

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 25TH JANUARY 2010

REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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THETFORD: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, FORMER THETFORD COTTAGE HOSPITAL, EARLS STREET

Applicant: NORFOLK NHS PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Reference: 3PL/2009/0977/F

Summary – This report concerns proposals to demolish the former Thetford Cottage Hospital and redevelop the site for 13 new dwellings. Subject to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding issues relating to affordable housing, it is recommended that permission is granted subject to conditions and a legal agreement.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns applications for planning permission for residential development on the site of the former Thetford Cottage Hospital. The proposed development would include the conversion of the original cottage hospital into 4 flats and the erection of 9 new build dwellings on the remainder of the site. Later additions to the original cottage hospital would be demolished to make way for the new houses. A new access would be created on Earls Street and an existing footway widened and extended. The application is supported by a number of technical reports, including a Design & Access Statement and an Arboricultural Implications Assessment.

The application site is located on the edge of Thetford town centre, within an area of mixed residential and commercial development. The site falls within the Thetford Conservation Area. The site extends to 0.19 hectare, the majority of which is currently occupied by former hospital buildings. The original cottage hospital dates from the late nineteenth century, but has been altered and extended significantly in more recent times. A lime tree on the site frontage is subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

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

Thetford Town Council has raised no objection to the application subject to the reinstatement of a commemorative stone and the use of appropriate building materials. The retention of the original cottage hospital building is welcomed, as is the proposed removal of later unsympathetic additions. Concerns are expressed about the PCT's overall strategy for health care provision in the town.

The Highway Authority has raised no objections to the application, subject to agreement being reached on proposed off-site highway improvements.

Norfolk Landscape Archaeology has raised no objection subject to a condition requiring an archaeological evaluation.

Norfolk Police have made comments on designing out crime, particularly in respect of boundary treatments, creating defensible space and natural surveillance.

The Thetford Society has welcomed the proposals to retain the original cottage hospital building, but concerns are raised about the relationship of the proposed houses to the adjacent snooker club and about the level of parking proposed.

The Historic Buildings Officer has raised no objection to the application, subject to conditions relating to external materials.

The Tree & Countryside Officer has raised no objection subject to a tree protection condition.

The Council's Housing Enabling & Projects Officer has raised concerns about the lack of provision of affordable housing within the development.

The Council's Environmental Health Officer has raised no objection to the application.

The Council's Contaminated Land Officer has requested conditions relating to further site investigation.

Letters of objection have been received from several local residents raising concerns about the scale of development and the level of car parking proposed. Objections have also been raised by an adjacent doctors' surgery about potential overlooking and parking problems. Concerns have been raised by the Thetford Snooker Centre that nuisance to residents could be caused by late night activity.

5. PLANNING HISTORY

Planning permission for the redevelopment of the site for houses was refused on the grounds that the demolition of the original cottage hospital building would be harmful to the character of the area.

6. POLICY

The application site falls within the Settlement Boundary for Thetford. At a national level, policies set out in PPS 3 *Housing*, PPG 13 *Transport*, and PPG 15 *Planning & the Historic Environment* are relevant. The following Core Strategy Policies are also relevant: DC1 (Amenity), DC2 (New Housing), DC4 (Affordable Housing), DC11 (Open Space), DC12 (Trees), DC14 (Energy Efficiency), DC16 (Design), DC17 (Historic Environment) and DC21 (Parking).

7. ASSESSMENT

The principal issues raised by the application concern: i) the extent to which the proposals would accord with local and national planning policy relating to housing development, ii) the likely impact of the development on the character of the area, iii) the adequacy of parking provision, and iv) relationships with adjacent uses.

Policy

It is considered that the redevelopment of the site for housing would accord in general terms with national and local planning policy, as set out in PPS 3 and Core Strategy Policy DC2. The proposal would be compatible with existing uses in the locality and would provide for the re-use of previously developed land in a central location close to shops and facilities. The density of development proposed (68DPH) would fall within policy guidelines, taking into account the character of the area and the town centre location.

The current proposals were drawn up prior to recent changes in affordable housing policy thresholds and requirements. As a result, no provision had been made for affordable housing. Following further discussions, proposals have been tabled to provide a number of affordable units, but at a level below policy requirements due to financial viability considerations. A financial appraisal of the proposed development has been submitted for consideration. Discussions are currently on going on this matter.

In order to meet the requirements of Core Strategy Policy DC11, financial contributions have been requested towards local recreational provision. Use of renewable energy, as required by Policy DC14, could be secured by planning condition.

Local character

In response to the previous refusal of planning permission, current proposals for the redevelopment of the site include the retention of the original cottage hospital building. Existing unsympathetic additions would be demolished, and uPVC windows would be replaced by timber sash windows of traditional design. Overall, it is considered that the refurbishment of the cottage hospital building would enhance the street scene and surrounding conservation area, whilst securing the future of a local landmark building. From the representations received it is clear that the cottage hospital is a valued part of the social history of the town.

The layout and design of the proposed new development is generally well considered, and takes proper account of the pattern of existing development. The proposed houses would be of traditional design, and arranged in short terraces, with simple facades, reflecting the established pattern of development on Earls Street. The proposed new housing would be smaller in scale than the retained hospital building and the adjacent snooker centre. External materials would include red and buff bricks, flint work, timber windows and clay pantiles. A pair of semi-detached houses is proposed next to the original hospital in order to maintain a built frontage to Earls Street, whilst to the rear, houses would be arranged to create an urban mews style development. Existing flint boundary walls to the side and rear would be retained. It is considered that the proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Parking

The application proposed that 15 parking spaces be provided to serve the development – 1 space per dwelling plus 2 visitor spaces. This level of provision falls below the minimum of 2 spaces per dwellings set out in the Core Strategy parking standards. However, Policy DC21 does acknowledge the benefits of reducing parking provision in order to encourage more sustainable forms of transport in locations that are well served by public transport and in town centres. Given the central location of the site, the size of dwellings proposed and the proximity of public car parks for visitors, it is considered that the reduced level of parking proposed is acceptable. It is recommended that cycle storage facilities should be required by

condition for each dwelling proposed. The Highway Authority has raised no objection to the level of car parking proposed.

Relationship with neighbouring uses

The layout and design of the development has been designed to minimise impact on neighbouring properties due to overlooking. Specific concerns have been raised by the adjacent medical practice, although at first floor level only a landing and bedroom window would face directly towards the surgery building. These windows could be relocated/omitted if necessary.

Objections have also been raised locally about potential conflicts between the existing snooker centre and houses proposed close to the southern site boundary. Particular concerns are that the coming and going of snooker club customers, particularly late in the evening, would cause disturbance to adjacent residents, and that subsequent complaints could result in additional burdens/limitations on the business. Whilst these concerns are acknowledged, the layout of the proposed development does to some extent help to limit the level of disturbance likely to be experienced. The elevation facing the snooker club entrance contains only a landing window, whilst an existing substantial concrete panel fence on the boundary provides a degree of screening. The proposed development would nonetheless be subject to a certain level of noise from activity within the street, including at night, but it is not considered that this level of disturbance would be unexpected in a town centre situation or would be sufficient to justify refusal of permission in this context.

Other matters

Improvements to existing footways are proposed as part of the development, including the widening of the existing footway on the site frontage and the construction of a new footway in front of the adjacent snooker centre. Some further improvements to the junction of Earls Street with Norwich Road have been requested by Norfolk County Council, but it is not considered that such works could reasonably be required in connection with the proposed development, given its scale and the previous use of the site.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Subject to the satisfactory resolution of outstanding issues relating to affordable housing provision, it is recommended that planning permission is granted subject to conditions relating to external materials, landscaping, tree protection, boundary treatments, permitted development rights, access and footway improvements, construction operations, parking provision, cycle storage, renewable energy and site investigation. A legal agreement is also required in relation to affordable housing and recreation contributions.