

Planning Committee

Wednesday, 26 October 2022

7.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Harold Craske (Chair)
Cllr Emma Morley (Acting Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Brian Francis
 Gary Harding
 Samir Jassal
 Bob Lane
 Lyn Milner
 Tony Rice
 Jenny Wallace

Note: Councillors Ejaz Aslam, John Burden, Jordan Meade, Gurbax Singh, Steve Thompson were also in attendance.

Shazad Ghani	Service Manager (Planning)
Richard Hart	Team Leader (Development Management)
Laura Caiels	Principal Lawyer (Place Team)
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Service Manager (Minutes)
Karen Gingles	Committee Service Officer (Minutes)

29. Apologies for absence

Apologies of absence were received from Cllrs Brian Sangha and Elizabeth Mulheran. Cllrs Lyn Milner and Jenny Wallace attended as their substitutes.

30. To sign the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 28 September 2022 were signed by the Chair.

31. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

32. Planning applications for determination by the Committee

32.1 20220811 - 76 Pier Road, Northfleet

The Chair advised the Committee that application 20220811 had been withdrawn by the applicant.

Due to the withdrawal of the application only happening two days prior to the meeting, the Chair thanked Officers for their hard work in producing the report.

32.2 20220728 - Former Gurdwara, Clarence Place, Gravesend

The Committee considered planning application 20220728 in relation to the former Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara, Clarence Place, Gravesend, Kent. The application was for the conversion of the existing building to accommodate 14 residential apartments with ancillary cycle and bin storage facilities.

The Planning Officer informed the Committee that the application site was centrally situated on the northern side of Clarence Place and opposite the Windmill Hill Gardens/Recreational Grounds, which contained a Grade II Listed War Memorial. The rear of the site faced onto William Street.

The Planning Officer referred Members to sections 1.1 – 1.7 of the main report, which outlined the key points. The Committee were informed that the building had been vacant for 12 years and was in a state of disrepair.

The Planning Officer informed the Committee that the proposal was for a car free scheme, due to the footprint of the existing building, no onsite parking was possible. As the site was within easy walking distance to the town centre and within 5 minutes' walk to Windmill Street, (where public transport and local amenities could be found), this was considered a sustainable development. Members were advised that residents had raised concern over the potential increased demand for on street parking in the vicinity but were assured that a traffic management plan had been proposed which would be subject to a planning condition. Members were notified that the proposed scheme in relation to parking offered no conflict with Local or National Planning Policy.

It was mentioned that the former Gurdwara fell within the Windmill Hill Conservation Area and was identified as one of the principal landmarks within the Conservation Area. It was noted that the site offered a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and although not a listed building, it was a non-designated heritage asset. The proposed conversion to the building would preserve and enhance the appearance.

The Planning Officer addressed the concerns of residents with regards to neighbouring properties being overlooked. As the proposal was to convert the original building, it was highlighted that there were existing windows on the east and west flank elevation, but these would have obscured glazing which would be controlled by condition.

It was also noted that the proposal of 14 apartments would offer a modest contribution towards the Borough's housing need.

The Committee heard the views of registered speakers in favour of the application who clarified the following points:

- There would be a detailed survey carried out of the building. Concern was raised as to the material used on the exterior. The agent advised that the suggestion of removing the current longstanding render could prove problematic. He advised that from experience, stonework underneath render could absorb moisture from the

render and therefore when removal was attempted could remove a layer of the stone. The Committee was advised that if it was not possible to remove the render then other options would be investigated to ensure the appearance was in keeping, such as painting the exterior a more sympathetic colour. The Service Manager (Planning) advised Members that there was no requirement for the render to be removed from the façade of the former Gurdwara, or to revert the exterior to its former condition as in the late 1800's.

- To encourage the use of public transport, future occupants would be made aware of the scheme being car free at the time of purchase. Residents had the opportunity to store bicycles on site and would be informed of the possibility of applying for an on-street parking permit and of the nearby car park. The agent suggested that whatever the building was used for, it would potentially raise the question of parking and this was not an issue unique to housing. However due to the proximity to the town centre, the car free scheme was deemed acceptable.

The Planning Officer raised a point of clarification and referred the Committee to section 6.62 of the report which referenced a proposed Travel Plan. Members were advised that the intention would be to include an information pack for future residents regarding sustainable travel.

- If approved the proposed conversion would begin as soon as possible after further inspection and analysis of the building. It was hoped that it would begin by Spring 2023 at the earliest however this was subject to the client discharging all the relevant planning conditions.
- The proposed plans would be inclusive to all, incorporating an internal lift and ramp at the main entrance of the building ensuring access for wheelchair users.
- Concern was raised regarding the wording of conditions 5 and 8 in relation to Trickle Vents and Tile Vents as it conflicted with Building Regulations. The Planning Officer advised that the wording of these conditions would be considered by the Case Officer and applicant if the application was to be delegated to the Service Manager (Planning) to grant permission as recommended.

The Committee heard the view of a representative of the Windmill Hill Association. The speaker informed the Committee that rather than fully objecting to the application, they supported the application, but had concerns related to parking and building materials. However, the enhancement of the building and the area was welcomed if done sympathetically.

The Planning Officer advised Members that the matters raised by the Windmill Hill Association were covered by planning conditions. In relation to providing greater detail on the materials to be used, in the form of pre-commencement conditions, Members were advised that conditions 3-10 would be considered in detail by the Planning Officer at the appropriate time during construction. Requiring such detail prior to commencement, would be contrary to the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance.

The Committee heard the views of Cllrs John Burden (Leader of the Council), Steve Thompson (Ward Councillor for the Central Ward) and Gurbax Singh.

Following a detailed discussion, the Committee raised the following points:

- There was a real housing need within the Borough and this conversion would provide 14 new homes.
- By retaining the original building, there would be no option for on-site parking therefore this needed to be accepted. Many other schemes within the town centre had been approved in the past with a similar car free approach.
- The property had already been in a state of disrepair for 12 years and the proposal would comply with the Local and National Planning Policies.
- The design was praised particularly as most of the accommodation exceeded the required floor space and a library was included as part of the design. Members had confidence that Officers would ensure the heritage of the building would be retained and area would be enhanced with the build. The proposal was considered a vast improvement to the current state of the site and would offer an attractive build for both residents and visitors to the area and neighbouring Windmill Hill Gardens.
- Concern was raised as to why the render would need to be removed when it had been legally standing for such a long period of time. It was felt that conditions should not be imposed that cannot be achieved, such as the removal of render to expose the stonework. Removal could cause damage, resulting in further expense that may prove unaffordable. The exterior could be painted a more sympathetic colour. After some concern regarding the look of render, the Service Manager (Planning) informed the Committee that the building as rendered at present was actually considered positive in the Conservation Area appraisal. It was also observed that many buildings within Clarence Place had a rendered exterior.
- Conditions 5 and 8 (in relation to Trickle Vents and Tile Vents) would need to be reviewed so as not to conflict with Building Regulations.
- If permitted, the section 106 monies should only be released for the purposes it was intended for and must be spent locally.

Resolved that application 20220728 be **DELEGATED** to the Service Manager (Planning) in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, to grant permission subject to planning conditions (to incorporate those areas raised by Members) and the completion of a section 106 legal agreement.

Note: (1) Amar Sumray, Tejinderjit Kaur and Jeff Haskins (agent) spoke in favour of the application.

(2) David Moesli, representative of the Windmill Hill Association, addressed the Board.

(3) Cllrs John Burden, Gurbax Singh and Steve Thompson spoke with leave of the Chair.

33. Planning applications determined under delegated powers by the Director (Environment)

A schedule showing applications determined by the Director (Environment) under delegated powers had been published on the Council's website.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.31 pm.