

Application No: 09/1485M

Location: COTTONS HOTEL, MANCHESTER ROAD, KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE, WA16 0ED

Proposal: THREE STOREY EXTENSION TO PROVIDE A NET ADDITION OF 27 NO. BEDROOMS AND ASSOCIATED ADDITIONAL ON-SITE PARKING (RE-SUBMISSION OF 08/2233P)

Applicant: SHIRE HOTELS LIMITED

Expiry Date: 27-Aug-2009

Date report Prepared: 30-Jul-2009

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Approve

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether the proposal constitutes appropriate development in the Green Belt and if not, whether very special circumstances have been demonstrated that warrant approval of the proposal
- The design and appearance of the proposed alterations and extensions and whether the visual impact of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area is acceptable
- The impact upon highway safety in the vicinity of the site
- The impact upon the amenity of nearby residents
- Whether the proposal would have any adverse impact on nature conservation interests

REASON FOR REPORT

The application is before the Strategic Board as it is a major application which departs from the Local Plan.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site comprises a two / three-storey hotel and spa facility that has been substantially extended over the past 40 years with external car parking for 188 cars. By way

of background the following provides an indication of the timing and scale of previous permissions for bedroom extensions:

1961 – 6 bedrooms
1982 – 53 bedrooms
1986 – 27 bedrooms
1994 – 17 bedrooms
2000 – 8 bedrooms

This has resulted in 109 existing bedrooms

The site is located within the Green Belt as identified in the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks full planning permission to erect a three-storey bedroom block extension to the side and a first floor rear meeting room extension. Additional car parking will be provided in the area of the site currently occupied by two tennis courts. On site parking for a total of 215 vehicles is proposed. The proposal also involves some internal alterations to improve the hotel reception, function room and meeting / conference areas.

RELEVANT HISTORY

There is an extensive planning history on the site, the most relevant is listed below. There has also been a range of permissions for relatively small extensions.

08/2233P – THREE-STOREY EXTENSION TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL BEDROOMS, FIRST FLOOR EXTENSION AND CAR PARK EXTENSION – Refused 07.01.2009

00/2183P - DEMOLITION OF MANAGER'S HOUSE AND ERECTION OF A TWO-STOREY EXTENSION TO PROVIDE 8 BEDROOMS; TWO-STOREY FRONT AND REAR EXTENSIONS TO PROVIDE TRAINING ROOMS; BALUSTRADE TO FLAT ROOFED AREA - Approved 01.11.2000

00/0891P - DEMOLITION OF MANAGER'S HOUSE AND ERECTION OF A TWO-STOREY EXTENSION TO PROVIDE 8 BEDROOMS; TWO-STOREY FRONT AND REAR EXTENSIONS TO PROVIDE TRAINING ROOMS; BALUSTRADE TO FLAT ROOFED AREA; ADDITIONAL LANDSCAPING -
Refused 14.06.2000 APP/C0630/A/00/1050458 Withdrawn 10.11.2000

99/2379P - DEMOLITION OF MANAGER'S HOUSE & ERECTION OF TWO-STOREY 8-BEDROOM BLOCK EXTENSION; TWO STOREY FRONT AND REAR EXTENSIONS AND BALUSTRADING TO FLAT-ROOFED AREA - Refused 05.01. 2000

99/1303P - EXTENSION TO GYMNASIUM - Approved 11.08.1999

99/1301P - DEMOLITION OF MANAGER'S HOUSE AND ERECTION OF 10-BEDROOM BLOCK EXTENSION - Refused 11.08.1999

97/0316P - ALTERATIONS & EXTENSIONS TO HOTEL - Refused 20.06.1997
APP/C0630/A/97/285015 Dismissed 07.04.1998

77538P - SINGLE-STOREY KITCHEN EXTENSION BETWEEN HOTEL BOILER PLANT & STAFF CHANGING BUILDING - Approved 18.05.1994

75168P - EXTENSION TO FORM 17 ADDITIONAL BEDROOMS LEISURE POOL ASSOCIATED FACILITIES AND ADDITIONAL PARKING - Approved 24.03.1994

46018P - HOTEL EXTENSION - Approved 15.10.1986

46022P - HOTEL EXTENSION – Approved 15.10.1986

44991P - 27 BEDROOMS MEETING ROOM POOL AND CAR PARK EXTENSION - Refused 28.05.1986 - Appeal withdrawn 07.11.1986

41554P - PROPOSED CAR PARK EXTENSION FOR 42 CARS - Approved 21.06.1985

31405P - EXTENSIONS TO FORM NEW BEDROOM BLOCK; SWIMMING POOL AND STAFF ACCOMMODATION ALTERATIONS AND REFURBISHMENT OF EXISTING HOTEL - Approved 08.11.1982

POLICIES

Regional Spatial Strategy – DP1 (Spatial Principles), DP3 (Promote Sustainable Economic Development), DP5 (Manage Travel Demand; Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility), DP7 (Promote Environmental Quality), RT2 (Managing Travel Demand), W7 (Principles for Tourism Development) and RDF4 (Green Belts).

Local Plan Policy – NE11 (Nature Conservation), BE1 (Design Guidance), GC1 (Green Belt – New Buildings), RT13 (Tourism), DC1 (Design – New Build), DC2 (Extensions and Alterations), DC3 (Amenity), DC6 (Circulation and Access), DC8 (Landscaping) and DC9 (Tree Protection).

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Highways – No objection subject to conditions / s106 (travel plan)

Environmental Health – No objection

Visit Chester & Cheshire (Tourism Board) – Support the proposal as this will help contribute to the growth of the visitor economy in Cheshire East.

Tatton Park & Visitor Economy Manager – Supports the application from a visitor economy perspective.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Knutsford Town Council – No objection

Tabley Superior Parish Council – Comments not received at time of report preparation.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

None received at time of report preparation. The last date for comments on the application is 29 July 2009.

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The applicant has submitted a range of supporting documents. The Planning Statement outlines the policy background to the application and identifies the very special circumstances that the applicant considers exist to justify inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It sets out that the hotel provides four star accommodation and conference facilities, and is in direct competition with similar hotels within and adjacent to the Borough. Additional bed spaces are necessary to support the growth of local business and the extension of Parkgate Industrial Estate. The Council has accepted the appropriateness of the site for a major hotel and leisure complex by granting previous planning permissions for very substantial extensions. This approach is consistent with the approach taken by the Council taken in respect of other major hotels in the Borough, including Mottram Hall, Shrigley Hall, Moorside Grange and The Deanwater. The Council also considered that the recent Mere Golf & Country Club application comprised very special circumstances when granting permission for an 86 bedroom ancillary facility. They consider the case for Cottons is stronger being an existing hotel.

The Design & Access Statement outlines the design philosophy and evolution for the proposed extension, and incorporates a landscape statement with proposals for additional planting.

A report to consider whether there is a need for additional tourist accommodation in and around Knutsford has also been submitted. This examines the hotel's competitors and current market position and performance.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Green Belt

Since the previous application (08/2233P) was refused by the Main Planning Committee of the former Macclesfield Borough Council, the applicants have redesigned the side extension and removed the car park extension from the proposal. Consequently, there is no longer any encroachment of the hotel facility into the wider Green Belt.

The applicant is in agreement that the proposed extensions represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt as identified in PPG2. The assessment of the Green Belt issues therefore rests on the demonstration or otherwise of very special circumstances. The applicant's stated very special circumstances are summarised in the submitted planning statement as:

- Provision of needed additional bed spaces in a sustainable manner
- Securing the long-term viability of the business that supports the local economy
- Provision of accommodation in a way that would be proportionate to the site and its surroundings without adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

These issues are expanded upon in the submitted *Report to consider whether there is a 'need' for additional tourist accommodation in and around Knutsford* (Mike Stapleton, September 2008), and its addendum of April 2009. At the time of the previous application, the Council engaged the services of Tourism UK to provide a consultation response to this report. Their comments are still relevant to the consideration of this application. Tourism UK noted that:

- It is correct to state that where high hotel occupancy already exists economic growth can only be achieved through additional supply.
- The Mike Stapleton report shows that the applicants manage the business well and have continued to invest in the property.
- The report provides reasonable evidence to support the claim that additional bed spaces are needed in the area.
- The extension would ensure that the hotel was able to attract more conference business, that is was more profitable, and consequently would help to secure the long term viability of the hotel.
- In terms of current viability, the hotel produces an EBIT of £1.3m which is a profitable and viable business, however, if the capital employed is £20m, then this equates to a return of 6.5%.
- The business is not in decline but has remained fairly stagnant over the last 4 years with turnover growth not quite keeping up with inflation. Looking at occupancy achieved and the profitability of the business the operators are achieving all that they can out of the current assets and that further growth in profit would be unlikely without additional bedrooms.

The addendum report (Mike Stapleton, April 2009) submitted on behalf of the applicant notes that the Committee Report for the Mere Golf & Country Club application refers to "*A 10% investment is a reasonable expectation for most investors*". Consequently, it is highlighted that Cottons has failed to deliver a return on investment as high as officers accepted as being a "reasonable expectation" with regard to Mere.

Drawing some conclusions from the business case put forward by the applicant, it is apparent that the business is not in decline or at risk of failure, but there is an implicit requirement to remain competitive. This competitive requirement may indeed now be even more acute given the recent approval of 86 bedrooms at Mere Golf & Country Club. The existing return in investment would appear to be relatively modest, and it has been confirmed by Tourism UK that further growth in profits would be unlikely without additional bedrooms.

Furthermore, it is accepted that there is a requirement for additional hotel accommodation in Knutsford. This is reinforced by the comments from the local Tourist Board (Visit Chester & Cheshire) who consider that it is necessary to maximise the impact of existing assets, and to encourage them to develop in order for the full potential of the visitor economy to be realised. In this regard the note that Cottons is an important contributor to the visitor and local economy. Similarly, the Council's own Visitor Economy Manager identifies the value and potential of the Knutsford area with its many attractions, major events and business tourism to

the visitor economy of the area. He states that *there will continue to be a need for quality accommodation in the area for both tourism/leisure and business use and this will contribute to the potential growth of the Cheshire east visitor economy.*

The application site is approximately 1 mile from Knutsford Town Centre. The specific scale and character of the town centre significantly restricts the availability of non-Green Belt sites for such development, which again would suggest that the optimum solution is to maximize the potential of existing hotel sites. The comments from the submitted addendum report are also noted where it considers that a separate hotel with 27 bedrooms (the net total proposed in this application) would not be viable, and no developer / operator would consider it. The report states, *even if sequential testing indentified a site capable of providing enough land for 27 hotel bedrooms plus associated facilities and car parking, no such site would actually be developed.* Travelodge, which provides minimal facilities in relation to bedrooms, is referred to as even this company seek development opportunities for a minimum of 50 bedrooms.

The extension is substantial and will reduce the openness of the Green Belt within the site. However, paragraph 38 of PPS7 advises, "Planning authorities adopt a positive approach to proposed extensions to existing tourist accommodation where the scale of the extension is appropriate to its location and where the extension may help to ensure the future viability of such businesses". This advice is echoed in the Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism. The site is located near to other sizeable commercial uses, notably a large Land Rover dealership, and Fryers Rose Garden Centre / Sunlight Conservatories, where it could be argued that the impact of the extension will not be as significant when compared to a more isolated rural setting.

Having regard to the details outlined above, it is considered that the combination of these factors represents the very special circumstances required to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt caused by the inappropriate development of this proposal.

Design / Character

As is evident from the planning history, the hotel has been incrementally extended over the past 40 years. A fact that is not lost in its appearance. The existing building comprises a mix of single-storey, two-storey, two and a half-storey, and three-storey elements, finished predominantly in render with some brickwork features.

The first floor rear extension is very similar in form to the existing building, and is not prominent from public vantage points. The proposed side extension continues the two and a half storey appearance of the existing front elevation. The extension is 32 metres wide, and gives the existing building rather elongated appearance. However, the monotony of the front elevation is broken up by staggering the front building line, which divides this elongated elevation up into four equal sections. The end section, which is perhaps the most prominent in views when leaving Knutsford town centre, has a lower ridge line in an attempt to reduce its visual impact.

The incremental additions, and variety of styles, are evident on the existing building. The proposed design, whilst it simply reflects the style of the part of the building it extends from, it does serve to add a degree of continuity to the building, and is considered to be acceptable.

Positioned on the southeast side of the existing building, the proposed side extension will be visible from the A50, Manchester Road. Due to the relationship with public vantage points and the presence of existing and proposed vegetation, it is difficult to view the hotel in its entirety. It is largely glimpses of sections of the front elevation that are viewed when travelling along Manchester Road. The character of the area outlined above is not considered to be unduly harmed by the proposal.

Landscaping and Tree implications

The proposed scheme will result in the loss of some existing trees within the car park to accommodate the new extension, and near the site entrance. The Arboricultural Officer has commented on the application and he notes that none of the trees allocated for removal are of significant amenity value, and subject to appropriate replanting their loss can be accepted. The proposal also replaces two existing tennis courts with an extended car parking area and associated soft landscape areas to the boundaries.

The landscaping proposals involve the better management of the Manchester Road boundary and the screening belt along the southern boundary, as well as additional planting in the car park areas. The landscape proposals include a reduction in the width of the southern landscape belt from 7 metres to 4.8 metres, as well as the removal of selected trees within the remaining belt in exchange for some replanting. These removals are likely to reduce the density of planting and will potentially open up views through the tree belt. The submitted landscape layout is considered to be acceptable as an indicative guide, however further details will be required by condition to ensure that the integrity of the effective boundary screening is retained, to offset the loss of trees, and create a suitable layout for the car park in relation to the site and building.

Nature Conservation

No significant ecological issues are raised by the proposal, however a condition is recommended to ensure that some provision is made for birds and bats as part of the development in order to achieve a nature conservation gain in accordance with PPS9.

There may be some potential to disturb breeding birds (and lead to an offence being committed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act), and the Nature Conservation Officer recommends a condition in this regard requiring a survey for nesting birds. However, as this is a matter dealt with by other legislation, it is suggested that an appropriate informative is attached instead, should Members be minded to approve the application.

Residential amenity

Having regard to the distance to and relationship with the nearest residential properties, no significant amenity issues are raised.

Highways and transport

Located between 2 and 3 kilometres from Knutsford bus and train stations, the site is reliant on private car use. Consequently a Travel Plan has been submitted that looks at more sustainable transport choices for visitors and staff. The travel plan appears to satisfy the

criteria set out for the formulation of such schemes and has taken on board comments issued by the former Highway Authority for the previous interim travel plan (submitted as part of application 08/2233P). However, the Highways department notes that considering that the proposed development is a small section of the site as a whole and the fact that the hotel already admits to using a mini bus for various pick ups, matters such as travel plan surveys, a car sharing register, preparation of a travel database and the issue of welcome packs to all existing staff could be undertaken in a shorter time scale than identified in the TP documentation. The Travel Plan should be subject of a Section 106 Agreement with the applicant.

Highways consider that the increase in vehicular traffic is insufficient to create any significant impact on the adjoining highway network. Consequently they raise no objections subject to conditions relating to car parking, cycle parking and surface water drainage (petrol interceptors needed). No objections are raised with regard to the car parking provision and layout or with regard to the servicing arrangements.

Heads of Terms

A section 106 agreement is required to produce and operate a travel plan for the Cottons Hotel, which has been produced in accordance with local and national standards, guidance and best practice and has regard to the nature of the site, its accessibility and local transport provision, along with the requirement to pay the Highway Authority's costs associated with the monitoring and review of the travel plan. Such a plan (and its successors), which if appropriate, shall be implemented in a phased manner, shall include procedures for monitoring, review, remedial action and shall be operated at all times while the development is occupied.

CONCLUSION

The proposal is defined as inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However, very special circumstances are considered to exist to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt caused by inappropriate development. The design of the building is also considered to be acceptable, and has an acceptable impact upon the character and appearance of the surrounding area. A recommendation of approval is therefore made.

SUBJECT TO

The receipt of comments from outstanding consultees, the expiry of the publicity period and referral to Government Office for the North West.

Application for Full Planning

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to following conditions

1. A03FP - Commencement of development (3 years)
2. A01AP - Development in accord with approved plans
3. A06EX - Materials as application

