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Sent: 16 March 2026 17:42
To: Caroline Grist <caroline.grist@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: 25053 - Wykehurst House - Planning Applications Progress

Good evening Caroline,

We are now ready to respond to Emily's comments on the proposed atrium design. I attach amended drawings and responses to each of the points raised, as the numbered items below. In overview, our response is to retain the concept of the atrium space (which the house has enjoyed since listing) but to also preserve much more of the original fabric and openings, within a more pared-back presentation, more distinct from the primary ground to first floor staircase.

Please note that we have not amended all the proposed drawings, instead seeking agreement to this new design direction before further alterations are completed.

- 1. 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.**

Our response, as follows:

Having explored many options for this space, we found that by locating a stair to the east end of this space we left a small yet tall space remaining in the residual volume of the current 'atrium' (the original lightwell proportions). This space would have little function in the current building arrangement and is oddly proportioned as an interior space. In our options exercise, we found that further design intervention was necessary to appropriately deal with this residual space, whilst also preserving its current function as an internal passageway. The resulting design solutions became contrived and did not befit the simplicity of the original, and significant, design of this home. We therefore elected to embrace the spirit of the original design, posing the question – if the designer had been afforded the whole volume of the 'atrium' today, how might they respond?

Further, we do not want to re-create an exterior lightwell, which was an apparent feature of the original design, but was lost in the 70's conversion to apartments (pre-listing). The lightwell brought light and ventilation to the interior but also limited ambition of the original stair design, constraining it within the east central side of the building. The lightwell feature opened the heart of the plan to the weather, and in so doing, led to historic damage to the property (being located over the entrance hall) during its long vacant period.

The original plan arrangements were lost, and their precise details and configuration are unknown. At the time of listing, the lightwell was one single 'atrium' space which had been covered over for improved weathering. It is our strong preference to retain the current feature, to best preserve the interior and to work with the current proportions in the creation of a new and distinct interior space. We consider it important that this feature is distinct, so that the layers of history are legible and discoverable within the building. However, the space must also not be a jarring departure within the context of the interior.

Today, the concept of a lightwell is considered unnecessary to the function of the house, which is now a viable interior passageway between rooms. Re-creating an external lightwell feature would expose the original fabric to greater risk over the long term.

Our designs therefore create a new design solution, for the future of the home, rather than a restoration of earlier intent. We find that adherence to the original plan form would not benefit the design of the home, as it performs today. To undertake such a restorative plan solution would, in our view, require greater adherence to the detail of that original scheme, including the lightwell. This would significantly alter the current layout the home enjoys (and as existed at the time of listing) and would rely on details no longer available to us.

- 2. 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.**

Our response, as follows:

We have now altered the design to preserve much more of the original building fabric and openings, which are particularly prevalent on the north elevation. The revised proposals preserve our intention to create an interior which is both new and purposeful, but also 'marks' the historic pattern of openings for record. We have also updated the existing drawing to highlight the history of the openings at the time of building acquisition.

The revised design no longer mimics the grander arched features of the primary stair and is therefore more distinct as a secondary route. Simpler rectilinear panelling and framing are proposed, which echo the framed and panelled ceilings of the entrance hall and principal stair.

Preservation of the original openings, and in particular the single arched opening, which was the original second floor stair access, suggests a more modest treatment for openings at the second floor generally. We have retained the original opening and propose new openings, matching its size and detail, to balance the new internal elevation.

Originally, the first-floor arched opening, passing from primary stair into the secondary stair, was (and is) arched. As guests then progressed up the stair to second floor, you would have passed through another arched opening. The arched doors created a legible feature, sign-posting the route for guests. The re-use of this feature, within our new designs therefore seems wholly appropriate, following the original design intent as alluded to above.

Using the smaller arched opening apertures, preserves more of the original fabric, whilst still providing light and outlook to the second-floor gallery and to the large open room to the north side.

- 3. 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.

Our response, as follows:

Generally, we are seeking to work with what has been inherited and do not seek a full restoration, not least due to the level of detail in the available historic evidence. However, the proposals now show openings which are similar in proportion to those originally intended at second floor. Indeed, the lost central access is now restored as part of this proposal, accessed off the 'bridge' landing. Please also refer to item 6 below.

- 4. 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 corncicing 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.**

Our response, as follows:

It is our observation that every aspect of the original, significant building design and implementation was finished to the highest standard and with high-quality materials and fittings. The 1970s conversion and limited 'restoration' sought to replicate the look but did not replicate the quality. The current 'atrium' space was heavily modified during this period of conversion to apartments and only limited wall fabric and openings survive. Of these openings, we also cannot be entirely sure of their originality, but have marked our research-based findings on to the existing elevational drawings. This has also informed our design decisions.

We do know that the second floor was used by guests and that they will have used the lost 'second' stair to access their rooms. This stair would have been wholly distinct from the surviving 'back-of-house' stair, which uses contemporary styling and cutting-edge building techniques from that period (1870's). The original design of the house, as a whole, shows an absolute separation between the staff and maintenance of the house, from the family and guest parts. Stylistically, the family perceived a revivalist interior, graded from the most highly crafted and decorated ground floor, lessening in degree to first then second floors.

The 'second' stair would have been secondary in scale and purpose but would have been finished to a very high standard using the highest quality materials. The revised design seeks to strike a similar balance, as per the original intent. Importantly, the proposals bring back a function of the building lost for fifty years. The apartments are now altered to return to guest suites, all accessed through a feature stair restored to the heart of the building, now a home once more. This intervention is considered to offer significant benefit, in reinstating the historic pathways through the house and thereby its functionality. We believe this benefit outweighs harms (now reduced) to the surviving fabric and openings.

Please also refer to our responses to items 6 & 7 below.

- 5. It will be helpful of 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.**

Our response, as follows:

Additional notes have now been added to the existing drawings. Please note that the ironwork references a steel beam through the space which is believed to be original. This is an important feature which has been preserved within the design and has dictated the location of stair and landing alike.

- 6. 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.**

Our response, as follows:

We have received a photograph from the client, as attached, showing the second-floor north room at a time close to their acquisition. This photo shows plasterboard and new timber to the ceiling joists. This evidence fits with the extent of alteration seemingly undertaken between the original (assumed) layout, the 1970's alteration to apartments and subsequent changes by the Golestan family. Original timbers in the mansard roof show signs of an earlier lath and plaster, long since removed, with a darker aged timber. This is compared with the appearance of the ceiling joists.

The proposal seeks to retain these ceiling joists but leave the larger vaulted area above exposed. A small circular window, facing south, will allow light to permeate this volume and add intrigue. Moreover, the additional height in the vaulted section balances the proportion of the room, and the dominant features of the preserved front dormer windows.

In our responses above, we have sought to establish that the lost second stair was an important feature within the original house design, that was used by guests to access their rooms. The openings were designed to 'signpost' this route and to create a clear visual hierarchy. Our revised design uses these same devices – we now propose a secondary stair within the existing atrium space, which connects to a bridge landing. The bridge has two possible exits, designed to have equal importance (and hierarchy). One will access the existing corridor and individual bedroom suites, the other will access a single, flexible lounge area to be shared by all guests.

Given the loss of the original planform and finishes to the second floor north, and even the very purpose for sub-division of the space within, we believe that the proposal is an appropriate response. The original features of the roof form, dormer windows and fireplaces are retained and clearly legible within the space, and the room is provided with a new purpose and function which suits the detailed consideration of the atrium design and the balance of accommodation in the house as a whole.

- 7. 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.**

Our response, as follows:

We made our own measurements of the existing fireplace openings to inform the existing drawings; one has a narrower square opening, the other larger but with sides tapering inward. They are also of different heights, but this would have lesser impact on the original fireplace surround design. So, the width of the back recess of both fireplace recesses is similar, to receive a similar grate and surround. We believe that the new and matching fireplaces are suitable for the symmetrical nature of the room, which lacks a dominant end. The lead elevation of the room is the front facing window elevation.

Can we please ask if the attached proposals, with justification, are more agreeable in principle? We will then complete revision of the remaining drawings swiftly to assist with the full determination of the submission.

Kind Regards

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