



Planning Department  
East Devon District Council  
By email to: [planning@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:planning@eastdevon.gov.uk)

27<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

**The Knowle and The Knowle Park, Sidmouth – Planning Application:  
16/0872/MFUL**

SAVE writes to **object** to the planning application by PegasusLife to demolish the 19th-century council offices and build on the Knowle Park in Sidmouth, Devon.

The Knowle is an important local landmark building in Sidmouth standing in attractive landscaped grounds. It started life as a cottage ornée in the Picturesque style and was adapted in the mid-19th century as a hotel before becoming the council's offices in 1969. Despite its alteration for different uses over time, it retains a special character with a pergola-featured roof and flint walls at the back. Significantly, it also retains much of its late-19th century interior decoration. These features give the interior a grand and imposing feel and the council chamber is a favourite with local people who hire it for events such as weddings and conferences.

Despite declining to list the The Knowle in 2012, Historic England acknowledged that both the house and the park are of 'clear local interest' and are 'evidently highly-valued by the local community'. The report also noted that the building 'retains some attractive internal features' specifically noting fireplaces with delft tiles, decorated timber door frames, an open-string main staircase, some plaster ceilings, Pugin-style patterned wallpaper and painted columns. It is important to note that statutory listing recognises nationally important heritage assets but it does not follow that undesignated heritage assets do not merit protection or have no value.

Parts of the park were designated in 1973 as Public Open Space. There are important survivals from the original scheme including the southern terraces and paths, open fields to the north east, and plants and mature trees. The park is a much-loved local amenity and provides a visual contrast to the urban landscape.

In our view, the loss of the Knowle and the additional development of the park's upper lawns and car park as proposed represent a devastating blow to the history and character of Sidmouth, a remarkably well-preserved Regency town in a beautiful setting on the Jurassic coast. The long-term benefits of retaining this building should be properly considered as it would serve to secure an important local landmark.

The NPPF (126) states that in their Local Plans, local planning authorities 'should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance.' In addition, it states (131) that:

'In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'

Paragraph 18.61 of East Devon Council's Local Plan states that:

'We will adopt a positive, proactive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment....as well as the contribution made by the historic environment by virtue of:

1. its influence on the character of the environment and an area's sense of place...'

The Knowle, which dates back to 1810, has played an important part in the history of Sidmouth and the lives of its residents and its visitors. In considering this planning application, its local significance should be fully taken account of in accordance with national planning policy guidelines and East Devon Council's Local Plan. The consequences of the loss of this building and the extensive development proposed will impact significantly on the site and the surrounding area which comprise two conservation areas. In particular, the proposed development of 115 new homes constitutes clear over-development of the site; the East Devon Local Plan only recommends 50 homes on this site.

It is also noted that application sets a nineteen metre apartment block (Building E) just eight metres away from the Grade II listed 'summerhouse' in the Knowle Park. This significantly impacts the setting of this listed structure and the character of this area of the park.

In light of the above concerns, SAVE urges East Devon District Council to reject this application and require a revised design for the site that preserves the historic buildings and better protects the character of the park which is such an important amenity for the community and wider public.

Yours sincerely,



Liz Fuller  
Buildings at Risk Officer