

DISTRICT PLANNING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2021

Councillors Present: Phil Barnett, Jeff Beck (Substitute) (In place of Dennis Benneyworth), Hilary Cole, Carolyne Culver, Clive Hooker (Vice-Chairman), Royce Longton, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, Graham Pask and Tony Vickers

Also Present: Simon Till (Team Leader - Western Area Planning), Jenny Legge (Performance, Research and Consultation)

Apologies: Councillor Dennis Benneyworth

PART I

6. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendments:

Item 1, page 15, paragraph four: The Chairman noted that, "...nine voting in favour of the Officer recommendation for refusal and three voting against." should read, "...nine voting in favour of the Officer recommendation for refusal and two voting against."

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

8. Schedule of Planning Applications

(1) Application No. & Parish: 20/01083/FUL - Quill Cottage, Craven Road, Inkpen

(No declarations were received.)

1. The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4(1)) concerning Planning Application 20/01083/FUL in respect of a replacement dwelling at Quill Cottage, Craven Road, Inkpen.
2. The Chairman noted that there had been considerable debate about size increase and measurements at previous meetings of the Western Area Planning Committee. He stated that a new officer had looked at the drawings and had presented a fresh set of measurements, which had not been challenged by the applicant or their agent, so Members were directed to take these to be definitive.
3. Mr Simon Till, Team Leader – Western Area Planning, introduced the report to Members, which took account of all the relevant policy considerations and other material planning considerations. In conclusion, the report detailed that the proposal was unsatisfactory in planning terms and officers recommended that the Head of Development and Planning be authorised to refuse planning permission for the reasons listed in the main and update reports.

Removal of speaking rights

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4. As resolved at the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 29 April 2020, public speaking rights had been removed for virtual Council meetings. This right had replaced with the ability to make written submissions. This decision was made in accordance with The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.
5. The above changes to speaking rights were subsequently amended at the Council meeting on 10 September 2020. It was agreed that parties making written submissions in relation to a planning application would be invited to attend the remote meeting of the Planning Committee to answer any questions that Members of the Committee might wish to ask in order to seek clarification on any part of their statement.
6. In accordance with the Extraordinary Council resolution, written submissions relating to this application were received from, Mr James Puxley, objector, Mr Roger Hunt and Mrs Claire Jones, supporters, and Mr Ashley Jones, applicant. Those able to attend the remote meeting were, Mr Hunt, Mrs Jones and Mr Jones.
7. Individual written submissions were published online along with the agenda <http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=153&MId=5677&Ver=4>

Objector's Submission

8. The Clerk read out the representation. Mr Puxley was not available to be questioned at the meeting.

Supporters' Submission – summarised

9. The Clerk read out a summary of the representations as follows:

The houses on Craven Road are a mix of styles and designs. The proposed new house will have a beneficial impact on the setting, character and appearance of the site. The proposed replacement building would significantly enhance the street scene when compared to the existing building.

The proposed brick and flint construction has been used elsewhere in the village (most recently Lower Inkpen House which mirrors the older cottages next door). It is a style common throughout the region. It will give a feel in keeping with the ANOB and will improve the look of the area when compared with the existing bungalow. With modern insulation, the new building will be more environmentally friendly than the existing building.

There are also examples of the use of dormer windows in the immediate vicinity: Vale Farm, The Swan Public House, Masefield House and Holly Tree Cottage.

Summary points:

- No objections filed on West Berkshire Planning website
- Immediate Neighbours and Craven Road residents do not object to this application
- Inkpen Parish Council Support by a majority
- This is not a 'development' this is a family who contribute considerably to this community and want to have a family home in a village they want to live in.
- There will be minimal impact on the open space, countryside and footpaths concerned, the impact of this proposed house will be minimal.

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- The houses either side have a far greater impact on the AONB and open space views from the footpath behind Quill Cottage than this house will.
 - The neighbours and those residents who I have spoken to feel that this will be an improvement on the current bungalow.
 - There are dormer windows all along Craven Road. Vale Farm next door to Quills is surrounded by dormer windows
 - The design has taken into consideration the Inkpen Design Statement and is consistent with other houses built recently in Inkpen and the surrounding villages.
 - If the planning department do not agree with the materials being proposed the family are prepared to work with them to make changes to the exterior.
 - It is very unlikely that whomever owns this bungalow and plot would keep this run down, unattractive 70's bungalow hence the support for this application which is sympathetic to its surroundings, its neighbours and the village as a whole.
 - Better to support a planning application which has the support of its community than to be faced in the future by a development which is not and will no doubt push the planning department to its limits.
10. Members questioned the attendees as follows:
11. Councillor Graham Pask noted in the supporters' statement that Inkpen Parish Council supported the application by a majority, but page 29 of the papers stated that they had objected to the application for five reasons. Mrs Claire Jones explained that the objection in June was made via an emergency email and not a meeting. She noted that the email referred to impacts on the paddock and other points that she felt would not have been made by someone who had visited the site or who had seen the plans. She highlighted that four out of seven Parish Councillors supported the plans. The email in June was not part of a meeting and she questioned how the objection come about. Mrs Jones stated that she was vice-chairman of Inkpen Parish Council.
12. The Chairman noted that the Parish Council's website did not refer to a June meeting, but a meeting that had taken place in February, at which Mrs Jones had declared an interest and had not taken part in the vote. There was no other meeting at which the Parish Council had indicated they had changed their view. Mrs Jones confirmed that she had been misled about the need to declare a personal interest at the meeting and had abstained from the vote. She explained that the clerk had sent the email as an emergency response. The Chairman indicated that this was not relevant to what the committee were being asked to determine. Mrs Jones agreed.
13. Councillor Tony Vickers asked what evidence there was that a future owner would not keep the bungalow in its current run down state. Mrs Jones noted that there was another bungalow for sale on Pottery Lane at £725,000 which had a smaller garden. She could not imagine why anyone would pay £700,000 to live in Quill Cottage, since the property was so small, run down and unsuitable for a family.
14. Councillor Clive Hooker noted there had been a Planning Sub-Committee in February 2020 where the site had been discussed. Mrs Jones explained that this had related to a previous application, which incorporated a large garage. She repeated her explanation for why she had abstained in the vote.
15. Councillor Hooker noted that Mrs Jones's submission referred to the proposed development as having minimal impact and that it took the Inkpen Design Statement into consideration, but he suggested that it may breach the dark skies policy. He went on to note that the Parish Council's objection to the previous application, which

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was similar in scale, related to the dwelling being disproportionate to the original, with the volume being more than double that of the original. The objection had also cited significant impacts on: the highway and adjacent footpath; the openness of the site; the amenity of the AONB; and dark skies. He observed that Mrs Jones supported this application, and yet she was a member of the committee that had previously objected to it. He asked if she had changed her mind. Mrs Jones noted that the email objection related to the current plans, and Councillor Hooker was referring to an objection relating to the previous application where the plans had been withdrawn. She indicated that she was confused as to why Councillor Hooker only said there had been one official objection.

16. The Chairman suggested that the Parish Council had submitted a different recommendation in June. Mrs Jones agreed.
17. Councillor Hooker agreed that the previous application had been withdrawn, but suggested that the impacts of the two proposals were similar with respect to lighting and the view from the footpath.
18. Councillor Vickers queried if Members were allowed to take account of minutes of a meeting relating to a different application, which were not in the papers. The Chairman noted that officers had indicated in the papers that Inkpen Parish Council objected to the proposal. Mrs Sharon Armour suggested that Mrs Jones was attending the meeting as a supporter rather than as a Parish Council representative. She acknowledged that Mrs Jones had clarified what she knew about the Parish Council response and directed the Committee to ask Mrs Jones about her views on the planning merits of the application.
19. Councillor Phil Barnett asked if the proposal would enhance the street scene. He asked whether the supporters felt the proposed building to be more suburban than rural in character. Mrs Jones explained that there were many houses in Craven Road that could be argued to be suburban in character, and many that were larger and more modern in appearance than this one. She noted that the applicant had already discussed hedges and planting to screen it from the footpath.
20. Councillor Hilary Cole confirmed that the Parish Council comments on the planning portal were the same as those on page 29 of the agenda.

Applicant's Submission

21. The Clerk read out the representation. Members questioned the attendee as follows:
22. Councillor Vickers noted the applicant had actively sought dialogue with the planning office, but the officer's report indicated that they had sought to contact the applicant. He asked the applicant for clarification on what engagement had taken place. The Chairman suggested that this matter was not relevant to what the Committee was being asked to determine. Councillor Vickers indicated that it was relevant in relation to the discussion about materials, which was one of the key factors in Policy C7. The Chairman suggested that the question should be whether the applicant had discussed materials with officers. Mr Ashley Jones indicated that he had tried to do so and although this application had been submitted for 12 months, no discussion had taken place. He stated that he was very amenable to changing materials, but without any dialogue he was unclear what planning officers would accept or advise.

Ward Member Representation

23. Councillors Claire Rowles and James Cole in representing the Committee as Ward Members made the following points:

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- Councillor Rowles thanked officers for rescheduling the application to accommodate Mr Jones who was rowing the Atlantic for charity.
- Prior to visiting Quill Cottage, the Ward Members had shared officers' concerns about over-development in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that was contrary to Policy C7, but after site inspection their view changed.
- This application had been to Western Area Planning Committee twice and had been thoroughly scrutinised and approval had been recommended after looking at all areas of policy, particularly C7.
- Much attention had focused on measurements and officers had accepted that errors were made, but all parties were now in agreement and the key issues were proportionality and impact.
- The proposal would enhance the local area by replacing a drab 1970s bungalow with a house more in keeping with neighbouring properties, which were all two-storey houses.
- With a proposed increase in height of 2.5m it would not be overly visible from the public right of way. The property was already well-screened by mature vegetation.
- Officers were relying on the Inglewood Farm Cottage appeal, but it had no relevance to this application, since it was not a bungalow and was a small extension to an already approved application to demolish and replace a two-storey house in a remote part of Kintbury.
- The applicant had followed their interpretation of the Inkpen Design Statement and there were five brick and flint cottages within a mile. Although the applicant had indicated that he was willing to change the materials, there had been no engagement from officers.
- The officer had also stated that dormer windows did not form part of the local street scene, however during the last Committee Councillor Howard Woollaston stated that he had counted six within half a mile.
- Councillor James Cole noted that in September 2020, planners had approved an application for Fishery Cottage where the Parish Council objected. This had a 45 percent increase in footprint, but was not considered disproportionate to the original, and the planning officer stated that any proposal for a replacement dwelling that more than doubled the original dwelling would normally be regarded as disproportionate, as it would be more visually dominant than the original. This building was 8.1 metres high and in full view of two footpaths and on the river.
- The proposed extension to Quill Cottage was for a 21 percent increase in footprint, a 61 percent increase in volume, which was small considering it was adding a second floor.
- The proposal was well-designed and in an area of two storey houses and the 49% increase in height was not out of line.
- The Parish Council had objected to the first proposal, but had changed its view, with four out of seven in favour of the application.
- The CPRE objection mentioned the Lord Lieutenant, but Councillor James Cole had confirmed that he was unaware of it. Also, the local CPRE representative was also the clerk to the Parish Council.
- The development was within policy, which was why they had asked Western Area Planning Committee to approve it.
- The existing building was of poor quality and should be replaced.
- The proposed building was not disproportionate.
- Environmental aspects were very good.
- Local people wanted it.

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- Flint was widely used and Councillor James Cole had flint in the walls of his yard, which was two miles away, but if Members did not like it, then the applicant was happy to take it out, yet there had been no attempt to discuss this.

Members' Questions to the Ward Members

24. Councillor Ross Mackinnon noted that officers had stated the proposed increase in floor space to be approximately 113 percent. Councillor James Cole referred to the table on page 20 of the papers, and confirmed that his comments related to footprint. The Chairman noted that the increase in external area, was 113 percent. Councillor James Cole agreed that a second floor would double the floor area, but stressed the need to look at the impact on the village, street scene and nearby houses. He suggested that it was important to consider footprint, height and volume. The Chairman agreed that these should be considered when determining proportionality.

Member's Questions to Officers

25. Councillor Hilary Cole asked for confirmation about what engagement had taken place between the planning officers and the applicant. She also asked if the applicant had paid for pre-planning advice. Mr Till noted that the previous application had been withdrawn, in part due to officers' advice. He stated that officers had made the applicant aware of their concerns. He noted that the application had been with the Council for some time and there had been plenty of opportunity for the applicant or their agent to make alternative proposals in writing, but they had not done so. He confirmed that pre-application advice had not been sought. He was unable to comment on the specific level of dialogue with the applicant, but the applicant had been made aware of officers' concerns. However, there was no record that he had sought to amend the application to address these concerns, including those about materials. The Chairman indicated that he did not want to get involved in what dialogue had taken place.
26. Councillor Pask noted that the red line of the application was not the same as in Mr Till's presentation. He asked if the map in the presentation was related to the Certificate of Lawfulness. He also asked about the blue line shown on the plan. Mr Till confirmed that the map used in the presentation had been submitted in 2005 for another application, which corresponded with the Certificate of Lawfulness. The plan for the latter was of poor quality. The location plan for the current application did not show the rectangular section to the rear of the garden space, but it was included in the blue line showing the applicant's ownership. He stated that the matter was not prejudicial to the determination of this application. He suggested an informative could be applied to state that the residential curtilage was not accepted as correct and referring to the Certificate of Lawfulness.
27. Councillor Vickers asked if gross external floor area included both floors of the property. Mr Till confirmed that it did and the increase in footprint would be about 21 percent. He stressed that it was important to provide the full set of figures and not just the footprint.
28. Councillor Vickers observed that according to the policy, significant considerations in relation to proportionality were massing, height and layout, but not gross external floor area. Mr Till agreed, but indicated that the table had been included for completeness of information because Members often asked for these details. He noted that the Inspector's decision on Inglewood Farm Cottage referred back to the policy and the matters that Councillor Vickers had raised.

Debate

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29. Councillor Alan Macro opened the debate. He suggested that the increase in size of the proposal would have a dramatic effect on the neighbourhood and on the AONB, and that it was disproportionate. He was not concerned about the proposed materials, since there were a large number of building designs and various materials in the road, including one building clad with light blue/grey wood. He noted there were several buildings nearby with dormer windows. He indicated that he supported the officer's recommendation in relation to the disproportionate increase in size, but not in relation to materials.
30. Councillor Hooker indicated that the design needed to be sympathetic to the fact that it was in a rural location within the AONB and in an area with a dark skies policy. He noted the requirements of Policy C7, which referred to small rural properties being purchased, demolished and replaced with substantial new houses that were alien to the local context and did not conserve or enhance the character of the AONB, and as such should be resisted. Also, the policy stated that if the replacement dwelling was disproportionate, it would not be accepted. He agreed that the issue of proportionality was subjective, but the application was to replace a three bedroom bungalow with a double-fronted four bedroom house, including a ridge height that was 2.4 metres higher, which he did not feel to be proportionate. He considered the impact of the current property on Craven Road and the public rights of way to be negligible, but suggested that the proposed house would have a much greater impact. He also noted the considerable increase in glazing on the proposed property, which was contrary to the Village Design Statement that supported the dark skies policy. He noted that the application had not been helped by the reduction in curtilage, which gave the appearance of a larger property on a smaller plot. He reserved judgement pending the remainder of the debate.
31. Councillor Mackinnon highlighted a photograph taken from the public right of way, which suggested that the increased height of the proposed building would have a very significant impact on the view. He also suggested that the computer simulation of the new property did not suggest it was proportionate. He did not accept the supporters' argument about redeveloping an eyesore and suggested that this did not justify the proposed increase in scale. He sympathised with the applicant, and acknowledged the applicant's community work, but stated that this was not relevant to the planning application. He reserved judgement pending the remainder of the debate.
32. Councillor Pask applauded the design of the house, but suggested that it was not right for this location in the AONB. He agreed that the existing bungalow was not of any architectural value, but felt that it could be improved/replaced with something more proportionate. He noted the two appeal decisions included in the pack which both related to Policy C7. In both cases, the Planning Inspector commented on proportionality. He suggested that this application was disproportionate in this location. He indicated that he was minded to support the officer's recommendation.
33. Councillor Vickers noted the difference between the policy and the supporting text. Within the policy he observed that it was important for the proposal to satisfy all three of the following: to be proportionate; and have appropriate materials; and not have an adverse impact. In determining whether the proposed development was proportionate, he noted that the supporting text in the policy suggested that consideration be given to the impact of a particular property in a particular location. He had visited the site in July and did not feel that it would be unduly disproportionate in that particular location. He noted that the applicant had not managed to discuss materials with officers, but the applicant was happy to change materials. In terms of adverse impact, he had walked the area and did not consider it an issue. He noted

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that Mrs Claire Jones, who was a parish councillor and lived in the area, supported the proposal. He noted Councillor Macro's observations, but suggested that it would have a beneficial rather than adverse impact, since the existing property did not add to the beauty of the AONB. He suggested that nobody in Inkpen would be sad to see the existing property go and to be replaced with the proposed development.

34. Councillor Phil Barnett noted that Members did not appear to be strongly for or against the application. He confirmed that he had visited the site and felt that the applicant had a constructive approach. He recognised that the proposed property was large, but it would not be out of step with other properties in the village. He suggested that it was important to consider the applicant's needs and what would be a suitable replacement property.
35. Councillor Hilary Cole indicated that she understood the applicant's desire to replace the bungalow. She accepted that there were a variety of homes in Craven Road, but there was no particular pattern or design and while some were attractive, others were less so. She agreed with Councillor Hooker's reference to paragraph 4.7 of Policy C7, which had specifically been included at Members' request and referred to small rural properties being purchased, demolished and replaced with substantial new houses as was the case with this application. She also suggested that Policy C3 was relevant, which considered design. She noted that the applicant was now willing to discuss materials, but this could have been done as part of pre-planning advice. She suggested that the planning authority should not be overly prescriptive regarding design, but she felt it important to bear in mind character and appearance for this site, since it was elevated, which would accentuate the size of a two storey building.
36. Councillor Carlyne Culver agreed with comments made regarding proportion. She noted that there were houses of different designs on Craven Road, so the argument that it should be in keeping with the local area was weak. She felt that the environmental intentions were very good, but noted there were three seating areas in the downstairs plus a kitchen and study, which she did not feel to be necessary and inflated the size of the property. She indicated that at previous planning meetings, the need to have more smaller properties had been acknowledged, and she felt there to be a surfeit of four and five bedroom properties. She suggested that it was possible to refurbish a bungalow, and this would be an option for the applicant. She suggested that for future meetings 3D presentation should be used to give a better sense of the impact of proposals.
37. Councillor Vickers proposed to reject the officer's recommendation and to approve planning permission, subject to the conditions outlined on page 59 of the agenda papers. Councillor Phil Barnett seconded the proposal.
38. The Chairman disagreed with Councillor Vickers's interpretation of the policy whereby a proposal must satisfy all three of the criteria relating to proportionality, appropriate materials and impact. He noted that consideration should be given to more than just footprint, since otherwise this would allow buildings with multiple storeys. He suggested that if Members decided the proposal was not proportionate, then it would be contrary to policy and Members would need to consider if there were exceptions that applied in this particular case, since otherwise this would set a precedent.
39. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Vickers, seconded by Councillor Barnett to refuse planning permission. At the vote the motion was not carried.

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40. Councillor Hilary Cole proposed to accept officer's recommendation and refuse planning permission for the reasons listed in the main report and update report. This was seconded by Councillor Hooker.
41. The Chairman sought confirmation from the proposer and seconder if they agreed with all of the reasons for refusal. They confirmed that they did.
42. Councillor Macro proposed an amendment that removed the refusal reasons for materials, particularly for dormer windows. Mrs Armour confirmed that the proposer and seconder would need to agree, otherwise the amendment could only be made if the proposal failed and a further vote was required.
43. The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to vote on the proposal by Councillor Hilary Cole, seconded by Councillor Hooker to refuse planning permission. At the vote the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Head of Development and Planning be authorised to refuse planning permission for the following reasons:

Reasons

The proposal is considered to be unacceptable in principle. The site is within open countryside in the North Wessex Downs AONB. The replacement dwelling is disproportionate in size, scale, mass and bulk to the existing dwelling and will have an adverse and harmful impact on the setting, character and appearance of the site within the wider landscape including the open countryside and North Wessex Downs AONB.

By the nature of the proposed dwellings scale, mass and bulk the development would result in a harmful impact on the openness and rural character of the street scene, open countryside and North Wessex Downs AONB. The use of flint material, light grey window casement and drain pipes, and inclusion of dormer windows do not form part of the design of the street scene. The proposed dwelling includes a significant level of glazing in an area which benefits from dark skies. The soft landscaping to the front of the site, facing Craven Road will be lost and replaced with hardstanding and a timber shed forward of the principle elevation. For the reasons listed the proposed development would not result in a replacement dwelling of high quality design which respects the rural character and appearance of the open countryside, North Wessex Downs AONB and street scene. It would result in a much larger, higher and prominent built form on the site, of inappropriately suburban design, which would have a significantly detrimental visual impact on the character and appearance of the local area and the surrounding AONB. Due to the extensive areas of glazing proposed there would also be an unacceptable negative impact on the dark skies within this part of the AONB.

The proposal is contrary to development plan policies ADPP5, CS14 and CS19 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026) and policies CS3 and CS7 of the Housing Allocations DPD, West Berkshire Council's Quality Design SPD Part 5 and the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.05 pm)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lee', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature

2 March 2022