HERITAGE STATEMENT

Retrospective retention of two existing flagpoles

Planning Application Reference: 26/01927/HDC

Site: Pathfinder House, Huntingdon

Applicant: Huntingdonshire District Council

1. Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of a retrospective planning application for the retention of two existing 10-metre-high flagpoles within the paved courtyard at Pathfinder House, Huntingdon.

The statement considers the heritage significance of the surrounding historic environment, particularly the Huntingdon Conservation Area and the setting of the Grade II* listed Castle Hill House.

It assesses the potential effects of the existing flagpoles upon the character, appearance and significance of these heritage assets, taking account of their location, scale, design, materials and civic function.

2. Site Location and Heritage Context

Pathfinder House is situated within an established civic and administrative complex between St Mary's Street and Castle Moat Road, Huntingdon.

The site lies within the designated Huntingdon Conservation Area, which encompasses an important part of the town's historic environment.

The surrounding area is characterised by a mixture of historic and contemporary architecture, mature trees, landscaped spaces and pedestrian courtyards.

Of particular significance is Castle Hill House, situated adjacent to the Pathfinder House complex.

Castle Hill House is a Grade II* listed building, recorded on the National Heritage List for England under List Entry Number 1128637.

The flagpoles are located within an existing hard-landscaped courtyard between the surrounding buildings, aligned with the corner of Building B, as illustrated on the accompanying site plans.

The historical association between Castle Hill House and the Royal Air Force continues to be acknowledged within the adjoining Pathfinder House civic complex.

Ten meeting rooms are named after historic RAF airfields, including Wyton, Warboys, Gransden and Oakington, while the two Civic Suite chambers are named Lancaster and Stirling in recognition of the aircraft associated with the wartime period.

These naming conventions demonstrate an ongoing institutional recognition of the site's military heritage and contribute to the continuity of its historical identity.

3. Significance of Castle Hill House

Castle Hill House, 20 High Street, Huntingdon, was constructed in approximately 1787 and is an important example of late Georgian architecture.

The building is principally constructed of gault brick and retains significant architectural features, including sash windows with glazing bars, decorative cornices, a central entrance with Corinthian detailing and a pedimented surround.

Its Grade II* designation recognises its particular architectural and historic importance.

In addition to its architectural significance, Castle Hill House has a notable association with the Second World War.

During the conflict, the building served as a headquarters for Royal Air Force operations, including the Pathfinder Force, which played an important role in directing bombing operations over continental Europe.

This historical association is commemorated by a blue plaque displayed on the building.

The building's significance therefore derives from both its surviving Georgian architectural character and its associations with Huntingdon's civic and military history.

Its setting, including its relationship with neighbouring buildings, landscaped areas and public spaces, contributes to the appreciation of this significance.

4. Significance of the Huntingdon Conservation Area

The Huntingdon Conservation Area is designated in recognition of the special architectural and historic interest of the town's established urban environment.

Its character is influenced by historic buildings, traditional building materials, established streets, mature landscaping and the relationship between civic, commercial and residential uses.

Within the Pathfinder House complex, the juxtaposition of historic buildings and more contemporary civic architecture reflects the continued evolution and administrative function of this part of Huntingdon.

The conservation area's significance is derived not solely from individual historic buildings but also from their collective architectural character, townscape relationships and historical associations.

The retention of the flagpoles should therefore be considered in relation to their contribution to, and potential effect upon, this established setting.

5. Description of the Existing Development

The application seeks retrospective planning permission for two existing flagpoles installed approximately four years ago.

Each flagpole has the following specification:

- Height: 10,000mm (10 metres).
- Material: Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP).
- Finish: White.
- Base: Hinged base plate.
- Finial: Gold-coloured onion finial.
- Halyard: Internal.

The flagpoles are positioned approximately 5.8 metres apart, measured centre to centre, with the nearest flagpole approximately 4.4 metres from Building B.

They are freestanding structures situated within an existing paved courtyard and do not require attachment to any historic building.

No further construction, ground disturbance, vegetation removal or alterations to the surrounding landscaping are proposed.

6. Assessment of Heritage Impact

The two existing flagpoles are situated within the paved civic courtyard at Pathfinder House, directly in front of the rear elevation of the Grade II* listed Castle Hill House.

Photographs submitted in support of the application illustrate the relationship between the flagpoles, the historic building and the surrounding contemporary civic development.

The photographs confirm that the flagpoles are visible against the backdrop of Castle Hill House and introduce two vertical features into views of its rear elevation. Their presence therefore has a discernible visual effect upon the setting of the listed building.

However, the flagpoles are slender, freestanding structures which do not form a substantial visual barrier. The historic building's architectural composition, brick elevations, sash windows, entrance detailing and roofline remain readily visible and appreciable.

The wider courtyard is already characterised by a combination of contemporary administrative buildings, paved pedestrian areas, seating, cycle stands and established landscaping. The flagpoles are therefore experienced within an existing civic environment rather than an otherwise undeveloped historic landscape.

The flagpoles do not physically connect to or alter the listed building. No additional construction works, ground disturbance or changes to the surrounding landscaping are proposed.

Their white GRP finish, restrained proportions and traditional gold-coloured finials provide a relatively simple appearance, while their civic and commemorative use is consistent with the established function of Pathfinder House.

We acknowledges that the height and positioning of the flagpoles introduce a degree of visual change to the setting of Castle Hill House. Nevertheless, having regard to their limited visual mass, the continued legibility of the historic building and the existing character of the courtyard, the applicant considers that the effect on the building's heritage significance is limited.

We therefore consider that the retention of the flagpoles would preserve the ability to appreciate the principal architectural and historic significance of Castle Hill House and would not result in material harm to the character or appearance of the Huntingdon Conservation Area.

This assessment is supported by the accompanying site photographs showing both the immediate relationship between the flagpoles and Castle Hill House and the wider context of the courtyard.

7. Conservation and Mitigation

The application concerns the retention of two existing structures, rather than additional development.

The following characteristics help limit potential heritage impacts:

- The flagpoles are located within an established hard-landscaped courtyard.
- Their slender form limits their overall visual mass.
- Their white finish and traditional design are consistent with their civic function.
- No physical alterations to Castle Hill House or other historic buildings are proposed.
- No additional flagpoles, vegetation removal or changes to the surrounding landscaping are proposed.
- The internal halyard arrangement reduces the need for external ropes and associated fittings.

We consider that these characteristics provide a proportionate response to the sensitivity of the historic setting.

8. Conclusion

We recognise the architectural and historic significance of Castle Hill House and the importance of preserving the character and appearance of the Huntingdon Conservation Area.

The two existing flagpoles are prominent but slender civic features located within an established paved courtyard associated with Pathfinder House.

Their design, materials and positioning are considered to limit their visual impact, while their continued use supports the civic and commemorative functions of Huntingdonshire District Council.

On the basis of the information currently available, the applicant considers that the retention of the flagpoles can be accommodated within the established civic setting without materially diminishing the heritage significance of Castle Hill House or the wider conservation area.

The application is therefore submitted for consideration alongside the accompanying plans, elevations, photographs and Planning Statement.

9. Supporting Information

This statement should be read alongside:

- Site layout plan identifying the application boundary and flagpole positions.
- Site plan showing relevant boundary measurements.
- Flagpole elevation drawings and technical specifications.
- Existing site photographs and architectural illustrations.
- Planning Statement for application 26/01927/HDC.
- Historic England National Heritage List entry 1128637, Castle Hill House.
- Huntingdon Conservation Area character assessment.

Prepared in support of Planning Application 26/01927/HDC.