

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOWN FORUM

Head of Planning Services
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Town Hall, Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS

2nd March 2009

Dear Sir

**Applications to demolish and redevelop Dunorlan House, Tunbridge Wells
TW09/00255 and TW09/00256**

The subject of the above-mentioned applications, by Octagon, was raised at the meeting of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Forum at its meeting on 26th February. As a result, I am writing to you to express our serious anxiety about the proposals that are being put forward by these developers.

In particular, the proposals are considered to be open to objection on the following grounds:

1. The large and somewhat strange-looking block of flats proposed would detract from the character and appearance of the Royal Tunbridge Wells Conservation Area.
2. The proposals would be contrary to Local Plan policy E11, in that they would cause significant harm to the character and setting of a historic park or garden, namely Dunorlan Park.
3. Piecemeal development within this very special area would be premature, pending a proper overall review of the whole site of the former mansion and its front and kitchen gardens, as part of the emerging Local Development Framework.

On this last point, a sheet of plans of the area is enclosed. Plan A shows the mansion, its front garden, kitchen garden, and the Marnock-designed parkland in its Victorian heyday. Plan B shows the present situation, with nine post World War II houses that have been scattered around in an apparently random way, after the mansion was pulled down and its site, together with the adjoining garden area, sold off as individual building plots. Overlaid on this in red are the numbers of the three unwelcome and arbitrary piecemeal applications that have, so far come forward for the redevelopment of seven of the nine houses.

The realisation of any one of these large schemes would represent a serious blow to the setting of the Park, and the combination of all three would have been devastating. Clearly, the setting of this precious and beautifully-restored public park is too important a matter to be left simply to the haphazard opportunism of market forces. The point of "Development Control" is to control, and the point of Local Development Frameworks is to provide a framework within which any redevelopment can be guided, in the interests of good planning.

Thus, we are keen to see an overall plan produced, as part of the Local Development Framework process, in order to provide a context into which any redevelopment can appropriately fit. Key considerations in such a plan should, of course, include respect for the setting of the Park, and the enhancement of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, instead of damage to that character. That has consistently been the stated position of the Town Forum, first at the Sunrise Public Inquiry in July 2008, then in our response to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) consultation and, most recently, in our last Liaison Meeting with the Director of Planning.

The enclosed Plan C shows the area in need of an overall plan outlined in red. Overlaid on this is a tentative diagram that it is hoped may be helpful in getting debate on this important subject started. The particular approach indicated takes its cue from the successful Willicombe Park concept adjoining. There, a mansion that had almost disappeared has been rescued to form a semi-public central feature, providing shared facilities, while low development has been allowed in its grounds. Any such central feature at Dunorlan would, needless to say, have to be of outstandingly good design, and well related to the surviving classical terraces.

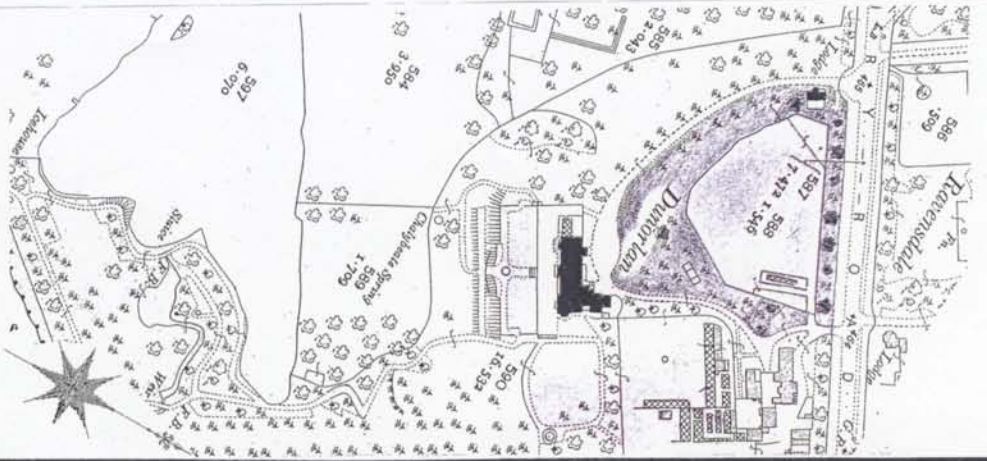
This diagram, of course, is merely an illustration of one form of approach, and there may very well be other and better ideas, based upon firmer information. The important point here is that the Local Planning Authority could be more proactive, rather than just reactive, and that there should be wide consultation and engagement with as many interested parties as possible.

Having joined forces with the Council and others, in seeing off the Sunset Appeal, we are especially concerned that the opportunity to provide a better solution for the whole area should be firmly grasped, and not allowed to slip away.

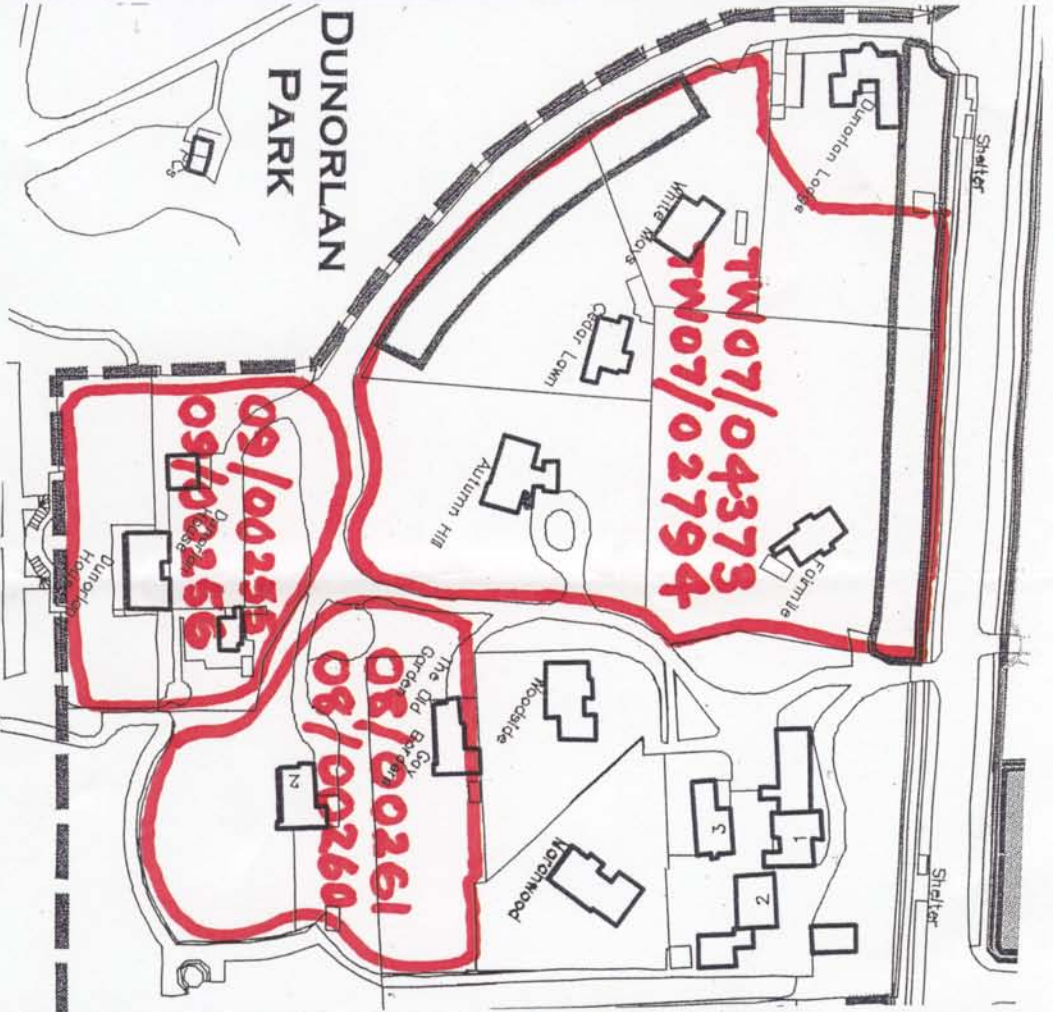
Yours truly



Dr Philip Whitbourn
Planning Champion, RTW Town Forum



A PLAN OF DUNORLAN MANSION AND ITS GROUNDS IN VICTORIAN TIMES



B BLACK AND WHITE BASE MAP, SHOWING NINE POST WORLD WAR II HOUSES BUILT ON THE SITE OF THE FORMER DUNORLAN MANSION, AND ITS FRONT AND KITCHEN GARDENS. UNWELCOME PIECEMEAL APPLICATIONS INDICATED IN COLOUR



C DIAGRAM ONLY, INDICATING AREA IN NEED OF AN OVERALL PLAN