansion House in Prospect Park, Reading.

In the 1794 catalogue of the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy, London (Cat. No.647) was an entry for North-east front of Coombe Lodge, now building near Whitchurch in Oxfordshire by J.W. Sanderson. Attached is a screenshot of the entry for the work in the 1794 exhibition catalogue.

Historic England hold a photograph in their archives taken by Henry W Taunt

(HTO1554) of the north front of the house taken from the gardens and the text accompanying it states that the kitchen wing of this original building survives. The 18th century services pavilion still stands and is most likely that this is the kitchen of the original building. This is further supported by the evidence of a cellar and what possibly was the scullery which can be found just south of the pavilion. The Heritage Statement and other documentation provided by the applicant's consultant is inaccurate in its description of this part of the building; in addition to this there is no mention of the cellar or potential scullery. In the 19th century, the house was made larger and changed, as a result both corridor wings were raised to match the height of the main house. In addition to these two full-height bow windows were added to the west front and pediments were added to most of the principal windows.

Detailed cross referencing with various maps (in the public domain) and photographs leads me to conclude that the south pavilion also remains. I would again question whether the conclusions reached by the applicant's consultant in the Heritage Statement are correct.

The application also fails to mention the architect of the later work on the building, William Ravenscroft who is another well-known local architect perhaps best remembered for his Domestic Revival houses including The Gables, Reading and a collection of buildings in Milford on Sea. He was a well-known member of the community and was contributed to the Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Reading in 1887. Ravenscroft was most likely responsible for the design of the bow windows (as evidence in the Oxfordshire County Council's records). Interestingly, the documentation provided by the applicant makes no reference to Ravenscroft.

I note that the Assessment of Significance documents provided by the applicant were compiled nearly two years ago when the Oxfordshire History Centre was shut. This centre is now open and the plans are available for study. The existing Assessment of Significance is therefore out of date and does not contain the full information available on architectural value of the building. I disagree with the statement made in the proposal that much of Coombe Lodge today dates from the 1980s when the last significant re-modelling took place. In fact, the reverse is true.

In addition to the architectural value of the building is the rich history of its residents. Samuel Gardiner bought £14,181 worth of property in Whitchurch in 1792, including the Manor of Whitchurch. Gardiner led a fascinating life and was obviously a deeply philanthropic man and was responsible for setting up the Parish School. His youngest son, Captain Allen Francis Gardiner (born 1794) rose to prominence as a naval officer and Anglican missionary who laid out the plan for the city that is now called Durban. His reputation as a Victorian hero was such that the Anglican Calendar marks the 6th September every year as Allen Gardiner Day.

The next eminent family after a long line of Gardiners were the Fosters, beginning with John Foster (1832-1910) who was an industrialist and Deputy Chairman of the Great Eastern Railway Company. He was responsible for

adding the two large Victorian side wings and changing Coombe Lodge to Combe Park.

The final family of any note to live at Coombe Park were the Howards who added a stud complex which produced many high-quality racehorses, including Willonyx, who won 5 principal races in 1911, including the Ascot Gold Cup. It is sadly at the end of the war that the damage to Coombe Park began.

SODC Tree Officers recently put in place a few TPOs on the estate. It seems nonsensical to now reverse that by allowing them to be felled to make way for the oversized development that is planned, given how rigorous the listing process is. In addition to this the plan does not seek to restore the existing parkland setting designed by Repton landscape. I note that SODC's Landscape Architect has lodged a holding objection in relation to the parkland.

While Repton's Red Book's location is currently unknown there are contemporary sources that confirm that Repton did complete the landscaping at Coombe Park, a lengthy quotation regarding the difficulty in designing the garden can be found in the 1840 publication by J.C. Loudon entitled *The Landscape Gardening & Landscape Architecture of The Late Humphry Repton, ESQ.*

The planned demolition of Coombe Park will result in the release of tonnes of carbon and the creation of a faux Italianate design. In recent years SODC has permitted the demolition of a number of old buildings in Whitchurch, including The Haven and Firhill which have resulted in carbon being released as well as the loss of architecturally important buildings from the village. The Royal Institute of British Architects say this is wrong and that we should refurbish old buildings.

Indeed, on their website SODC state that they want to become a carbon neutral district by 2030 and that they will show leadership. SODC also state that they have lobbied Government to facilitate the urgent retrofit of existing homes to ensure we meet energy targets.

Refusing this proposal would seem like an excellent way of showing such leadership and showing commitment to the target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. On their website SODC also draw attention to the 2018 IPCC report which concluded that we have just 12 years to act on climate change, if global temperatures are to be kept within the recommended 1.5 degrees Celsius. Only last week the UK Met Office confirmed that there is now a 50-50 chance that the world will warm by more than 1.5c over the next five years. The time for that leadership is now. The 1980s extension to the building should be removed and the remaining building be restored to its former glory along with a programme of research into the Repton design of the landscape with a view to as full as restoration as possible.