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| Planning Reference No: | 10/0947N |
| Application Address: | Former George Hotel West Street Crewe |
| Proposal: | Proposed Residential Development Comprising of 9 no. 2 Storey Dwellings including Associated Parking & Vehicle Access |
| Applicant: | Pochin Developments & Malahat Properties |
| Application Type: | Outline Planning Permission |
| Grid Reference: | 368157 355955 |
| Ward: | Crewe West |
| Earliest Determination Date: | 28 April 2010 |
| Expiry Dated: | 7 May 2010 |
| Date Report Prepared: | 9 April 2010 |
| Constraints: | Settlement boundary |

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Delegated Authority to APPROVE subject to conditions and no new issues being raised

MAIN ISSUES:

- Impact on Highway Safety
- Impact on Nature Conservation
- Impact on Neighbouring Amenity
- Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area
- Contaminated Land

1. REASON FOR REPORT

This application is included on the agenda of the Southern Planning Committee as the application has been called in by Councillor Cartlidge due to concerns regarding highways issues, over domination and the impact on neighbouring residential amenity.

2. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application relates to the site of the former George Hotel located on the northern side of West Street within the built up area of Crewe. The site is a little over 2km to the west of Crewe town centre. To the north of West Street is an extensive area of housing. To the south there is King George V Playing Fields and a Fitness First gym and Leisure Centre. Further to the south of Coppenhall Lane there is an additional area of housing. Marshfield Bank Employment Park lies further to the west. There is also an extensive employment area, including the Bentley car plant, to the north of the residential area adjacent to the application site.

The site itself measures 0.41ha and did comprise a vacant public house, its car park and beer garden. This building has however since been demolished. The site is bounded by a low wall to the front of the site, with concrete panelling to 2a Sunnybank Road and shrubs and hedging to 639 West Street. There is a prominent willow tree located in the former beer garden area.

3. DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

The proposals relate to an outline application with all matters reserved for proposed residential development comprising nine 2 storey dwellings and associated car parking and vehicle access.

It is proposed to position a pair of semi-detached two storey family houses on the smaller plot and two blocks of housing on the larger plot. The latter would comprise one pair of semi-detached two storey houses and a row of 5 two storey terraced houses fronting onto West Street.

4. RELEVANT HISTORY

None relevant

5. POLICIES

Development Plan Policies

Regional Policy

DP2 Promote Sustainable Communities
DP3 Promote Sustainable Economic Development
DP5 Manage Travel Demand; Reduce the Need to Travel, and Increase Accessibility
DP7 Promote Environmental Quality
DP9 Reduce Emissions and Adapt to Climate Change

Local Plan Policy

NE.5 Nature Conservation and Habitats
BE.1 Amenity
BE.2 Design Standards
BE.3 Access and Parking
BE.4 Drainage, Utilities and Resources
BE.6 Development on Potentially Contaminated Land
TRAN.9 Car Parking Standards
RES.2 Unallocated Housing Sites
RES.3 Housing Densities
CF.3 Retention of Community Facilities
E.7 Existing Employment Sites

Other Material Considerations

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS3: Housing
SPD Development on Backland and Gardens

6. CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

None received at the time of report preparation

7. OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

Letters of representation have been received from the occupiers of 7 Bilton Way and 2B Sunnybank Road, 3, 18 & 24 Coppenhall Lane, 627 West Street, 14 Deva Road, 4 Merrills Avenue, of 639 West Street, 2B, 18 Sunnybank Road, 9 & 11 Primrose Hill, 5 Bilton Way, 15 Burlea Close, 3, 16 Coppenhall Lane and 4 Merrills Avenue making the following points:

- Positive use of space
- Convenience store would help
- In need of quick development
- Need to restrict parking for residents and double yellow lines
- Pavement curbs need realigning
- Highway safety; concerns regarding additional on street parking
- Amenity; litter, conflict between use of smaller unit and residential properties,
- Request removal of willow tree due to anti social behaviour
- Request houses no more than 2 storeys
- Request provision of post office
- Will enhance the area
- Opening hours need restricting
- Houses should be no more than 2 storeys
- Houses are too close to the retail units
- Will need policing in the evenings
- Drainage issues need to be addressed as during heavy rain flooding occurs along the road
- Concerns about noise and volume of traffic
- Concerns about antisocial behaviour at night time
- Problems with speeding traffic will be exacerbated.

8. APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

In support of the proposal the applicant has submitted a Design and Access Statement (DAS) which provides details on the pre-application discussions undertaken and information on the use, amount, layout, scale, landscaping, appearance, access and sustainability of the proposals.

9. OFFICER APPRAISAL

The main issues in this case concern the principle of residential development, the impact of the development on the amenities of adjacent residential properties, the appearance of the locality, access and parking provision and nature conservation.

Principle of Residential Development

The site lies within the settlement boundary of Crewe and is classed as an unallocated Brownfield site. Policy RES.2 of the Local Plan states that development on such sites will be permitted subject to policies BE.1- BE.5. Residential development on the site is therefore acceptable in principle, subject to details matters of design, amenity car parking, access and drainage considerations.

In terms of density policy RES.3 suggests between 30-50 dph where the quality of the local environment is not compromised and provided that this is on a scale in keeping with

the character of the area. The Supplementary Planning Document: Development on Backland and Gardens states that developments which look cramped or fails to comply with appropriate spacing and open space guidelines will not be permitted.

In this instance, the proposals achieve a density of 45dph which accords with national guidance and is synonymous with the existing character of the area.

Loss of Community Facility

The public house is located within Crewe, although it is outside the town centre boundary. Demand for public houses has declined- 56 (of which 80% are in urban areas) close each month. The building had been vacant for some time prior to demolition. Given that the use ceased some time ago, the building has been demolished and the proposals represent an opportunity to re-establish a business use at the site it would be unreasonable to require any kind of marketing in respect of the re-use of the site for a public house.

In addition it should be noted there are a considerable number of other public houses within a short walking distance of the site and public houses within urban areas have been going into decline due to a lack of demand for such facilities.

Policy CF3 seeks to protect community facilities which make a positive contribution to the social or cultural life of a community, unless suitable alternative provision is made. Information received in support of other similar proposals has demonstrated that, in line with other appeal decisions which would result in the loss of a public house, where there are other facilities within easy walking distance then there are no planning objections to the loss in principle. Appeal decisions make it clear that the consideration is whether there are alternative establishments in the local area not whether they offer exactly the same ambience/ facilities as the one which has closed. Policy CF3 makes no reference to the need to market an establishment before it is lost or for any considerations regarding viability. Whereas the Council has used such a reason for refusal for other premises in villages, the same considerations do not apply to the loss of a public house in a town such as Crewe with other public houses within walking distance.

Loss of Employment Site

The former public house also constituted an employment site, which local plan policies seek to protect. However, given that a parallel application is under consideration for the redevelopment of another part of the site to provide 2 retail units it is considered that overall the number of jobs provided on the site is likely to increase over the number associated with the previous use. Consequently there is no conflict with these policies.

Amenity

The redevelopment of the site for housing is considered to be an appropriate land use as the site is surrounded by residential development.

The site is capable of accommodating a residential development of 9 units in accordance with the Councils guidelines relating to new housing sites. In particular a distance of 21m can be retained between the existing properties along Sunnybank Road and Primrose Hill and the new houses. A development can also be accommodated within the site without adversely affecting the garden area or principal windows of No.2a Sunnybank Road and 639 West Street.

There will not be any conflict between the retail units proposed under 10/0665N and the new dwellings, provided that the conditions suggested by Environmental Health in respect of that application are imposed. A condition in respect of boundary treatment should eliminate the opportunity for overlooking of garden areas from the retail units.

The Council's Supplementary Planning Document: Development on Backland and Gardens recommends the provision of 50 sq. m of private amenity space per dwelling. The proposed layout appears to provide sufficient garden space for the units although, as proposed, the presence of the existing willow tree will cause an amenity issue for the residents of plot 9. However this is an outline application with all matters reserved and it is considered that an amended site layout plan could resolve this matter.

Design Standards

PPS1 seeks to encourage high quality, inclusive design which takes the opportunity to improve the character of the area.

Policy BE.2 adds to this that proposals should respect the character, pattern and form of the surroundings, not adversely affect the streetscene and deter vandalism and crime.

The existing buildings surrounding the site are mostly residential and are of varying ages and architectural styles. Most of the houses are two storeys high with some single storey properties along West Street. There are more utilitarian buildings such as the Fitness First leisure centre within the locality.

The SPD states that *'a development which looks out of place and doesn't respect the positive characteristics of immediate surroundings will not be permitted. Although new development should have its own sense of identity this should not be at the cost of the surrounding built environment. Housing may take a similar form and appearance to that in the surrounding area, but it is equally possible that a design allowing a more or less dense development might be appropriate'*

As this is an outline application no elevational details have been supplied. The indicative site layout plan shows two pairs of semi-detached dwellings and a row of five terraced properties. Given the variety of different building styles and types within the locality it is considered there is sufficient variation to ensure that the footprints shown would not result in a form of development out of keeping with the prevailing character of the area.

The properties proposed are two storey, respect the established building line and address the road frontage. As such the layout would appear to respect the prevailing character and pattern of development within the locality.

Highway Safety

Appendix 8.1 of the Local Plan stipulates that a minimum of two car parking spaces per dwelling should be provided. The indicative layout shows that the proposals are capable of according with this standard and as such will not exacerbate parking problems within the locality.

It is considered that this small residential development will not unacceptably exacerbate existing traffic volumes or in the locality, particularly given the established use of the site as a public house.

The point of access will be shared with the retail units. However there is a clear demarcation between car parking for the residential properties and car parking for the customers and staff of the retail units. There is sufficient visibility at the access to negate any conflict between users and in the absence of any objection from the Strategic Highways Manager it is not considered that a refusal on highway safety grounds could be sustained.

Nature Conservation

There is a large and prominent willow tree located in the north east corner of the site.

The landscape architect has independently inspected the tree and considers that it makes an important contribution to the character of the area and has an aesthetic amenity value to the public realm, and should be retained.

Whilst the indicative layout proposed would result in an unsatisfactory relationship between the tree and unit 9, as this is an outline application with all matters reserved, it is considered that an amended site layout would enable both the retention of the tree and the provision of a garden area for plot 9 which would not suffer from overshadowing. Furthermore the development could be constructed without undermining the longevity and subsequent long term retention of the tree.

Local residents have expressed concern about the impact of the tree on their properties. However, the tree in question is 12m from the nearest residential property at 11 Primrose Hill and the Councils Landscape Architect has concluded that any amenity issues for neighbouring properties resulting from the presence of the tree are insufficient to warrant its removal.

Concerns have also been raised in respect of the tree providing a focal point for anti-social behaviour. However it is considered that this issue would be addressed through securely enclosing the tree within the private garden area of plot 9. It is recommended therefore that the tree should be retained and a condition imposed to ensure that adequate tree protection measures are provided.

Other Matters

Given that residential development is a sensitive end use it is considered necessary to condition a contaminated land assessment.

The earliest determination date for this application is 28th April 2010. In order to ensure that the application is determined within the statutory timescales and performance target are met, the recommendation is that delegated powers be granted to the Head of Planning and Policy to determine the application following the expiry of the consultation period, provided that no new material considerations are raised.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND REASONS FOR DECISION

The principle of residential development on the site is acceptable as the site lies within the settlement boundary of Crewe where there is a presumption in favour of development. The indicative site layout represents a form of development which would respect the prevailing character and pattern of development within the locality and as such would not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the area. In addition the proposals will not raise any concerns for neighbouring amenity, highway safety or nature conservation.

11. RECOMMENDATION

Resolve to GRANT DELEGATED AUTHORITY to the Head of Planning and Policy to APPROVE the application subject to no new issues being raised and the following conditions:

- 1. Standard Outline Condition**
- 2. Submission of Reserved Matters**
- 3. Materials**
- 4. Approved Plans**
- 5. Tree to be Retained**
- 6. Tree Protection Measures**
- 7. Contaminated Land**

Location Plan: Cheshire East Council Licence No. 100049045

