

REPORT OUTLINE FOR AREA PLANNING COMMITTEES

Date of Meeting	24 June 2015
Application Number	15/03367/FUL
Site Address	Neston Gospel Hall Chapel Lane Neston Wiltshire SN13 9TD
Proposal	Conversion of Redundant Chapel as Extension to Existing Dwelling with Associated Upgrade of Parking Facilities.
Applicant	Neston Park Estate Office
Town/Parish Council	CORSHAM
Division	CORSHAM WITHOUT AND BOX HILL – Cllr Richard Tonge
Grid Ref	386384 167937
Type of application	Full Planning
Case Officer	Alison Grogan

Reason for the application being considered by Committee

Called in by Councillor Richard Tonge for the Committee to consider whether this is a good use of the building.

1. Purpose of Report

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

2. Report Summary

The main issues are:

- Principle of development
- Impact of the works on the appearance of the building and the character and appearance of the conservation area
- Level of amenity for future occupiers and visitors to the graveyard
- Highways

3. Site Description

Neston Gospel Hall is situated on the south side of Chapel Lane on the outskirts of Neston.

The Hall is situated behind a stone wall along the frontage, gable end onto the lane with a gothic style entrance facing the road. The sides of the building have large feature windows

up to the eaves. There is a modern single storey lean-to extension to the rear and there is a modest two-storey one-bed dwelling attached to the south-west corner of the building.

Along the south-east side and rear of the building there is an active burial ground which is well maintained.

The Hall is not Listed but lies within the Neston conservation area and the building and its surroundings make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area, and is considered to be a non designated heritage asset.

4. Planning History

N/12/01617/FUL – Proposed Change of Use of Neston Gospel Hall to 4 Bedroom Dwelling – Withdrawn September 2012.

5. The Proposal

The proposal is to convert the chapel and incorporate it as an extension to the attached dwelling so that it will become a 4 bed dwelling. The grassed area on the south west side of the building will be the parking and amenity area.

The agent has stated that the burial ground will be retained in the ownership of the Trustees who will continue to cover the issues regarding surrounding walls and trees. At the specific request of the Trustees, the Burial Ground boundary will abut the wall of the Hall, with no new fences, or direct access from the domestic building.

The proposal also includes an off-road parking area for visitors to the burial ground, which will be located to the side of the burial ground

6. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2014:

Chapter 7 – Requiring Good Design

Chapter 12 – Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment

Wiltshire Core Strategy:

CP49 – Protection of Rural Services and Community Facilities

CP57 - Ensuring High Quality Design and Place Shaping

CP58 - Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment

7. Consultations

Corsham Town Council – Support the proposed application as it would help to preserve the building.

Senior Conservation Officer – The structure to support the first floor will be highly intrusive and will have a significant impact not only on the interior space but will compromise the external appearance, as the inserted floor will be clearly visible through the windows. Also object to the large roof lights.

Highways – Require that 3 parking spaces are provided for the converted dwelling. The details state that there is existing car parking but there is no evidence that this has been used to park vehicles, therefore evidence is required that this has been used for car parking in recent times. I have concerns with regard to access and parking in this area, the visibility splays in both directions are restricted by the walls and vegetation and therefore sub standard. This will not be suitable when considering vehicles will be reversing. The details related to the car parking area are not clear, a drawing will be required that clearly outlines the upgraded access and the visibility splay.

Amended plans have been received to overcome the concerns raised by the Highway Team. The additional comments will be presented as a late item.

8. Publicity

The application was advertised by site notice and neighbour consultation.

A letter has been received by a member of the public raising concerns regarding the maintenance and up-keep of the burial ground where a family member is buried.

9. Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act states that *“determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise”*.

This is the starting point from a policy point of view. The Wiltshire Core Strategy forms the local component of the current development plan.

The conversion of this building to a dwelling would result in the loss of a community facility and therefore core policy 49 is applicable. This policy aims to protect community facilities and states that *“Preference will be given to retaining the existing use in the first instance, then for an alternative community use. Where this is not possible, a mixed use, which still retains a substantial portion of the community facility/service, will be support.*

Redevelopment for non-community service/facility use will only be permitted as a last resort and where all other options have been exhausted”. The policy goes on to indicate that such applications will need to demonstrate that a comprehensive marketing plan has been undertaken to demonstrate that all preferable options have been exhausted. The policy includes the minimum requirements for such a marketing plan.

This policy is in-line with the advice given in the NPPF which states that policies and decisions should “guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services”.

The agent has stated that the scheme is for the conversion and inclusion of the chapel into the domestic section of the building and it is not a conversion of an isolated building. He goes on to state that the local preference is for the conversion to a dwelling rather than a commercial building. In terms of the marketing plan, it is stated that the “literal guidance laid down in core policy 49 would result in an effectively unsustainable exercise, which would cause the building to remain empty for a considerable period of time....the improvements regarding the car parking will be of great benefit to the community using the burial ground”.

Whilst the points raised by the agent have been noted, there is no evidence to support his view that an alternative community facility/service could not be found for this building and no information has been submitted to demonstrate that alternative uses have been considered.

Design and Impact on the Conservation Area

The Hall is a simple non-conformist chapel dating from the mid 19th C. It is typical of the many plain religious buildings constructed by local congregations. It was later extended, so obviously formed a significant part of the community into the 20thC. The building is flanked by two green spaces; to the south-east lies the graveyard, separated from the road by a low stone wall (which also encloses the chapel), covered with greenery, whilst to the north-western area of grass lies open to the road. Although not listed the hall lies within the Neston conservation area and the building and its surroundings make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. Following consultation with the Senior Conservation Officer it is felt that this building is considered to be a non designated heritage asset.

Paragraphs 131, 135 and 137 of the NPPF indicate that new development in conservation areas should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, enhance or better reveal their significance and in weighing applications that directly affect non designated heritage assets a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

The Senior Conservation Officer raised concerns regarding the size of the proposed roof lights and revised plans have now been received which show much smaller windows which are now considered to be acceptable. However, the Senior Conservation Officer also raised concerns regarding the proposed works to convert this building in relation to the structure that will support the first floor which is considered to be highly intrusive and will significantly impact not only on the interior space but the external appearance, as the inserted floor will cut across and will be clearly visible through the windows. It was suggested that as an alternative a mezzanine floor could be inserted over the rear part of the building approximately 4.5m in depth from the back wall and set back so that it did not run across the window. This compromise was not accepted by the agent who has stated that the floor was carefully considered and will not be noticeable from the outside of the building. However, this is not considered to be the case as the floor will be seen through the windows and this will be exacerbated when furniture is placed in the rooms. The proposal is therefore considered to conflict with core policies 57 and 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and paragraphs 17 (10), 131, 133 and 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on Amenity

The burial ground wraps around two sides of the building, it is an active burial ground and is well maintained and used. The proposed plans indicate that there will be a new parking area for four cars to be used for visitors to the burial ground and a new lynch gate for pedestrian access.

The burial ground and Hall have a close relationship and it is considered that the conversion of the Hall to residential would not be compatible in terms of amenity for future occupiers of the dwelling or to visitors of the burial ground. The existing dwelling is situated on the other side of the Hall to the burial ground and therefore there is a degree of separation. The proposed conversion together with the existing dwelling would result in a substantial family house where the amenity of future occupiers would be compromised by visitors to the burial grounds in terms of privacy and disturbance. This would also be an issue for visitors to the burial ground who are likely to want quiet reflection as they pay their respects.

Overall it is considered that these uses would not be compatible and would result in a poor level of amenity for both future occupiers and visitors to the grounds, which is considered contrary to core policy 57 (vii) and paragraph 17 (4) and Section 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Highways

Highways raised concerns regarding this proposal in terms of the parking area for the proposed dwelling and also in terms of the visibility and access for the public parking. The agent has submitted revised plans which have been sent to Highways but unfortunately no comments have yet been received on the revised plans and these will be reported as a late item.

Highways also request confirmation that the grassed area in front of the attached dwelling has been used for parking and the agent has submitted a letter from a local resident addressing this issue.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is considered that this proposal would result in the loss of a community facility/service and no evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that alternative community uses have been considered or the building marketed for such purposes.

The building is considered to be a non designated heritage asset and the proposed structure for the first floor will have a detrimental impact on the appearance of this building as it will be clearly visible through the windows, this will be exacerbated by any furniture in the rooms. Additionally given the close relationship of the Hall and the burial ground it is considered that the conversion to residential would not be compatible in terms of amenity for both potential occupiers and visitors to the grounds.

It is therefore considered that the proposal conflicts with core policies 49, 57 and 58 and paragraphs 17 (4) (10) (12), 131, 133, 135 and Sections 7 and 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Concerns were raised by Highways and whilst revised plans have been submitted the comments are still awaited and will be reported as a late Item.

RECOMMENDATION

The application be refused for the following reasons:

1. No evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the building has been marketed for an alternative community use and that all preferable options have been exhausted in order to justify the change of use. The proposal is therefore contrary to core policy 49 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and paragraph 17 (12) and Section 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. The proposed works to incorporate a first floor would be intrusive and detrimental to the appearance of this non-designated heritage asset to the detriment of the character and appearance of the Conservation Area, contrary core policies 57 and 58 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and paragraphs 17 (10), 131, 133 and 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
3. The proposed residential use would be incompatible with the use of the burial ground in terms of amenity for both future occupiers and visitors to the burial ground in terms of privacy and disturbance and therefore contrary to core policy 57 (vii) and paragraph 17 (4) and Section 7 of the National Planning Policy Framework.