

Committee Report

Item No: 3

Reference: DC/17/02630

Case Officer: Philip Isbell

Ward: Eye

Ward Member/s: Cllr Michael Burke

Description of Development

Planning Application for a change of use from former sheltered accommodation common room to local authority office use.

Location

Common Room, Tacon Close, Eye, Suffolk IP23 7AU

Parish: Eye

Conservation Area: No

Listed Building: No

Received: 08/06/2017

Expiry Date: 09/08/2017

Application Type: FUL - Full Planning Application

Development Type: Change of Use

Environmental Impact Assessment:

Applicant: Mid Suffolk District Council

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION

The application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk. Alternatively, a copy is available to view at the Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Council Offices.

PART ONE – REASON FOR REFERENCE TO COMMITTEE

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

This application is reported to committee as the applicant is the District Council. The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the application file and is satisfied that the application has been processed properly and correctly in accordance with all established procedures and requirements.

PART TWO – APPLICATION BACKGROUND

All Policies Identified as Relevant

The proposal has been assessed with regard to adopted development plan policies, the National Planning Policy Framework and all other material considerations. Highlighted local and national policies are listed below. Detailed assessment of policies in relation to the recommendation and issues highlighted in this case will be carried out within the assessment:

List of other relevant legislation

- Human Rights Act 1998
- Town & Country Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (any rural site)
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010
- Localism Act
- Consideration has been given to the provisions of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, in the assessment of this application but the proposal does not raise any significant issues.

Details of Previous Committee / Resolutions and any member site visit

None

Details of any Pre Application Advice

None

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

Environmental Health - Noise/Odour/Light/Smoke

Environmental Health

No objection in respect of environmental health issues.

SCC - Highways And Rights Of Way

Suffolk County Council Highways

The current proposal would not have any severe impact on the highway network in terms of vehicle volume or highway safety. Therefore, Suffolk County Council does not wish to restrict the grant of permission.

Eye Parish Clerk

Eye Parish Council

No reply received.

B: Representations

Three letters of objection have been received. All refer to loss of parking, traffic and highway safety concerns.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

From an assessment of relevant planning policy and guidance, representations received, the planning designations and other material issues the main planning considerations considered relevant to this case are set out including the reason/s for the decision, any alternative options considered and rejected. Where a decision is taken under a specific express authorisation, the names of any Member of the Council or local government body who has declared a conflict of interest are recorded.

1. The Site and Surroundings

1.1. The proposal site comprises a vacant underused single storey building as part of a cul de sac of sheltered bungalows.

2. The Proposal

2.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of the former common room building to a local authority office use. The application forms part of the evolution in the provision of local government services by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and provides new opportunities to work closer with the communities that the Councils serve.

2.2 The intention is that the proposal building will be used as a 'touchdown point' for local authority employees, providing a short term office location for employees who are working in the community around the Districts and need access to some office facilities during the course of a working day. Given the nature of this use, it is expected that employees would normally be present at a touchdown point for circa 2-3 hours. It is anticipated that a total of 3-6 employees would be able "touch down" at the site at any one time. The applicant has indicated the proposed hours of operation are between 08:00- 18:00 Monday – Friday.

3. National Planning Policy Framework

3.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) contains the Government's planning policies for England and sets out how these are expected to be applied. Planning law continues to require that applications for planning permission are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The policies contained within the NPPF are a material consideration and should be taken into account for decision-making purposes.

- Para 6: Achieving sustainable development
- Para 7: Three dimensions to sustainable development
- Paras 11 – 15: The presumption in favour of sustainable development
- Para 17: Core planning principles
- Paras 56 & 60: Requiring good design
- Para 64: Development of poor design must not be supported.
- Para 186: Approaching decision taking in a positive way.
- Para 187: Local Planning Authorities should find solutions rather than problems in decision taking.

- Para 197: Assessing and determining application applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- Paras 203 -206 – Planning conditions and obligations.

4. Core Strategy

4.1. Summary of relevant policies Core Strategy 2008 and Core Strategy Focused Review:

- Policy FC1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- Policy FC1.1: Mid Suffolk's approach to delivering sustainable development
- Policy CS1: Settlement hierarchy
- Policy CS4: Adapting to climate change.
- Policy CS5: Mid Suffolk's environment

5. Neighbourhood Plan/Supplementary Planning Documents/Area Action Plan

5.1. None

6. Saved Policies in the Local Plans

6.1. Summary of saved policies in the Mid-Suffolk Local Plan adopted June 1998:

- Policy GP1: Design and layout of new developments
- Policy H16: Protecting existing residential amenity
- Policy T9: Parking standards
- Policy T10: Highway consideration in developments

7. The Principle of Development

- 7.1. The development would be within the settlement boundary of the Town and policies encourage economic growth subject to there being no detrimental material impact to warrant refusal. As described above the proposal will provide office facilities for local authority employees who are working around the district, including employees undertaking visits in the surrounding communities. This represents a new way of delivering local government services closer to the communities the Council supports.
- 7.2 Officers consider the proposal would give rise to clear public and social benefits, enabling local authority employees to work more effectively, with greater access to support the social and cultural well-being of communities. Further public benefits are considered to include economic benefits, albeit limited, arising from local authority employees utilising services and facilities in those localities and some environmental benefits can be envisaged by reducing the need for local authority employees to have to travel longer distances by car to access office facilities as required. By working closer in the community it is also likely that there will be greater opportunity to reduce requirements for the public travelling to meet officers at a more traditional central office location.
- 7.3 Given the wider concept and public benefits inherent in the touchdown concept approach to delivering the Councils services Officers consider the proposal would amount to sustainable development for the purposes of the Framework, whilst remaining consistent with Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy. Officers therefore consider the proposal is thereby acceptable in principle.

8. Site Access, Parking and Highway Safety Considerations

- 8.1 Policy T10 of the Local Plan requires the Local Planning Authority to consider a number of highway matters when determining planning applications, including; the provision of safe access, the safe and free flow of traffic and pedestrian safety, safe capacity of the road network and the provision of adequate parking and turning for vehicles. The Policy is supplemented by Policy T9 of the Local Plan, requiring proposals to provide areas of parking and manoeuvring in accordance with the parking standards adopted by the district.
- 8.2 The Suffolk County Council adopted parking guidance sets out that B1 uses, which include offices, would be expected to provide a maximum of 1 space per 30m². A development of that nature would therefore be expected to provide a maximum of 3 parking spaces.
- 8.3 There are three spaces potentially available, but it is acknowledged that there are concerns regarding residential amenity in terms of parking. The associated traffic disturbance has been considered and given the amenity benefits of keeping traffic out of Tacon Close it is considered that it would not be appropriate to require the provision of on site parking and to manage parking offsite. This is within the applicants gift as principal user for local government purposes.
- 8.4 Given the availability of public car parking within the town it is considered appropriate to rely upon public car parking to support this office.
- 8.5 In all the circumstances it is considered that the absence of on-site car parking would not cause unacceptable harm having regard to the planning merits in the round.
- 8.6 Officers consider that the proposal will inevitably result in some modest change to the existing activity within the environment of this space, attributed to the introduction of an office use in a largely residential area. Considering the nature of the use, with no noise intrusive operations or public visitors, and limited vehicular and pedestrian movements expected due to the limited number of employees attending the premises and with controlled hours of operation, the development proposed would not have a significant or unacceptable detrimental impact on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties. In broad terms the use would be similar, but as a local government office not completely alike, to a Class B1a office use which can be carried out in any residential area without detriment to the amenity of that area.
- 8.7 To ensure an acceptable safeguard of residential amenity for those neighbouring properties, Officers recommend conditions ensuring hours of operation be restricted to 08:00- 18:00 Monday – Friday and that the site be permitted for local authority office use only without public access.

9. Design and Layout [Impact On Street Scene]

- 9.1. No change to the external building is proposed.

10. Landscape Impact

- 10.1. None

11. Impact On Residential Amenity

- 11.1. Policy H16 of the Local Plan seeks to protect the existing amenity of residential areas. Paragraph 17 of the NPPF sets out several core planning principles as to underpin decision-taking, including, seeking to secure a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

- 11.2. The Councils Environmental Protection Team raises no objection to the proposal with respect to noise, odour, light and smoke. However, your officers do consider that the proposal will inevitably result in a change to the existing environment, attributed to the introduction of an office use in a largely residential area and it is acknowledged that objections have been received which highlight the impact upon residential amenity in Tacon Close.
- 11.3. It is appropriate to ensure a proper safeguard of residential amenity in delivering a “touchdown point” within available existing premises in close proximity to homes. To achieve this your Officers consider that parking in public car parking in the town would allow officers to attend with relative convenience and without undue disturbance to residents of Tacon Close. Furthermore the operating hours of the touchdown facility can be controlled to 0900 – 1800 hours which would help to safeguard morning amenity for residents to traditional office hours. Lastly it is appropriate to control the use to that “touchdown activity” described so that residents may have certainty that the use will operate as expected.
- 11.4. Whilst the touchdown office use will be evident to residents in the immediate vicinity it is considered that this local government use would be limited in nature, manageable by planning condition, and of clear public benefit to the wider community whilst effectively reusing an existing local authority asset. There would not be an unacceptable harm to local amenity having regard to the foregoing.

12. Details of Financial Benefits / Implications (S155 Housing and Planning Act 2016)

- 12.1. The change of use would alter business rates and the development is for Mid Suffolk. However, there are no material planning considerations in respect of these matters.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

13. Identification of any Legal Implications and/or Equality Implications (The Equalities Act 2012)

- 13.1. None

14. Planning Balance

- 14.1. When taken as a whole and as a matter of planning judgement, the proposal is considered to adhere to the development plan and represent sustainable development for the purposes of the NPPF. The NPPF states that development that complies with an up to date development plan should be approved unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case there are no material considerations that would indicate otherwise, the application is therefore recommended for approval, subject to conditions. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Corporate Manager for Growth and Sustainable Planning be authorised to grant Planning Permission subject to conditions including: -

- Time limit for commencement of development
- Approved plans
- Hours of operation to be 09:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday only.
- The development permitted shall be used solely as Local Authority office (without public access) and for no other use.