

Application No: 16/4706N

Location: REASEHEATH COLLEGE, MAIN ROAD, WORLESTON, NANTWICH, CHESHIRE, CW5 6DF

Proposal: Construction of student accommodation scheme and associated works

Applicant: Ben Hunt, Reaseheath College

Expiry Date: 06-Jan-2017

SUMMARY

The application seeks full planning permission for five 2 and 3 storey blocks of student accommodation to the rear of the Reaseheath campus. The site is situated within the Open Countryside and adjacent to the Reaseheath Conservation Area. It is considered that the principal of development is acceptable and is associated with the agricultural nature of the College.

The proposal will enable more on-site provision for student accommodation, which in turn will reduce movement to-and from the site, making it more sustainable. The internal parking provision is to be managed by the College, to ensure it does not have a knock on affect on the adjacent roads, and the Strategic Highways officer has raised no concerns with the development proposal. Furthermore, the loss of trees and impact on ecology is considered to be acceptable and will not have a detrimental impact Trees or protected species. There will also be no significantly negative impact on neighbouring amenity.

The amended proposal is of design, height, bulk and position which will have a minimal impact on the Conservation Area and Open Countryside. Details of hard and soft landscaping and materials details are subject to approval by condition, and therefore the proposal is considered to acceptable in accordance with Local and National Planning Policy.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve with conditions

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

Reaseheath College is located approximately two miles north of Nantwich town centre and is accessed off the A51. The application site is located centrally within the college campus, on land previously used for greenhouses and other horticultural purposes. The land is slightly elevated from the adjacent land and the Reaseheath Conservation Area is sited to the south of the site, but not within it.

The application site is located just outside the Reaseheath Conservation Area and is within the open countryside.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Full Planning Permission is sought for the construction of a student accommodation scheme and associated works. The revised proposal is for 200 student bedrooms, in the form of 5 blocks of townhouse designed properties. The proposed buildings are a mix of 2 and 3 storey height and the proposed buildings would be of brick construction with tiled roof, and large window openings. The proposal also includes a small single storey Laundry building and associated soft and hard landscaping to create a courtyard.

RELEVANT HISTORY

P97/0086 - Replacement glasshouse incorporating farmshop – approved with conditions 3rd March 1997

P98/0950 - Steel framed building (GPDO Determination). – Determination – approval not required (stage 1)

P08/1142 - Construction of Barn for Teaching, Barn for Staff/Student Services, Tractor/Tool Store, Landscape Workshop and Teaching Area, 3 Commercial /Teaching Glasshouses, 3 Polytunnels and Associated Works (Development to be Constructed over 2 Phases) – approved with conditions 11th December 2008

7/09192 - Glass house. – approved with conditions 5th August 1982

POLICIES

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council Local Plan Policy

BE.1 (Amenity)
BE.2 (Design Standards)
BE.3 (Access and Parking)
BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)
BE.5 (Infrastructure)
BE.7 (Conservation Areas)
NE.2 (Open Countryside)
NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)
NE.9 (Protected Species)
RT.9 (Footpaths and Bridleways)
TRAN.5 (Provision for Cyclists)
TRAN.6 (Cycle Routes)

TRAN.9 (Car Parking Standards)

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy – Submission Version

SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East

SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles

SE 1 Design

SE 7 The Historic Environment

SC 3 Health and Well Being

CO 1 Sustainable Travel and Transport

Worleston and District Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan is yet to reach Regulation 14 stage and as a result no weight can be given to the Neighbourhood Plan at this stage.

Other Material Planning Considerations

Reaseheath Local Development Order

The EC Habitats Directive 1992

Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010

Circular 6/2005 - Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System

CONSIDERATIONS (External to Planning)

United Utilities: No objections subject to conditions for a flood risk assessment, and sustainable management and maintenance plan.

Environmental Protection: No objections, subject to conditions for noise mitigation, travel information pack, and contaminated land, soil and unidentified contamination.

Highways: No objection, subject to condition Construction Management Statement implementation

Flood Risk: No objection subject to conditions for surface water drainage, management of overland flow, and finish floor levels.

Spatial Planning - In summary, the proposals are considered acceptable and no objections are raised to the application for Student Accommodation. The site proposed for the Student Accommodation does not fall within the remit of the recently approved Local Development Order (LDO) which was adopted on 19th October 2016.

As an informative, any future development on the Reaseheath College campus site must be determined in line with the Design Statement and Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), produced to support the LDO.

Reaseheath College is an established educational institution and already offers a level of Student Accommodation on site, which was subject to planning approval and has since been completed.

Opinion Research Services (ORS) prepared a Housing Development Study to consider the full objectively assessed need for housing (FOAN) in the Borough. ORS found that the headline Objectively Assessed Need for Housing in Cheshire East was 36,000 dwellings over the 20-year

period 2010-30, equivalent to an average of 1,800 dwellings per year. However this relates to C3 housing and C2 (residential institutions for the elderly) only and so the need for Student Accommodation across Cheshire East has not been tested or set at a particular level. These proposals are also fully compliant with policies within the emerging Local Plan Strategy (LPS), particularly policy EG2, Rural Economy.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH / TOWN COUNCIL

Worleston and District Parish Council – Worleston Parish Council (WDPC) is not objecting to the whole of this application, only the Contractors Access which from a planning perspective is unsafe and unwelcome and purely a convenience for RHC.

WDPC questions the need for a 4 storey accommodation block which if visible from outside the campus is totally out of character with the low rise nature of the rest of the campus within a rural environment.

WDPC strongly object to the proposals for the access to contractor's traffic. Strictly speaking this is outside of the recently approved LDO, however WDPC believe the planning principles to be like for like. In point 4 of the conditions attached to the LDO for campus sites 1-5 CEC states that all construction access should be via Worleston Road/B5074 entrance for the reasons of "protecting the amenity of nearby residents". WDPC would ask what is the difference here. The College would like to use Wettenhall Road and the farm track for construction access, seriously damaging the amenity of houses on Reaseheath Green A51, Holly Bank Farm and the residents on the lower half of Cinder Lane. Having already secured an extra entrance on the B5074, the Parish Council believes that this would set another precedent for a general entrance off Wettenhall Road. An unclassified Road the section between the A51 and the farm track is narrow endangering pedestrians and cyclists particularly between the Crewe Alex Training Ground and the splay into the A51 junction. Two 30 ton vehicles would not pass simultaneously without extreme care. The stretch also contains a 45 degree bend and a pinch point on the junction with the A51, a frequent site for minor and medium grade accidents. The very nature of this traffic, i.e. Multiple trips daily for 30 ton plus vehicles will exponentially increase traffic movements on this stretch of unclassified rural highway. RHC have shown on the recent Muga pitch project to pay scant regard to traffic management etc. with:

- construction access allowed well in advance of agreed start times
- allowing large vehicles to queue on a major trunk road and blocking visibility from and access to private driveways. Using this entrance these vehicles again would access via the A51 and then Wettenhall Road, compromising the amenity of these properties plus those in Cinder Lane adding many 10's of heavy vehicle movements per day. Traffic queuing to join the A51 would be seriously inconvenienced whilst potential lines of heavy tippers wait to join the busy A51 which is already congested at peak times by college traffic on the Reaseheath roundabout and the student crossing at the equine centre. This road is the lifeline for Poole, Cholmondeston, Aston, Stoke and Wettenhall etc to the A51 and Nantwich. Indications are that some traffic would attempt to miss this pinch point by using smaller lanes around Worleston School to gain access to the B5074, a potential dangerous scenario. To quote the LDO judgement we believe using this so far low level entrance is not in the interests of the amenity of nearby residents. In addition a hazard and an inconvenience to upstream villager relying on this road for access to Nantwich. Whilst WDPC appreciates the condition placed by planners on the LDO approval, WDPC fail to see any material difference in terms of this development. It is instead rather more of a planning convenience for RHC which in their many meetings with the Parish Council has never been presented before. If approved WDPC believe RHC will take as a precedent for future projects to the detriment of

residents. Access is available via Worleston Road and the rear (northern end) of the campus so in the interests of resident amenity, highway safety and condition, pedestrian and cycle safety, and the maintenance of a reasonable journey to work and school thoroughfare WDPC would ask that the Planning Committee reject this part of the application and stick to the judgement in point 4 of the LDO Approval.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:

None received at time of writing this report.

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The application site is situated wholly within the Open Countryside, where Local Plan Policy NE.2 and Policy PG 5 of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan, note only development which is essential for the purposes of agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation is acceptable. The application does not necessarily meet these requirements; however the site is an existing Agricultural College within the open countryside and therefore is a use which is appropriate within a rural area. The proposed development must be in keeping with the agricultural nature of the site and the wider open countryside. The proposal will be sited within the existing envelope of development, on previously development land, within the site and therefore it is considered that provided the development is of a scale and design which is keeping with the surrounding development the proposal will not have detrimental impact on the character of the open countryside.

Therefore it is considered that the principle of development on the site is acceptable, subject to compliance with the relevant policies of the Local Plan. Furthermore, as this site is situated adjacent to the Reaseheath Conservation Area, the design, scale and position of the development are key considerations in the determination of the application.

In terms of the emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy there is support within Strategic Priority 1 which states that economic prosperity will be created by *'securing excellent educational facilities to meet the needs of the current and future population of all ages, to improve educational attainment and provide a wide skills base'*.

Furthermore policy SC3 (Health and Well Being) which states that the Council will improve education and skills and life-long learning and policy SD1 (Sustainable Development in Cheshire East) states that development should provide appropriate infrastructure to meet the needs of the local community including education.

Design and Impact on the Conservation Area

The proposal as amended is for five 2 and 3 storey blocks of student accommodation, with varying numbers of 'town houses' creating small terrace blocks of student accommodation. The scheme has been amended to reduce the number of beds from over 300 to 200. The scheme has also reduced from seven blocks of 3 and 4 storey buildings, to the now proposed five blocks of 2 and 3 storey height.

The proposed blocks of student accommodation would be positioned around a hard landscaped area and parking area, creating a courtyard style landscaped development. The site is surrounded by buildings on three sides and open countryside to the north. The surrounding buildings are a mix of traditional and more modern and are a mix of single storey, and two storey with some buildings of a three storey height, but mainly these are features such as chimneys. The Reaseheath Conservation area sits adjacent to the southern site boundary. There is also a Public Right of Way which runs approximately 350m to the north of the site.

The revised scheme includes a mix of 2 and 3 storey buildings. The applicant states that the buildings will be constructed on a lower level than the current land level of the site, which is slightly elevated than the adjoining buildings, and the eaves have been reduced as low as possible to help reduce the overall height of the buildings.

The proposed student accommodation blocks would be sited around the edge of the site with an open aspect to the north and two blocks reduced to partly two storey adjacent to the conservation area boundary. The elevations include large windows and are of a symmetrical nature. The roof line of each block has been designed in such a way as to break up the bulk of the buildings and create a development which is more akin to the existing development within the Reaseheath site, which is of varied height, scale and density.

The Design and Heritage Officers have reviewed the revised proposal and considered that the majority of the original concerns with the original proposal, in regards to design, height, mass and impact on the conservation area have now been addressed. Although the overall height of some of three storey blocks would benefit from a reduction in height in parts to help create a more varied detail, the development has been significantly altered with the removal of two blocks to allow views through the site. The variations in height and rooflines and siting of the blocks adjacent to the Conservation Area will help to reduce the overall impact of the development on the open countryside and Conservation Area.

The material pallet is an important consideration in this sensitive position, on the edge of the Conservation Area and open countryside. It is considered that the details of the external materials, soft and hard landscaping will need to be approved by condition.

It is therefore considered that the proposed development as amended will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the open countryside or the adjacent Conservation Area, subject to controlling conditions for materials and landscaping which are key to the detailed delivery of this development.

Amenity

Policy BE.1 (Amenity) states that development will be permitted provided that the development is compatible with surrounding land uses, does not prejudice the amenity of future or neighbouring occupiers, does not prejudice the safe movement of traffic and does not cause an increase in air, noise, water pollution which might have an adverse impact on the use of land for other purposes.

The proposed building is sited within the existing College campus with no neighbouring properties surrounding the site. Therefore, considering the separation distances and the intervening boundary treatment will help to mitigate any negative externalities.

Furthermore, the bedroom sizes, position of habitable windows and potential overlooking issues are all considered to be acceptable and will not have an adverse impact on the future occupiers of the site. Furthermore the inclusion of a shared amenity spaces helps to create a more inclusive environment for the future occupiers.

It is considered that the proposal complies with policy BE.1 (Amenity).

It is noted that the Parish Council have raised objections with the use of a construction access off Woreleston Road due to amenity impact on neighbouring properties. This is temporary proposal, and whilst there may be some disturbance to the neighbours during the construction period this will be for a limited time, as with any development site, and therefore given the temporary time frame the access will be in use it is considered to be acceptable and will not have detrimental impact on neighbouring amenity in the future. A condition will be added to the permission to ensure the access is returned to previous use once the development has been completed.

Highways

The proposal seeks permission to erect a number of buildings for student accommodation. This application is not included the Reaseheath College LDO that was given permission recently.

The Strategic Highways Manager has considered the larger scheme for 260 beds, the proposal has been reduced since then and comments on the revised scheme are still outstanding. The car parking provision has been altered, however additional spaces are to be provided and managed by the college.

The Strategic Highways Manager noted previously that it is preferable if student accommodation is located within the College itself as this limits the number of trips to and from the site on a daily basis. There are a number of car parks located within the college and many of these are fully utilised and there will be a need to manage the parking provision for students bringing vehicles to the site. However, the operational parking issues will be internal and it is not considered that it will affect the public highway.

It is therefore considered that the proposals are acceptable subject to revised comments from the Strategic Highways Manager.

Landscape

The site was previously occupied by glass houses, poly tunnels and a plant nursery and there are a number of trees and lengths of hedge on the site. There is also an off site group of trees to the south east.

The amended plans appear to give more separation to the Conservation Area boundary. The council's Landscape Officer anticipates the buildings (and associated lighting) would still be visible from some viewpoints outside the site, the proposals omit previously proposed light coloured render and the removal of the northern blocks is an improvement. The reconfigured layout includes 27 parking spaces and appears to provide adequate landscaped space between buildings although some of the space is occupied by cycle stands. Future car parking is still indicated outside the application site, this would be subject to a separate planning application.

The planting proposals are reasonable. The proposed tree planting is appropriate for the site use but is essentially ornamental and it should not be assumed that this would make a significant contribution to screening.

On the latest landscape plans the various areas to be hard surfaced are not clearly specified and there are no specific material details for the paving and 'hard surface' defined in the key. Car parking and routes through the site are represented by the same colour on the plan, and a concrete paving banding strip is a different colour on the key to that on the plan. The key annotation indicates the car park would be tarmac which would be acceptable, however tarmac would be inappropriate for routes through the central space. (Earlier visuals showed these routes as light grey coloured modular concrete paving with contrasting strips). Detailed design details for seating, lighting, cycle stores etc. have yet to be agreed and will be conditioned for future approval.

Proposed off site screen planting and an increase of hedge height to help address views from the north as described in the '*Supplementary Landscape Planning Information Rev C*' is welcomed. As these works are sited outside the red edge but within the blue edge of the application site a Grampian condition can be used to ensure the works are carried out.

Overall the amended scheme has made improvement in terms of the impact on the wider landscape, although some elements of hard and soft landscape detail, lighting and street furniture need to be agreed by condition.

Trees

The submitted Arboricultural Implications assessment indicates that all the existing vegetation within the site, (comprising three groups of trees and 5 lengths of hedge) would be removed due to the proposed development. The tree groups comprise a group of four early mature Pines and 3 Spruce to the north east of the site and two groups of fruit trees. All the vegetation is afforded Grade C in the report. A group of Grade B off site trees would be retained.

The existing on site vegetation is not of significant quality and subject to planting in mitigation of losses as part of an overall landscape scheme it is considered that the development is acceptable in forestry terms.

Ecology

The Council's Ecologist has considered the application and submitted ecological report and does not anticipate there being any significant protected species issues associated with the proposed development.

Hedgerows

A native species hedgerow is present along the site's northern boundary. Habitats of this type are a material consideration for planning. The current proposals include the loss of this hedgerow and its replacement with a mixed species hedgerow.

Whilst this will include the loss of initial biodiversity, The Council's Ecologist has confirmed that a replacement mixed species hedgerow is a reasonable proposal to address the issues.

Great Crested Newts

This protected species was recorded at a pond located over 280m from the boundary of the application site. The Council's Ecologist advises that, considering the distance between the pond, the nature of the habitats affected by the proposed development and the scale of the proposed works Great Crested Newts are not reasonable likely to be affected by the proposed development.

Nesting Birds

If planning consent is granted it is recommend that a condition be attached to safeguard nesting birds.

Whilst the native hedgerow is not to be retained, a replacement is proposed and the both the Ecologist and Landscape Officer have confirmed this is acceptable. It is considered therefore that in this instance mitigation has been proposed that will afford suitable mitigation for the initial loss.

Other matters

This application does not form part of the LDO for Reaseheath, therefore the comments from the Parish Council relating to the LDO are not relevant to this application.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

The application seeks permission for five 2 and 3 storey blocks of student accommodation to the rear of the Reaseheath campus. The site is situated within the Open Countryside and adjacent to the Reaseheath Conservation Area. It is considered that the principal of development is acceptable and is associated with the agricultural nature of the College.

The proposal will enable more on-site provision for student accommodation, which in turn will reduce movement to-and from the site, making it more sustainable. The internal parking provision is to be managed by the college, to ensure it does not have a knock on affect on the adjacent roads, and the Strategic Highways Manager has raised no concerns with the development proposal. Furthermore, the loss of trees and impact on ecology is considered to be acceptable and will not have a detrimental impact trees or protected species. There will also be no significantly negative impact on neighbouring amenity.

It is therefore considered that the limited harm to the open countryside will be outweighed, and would not significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefit of creating more on site student accommodation within the college site. This will reduce trips to and from the site, and subject to detailed material and landscape detail should not have a detrimental impact on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable and in accordance with the Policies of the Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan, Emerging Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy and the NPPF.

RECOMMENDED DECISION – Approve with conditions

Conditions

1. Time
2. Plans
3. External Materials, including doors, windows, mortar, bricks, tiles, rainwater good, etc to approved
4. Surfacing materials to be approved
5. Windows and door reveals of 100mm
6. Landscaping Plan to include boundary treatment
7. Landscaping implementation
8. Street furniture, cycle stores, lighting columns submitted for approval
9. Hedge and tree planting (outside of red edge) shall be carried out within next planting season
10. Nesting bird survey required if work commence between 1st March and 31st August
11. External lighting plan
12. Travel plan to be submitted and agreed in writing
13. Construction Management plan implementation
14. Drainage management plan
15. Drainage – overland flow management
16. Finished floor levels – flood risk
17. Noise mitigation implementation
18. Travel Information pack
19. Contaminated Land – Phase II
20. Contaminated land – soil
21. Contaminated Land – unexpected
22. Development to be carried out in accordance with the FRA
23. Sustainable drainage management and maintenance
24. Existing and proposed levels

In order to give proper effect to the Board`s/Committee`s intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Planning (Regulation), in consultation with the Chair (or in her absence the Vice Chair) of Southern Planning Committee, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

