

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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8 August 2024

Mr and Mrs Beale
1 The Drive
Blackmore End
St Albans
Hertfordshire
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Our Ref : 24/01387/PRE

Contact : Andrew Hunter
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Dear Mark

Site – 1 The Drive, Blackmore End

Proposal – One detached 4-bed dwelling

I refer to your pre-application submission in respect of the above site, I am writing to you following an examination of the information submitted and a site visit.

I would emphasise that this does not constitute a formal determination and is without prejudice to any subsequent formal planning application.

For your information the relevant government guidance and policies from the development plans are set out below.

Development site

The site is part of No. 1 The Drive, a detached two storey dwelling with a pitched roof on a corner plot. Its front and east side boundaries are largely comprised of trees and other vegetation, and other trees are within the site.

The locality has a semi-rural character, with open countryside to the east, and dwellings in other directions. The site is in the Category B village of Breachwood Green (as specified in Local Plan Policy SP2).

Relevant planning history

None.

Proposal

The erection of a detached 4 bed dwelling in the NE corner of the site, which would be to the east of the existing dwelling. Access to the new dwelling would be via a new crossover from Kimpton Road. The plans submitted do not include floor or elevations, and only a partial

block plan within the site area, therefore the commentary of the proposal below will be limited due to the limited amount of detail provided.

Consultation responses

Council Ecologist

The existing garden area appears to be tall grassland with trees and as such could have an ecological interest associated with it. As such the applicant is advised that any future planning application should be supported by an ecological appraisal. Particularly as some trees are proposed for removal. This would indicate any potential protected species interest on the site. Should such an interest be found it may be necessary to undertake further surveys to determine the level of use. **The results of these surveys and details of proposed mitigation would need to accompany an application.**

Additionally Biodiversity Net Gain would apply to the proposal so there would be a mandatory requirement to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. As such a completed Statutory Metric calculation will need to be provided.

Relevant policies

NPPF

Generally and specifically: 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes; 9 – Promoting sustainable transport; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places; 15 - Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031:

Strategic Policies

Policy SP1 Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire
Policy SP2 Settlement hierarchy and Spatial Distribution
Policy SP6 Sustainable transport
Policy SP8 Housing
Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability
Policy SP12 Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Landscape

Development Management Policies

Policy T1 Assessment of transport matters
Policy T2 Parking
Policy D1 Sustainable design
Policy D3 Protecting living conditions
Policy D4 Air quality
Policy NE2 Landscape
Policy NE4 Biodiversity and Geological Sites

Discussion

The main material considerations relating to this concern whether the principle of the development is acceptable, character and appearance, impacts on neighbour amenity, future living conditions, access and parking, landscaping and trees and biodiversity.

Principle

The site is located within the Category B village of Blackmore End where Local Plan Policy SP2 supports infilling development which does not extend the built core of the village.

An application for a new dwelling on land adjacent to No. 51 Beech Way (reference 24/00797/FP), the adjoining plot to the south of the site, considered that this plot was in the core of the village. That site was considered to be in the core of the village as Blackmore End is dominated by housing with no easily defined core, and as Beech Way is in a central location. Given the site for this pre-app proposal is near that site, it is considered that the pre-app site is also in the core of the village.

Infilling is defined in the Local Plan as:

The development of a relatively small gap between existing buildings.

The dwelling refused under 24/00797/FP was considered to be infilling, which would have had dwellings on three sides. The dwelling proposed for the pre-app would have dwellings to its west and north, with a larger distance to the closest dwelling to the south. As this southern dwelling is visible from Kimpton Road where the proposed new entrance would be, it is considered that the proposal would be infilling. The proposal is considered acceptable in principle.

Character and appearance

As stated above, no floor or elevation plans of the new dwelling have been provided, and what appears to be a partial block plan where the building line is shown. It is not therefore possible to provide any comments in relation to the design of the dwelling. The size of the dwelling can be inferred to be two storeys as it would have four bedrooms, however detailed comments on the size of the dwelling can't be provided as such information hasn't been provided.

The main assessment is whether a two storey 4 bed dwelling could be accommodated satisfactorily within the site, and how it could affect the character and appearance of the wider locality.

The area of the site identified for the new dwelling is a small part of the plot of the existing dwelling, and is close to the east side of the garage part of 1 The Drive. It is considered that a four bed dwelling would be likely to have a large footprint and overall size in relation to the size of the site, and would be in close proximity to 1 The Drive.

In addition to the size of the dwelling being likely to be large in relation to the site, the site would also need to provide space for the vehicular access, a minimum of two parking spaces with turning, acceptable private amenity space, bin and bike storage, and spacing around trees.

It is not considered that the site for the dwelling would be sufficiently large to accommodate the dwelling itself and everything ancillary to it that would be required for the site to function as a new residential unit. A new dwelling would be likely to appear cramped within the site, and it could potentially be described as overdevelopment of the site. These impacts would be further exacerbated by the new dwelling being likely to be close to 1 The Drive and large trees in the site.

A material consideration is recently refused planning application 24/00797/FP for a new dwelling at No. 51 Beech Way, which was a three bedroom dwelling on a larger site than for your pre-application submission, which was refused for 3 reasons including:

By reason of its restricted plot size and limited useable garden area the proposed dwelling would appear cramped and an overly urban form of development that would be at odds with the prevailing pattern of development. As such the proposed development would be an overdevelopment of the site and harmful to the character and appearance of the area contrary to Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan 2011 - 2031 and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023).

The site for that dwelling was approx. double that of the site chosen for your proposal. The issues stated in that reason for refusal would be considered likely to be applicable to a planning application for your site.

A new dwelling of the size proposed would also be considered to appear 'squashed in' on the site for the reasons above and is not considered in keeping with local character of dwellings that appear more spacious within their sites. A smaller dwelling is likely to have similar issues as set out in this letter, and may also be unlikely to be supported if a planning application was submitted.

Overall, the size of the site and constraints within it and around it are considered too small to accommodate a 4 bed dwelling satisfactorily. A new dwelling here would also be considered to appear out of character with the locality for the reasons above.

Neighbour amenity

Due to the location of the site, a new dwelling in that location would not be considered to affect the amenity of dwellings that share a boundary with the larger site of 1 The Drive. The new dwelling would also be separated from dwelling No. 48 Kimpton Road to the north by road The Drive and potentially obscured by trees and vegetation, and would be considered unlikely to harm the amenity of that dwelling. The impacts could only be conclusively determined from detailed plans, but on the basis of the above, a new dwelling is unlikely to be harmful to amenity.

Future living conditions

This is relevant to the new dwelling, and to existing dwelling No. 1 The Drive.

As stated above, the new dwelling would be 4 bedrooms, and would be on a small plot with some large trees on it. It is not known how much private amenity space the dwelling would have, however this would be restricted by the footprint of the dwelling, parking areas, and retained trees. It may be the case that the amount of private amenity space would be of an insufficient size and quality for the occupants of the dwelling.

The main habitable rooms should receive acceptable outlook, light and privacy. Room sizes should also comply with the March 2015 Technical housing standards. It is not possible to determine if this would be the case from the limited information submitted, but would be a matter for consideration should a planning application be submitted.

The development of the new dwelling would result in some loss of the rear garden of No. 1 The Drive, however due to the size of the site a sufficient rear garden would remain.

No. 1 The Drive has a triple garage with first floor roof accommodation which would be close to the site, and potentially the new dwelling. The garage has rear windows which the dwelling would be likely to be visible from, however as the garage is not a habitable room this does not raise concerns.

The first floor accommodation above the garage has three dormers. No. 1 The Drive dates from a 2004 planning permission, which approved the rooms being served by the dormers and facing the proposed dwelling as a bathroom, living room, and bedroom. The pre-application statement states that all three windows would be made obscure. As one room served by them is a bathroom, and as the other two rooms have similar dormers on the other side that would not be affected by the dwelling, it is not considered that the rooms of No. 1 would be adversely affected.

Due to the small size of the site, the new dwelling is likely to be close to the new boundary with the remaining part of the rear garden of 1 The Drive. Upper floor rear windows of the dwelling may harmfully overlook the remaining rear garden, which would be a concern that would weigh against a planning application.

Parking and highways

The new dwelling should have two parking spaces, and one covered cycle space, to meet the minimum Council standards and to be acceptable. Visitor parking is not considered to be required. The site is potentially large enough to provide these, and should preferably also include a turning area so that vehicles could leave the site in a forwards gear. Existing parking provision for 1 The Drive would not be affected.

With regards to the highways impacts arising from the proposed access arrangement, Hertfordshire Highways provide a paid pre-application advice service to receive confirmation of the suitability of proposed projects and I would encourage using this service should you choose to proceed with an application for planning permission to determine if the proposed access is suitable.

Hertfordshire Highways would be consulted on any new application submitted, and their comments would be given significant weight in the determination of an application. The proposed new access will be assessed as to whether its location is appropriate, as well as visibility to be provided, proposed surfacing materials etc. I consider it unlikely that the increase in traffic generation would be harmful.

Landscaping and trees

No details of hard and soft landscaping have been provided. An application should provide details of the main areas of each, and if approved, further details may be required by condition. There may not be space for much soft landscaping and planting due to the size of the dwelling and required hardstanding, which is considered indicative of the small size of the site.

The site has extensive tree coverage in its northern half, and also has numerous trees near its south boundary. Any application to submitted should included a full detailed tree survey, setting out which trees are existing and which would be removed/pruned. It would be preferable to retain the larger trees on the north and east edges of the site as these are larger, more prominent, and make a positive contribution to the character of the area.

Due to the small size of the site, there may be future pressures from occupants of the dwelling to lop or fell some or all of the trees to reduce potential building damage/overshadowing, and/or impacts on the garden and parking areas of the site.

Ecology and biodiversity

The Council's Ecologist has provided the following comments:

*The existing garden area appears to be tall grassland with trees and as such could have an ecological interest associated with it. As such the applicant is advised that any future planning application should be supported by an ecological appraisal. Particularly as some trees are proposed for removal. This would indicate any potential protected species interest on the site. Should such an interest be found it may be necessary to undertake further surveys to determine the level of use. **The results of these surveys and details of proposed mitigation would need to accompany an application.***

Additionally Biodiversity Net Gain would apply to the proposal so there would be a mandatory requirement to deliver 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. As such a completed Statutory Metric calculation will need to be provided.

The first paragraph from the Ecologist states an ecological appraisal/survey should be submitted with an application to identify whether protected species and their habitats are present. If protected species are found, further surveys may be necessary. Protected species mitigation and enhancement measures may also be required, which should be set out in the appraisal.

The second paragraph sets out that a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain should be created from the development, which can be on-site or off-site. More detailed information is available on our website here:

[Biodiversity Net Gain | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/biodiversity-net-gain)

It may be the case that an ecologist that produces the ecological appraisal could also carry out the BNG assessment. On-site provision would be a more straightforward process, however due to the small size of the site, the likely relatively amount of development required, and potential tree and vegetation loss, off-site provision may be the most likely option.

Conclusion

While limited information has been provided of the size and design of the proposed dwelling, it is considered unlikely that the Council would be able to support such a proposal due to the small size of the site, the relatively large amount of development that would be required, and the constraints to development within and near it. This could be over-development of the site, which would not be acceptable. It is also considered that a smaller dwelling may not be able to be supported.

There may be further issues relating to impacts on No. 1 The Drive, impacts on trees, and the need to provide a biodiversity net gain.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Hunter

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