

Application No: 11/2085M

Location: ST MARTINS CHURCH, SHRIGLEY ROAD NORTH, HIGHER POYNTON, SK12 1TE

Proposal: Outline Application Application for Erection of Parsonage (resubmission of 10/0904M)

Applicant: The Parochial Church Council of St George with St Martin Poynton

Expiry Date: 19-Jul-2011

Date Report Prepared: 28 July 2011

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether the proposal is acceptable in the Green Belt

REASON FOR REPORT

The application has been brought to the Committee at the discretion of the Head of Planning & Housing due to the nature of the application and the significant local interest.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site comprises an area of open land within the grounds of St Martin's Church, Poynton. The site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks outline planning permission to erect a new parsonage, with all matters reserved except the layout / siting of new dwelling.

RELEVANT HISTORY

10/0904M - Erection of parsonage (outline) – Refused 04.06.2010

POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy

DP1 (Spatial principles applicable to development management)

DP2 (Criteria to promote sustainable communities)

DP4 (Sequential approach to make the best use of existing resources)
DP5 (Objectives to reduce the need to travel and improve accessibility)
DP7 (Criteria to promote environmental quality)
DP9 (Objectives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change)

Local Plan Policy

GC1 (Control over new buildings in the Green Belt)
BE1 (Design principles for new developments)
DC1 (High quality design for new build)
DC3 (Protection of the amenities of nearby residential properties)
DC38 (Guidelines for space, light and privacy for housing development)

Other Material Considerations

PPS3 Housing Self Assessment Checklist

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Strategic Highways Manager - No objections

British Waterways – No comments to make

Poynton Town Council – No objection, subject to CE views on the justification of “key worker” status, lack of proximity of the parsonage to the church, and subject to any further deliberation by the Northern Planning Committee. The development was felt to be important for the revitalization of Higher Poynton.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

30 letters from local residents / church members have been received supporting the proposal on the following grounds:

- Shows church’s long term commitment and intention to develop congregation.
- Remove risk of site being put to alternative commercial use in future.
- Dwelling would provide permanent link with community.
- Improved security and environmental management of the site.
- The key worker on site for St Martin’s would help those whose work is to provide community activities in this semi-rural community and would encourage strong communities
- Further the Cheshire East Sustainable Communities aims for 2010 to 2025, and three main objectives of Ambition for All, namely to nurture strong communities, to provide for children and youth, and to help the older end of an ageing population.
- Community of Higher Poynton has suffered in recent years from the closure of the Post Office and the Butcher’s Shop, and have suffered a consequent loss of community cohesion.
- The congregation of St Martin’s has dwindled over the years as the population has aged every effort must be made to revitalise the community.
- A parsonage on-site will make it easier to provide access for the groups using the hall.

- Will provide a dedicated Minister. It is currently very difficult for people to feel that their minister knows them and can meet their spiritual needs if there is a different person preaching or leading each week.
- When purchased over 80 years ago the deeds made clear the intention to have a church, a hall and a parsonage.
- The retention of the church in Higher Poynton would allow significant numbers of people in these communities have the option of walking to church/hall activities rather than necessitate car or bus journeys further afield.
- A resident minister is also not just a caretaker but someone who would facilitate contribution to the community at Higher Poynton. If the work in Higher Poynton and surrounding area is going to thrive it will need leadership on site and not at a distance.
- It has been impossible to find suitable housing in the vicinity.
- The need to develop actions on local affairs and social cohesion is considered an important and desirable national objective.
- The Diocese of Chester follows high standards in maintaining high standards for clergy housing. It is unlikely therefore that suitable accommodation would be found on the open market.

Three letters have been received from neighbouring properties objecting to the proposal on the following grounds:

- Site is in the Green Belt where recreation and leisure are encouraged, adjacent to a Conservation Area.
- Dwellings restricted to forestry or farm workers in this area.
- Building is not within the confines of the church or hall.
- Non church related groups have no relevance to a Parsonage, only a caretaker.
- All windows in neighbours house are habitable and none are secondary.
- Congregation has dwindled over the years, now confined to elderly, below 20 persons mainly arriving by car as they do not live in the vicinity.
- Existing drainage problems.
- Create a precedent
- The church hall is used by many groups, but in the main they are not from Higher Poynton or Middlewood (brownies, dance, birthday parties).
- There is already a community hall, Middlewood House, used by the Middlewood Women's Institute, Middlewood Wine Society and many more.
- A neighbour was the voluntary caretaker of the church hall. After he died, no-one from the church approached local residents to take on the job. Surely it would be more cost effective to pay a local resident to act as part-time caretaker. The safety and security of the hall is in the local's best interests.
- The proposed parsonage is to be built on green belt land; in our view this plan would be an exception without cause. We choose to live here because of Higher Poynton's semi ruralness, the building of a detached house would detract from that aspect.
- There are two houses for sale on Shrigley Road North, one at £239,950. To suggest that a parsonage has to be a 4 bedroom detached house is ridiculous and out of keeping with the area. The majority of properties on Shrigley Road North are 3 bedroomed semi-detached or terraced.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

A copy of the Church of England's publication entitled "Parsonages: A Design Guide" (commonly referred to as "The Green Guide") has been submitted. This was produced by Church Commissioners in December 1998 as a design guide for building new parsonages to set out exactly what is required for such new buildings. A copy of this document can be viewed in full on the application file.

A design and access statement has also been submitted on behalf of the applicant. The statement outlines that the church is currently served by a minister who lives near the parish church of St. Georges in Poynton, and the services held at St Martins are conducted on a rota basis by church staff and retired clergy living within the parish. The previous key holder has retired, and it is imperative that continuous leadership and pastoral care is provided by a resident clergy acting as key holder and overseeing activity at the site. The dwelling is required to meet the needs of the congregation and community with a view to expanding the congregation. The dwelling needs to be on the site to allow appropriate access for parishioners and privacy for the clergy family, and to meet the requirements of the Green Guide. Similarly, existing housing in the locality does not meet the standards set out in the Green Guide as it does not meet the standards set out in the Green Guide as it lacks the necessary accessibility and privacy.

The design and access statement also seeks to address comments that were made during the previous committee meeting which the Church strongly disagreed with. These are summarised below:

- The Church was unimpressed that discussions between the Council and the Church did not take place during the application.
- The application was misrepresented and "lengthy discussions" were misleadingly claimed. It is hoped with the resubmission that there will be the chance for proper discussions.
- The suggestion by the officer that the Church would sell the property soon after its completion was made without evidence or consultation, and was a less than honest way for the planning officers to have dealt with the application.
- At the Committee meeting a Councillor made disparaging comments about the demise and financial situation of the Church of England, which is all contrary to the Church's true position in Poynton.
- In the Church of England a Parish is responsible for its own finances, raising their own income with the large majority of this from the direct donations of church members.

The appointment of a key worker would allow them to build up the congregation at St Martins through his or her residential presence on the site. In order to continue community usage the church needs someone to live on site to provide keys, help security and provide a point of contact for users. The church has also experienced a break in since the last application, and a presence on site would act as a deterrent.

A comprehensive property search was carried out in May 2011 found only six houses with four bedrooms or more available for sale in Higher Poynton, which range in price from £550,000 up to £700,000 and are all located some distance away from the site. All of which are unaffordable to the church and do not fulfil the clear identified need for the parsonage to be located on the site.

A supporting letter from the Bishop of Stockport, on behalf of the Diocese of Chester, has also been submitted with the application which notes the following:

- When the land was first purchased the deeds expressed a desire to build a complex of church, church halls and a dwelling for a resident minister
- Decisive action needs to be taken to arrest the decline in congregation.
- A part-time priest is therefore needed who can be resident in Higher Poynton and be solely responsible for the Church of St Martin.
- The Diocese of Chester follows national guidelines in maintaining high standards for clergy housing (access for parishioners and privacy for family) which means it is unlikely that suitable accommodation could be found on the market elsewhere.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Green Belt

As a new dwelling in the Green Belt, the proposal is defined as inappropriate development. It is therefore necessary to establish whether “very special circumstances” exist to clearly outweigh the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm that may be identified.

The primary aim of Green Belt policy is to keep land permanently open. The dwelling would be sited in what is currently a very open location, adjacent to the existing dwelling at 6 Shrigley Road North. However, in order to accommodate the church’s required facilities, including four bedrooms, the dwelling will have to be a considerable size, which will reduce the openness of the Green Belt.

An agricultural worker’s dwelling is an example where a new dwelling can, in some cases, be justified in the Green Belt. The current proposal should be assessed in a similar way, by examining whether the nature and demands of the work concerned make it essential for one or more people engaged in the enterprise to live at the site of their work. Relevant guidance on occupational dwellings can be found within Annex A of PPS7, which highlights that local authorities should apply the same stringent levels of assessment to applications for new occupational dwellings as they apply to applications for agricultural workers’ dwellings.

The reasons put forward by the applicant for requiring a new dwelling include meeting the needs of the congregation and community with a view to expanding the congregation, and without it the future of the church is threatened. It is suggested that the dwelling needs to be on the site to allow appropriate access for parishioners and privacy for the clergy family, and to meet the requirements of the Green Guide, as well as the occupier acting as key holder for the church hall. For an agricultural worker, the reasons for justifying a dwelling on site are commonly animal welfare, or to deal with out of hours emergencies. Such issues cannot be dealt with in a timely fashion if the farmer lives off site. In this case, it is not entirely clear why the minister needs to live on site, what exactly a resident minister will bring to the church, what are the nature and demands of the minister’s work that make it essential for a 24 hour presence on the site and why their function cannot be carried out off site. The only role that has been identified to link the occupier of the dwelling to the site is as a key holder and security resource. It has been highlighted by a neighbour that following the death of the voluntary caretaker of the church hall, no-one from the church approached local residents to take on the job. They raise the point that it would be more cost effective to pay a local resident to act as part-time caretaker. The safety and security of the hall is in the local’s best interests.

In the supporting design and access statement it states that, *The Church is confident that they could find a Christian minister who is either non-stipendiary (i.e. earns money part-time in another profession) and is aged 25 to 65 or is recently retired and aged 65 to 70.* This implies that any minister that is to be employed at St Martins and will occupy the dwelling would be part time only.

A key point put forward to justify the dwelling in the supporting information and by some of the letters of representation is that a resident minister would allow local people to have a focus in place at the church land itself. This is as opposed to the current situation where services are conducted on a rota basis by church staff and retired clergy residing within the Parish. However, the question is raised whether it is truly a dwelling that is required or simply a single minister with specific responsibility for the Parish to provide that focus and point of contact?

Existing dwellings on the open market have been generally discounted as they do not provide the necessary access for parishioners or privacy for the clergy family, and they do not meet the standards in the Green Guide. They are also beyond the financial reach of the church. However, in the section of the Green Guide that refers to site selection, it is stated as “very desirable” that the Church is within 10 minutes walk. It does not state that the dwelling must be located on the site, and given that is identified as being “very desirable” it could even be more than 10 minutes walk away. In fact the same section of the Green Guide recommends that the dwelling is not physically attached to the church or parish buildings for reasons of privacy and future saleability. The location of the parsonage is therefore not considered to be restricted to the application site or even Higher Poynton. Widening the property search may find other suitable dwellings for use as a parsonage in addition to those found during the “comprehensive property search carried out in May 2011”, such as those identified by a neighbour. It should also be noted that the Green Guide refers to the recommendations made within it not being a series of prescriptions and hope that they will be interpreted flexibly.

Overall, whilst the objectives of providing a dwelling to accommodate a resident minister to promote the church are understood, the information submitted is not considered to demonstrate a fundamental functional need for somebody to be present on the site at all times, nor why any need that does exist cannot be provided by existing accommodation in the Poynton / Higher Poynton area. It is therefore concluded that the very special circumstances required outweighing the harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriate development and loss of openness have not been demonstrated in this case. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy GC1 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan and the national guidance contained within PPG2 and PPS7.

Housing

The location of the site is beyond the distances to a food shop, post office, bank, medical facilities, etc, recommended in the North West regional; Assembly’s Sustainability Toolkit, and is therefore not in the most sustainable of locations. However, having regard to the nature of the proposal and the close proximity of a regular bus service, if Members are minded to accept the proposal in Green Belt policy terms, then it is considered to be unreasonable to object on sustainability grounds.

Character

The dwelling is to be located at the northern end of the application site adjacent to an existing dwelling at 6 Shrigley Road North. Notwithstanding the objection on Green Belt grounds above, in the context of the street scene and general character of the area the siting of the building is considered to be acceptable. The appearance of the dwelling has been reserved for subsequent approval, and the Conservation Officer has objected due to there being insufficient information to assess the impact upon the Macclesfield Canal Conservation Area (opposite). However, due to the outline form of the application, this is not considered to be a justifiable reason for refusal.

Amenity

The siting of the building is such that a dwelling could be erected without undue harm to the amenity of 6 Shrigley Road North or any other nearby properties.

Highways

Details of the proposed access have also been reserved for subsequent approval, and the Strategic Highways Manager raises no objections to the proposal on the basis of the information submitted.

Ecology

The Nature Conservation Officer does not anticipate any significant ecological issues associated with the proposed development.

Other Matters

It should be noted that although as an outline application the submission should include information on the scale parameters (upper and lower limits for height, width and length) and indicative access points, which have not been provided. This is being raised with the applicant and it is anticipated that this information will be reported to Members in an update.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

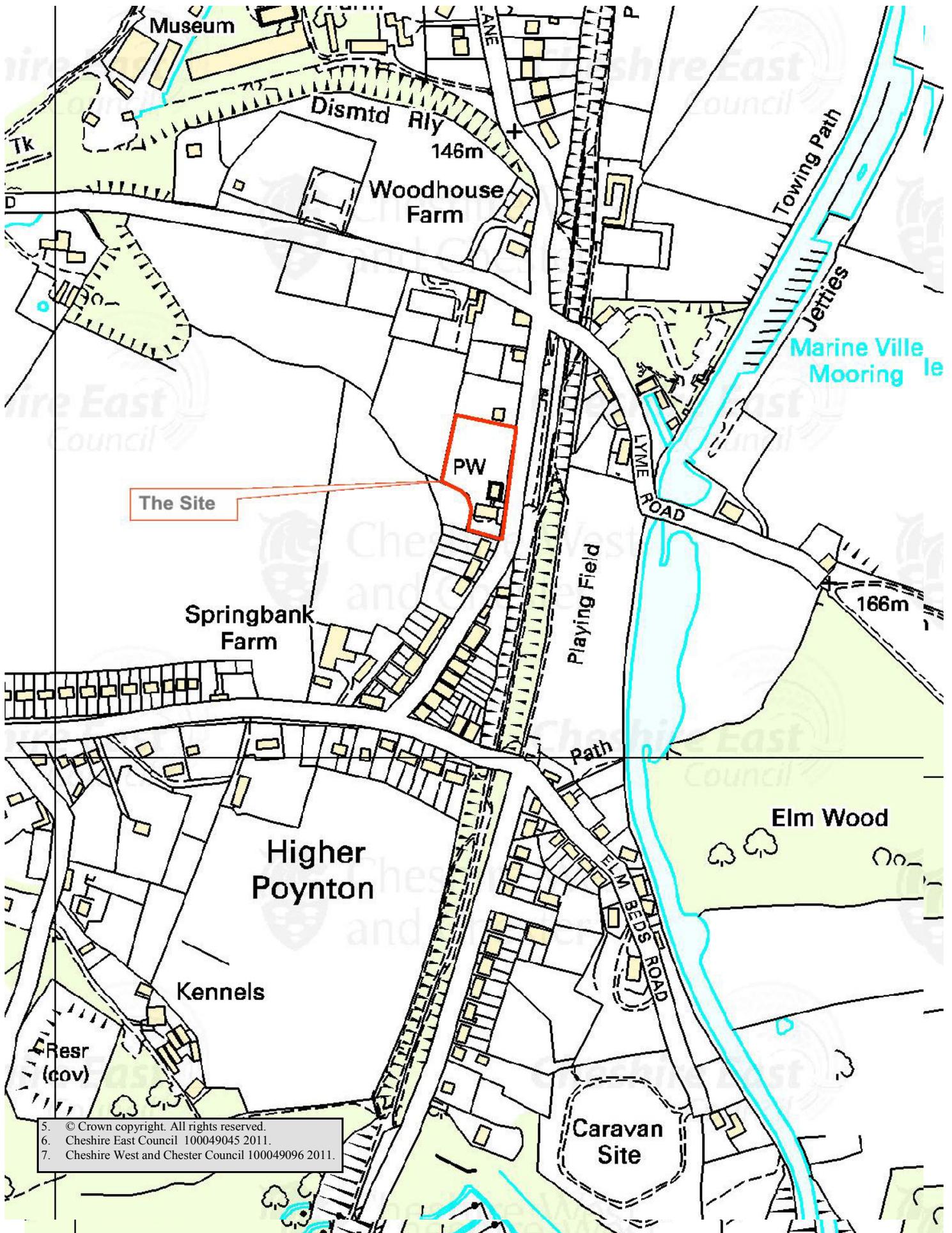
The comments received in both support and objection have been give due consideration, however, by virtue of the proposal representing an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt, which also reduces openness and very special circumstances not having been demonstrated, a recommendation of refusal is made for the following reason:

- 1. The proposal is an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt, as defined by the Development Plan. The development is therefore contrary to policies GC1 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan and would cause harm to the objectives of this policy. The development is similarly contrary to national policy guidance relating to development within the Green Belt and the provision of occupational workers dwellings (PPG2 and PPS7). It is not considered that very special circumstances exist to justify the approval of inappropriate development in the Green Belt.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Refuse for the following reasons

1. Inappropriate development in the Green Belt



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- 6. Cheshire East Council 100049045 2011.
- 7. Cheshire West and Chester Council 100049096 2011.