

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

### **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 23<sup>rd</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

#### **REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

(Author: Nick Moys, Principal Planning Officer (Major Projects))

#### **WATTON: ERECTION OF RESIDENTIAL CARE HOME, BEECHWOOD HOUSE, HIGH STREET**

**Applicant: Jetspark**

**Reference: 3PL/2009/0681/F**

**Summary** – This report concerns a planning application for a residential care home in Watton town centre. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding tree issues, it is recommended that permission be granted subject to conditions.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report concerns an application for full planning permission for a new residential care home in the grounds of a house in Watton town centre. The care home would provide 40 resident rooms and ancillary facilities, accommodated within a series of interconnected 2-storey blocks. The existing residential property, Beechwood House, would be retained for use in connection with the proposed care home, although some later additions to the house would be demolished. A new access would be formed onto the High Street.

The application site is located in Watton town centre, midway along the High Street. The site comprises an existing house and garden, and extends to approximately 0.26 hectare. The surroundings area is mixed in character, with commercial uses of various kinds predominating. Shops, public car parking and a number of residential properties immediately adjoin the site. The site falls within the Watton Conservation Area and includes a number of TPO trees.

The application is supported by a Design & Access Statement, a Needs Assessment Report, and an Arboricultural Implications Assessment

#### **2. KEY DECISION**

This is not a key decision.

#### **3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

The following Council priorities are relevant to this report:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well planned place to live and work

#### **4. CONSULTATIONS**

Watton Town Council has objected to the application on the various grounds, including that the development would add to traffic congestion, that the new access would be unsafe, that insufficient space amenity space would be provided and that there would no emergency access to the rear.

The Highway Authority has objected to the application on the grounds that the development would result in an intensification of traffic movements onto the High Street causing interference with the flows of traffic and pedestrians.

The Environment Agency has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions.

Norfolk Landscape Archaeology has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions.

Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services do not support the application. It is considered that the existing provision of care home facilities in the area is adequate. The proposed scheme would not meet the County Council's aspirations for the residential care of the elderly.

Norfolk Police have raised no objections to the proposal, subject to improvements being made to natural surveillance of the proposed car parking.

The Historic Buildings Officer has objected to the application on the grounds that the scale and design of the development would be inappropriate.

The Tree & Countryside Officer has objected to the application on that the grounds that tree protection measures and new tree planting proposals had not been adequately considered.

The Council's Contaminated Land Officer has raised no objection to the application subject to conditions.

## **5. SITE HISTORY**

Proposals were submitted in July 2006 for the erection of 14 dwellings and a retail unit at Beechwood House. The applications were subsequently withdrawn.

## **6. POLICY**

Relevant national planning policy can be found in PPS 1 'Delivering Sustainable Development', PPG 13 'Transport' and PPG 15 'Planning & the Historic Environment'. At a local level, Policies DC12 (Trees & Landscape), DC14 (Energy Efficiency), DC16 (Design), and DC17 (Historic Environment) of the Core Strategy & Development Control Policies DPD are relevant.

## **7. ASSESSMENT**

The principal issues raised by the application concern the likely impact of the development on: i) the character and appearance of the area, ii) existing trees, and iii) highway safety.

### **Impact on local character**

Beechwood House is a period residential property set in generous gardens. Although not in keeping with the pattern of continuous frontage development that characterises this part of the High Street, Beechwood House nevertheless makes a positive contribution to the appearance of the area, adding incident and variety to the street scene.

The proposed residential care home development would be located behind Beechwood House, and would have only a marginal effect on the appearance of the existing street scene. From the High Street, only glimpse views of the new developed would be afforded through gaps between existing buildings. The proposed demolition of the rather unsympathetic later wing would improve the appearance of the Beechwood House. The creation of new entrance, with low walling, railings and

landscaping would offer further opportunities for the enhancement of the appearance of the property.

Although partly screened by the existing house, the proposed new buildings would be clearly visible from a number of viewpoints. The scale of the development is such that it would inevitably result in a significant change to this backland area from open landscaped private garden to a much more built up character and appearance. The resulting relatively dense development and site coverage would, however, not be out of keeping with the character of development generally in this part of the town centre. The proposed car home has been laid out and designed to minimise its apparent scale in order to ensure that it is not out of keeping with neighbouring buildings despite its extensive building footprint. The form of the building is highly articulated, with set backs, projecting bays, changes in materials, and an irregular roofline, all helping all help to reduce the visual bulk of the development. Visual connections between old and new buildings are established by the predominant use of brickwork for the elevations, and reinforced by the addition of new brick walls to create a series of enclosed courtyards.

### **Trees**

The application site includes a number of trees, some of which are the subject of a TPO including a large beech tree in front of Beechwood House and a group of pollarded limes to the rear. Of the total of 33 existing trees on the site, it is proposed to remove 15 trees, the majority of which have been classified as of low amenity value. The large beech tree would be retained, and the proposed new access drive has been aligned to minimise disturbance to the root protection are, but the pollarded limes would be removed. Elsewhere a number of trees on the southern and western boundaries would be retained (including limes, laurels and cypresses) in order to provide some screening from the adjacent public car parks. A total of 19 replacement trees are proposed. Further comments from the Tree & Countryside Officer are awaited following the submission of an Arboricultural Implications Assessment.

### **Highway safety**

Both the Town Council and the Highway Authority have raised concerns about the impact of the development on traffic and pedestrian safety along this section of Watton High Street. Concerns relate to increased traffic, restricted access visibility and consequent interference with pedestrian and vehicle movements along the High Street and from the adjacent Beechwood Avenue.

In response to these concerns, amendments have been made to the design of the entrance and additional information provided about anticipated traffic levels. It is proposed to lower the height of the existing high boundary wall and to replace part of it with open metal railings set back further from the pavement. This would improve visibility for traffic and pedestrians.

In terms of traffic movement, it is not anticipated that the proposed care home will result in a significant level of traffic movements. It is proposed to provide only the minimum level of parking consistent with the daily operational needs of the development, together with space for servicing and deliveries. Staff and visitors would generally be expected to use nearby public car parks or use alternative forms of transport. In transport terms, the town centre location of the site can be considered to highly sustainable. A travel plan could be required to help manage traffic generation from the development.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

Subject to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding concerns relating to trees, it is recommended that planning permission be granted subject to conditions.