

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

7th June 2006

**S/0706/06/F – Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth
Erection of New Ward Building to Accommodate Two Secure Wards,
One Rehabilitation Unit, Reception and Visitors Centre with New Landscaping,
Fencing and 57 New Car Parking Spaces
for Partnership in Care Ltd**

**Recommendation: Approval
Determination Date: 10th July 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, registered on 10th April 2006, 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 Lime tree, which is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO), is to be felled.
5. The application was submitted with a planning statement, design statement, flood risk assessment and landscape statement which can be viewed as part of the background papers and will be on display at the meeting
6. A public footpath runs along the north eastern site boundary.

Planning History

7. At the March meeting (**Ref S/2362/05/F** – Item14) Members considered an identical application in terms of the built proposal. It was resolved to give Officers delegated powers of approval/refusal subject to the receipt of further information that retained as many existing trees as possible and demonstrated the ability to adequately safeguard those trees shown to be retained.
8. As the necessary information could not be submitted within the period for determination that application was refused for the following reason:
9. 'The proposal fails to demonstrate how existing trees can adequately be safeguarded from the physical impact of the development. The inevitable loss of trees, shown to be retained, some of which are statutorily protected by Tree Preservation Orders, will damage the parkland setting of the adjacent Grade II Listed Building, Kneesworth House. As such the proposal is contrary to Policies EN4, EN5 and EN28 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004.'
10. 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 permissions have been granted since including improved staff and office facilities and extensions to buildings to provide better patient facilities and accommodation.

Planning Policy

11. **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.
12. **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.
13. **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".
14. The supporting text specifically refers to Kneesworth House recognising it as a privately run hospital.
15. **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.
16. **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."

17. **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.
18. 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).
19. **Policy EN5** of the Local Plan is concerned with the landscaping of new development.
20. **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.
21. **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

Bassingbourn-cum-Kneesworth Parish Council

22. Recommends approval. “There was no objection to this application but Councillors are concerned over the long term plan for development of the site.

Chief Environmental Health Officer

23. No objections but requests a condition restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the construction process.

Environment Agency

24. Comments will be reported at the meeting

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

25. Should permission be granted adequate provision should be made for fire hydrants by way of a Section 106 agreement or planning condition.

Cambridgeshire County Archaeologist

26. 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.

Local Highways Authority

27. 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 comprise suitable geometry to facilitate as safe ingress/egress as possible.
28. The junction should comprise vehicle-to-vehicle visibility of 4.5m x 90.0m.

29. The survey drawings submitted in support of the application indicates the provision of such splays. It is noted that existing signboards are to be relocated.
30. A condition should be attached to any consent relating to the provision of such splays.

Conservation Manager

31. Comments on the current application will be reported verbally but in respect of the previous application no objections were raised to the principle of the development subject to acceptable landscaping and material details being secured by condition.
32. "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.
33. 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.
34. This will be replaced by a new access serving the new units – thus the main house still serves as the main reception area.
35. 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.
36. 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.
37. 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.
38. 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.
39. 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.
40. The design is modern and thus will contrast with the form of the main house.
41. 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.
42. 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".
43. Further comments concern the importance of securing appropriate materials by condition notwithstanding the materials specified in the design statement.
44. 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

45. The detail submitted in relation to tree retention and tree protection follows a site meeting. The detail and layout is acceptable. The submitted plan indicates areas of 'No Dig' construction and location of protective fencing, which should be secured by condition. A condition requiring the submission of a detailed landscaping scheme is also required.

Environment and Community Services, Cambridgeshire County Council

46. Supports the application from a strategic planning point of view. Although located in the countryside it can be seen to be essential in this particular location as it is integral to the existing hospital facilities, and is therefore in accordance with Structure Plan Policy P1/2.
47. However, it is suggested that some justification for the number of parking spaces should be sought, as 57 additional spaces may be considered excessive when considered against the Council's parking standard's. As an alternative, a lower number could be sought. Combined with a package to enhance travel by sustainable modes.

48. **Anglian Water**

Comments are awaited

49. **Land Drainage Manager**

Comments are awaited

Representations

50. None received at the time of writing the report. In respect of the earlier application a letter of objection was received from a planning consultant acting 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. It is anticipated that a similar later will be received in respect of the current application.
51. The consultation period expires on 8th June 2006.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

52. 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. Members considered these matters at the March meeting and resolved that, provided the impact on existing trees could be satisfactorily addressed, consent could be granted. However as this a new application I have rehearsed the issues below.
53. 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.
54. During discussions prior to submission of the earlier application 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 was previously considered by both the Conservation Manager and the then Landscape Design Officer to have an acceptable impact subject

to appropriate materials and detailing and revisions to the landscape proposals. Any additional comments on the current application will be reported at the meeting

Need

55. The application includes a Planning Statement.

56. ***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.

57. ***Kneesworth House***

The detailed justification is contained within paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7 of the planning statement which can be viewed as part of the background papers. 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.

58. It is noted that Cambridgeshire County Council gives strategic support to the application.

Impact on Landscape

59. The Landscape Design Officer commented on the previous application. 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 were suggested by the Landscape Design Officer at the time of the previous application and can be dealt with by condition.

Impact on setting of Kneesworth Hall

60. 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

61. A Flood Risk Assessment was submitted prior to consideration of the earlier application and was accepted by the Environment Agency. The same document accompanies the current application.

Highway Safety

62. 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, adequate visibility can be achieved.

Car parking standards

63. 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. However, given the comments of Cambridgeshire County Council, I have asked the applicant to provide additional information in respect of visitor numbers, although Members will note the suggestion of a Green Travel Plan in the next paragraph.

Green Travel Plan

64. The Planning Statement indicates 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

65. In respect of the proposed fencing to secure compounds the application includes a photograph of the type and design of fencing used on other such sites. 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

66. 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 previous comments of the Conservation Manager in relation to the impact of the proposal on the setting of Kneesworth Hall.

Amenity

67. 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.
68. 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

69. It is regrettable that a Lime which forms part of a group of trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order is to be felled. 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 is so detrimental as to justify refusal of the scheme.
70. Additional information has been submitted with the current application in respect of tree protection and areas of 'no-dig' construction and the Trees and Landscape Officer is of the view that the detail and layout is now acceptable. Conditions should be attached to any consent in respect of tree protection and the submission of a landscaping scheme.

Sustainability

71. 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.
72. I am of the view that the current application has satisfactorily addressed the reason for refusal of the previous application and therefore I can recommend that consent be granted.
73. The proposal is considered to be essential in this particular location, thereby complying with Policy P1/2 of the Structure Plan 2003. I do not consider there is a need to refer the application to the Secretary of State as a Departure, since it would not significantly prejudice the implementation of the Development Plan Policies by reason of its size, impact on the area and nature and type of development in this particular location.

Recommendation

73. That, subject to the receipt of outstanding consultations, delegated powers be granted to approve the application subject to safeguarding 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 to ensure compliance with the 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 any comments from the Environment Agency or 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 P1/2, P1/3**
 - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 EN1, EN3, EN4, EN5, EN28, EM7**

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

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
- Planning File reference S/0706/06/F & S/2362/05/F

Contact Officer: Paul Sexton– Area Planning Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713255