

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation
Control Committee

7th July 2004

AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

**S/0989/04/F – Steeple Morden
Extension and conversion into 18 flats, The White House, 66 Hay Street, for A R J
Construction Ltd**

Recommendation: Delegated Approval

Departure Application

Site and Proposal

1. The White House, 66 Hay Street, Steeple Morden is a former nursing home standing in extensive grounds (2.85ha) to the rear of residential properties in Hay Street. Access to the site is via a narrow driveway between houses in Hay Street and is also the route of a public footpath.
2. This full application, registered on 12th May 2004, proposes the extension and conversion of the building to form 18 flats, comprising 6 one-bedroom and 12 two-bedroom units. The proposal includes 2 two-storey extensions on the east and west sides of the building at its northern end, small first floor additions over existing ground floor elements and the raising of the roof by approximately 1.5m across the whole building to allow for the creation of 2 flats at second floor level. A total of 35 car parking spaces are provided to the south and west of the building.
3. The proposal indicates that the existing access and footpath from High Street will be improved to meet Highway Authority standards although no details of these works are provided.
4. The application includes a proposal to provide an area of the grounds which will be made available to the Parish Council with access from the adjacent public footpath although this area is not identified on the submitted drawings.
5. The application is accompanied by a design statement which is attached as Appendix 1. The applicant has also submitted a Development Risk Analysis setting out financial information in respect of the scheme.
6. The site is outside the village framework and the application has been advertised as a departure from the development plan.

Planning History

7. Planning consent was granted in the late 1980's for a substantial extension to the building in connection with its former use as a nursing home (**Ref: S/0989/04/F**).
8. Two applications for the demolition of the existing building and the erection of 8 dwellings were refused and dismissed at appeal in 2002. (**Refs: S/2105/00/F and S/0559/01/F**).

9. Following the dismissal of these appeals the site was sold and work commenced on converting the building for use as a psychiatric hospital. As this use falls within the same use class as a nursing home no formal consent for change of use was required, however applications for extensions to the building and erection of a fenced compound were withdrawn following considerable local opposition to the proposals. **(Refs: S/2171/02/F; S/2172/02/F; S/0235/03/F and S/0236/03/F).**

Planning Policy

10. **Policy SP1/2** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (“The County Structure Plan”) states that development in the countryside will be restricted unless the proposals can be demonstrated to be essential in a particular location.
11. **Policy SE4** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 (“The Local Plan”) identifies Steeple Morden as a Group Village where development is restricted to 8 dwellings on sites within the village framework. Exceptionally development may consist of up to 15 dwellings if this would make best use of a brownfield site.
12. **Policy SE8** of the Local Plan 2004 states that residential development outside village frameworks will not be permitted.
13. **Policies HG7 and HG8** of the Local Plan sets out the Council’s policy in respect of affordable housing.

Consultation

14. **Steeple Morden Parish Council** recommends refusal, although its comments would suggest to me that it supports the principle. A further letter is expected from the Parish Council to confirm this. Its comments are attached as Appendix 2.
15. The **Local Highway Authority** is disappointed that, given a site meeting and discussion, the submitted drawings do not show details of the proposed roadway and footpath arrangements at the front of the site and requests that a suitable plan be submitted.
16. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests a condition be imposed on any consent restricting the hours of operation of machinery during the period of construction. Attention is drawn to two instances where bathrooms are proposed directly above bedrooms of other units stating that this may give rise to excess noise within these bedrooms unless adequate precautions are installed or the bathrooms re-orientated.
17. The **Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council** is concerned that adequate secondary school capacity is not available in this area to meet additional demand created by residential expansion. A contribution of £30,000 is requested to cover the cost of 3 secondary school places. Adequate primary school capacity exists.
18. **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requests that adequate provision is made for fire hydrants.

Representations

19. The occupier of 64 Hay Street, immediately to the north of the access, has written in support of the application. It is a high quality development and will enhance the area. It will provide some much needed 1 and 2 bedroom dwellings. The development complies with the spirit of the planning inspector's findings from the last planning appeal for the site in that it restricts development to the current footprint of the building; it preserves the rural character of the site; and it does not substantially intensify the use of the site. It is understood that current planting within the driveway to the site is to be removed in order to provide adequate access. It is requested that planting be re-installed as part of the new development in order to reduce the noise from the driveway on the house and garden of No64, maintain privacy in the garden and maintain the current rural atmosphere in this part of Hay Street.
20. The occupier of Rose Cottage, Hay Street comments that light pollution is a concern and suggests that external lighting along the paths and entrances is low level and white to reduce the glare on other buildings.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

21. The key issues to be considered here are whether there is sufficient justification to warrant a departure from the development plan and allow residential use of this building in the countryside; whether the proposed use and alterations to the building are acceptable having regard to the impact on residential amenity, the wider countryside and suitability of the access; and whether the scheme should provide an element of affordable housing.
22. Officers have previously indicated that a residential use of the building would be acceptable although initially this advice was given on the basis of its use as a single dwelling, a view supported by comments made by the appeal inspector. Subsequently advice has been given that the subdivision of the existing building into flats would be appropriate. Whilst the site is outside the village framework it is well related to it. The use of the building by an intensive commercial use, i.e. offices, would be inappropriate in my view given the relationship of the site and access to residential properties.
23. The proposal to extend and convert the building into 18 units represents a scale of development which is considerable above that which would normally be acceptable in a group village. The Policy does exceptionally allow for development of up to 15 dwellings where it makes best use of a brownfield site but such sites should be within the village framework. The appeal Inspector recognised that that part of the site which contains the building could reasonably be described as brownfield land. The scheme involves additions to the building to create space to accommodate 18 flats, including the raising of the roof of the existing building by approximately 1.5m however the Development Risk Analysis suggests that this number of units is required for a viable scheme.
24. The extensions to the building, including the increase in height by 1.5m will not, in my view, materially alter the impact of the building on the wider countryside. Although the increase in height will be perceived by adjoining properties in Hay Street there is sufficient distance between The White House and these properties for any impact not to have an adverse effect. The second floor has been designed with dormer style openings in the rear elevation facing away from residential properties, with rooflights in the west facing elevation towards Hay Street. A condition can be imposed to ensure that these rooflights are placed at sufficient height to prevent overlooking, although at the nearest point the existing building is 30m from the rear boundary of properties in Hay Street.

25. Adequate car parking has been provided within the site and whilst this requires the removal of some existing planting there is ample space for replacement planting to be carried out
26. The Local Highway Authority gave informal advice prior to the submission of the application that it was happy in principle with the access serving 18 flats subject to a number of improvements being carried out, although given the restricted width of the access and the existence of the footpath, there is a limit to what can be done. Given the formal response of the Highway Authority I have written to the applicant requesting a drawing showing these details. It is important to demonstrate how the existing footpath will be dealt with in any proposal to improve the access.
27. The requirement to provide affordable housing under Policy HG7 of the Local Plan relates to sites within village frameworks. Policy HG8 refers to exception sites for affordable housing within or adjoining villages but looks for schemes where 100% affordable housing is provided. Given that the site has an existing use value it is clearly not possible to provide 100% affordable housing. However, as the application is a departure from the development plan and the site is well related to the village it is in my view appropriate to consider whether a percentage of the units could come forward as affordable housing. There may however be factors which argue against this and show that the scheme benefits the community in other ways.
28. The proposal does provide a mixture of one and two bedroom flats. Development Risk Analysis submitted by the applicant sets out development costs, including the amount paid for the site. It appears to indicate that the provision of affordable dwellings within the scheme may render it non viable. However further advice is being sought on this point. Steeple Morden Parish Council has not requested the provision of affordable housing within the scheme.
29. The proposal offers an area of the existing grounds of The White House that will be provided to the Parish Council for public access. This is not something that I could require from the applicant and should be seen as a gain to the community and balanced against the lack of provision of affordable housing.
30. In my view development costs appear likely to mean that affordable housing cannot be provided in the case but will advise Members further on this point.
31. Although Steeple Morden Parish Council has recommended refusal of the application I am aware that from subsequent discussions that this is purely based on the wish to ensure that a Section 106 Agreement is in place in respect of the amenity area. A further letter to this effect from the Parish Council is to be submitted.
32. A Section 106 Agreement will be required to be provided for the education contribution requested by Cambridgeshire County Council. This agreement can include reference to the amenity area but, having discussed this matter with the Legal Officer, I am of the view that the details of its provision should be agreed between the Parish Council and applicant direct as the scale of the proposed development falls short of the trigger for open space provision in Policy TR2 of the Local Plan. The Section 106 Agreement will merely provide that such agreement between these parties is in place prior to occupation of any of the units. I will advise the applicant and Parish Council of this view prior to the meeting and report any response.
33. The Parish Council requests that permitted development rights are withdrawn to maintain the character and setting of The White House and its surroundings. As the

development is for flats no permitted development rights exist and therefore such a condition is not necessary.

34. There is a request from both the Parish Council and occupier of 64 Hay Street for replacement of any planting lost as a result of improvements to the existing access and driveway. Until the requested details of the works to the access are submitted I am unclear what space will exist for replacement planting. I understand that the applicant has agreed to undertake new planting within the garden of No64 and has discussed this with the occupier. Whilst planting on land outside the site could not be controlled by condition it could be included within the Section 106 Agreement if such planting were considered essential and could not be accommodated within the site.
35. A condition can be attached to any consent requiring details of any external lighting to be submitted for approval prior to its installation.
36. This is an unusual case given the scale of the existing building and its location just outside the framework of the village. I am therefore of the view that there is sufficient justification in this case to warrant supporting the proposal as a departure from the development plan.

Recommendations

37. That, subject to the receipt of satisfactory amended plans showing the upgrading of the existing access to meet the requirements of the Local Highway Authority, that the application be referred to the Regional Office as a departure from the Development Plan on the grounds that Members are minded to approve the scheme subject to the prior signing of a Section 106 covering the provision of the amenity area and securing an education contribution, and subject to safeguarding conditions.

Informatives

Reasons for Approval

1. In resolving to grant planning permission for this development regard has been given to the policies contained within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 and the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004. Although the site is outside the village framework of Steeple Morden it is well related to the village and given previous use of the site and its relationship to existing residential properties the proposal for extension and conversion into 18 flats is considered to be an acceptable alternative use.
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
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: Application File S/0989/04/F

Structure Plan 2003
South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004

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