

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: 20 January 2012

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. The application has previously been considered by the Northern Planning Committee on 13 April 2011, where it was resolved to defer the application to allow officers to assess additional information submitted by the applicant and to allow further negotiations to take place regarding the scheme of redevelopment for application 11/0107M.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site comprises a detached two-storey locally listed building dating from the 19th 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

Regional Spatial Strategy

None directly relevant

Local Plan Policy

BE2 – Preservation of Historic Fabric

BE3 – Conservation Areas

BE4 – Demolition Criteria in Conservation Areas

BE20 – Locally important buildings

Other Material Considerations

Prestbury Supplementary Planning Document (July 2011)

Prestbury Conservation Area Appraisal (2006)

Prestbury Village Design Statement (2007)

Local List of Historic Buildings SPD (2010)

PPS5 Planning for the Historic Environment

Ministerial Statement – Planning for Growth (March 2011)

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (July 2011)

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

English Heritage – Recommend the refusal of the application based on an unsatisfactory justification for the demolition of Ford House.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

Prestbury Parish Council – Object to this application on the grounds that Ford House is a building of local historical interest in a conservation area and is part of the heritage of the village and it would be a loss of a community asset and is an overdevelopment of the site.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

The majority of letters received in representation make reference to both the planning application and the Conservation Area consent application. All representations are therefore highlighted below:

Prior to the revised plans being submitted, 122 letters of representation had been received. 91 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

31 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

Since the reconsultation process on the revised plans, a further 16 letters have been received. 12 of these letters (including one from the Prestbury Business Forum) support the proposal for the following additional reasons:

- Lengthy delays on the Ford House site are adversely affecting local businesses
- It will restore the street scene
- Increased number of people in the village will be a benefit to local businesses
- Support from Prestbury Business Forum

4 of the letters (including one from the Prestbury Amenity Society and one from the Save Ford House Group) object to the proposal for the following additional reasons:

- Locally listed buildings should be preserved
- Conservation Areas are intended to ensure that such buildings are preserved rather than replaced
- Replacement does not preserve and enhance character and appearance of Conservation Area
- Absence of any community accommodation, i.e. Youth Club
- Ford House is one of the first older buildings seen by visitors when approaching from North East
- Location in relation to Grade 1 listed church enhances necessity to preserve
- Does not recognise the recommendations of PPS5 particularly clause 2.6
- Contrary to Prestbury SPD and Village Design Statement
- Deliberate neglect does not justify demolition (PPS5)
- Building is protected by policies BE2 and BE20
- Adverse impact upon historic fabric
- Proposal is not enabling development
- No evidence of substantial public benefit
- Contrary to policies BE3 and BE4
- Copper Beech tree is a dominant feature of the site and will be lost if development is approved – with other direct tree losses and threats – contrary to DC9
- Does not comply with policy DC41 relating infill housing development
- No agreement on replacement community facilities for the Youth Club. A s.106 agreement should be submitted with details of provision to offset this loss of community facilities and car parking (policy IMP1)

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.

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 and 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.

Additional information submitted since the previous committee meeting has highlighted the fact that it is the Prestbury Conservation Area that is the designated Heritage Asset, in accordance with the PPS5 definition, and not the locally listed Ford House, which is an “undesigned” heritage asset. The appropriate policy test is therefore HE9.4 of PPS5 rather than HE9.2.

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.

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.

Locally Listed buildings are identified within PPS5 as "heritage assets", whereas Conservation Areas are identified as "designated heritage assets". A heritage statement has been submitted with the application that provides a description of the significance of the heritage assets affected and the contribution of their setting to that significance in accordance with policy HE6 of PPS5.

Policy HE9 of PPS5 identifies levels of harm to designated heritage assets arising from proposed developments, and how they should be considered. HE9.2 refers to "substantial harm to or total loss of significance", and HE9.4 refers to proposals that result in "less than substantial harm". The applicant's heritage statement maintains that the correct test should be that of HE9.4, as the harm of the proposal is less than substantial. This is due to the alterations that have been made to the original Ford House, the condition of the existing building, and the fact that the replacement is sympathetic to the existing in terms of scale, height, mass and design.

English Heritage, however, considers that the test in HE9.2, in terms of the substantial harm to the Conservation Area by loss of a principal building, should be applied. English Heritage maintain that Ford House does make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, noting that even though the building has had some external alterations, mainly Edwardian and 1970s rear extensions, the main façade towards The Village is largely intact and is a focus when driving through the village. They do also acknowledge that the interior has little significance due to the extent of alterations, that Ford House is in a poor condition, and that it will be costly to repair the building. However they do not consider that this should be a factor to take into account when assessing the application as this could result in a number of cases where deliberate neglect would be seen as a way of obtaining consent for demolition. An issue that is reinforced by policy HE7.6 of PPS5.

The Council's Conservation Officer however considers that the impact of the proposal, upon the Conservation Area, in terms of street scene appearance is arguably limited, due to the replacement building mimicking the original Ford House. However, impact on street scene within the conservation area is a small consideration, outweighed by the fundamental principle of demolition. This would be contrary to the Local Plan by virtue of loss of historic fabric, loss of a Locally Listed Building and loss of a building which makes a positive contribution to the character (with emphasis on character rather than appearance depending on the final finish of the new building) and appearance of the Prestbury Conservation Area. He considers 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 total loss of Ford House (a heritage asset) is unfortunate, and is arguably contrary to policies BE2 and BE20 of the Local Plan. However, whilst it is acknowledged that HE7.6 states that the deteriorated state of a heritage asset that has been caused by deliberate neglect or damage should not be a consideration when assessing development proposals, there is no specific evidence in this case to suggest that the condition of the building has arisen through the deliberate actions (or inaction) of the site owners. The condition of the building should therefore be considered in order to assess the level of harm arising from the current proposal.

The building is in a poor state of repair, and the Council's Structural Engineer has visited the site. He generally concurs with the submitted structural engineers report and considers that the repairs/rebuilding elements noted in that report would leave the structural skeleton of the main building generally in place although all roofs and floors would probably have to be stripped out and replaced. He also notes that without any repair works being undertaken on the building, what remains of the structure will very rapidly deteriorate due to the ingress of water that is already occurring in many areas.

The report also recommends the repair of hairline cracks in the roughcast

render, however given that cement-based render is incapable of movement any cracks will open up again in the future. The render is also impervious and prevents the passage of moisture through the solid brick walls which is necessary to avoid further decay. The removal of the render is therefore also necessary in the long term, and it is likely that this could not be achieved without damaging the face of the bricks, which will mean either removing the roughcast and re-rendering in a lime-based coating to allow for movement and permeability of moisture, or the replacement of the outer leaf of bricks.

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."*

A repair option has been investigated by the applicants, which indicates that it is possible to repair the building, however, the policy test (above) is whether the building is beyond reasonable repair. The cost of this repair is clearly a limiting factor to the future of the building and the potential of the site. Detailed costings have been submitted, which indicate that it would be significantly more costly (in excess of £100,000) to partially demolish and refurbish the existing building to their requirements than demolish the entire building and construct a replacement.

Policy HE9.1 of PPS5 states that loss affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification, and that there is a presumption in favour of the conservation of all designated heritage assets. English Heritage considers that 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. They consider that 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.

Similarly, the Local List of Historic Buildings Supplementary Planning Document states that “proposals for the demolition of Locally Listed Buildings must normally demonstrate clear and convincing evidence that the building is no longer of local importance”. As noted above, the existing condition of the building does serve to undermine its local importance. Furthermore, Prestbury Parish Council carried out their own independent survey of the development proposals. 1,391 questionnaires were sent out to Prestbury residents / businesses, and 707 were returned. The results found an overwhelming support for the proposal to demolish Ford House and erect a replacement building with town houses to the rear. 525 of the 707 respondents supported the current scheme. These results do serve to question whether Ford House is still truly of local importance if the majority of local people are happy to see it replaced.

The two aspects of Ford House that are considered to contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area are its historic fabric and its visual function due to its prominent position at the end of The Village. These are the aspects picked up on by English Heritage, The Council’s conservation officer and the applicant’s historic buildings advisor.

In terms of historic fabric, clearly the works that would be required to bring the existing building back to a useable condition would have a significant effect upon the existing historic fabric. The evidence would suggest that only the shell of the brickwork walls would remain, which would undermine the historic integrity of the building significantly.

With regard to its visual function at the end of The Village, it is difficult to see how the effect of the building or its contribution to the Conservation Area would be significantly different if the building were to be replaced, as opposed to being repaired to the extent outlined above. The historical “associations” would not necessarily be so great, but as the local listing identifies,

the current Ford House is already a “reconstruction of an earlier building, rebuilt circa 1850 – 1875”. The quality of the materials to be used in its repair or its replacement is perhaps of more importance. The building does not merit national listing, whereas the majority of the other buildings along The Village are nationally listed.

In terms of public benefits, 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 (approved under application 11/0144M), thereby securing the future of this significant heritage asset, as well as facilitating required works to the Grade II listed Norman Chapel and Hearse House. The supporting information does suggest that the church extension and facilities within Ford House provide benefits to both the church and the wider community. These include improvement to visual appearance of the village; the creation of two new jobs: A Community & Youth Worker (primarily in Upton Priory) and a Children & Families Worker; upgrading of the Church of the Resurrection at Upton Priory for community uses, which is in the Parish of Prestbury; Parish office; some of the income from the sale of the new buildings will be for the benefit of children and young people; Ministry team workspace (clergy, readers, pastoral workers); increased availability of existing community spaces, with groups relocating back to church facilities freeing space elsewhere.

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.

The concern expressed by Prestbury Business Forum should also be acknowledged. They consider that the structural condition and appearance of Ford House is severely affecting the street scene, and is now impacting adversely on the businesses trading on The Village and New Road in particular. The proposal will restore the street scene and will lead to an increase in the number of people living in the centre of the village and increased footfall which will help support the businesses trading in the village.

It is therefore considered, having considerable regard to the existing condition of the building, that the harm to the Conservation Area arising solely from the replacement of Ford House is less than substantial harm. There are identifiable benefits to the scheme, some more tangible than others. The harm to the Conservation Area (as a designated heritage asset) arising from the demolition of Ford House is not considered to be sufficiently significant to resist the principle its demolition. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with the requirements of PPS5.

However, 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 therefore the proposal is contrary to policy BE4 of the Local Plan.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The principle of the demolition of Ford House is accepted for the reasons outlined above, however given that the accompanying planning application 11/0107M is not considered to be an acceptable form of replacement development within the Conservation Area at this time, this application is recommended for refusal.

Application for Conservation Area Consent

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse for the following reasons

1. R03CA - Demolition of building in Conservation Area

