

North Hertfordshire District Council

Building Conservation comments

File Ref: 24/01371/FP

Date: 06/09/2024

Planning Officer: AHD

Address: Hillcrest and land at Tussocks, The Causeway, Therfield SG8 9PP

Subject: Erection of seven dwellings (4 x 3-bed and 3 x 4-bed) including creation of vehicular access off The Causeway, carport, parking, landscaping, and associated works following demolition of existing dwelling and outbuildings.

1.0 Recommendation

1.1 Await feedback to the matters raised.

1.2 The development would consolidate and to an extent urbanise this part of Therfield Conservation Area ['TCA']. It is noted that the applicant's heritage consultant has confirmed at 5.20 of the Heritage Impact Assessment ['HIA'] that:

"the less than substantial harm identified must be balanced against public benefits in line with the requirements of paragraph 202 of the NPPF. The proposals do not offer overt heritage benefits, but public benefits are identified within the Planning Statement accompanying the application and readers are directed there for a full summary." I concur with the view that there would be some harm but owing to some of the positive design changes made, the degree of harm is considered low on the harm continuum.

1.3 Subject to the applicant's response, I am likely to raise **NO OBJECTION**, taking the position that the development would on balance satisfy the provisions of Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the aims of paragraph 135 and Section 16 of the NPPF together with Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 - 2031.

2.0 Recent history

2.1 On 12 January 2024, I commented under ref: 23/02417/FP for 'Erection of 10 residential dwellings (1 x 2-bed, 7 x 3-bed, 1 x 4-bed and 1 x 5-bed) including creation of vehicular access, parking, landscaping, and associated works following demolition of dwelling and outbuildings' to which I registered an objection. The application was then withdrawn. Discussion continued and in response to an amended scheme, I emailed the case officer the following on 10 April 2024:

Considering the following:

- *Extending the gardens to Plots 1 and 2 rearwards but incorporating another dwelling to form a terrace of three properties (Plots 1-3).*
- *Omitting Plots 3 & 4 and replaced by a carport structure.*
- *Replacing Plots 5 & 6 with a house originally offered on Plot 1 and now relabelled Plot 4.*
- *Reverting to a pair of dwellings where Plots 8-10 are shown and now relabelled plots 6 and 7.*

- Including the parcel of land vacated by originally proposed Plots 7 & 8 within the garden grounds of Tussocks.
- Retaining a dwelling at Plot 5 to the north of the existing dwelling at Tussocks but with more landscaping space in front of the dwelling.

I am more comfortable with this proposal. Having said that, it would be disappointing, to say the least, if the dwellings on the site of the originally proposed Plots 7 & 8 were to be resubmitted at some further point in time.

I consider this to be a better handled scheme but on a slight note of apprehension, the car port to serve Units 1-3 and the retention of Plot 5 will, cumulatively, establish a hinterland of built form behind the frontage buildings. Whilst this goes against the establish grain of the area, I acknowledge the applicant's willingness to meet someway in the middle and the rearward gardens to Units 1-3 is a significant and welcome departure/concession from the original submission.

- 2.2 I agree with 1.6 of the HIA where it states that “of key importance is whether or not the proposals cause harm to the conservation area through eroding its values or detrimentally affecting its character and appearance”.



KV10: View from The Causeway adjacent to Fordham's terrace south towards the village green. This view shows a variety of boundaries within the conservation area including estate railing, formal hedges and soft margin planting, as well as the rural character of the road treatment only including short lengths of kerb.

- 2.3 I concur with 1.8 of the HIA where it states “The nearest listed building is located to the site is Elm House, located to the southwest (UID: 1102622). Following the site visit and through the application of professional judgement it is considered that this listed building is sufficiently distant from the application site and divided from it by both mature planting and the presence of intervening houses, that there is no potential for its significance to be affected by the proposals considered here”.

3.0 The Local Plan and NPPF

- 3.1 Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 as are the following paragraphs of the NPPF (2023 version):

- **200** (local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting)
- **203** (desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness),
- **205** (great weight should be given to the asset's conservation),
- **206** (clear and convincing justification), and
- **208** (harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use).

4.0 The Proposal

- 4.1 It is noted that the scheme has been reduced by three units which is a significant improvement overall, however, the HIA acknowledges that there remains some harm albeit less than substantial. However, paragraph 5.20 goes on by saying that this:

“..... must be balanced against public benefits in line with the requirements of paragraph 202 of the NPPF. The proposals do not offer overt heritage benefits, but public benefits are identified within the Planning Statement accompanying the application and readers are directed there for a full summary. In brief public benefits include the provision of new family homes within a sustainable location, through new family housing support for community facilities such as the school, public houses, community groups and clubs, biodiversity net gain and richer habitats provided as well as the benefit of employment throughout the development phase.”

- 4.2 The HIA then states at 5.21:

“Officers, including the conservation officer, were content that the current proposals are supportable in heritage terms and acknowledged the positive evolution of the scheme in response to officer concern on previous iterations.”

- 4.3 Whilst I am ‘on board’ generally with the latest scheme there are some matters for which I seek a response, and these are in no order of priority:

Housing mix including size of units 1, 2 and 3.

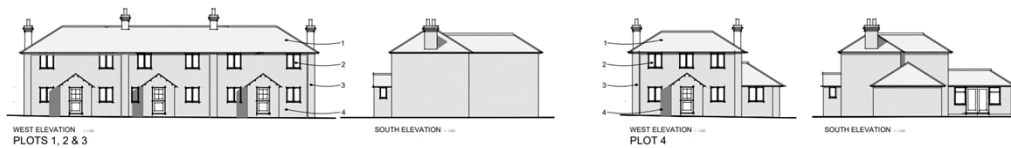
- 4.4 The previously withdrawn scheme included the following and it is noted that 80% were 2 or 3 beds.

Property No.	Property Type	Floor area (m ²)	Bedrooms	Parking spaces	Cycle spaces	Storey Number
1	Semi Detached	148 (1593sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
2	Semi Detached	148 (1593sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
3	Detached	62.5 (672sqft)	2	2	2 (In shed)	1
4	Detached	126 (1340sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	1.5
5	Detached	196 (2109sqft) Inc garage	4	2	2 (In shed)	1.5
6	Detached	286 (3078sqft)	5	2	2 (In shed)	2
7	Semi Detached	113 (1216sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	1.5
8	Semi Detached	113 (1216sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	1.5
9	Semi Detached	131 (1410sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
10	Semi Detached	131 (1410sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2

- 4.5 The current scheme provides the following where only 57% are 3-beds and there are no 2-beds.

Property No.	Property Type	Floor area (m ²)	Bedrooms	Parking spaces	Cycle spaces	Storey Number
1	End of Terrace	142 (1528sqft)	4	2	2 (In shed)	2
2	Mid Terrace	145 (1560sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
3	End of Terrace	142 (1528sqft)	4	2	2 (In shed)	2
4	Detached	152 (1636sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
5	Detached	219 (2357sqft)	4	2	2 (In shed)	2
6	Semi Detached	132 (1420sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2
7	Semi Detached	132 (1420sqft)	3	2	2 (In shed)	2

- 4.6 Whilst the distribution of dwelling size based on number of bedrooms is not itself a conservation matter, what is significant is the depth of the rear projections to units 1-3 (incl.). It is accepted that the discussions following the withdrawn scheme indicated rear additions, but the two-storey depth was shorter with what was anticipated to be single-storey additions to make up the ground floor accommodation. In other words, the two-storey rear projection depth for these units was expected to be broadly similar to Plot 4. Rather than creating a 3-bed unit flanked by 4-bed units it was anticipated that each unit would be a 3-bed with a generously sized rear bedroom.



- 4.7 The above point also impacts upon the rear elevation treatment where a continuous rear building line is created with broad connecting hipped roofs. A more sensitive handling of these elevations would result if the hipped ends were slightly narrower pulling the flank walls away from the rear windows on Plots 1 and 3. Furthermore, if the hipped ends were fully defined with recesses created to provide a space for what would be two downpipes (blue lines in image below), this would (to an extent) overcome the appearance of a continuous elevation.



- 4.8 The rear elevation of plots 1-3 above is somewhat underwhelming when compared with Units 6 and 7 below where there are no rear projections and more traditional fenestration.



Elevation treatment

- 4.9 The window treatment for plots 1 – 4 is disappointing. Whereas the other house-types display what appears to be vertically sliding sash windows (this can be conditioned), the windows for plots 1 – 4 have no glazing bars (although the image below is shown on drawing no. 478.10 Rev A and suggests something different).



2 - TIMBER FLUSH
CASEMENT WINDOWS

- 4.10 The improvements made to new Plot 5 when compared with the previous Plot 6 are welcomed and supported in design terms.



Carport serving Plots 1, 2 and 3

- 4.11 I have a couple of observation here:

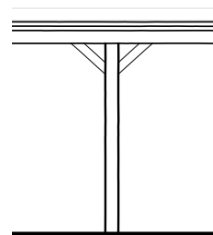
- With the building located on the rear boundary and with consideration for 'O' Class spread of flame (Building Regs), what is the facing material for this building. Drawing no. 478.10 Rev implies timber boarding but are we going to be asked to consider an alternative like Cedral boarding?
- Also, the design of this building will be enhanced if an open-eaves is adopted (exposed rafter feet) and the posts do have curved knee braces as suggested in the image below left and not as drawn below right – are the posts intended to be ground earth-fast (ground mounted) or on brick plinths?



5 - HORIZONTAL TIMBER
CLADDING IN BLACK



6 - TRADITIONAL OAK POSTS



Ecology

- 4.12 The omission of previous Units 7 and 8 is also welcomed, thereby, maintaining the setting to the rear of the School House (a positive building) and would ease significantly the potential impact of the scheme on the spacious quality around the pond where it is understood that the pond supports a medium sized breeding population of Great Crested Newts (GCN).
- 4.13 I previously stated that whilst not an ecologist I said that should a further proposal be submitted, it raises the question as to whether the area around the pond could be the focus of an environment project by creating a well-managed 'natural' area perhaps with meadow areas that could be a communal area centred on the pond feature and perhaps given over to a management company not only benefitting the occupiers of the new dwellings but also perhaps providing an accessible community 'eco hub' alongside the school? As before, I will not advocate this if this runs counter to ecological advice.



Mark Simmons
Senior Conservation Officer