

Committee Report

Committee Date: 26 July 2017

Item No: 4

Reference: DC/17/02636
Case Officer: James Platt

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

Location: 1-8 School Close, Norton, Bury St Edmunds

Parish: Norton

Ward: Elmswell & Norton

Ward Member/s: Cllr Levantis & Cllr Mansel

Site Area: 0.0074 Hectares

Received: 08/06/2017

Expiry Date: 09/08/2017

Application Type: Full Planning Permission

Development Type: Change of Use

Environmental Impact Assessment: N/A

Applicant: Mid Suffolk District Council

Agent: N/A

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION

Defined Red Line Plan:

The defined Red Line Plan for this application is Site Plan received 8th June 2017. This drawing is the red line plan that shall be referred to as the defined application site. Any other drawings approved or refused that may show any alternative red line plan separately or as part of any other submitted document have not been accepted on the basis of defining the application site.

Plans and Documents:

The application, plans and documents submitted by the Applicant can be viewed online at www.midsuffolk.gov.uk via the following link:

<http://planningpages.midsuffolk.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal= MSUFF DCAPR 109833>

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:

This application is reported to committee as the application is on behalf of Mid Suffolk 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

This section details history, policies, advice provided, other legalisation and events that form the background in terms of both material considerations and procedural background.

History

1. None

Details of Previous Committee / Resolutions

2. None

Details of Member site visit

3. None

Details of any Pre Application Advice

4. Pre-application advice has been sought from the local authority, with Officers providing advice on validation requirements and the possible material planning considerations relevant to the proposal.

PART THREE – ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATION

Consultations

5. This is a summary of the consultation responses received.

Norton Parish Council- Make the following comments;

- The Parish Council has concern about parking that continues to be an issue in School Close, particularly with school buses using the Close.

Environmental Protection – Noise/Odour/Light/Smoke – No objection

Suffolk County Council – Highways – No objection

Representations

6. A third party representation has been received, comments are summarised below;
 - Building work at Norton Primary School will be undertaken between July – December 2017, it is expected that contractors will be using School Close to access the site.

The Site and Surroundings

7. The proposal site comprises a vacant common room building at School Close, Norton. The building was previously used in association with a 'category 1' sheltered housing scheme, however, the scheme has been reclassified as general needs housing, with the common room becoming redundant.
8. The proposal building is of single storey scale, with an approximate floor area of 74 square metres. An area of car parking lies to the immediate west of the proposal building.
9. The site is located within the Norton Settlement Boundary.

The Proposal

10. 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.
11. 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.
12. The applicant has confirmed that the touchdown points will not be available for meetings or appointments with the public and there will be no requirement for deliveries to be made to the site. Office peripherals will be taken to site as part of normal office operations.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

13. 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.

CORE STRATEGY

14. 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

SAVED POLICIES IN THE LOCAL PLAN

15. 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

Officer's Assessment

16. 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 an express authorisation, the names of any Member of the Council or local government body who has declared a conflict of interest are recorded.

Sustainability of the Proposal

17. Paragraph 197 of the NPPF states that in assessing and determining development proposals, local planning authorities should apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development, as outlined in paragraph 14 of the Framework, which should be seen as a golden thread that runs through the planning system.
18. Paragraph 7 of the NPPF identifies three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental considerations and indicates that planning should seek gains in relation to each element. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:
19. **economic role** – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy
20. The overall thrust of the policies contained within the development plan, when taken as a whole, present a presumption in favour of sustainable development (see Policy FC1 and Objectives of the Core Strategy Focussed Review).
21. Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy identifies a settlement hierarchy as to sequentially direct development, forming part of a strategy to provide for a sustainable level of growth. The Policy identifies categories of settlement within the district, with Towns representing the most preferable location for development, followed by the Key Service Centres, Primary then Secondary Villages.
22. Norton, for the purposes of Policy CS1, is identified as a Primary Village. The supporting Policy text identifies that Primary Villages are capable of limited growth where local need has been established, including employment, amenity, and community facilities.
23. 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.
24. 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.

25. Given the wider concept and public benefits inherent in the touchdown concept approach to delivering the Council's Service 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.

Design and Impact upon the Character and Appearance of the Area

26. Policy CS5 requires development to be of a high quality design that respects the local distinctiveness and the built heritage of Mid Suffolk, enhancing the character and appearance of the district.
27. Policy GP1 of the Local Plan states that proposals comprising poor design and layout will be refused, requiring proposals to meet a number of design criteria including maintenance or enhancement of the surroundings and use of compatible materials.
28. Paragraph 56 of the NPPF attaches great importance to the design of the built environment, stating that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development
29. The proposal comprises a change of use of the existing common room, with no external alterations proposed as part of the application. Officers thereby consider the contribution of the building to the character and appearance of the area would remain as existing. Furthermore, Officers consider the design of the proposal building appears suitable to accommodate the proposed use.
30. In conclusion, the proposal is considered to accord with the above policies.

Residential Amenity

31. Policy H16 of the Local Plan seeks to protect the existing amenity of residential areas.
32. 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.
33. The Councils Environmental Protection Team raises no objection to the proposal with respect to noise, odour, light and smoke.
34. 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.

35. To ensure an acceptable safeguard of residential amenity or 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.

Highway Safety

36. 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.
37. 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.
38. 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. The development would therefore be expected to provide a maximum of 3 parking spaces. The applicant has indicated that a total of 4 parking spaces will be available to serve the proposal, furthermore there appears some opportunity, albeit limited, for vehicles to park at points along School Close.
39. Officers consider that whilst the parking spaces proposed to serve the development exceed the maximum requirements set out in the County parking guidance, the number of parking spaces is sufficient to serve the intended short term “touchdown” nature of the operation of the site, having regard to the number of employees expected to occupy the site at any one time.
40. The Local Highway Authority raises no objection to the proposal.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

Planning Balance

41. When taken as a whole and as a matter of planning judgement, the proposal is considered to accord with the development plan and represent sustainable development for the purposes of the NPPF subject to suitable conditions. 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.
42. The application is therefore recommended for approval.

Statement Required By Article 35 Of The Town And Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015.

43. When determining planning applications, The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 requires Local Planning Authorities to explain how, in dealing with the application they have worked with the applicant to resolve any problems or issues arising.
44. In this case the Local Planning Authority have worked constructively with the applicant to address and resolve relevant planning issues.

Identification of any Legal Implications of the decision

45. It is not considered that there will be any adverse Legal Implications for planning consideration should the decision be made as recommended.
46. The application has been considered in respect of the current development plan policies and relevant planning legalisation. Other legislation including the following have been considered in respect of the proposed development.
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - The Equalities Act 2012
 - 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.

RECOMMENDATION

- (1) 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 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday only.
 - The development permitted shall be used solely as local government office (without public access) and for no other use.
 - Prior to the commencement of the use, four parking spaces as located on the parking plan in blue shall be made available and thereafter maintained free of obstruction except for parking for sole use of the office use approved.