

Kelmscott Manor HG-15-08622

We are writing as residents of Kelmscott to **“Raise a Concern”** regarding the above HLF application.

Planning Application 18/1509/FUL went before the Lowlands Area Planning Committee at West Oxfordshire District Council on 13 August and disappointingly for our Village the application is being approved, simply ignoring the negative impact of the plans upon our village, our homes, our lives, the environment and the conservation area in favour of dubious public benefits of mass tourism in a previously tranquil part of the Country. We believe that this planning permission allows the Society of Antiquaries to progress to Stage 2 of the HLF funding process and we wish to raise our very real concerns before this happens.

The planning application was poorly presented by the case officer, omitting any photographs of the village conservation area. The presentation was rushed because previous cases had taken so long and the views of the villagers and objectors were barely mentioned. As a consequence, we do not feel that the Planning Committee had sufficient unbiased information to be able to make an informed decision despite:

1. A significant number of households in Kelmscott raising objections. In fact, 54% of those households not owned or occupied by SAL tenants or staff (5), or second homes (3), or homes for sale (2), submitted objections to these plans. A further 8% of households raised alternative suggestions or required conditional approval. Our objections and comments were only briefly summarised in the case document, hardly mentioned at the Committee meeting and despite photographs being provided within these objections, none were made available to the Committee at the meeting. Online objections give a much fuller picture of the problems Manor open days cause with specific issues raised by farmers, families with children, a First Responder and other Kelmscott residents and these can be viewed in their entirety at <https://publicaccess.westoxon.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?keyVal=P8X2DTRKJDQ00&activeTab=summary> *Update - WODC have removed all objections from the comments page therefore this link is no longer valid. A selection of comments are included here at www.kelmscott.org.uk*
2. Clear contravention of planning policies contained within West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 which covers the whole of West Oxfordshire District and includes the Council’s planning policies including the following:
 - BE1 Environmental and Community Infrastructure
 - BE3 Provision for movement and parking
 - BE4 Open space within and adjoining settlements
 - BE5 Conservation areas
 - NE1 Safeguarding the countryside
 - T1 Traffic generation
 - T6 Traffic management
 - TLC1 New Tourism, Leisure and Community FacilitiesAs seen by: <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/residents/planning-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2011/>
3. A proposal that “there was never a clearer case for a site visit” put forward by a Councillor and supported by a number of members of the Committee that any decision should be postponed until a site visit was undertaken by the Committee on a Manor open day together with a representative of Oxfordshire County Council Traffic Department.

4. One Committee member saying that open days must be a “nightmare” for residents and another describing the plans as “a joke” and adding “these are peoples’ lives we are talking about”.

The village is already in discussion with a Councillor present at the planning application meeting regarding the above matters.

Our concern is that quite simply, we do not consider that the Society of Antiquaries of London, also referred to throughout this document as SAL or the Manor, has met your criteria under the difference the project will make for communities, those criteria being:

“Your local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit; and Your local economy will be boosted”

If HLF provide the funding for the expansion of Kelmscott Manor, this will result in the destruction of our local area and community. It will be a thoroughly unpleasant place to live, it will be much harder to visit or carry out business and the local economy will suffer as a consequence.

Consider first the statement that our local area/community will be a better place to live, work or visit. This will not be the case:

1. Currently, the Manor is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays from April to October, with group visits on a Thursday. Parking is meant to be contained within their car park at the top of the village, a field set aside for this purpose. Because the field has no facilities and is a 410 metre walk from the Manor, many visitors park within the village itself despite a drop off facility or parking at the Manor for less abled visitors. Safe access and passage in and out of the village and within the village is currently difficult with cars and coaches trying to pass on single track, two-directional, 2.8 metre wide lanes whilst avoiding pedestrians at the same time. On Manor open days farmers have had to tow the school bus and several other vehicles grounded on drainage dykes when trying to avoid oncoming traffic. This opening pattern and level of visitors and traffic is already damaging our village and we have reached saturation point.

HLF funding conditions which require the Manor to attract a much broader range of visitors and to almost double the number of visitors per annum from some 20,000 to 40,000 are simply unsustainable in a rural hamlet of this size.

2. The village of Kelmscott is a Conservation area with some 34 houses, two working farms, a church, a pub and fewer than 100 permanent residents. It is served by two-directional single track roads with no speed restrictions, no parking restrictions, no street lighting, no public transport, no formal passing places, few effective footpaths, impaired sightlines for foot and motorised traffic and no public toilets.

Our village is to be faced with a never ending stream of traffic, all trying to negotiate our narrow roads for up to six days a week from February to November. Oxfordshire Highways claim that there will be no more traffic on the roads each day and that only the numbers of days affected will be increased. This is clearly nonsense. With the increased publicity surrounding an HLF funded project and the Manor having to increase visitor numbers in order to meet HLF funding criteria, visitors will not all arrive in equal numbers spread across the six days. A possible scenario gives 1,000 visitors in 500 cars all turning up on a Saturday and only a few hundred on a Thursday or Friday. This would be an impossible

situation. Vehicular traffic is meant to enter and leave the village via the East entrance, but this is not mandatory and is patently being ignored by a significant number of cars and particularly, large coaches.

Traffic surveys commissioned by the Manor did not address the flow of traffic through the village. Furthermore, the survey only assessed cars at the car park and at the Manor itself, for a limited period during the two open days covered. The survey excluded Manor visitors parking within the village itself and made no attempt to correlate its findings with actual visitor numbers at the Manor site during this period. It cannot therefore be relied upon to provide accurate traffic information.

3. Whilst it is the Manor's intention to remove all traffic from the village, as quoted at the Planning Committee meeting by the planning case officer "you can't stop people parking in the road if they want to". Faced with a 410 metre walk in the rain or a lengthy wait in a field without toilets, waiting for some sort of electric vehicle to ferry you to the Manor, you are going to park as near as you can, it is simply human nature. There is absolutely nothing to stop all of these visitors just parking around our lanes. We have a Community First Responder in the village who has already experienced difficulties attending potentially critical incidents because of vehicular obstructions and pedestrians in the village lanes. Pedestrians have to walk in the road as there are only limited short stretches of footpaths which are usually blocked by parked cars. The school bus struggles to get in and out of the village owing to current levels of congestion and we can only hope that an emergency vehicle never needs to get through the village on a Manor open day.
4. Our lives are already being adversely impacted by the pedestrian traffic and number of visitors. On arrival at the car park, visitors currently receive a map of the village showing the walking route to the Manor with other points of interest marked, including the Morris Memorial Hall, the pub, the church and Memorial cottages. This encourages visitors to believe that the whole village is part of the Kelmscott Manor Estate and they are intrusive as a consequence. They enter the Morris Memorial Hall building or garden when a private function is taking place, they picnic within private hall grounds, enter individual gardens, take photographs of our homes without our consent, they leave litter and other debris amongst our verges, paddocks and hedgerows, physically destroy verges and hedgerows by the volume of traffic and generally erode the peaceful tranquillity of the distinct rural nature of a hamlet such a Kelmscott. At the moment, we have to manage this intrusion for 2 full public open days and one group day per week. Your funding will ensure that we suffer this level of nuisance for up to 6 days a week for some 10 months of the year. How on earth are our children meant to enjoy their village safely? How on earth is this making our community a better place to live?
5. The car park is currently a field which when not being used as a car park retains its appearance as a field in keeping with the local rural area and preserving the views into and out of the Conservation area. Local council development control advice for Kelmscott as a Conservation area states quite clearly that "special care must be taken to ensure that views into and out of the village, as well as views within the village are not harmed". Once your funding allows the Manor to carry out their expansion plans and develop the car park, this environmental tranquillity is lost. The field is adjacent to the Conservation area but views from and into the Conservation area will be harmed by tarmac visibility splays, grass verge easing, loss of hedges, trees and other foliage, including veteran trees,

permanent posts marking parking bays and parking surfaces suitable for coaches. Never again will this look anything other than a car park albeit one without any public facilities whatsoever. Furthermore, there are still two blind bends on the access road leading to this car park and another on the road down into the village, all presenting serious dangers for pedestrians and vehicles alike. Again, this really does not make our village a better place to live.

6. In order to remove unsightly vehicles from the Manor site it is planned to replace disabled parking and drop off at Manor gates with some sort of electric vehicle travelling on the public highways. No information has been provided as to the type of electric vehicle, the route they intend to use, the frequency, or how they will impact on pedestrian safety and traffic flow. It was mentioned at the planning committee meeting that the vehicles may resemble golf cart type buggies, which I believe can take some 4 - 6 passengers. It seems unlikely that a coach will arrive at the car park, unload its 60 passengers who will then all wait patiently to be transported in small groups to the Manor. Furthermore, will these vehicles have the manoeuvrability needed to pass poorly parked vehicles or oncoming traffic along the route through the village? As an electric vehicle is normally very quiet, some sort of audible alarm will be required to warn visitors walking in the road of their presence. The noise pollution caused by these vehicles ferrying passengers throughout the day for up to 6 days a week and up to 10 months a year will be unbearable.
7. Currently, the car park is often unstaffed and the Manor relies heavily upon volunteer effort to carry out most of the tasks associated with running a visitor attraction. From the material presented, it is unclear how they intend to manage visitors or marshal traffic and the car park in the future. Currently, the Manor is open for 91 days per year and your funding conditions will require this to increase to 199 days per year. However, SAL plan to increase staff by only 2.5 salaried positions, which is surely an insufficient number to cope with the increased demands such expansion would require to be properly managed. It is also not clear if the Manor have explored whether they will actually have sufficient workforce to cope with the extended opening and increased visitor numbers and if not, whether they will be able to recruit more, given the location of Kelmscott and the fact that volunteer effort is not salaried.
8. The discussions held with the village have not been entirely honest. The pre-Christmas December 2017 consultation was poorly timed and the resultant statistics, misleading and unhelpful, having been presented as x% of the population, where that population included children and non-permanent residents. The issues covered in the questionnaire were biased and questions poorly worded with "yes and no" answers. The villagers at this consultation were not in possession of all the facts regarding vehicle and pedestrian management, as no final decision had been made at that time. Therefore, any responses to questionnaires completed could be deemed not valid. Ignoring villager proposals for token entry schemes and alternative access roads into the village are also unhelpful. The fact that so many villagers have objected to the Manor plans during the council planning process and the fact that we are hereby raising this concern shows very clearly that the village are not happy with these expansion plans.
9. Whilst the environmental impact of the plans upon the site and the car park are included within the plans, no thought has been given to the environmental impact upon the village itself. The lack of public transport means most visitors will arrive by car. We will therefore subject our village and the local area to significantly increased levels of pollution and ever increasing destruction of grass verges and the flora and fauna contained within this rural environment.

Furthermore, St George's Church, a Grade II* listed building and William Morris's grave, a Grade II listed tombstone will have no funding to cope with footfall and damage caused by increased visitor numbers.

It is obvious that our local community will not be a better place to live, work or visit. Indeed, our local community will deteriorate into nothing more than a Disney like experience for thousands of visitors each year.

Consideration is now given to the statement that "your local economy will be boosted".

1. There are two working farms in the village. One of these is an agricultural family business of some 35 years and it is already becoming increasingly difficult for them to carry out daily duties using agricultural vehicles around the village owing to the increased levels of vehicle and foot traffic and inconsiderate parking. The other farm is also suffering and Kelmscott Manor visitor numbers are already impacting on their ability to farm and service their land beyond the Manor. They can only now carry out their work by avoiding open days as the combination of pedestrian and agricultural machines is a dangerous combination. If the HLF funding means that the Manor will be open 6 days a week, are our local farms only going to be able to conduct their business on the 7th day? It is impossible to farm on this basis and your funding may only ensure the demise of these two long standing farms.
2. Routine deliveries to our businesses are frequently impacted by poorly parked cars and pedestrians walking in the road. This does not boost our local economy.
3. A farmer's diversification business within the village has planning consent which prevents them from receiving deliveries on Wednesdays to avoid impacting upon congestion when the Manor is open. How will they operate this business if they have further restrictions imposed?
4. The Morris Memorial Hall is run and managed on an entirely voluntary basis by villagers. We depend on a small number of wedding lettings each year as an important source of income, however, it is already becoming a much less attractive option to hire the hall due to the intrusive actions and inconsiderate parking of some visitors to the Manor.

Far from boosting our local economy, it is likely that this expansion will severely damage it.

In conclusion, villagers have made constructive suggestions at various times as to how the Society of Antiquaries could manage their Heritage asset but unfortunately, SAL are unwilling to consider anything other than expansion. We believe that it is perfectly possible and plausible to carry out the required conservation to this Heritage site without destroying the village and the unique characteristics of Kelmscott that made it so important to William Morris. Indeed, recently, in an 18 month period, the village successfully raised the £130,000 required to conserve the Morris Memorial Hall by seeking funding, grants and support from a wide range of charitable trusts, local organisations and individuals, demonstrating just how deeply we care about Conservation and our Heritage. Whilst the sum involved is much less, it serves to demonstrate that it is possible for a few people, with no professional fundraising skills and a much narrower support base and network of contacts, to raise a significant amount of money without sacrificing the integrity of the village to do so.

We ask you to consider the above concerns against your own criteria before you go ahead with the next stage of funding for this project. We are happy to meet with you and provide any further information as required.

On behalf of objectors to WODC Planning Application 18/1509/FUL

21st August 2018