

Design and Access Statement to accompany the application for a proposed new house to be built on Stevenage Road, St Ippolyts, Hitchin, SG4 7PE

The applicant, Mr Blaksley (age 65) is the owner of the vacant plot to the immediate west of the adjoining Caleb's Cottage in which he currently lives whilst caring for his elderly mother of 93, who owns the cottage. Following the latter's inevitable death, Caleb's Cottage will need to be sold and, having been a local resident for most of his life, Mr Blaksley very much wishes to remain in St. Ippolyts. Not having an existing property of his own he now wishes to build for himself a small, single storey dwelling house upon the vacant plot for his own occupation after the death of his mother and the sale of Caleb's Cottage. Mr. Blaksley is unmarried and has no dependent children.

The subject site lies in the heart of St. Ippolyts, just off the village green and within the existing St. Ippolyts Conservation Area and which is itself within the local settlement boundary. See attached site plan and map.

Although the site is currently somewhat overgrown and laid to garden use, it is not a 'greenfield', virgin site and instead is best described as being 'brownfield'. As corroboration, the topsoil is only some 150mm deep in places and below which evidence of a former construction can be found.

Before being sold to and becoming the garden of Caleb's Cottage in the 1980's, the site was used as the carpark for the adjoining public house known as 'The Olive Branch' and which is now a private house. Prior to its use as a carpark there had previously been a thatched-style house on the site and for which there is photographic evidence, together with further and uncontroversial evidence of the building itself, as seen clearly on a map of the area dating from 1884.

Consequently and given the clear precedent of a previous dwelling, we consider it to be both ideally suited and entirely appropriate once again to have a dwelling house upon this site. (See attached photograph and map).

- The photograph is from 'A Parish Remembers; St. Ippolyts memories and photographs from 1900 -1950'. Supplied by St. Ippolyts Parish Council.
- The map is supplied by the National Library of Scotland; Hitchin, Hertfordshire, Sheet 12. Enlarged to show the site and its immediate neighbours.

Taking the D&A format from the CABE template, as follows:

The Site:

The site measures (approximately) 24m deep by 18m wide and is therefore 432 m² in area. The site slopes gently upwards towards the south and away from the road on its northern side. The site is open-fenced to the east, 6' larch-lap and laurel fenced to the south and tall, beech-hedged to the west. It is entirely private and not overlooked by any of the four abutting neighbours. There are a number of established shrubs and small trees already on the site and the majority of these will be retained.

The Proposal:

It is proposed to build a single storey, two-bedroom dwelling house using traditional materials and incorporating a highly energy-efficient design. The gross area of the proposed building will be 94m². The house will have off-road parking for one car and hardstanding for a visitor vehicle.

Density:

The site area is 432m² and the new house will be 94m². Including half the road (+3m) this provides a local density of 486m² (24+3 x 18). This in turn provides 20.6 houses per hectare which is a figure entirely acceptable for local density.

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NORTHGATE

Appearance:

The present aspect from the road is of an overgrown, vacant garden plot and the new dwelling has been designed to fit in favourably with the street scene; see drawing 04 . Being a feature of the site, it is proposed to retain most of the attractive hazel bushes to the front and also to plant new shrubs to replace those which are currently situated where the house is proposed to be built. The overall appearance of the new scheme is very attractive and blends in exceptionally well with both the local streetscape and the existing village scene.

Landscape:

The present quantity of trees and shrubs will be retained as far as possible and new planting will be reinstated within the plot to replace those few lost to the building work. The majority of the existing hazel bushes are to remain and which not only characterise the street frontage but also divide the site from the neighbouring 'Olive Branch' property. The large hedge to the front of the property will need to be cut back as required to allow access onto the site but this will be kept to the minimum necessary for the safety of both pedestrian and vehicular access. To the rear of the new house will be a private garden which is not overlooked by any other property or its windows.

Planning Issues:

As part of its plans to ease the current housing shortage the new Government is determined to see brownfield plots such as this site being re-used for residential purposes. Extracts from the Local Plan have been selected that would support this application.

Section 9 D1:

This deals with design and sustainability and lists eight issues with which any new development should comply. Without going into each one specifically, the proposed development complies with all of them and, in a very positive manner.

Essentially, the new house has been designed with the existing Conservation Area very much in mind, so as to produce an attractive contribution to the street scene. Additionally, the fabric of the building within the scheme incorporates the following characteristics:

- to a standard well beyond the requirements of the building regulations and approximately ten times more efficient than any of the existing and neighbouring houses.
- Rainwater will be disposed of by soakaways onsite and compliant with SUDS recommendations. Where practicable, there will also be the use of water storage butts.
- By its very nature the proposed house will be future-proofed as a single-storey dwelling suitable for elderly residents and also for those with mobility issues. The garden to the rear of the house also renders the property suitable to be occupied by a more youthful couple.
- 'Secure by Design' features to reduce the potential for crime in this area.
- Car-parking provision will remove any need to park on Stevenage Road. The parking bay shown on the plan is of the larger size now being recommended by Highways. With the additional hardstanding turning area, any vehicle using the onsite parking space will be able to enter and leave the site in a forward gear.

D3; Impact upon the Neighbours:

The proposed development will have a negligible (if any) impact upon the neighbouring properties and their occupants. Privacy will be maintained on all three sides by the existing fencing and hedging arrangements and the new dwelling will not be situated anywhere even close to the immediate neighbouring houses.

Section 4 policy 118 on the local plan ".....Sites in the most accessible locations will generally be expected to provide smaller units at higher densities" Such as we have here. Paragraph 119 asks for provision for older residents are provided in development schemes.

Accepting that infill development within an existing settlement is always controversial, I believe this scheme answers all the relevant planning issues pertaining to the Local Plan.

Furthermore, the proposed scheme will contribute visually to the village streetscape whilst providing Mr. Blaksley with suitable and local accommodation for his remaining years.

Finally, Mr Blaksley has since visited and spoken at some length with all five of the immediate neighbours and appraised them of his proposals. The overall reaction was entirely favourable and in three cases enthusiastic, together with encouraging comments on the design and layout of the proposed house. Mr. Blaksley has also spoken at length to the chair of the Parish Council (Mrs Pamela Skeggs) and she has not only voiced enthusiasm for the project but furthermore has also assisted with the supply of the photograph of the earlier dwelling upon the site. We are therefore not anticipating any significant objections to the proposal from local residents.

We commend this proposal to the Planning Department for its consideration.

Edmund Wright, Architect.