

Comments for Planning Application 18/01509/FUL

Application Summary

Application Number: 18/01509/FUL

Address: Kelmscott Manor Kelmscott Lechlade Oxfordshire GL7 3HJ

Proposal: Internal and external alterations to allow repair to buildings. Erection of new learning building and construction of car park.

Case Officer: Miranda Clark

Customer Details

Name: Mrs Laura Roberts

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Neighbour

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Landscape
- Highways
- Neighbourliness
- Policy / Principle

Comment:

This response refers to the proposal to:

- Increase Kelmscott Manor opening days from 91 days total to 199 days total, an increase of 218%
- Increase visitor numbers from approximately 21,000 per annum to approximately 35,000 – 40,000 per annum, an increase of 60% - 90%

Kelmscott is a designated conservation area with approximately 80 residents and 34 houses. It has limited infrastructure with single track lanes into and around the village, no street lights, few effective footpaths, impaired sightlines for foot and motorised traffic, few public facilities and public transport.

My husband (who has already objected separately) and I have lived in Kelmscott for 20 years and enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of this tiny hamlet, its intensely rural character and peaceful surroundings. Whilst sympathetic to the plight of the Society of Antiquaries and the conservation work required at Kelmscott Manor, I do not support or accept that the only way to achieve this conservation is by expansion and the subsequent permanent destruction of our way of life in Kelmscott as a consequence. Unlike the Society of Antiquaries who have managed to amass and fund a large team of professionals to put this 128 document planning application together, I do not possess the same skills, time or money but nonetheless can easily identify the many aspects of this planning application which are in direct contravention to much of the planning authority policy contained within the **2011 West Oxfordshire Local Plan**.

1. Environmental and Community Infrastructure

The village is already at saturation point with the current level of visitors of approximately 21,000 per annum, a rise from around 12,000 per annum over the last 10 years. It is impossible to know how the expected 35,000 – 40,000 visitors to the Manor, as required by the Heritage Lottery Fund, an increase of 60% - 90% on already challenging current levels will arrive in Kelmscott each year but since there is no public transport it is expected that whilst some will arrive on coach trips, the majority will arrive in private cars. Since the highways into and within Kelmscott are narrow, single track lanes, the local environment will be irrevocably damaged by traffic pollution and cars and coaches driving onto and destroying grass verges in an attempt to get into or out of the village. Once visitors reach the village, they will arrive at a frequently unsupervised car park with no public toilets or other facilities because it is essentially an agricultural field which is being used as a car park. I therefore conclude that there is no appropriate supporting transport, service and community infrastructure available nor will there be, no provisions have been made within the plans to safeguard the local environment and that policies BE1, BE3 and T6 are being contravened.

2. Traffic and pedestrian movement; parking

In clear contravention of Policies BE3 and T6, it is not safe for 35,000 – 40,000 visitors per annum to walk from the car park to Kelmscott Manor. Throughout this 410 metre, 10 minute journey, pedestrians will have to walk in the road for the majority of the route. This route is single track, frequently traversed by the agricultural traffic associated with the two working farms and restricted by parked vehicles which further narrow the road and create blind spots around which children and pedestrians can't be seen by oncoming vehicular traffic. What little pavement there is is normally obstructed by parked vehicles. Indeed the proposal to increase visitor numbers and visitor open days will cause additional on-street parking either where visitors do not wish to walk the 10 minute route to the Manor and therefore park within the village itself, nearer the Manor, or where the Manor car park itself is full. There is nothing to stop visitors to Kelmscott parking anywhere within the village as currently experienced. Additional parked vehicles will add to existing problems with parking by other parties trying to interact with Kelmscott including pub visitors, Thames path users, service deliveries and even horseboxes and caravans. The road is also bordered by unguarded drainage ditches throughout much of its length, often obscured by foliage and therefore invisible to pedestrians trying to get out of the way of vehicles. It is incredibly difficult for residents who have to traverse this pedestrian route on a Kelmscott Manor open day to simply get into and out of their own homes. It is unimaginable to consider the implications for emergency vehicles trying to get through.

Attempting to direct all traffic into and out of the car park is flawed because they still have to access village boundaries and the limitations provided by the current access

routes. The Kelmscott Manor designated Eastern single track access road to and from Kelmscott is a two way route. Once cars and coaches have negotiated this 2.8m wide two directional single track lane complete with its blind bends and limited passing opportunities into the village, there is nothing to force them to park within the car park. Indeed, faced with a choice of parking in a frequently unsupervised field, with no public toilets and especially if it's raining, many will choose to find parking near Kelmscott Manor itself as they currently do.

The traffic survey reported within the planning documentation only assessed cars at the car park itself and only for a limited period during the two open days covered. This survey also excluded Manor visitors parking within the village itself and those disabled visitors parked at the Manor. The survey made no attempt to look at total vehicle numbers coming into the village or correlate their findings with visitor numbers to the Manor during the survey periods. As the car park is frequently unsupervised, parking is uncontrolled and vehicles often park within the village itself. The survey is therefore flawed and cannot be relied upon to provide accurate traffic information.

I believe that the proposed new car park is meant to hold 3 coaches, 9 disability places and 145 cars compared with the current 130 spaces available. This only actually provides an extra 15 general parking spaces but as volunteer numbers total 21 on an open day and staff cars will provide a further 5, the car park is already smaller than the existing one once all traffic is removed from the Manor grounds. Even if there were measures in place to prevent visitors parking within the village, the car park wouldn't be large enough in any case.

I note from the employment statement presented within the planning application that despite increasing open days by 218%, the society plan only a further 2.5 salaried positions. Assuming that at least one of these employees has to spend their day ferrying disabled and less-abled visitors to and from the car park, it is clear that there will be no staff available to supervise or control car parking. Therefore visitors are likely to continue to park within the village, closer to the Manor, as they currently do.

I conclude that there is no safe or convenient circulation of pedestrians and cyclists within the proposed pedestrian circulation route, thus there is no safe movement of vehicular traffic as a consequence. The planned proposal will significantly increase the numbers of pedestrians at risk, will increase traffic conflict on single track roads and thus increase the potential for accidents. Furthermore, increased traffic will increase environmental pollution and damage.

3. Conservation

The planned changes to the public highway contravene Policy BE5, since the public highway is within the Conservation area. At present, existing hedgerow vegetation shields the Manor car park almost entirely, ensuring that the views within the area are not damaged. The proposal to alter the Conservation Area public highway by

introducing visibility splays either side of the car park entrance, felling important tree and hedge groups (defined as important within the Kelmscott Conservation Area) and easing kerbs will all permanently harm and alter the initial view of Kelmscott as you enter the village boundary and Conservation area. This proposal is therefore completely out of character within the setting of this rural Conservation area and will do nothing to resolve the issues surrounding the blind junction immediately opposite the car park entrance.

Currently, when the car park is not being used as a car park, it retains its appearance as a field in keeping with the local rural area. Permanently marking car park bays by using wooden pegs will be ugly and will contravene Policy NE1 by not maintaining the value of the countryside, its beauty, local character and distinctiveness. It should also be noted that the physical changes to the highway and car park were not mentioned in any of the discussions with the village or documentation supplied prior to the planning application.

4. Provision for disabled and less-abled visitors

The planning documentation shows that Kelmscott Manor are intending to use electric vehicles to transport limited mobility visitors between the car park and the Manor site and vice versa. The planning documentation doesn't specify the exact type of these vehicles to be used but all electric vehicles are normally very quiet when travelling. If they are not fitted with continuous audible alarms then drivers will have to frequently use their horns to warn able bodied visitors walking in the middle of the road of their presence. These visitors will often be walking in the same direction of travel as the electric vehicles, will have their back to the vehicle and will not see or hear them coming. Whichever form of audible alarm is used, the consequent noise pollution caused by these vehicles ferrying limited mobility passengers to and fro throughout the day for up to six days per week will seriously affect the lives of Kelmscott residents.

The planning documentation doesn't specify how these vehicles are to be summoned or whether they will be travelling continuously throughout the day. I assume that disabled visitors will be left at the car park waiting for transport and, as previously mentioned, there are no public toilets. If the electric vehicle is delayed, a more likely scenario will be for those disabled visitors to either park near the Manor or for an able bodied carer to drop them at Manor gates, a practise which currently exists. This does not therefore remove traffic from the village.

5. Tourist development

Policy T1 specifically states that proposals which would generate significant levels of traffic in locations where travel by means other than the private car isn't realistic, will not be permitted. The Manor expansion plans with visitor number increases of between 60% and 90% and open day increases from 91 to 199, i.e. 218% do not

include appropriate facilities to offer the general public a satisfactory alternative to private car travel, in direct contravention of Policy T1.

6. Protection of open space

35,000 – 40,000 pedestrians walking our narrow lanes will adversely impact upon the open space within Kelmscott. This open space is defined by West Oxfordshire District Council Environmental policy, section 3.6 which states that “Open spaces are of value to the local community and fulfil a wide range of historical, conservation, social, cultural, ecological and amenity functions. Open spaces and other areas of green space in our villages include private gardens, allotments, churchyards, hedgerows and individual trees, paddocks and informally grazed small fields and grass verges”. Manor visitors already adversely impact upon our open space therefore the substantial increase in volume of visitor numbers and the number of open days can only make matters much worse. Currently, visitors trespass by entering the Morris Memorial Hall building or garden when a private function is taking place, they picnic within private Hall grounds, enter individual gardens, infringe upon our privacy by taking photographs without our consent, 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 as Kelmscott. Indeed Kelmscott Manor encourages its visitors to treat the village as part of the “Kelmscott experience” by including private homes and other buildings within their village guide. This includes the grave of William Morris in the churchyard.

Are the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) and the Church Commission happy that the proposed increase in visitor numbers visiting the grave and Grade I listed St George’s church will not damage the fabric, structure and grounds of this important heritage building?

7. Over ambitious tourist expansion

The expansion of Kelmscott Manor is completely unrealistic given its location within a rural hamlet, which has limited access and infrastructure and is designated as a Conservation area. The proposed expansion plans will not maintain or enhance the value of the countryside but will adversely impact upon the local character and distinct nature of Kelmscott. Unacceptable levels of traffic will be generated on the local single track highway network, both within Kelmscott and on the local roads into Kelmscott as covered in some detail above.

Rather than destroying Kelmscott by these over ambitious expansion plans, the Manor should seek to conserve its and our heritage by means which are in keeping with the natural and built heritage of this village.

8. Consultation

The discussions held with the village have not been entirely honest and presenting statistics in the planning application as x% of the population being happy with biased questionnaires and including their own tenants and children within the total representative population, are misleading and unhelpful. Ignoring villager proposals for token entry schemes and alternative access roads into the village are also unhelpful.

The motives of Kelmscott Manor are less altruistic than they would like to present. In their Design, Access and Historical statement, landscape aims are given as:

“The landscape is an integral part of the site (Kelmscott Manor), providing an important setting to the group of buildings. It forms the rural setting, which was so influential to Morris’s work, and it is vital that the connection between the buildings and landscape is reinforced. The landscape issues are briefly as follows:

- Remove cars from the farmyard, adjacent to the house, and west meadow;
- Overcome any contamination issues from car parking on the site”

Far from being a desire to aid villagers by removing traffic from the village, it is clear from this design statement that the overriding aim is to remove the visible eyesore of traffic from the rural setting of Kelmscott Manor itself and place it firmly within the rural setting and surrounding village of Kelmscott.

9. Conclusion

The whole planning application has no regard whatsoever for the negative impact upon the area immediately between the proposed car park and the Manor, that is, our village.

Attracting 35,000 to 40,000 visitors per annum and proposing up to 6 open days per week will not maintain or enhance the value of the countryside and will permanently destroy the beauty, character, charm and distinctiveness of Kelmscott.

Of course I support conservation of the Manor. I do not however support conservation by expansion in an area where the local infrastructure does not support such expansion and where the consequences of this expansion will be the permanent loss of our way of life in Kelmscott.

Kelmscott is unique in the modern world and a true escape from the stresses of everyday life, the characteristics that made it so important to William Morris. If the planned proposals go ahead without significant change, this rural idyll will be lost for ever.