



Woodford Neighbourhood Forum

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Ms Jane Chase
Planning Officer
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Town Hall, Edward Street
Stockport
SK1 3XE

25th November 2019

Dear Ms Chase

Reference: DC/074866

Proposal: Change of use from A3 cafe/restaurant to C3(a) to create 2 residential dwellings. Demolition of the flat roof, single storey section toward Chester Road. Construction of extensions including a two storey block at the Chester Road end of the existing 2 storey section, extending toward Old Hall Lane and a first floor extension on top of the single storey block at the south end of the existing building. Change roof from the current mono-pitch to a double pitch. External works to provide parking, external amenity spaces and outbuildings.

Location: 547 Chester Road, Woodford, Stockport, SK7 1PR

As a consultee, Woodford Neighbourhood Forum would like to make comments on the above planning application, which raises complex issues and concerns. We have identified relevant planning policies and have assessed this application against them. We have concluded that this planning application is in conflict with a number of national and local policies and we have made suggestions for alternatives that would achieve compliance. The Appendix contains background notes on policy which were helpful to us in assessing this application.

Issues and Concerns

- The site of the application occupies a very prominent position in a semi-rural part of the village. Therefore it has a high potential to affect its character.
- It is close to Woodford Church and the Lychgate, which are Grade II listed buildings, and to the Davenport Arms, which is a building that adds to the character of the village. Any proposal should not have an adverse impact on these key features.
- The application proposes a change of use from an employment use (restaurant) to two dwellings (residential). We have not seen submitted evidence to show that a business use is no longer viable.
- The application proposes to replace commercial premises plus a flat with two large 4-bedroomed houses. This represents a change to the main use of the site as an employment use. It also represents a detriment to the residential amenity in the village arising from the scale of development proposed.
- The site lies within Green Belt, and is therefore subject to Green Belt policies in the NPPF and the saved policies in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan.

- The application proposes an increase in the footprint and volume of development, which have the potential to harm the openness of the Green Belt and the heritage setting.
- The site is on Old Hall Lane, which provides access to the Church Hall, Church Yard, Avro Golf Club and footpath 106HGB. These uses, involving cars and pedestrians should be taken into account when assessing the proposals. The width of the carriageway is restricted at times because the lane is used for car-parking when services are held at the Church. There is frequent traffic to and from the golf club.
- We have noted a number of errors and omissions in the application document including:
 - The submission makes no attempt to assess the current proposals against the following statutory saved policies in the Stockport Unitary Development Plan: GBA1.2, GBA1.5 and GBA1.6
 - Neither the Design and Access Statement, nor the Green Belt Assessment, accompanying this application refer to the Woodford Neighbourhood Plan, which now forms part of the Stockport Development Plan. There is reference to WNP COM3 in the Heritage Statement.
 - There are references to Cheshire East Council (at 2.1 of the Design and Access Statement) as the Local Planning authority. A list of planning applications from 1975 in Cheshire East Council is provided. However, as we know, from April 1974 Stockport Council has been the local planning authority for the Woodford area. Prior to that date, Woodford was a parish area within the former Cheshire County Council area. Some planning records prior to 1974 may be held by Cheshire East Council but it is unlikely these are relevant to the current application due to the passage of time and the more recent planning history of this site.
 - The planning submission material refers to the Stockport Local Plan and Local Plan Strategy. For example at 1.10 of the submitted Planning Green Belt Statement accompanying the application, it states: Recently adopted local policy (the Local Plan Strategy) has not set a figure but across other authorities a guidance figure of 30% has been considered appropriate. This sentence contains a number of errors which are outlined in the Appendix.

Assessment against relevant planning policies

We have identified the following relevant policies and have assessed this application against them. A summary is provided below and further notes on the policy background are to be found in the Appendix.

1. NPPF

We have assessed the extent to which the application satisfies NPPF 2019 criteria, as set out in the two most relevant sections, namely chapters 2 and 13, as follows:

1.1. Chapter 2 Achieving sustainable development

The new NPPF 2019 is explicit that sustainability is achieved through the plan-making process and by the application of the NPPF as a whole.

Paragraph 7. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of

sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Assessment: As this application proposal is a hybrid application for change of use of buildings and land as well as new development to create a larger single building, all elements have to be considered together as one development. That then creates a mismatch between the degree of details submitted for the construction components (which have substantial amounts of detail in the submission) and the very limited information regarding the proposed change of use of land and buildings which has little if any relevant information attached to the planning submission.

Paragraphs 10 and 11. So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. (see Appendix)

Assessment: The basis for any decision to refuse this application has to be based on item (d)(i) of paragraph 11f. The Framework seeks to protect areas or assets of particular importance and this provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed. The site of the application has been an essential part of the Greater Manchester Green Belt for more than 30 years. In terms of affected assets, these include the Green Belt as an asset by reason of inappropriateness and other harm, specifically the permanent loss of openness and encroachment into countryside that would result and the potential adverse impacts on the setting of the adjacent listed buildings (Christ Church and Lych Gate) and the Davenport Arms, as a feature of interest.

Paragraph 12. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making.

Assessment: Any decision to refuse planning permission for this development should be based on the relevant policies in the Development Plan as referred to in the decision notice. In addition, as both the areas of Green Belt and heritage assets are permanent aspects of the local Woodford area that should itself also carry some weight in decision making.

1.2. Chapter 13. Protecting Green Belt land

Paragraph 143 states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Assessment: Residential development by the construction of two large new dwellings comprises inappropriate development.

NPPF paragraph 144 confirms that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Assessment: Very special circumstances have not been addressed in the planning submission. It is not considered there are any such circumstances that would be applicable to the scale of development proposed in this area of Green Belt.

2. Stockport Unitary Development Plan 2006

The submission fails to address any of the three specific policies for the Green Belt, all of which the proposed development would conflict with.

GBA1.1 Extent of Green Belt, which sets out the areas of Stockport Borough to continue to lie within the Greater Manchester Green Belt in the UDP and also identifies which other policies in the UDP would apply over the area of Green Belt defined on the Proposals Map.

Assessment: The whole application site has lain within the Green Belt since the Greater Manchester Green Belt Plan was adopted following examination in 1984. The application proposal therefore lies wholly within the Green Belt.

GBA1.2 Control of development in Green Belt, which presumes against the construction of any new buildings in the Green Belt unless the proposal lies within a list of four exceptions set out in earlier Government guidance

Assessment: None of the specified exceptions in GBA1.2 apply to the proposed development. There is therefore a clear conflict with this policy.

GBA1.5 Residential development in Green Belt, which makes it clear that new residential development is not normally acceptable in the Green Belt. The policy clarifies that minor domestic development and certain forms of residential use may be acceptable and not in conflict with the purposes of Green Belt policy.

Assessment: The proposed development proposes to convert and extend a restaurant and accompanying flat to two new dwellings. The scale and type of development proposed in the application proposal does not meet any of the criteria set in GBA1.5, and there is clear conflict with this Saved policy. No special circumstances have been set out which justify the size and amount of residential development proposed. The development conflicts with this policy.

GBA1.6 Re-use of buildings in the Green Belt, which sets out six potential circumstances in which the change of use or conversion of buildings of permanent and substantial construction may be permitted.

Assessment: The proposed development proposes to convert and extend a restaurant and accompanying flat to two new dwellings. The scale and type of development proposed in the application proposal does not meet any of the criteria set in GBA1.6, there is clear conflict with this Saved policy. No special circumstances have been set out which justify the size and amount of residential development proposed. The development conflicts with this policy.

3. LDF Core Strategy/Development Management policies

CS1 Sustainable development

SD-1: Creating Sustainable Communities, which states that development demonstrating the creation of Sustainable Communities will be given favourable consideration so long as it is in compliance with other development plan policies.

Assessment: There will be some components of the application proposals which may support sustainable communities. However, the application site is located within the rural area of Stockport with limited local facilities and the development would not be in compliance with many Development Plan policies particularly those relating to the Green Belt policies. Therefore the development cannot comply with policy SD-1.

CS2: Housing provision, which is a Core CS Policy, and states that a wide choice of high quality homes will be provided to meet the requirements of existing and future Stockport households. The focus will be on providing new housing through the effective and efficient use of land within accessible urban areas, and making the best use of existing housing.

Assessment: The application site does not lie within an urban area but rather an area on the periphery of the urban area which has a statutory definition of land in Green Belt. Neither is the site located within a sustainable location based on other policies set out in the Core Strategy and any analysis of local transport. Any new development should maximise support for sustainable transport solutions including multi-mode use to include cycle and rail. The additional housing aspect of the proposal would be contrary to and in conflict with policy CS2.

CS3 Mix of housing, which requires a mix of housing, in terms of tenure, price, type and size will be provided to meet the requirements of newly forming households and other sectors of the housing market.

Assessment: The proposed development would involve the loss of one flat and its replacement by two large semi-detached four bedroom houses leading to a loss of a smaller property and a gain of two large properties. There are therefore planning reasons which justify both retention of the smaller unit and additional provision of the larger units. In the Planning balance and given also the rural nature of the location is considered to be neutral in the Planning balance for this application.

CS4 Distribution of housing (includes three policies H-1, H-2 and H-3)

H-1: Design of Residential Development, which requires the design and build standards of new residential development to be of high quality, be inclusive, sustainable and contribute to the creation of successful communities. Proposals should respond to the townscape and landscape character of the local area, reinforcing or creating local identity and distinctiveness in terms of layout, scale and appearance and a range of other material factors.

Assessment: The details of the housing development submitted to accompany the planning application show a new development of two new substantial houses through rebuilding and based on the footprint of the existing restaurant and flat. The appearance and massing of the proposed houses are out of scale with the existing structure and would introduce additional and new elements, which do not respond to or reflect the local character of Woodford.

CS8: Safeguarding and improving the environment, which is a wide ranging one (nearly 30 pages of text in the Core Strategy) which concerns matters of the historic and natural environment giving emphasis to the distribution of greenspace and the role that planning policy contributes to a sustainable development approach in the Borough, particularly with regards to low carbon.

Assessment: Emphasis in CS8 is given to green infrastructure and strategic and local open space along with other environmental matters. Given the massing and appearance of the proposed dwellings in comparison to the existing building on site it can be concluded that CS8 is not met. CS8 does also emphasize the importance of the landscape character areas, the site lying within Green Belt. Given this emphasis, it can only be concluded that the application proposal is contrary to CS8 and therefore this weighs against the development in the Planning balance.

CS8 SIE-1: Quality Places, which emphasises the need for good quality design which is reflective of national policy. There are eight criteria listed which good quality design is required to meet.

Assessment: Policy SIE-1 is not addressed in the Design and Access Statement for this application. As no assessment has been undertaken, it is concluded that the policy is neutral in terms of the Planning balance for determining this application.

4. Woodford Neighbourhood Plan

Woodford Neighbourhood Plan 2019 became part of the Development Plan for Stockport Council in October 2019 after a successful referendum. In the view of the WNF, as a recently made Plan fully compliant with current national and Borough Planning policies, considerable weight should be given in the decision making process to the Neighbourhood Plan.

ENV2: Enhancing public rights of way

The enhancement of public rights of way throughout the Neighbourhood Area will be supported.

Assessment: Old Hall Lane provides access to the Church Hall, Church Yard, Avro Golf Club and footpath 106HGB. The lane is narrow and becomes even narrower when used for parking during Church services. Traffic to and from the golf club is frequent and the lane is also used by pedestrians. These uses should be taken into account when assessing the proposals.

ENV3: Protecting Woodford's natural features

The protection and/or enhancement of Woodford's natural features, (including those identified in the WNP), will be supported.

Assessment: There is some loss of vegetation within the curtilage proposed in the application, as identified in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment report accompanying the application. This includes removal of a non-native conifer hedge and non-native conifer tree (both Lawson Cypress) at the front of the curtilage. This is not in conflict with ENV3. However, some pruning is proposed of a native tree (oak) within an enclosure around an electricity substation adjacent to the property. No details have been provided with the

application as to the proposed mitigation of these works on natural features to accommodate the proposed development. There is therefore conflict with policy ENV3.

ENV4: Supporting diversity

The conservation, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity, including that found in open spaces, trees and hedgerows, in order to promote and support wildlife and other forms of biodiversity will be supported. Development should, where viable and deliverable, achieve net gains in biodiversity.

Assessment: No information is provided on this matter so compliance with ENV4 can be considered as neutral in the Planning balance.

The curtilage currently contains little vegetation. The drawings accompanying the application show sections of new hedge and 8 new trees at the front of the curtilage, which are welcomed and should be native species (see later).

EMP2: Loss of employment

Proposals for the change of use of employment land should be supported by evidence that the existing land use is no longer viable.

Assessment: No evidence has been submitted with the application to support the change of use and therefore there will be a loss of employment from the existing use as a restaurant to use and extensions for residential use. There is therefore clear conflict with policy EMP2.

COM3: Woodford Heritage assets

New development affecting a heritage asset, including the setting of the asset, should conserve or enhance the asset in a manner according to its significance.

Assessment: Although a Heritage Report accompanies the application, given the size of development and position of the proposal in the context of the setting of two heritage assets it is not considered that policy COM3 is met by the current proposals. There is conflict with COM3.

DEV1: Limited infilling

Summary of policy: Limited infilling comprising one or two dwellings will not be inappropriate within the Green Belt subject to respecting local character.

Assessment: The proposed two new dwellings would be sited on a previously developed. However, due to their scale and appearance it is not considered the development would comply with policy DEV1 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

DEV2: Replacement of existing dwellings

Development comprising the replacement of a dwelling should not be materially larger than the dwelling that it replaces and must have regard to local character and residential amenity

Assessment: The development proposes two new large dwellings which are in terms of both scale and appearance substantially larger than the existing building on site, the residential component of which is a flat. There is conflict with DEV2.

DEV3: Extensions to existing dwellings

Residential extensions should be in keeping with the host property and its surroundings. Development that would reduce an existing gap between properties should not create an incongruous “terracing” effect.

Assessment: There are two uses on the site at present. The application proposal is both an extension to the restaurant and the flat. Both extensions would change the appearance and character of this site by increasing the scale and massing to the detriment of this rural area. There would be a reduction in the space between this property and the Church on the other side of Old Hall Lane. There is conflict with DEV3.

DEV4: Design of new development

All new development in Woodford Neighbourhood Area should achieve a high standard of design. New residential development proposals should demonstrate how they respect and respond to the Neighbourhood Area’s rural character, to its ecology and to its landscape. Where appropriate and viable, the development of sustainable drainage systems, the retention and enhancement of landscape, wildlife and ecological networks and the achievement of high environmental and energy standards will be supported.

Assessment: The proposed development seeks to reflect some local design features, but the scale of development proposed would be out of keeping on this site, within the immediate setting of two listed buildings. The proposal will have an overbearing effect on the entrance to Old Hall Lane because the proposed buildings extend closer to the lane than the existing buildings and will be two-storey throughout, effectively reducing the gap between this property and the Church.

In the proposed location, the garage for house 1 would obstruct the view down Old Hall Lane from Chester Road.

The proposed new trees around the perimeter of the curtilage could also dominate the scene. They will need to be small species in order to avoid blocking the view of the Church from the Chester Road.

There is conflict with DEV4.

Summary

We believe that this planning application should be refused for the following reasons:

- The proposed development would fail to comply with chapters 2 Achieving sustainable development and chapter 13 Protecting Green Belt land of the NPPF 2019.
- The proposed development is contrary to relevant policies for Green Belt set out in the SUPD 2006 (GBA1.2, GBA1.5 and GBA1.6).
- The proposed development is contrary to the following Core Strategy parts of the Development Plan: CS1 Sustainable development including SD-1: Creating Sustainable Communities; CS2 Housing provision; CS3 Mix of housing; CS4 Distribution of housing Including H-1 Design of residential development and CS8 Safeguarding and improving the environment.
- The application fails to comply with relevant policies in the WNP: Environment (ENV2, ENV3), Community (COM3), Employment (EMP2), and Development (DEV2, DEV3 and DEV4).

Suggestions

We would like to put forward the following suggestions:

- A smaller development incorporating local design features would be more appropriate, provided that the change of use to residential use is fully justified.
- A smaller property would be in line with the results of consultation carried out by WNF during the preparation of the WNP, which showed that residents thought that smaller houses were needed in Woodford.
- Given the narrowness and multiple uses of Old Hall Lane, the application needs assessing from a highways perspective.
- If any problems with access to and from Old Hall Lane are predicted, a single dwelling could reduce these.
- New vegetation included to mitigate any losses and enhance biodiversity should include native species and species which help pollinators.
We would like to suggest mixed native species for the hedge, and small native species for the trees, such as Rowan. Rowan trees do not become enormous and so will not dominate the scene and they bear blossom and berries which are useful for pollinators and birds, respectively. These measures would support wildlife in the area and increase biodiversity on the site.

Yours sincerely,



Evelyn Frearson

On behalf of Woodford Neighbourhood Forum Management Committee