

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

1st March 2006

**S/2362/05/F - Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth
Erection of New Ward Building to Accommodate Two 16 Bed Secure Wards, 8 Bed
Rehabilitation Unit, Reception and Visitor Centre with New Landscaping, Fencing and
56 New Car Parking Spaces for Partnership in Care Ltd**

**Recommendation: Delegated Approval/Refusal
Determination Date: 10th March 2006 – (Major Application)**

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The application site lies to the south and east of the main built up part of the village, adjacent to the village framework for Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth. It is accessed directly from the A1198 via an in-out access. The main building on site is Kneesworth Hall, a Grade II Listed Building, which is part of the privately run hospital that cares for patients with mental illness in low to medium secure wards. There are a number of buildings of various ages that form the hospital complex all situated within a parkland setting.
2. The full application, submitted on 9th December 2005, proposes the erection of a single storey pitched roof building of approximately 6.2m in height with a floor area of approximately 2990m² to accommodate two 16 bed wards and one 8 bed rehabilitation unit. Patients from the existing Wortham House (20 beds) are to be accommodated in the new wards and this building would be converted to administrative purposes for the hospital. The two secure wards would have their own garden courtyards enclosed by 3m high fencing. The rehabilitation unit would have an additional entrance to allow patients access to external patio and garden and to 'the flats', an existing two storey building which is currently used as offices and is intended to contain additional occupational therapy facilities and activities in due course. All the wards would be accessed via the main entrance in the central link block containing a reception, a new family visitor centre, staff restrooms and facilities.
3. A new access road serving the ward buildings and the extended car park would be constructed across the site of the existing 1950s gymnasium building that is to be demolished. The existing car park to the north of Kneesworth House would be reconfigured and extended in a semi-circle increasing from 25 to 75 the numbers of car parking spaces. The existing entrance to the car park would be closed and access gained via the new driveway. On the south west side of the new road, five additional car parking spaces, including two for disabled plus an additional one close to the entrance of the ward building would be provided.
4. A TPO Lime and a Sycamore are to be felled.
5. The application was submitted with a planning statement, design statement and landscape statement. The planning statement is attached as Appendix 1.
6. A public footpath runs along the north eastern site boundary.

Planning History

7. In the 1980's the use was changed from a school to the hospital within the same use class, C2 without the need for specific planning permission. Various planning

permission have been granted since including improved staff and office facilities and extensions to buildings to provide better patient facilities and accommodation.

Planning Policy

8. **Policy P1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (the Structure Plan) states that development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposal can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular rural location.
9. **Policy P1/3** of the Structure Plan states that a high standard of design and sustainability will be required for all new development which minimises the need to travel and reduces car dependency. In addition development is expected to provide a sense of place which responds to the local character of the built environment and takes account of community requirements by including a mix of housing opportunities and designing for the needs of all sections of the community.
10. **Policy CS12** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (the Local Plan) states that: "The change of use of existing buildings to nursing homes or convalescent homes will be permitted, subject to design, scale, layout, access and parking arrangements. New buildings for such uses will only be permitted within the built-up framework of villages".
11. The supporting text specifically refers to Kneesworth House recognising it as a privately run hospital.
12. **Policy EN1** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will ensure that the local character and distinctiveness of the Landscape Character Areas will be respected, retained and wherever possible enhanced. While recognising that landscape is a dynamic concept, planning permission will not be granted for development which would have an adverse effect on the character and local distinctiveness of these areas.
13. **Policy EN3** of the Local Plan states: "In those cases where new development is permitted in the countryside the Council will require that (a) the scale, design and layout of the scheme (b) the materials used within it, and (c) the landscaping works are all appropriate to the particular 'Landscape Character Area', and reinforce local distinctiveness wherever possible."
14. **Policy EN4** of the Local Plan states: "The District Council will not grant planning permission for development which would adversely affect or lead to the loss of important areas and features of the historic landscape whether or not they are statutorily designated.
15. The supporting text identifies areas of rare parkland as a historic landscape at 11 different locations and states: "There are other man-made landscapes of local value which contribute to the quality of the whole landscape and which, in some cases, form the setting of Listed Buildings. Any development proposal must ensure that there is no adverse impact on either the grounds themselves or the Listed Building whose setting they provide. (Examples include...Kneesworth Hall...).
16. **Policy EN5** of the Local Plan is concerned with the landscaping of new development.
17. **Policy EN28** of the Local Plan states (in part) that The District Council will resist and refuse applications which would dominate the Listed Building or its curtilage buildings in scale, form, massing or appearance; would damage the setting, well-being or attractiveness of a Listed Building; or would harm the visual relationship between the building and its formal or natural landscape surroundings.

18. **EM7** of the Local Plan states that development for the expansion of existing firms within village frameworks or on suitable brownfield sites next to or very close to the village frameworks will be permitted subject to the provisions of Policy EM3 [local user] and EM6 [no adverse impact on amenity, traffic, character etc and would contribute to a greater range of local employment opportunities]. A firm or business will be considered as 'existing' if a significant element of its operations has been based in the Cambridge Area for a minimum of two years prior to the date of any planning application for development.

Consultation

19. **Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council**
Recommends approval

20. **Chief Environmental Health Officer**
No objections

21. **Environment Agency**
Objects
"The proposed development would be at risk of flooding and would increase the risk of flooding to existing property.

22. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service**
Should permission be granted adequate provision should be made for fire hydrants by way of a Section 106 agreement or planning condition.

23. **Cambridgeshire County Archaeologist**
Important archaeological deposits may survive on the site which could be damaged or destroyed by the development. The site should therefore be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation which should be secured through a planning condition.

24. **Local Highways Authority**
Initial comments:
"Within the last five years there have been three injury accidents directly related to the hospital access(es). It is therefore essential that the junction with the A1198 comprises suitable geometry to facilitate as safe ingress / egress as possible.
25. The junction should comprise visibility of 4.5m x 90.0m. A suitable survey plan of the frontage should be obtained from the applicant / agent indicating the provision of such visibility. Such visibility splays must be provided clear of any boundary enclosures or planting".
26. Following submission of survey plan:
"I note that the signboard currently within the visibility splay to the north is to be relocated. I also note that any enclosure or planting will be maintained at a height not exceeding 600mm.
27. I recommend that the sign relocation and any reduction in enclosure/planting height be undertaken prior to the commencement of any new building work".

28. **Conservation Manager**
No objections to the principle of the development subject to acceptable landscaping and material details being secured by condition.
29. "The site is visible from the access drive and given its location between the house and road will have an impact on the setting of the house.

30. It is proposed to enhance the setting of the house by demolishing the old gym. This is a post war building of no historic or architectural merit which by virtue of its proximity to the main frontage has a very significant impact on the setting of the building.
31. This will be replaced by a new access serving the new units – thus the main house still serves as the main reception area.
32. The majority of the trees to the north west of the house will be retained – these form an important buffer to the new development and will ensure the main setting of the house is thus retained.
33. The new units will be secure areas and all three wings will interlink. Two of the units are proposed to have external exercise yards – these need to have high fencing to enclose them and there cannot be trees in close proximity to avoid them facilitating escape.
34. The design of the units has to meet National Car Standards and NHS Estates Building Note 35 thus the size and form is restricted to some extent by the requirements of this.
35. Design – The pre-application discussions have resulted in the scale and form of the buildings being revised – rather than two storey the buildings are now single storey – a scale far more in keeping with the locality. Mounding is proposed to reduce the impact to the driveway.
36. Whilst the proposals represent a large development the scale of the scheme will still be subservient to the ‘two storey with rooms in the roof’ scale of the main house.
37. The design is modern and thus will contrast with the form of the main house.
38. The admin house is red brick with a slate roof with lighter brick details. It has large dormers and deep eaves. The chimneys form a major feature on the skyline.
39. The proposal is not considered to diminish the status of the house – the different architecture and height of the buildings will maintain the hierarchy with the main house at the top of the scale”.
40. Further comments concern the importance of securing appropriate materials by condition notwithstanding the materials specified in the design statement.
41. “The proposal will impact on a TPO tree and therefore the Trees and Landscape Officer should be consulted. Their views on the need to reinforce or replace any of the existing trees will be material to the preservation of the setting to the house”.

Trees and Landscape Officer

42. “I object to the proposal in relation to the following loss of the Lime and Sycamore as indicated. I am also concerned about the impact on the other trees marked on plan with respect to effect of construction adjacent footpaths roadways and car parking.
43. Data on the trees should be supplied in accordance with BS:5837:2005 to reflect appropriate root protection areas”.

Landscape Design Officer

44. No objections subject to revisions to the landscape proposals. The proposal follows pre-application discussion and is preferable to the earlier schemes in terms of visual impact particularly to the wider countryside. It will be visible from the footpath and may be from the road leading into Bassingbourn however the impact will be broken by the new planting and other buildings.

45. A detailed assessment of the landscape proposals is given with suggested improvements given. This information has been passed to the applicants and I await their response.

46. **Anglian Water**
Comments are awaited

47. **Land Drainage Manager**
Comments are awaited

Representations

48. One letter of objection has been received from a planning consultant who acts “..on behalf of clients who are concerned to ensure that all such establishments are constructed and operated to recommended standards, in the interests of prospective patients, local residents and fair competition.”

49. The development is inconsistent with the provisions of the development plan in particular Policy EN1.

50. Concern about loss of and potential damage to trees and lack of Arboricultural Report.

51. Insufficient detail contained within the application in relation to drainage.

52. Applicant should provide a Highway Statement to include a speed survey and traffic counts. A Green Transport Plan should also be required to encourage cycling.

53. A sunlight and site layout assessment should be provided by the applicant in conformance with the BS Daylight Code.

54. Precise details should be given in relation to proposed materials.

55. Fencing detail is insufficient.

56. “The proposals are not good design, have no local distinctiveness or identity and do not respect, let alone enhance the locality...They do not respect the surrounding character of the area by virtue of overdevelopment as the application site lies within the East Anglian Chalk landscape Character Area and Natural Area which is characterised by large open fields and would be detrimental to the character of the area as a result of increased development in a predominantly open countryside area”.

57. A 3m high fence is proposed which would be visually inappropriate in this countryside location and will affect the setting of the Listed Building.

58. Proposal is detrimental to the setting of the Listed Building.

59. No transport assessment submitted.

60. Applicant has failed to demonstrate an overriding need for approval.

61. Increase in activity will adversely affect amenity of those that live adjacent to the site.

62. Increase in congestion and parking on site.

63. Too many new car parking spaces to be provided.

64. Design is bland, uninteresting, featureless and out of character with the locality.

65. Additional tree planting aimed at screening the development will harm the open character of the area.
66. Increased lighting and noise will have an adverse impact upon the amenity of the patients which are in the process of rehabilitation.
67. Proposal offers poor amenity for the intended occupants.
68. Will create a precedent for further development on the site.
69. The letter refers to both Government and Local Policies that the writer considers relevant.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

70. The key issues to consider are the need for the development, the impact on the parkland setting of Kneesworth House, a Grade II Listed Building, and the impact on the wider landscape and countryside.
71. The site lies beyond the village framework for Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth and in the countryside. The proposed new building is therefore contrary to Policy CS12 of the Local Plan in that it would lie outside of the built-up framework of the village.
72. During pre-application discussions officers indicated that if a proposal could be put forward with sufficient justification i.e. there was a clear and well established need for the hospital to expand and the impact on both the setting of the adjacent Listed Building and the wider landscape and countryside could be minimised to acceptable levels that officers may be able to give general support. Early schemes showed a building that was in part two storey and too close to the NE footpath to allow for new planting. The single storey approach is now considered by both the Conservation Manager and the Landscape Design Officer to have an acceptable impact subject to appropriate materials and detailing and revisions to the landscape proposals.

Need

73. The application includes a Planning Statement, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 1.

National context

It is stated that the closure of many large NHS hospitals has created a shortfall in accommodation for those with mental illness, recognised by the Government in its White Paper “Modernising Mental Health Services”. The National Service Framework for Mental Health published in 1999 identifies gaps in medium secure provision and states that patients are often placed inappropriately in higher levels of security than is necessary. It recognises that the independent sector has a role to play in providing additional bed spaces and specialist services. Kneesworth Hospital can provide a ‘quality of life’ opportunity for individuals to help achieve one of the Government aims in the National Service Framework to ensure that each person with severe mental illness receives the range of mental health services they need.

Kneesworth House

The detailed justification is contained within paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 of the planning statement attached as Appendix 1. However, the thrust of the argument is that the existing facilities are not up to appropriate standards which is adversely affecting patients and there is a need to bridge the gap in patient accommodation between the medium secure and rehabilitation units by providing new low secure accommodation.

Impact on Landscape

76. I note the comments of the Landscape Design Officer. The character of the landscape is one of large open fields interspersed with hedgerows and lines of trees.

The building is single storey and will sit within existing vegetation. There is sufficient scope for new planting which will further help assimilate the building into its surroundings. Various changes to the landscape proposals have been suggested by the Landscape Design Officer which have been forwarded to the applicants.

Impact on setting of Kneesworth Hall

77. I note the comments of the Conservation Manager. Of particular concern are the proposed materials. However, these can be considered by way of a condition requiring submission prior to any development commencing. The contrast in design and height coupled with the distance from Kneesworth Hall result in a development that will not adversely affect its setting. In addition the demolition of the modern gym building which is close to Kneesworth Hall and currently has a very significant impact on its setting will improve the setting and is to be welcomed.

Flood Risk

78. A Flood Risk Assessment has been submitted and is currently with the Environment Agency for its consideration. Members will be updated verbally at the meeting.

Highway Safety

79. The Local Highways Authority has confirmed that subject to the removal of a signboard and the cutting back and maintenance of some existing planting above a height of 600mm that adequate visibility can be achieved.

Car parking standards

80. The Local Plan standard is a maximum of 1 space per 4 staff plus 1 per 3 daily visitors. 52 new posts are to be created giving a required number of 13 spaces + visitor parking. Numbers here are not known though the application states that there is a general shortage of visitor parking on the site and there is a need to provide for this close to the entrance of the new building as it will contain a new visitor centre. Officers have found it difficult to park during visits to the site and parking on the estate roads has been seen. At pre-application stage the suggested number of new spaces was 81. This has been reduced to 54 in this application and I do not consider this to be excessive.

Green Travel Plan

81. The Planning Statement indicates, at 5.4, that the proposal will provide employment locally and the hospital is encouraging existing staff to walk and cycle to work. I consider it important to ensure that where possible alternative methods of travel to and from the site, other than by car, are encouraged and secured. I therefore consider a condition requiring the submission of a Green Travel Plan to be justified.

Fencing detail

82. The initial submission of the application did not contain detail in relation to the type and design of the proposed areas of fencing to secure compounds other than to indicate its location and proposed height of 3m. A subsequent letter enclosed photographs of fencing used at another site shows what is proposed here. This fencing is a dark green metallic 3m high mesh with an inward facing crank. The precise details can be required by condition. I note that the extent of the fencing is kept to a minimum as it is only used to enclose two relatively small areas and will not in my view have any detrimental visual impact particularly if softened with appropriate planting.

Design

83. The design approach is to produce a relatively low lying modern building with low pitched roofs that is in contrast to the 3 storey historic character of Kneesworth Hall. The form of the building has largely been dictated by its functional requirements. I do not find the design to be inappropriate and I note the comments of the Conservation Manager in relation to the impact of the proposal on the setting of Kneesworth Hall.

Amenity

84. The nearest residential property to the location of the proposed new building is Hill View, 12-14 Chestnut Lane situated to the north west at a distance of approximately 230m. I consider this to be at a sufficient distance so as not to be materially affected.
85. No. 53 Old North Road has its garden to the north of the main access to the hospital and may experience an increase in disturbance from additional vehicle movements however the garden is large and the dwelling is some 50m from the access. In my view the amenity of its occupiers will not be adversely affected.

Loss of Trees

86. It is regrettable that two trees have to be felled including a Lime which forms part of a group of trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order. However there are 31 TPO trees in the vicinity, the Lime is one of the smaller trees and there is scope for a replacement to be planted close by as part of a landscape scheme. I do not consider that the loss of this tree and a sycamore is so detrimental as to justify refusal of the scheme.
87. I note the comments of the Trees and Landscape Officer in relation to the threat to other trees. I therefore consider a condition requiring hand digging and details of the construction methods of hard surfaces in the vicinity of trees to be justified.

Sustainability

88. The hospital site lies outside of the village but adjacent to it. Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth has a good range of local services and the hospital site is accessible by a range of transport options including public transport. I do not therefore consider this proposal to represent an unsustainable form of development.

Recommendation

89. Delegated Approval/Refusal subject to acceptable revisions to the landscape proposals and the submission and satisfactory outcome of consideration of a Flood Risk Assessment and subject to conditions to ensure implementation within 3 years, submission of details of all materials, submission and implementation of a landscape scheme, boundary treatment, the submission and timescale implementation of a Green Travel Plan, submission of details of compound fencing, highway visibility improvement and maintenance measures, measures to ensure tree protection through the course of development, hand digging in the vicinity of existing trees and a method statement for the construction of all new hard surfaced areas, foundation construction details to ensure tree protections, no external lighting without planning approval, scheme for the investigation of archaeological remains and the provision of fire hydrants. In addition any conditions necessary as a result of the findings of the Flood Risk Assessment or from the awaited comments from Anglian Water.

Reasons for Approval

1. Although the development is not in accordance with South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policy **CS12**, it is considered to be acceptable as a departure from the development plan for the following reasons: the proposal is required to provide a better standard of care to patients and to meet nationally recognized shortfall in this type of accommodation. The proposal is not felt to adversely affect the visual quality of the wider landscape or harm the setting of the adjacent Grade II Listed Building.
2. The development is considered to generally accord with the Development Plan in all other respects and particularly the following policies:

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 Policies **P1/2, P1/3**

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 Policies **EN1, EN3, EN4, EN5, EN28, EM7**

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Planning File reference S/2362/05/F, South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003.

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