

## **LITTLE ABINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

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### **S/3921/19/FL. Bancroft Farm, Church Lane. Erection of 6 dwellings and change of use and conversion of 2 agricultural barns to office space (Use Class B1(a) following the demolition of agricultural buildings and removal of hardstanding and associated works.**

#### **UPDATE APRIL 2020**

Little Abington Parish Council (LAPC) met by video conference to discuss this application on 27 April 2020. There was unanimous objection to it. It was agreed that the SCDC Planning Committee should be requested to make a site visit and to review the application. I.e. not leave it to delegated decision making.

Five letters of objection were received. There was public representation on behalf of three households at the meeting.

In essence the concerns are the same as they were in December 2019. Some minor amendments to the application were noted but these were thought to be cosmetic rather than significant changes made in response to previous objections and comments.

If anything, the changes have had a negative impact on the proposal – gardens of two of the plots will be smaller and out of proportion to the size of the proposed dwellings.

There was grave concern that the boundaries of the proposed development would still encroach onto the Protected Village Amenity Area (PVAA). The boundaries of the PVAA were agreed after a long and rigorous review of the Local Plan involving independent inspectors. It was felt that these boundaries and the principle of retaining the PVAA as an area of natural and historical interest should be respected.

There is still insufficient parking allowed for the business units – we understand there are industry standards – as well as for the housing development. This could lead to dangerous parking in Church Lane and into Westfield.

Retention of the flint wall was welcomed but the proposed post and rail fence is out of keeping with the area.

LAPC noted the report from the Conservation Officer and fully supported the views expressed.

In addition to the points made in December:

- LAPC wishes to emphasise that when this plot was put forward as a potential site for a small housing development it was not envisaged that it would be a mixed development of housing and offices.
- It was expected that development would be for up to six smaller dwellings with good size rooms suitable for downsizing, meeting Lifetime Living Standards, and that the design would be in keeping with the rest of the area. This was supported by local residents in a Housing Needs Survey.

- The Planning Committee should note that the majority of the housing opposite the proposed development is bungalows set well back from the road.
- The proposed layout includes a service road for the houses and the office units. Our previous response highlighted concerns about its dual purpose. It also takes up a lot of space that could be used to improve the layout if the entire plot is used for housing. It would be much improved by mirroring the layout of the dwellings opposite i.e. front facing, set back from the road with gardens backing onto the attractive vista of the meadow of the PVAA which is currently used for grazing Shetland Ponies.
- The barns should be retained, possibly remodelling them as one dwelling with a garage.

Little Abington Parish Council

29 April 2020

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## SUMMARY

Little Abington Parish Council (LAPC) objects to this planning application. Although it is an improvement to the previous application, which was withdrawn, there is still considerable work to do to produce an acceptable proposal. LAPC agrees that the Bancroft Farm farmyard site, which has been left to fall into disrepair and neglect, should be used for housing which meets Little Abington's needs.

The Parish Council supports the need for housing development in the village. Following consultation with residents the Bancroft Farm farmyard site was identified as a potential site for a small development of up to six dwellings suitable for downsizing. The possibility of including office space was not included in community engagement.

The site is not included in the Local Plan, although at one stage it was counted in the housing trajectory. The Local Plan confirmed PVAA status on the adjoining land. LAPC was astonished to learn from the applicant that SCDC has agreed to disregard this and allow the development to extend onto the PVAA.

The Parish Council has received seven copies of objections to this application submitted to the District Council by local residents. It was discussed at a Planning Committee meeting on 16 December 2019. There was a majority decision not to support the application. LAPC strongly recommends that the SCDC Planning Committee should visit the site before making a decision.

Reasons for objection are summarised below. A detailed response can be found in the attached document.

1. The proposed site extends onto the Protected Village Amenity Area.
2. Layout, design and materials are not in keeping with the surrounding residential area.
3. Use of the site for business units with consequent need for parking and vehicular access and resultant reduction in space for house building.
4. Concerns about impact on green spaces and biodiversity.
5. Parking and road safety.
6. Flooding.

LAPC supports a proposal from the local footpaths group for a new route across the PVAA to join up with the existing public footpath.

### **Local support for housing development**

Little Abington Parish Council (LAPC) recognises the need for some housing development in the village of Little Abington. A development of up to six dwellings on the old Bancroft Farm farmyard site had the support of residents following a Housing Needs Survey.

The Abingtons are a close-knit community. Many residents have lived in the village for much of their lives. As they get older, they might be reluctant to move away and lose their connections and support networks.

The parish councils in Great Abington and Little Abington agreed it would be appropriate for any new dwellings in Little Abington to be suitable for residents who wished to downsize, possibly to bungalows or similar properties. One consequence of this downsizing would be to release large “executive” homes. New, family-style accommodation is being provided through three housing developments in Great Abington. This application for six dwellings includes three 1.5 storey bungalows, one single storey bungalow and two 2 storey houses. One property would have 4 bedrooms, which is unlikely to be suitable for downsizing.

#### **1. Protected Village Amenity Area.**

The Local Plan designates the meadow (excluding the farmyard) as a Protected Village Amenity Area (PVAA). The Parish Council requested Local Green Space designation, but this was not supported in the Local Planning process.

The proposed development site extends beyond the original boundary of the farmyard onto PVAA land. Although we understand that SCDC advised the applicant that this would be acceptable, LAPC strongly believes that building should not be permitted there in order to preserve the open view. It is possible that allowing one encroachment on a protected area will lead to further development and the loss of a much valued green space in the village close to the Conservation Area.

#### **2. Layout, design and materials not in keeping with the surrounding residential area.**

##### **- Layout.**

Retaining the barns for business units reduces the plot size for a housing development. We note that this application has reduced the number of dwellings from seven to six. There is quite a lot of open green space but some of the properties have very small gardens.

Plots 1 and 6 will back onto Church Lane. One consequence of this will be views of “*back garden paraphernalia*” e.g. laundry, garden sheds and children’s toys. Although we understand that there would be some screening, which residents could remove, this is completely out of keeping with the existing arrangements. Properties close to the proposed development in Church Lane and Bourn Bridge Road have a consistent layout. They face frontwards with driveways set back from the road. Some have large trees in their front gardens enhancing the rurality of the setting. In contrast, the proposed development is laid out like a “compound” and the tree-lined rural character of Church Lane will be irrevocably destroyed.

LAPC would prefer consistency, i.e. all the properties facing the road.

##### **- Design**

The interior layouts are an improvement on the previous application. The majority of the properties, with downstairs bathrooms and living accommodation are likely to meet Lifetime Living Standards

##### **- Materials**

Most of the properties in Church Lane opposite the proposed development site and the surrounding area are built of reclaimed Cambridge brick in a buff colour. The drawings show

plot 4 as red brick. This seems to be at odds with the rest of the housing development although the office units would be red brick.

**3. Use of the site for business units with consequent need for parking and vehicular access, resulting in reduced space for house building.**

We understand that converting the barns to office space is a speculative development. It is hard to judge if there is local demand for business units within the Abingtons community or from businesses further afield, although the latter would probably drive to work.

When residents were consulted it was not thought that the site would be used for employment but that the entire farmyard site would be used for a housing development. The proposal to convert the two old barns, which are in a very poor state of repair, to business units has reduced the area available for house building.

Vehicular access to the business units will be through the housing development with cycle and pedestrian access permitted through the gap for access for the resident in the house on the corner to park their car.

We note only 8 parking spaces, including two for disabled, have been allowed. It is probably unrealistic to expect all occupants of the units to be local enough to walk or cycle to work. With so little parking provision for the number of occupants that the proposed floorspace would permit (plus any visitors and deliveries), alternatives will include parking on the housing development or in Church Lane, which is a narrow street in a rural setting. One resident has suggested double yellow lines on the corner of Church Lane to prevent dangerous parking.

**4. Impact on green spaces and biodiversity including the loss of an historic treescape.**

The application now includes a more comprehensive assessment of biodiversity and confirms the presence of bats. The local Naturewatch Group also reports strong evidence of other mammals as well as birdlife. The developer will need to get the appropriate bat licences. We understand bat boxes and bird boxes will be provided. Although the indicative plan does not show any bat boxes.

Increased street lighting and penetration of lights into the meadow/PVAA which is currently a dark area will disturb wildlife. In particular it will disrupt the feeding behaviour of the seven species of bat identified in and around the site as well as the Shetland Ponies that graze there. There will need to be arrangements to ensure lighting levels for the office units are kept to a minimum outside working hours.

Several of the trees in Church Lane are more than 100 years old and they have TPOs. It is understood that they were part of a plantation linked to Abington Hall (now Granta Park) planted by Humphrey Repton. The information in the application about the treescape and which trees are to be retained, which was not included in the papers sent to the Parish Council, suggests that several mature trees will be felled.

We understand from the applicant that the site layout included in the application is an indication of location of trees. This is a full planning application; therefore it should be accurate. The Parish Council would like to see a schedule of replacement trees and their locations and proposed hedging materials

Clearly, increasing traffic will have an impact on air quality and air pollution.

**5. Parking and road safety.**

Parking and road safety are important concerns.

We believe there is insufficient provision for residents' and visitor parking. This could lead to parking in Church Lane, on the verge outside the church and in Westfield. The church is used regularly for services and larger events. The congregation comes from the seven villages in the Granta Vale Parish and parking is at a premium. The cemetery is still open;

funerals and weddings already cause some problems because of parking. LAPC does not object to small office developments per se, but they need space around them which is not available in this restricted site and therefore we feel that offices are totally inappropriate within the present proposal.

The development, including the business units, will generate additional traffic. The village Speedwatch team regularly monitors in Bourn Bridge Road and Church Lane because of problems with speeding vehicles and some dangerous driving throughout the day.

One of the consequences of closing access to Granta Park via the old coach road in Bourn Bridge Road has been increased cycle traffic through the village at the beginning and end of the normal working day. Cyclists will be at greater risk.

The pavements are used by families and by children walking to and from the bus stops or to the local primary school. Some vehicles already park on the pavement and cause obstruction to pedestrians, pushchairs and wheelchair users. This is likely to get worse if the occupants of the offices and “overflow” from the housing park there. Double yellow lines might need to be considered.

Vehicular access to the offices through the housing development will lead to some “contra flow” of traffic and pedestrians with householders departing and returning to and from work and school at the same time as office users are arriving and leaving, negotiating their way past parked cars and residential traffic in the opposite direction.

Some parents have expressed grave concerns about road safety while building work is in progress. Any development of this site must include careful consideration to routes for vehicles accessing and delivering to the building site and parking for building workers so that they do not increase hazards or inconvenience for local residents.

## **6. Flooding.**

We note that the documentation included in the application states that there is no flood risk from the river. The corner of Church Lane regularly floods after heavy rain. Unless the works associated with this development include some improvement to drains and drainage, creating more hard standing will reduce the amount of land available for soak away and hence increase the risk of flooding.

### **Enhancing residents' amenity**

The public footpath across the meadow/PVAA was fenced off in 2014. Until then the meadow was left open for residents to enjoy; one resident even cut the grass to delineate paths. The Abingtons Footpaths Group has suggested designating a new path from the corner of Bourn Bridge Road across the PVAA to join the existing public footpath. LAPC supports this suggestion.

### **Conditions**

When a suitable proposal has been submitted and approved the following conditions would need to be included in the approval.

- Working hours, given proximity to residential property.
- Restricting delivery times given proximity to residential property and concerns about road safety.
- Routes for vehicles to and from the building site given narrow roads into and out of the village and concerns about road and pedestrian safety.
- Arrangements for building site parking because of concerns about parking on footways, parking on narrow roads, access to the church, and road and pedestrian/cyclist safety.

- Keeping the area clean and tidy. Building work on another site in Church Lane is creating mud and mess.
- Arrangements for storing building materials.
- Tree protection for the mature trees that are to be retained - when confirmed.
- Careful consideration must be given to protecting the PVAA throughout the period of building.
- Making good any damage to road surfaces, kerbs, pavements and verges as a result of the building work and the associated heavy traffic.

Little Abington Parish Council

19 December 2019