

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

12th May 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/1341/03/F - LITLINGTON
ERECTION OF SIX DWELLINGS, EXTENSION AND CONVERSION OF SCHOOL
HOUSE INTO THREE DWELLINGS AND EXTENSION AND CONVERSION OF
SEXTONS COTTAGE INTO TWO AFORDABLE DWELLINGS FOLLOWING
DEMOLITION OF EXISTING INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS, OBLIC ENGINEERING
SITE, CHURCH STREET, FOR PARKLANS HOMES LTD.**

Departure Application

Members will visit the site on Monday 10th May 2004.

Conservation Area

Site And Proposal

1. The site is located on the south side of Church Street to the east of the Church, a Grade II* Listed Building, and the Old Vicarage. To the south west is Manor Farm. The site, that extends to approximately 0.8ha comprises the two storey Old School building, that has substantial single storey extensions to the rear previously used as a workshop, Sextons Cottage, a small cottage on the east side of the site and a commercial building on the west boundary. The site sits below the level of the Church and Vicarage to the west.
2. This full application, as amended by drawings received 27th January 2004 and 6th April 2004 proposes the change of use and conversion of the Old School House into 3 one-bedroom dwellings, the extension of Sextons Cottage to form 2 two-bedroom dwellings and the erection of 6 new dwellings forming a courtyard at the rear of the site. The six new dwellings are a mixture of two storey and single storey buildings and comprise 4 four-bedroom units and 2 three-bedroom units. The existing commercial buildings to the rear of the Old School House are to be demolished.
3. Access to the new dwellings and converted School House is gained at the north-western end of the site.
4. The density of the development is approximately 14 dwellings per hectare. The site is within the village framework.

History

5. Planning consent was granted in July 2002 for the conversion of the Old School House into three one bedroom dwellings and the erection of four dwellings on land to the rear, following demolition of the existing extensions to the Old School House – **S/2132/02/F**. Sexton's Cottage was to be retained as a single dwelling. That application was considered by Committee and was the subject of a site visit by Members.

Policy

6. **Policy P5/5 of the County Structure Plan 2003** encourages small scale housing developments in villages only where appropriate, taking into account:
 - The need for affordable housing;
 - The character of the village and its setting; and
 - The level of jobs, services, infrastructure and passenger transport provision in the immediate area.
7. **Policy SE5 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** identifies Litlington as an infill village. Development in infill villages is limited to not more than two dwellings, on sites within the village framework and should be sympathetic to the historic interests, character and amenities of the locality. Policy SE5 states that in very exceptional cases a slightly larger development may be permitted if it would lead to the sustainable recycling of a brownfield site bringing positive overall benefit to the village.
8. **Policy SE9 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that development on the edges of villages should be sympathetically designed and landscaped to minimise the impact of development on the countryside.
9. **Policy HG7 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** states that the District Council will negotiate with applicants to secure the provision of accommodation to meet some of the continuing need for affordable housing in the District before it determines any application for planning permission for residential development in villages of under 3000 population such as Litlington. In such villages such provision may represent up to 50% of the total number of dwellings for which planning permission may be given, dependant on the level of clearly identified local need, although higher or lower percentages may be agreed in the light of factors such as proximity to local services; access to public transport; the particular costs associated with the development; and whether or not the provision of affordable housing would prejudice other planning objectives warranting greater priority in the particular case.
10. **Policy EM8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** seeks to resist the conversion or redevelopment of employment sites in villages to residential use unless they are causing a nuisance by virtue of noise, smell or traffic generation or where it is demonstrated that the site is inappropriate for any employment use to continue having regard to market demand.
11. **Policy P7/6 of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003** states that Local Planning Authorities will protect and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of the historic built environment.
12. **Policy EN30 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** seeks to ensure that new development preserves or enhances the special character and appearance of Conservation Areas.
13. **Policy EN28 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004** seeks to preserve the setting of Listed Buildings. It states 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; would harm the visual relationship between the building and its formal or natural landscape surroundings or; would damage archaeological remains of importance unless some exceptional, overriding need can

be demonstrated, in which case conditions may be applied to protect particular features or aspects of the building and its setting.

Consultations

14. **Litlington Parish Council** recommends refusal of the application as amended. Its comments are attached as Appendix 1.
15. **The Conservation Manager** states that the revised scheme appears to address the conservation concerns and therefore has no objection. The following issues are emphasised which can be dealt with by conditions:
 - a) Windows in the schoolhouse in particular need to be carefully detailed to retain existing architectural forms.
 - b) Windows to be timber and painted.
 - c) Pattern of slate roof to the schoolhouse needs to be retained.
 - d) Boundary treatment to the street frontage needs to be detailed. Railings? Walls? Planting?
 - e) Surface treatment to road frontage needs to be detailed, avoiding block paving.
16. **English Heritage** has no objection.
17. **The Local Highway Authority** commented in respect of the original submission that little consideration had been given to the access arrangement for this development. Whilst the existing use class of the site and its potential traffic generation is recognised the access should comprise the best layout and visibility that can be achieved.
18. The access to Sextons Cottage should be located adjacent the west boundary to afford maximum visibility to the west and comprise a minimum width of 4.5m together with pedestrian splays of 2.0m x 2.0m. The number of parking spaces should be appropriate for the number of units and this remote rural location.
19. The private access road serving the remainder of the development should be a minimum of 5.0m wide and be 90 degrees to Church Street for a minimum distance of 10.0m. In addition the centre line of the access should be a minimum distance of 6.0m from the north west corner of the site boundary. A common turning area should be provided within the private access road.
20. In respect of the amended scheme it comments that in December last year a junction layout was forwarded direct from the consulting engineers that satisfactorily addressed the highway issues and questions why this drawing, which was appropriately dimensioned, has not been submitted with the latest revisions.
21. **The Environment Agency** requests conditions requiring the submission of schemes for foul and surface water drainage and ground contamination investigation, assessment and remediation as well as putting forward safeguarding comments.
22. **The Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests that a condition be imposed restricting the hours of operation of power operated machinery on the site during the construction period. If driven pile foundations are to be used a method of construction should be submitted. Further information should be supplied on the site history to determine possible land contamination.

23. **The Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council** is concerned that adequate education capacity is not available in the area to meet demand created by such a development.
24. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** has considered the application and confirms that additional water supplies for firefighting are not required.
25. The comments of the **Acting Research and Development Manager** on the amended scheme will be reported verbally. The principle of the provision of two 2-bedroom units which will be brought forward as affordable housing under Policy HG7 of the Local Plan is supported.

Representations

26. The occupiers of The Old Vicarage to the west object on the following grounds:
27. The proposed increase in the number of units on the site is based upon the extension of the village boundary to the rear of the site. The land was made available for garden space, not further built development. The addition of two further houses on the land made available for this purpose is a cynical attempt to increase profits and goes far beyond what is acceptable under the terms of an "infill" policy village.
28. The original development of four houses was welcomed and approved on the basis that a larger development than would usually be allowed under 'infill policy' transformed an unattractive brown field site. It is felt however that the previous consent allowing four rather than two units has already taken account of these mitigating circumstances and that the tenets of infill policy should not now be simply ignored because the developer has already achieved a greater number of units.
29. The increase in housing density is presented as filling the newly introduced requirement for 'affordable' housing. The criteria for inclusion of affordable housing in new developments were not relevant when this scheme went through the planning process. Should the developer passionately wish to include affordable housing at this stage, it could easily be provided for within the previously approved footprint.
30. The new proposals fail the principles of good neighbourliness. Whilst reverting back to the preferred courtyard style the newest amendments do not take into account the privacy and amenity of the development's neighbours.
31. The revised layout of the approved scheme continues to fail all the yardsticks of good neighbourliness, and in particular elevation G of the proposal. Although fenestration had not yet been agreed on the approved scheme, the plans indicated the possible inclusion of two rooflights overlooking the Old Vicarage and its garden. The newest proposals show a continuous and much extended visible tall roofline running along the boundary with the Old Vicarage for over 35 metres, and include four overlooking rooflights and two full (and unnecessary since they can be accommodated on the opposite walls), windows overlooking in the extra Unit 4.
32. Whilst there is relief that the new proposals no longer include plans to reduce the height of the party wall it is still felt that the relationship of the proposed development to adjacent properties within a Conservation Area is unacceptable.
33. The sensitive nature of the site is once again emphasised – between the village's three principal period buildings, including a 13th Century Church, and in the heart of a Conservation Area that includes some historically important open spaces. Surely

Conservation Areas are defined so that they can be protected and conserved. In this case it is strongly believed that a high density is entirely alien to the setting and very nature of Litlington's Conservation Area.

34. The occupier of Manor Farm to the east of the site is concerned on the following grounds:
35. Too many houses are proposed on such a small site. The gardens have been made extremely small for what will be family homes. This will force the children to play in the street, causing noise for the listed church and Manor.
36. There will be too much traffic entering and exiting through a narrow entrance.
37. There are now three units overlooking straight into the garden of Manor Farm, with extra windows at 5m and 6m in height. There is also a continuous roofline giving a very "built-up" feeling in such a rural location.
38. No fence is shown between the proposed houses and Manor Farm which will mean views of washing, barbeques, climbing frames through a non-evergreen scrub hedge.
39. The extra houses extend 20-30 metres into "green field" so that the original argument of redeveloping a brownfield site does not apply.
40. The occupier of Silverlands, Church Street remains concerned about the parking and general access arrangements. It would appear that parking spaces for all three dwellings at the School House are behind the building and reached from the access road. The front doors of dwellings 1 and 2, however, appear to face onto Church Street and it seems probable that casual visitors, delivery vans etc will park on Church Street. The plans do not show a boundary in front of the School House and it is considered essential that this should be a solid boundary without direct access to the front of the dwellings so that the risk of increased obstruction and restricted visibility along an already difficult stretch of road close to a dangerous corner can be avoided.
41. There is also concern about drainage in the Church Street area. Although it is understood that Anglian Water has said that it foresees no problems there have certainly been problems in the past and several residents have suffered from difficulties caused by backing-up of sewage. These problems have presumably been documented by Anglian Water.

Applicant's Representations

42. Attached as Appendix 2 is a copy of a letter submitted in support of the application from the applicant's agent

Planning Comments

43. The key issues to consider in determining this application are the provisions of Policy EM8 of the Local Plan; the scale of development in relation to local plan policies and its impact on the character of the site, conservation area, nearby listed buildings, and the amenity of local residents; highway safety and; the provision of affordable housing.
44. The first of these, whether, in the light of the Local Plan presumption in favour of retaining employment sites in villages, the principle of the redevelopment of the site

for residential purposes should be considered was debated and accepted at the time of the previous consent.

45. Given that the principle of redevelopment of the site for residential use has been accepted the next issue to consider is the scale and form of development that is appropriate. The existing former school building lends itself to conversion to three small units of accommodation and the Sextons Cottage for restoration and extension to two 2 bedroom units which will be brought forward as affordable housing under Policy HG7 of the Local Plan. The principle of this latter provision is supported by the Acting Research and Development Manager. The previous approval predated the need to secure the provision of affordable housing in such schemes and I consider that the provision of such housing in the current scheme to be a significant gain for the village.
46. The demolition of the unsympathetic extensions to the rear of the school building is to be welcomed.
47. Litlington is defined as an infill village where development would normally be restricted to not more than two dwellings. It is my view however that two dwellings in the rear section of the site would not be making best use of this brownfield site, and that the potential exists for a greater number of dwellings provided the scale and form is one that will enhance the Conservation Area and setting of adjacent listed buildings. Any such scheme would be subject to the Departure procedure, although Policy SE5 of the Local Plan does provide for a slightly larger development on a brownfield site.
48. As amended the scheme for six new dwellings designed as a courtyard, with a mix of single and two-storey elements has the support of the Conservation Manager. Although it extends the scale of the courtyard previously approved it allows for the provision of a better range of housing types (4 two bedroom and 2 three bedroom units) as opposed to the 4 four bedroom houses originally given consent. The extension of the village framework at the rear of the site through the Local Plan process means that the scheme remains within the framework.
49. I have viewed the site from the grounds of the properties to either side and am of the view that whilst the current proposal extends the built form a further 18 metres into the site from that previously approved the latest set of revised drawings, which alter window details in the first floor elevations of Units 3 and 4 at the western end of the site to face into the courtyard makes the relationship to adjacent dwellings acceptable.
50. The Local Highways Authority is happy with the principle of the access arrangements. The potential traffic generation from this development is significantly less than that of a commercial use of the site. Car parking provision within the site is adequate, parking for the Old School House and Sextons Cottage being provided in a courtyard to the rear. Parking for the six new dwellings at the rear is provided within the main courtyard.
51. Any reasonable requirement of the County Council as education authority can be included within a Section 106 Agreement.

Recommendation

52. That the application be advertised and referred to the Secretary of State (SOS) as a departure from the development plan. Subject to the application not being called in

by the SOS, the applicant be invited to enter into a Section 106 Agreement securing the provision of affordable housing within the site, along with a contribution towards education provision. Subject to the completion of the aforementioned that delegated powers of approval be given subject to safeguarding conditions.

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. The approved development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:
 - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003: P5/5** (Homes in Rural Areas) and P7/6 (Historic Built Environment);
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004: SE5** (Development in Infill Villages)
 - **HG10** (Housing Mix and Design)
 - **SE9** (Village Edges)
 - **EM8** (Loss of Employment Sites in Villages)
 - **HG7** (Affordable Housing in Village Frameworks)
 - **EN28** (Listed Buildings)
 - **EN30** (Development in Conservation Areas)

2. The proposal conditionally approved is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:
 - Residential amenity including noise disturbance and overlooking issues
 - Highway safety
 - Visual impact on the locality
 - Impact upon setting of adjacent Conservation Area and Listed Buildings
 - Drainage issues

3. All other material planning considerations have been taken into account. None is of such significance as to outweigh the reason for the decision to approve the planning application.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- County Structure Plan 2003
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Planning Application File S/1341/03/F

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