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Sent: 27 February 2026 08:59:05 UTC+00:00
To: "Caroline Grist" <Caroline.Grist@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: Wykehurst House DM/25/3228 and 3229

Hi Caroline

Comments on the above planning and listed building consent applications. My apologies for the delay in getting these to you, which has been caused by pressure of other work.

Firstly, I note that Historic England do not appear to have been consulted regarding these applications, which would be a requirement given the grade of the listing.

Wykehurst House is a II* listed country mansion located in a rural position outside Bolney. The house was constructed in 1871-1874 to designs by Barry, in the highly ornate Francois Premier style. It has been subject to extensive alterations and reconstruction following periods of use as a hotel during the early 20th century, requisitioning and then abandonment during and after WWII, and conversion to flats during the 1970s.

The current proposal, which is partly retrospective, is for internal and external works to the house in relation to remodelling of the centrally positioned, first to second floor lightwell, to restore its purpose as the primary circulation route between levels, including access to second floor guest suites. The proposed alterations comprise:

- Creation of new openings in existing walls;
- Installation of a new staircase and bridge to connect the two sides of the lightwell at second floor;
- Installation of new architectural mouldings and other details;
- Replacement of the existing rooflight; and
- Refurbishment of an adjacent room at second floor to include installation of new joists, ceiling and two new fireplaces into existing fireplace openings.

It sits alongside parallel applications for other internal and external works to the house and grounds, including a partially retrospective proposal for extensive works throughout the interior of the building including alterations to the layout, new partition walls, new doors, architraves, skirting and cornicing (DM/25/2172). The overarching aim of the proposals is to return the building to use as a single-family house.

The part of the house affected by the current proposals was extensively altered during the ownership of James 'Jimmy' Doyle, who purchased the house in 1971 and carried out numerous works, including the above-mentioned conversion to flats, one of which was retained for the use of Doyle's family. At this time, the original first to second floor staircase was removed to create an enlarged lightwell. The subdivision into flats rendered the staircase redundant and its removal created an internal courtyard which with appropriate openings allowed additional light into the new apartments. New access

ways and gantries into the flats were also created. This internal courtyard, which was originally open to the elements, was enclosed by a mono-pitch polycarbonate roof during the 1980s, which is still present.

The current proposal is partly retrospective, in that the previously existing finishes to the area have been comprehensively stripped out. Whilst this is regrettable, it is accepted that the fabric lost is likely to have dated in large part from the 1970s remodelling of the area. The strip out allows a better understanding of previous alterations to openings etc. around the stair/lightwell.

The proposed new staircase and associated works are not intended, according to the supporting statement, to recreate the original condition of this part of the building, as this is not entirely clear, and any restoration would therefore be conjectural. The intention is instead to restore the purpose of the space through the reintroduction of a staircase, but within a covered atrium which reads as distinct from the better-preserved surrounding parts of the house.

Whilst I would not necessarily disagree with this approach in principle, the detail of the application before us in my opinion raises a number of concerns relating to a lack of respect for what remains, or can be understood from documentary sources, of the original layout, and to loss of surviving historic fabric.

In particular:

- There appears to be good evidence that the original staircase was placed to the eastern end of the stair/light well. Why therefore is the proposed new staircase located at opposite end of the space? Whilst, as above, I would not expect a full restoration of the original scheme (nor I am sure would this possible on the surviving evidence), some adherence to the basic layout will be preferable in terms of how the reinstated space, and its function within the internal flow of the building, reads. It may also aid with the point below regarding loss of fabric, if original openings can therefore be more easily reused.
- There is an excessive loss of surviving historic fabric at second floor, in particular to the wall to the northern side where three large arches and a circular window are proposed, but also to the large new open archway to the southern side onto the bedroom corridor. Whilst I understand that the room layout around the stairwell has been altered, there are existing openings (some remaining open, some blocked with later fabric) which could and should be used, rather than promoting such a heavy loss of original material, including the evidence that this contains of the position of the original layout of this part of the building.
- The extensive opening up of the wall to the northern side of the lightwell at first floor also results in a loss of the original enclosed character of the stair/lightwell, and of the adjacent space, albeit that this has already been altered by loss of original partitioning. The adjacent space appears to have been originally compartmentalised as a pair of small bedrooms and box room; the large open lounge area now proposed is at odds with the historic character and use of the

space, and with the surviving character of the second floor of the house generally.

- I have some concerns relating to the aesthetic of the scheme, which seems perhaps overly grandiose for a secondary staircase and at second floor level, where one would normally expect plainer and more functional detailing and finishes. I note the point that details such as cornicing will be simplified in relation to that to the main stair hall, however the inclusion of the large arches and matching recesses around the space and the level and ornateness of the detailing generally seems perhaps excessive, especially at second floor. I would include the suggested choice of fire surrounds to the second-floor lounge in this consideration. This aspect of the proposal requires further justification and/or amendment.
- It will be helpful if the surviving historic door openings/architrave/ironwork mentioned in the supporting heritage statement can be marked on the existing and proposed plans, with an annotation to indicate how these will be preserved.
- Can the applicant please confirm (with photographic evidence) the previous finish to the walls/ceiling/skimming to the second-floor room? Was this entirely plasterboard? Was this room ceiled before strip out, and at what level? Can the previously existing ceiling, if present, please be marked on the sections? Photographic evidence of the room before strip out will be helpful.
- With respect to the fireplace openings to this room, is there any intention to alter their size? They do not appear from the photographs in the heritage statement to be identical at present. If there was/is a hierarchy of scale, this will presumably have related to the size and/or use of the rooms concerned and should be reflected in their treatment in the current proposal. Rendering them matching will not be an appropriate approach.

In summary, although I am supportive of the principle of the proposal to reinstate the staircase, the scheme requires further consideration and/or justification in terms of layout and detailing to ensure both that the original character of the spaces affected is reflected in the new scheme and that surviving fabric and features are appropriately retained and respected.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

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