

Committee Report

Item 7C

Reference: DC/21/00122
Case Officer: Averil Goudy

Ward: Walsham-le-Willows.

Ward Member/s: Cllr Richard Meyer.

RECOMMENDATION – GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION WITH CONDITIONS

Description of Development

Planning Application - Change of use of Common Room to dwellinghouse (bungalow) including an extension to rear elevation and parking.

Location

Common Room At, Victoria Gardens, Wattisfield, Suffolk

Expiry Date: 10/03/2021

Application Type: FUL - Full Planning Application

Development Type: Minor Dwellings

Applicant: Mid-Suffolk District Council

Agent: N/A

Parish: Wattisfield

Details of Previous Committee / Resolutions and any member site visit: None

Has a Committee Call In request been received from a Council Member (Appendix 1): No

Has the application been subject to Pre-Application Advice: Yes - DC/20/03187

PART ONE – REASON FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

The application is referred to committee for the following reason/s:

The application site is owned by Mid Suffolk District Council and Mid Suffolk District Council is the applicant.

PART TWO – POLICIES AND CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Summary of Policies

NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework

CS01 - Settlement Hierarchy

CS05 - Mid Suffolk's Environment

FC01 - Presumption In Favour Of Sustainable Development

FC01_1 - Mid Suffolk Approach To Delivering Sustainable Development

GP01 - Design and layout of development

H16 - Protecting existing residential amenity

H19 - Accommodation for special family needs

T09 - Parking Standards
T10 - Highway Considerations in Development
HB08 - Safeguarding the character of conservation areas

Neighbourhood Plan Status

This application site is not within a Neighbourhood Plan Area.

Consultations and Representations

During the course of the application Consultation and Representations from third parties have been received. These are summarised below.

A: Summary of Consultations

Town/Parish Council

Wattisfield Parish Council

Wattisfield Parish Council have considered planning application DC/21/00122 - Common Room At, Victoria Gardens, Wattisfield, Suffolk and would make the following comments.

Whilst there are no objections to the change and additions to the building, there are concerns about the changes proposed to allow for the parking spaces.

There are concerns that the new parking bays will involve scrubbing out or removal of the hedge and the installation of a replacement fence. It is considered the hedge should remain. It is suggested that the parking is redesigned to have parallel parking for say three cars, which would allow the hedge to remain, and then additional parking spaces be found using current grassed areas on the site. It was strongly felt that removal of a significant amount of hedging in times of climate change would not be a good policy.

County Council Responses

SCC - Highways

No objection, subject to condition.

Internal Consultee Responses

Heritage - Not Required

The Heritage Team do not intend to provide comments - proposals are not considered to result in sufficient impact to warrant Heritage involvement.

Strategic Asset Management

No comments received.

B: Representations

At the time of writing this report at least two letter comments have been received. It is the officer opinion that this represents two general comments. A verbal update shall be provided as necessary.

Views are summarised below:-

- Impact/loss of a view

- Proximity of parking area to trees – potential damage to vehicles

(Note: All individual representations are counted and considered. Repeated and/or additional communication from a single individual will be counted as one representation.)

PLANNING HISTORY

No relevant planning history.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

1.0 The Site and Surroundings

- 1.1. The application site is a modest plot comprising six residential units within a single storey building. Victoria Gardens was formerly used as sheltered housing accommodation. The residential units are now used as general needs housing. The building is made up of seven units, with the central one being a shared common room.
- 1.2. The site is within the defined settlement (Built Up Area) boundary of Wattisfield. The nearest neighbour is The New Manse to the south. There are residential properties to the west and northwest. Wattisfield Community Centre and Recreation Ground are situated to the east.
- 1.3. Victoria Gardens is accessed off The Street in Wattisfield. The parking area is situated to the east of the building, along the private highway. There are mature trees to the eastern boundary and within the front amenity space to the west of the building. A mature hedgerow bounds the site to the north and west.
- 1.4. The application site is within the Wattisfield Conversation Area. The Old Manse, approximately 45m south of the site, is Grade II listed.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1. The proposal seeks planning permission for the change of use of the common room to a dwellinghouse and the erection of a single storey front extension and alterations to the parking arrangements at Victoria Gardens.
- 2.2. The common room was previously intended to provide a focal point for the tenants within the sheltered housing units. However, owing the fact that the site has been de-sheltered and as services have reduced, the common room has fallen into disuse and is no longer required.
- 2.3. The change of use would convert the existing common room space into a two-bedroom residential unit, to include a living room, kitchen and bathroom.
- 2.4. The extension would protrude approximately 3.4m from the front elevation and measure 6.1m in length. The extension would have a pitched roof with a ridge and eaves height to match the existing building. The front elevation would have two windows and a single access door and both side elevations would have windows. The proposed materials include interlocking dark grey concrete pan tiles, brindle/heather facing bricks and white uPVC windows and doors to match the existing building.

- 2.5. The proposal seeks the provision of echelon parking to the east of the application building. The proposal would provide five parking spaces and one disabled parking space. The parking spaces would measure 5m x 2.5m.
- 2.6. The proposed plans also indicate that the existing eastern boundary hedge is to be cut back or grubbed out and replaced with a 900mm high chain-link and concrete post fencing.

3.0 The Principle Of Development

- 3.1. In 2020 the Government released updated Permitted Development Rights to allow for emergency development by a Local Authority or a health service body. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Coronavirus) (England) (Amendment) Order 2020 allows for development by/on behalf of a local authority on land within their ownership/leased/occupied or maintained by it for preventing an emergency, reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of an emergency or taking other action in connection with an emergency.
- 3.2. The emergency Covid-19 Permitted Development Rights would therefore have allowed the change of use on a temporary basis. In this case, as the need for the additional residential unit was not considered immediate, it was decided that planning permission would be sought for the proposed works.
- 3.3. Determination of any application must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A key material consideration regarding the principle of development is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, which requires proposals which accord with an up to date development to be approved without delay. However, various factors affect whether a development plan can be considered 'out-of-date'.
- 3.4. The age of policies itself does not cause them to cease to be part of the development plan or become "out of date" as identified in paragraph 213 of the NPPF. Significant weight should be given to the general public interest in having plan-led decisions even if the particular policies in a development plan may be old. Policies should be given weight according to their consistency with the NPPF.
- 3.5. Even if policies are considered to be out of date, that does not make them irrelevant; their weight is not fixed, and the weight to be attributed to them is within the remit of the decision taker. There will be many cases where restrictive policies are given sufficient weight to justify refusal despite their not being up to date.
- 3.6. Policies GP1, H16, H19, T09, T10 and HB08 of the Mid Suffolk Local Plan (1998) and policies CS1 and CS5 of the Mid Suffolk Core Strategy are the most relevant policies for assessing this application. Full weight is given to these policies as they are consistent with the aims of the of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 in terms of achieving sustainable development.
- 3.7. The Council can currently demonstrate that it has an adequate 5-year housing land supply measured at 7.67 years.
- 3.8. Policy CS01 of the Core Strategy Development Plan states that the majority of new development will be directed to settlements included in the Settlement Hierarchy, with a primary focus on towns and key service centres. Some provision is also given to meeting the local housing needs in primary and secondary villages. The application site is within the settlement boundary for Wattisfield, designated as a secondary village in the Core Strategy Settlement Hierarchy.

- 3.9. The principle of development in terms of creating a permanent two-bedroom residential unit is acceptable, subject to compliance with the detailed requirements of policies GP1, H16, H19, T09, T10 and HB08 which are considered below.

4.0 Nearby Services and Connections Assessment Of Proposal

- 4.1. The application site is within the settlement boundary for Wattisfield, designated as a secondary village in the Core Strategy Settlement Hierarchy (CS1). As a secondary village, provision is given for housing which meets local housing needs. Wattisfield is considered to be served with some facilities and services to meet daily needs. It benefits from a Community Centre, Church and Recreation Ground. It is not disputed that use of the private car will be necessary for access to services and facilities in nearby villages. There is also a regular daily bus service to Diss and Bury St Edmunds.
- 4.2. Thus, as an application for general needs housing, the proposal is considered to be in accordance with the requirements of CS1.

5.0 Site Access, Parking And Highway Safety Considerations

- 5.1. The proposal seeks to create a new parking area to serve Victoria Gardens, such that it engages parking considerations. In respect of policies T09 and T10 of the Local Plan and Paragraph 109 of the NPPF, development should not adversely affect the highway network and associated safety.
- 5.2. The parking area is to be located to the east of the residential units. The proposal would provide echelon parking, to include five parking spaces and one disabled parking space. The parking spaces would measure 5m x 2.5m.
- 5.3. At present, there is no designated parking area to serve the units. Residents currently utilise the private highway to the south and east of the building for parking. The proposal therefore offers an overall betterment of parking. The on-road parking would remain.
- 5.4. The Highways Authority have been consulted on the application and have no objection, subject to the implementation of a condition to secure the parking and manoeuvring areas on site.
- 5.5. The neighbour concerns regarding the safety and damage of cars from falling branches are noted. However, these concerns are not material to the determination of the application.
- 5.6. In summary, the proposed development is providing a significant betterment of the parking arrangements for the whole site. As the access driveway is private, on-road parking in this location is acceptable. There are no impacts on highway safety significant to warrant refusal.

6.0 Design And Layout

- 6.1. The proposal seeks the change of use of the common room to a dwellinghouse and the erection of a single storey rear extension and alterations to the parking arrangements at Victoria Gardens.
- 6.2. Section 12 of the NPPF requires inter alia that local planning authorities seek to promote and reinforce local distinctiveness as well as design. Paragraph 127 of the NPPF states that decisions should ensure that developments, amongst other things, are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping, are sympathetic to local character, and function well and add to the overall quality of the area.

- 6.3. Mid Suffolk Local Plan Policy GP01 states that proposals should maintain or enhance the character and appearance of their surroundings, and respect the scale and density of surrounding development, materials and finishes should be traditional, or compatible with traditional materials and finishes and should respect local architectural styles where appropriate.
- 6.4. Mid Suffolk Local Plan Policy HB08 requires that development within Conservation Areas to conserve or enhance their surroundings. Particular attention will be paid to (amongst other things) the form, grouping, scale and design of alterations to existing buildings, and the nature, colour and texture of the materials used.
- 6.5. The proposed extension would be situated on the southwest (front) elevation, facing the highway of The Street. The extension would have a pitched roof with a height of 4.9m, to match the existing building. The proposed wall and roofing materials, being brindle/heather facing bricks and interlocking dark grey concrete pan tiles, would match the host building.
- 6.6. The proposal is considered to function well and add to the overall quality of the area, in accordance with the requirements of the NPPF. The proposal is of an appropriate form and detailed design having regard to the host building and surrounding area. The materials proposed are in keeping with the host building and wider area. The proposal is not considered to constitute over development of the plot and not harm local distinctiveness. As such the proposal is considered to be in accordance with Local Plan Policies GP01 and HB08 and Paragraph 127 of the NPPF.

7.0 Landscape Impact, Trees, Ecology, Biodiversity And Protected Species

- 7.1. The proposal would require the cutting back or grubbing out of the hedgerow to the east of the building for allow for the provision of the parking area. The hawthorn hedge is low-level. The value of the hedgerow is considered to be minimal in its wider surroundings and in its contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 7.2. The applicant has confirmed that the proposed works are likely to consist of trimming in most places, with the possible grubbing out where the DAP bay is located. It is therefore likely that removal is not required. That said, its removal is not unacceptable and the proposed replacement fencing is not considered to have a detrimental impact on the wider landscape.
- 7.3. Please see section 9 below regarding the assessment of the impact on the Conservation Area.

8.0 Land Contamination, Flood Risk, Drainage and Waste

- 8.1. N/A

9.0 Heritage Issues

- 9.1. The application site is within Wattisfield Conservation Area and is within proximity of Grade II listed The Old Manse to the south of the site. The proposal therefore has the potential to impact the significance of the nearby listed building and the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. In this instance, the Council's Heritage Team consider that the proposals would not result in sufficient impact to warrant their involvement and therefore have not provided comments.
- 9.2. Despite being in the Conservation Area, the site is located within a 20th century development which does not share the historic character of most of the centre of Wattisfield. The proposed extension would be a minor alteration to the form of this 20th century building. The proposed materials are to match the existing building. The proposed development is therefore not considered to have a

notable impact on the setting of the listed building or on the character of the Conservation Area in this location.

- 9.3. The proposal would require the cutting back or grubbing out of the hedgerow to the east of the building for allow for the provision of the parking area. Mid Suffolk Local Plan Policy HB08 requires that particular attention is given to the retention of natural features such as trees and hedges. The hawthorn hedge is low-level such that the value of the hedgerow is considered to be minimal in its wider surroundings and in its contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The impact of its removal is considered to be neutral and its replacement with a 900mm high chain-link and concrete post fencing is acceptable.
- 9.4. The proposal would not be considered to cause harm to the significance of the nearby listed building or to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is considered to be in accordance with Mid Suffolk Local Plan Policy HB08.

10.0 Impact On Residential Amenity

- 10.1 The site is on the edge of a residential area, with a mixture of single-storey and two-storey detached and semi-detached properties. The unit proposed for the conversion and extension is situated centrally within the existing general needs residential building of Victoria Gardens. There are mature trees to the eastern boundary and within the front amenity space to the west of the building and a mature hedgerow bounds the site to the north and west. This vegetation restrict views from the highway and from neighbouring properties. The proposal is small in scale and is in keeping with the existing built form. The proposal is not considered to have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of any nearby properties.
- 10.2. It is noted that a neighbouring property within the Victoria Gardens complex has commented regarding the impact/loss of a view. The experience of views is not a material planning consideration, and whilst it is noted that the outlook of some properties will change, this is not considered to detrimentally impact their residential amenity.
- 10.3. The proposal, by virtue of its scale and design, is not considered to affect the privacy of the nearby properties. Whilst the proposal would result in an increase in fenestration to both side elevations, providing views towards nos. 1 and 6 respectively, this is not unacceptable. The grassed areas to the front of the building act as private amenity spaces for the residents, such that views are existing. Owing to the fact that a distance of approximately 11m would be maintained between the proposed extensions and nos. 1 and 6 respectively, the proposal is not considered to result in a significant loss of light or privacy.
- 10.4. The provision of a parking area would not have an adverse impact on the residential amenity of any neighbouring properties. The increased parking provision would reduce congestion on the private highway.
- 10.5. It is considered that the proposal will not have a significant impact on residential amenity of any nearby properties to warrant refusal of the application.

12.0 Parish Council Comments

- 12.2. The concerns raised by the Parish Council in respect of the loss of the hedgerow have been considered and addressed in sections 7 and 9 of the above report.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

13.0 Planning Balance and Conclusion

- 13.1. The proposed conversion of the common room to a dwellinghouse is acceptable. The proposal seeks to make good alternative use of the common room; it is in a state of dis-use and its conversion to a two-bedroom general needs residential unit would help meet local housing needs. A residential unit in this location would therefore be in keeping with the exiting character and form of the development and surrounding area.
- 13.2. The proposed extension would respect the host building and would not constitute over development of the plot. The proposed materials would match the host building. The proposal would have no detrimental impact on the privacy and amenity of nearby neighbouring properties. The proposed development is not considered of have a notable impact on the setting of the listed building or on the character of the Conservation Area in this location.
- 13.3. The proposed parking area would result in a betterment of the site overall. As the access driveway is private, on-road parking in this location is acceptable. The proposal is not considered to impact highway safety.
- 13.4. On balance, should it be necessary to grub out the hedgerow to the east and replace it within a chain-link and concrete post fence, this is acceptable. The hawthorn hedge is low-level such that the value of the hedgerow is considered to be minimal in its wider surroundings and in its contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.
- 13.5. The proposal accords with the NPPF and policies with the Development Plan and is therefore considered acceptable. This application is recommended for approval pursuant to its compliance with Local Plan policies GP1, H16, H19, T09, T10 and HB08 and Section 12 of the NPPF.

RECOMMENDATION

That authority be delegated to the Chief Planning Officer to GRANT planning permission.

(1) That the Chief Planning Officer be authorised to GRANT Planning Permission subject to conditions as summarised below and those as may be deemed necessary by the Chief Planning Officer:

- Standard time limit
- Approved Plans (Plans submitted that form this application)
- Highways - Provision of Parking and Manoeuvring Areas

(2) And the following informative notes as summarised and those as may be deemed necessary:

- Pro active working statement