

Building Conservation Group Consultation Document

File Ref: 17/02316/1
 Date: 09/11/2017
 Planning Officer: TA
 Address: The Gables, High Street, Barley, Royston, SG8 8HY
 Subject: Residential development of eight dwellings, garages, parking and landscaping. New access road, car park for existing surgery, relocation of existing electricity substation and double garage and store attached to existing garage for 'Chadwick'.

Building Conservation Comments:

This site lies wholly within the Barley Conservation Area (a Designated Heritage Asset for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 12 of the NPPF). To the east of the application are two listed buildings (White Post & 1-3 Sells Close Cottages). The Gables is a modern dwelling set back some distance from the High Street but not as far back as other properties such as Sells Close House, Foxacre and two properties (Wreay and Hanaper) both accessed off Hanaper Drive.

I previously commented on 25/09/2017 under ref: 17/00638/1PRE to which I raised significant concerns. My comments take into account Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Policies SP13 and HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016) are relevant in terms of my consideration of the above scheme. Public consultation on the Council's Submission Local Plan has been completed and the Council submitted its Local Plan to the Secretary of State for Examination on 9 June 2017. Therefore the Council is at an advanced stage of plan preparation and as such significant weight can be attributed to the emerging Local Plan and the policies contained within it. I have also taken into account Section 12 of the NPPF, in particular the following:

131. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.

134. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

I have also considered the Council's Design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) adopted July 2011 providing selective extracts thereof.

253. The village has developed either side of several roads and lanes, meaning that the pattern of development is sporadic with areas of open space in between clusters of houses.
Sense of Place

258. Barley has a unique sense of identity as development has occurred sporadically on the edges of the village over time, creating an open feel. Infill has largely been resisted, meaning that areas such as Smith's End Lane and Pudding Lane have retained a rural feeling even though they are part of the village. It is the sense of intimacy associated with these area which, when linked together form the character of Barley.

Design Principles

261. The design principles for Barley are:

- Infill that detracts from the open nature of the village should be resisted
- Views and gateways in and out of the village are an important feature and should be maintained and enhanced.

As stated previously there is very limited development in-depth on the west side of the High Street and the application site is primarily based upon an amalgamation of garden land at The Gables and an adjacent paddock which, together, represent a clear transitional area from village fringe to rural countryside. The perception of entering or moving towards the countryside is heightened when walking west along the sunken lane on the north side of the site and Plots 1-4 (incl) will certainly have an impact upon this perception. It is acknowledged, however, that the topography is such that there would be no clear views across the site from the sunken lane unless one climbs the steep bank on either side. The village has a strong rural character and that the landscape setting is more influential at the fringes. I previously stated that the characteristics of this village are that i) development is principally that of tight to the pavement and that ii) development on rear plots is not only a C20 phenomena but also a relatively infrequent feature of the settlement. The importance of open land to the north and west of White Posts which lies within the conservation area and contributes to its character and appearance, should not be understated. I appreciate that the paddock and similar land at the rear of High Street properties perhaps has limited historic significance and even if the conservation area boundary had been drawn tighter to the High Street properties this land would still command an important role in terms of the conservation area's setting.

It is my view that whilst the density of development would be broadly similar to that of the surrounding area, this low density development would not echo the settlement pattern in the area, which at this point is very much frontage development or, in the case of The Gables and Sells Close House are set further back from the road but these are individual properties and not a cul-de-sac as proposed. Apart from the views into the application site from the existing surgery access, there are no direct views into the site from the High Street, however, I have also considered the potential impact of the proposed development from the rear garden at White Posts. There are a number of mature trees at the rear of White Posts, the tops of which can be seen from the High Street, and the sense that White Posts is at the edge of the village is realised when looking west from the rear garden where fields beyond the conservation area form the ridge line in the distance.

House types

The 8 dwellings are as follows:

- Plots 1, 2 and 3 (all 2 beds)
- Plot 4 (5 bed but this could easily be modified to provide maybe up to 8 bedrooms - if 4 bedrooms are achievable in the roof space!)
- Plot 5 (very large 3 bed)
- Plots 6, 7 and 8 (all 2 beds but study could easily be a third bedroom)

I have previously raised an 'in-principle' objection to developing this site but I appreciate that the planning balance test will be left to the case officer to report on. First and foremost, however, the undeveloped space between proposed units 4 and 5 would be susceptible to a development proposal in the future should this scheme be granted planning permission. I have previously suggested at the pre-application stage as to how the site may be reconfigured to address this concern and **I only offer the**

comments below with regard to individual house types if the case officer is minded to recommend approval.

Plots 1 and 2 - drawing no.396x31

This pair of semis appears to be slightly extruded and would, in my opinion, benefit from a reduction in length. This could be achieved by some minor reconfiguration to the layout.

Plot 3 - drawing no. 396x31

A reasonable house type which would not necessarily require modifications.

Plot 4 - drawing no 396x32

In my opinion, this substantial house would appear incongruous alongside the adjacent house types and will have, I suggest, a significant impact upon the character and appearance of the area and upon the adjacent lane. In my view, there is a good case to consider omitting this house type for reasons provided later in my response.

Plots 5 - drawing no.396x33

A barn-type dwelling with single storey L-shaped range attached. Situated behind 'The Gables' and quite an imposing building but if the planning balance case weighs in favour of development, it would be difficult to find such a building objectionable in design terms. Having said that, enlarging this plot and slightly reorientating the main building and detaching the garage building would lessen the impact of the built form.

Plots 6, 7 & 8 - drawing no. 396x15C

These units are relatively well-designed. If I have any concerns, it may be to consider its relocation on the site and to perhaps omit the central dormer to the rear of Plot 8. I have significant concerns regarding the potential pressure for the space between Plots 4 and 5 to become a plot in its own right and the combined impact of large dwellings on what would be plots 4, 5 and 6 does concern me. There is, in my view a good case to consider omitting the unit on Plot 4, relocating Plots 6,7 & 8 to effectively become Units 4, 5 & 6 and insert a single dwelling on Plot 8 (as suggested in sketch form at pre-app). I realise that the above would significantly close-off the top end of the site but the centre of the site would remain more open when compared with either the scheme submitted late last year or that now under consideration. Furthermore, the mature tree towards the centre of the site appears to dominate Plot 6 and this area could be a useful 'green space' that would include the mature tree as a focal point.

Recommendation

This tranche of open land can be appreciated not only from the rear of White Posts (grade II listed) and from the rear of The Gables and the surgery but also from the sunken lane to the east. In my view, the fact that the proposed housing would be located towards the edge of the conservation area and at the rear of properties on the High Street does not diminish the importance of this space behind the existing buildings. It is fair to say that the site is not particularly prominent from the highway, nevertheless, its undeveloped and rural nature can be appreciated from here and acts as a reminder of the conservation area's relationship with the countryside. It is considered that the principle of residential development on this site would harm the character and appearance of the Barley Conservation Area where development in depth behind frontage properties (such as that of Greenbury Close Off London Road) is the exception rather than the norm and where the existing paddock in particular provides a distinctive transitional edge-of-settlement role.

By reason of the number of dwellings (8no.) together with a combination of size and siting, these dwellings would give rise to an 'engineered' and rather building dominated character rather than a naturally amorphous development at this end of the High Street. The development will have a deleterious impact upon the 'open' verdant character of this part of the Barley Conservation Area. Whilst the development will occasion limited harm to the setting of 'White Posts', it will harm the perception that this is an edge-of-village transitional area particularly when walking away from the village and into open countryside from the sunken 'green lane' permissive path.

states that the Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment and that a positive strategy will be pursued for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through: a. Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting.

I raise an **OBJECTION** on the basis that the proposal will harm the special character of the Barley Conservation Area and to a lesser extent, the setting of 'White Posts' a grade II listed building, therefore, will fail to satisfy the provisions of Sections 72 and 66 respectively of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. I conclude that the scheme falls short of meeting the aims of Policy SP13 or indeed the aims of Paragraphs 131, 132 and 134 of the NPPF. This is, in my opinion a Paragraph 134 case rather than a Paragraph 14 case i.e. that specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted. Although the degree of harm is considered to be less than substantial, the harm to the Barley Conservation Area must, however, be considered in light of the Framework which is a material consideration.

The Framework clearly sets out the need to address 'less than substantial harm' in a balanced manner against benefits associated with such schemes and I reiterate that it would be for the case officer to assess this harm against any perceived public benefits derived from this development. Paragraph 132 of the Framework sets out that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, '*great weight*' should be given to the asset's conservation. The harm to the significance of Barley Conservation Area can be considered '*less than substantial*' for the purposes of paragraph 134 of the Framework. Nevertheless, even harm that is 'less than substantial' still represents a harmful impact to the conservation of this heritage asset.

Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer