

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 18/02299/FP

Date: 26/11/2018

Planning Officer: TA

Address: The Gables, High Street, Barley

Subject: Erection of 10no. residential dwellings and provision of car parking area with all associated landscaping and ancillary works (as a revision to application 17/02316/1 approved on 30/05/18) (as amended by drawings received 8th November 2018).

I previously commented under ref: 17/00638/1PRE for 9 dwellings (top left image below) followed by two iterations under ref: 17/02316/1 for the following: *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'.*



The top right image was superseded by the bottom left image under ref: 17/02316/1 whilst bottom right is the current proposal. Whilst my responses to all four iterations has been consistent and I believe - justified, the same could not be said of the applicant, who has flipped from one scheme to another, persistently 'testing' the Authority on what it considers to be an appropriate level of development on this site

and with no convincing and consistent justification given, in particular, for the latest iteration.

My first reaction is that it is very disappointing having to respond to the latest scheme which is not only a 25% increase in the number of units when compared with the recent approval but in the case of Plot 4, reintroduces a house type in position which was resisted and re-negotiated as part of the approved scheme.

This site lies wholly within the Barley Conservation Area (a Designated Heritage Asset for the purpose of applying the aims of Section 16 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. 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.

I have also taken into account Section 16 of the NPPF, in particular the following:

192. *In determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*
- a) *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
 - b) *the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
 - c) *the desirability of new development making a **positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness**.*
193. *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** (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.*
194. *Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require **clear and convincing justification**.....:*
196. *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, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.*
200. *Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, **to enhance or better reveal their significance**. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.*

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. Whilst it may be argued that the paddock and similar land at the rear of High Street properties has limited historic significance, 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. I have previously stated 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.

I appreciate that this Authority has now granted planning permission for 8 dwellings, however, I repeat my in-principle objection and I set out below what I consider to be significant differences between the current proposal and that previously approved, for instance:

- Essentially, plots 1, 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10 are the same dwelling types as intended in the pre-application scheme last year. Plot 5 in the current scheme is essentially the relocated dwelling type for Plot 7 in the approved scheme, whilst Plots 6, 7 and 8 are mentioned below.

- I have consistently raised an objection to the house type on Plot 4, being a substantial 5-bedroom house, which together with the associated garage would introduce a built form close up the sunken path to the north.
- The approved scheme included a well-designed terrace of three and an open space right at the heart of the scheme which is now replaced by Plots 4, 5 and 9. I appreciated the design merits of what is generally considered to be a well-designed terrace seen in the context of the open space. In my opinion, the combination of i) Plot 9 severely impacting upon this green space, ii) Plots 4 and 5 having a less positive impact when compared with approved Plots 4, 5 and 6 and iii) the open space being reduced in area and dominated by a pond and sandwiched between The Gables and Plots 9 & 10 with approximately 1m clearance either side of the pond, means that the scheme's layout has been eroded and the green space would no longer play such a positive role in place shaping. Furthermore, introducing a second property on this side of the access road (Plot 9) reinforces the streetscene reducing rather than reinforcing the applicant's suggestion that this is a loose-knit development. Whilst the substitution of approved Plots 4, 5 and 6 with Plots 4 and 5 could be said to be more 'loose-knit', the combination of house types for Plots 4, 5 and 6 in the current proposal would lead to a less coherent form of development in comparison.



- The previously approved Plot 7 is the same build type as the now proposed Plot 5 and was approved as a barn-like building on this corner plot and to the west of The Gables. However, the new building on approved Plot 7 would be a two-storey flint building with facing brick details and slate roof and is described in the supporting documentation as a 'granary'. In my experience, I have never seen a three-dwelling conversion scheme masquerading as a 'granary' of the size and form suggested. The combination of house types would harm the character and appearance of the conservation area.



The applicant states at 1.3 of the DAS that

*“Following the grant of permission the scheme has been revisited and the proposal would make more efficient and effective use of the site without undermining its character and appearance. The development seeks to create a more **cohesive ‘historic farmstead’ arrangement**, with a mix of dwelling sizes and designs. The provision of two additional dwellings would increase the social benefit to be delivered by this development.”*

At 3.1 of the DAS it states that

*“The proposal is to create a development of ten houses, the design and layout of which recognises the edge-of-village location, and therefore proposes a low-density scheme with **generous spacing between buildings** and green space within the site. The development would be **loose-knit**, ensuring that **countryside views would be retained** through gaps across the land.”*

At 3.4 of the DAS it states

*“The design and layout follows the pattern of an historic farmstead, and is of a **style typically found on the edges of rural villages**. In this context, the dwellings on approach into the development would have the appearance of **a group of ‘farm workers’ cottages leading up to the ‘farmhouse’ and its associated ‘barn’ and ‘granary’**. Although the approved dwellings are well-designed in themselves, this grouping would appear more cohesive as a result of the identifiable design concept.”*

At 5.21 of the DAS it states the following

*Guideline 2 (Design and Layout) – the scheme has been designed as a **loose-knit group to replicate a traditional farmstead**, typical of a rural area and avoiding “urban fringe problems”. The main ‘farmhouse’ would be located at the rear of the site, with **its functional ‘granary’ and ‘barn’** appearing as conversions into dwellings. Although the granary would contain 3 units, it has been designed as a single unit to reflect the typical scale of a working historic farm building. The dwellings either side of the driveway have been designed as traditional cottages, on approach to the ‘associated’ farm. The high quality attractive designs would be acceptable in visual, functional and social terms. In accordance with the guideline, the dwellings would be grouped in an informal and smallscale cluster. The arrangement, with a central shared access and turning area, would allow for passive surveillance and would reduce the potential for crime.*

This is anything but a traditional farmstead group. Firstly, Plots 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10 create a streetscene when entering the site from the east, whilst Plots 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 are set in line and use a full range of wall and roof materials (Plot 4 – rendered with tile roof, Plot 5 – weatherboarded and tiled, Plots 6, 7 and 8 – flint and yellow stock brick with facing brickwork details and slate roof). This is an amalgam of forms and appearance that is anything but representative of a traditional farmstead grouping and would have an erosive quality resulting in harm to character and appearance of the conservation area (just need to look down the road at Lower Farm Cottages and Lower Farm Barns in terms of a more traditional farmstead group).

Recommendation

Policy SP13 the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Proposed Submission, October 2016) 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 192, 193, 194, 196 and 200 of the NPPF. 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. My reasons are as follows:

Reason 1

By reason of the number of dwellings (10no.) together with a combination of their size, siting and appearance, the proposal would not result in a *'more cohesive'* and *'loose-knit group'* that would *'replicate a traditional farmstead'* as suggested in the supporting documentation. Rather, the number of dwellings, the eclectic assemblage of house types, the streetscene created by Plots 1, 2, 3, 9 and 10 and the linear arrangement of Plots 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 would create anything but a traditional farmstead grouping. Even though a farmstead group is not essential, the proposal would give rise to an incoherent and 'engineered' arrangement that would not be a naturally amorphous development at this end of the High Street and would not make a positive contribution to local character and would actually harm the character and appearance of the Barley Conservation Area. 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. 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.

Reason 2

Under application ref: 17/02316/1, it was accepted that 8 units were necessary to deliver sufficient benefits to tilt the planning balance in favour of development. No convincing justification has been provided for the 25% uplift in development, thereby, falling short of meeting the aims of paragraph 194 of the NPPF, therefore, the scheme fails to satisfy the aims of paragraph 196 also.

Reason 3

Plot 9 would encroach upon an area that was defined as 'open space' under application ref: 17/02316/1 and which is located at towards the centre of the development. This space is considered to be an attribute in place shaping and ensures that to an extent, the verdant transitional character of this site, is retained. Plot 9 would not only serve to diminish the role of the open space but would also reinforce a streetscene when seen in the context of Plots 1, 2, 3 and 10 when entering the site. Both the diminished role of the open space and the increase in density will erode the 'loose-knit' character of the development which the applicant is keen to promote and would harm the character and appearance of the Barley Conservation Area.

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 193 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 196 of the Framework. Nevertheless, even harm that is 'less than substantial' still represents a harmful impact to the conservation of this heritage asset.

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