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DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

07 February 2012

APPLICATION NUMBER : CA//11/01885/FUL

PROPOSAL : Demolition of existing dwelling and the erection of a replacement dwelling.

LOCATION OF SITE : The Thatched House, Gravel Castle Road, Barham, CT4 6EU

APPLICATION TYPE : FULL APPLICATION

DATE REGISTERED : 21 November 2011

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE TARGET DATE : 16 January 2012

CONTACT OFFICER : Nicola Hughes

CONSERVATION AREA : BARHAM - NORTH

LISTED BUILDING : NOT LISTED

WARD : BARHAM DOWNS

APPLICANT : Mr Nicholas Showan

AGENT : Robinson Escott Planning

SUMMARY:

This application has been the subject of objection from Barham Parish Council in that the design of the proposed replacement dwelling-house is considered to be out of keeping with the locality and that this development may be a prelude to an intensification of residential development at this site. The application has been reported to the Development Management Committee in light of the Parish Council's objection. One further objection has been received from the Campaign to Protect Rural England (Protect Kent) raising the same concerns. A letter of support has also been received giving credit to the architectural design and novel building techniques.

RECOMMENDATION:

Grant;

Subject to the imposition of conditions relating to materials; construction details of all doors, windows, eaves, ridges, hips and verges, ridge and roof detailing, balconies/railings, rainwater goods, etc., detailing to be approved; removal of permitted development rights for the extension and alteration of the dwelling; Code Level 4 for Sustainable Homes, boundary landscaping to be retained and maintained and any other conditions considered necessary by the Head of Planning and Regeneration.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The application site is located close to the settlement of Barham and forms part of a collection of rural residential properties situated between the village and the A2. The existing

house on the site dates from the 1920's and is of a pastiche thatched house design. To the north, east and west the land is open countryside with detached properties sited to the south of the application site. A small coppice abuts the site on the north side with a substantial hedge denoting the other boundaries. Gravel Castle Road and Church Lane abut the site on the west and south sides. A public right of way (PROW) (bridleway) runs adjacent to the site along the northern boundary with the coppice. The application site is located on the side of the valley sloping downward from the north to the south.

The site falls within Barham North Conservation Area, a Special Landscape Area, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and an Aquifer Protection Zone. The coppice to the north of the site is protected by a Tree Preservation Order (W3 of TPO 1 1951).

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The applicant seeks permission to demolish the existing thatched dwelling-house and its replacement with a three-storey detached dwelling in this same location. The third floor of the replacement dwelling is accommodated within the roof space. The design of the new house is of a creative unique style that includes turrets, projecting bays, balconies, onion domed roofs, orangery style glazing features and ornate detailing. A sustainable carbon-neutral construction is central to the ethos of the replacement dwelling and utilises modern, innovative construction techniques. The house is to be finished using stone, brick and flint under a zinc/lead roof.

PLANNING HISTORY

None relevant.

THE APPLICANT'S CASE

A Planning, Design, Access and Heritage Statement has been submitted in support of the application. The existing building on site is not well built and requires substantial maintenance. The replacement dwelling utilises innovative construction techniques and would result in a highly sustainable and environmentally sound building. The existing house is not architecturally noteworthy being a 1920's pastiche thatched house. The existing developments immediately to the south of the application site are modern, constructed of red/yellow brick, flint, whitewash and shiplap with pitched roofs of slate, clay and concrete tiles. To the edge of the village (east of the site) is the applicant's business, Jali Ltd, which occupies a large red brick building with buff stone details in a Victorian engine shed design. The applicant considers that the redevelopment of this plot presents the unique opportunity to create an exciting piece of architecture commensurate with the position in the landscape. The proposed building seeks not only to complement and enhance the local landscape and architecture but also to push the boundaries of construction technology and design.

The applicant has aimed to achieve (amongst other matters) the following:-

- A house within the footprint and general mass of the existing house.
- That rests comfortably within the existing landscape.
- Its colour and tone blends with the treed backdrop when viewed from afar.
- That relates to the existing garden and landscaping.
- A dwelling with a sense of arrival as well as a dwelling to discover with an element of mystery and humour.
- A high standard of design and construction is to be achieved within an appropriate budget.
- Ease of future maintenance and total self-sufficiency (heat, power, water, etc) are sought.
- It must also be adaptable to future requirements as a home.
- Complement and enhance the character of the conservation area.

With regard to the design the applicant has sought to take influence from development within Kent, however it is also influenced by more stately properties that incorporate Dutch gables and S-shaped roofs and architectural detailing.

The new dwelling has been developed to embrace Eco-friendly construction technology which is well established in North America and Scandinavia. Instead of using conventional large factory made Structural Insulation Panels (SIP) it is proposed to use an on-site 'rapid-prototype' approach that is being developed by the applicant at his company. This involves computer aided design and manufacturing and controlled cutting machine to allow for rapid cutting and assembly using plywood panels to create a double skinned structural box which forms the core of the building. This is filled with foam. Advantages of this approach are; no heavy lifting equipment is required, saving of raw materials, zero lead time and greater design flexibility, construction speed and precision, minimal constructional packaging and transport. The finished result can go beyond the requirements of Code for Sustainable Homes Level 6. The doors and window frames can be fitted as the building is assembled. The roof would be constructed in the same way forming a 'warm' roof. Before inserting the foam in the cavity service ducting can be installed. This core construction would be hidden by the exterior construction of the building. Foam placed within the walls, linked to solar collectors underneath the roof cladding, is heated by the sun. With this method of 'solar gain' warming the high level of insulation installed it is believed that further heating will not be required for most of the year in the British climate.

A General Condition Report relating to the existing dwelling, the Thatched House, has been submitted with the application. The conclusions of this report indicate that the property has suffered an accumulation of years of neglect and requires a considerable amount of work to return it to a good condition. The thatched roof needs to be replaced and work to the chimney and its vertical abutments is needed. Substantial repairs have been identified for the existing render with insulation recommended prior to render reinstatement. Fungal decay at ground floor level has resulted from damp penetration. Replacement of flooring and installation of a damp proof membrane is recommended, as well as insulation. The report notes that significant steps can be taken to improve the existing property both in terms of its overall condition and thermal efficiency, however it recognises that there does come a point where the economics of undertaking such works becomes financially unviable. The applicant has concluded that it would be cheaper and easier to completely rebuild the house.

PLANNING POLICIES

Canterbury District Local Plan First Review:

BE1 - High quality designs, sustainable developments and specific design, amenity and landscape criteria to which the Council will have regard: cross-refers to SPGs.

BE7 - Conservation Areas and their settings to be preserved or enhanced: specific criteria for consideration.

BE8 - Demolition of buildings in Conservation Areas.

R6 - Special Landscape Areas: conservation and enhancement of natural beauty.

NE3 - Enhancement of biodiversity in SLA & AHLV.

South East Plan:

BE1 - Urban renaissance: strategy to enhance quality of life, inc. infrastructure planning. Promote design solutions relevant to specific context; build on local character/distinctiveness. Sensitive re-use of redundant/under-used buildings. Appropriateness of higher density & mixed use developments. Use of design led SPDs etc.

NRM2 - Adverse effects on the water environment are to be avoided.

Supplementary Planning Documents:

Supplementary Planning Document: 'Heritage, Archaeology and Conservation' adopted

October 2007.

Supplementary Planning Document: 'Sustainable Construction' adopted April 2007.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS

The occupiers of eight neighbouring properties have been notified of the application and site and press notices have been posted. Three letters of representation have been received.

One writer expresses support for the application and considers this to be an exciting piece of architecture, using novel building techniques that will enhance the village. Barham has developed over hundreds of years and is still developing. The proposal is inevitably different to that of the existing but reflects this current point in time. Examples of modern designs are set amongst traditional properties giving the village its eclectic character.

Barham Parish Council Members turned down the application as it is considered to be totally out of keeping with the area notwithstanding the property being largely screened by trees. It would be akin to Brighton Pavilion or a folly from a Dickensian drama. Concern has been expressed to the existing dwelling having been allowed to decay. Speculation is expressed to the redevelopment of this possibly paving the way toward an intensification of residential development of this site, possibly by a developer. No objection is raised to rebuilding the house in essentially the same style and footprint.

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) (Protect Kent) supports the comments made by Barham Parish Council and considers the proposal to be out of keeping with the surrounding area. The application is therefore opposed.

TECHNICAL CONSULTATIONS

None.

DRAINAGE CONSIDERATIONS

The site is noted to fall within an aquifer protection zone. The existing property has been served by drainage and there is no reason to doubt that a replacement property could not also be accommodated in this respect.

DISCUSSION

The principle of a replacement residential dwelling-house in the same location within the site is considered acceptable. The main considerations are primarily concerned with the demolition of the existing thatched dwelling-house in situ, the acceptability of the development in terms of its design and form, impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area and its impact on the amenities of neighbouring residents. A Conservation Area Consent application has also been made for the demolition of the existing dwelling (Ref No CA/11/2028/CAC).

The existing dwelling on site has been demonstrated by means of the Condition Report submitted in support of the application to be in a poor state of repair, as well as being poor in terms of its construction and eco-performance. This was evident at the time officers visited the site. The house itself has some character being thatched; however it is acknowledged that this is a 1920's pastiche development. It is not subject to local or statutory listing and the Council's Conservation Officer noted it was not worthy of listing at the time of visiting. Nonetheless, the property has some charm as it, along with its respective curtilage, has been included within the conservation area designation. Officers accept the findings of the Condition Report and consider that the loss of what is a pastiche dwelling in the conservation area could be justified provided an acceptable replacement development would result.

The applicant has described the design of the proposed replacement dwelling as a piece of

'constructivism'. In general terms the architectural style has a basis that conforms to traditional design principles, however the applicant has sought to be inventively creative taking influence from varying architectural styles and features within the external appearance of the building and the result is a rather inspired design. The applicant has advised that the exterior would be constructed of flint, stone and Kent gault bricks (buff colour). The stone and exterior ironwork would include decorative detailing and figures. Oak framed mullion windows with leaded lights reflect the fenestration of the current dwelling. The symmetry of the proposed building is to be on the same axis as the existing formal garden. The roof profile is to be of sheet metal and provides a contemporary sculptured detail capping the building. The applicant is seeking to create a sinuous flow in respect of the detailing such as decorative stone and metalwork. It is accepted that it would be of a new genre that is not placed in the past.

The applicant clearly desires an eclectic approach to the design of the redevelopment, however many traditional design principles have been utilised merging elaborate features more commonly associated with follies or Jacobean manor houses. The design embraces Flemish gables which are a feature commonly found in Kent. Elements of the design are reminiscent of the Brighton Pavilion. Nonetheless, there is no protocol that requires development within conservation areas to mimic repetitively traditional designs and forms for house types. Indeed creative design can in itself add character and interest enhancing the setting of such an area.

Sustainable construction is promoted through development plan policies and the Council's adopted SPD Sustainable Construction. It is clear that the applicant is again seeking an inspired approach to this element of the proposed dwelling-house as well. This is to be commended.

The design of the proposal is clearly a subjective matter and it is noted that it has not found universal favour or acclaim including from Barham Parish Council. Notwithstanding the considerations in respect of the proposed appearance of the dwelling-house consideration needs to be given to the potential prominence of the appearance of this new dwelling within its location. Overall, the proposal would not be substantially taller than that of the existing dwelling-house, although the overall massing would be greater it is not significantly greater. The coppiced woodland would obscure any view of the dwelling from northerly views. The substantial boundary landscaping would screen much of the proposed development from localised view and views from the wider context, although it is noted that the roof and upper floors would be visible from the other side of the valley to the south. The boundary treatment is within the applicant's ownership and control and as such can be conditioned to be retained. Given the siting of the dwelling within a well landscaped context the proposed replacement dwelling would not appear, in officers' view, overly conspicuous within the Barham landscape or the conservation area in which it is set.

Having given the proposal a great deal of consideration this creative approach has found favour with both Officers and the Conservation Officer. This site offers the opportunity for creating a development of inspired appearance. Historically, the construction of opulently designed buildings has been a feature of the British landscape. Whilst Barham Parish Council may prefer a more traditional approach to be taken it is officers' view that the proposal complies with the good design principle set out in Policy BE1. The proposal would preserve and characterfully enhance the setting of the conservation area thus conforming with the aims of Policy BE7. The proposal would also represent an acceptable replacement to allow for the demolition of the existing dwelling in accordance with the considerations required by Policy BE8. It is noted that the application site is situated within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area (Policy R6). Whilst the proposal would be visible from wider vantage points it is not considered there would be harm resulting to these landscape designations.

Much of the visual success of this building will be in the detailing. I have no reason to doubt that the application would not achieve a high standard of design or make use of quality materials. Nevertheless, it is considered prudent to impose conditions requiring details of the materials and feature elements of the design to be submitted for officer consideration to allow for further consideration of specific aspects of the detailed design.

The proposed development is contained within its own plot being well screened and some distance from any neighbouring residential occupiers. It is therefore concluded that no harm would arise to the amenities of neighbouring residents as a result of the proposed development.

The Parish Council has raised concern that this application may give rise to more intensive residential development taking place at this site in the future. This would be subject to an application and given due consideration should this occur in the future. The ability of the applicant to fund the proposal is a matter purely for the applicant and is not a planning consideration.

In respect of highway matters the access would remain as existing. The existing garage is to be retained at the site and there is ample space remaining for parking provision. The development is contained within the application site and therefore would have no implications in respect of the adjacent PROW. Similarly, the proposal would not effect the neighbouring coppiced woodland thus these TPO's trees would not be harmed as a result of the proposed development.

As a replacement dwelling the proposal does not require the payment of development contributions in accordance with the Council's adopted SPD.

The applicant clearly wishes to create a high standard of sustainable construction design that potentially could reach Code Level 6 of Sustainable Homes. The Council's current requirement is to achieve Code Level 4. This will be made a condition of any planning permission issued even though the resulting code level achieved may be higher.

It is not envisaged that the proposal would give rise to drainage issues that would harm the ground water aquifer.

In conclusion, the application is considered to accord with the Development Plan policies regarding the location and design of development in the conservation area. The proposal would not result in any undue loss of amenity to the occupiers of surrounding properties or result in creating highway concerns in this location.