

REPORT TO THE NORTHERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	30 January 2013		
Application Number	N/12/03969/FUL		
Site Address	St Patrick's Church, Corsham, SN13		
Proposal	Erection of Church Hall (resubmission of N/12/01902/FUL)		
Applicant	Mr S Chambers		
Town/Parish Council	Corsham Town Council		
Electoral Division	Corsham Pickwick & Rudloe	Unitary Member	Cllr Alan Macrae
Grid Ref	385988 170490		
Type of application	Full		
Case Officer	Chris Marsh	01249 706657	chris.marsh@wiltshire.gov.uk

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

The application has been called to Committee by Cllr Macrae, in order to consider the impact of the development on the listed building and Conservation Area.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the above application and to recommend that planning permission be REFUSED.

No objection is raised by the Town Council in respect of the application.

2. Main Issues

The main issues in considering the application are:

- Principle of development (C3)
- Impact on the character and appearance of the area and Conservation Area (HE1)
- Impact upon the adjacent Listed Buildings (HE4)
- Impact on neighbour amenity (C3)
- Impact on highway safety (C3)

3. Site Description

St Patrick's Church occupies a reasonably large plot between Park Lane and the main A4 road through Corsham, with vehicular access from the former only. The church is a Grade II-listed mid-C19th former school building that incorporates associated residential accommodation, which remains in use as such. The building's external appearance remains relatively complete, featuring a distinctive rubble stone facing with ashlar quoins and mullion windows, and complex roof clad in a mixture of plain and stone tiles.

To the East of the church is a strip of land currently laid to lawn and bounded by a dry stone wall to the South and East and by a close boarded timber fence to the North. A small stone storage building is incorporated into the southern wall, beyond which lie a number of mature trees and a further lawn. It is understood that this area was previously occupied by a Nissen hut-type building serving as a church hall, photographic evidence of which is included with the application, but this has long since been removed altogether.

4. Relevant Planning History

Application No.	Proposal	Decision
N/12/01902/FUL	Erection of Church Hall	Refusal
N/12/01903/LBC	Erection of Church Hall	Refusal

5. Proposal

The proposed development comprises the erection of a new church hall on the section of land to the East of the church building, currently enclosed by close boarded fencing and a dry stone wall and used as general outside amenity space in conjunction with the use of the church. The building is to be of a simple form, set over an elongated footprint of 18.3 x 6.2m on an East-West axis under an asymmetrical split-level pitched roof, the higher part of which covers the main hall area.

In terms of design, the proposed building is relatively conservative; clad in render with three pairs of timber-framed glazed doors orientated to the South from the main hall, plus additional doors to the East and West, and a slate roof. The enlarged southern roof plane will provide a covered walkway along this elevation of the building, providing access both around the building and from the internal space to the main lawn. Access is principally obtained from the western end, which features a partial canopy leading to a kitchen area with offset WCs and further on to the hall.

The proposal is a resubmission of the previous application, with some relatively minor changes. Previously listed building consent was required as the scheme included the removal of a section of curtilage-listed dry stone wall some 18m long. This is now to remain in situ, with only a small 1.8m-wide breakthrough to be created to provide access between the southern walkway of the hall and the adjacent lawn. A separate small area of garden is to be retained to the East of the building.

6. Consultations

Corsham Town Council – no objection

Conservation – objects, owing to the proposed building's impact upon the adjacent listed buildings

Highways – no objection

7. Publicity

The application was advertised by site notice, press advert and neighbour consultation.

No public representations have been received

8. Planning Considerations

Principle of development

The principle of development is considered acceptable under Policy CF1; the proposal relating to a community facility within the development framework boundary. Given the restricted arrangements for providing refreshments and general social meeting space outside of Mass that exist at present, it is considered reasonable that a purpose-built and separate facility could be contained within the site for this purpose. Having considered its defined shape and the existing circulation of the site, the section of land in question is also likely to represent the most appropriate position for such development.

Policy CF1 of the adopted North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011 goes on to state that "*Proposals, no matter how desirable from a social and community point of view, will need to be sympathetically designed to take account of adjoining properties and the area in general*". This presumption in principle does not, therefore, outweigh the other relevant policies of the development plan against which the proposal should be considered.

Impact upon the adjacent Listed Buildings

St Patrick's is a Grade II-listed building, which has undergone conversion from a schoolhouse to a church and retains identifiable characteristics of each. Although some alterations have been undertaken in the past, its form has generally remained coherent and the building occupies a defined position within the site and street scenes of both the Bath Road and Park Lane. The application has attracted an objection from the Conservation Officer, on the grounds that the proposed new hall is neither modest enough to have limited impact nor sufficiently innovative in design to hold its own complimentary place in context. Whilst the proposed render finish lends a less bulky appearance than natural or reconstituted stone, its extensive use gives the building little identity or definition of design. As such, it is considered the proposal is contrary to Policy HE4 of the adopted Local Plan.

Furthermore, the proposed hall's impact upon the property to the immediate North of the site, The Old Coach House, is an important consideration as any development of this part of the site will be seen in context with the Grade II-listed building. Whilst the close-boarded fence marking the boundary with The Old Coach House will obscure much of the new building, its sizeable northern roof plane will be clearly visible from the main road to the side of the property. Nonetheless, the elevated roof pitch is considered an improvement in relativity to the original scheme, which featured an awkwardly shallow pitch not evident on the traditional buildings in the vicinity.

Impact on the character and appearance of the area and Conservation Area

It is considered that, similarly to the previous application, the design of the proposed hall is inappropriate to both its immediate historic context and the wider area in which it is to be situated. This part of Corsham, although diverse in architectural styles, features a number of sensitive historical buildings occupying the larger and more visible plots near the main routes. Policy HE1 of the adopted Local Plan requires that proposals in Conservation Areas either conserve or enhance their setting; whilst it is considered that the current scheme would in fact detract in this respect.

The building's design makes little concession to its surroundings – the use of slate aside – and character of the Conservation Area. It is considered that the scheme fails to demonstrate the design innovation that might characterise the type of scheme sympathetic to the visual amenity of the area when viewed in context. Subsequent to the last refusal, the Council has made efforts to agree a suitable scheme, recommending the use of lightweight materials and a reconfigured asymmetrical roof and fenestration. Unfortunately, however, this advice has not been followed.

Impact on neighbour amenity

At present, the area of land to the East of the church is used on a regular basis by visitors, and as such general circulation and activity outside on this land is established, and indeed would continue should the current application be unsuccessful. The lack of opening fenestration on the Northern elevation of the hall will mitigate against any significant adverse impact on residential amenity to nearby properties by way of increased noise; either in terms of volume or duration.

Impact on highway safety

Owing to the established and proposed continuing use of the church facilities, it is not anticipated that the development would result in any increased traffic movements to and from the site, and as such no objection is raised on highways grounds.

Conclusion

The proposed development, whilst acceptable in principle, is of an inappropriate design, such that it would detract from the setting of the listed church and the appearance of the wider Conservation Area. Such is the massing of the proposed building, coupled with its limited and unrefined palette of materials, that it would prove detrimental also to the setting of the nearby listed building 'The Old Coach House' also.

9. Recommendation

Planning Permission be REFUSED for the following reason:

The proposed development, by reason of its siting, massing, design and appearance, would be harmful to the setting of the adjacent listed buildings and the character of the wider Conservation Area. The proposal therefore fails to accord with Policies C3, HE1 and HE4 of the adopted North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011 and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

