

Application No: 11/0108M

Location: FORD HOUSE, THE VILLAGE, PRESTBURY, MACCLESFIELD,  
CHESHIRE, SK10 4DG

Proposal: Demolition of Ford House (Conservation Area Consent)

Applicant: St Peters Parochial Church Council

Expiry Date: 22-Mar-2011

**Date Report Prepared:** 1 April 2011

### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION**

Refuse

#### **MAIN ISSUES**

- The impact upon the character and appearance of the Conservation Area
- Whether there is an acceptable scheme for replacement development in place

### **REASON FOR REPORT**

The application has been brought to the Committee by the Head of Planning & Housing due to the significant local interest in the proposal.

### **DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT**

The application site comprises a detached two-storey locally listed building from the 19<sup>th</sup> century most recently used as meeting rooms and other supporting activities to St Peter's church. Over the years there have been a number of external extensions and internal alterations, but recently the condition of the building has deteriorated to the extent that it was closed for health & safety reasons in 2007. The site occupies a prominent position at the north eastern end of The Village, within the Prestbury Conservation Area as identified in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

### **DETAILS OF PROPOSAL**

This application seeks Conservation Area Consent to demolish the existing building on the site.

### **POLICIES**

#### **Local Plan Policy**

BE2 – Historic Fabric

## BE3 – Conservation Areas

### **Other Material Considerations**

Prestbury Conservation Area Appraisal (2006)

Prestbury Village Design Statement (2007)

Local List of Historic Buildings SPD (2010)

### **CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)**

English Heritage – No objection to the principle of the new development behind the existing building, but do recommend the refusal of the application based on an unsatisfactory justification for the demolition of Ford House.

Prestbury Parish Council – No objection

### **OTHER REPRESENTATIONS**

To date 90 approximately letters of representation have been received. 69 of these letters either raise no objection or support the proposal for the following reasons:

- Ford House needs demolishing due to its condition
- The replacement building will provide essential accommodation for the church
- Ford House is currently an eyesore
- The development will provide funds for the much needed church extension
- It will bring new life into the village

21 letters either raise concern or object to the proposal on the following grounds:

- Loss of car park to rear of Ford House
- Loss of protected trees
- Youth Club building to the rear of Ford House does not belong to the church
- There are Great Crested Newts in the immediate vicinity
- Ford House is locally listed
- Dwellings should be affordable
- Youth Centre extension paid for by village fundraising
- Plans do not acknowledge former role of Ford House as a community resource
- Proposals do not address relocation of the youth club
- The site should be retained for the parishioners of Prestbury
- Financial contribution should be made to compensate for lost community facilities
- The site is subject to flooding
- Highway safety risk at access
- Proposed buildings are out of character
- No recognition of the relationship of the church with the wider community
- The density of the development is a concern

### **APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The following documents have been submitted on behalf of the applicant:

### **Planning, Design & Access Statement**

This statement outlines that the future of the building is intrinsically linked to a development project that will secure the future of St Peter's Church and its role at the centre of the village community. In view of the needs of the church for ancillary accommodation; the scale of the proposed extension appropriate to the church; the cost of development options; the structural condition of Ford House and, factors connected with highway safety it is concluded that the only viable option is to take down and rebuild Ford House for use as a parish office with residential accommodation for church staff. Plus erection of enabling residential development to the rear of the site in accord with policy H11 of PPS5

The site is within the Prestbury Conservation Area, and Ford House is included in the Cheshire East Council's List of Locally Important Buildings SPD. Although the existing building is attractive it has been significantly harmed by modern extensions and has deteriorated in recent years because the church had been struggling to provide sufficient funds to keep it in good order, whilst at the same time meeting its obligation to maintain to a high standard the grade 1 listed church building. The proposed rebuild would restore the original character of the building and would positively enhance the character of both the village centre and wider conservation area in accord with the aims of policies of PPS5 and the local plan.

The proposed development is fully justified based on the benefits it would bring to the church and the needs of the wider community. In accordance with Policy HE9.4 of PPS5, it is demonstrated that any harmful impact the proposal will have on the significance of the conservation area is less than substantial harm, and that therefore the local planning authority should weigh the public benefit of the proposal against the level of harm. There is also a case for considering the proposal as enabling development in accordance with PPS5 Policy HE11, and thus assessing the benefits of development against any harm caused.

In providing funds for the development proposals at St Peter's Church, the development at the Ford House site will secure the future viability and sustainability of a heritage and social asset of exceptional significance.

### **Sustainability Statement**

This statement addresses the key objectives from PPS1, the advice from the RSS on climate change and the Council's housing sustainability checklist.

### **Protected Species Survey**

The submitted bat survey identified the presence of common Pipistrelle Bats within the building. A programme of mitigation is proposed within the statement.

### **Arboriculture Assessment**

This report identifies that the extension will require the removal of several trees within the site. These losses should be considered in terms of the wider community benefits the schemes seek to provide.

### **Structural Report – Ford House**

The Structural Report recommends a range of remedial works throughout the entire building.

### **Flood Risk Assessment**

This outlines that given the proposed finished floor level, the properties should not in general be affected by flood events over an above the 1:1000 year event.

### **Transport Assessment**

The report concludes that the only viable access option involves reuse of the existing site access onto The Village which in turn requires the demolition of Ford House in order to meet the latest design guidance provided by the highway authority.

### **Confidential Report on Enabling Development – Meller Braggins**

This report looks at the market value of the site, and the relative costs of demolition and refurbishment.

### **PPS5 Statement – Ford House**

The primary significance of the building is its role in terminating the view along the main street and its location at the bend which makes it visible from both The Village and New Street. It gains value from its relationship to the mature trees that surround it, and is also important for its past role in the life of the worshipping community.

The building is in a very poor state of repair, and the scale of remedial works required to return it to beneficial use is extensive. The cost of these works exceeds that of taking it down and rebuilding.

The justification for development of the Ford House site is based on the benefits it would bring to the church and the needs of the wider community.

The requirement for replacement of Ford House is based on its physical condition; its lack of authenticity as a result of unsympathetic alterations; the cost of restoration; the need to provide safe access for vehicle users and pedestrians; and the unsuitability of the current layout of the building for church use.

The proposal for replacement will replicate the form and style of the existing building, but with a different internal layout, moving the footprint slightly to allow for a wider access way to the site for highway safety reasons.

In accordance with Policy HE9.4 of PPS5, it is demonstrated that any harmful impact the proposal will have on the significance of the conservation area is less than substantial harm, and that therefore the local planning authority should weigh the public benefit of the proposal against the level of harm.

There is also a case for considering the proposal as enabling development in accordance with PPS5 Policy HE11, and thus assessing the benefits of development against any harm caused.

In balancing the benefits that the scheme will bring against the proposals for demolition of Ford House and rebuilding, it can be seen that the public benefits will be very substantial. For in providing funds for the development proposals at St Peter's Church, the development at the Ford House site will secure the future viability and sustainability of a heritage asset of exceptional significance.

## OFFICER APPRAISAL

Ford House is identified in the adopted Local List of Historical Buildings SPD (2010) as:

*Nineteenth century reconstruction of an earlier building, rebuilt circa 1850-1875. Owned by Parochial Church Council and employed for a variety of church and community uses until closure in 2007.*

*Very prominent position in the village streetscene and a valuable contribution to the Conservation Area.*

Policy BE20 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan relates to locally listed buildings and states that “*development which would adversely affect their architectural or historic character will only be allowed if the borough council is satisfied that the building or structure is beyond reasonable repair.*”

In this case, the submitted information indicates that it is significantly more costly (in excess of £100,000) to partially demolish and refurbish the existing building than demolish the entire building and construct a replacement. However, the detailed costings of these estimates have not been submitted to show where the money would be spent in each case. Therefore at present the information is not considered to be sufficiently detailed to satisfy the Council that the building is beyond reasonable repair.

However, the applicant’s primary justification for demolition of Ford House is based on the benefits it would bring to the church site. The funds realized through the development of the town houses would finance the extension to the church, thereby securing the future of this significant heritage asset, as well as facilitate required works to the Grade II listed Norman Chapel and Hearse House. Further information on the works required to the Norman Chapel and Hearse House have been requested from the applicant to allow the council to better understand the benefits of the proposal and the viability issues that underlie it.

The supporting information does suggest that the church extension and facilities within Ford House provide benefits to both the church and the wider community. The case for demolition is further based upon its physical condition; its lack of authenticity as a result of unsympathetic alterations; the cost of restoration; the need to provide safe access for vehicle users and pedestrians; and the unsuitability of the current layout of the building for church use.

English Heritage has raised an objection to the demolition of Ford House due to the positive contribution it makes to the Conservation Area. This is strengthened by its inclusion on the list of locally important buildings. They note that policy HE9.1 of PPS5 states that “there is a presumption in favour of the conservation of all designated heritage assets”. This means that there should be a presumption in favour of managing change to a conservation area in a way that sustains and where appropriate enhances its significance. To replace one good building with a different but arguably equally as good building is not sustaining its significance. This

would be contrary to HE9.1 of PPS5. The applicant needs to demonstrate that the loss is necessary in order to deliver substantial public benefits.

These comments are consistent with the views of the Council's Conservation Officer, who notes that a replacement building would not display the evidence of successive alterations and sense of continuity over time which is apparent in the existing external fabric. The proposal would cause unacceptable harm to this locally listed building and hence to the character of the surrounding area to which it makes an important contribution. The local listing is considered to refer to not only to the street scene contribution, but also the contribution Ford House makes to the historical integrity of the Conservation Area. As such it would conflict with policies BE2 and BE4 of the Local Plan and Cheshire East Local List SPD which amongst other things seek to protect loss and damage to buildings of historic interest, historic fabric and to protect local distinctiveness.

The concept of enabling development is quoted widely in the supporting documentation. English Heritage define enabling development as *development that would be unacceptable in planning terms but for the fact that it would bring public benefits sufficient to justify it being carried out, and which could not otherwise be achieved.*

In their comments on the current application, English Heritage note that "In this instance, because the application for Ford House should be determined as a separate planning matter to the current application for the extension to St Peter's Church, consideration of the other public benefits should therefore be limited to the proposals for the Ford House site itself." They also state that, "a criterion for enabling development is that it is contrary to established planning policy", which the residential development is not. "An enabling development would only be acceptable in principle if the economic benefits would go into the repair of historic fabric in order to preserve a heritage asset, which in this case is proposed for demolition, and is not applicable to new buildings or extensions."

However, whilst these comments are acknowledged to the extent that the proposal may not amount to enabling development, the matters raised by the applicant to justify the demolition are still material planning considerations, which need to be afforded appropriate weight in the assessment of the application. The applicant maintains that the church extension is reliant upon the development of the Ford House site; therefore whilst they have been submitted as separate planning applications, they are fundamentally linked. As noted above, additional information has been requested that seeks to address the concerns that have been raised above.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION**

Unlike the application for the church extension, where there is a clear prospect of the required information overcoming the objections raised, in this case, the issues are more complex, and substantial weight needs to be afforded to the viability of the proposals and the community benefits that will derive from the proposal. Until all this information is received and assessed, it is not considered that the loss of a locally listed building and the associated Conservation Area impact can be accepted. A recommendation of refusal is therefore made by virtue of the proposal being contrary to policies BE2 and BE4 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan and the Cheshire East Local List SPD.

Furthermore, Conservation Area Consent should only normally be granted if an acceptable scheme of replacement development exists. This is to prevent the creation of derelict sites. The accompanying planning application 11/0107M is not considered to be an acceptable form of replacement development within the Conservation Area at this time, and accordingly this application is recommended for refusal.

Application for Conservation Area Consent

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse for the following reasons

1. Demolition of building in Conservation Area
2. Demolition of building in Conservation Area

Location Plan: Cheshire East Council Licence No. 100049045

