

Revd. Cannon Steve Pittis  
C/O Paul Airey  
65 Harefield  
Esher  
Surrey  
KT10 9TG

Planning and Building Service  
Beech Hurst  
Weyhill Road  
Andover, Hants SP10 3AJ  
Telephone 01264 368000  
Minicom 01264 368052  
Web site [www.testvalley.gov.uk](http://www.testvalley.gov.uk)

**Contact:** Mrs Sarah Appleton  
**Telephone:** 01264 368180  
**E-mail:** [planning@testvalley.gov.uk](mailto:planning@testvalley.gov.uk)  
**Your ref:**  
**Our ref:** 19/01187/PREAPS  
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Dear Sir

**APPLICANT:** Revd. Cannon Steve Pittis  
**PROPOSAL:** Pre-application advice - 4 dwellings, carpark, and graveyard extension  
**LOCATION:** Land Adjoining All Saints Church, Church Lane, Awbridge,  
**AWBRIDGE**

I refer to your request for pre-application advice relating to the above site. I understand that the proposals relate to the erection of 4 dwellings along with the provision of a church car park and graveyard extension. I understand from your submission that due to cost associated with providing a car park and graveyard extension to the church would be considerable and as such, the applicant is proposing to pay for this through the erection of 4 dwellings. My comments on your proposals are as follows.

Please note that the policies referred to below can be found on the following page on the Council's website: <https://www.testvalley.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planningpolicy/local-development-framework/dpd>

### **The principle of development**

The site is situated in a countryside location as defined by the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2016 (RLP). Policy COM2 of the RLP only allows development in such areas where the proposal is considered to be a type of development considered appropriate in a countryside location as defined by the other policies contained within the RLP (a) or if a countryside location is considered essential for the development (b).

Whilst there could be an argument that the proposed car park and grave yard are essential in this location (as it may be able to be demonstrated that these are required in association with the church), it is not considered that there is an essential need for the proposed dwellings to be located in the countryside, as such, in order for the proposals to be considered acceptable in principle, they would need to comply with other relevant policies within the RLP. I note from your submission that you believe that policy COM9 would be relevant in this instance.

### Policy COM9 – Community Led Development

Policy COM9 of the RLP is a permissive policy that allows community led development provided that:

- a) the proposal is supported by evidence that there is a need for the development to maintain or enhance the sustainability of the settlement through the delivery of community benefit;
- b) it is demonstrated that the community has been involved in the preparation of the proposal; and
- c) it is demonstrated that the community supports the proposal; and
- d) the proposal, if for residential development, helps meet the affordable housing need of the parish in accordance with the thresholds contained within policy COM7 and local evidence and restrictions contained within policy COM8.

In order for a development to be acceptable in principle under policy COM9, the justification submitted in relation to the above should be comprehensive and demonstrate that the proposal would sustain existing community facilities or deliver new ones which maintain or enhance the sustainability of that particular community. The background text to the policy makes it clear that if a proposal is being promoted under policy COM9, the development should be brought forward either by the Parish Council or bodies acting in partnership with the Parish Council (paras. 5.114/5.115 of the RLP). I note that at this stage, whilst the Parish Council have offered an 'in principle' support for the proposals, the scheme is not actively being promoted/lead by them either on their own, or in a partnership. To be considered a policy COM9 development, it is essential that the Parish Council is an integral part of the scheme. Just being consulted on, and supporting the proposal (as it seems from the Parish Council minutes) is not enough for the development to be considered under policy COM9.

In relation to meeting the criteria (a) under policy COM9, there must be robust evidence to demonstrate a need for both the graveyard extension and the car park either through a Parish Plan or through bespoke research and that there are no other workable options available to provide these facilities. Whilst I note from the submitted statement that the Parish Plan has raised the car parking for the Church as a 'concern' there does not, at this stage, seem to be any specific research or evidence which demonstrates a need for either the proposed car park or for the graveyard. It also seems that there is no current Parish Plan which identifies a need for the development. Without such evidence, the proposals would not comply with policy COM9 (a). If a need can be demonstrated, information would need to be provided to explain how the proposals would maintain or enhance the sustainability of the settlement through the delivery of community benefit, again, evidence would be required to support any assertions that the proposals would help to sustain or enhance the sustainability of the settlement.

With regards to point (b) of COM9, it should be demonstrated that the community has been actively involved in the preparation of the proposed development. The information submitted with the pre-application request indicates that the scheme has been prepared without any engagement or participation of the local community. Any retrospective involvement with the community on a scheme that has already been prepared would not comply with policy COM9. Please also note that the 'community' does not solely refer to the Parish Council. When considering community involvement, people and other community groups should be involved with the process. Without being able to demonstrate the community having a

meaningful input into the proposed development, the proposals would not comply with point (b) of policy COM9.

In relation to point (c), any formal application submitted under policy COM9 would need to include evidence which demonstrates that the community supports the proposed development.

Point (d) of policy COM9 relates to the provision of affordable housing. Where a development proposes residential dwellings, as in this case, such housing should help meet the affordable housing needs of the parish. Paragraph 5.118 of the RLP clarifies that any proposals for open market housing should include an element of affordable housing. It is not clear from the supporting information with the pre-application submission whether the 4 dwellings proposed would be affordable or not, however, it would seem that these dwellings would be for open market housing (assuming that open market housing is required to subsidise the provision of the car park/graveyard). If this is the case, and no affordable housing is proposed, the development would not be considered to comply with point (d) of policy COM9. If all of the housing proposed is to be affordable, evidence should be included within any formal planning application which demonstrates that the proposals comply with policy COM8 of the RLP (as the site is in a countryside location). With regards to a mix of open market and affordable housing on the site, my housing colleagues have confirmed that to enable the delivery of affordable housing, the inclusion of open market dwelling(s) may be considered, however, evidence would need to be provided that an all affordable housing scheme is not viable.

### Viability

It is noted from the information supporting the pre-application submission that in order to provide the car park and graveyard without having a direct impact on the church's resources, housing is also being sought as part of the proposals and that a viability assessment has been submitted to demonstrate that a minimum of 4 houses would be required to help pay for the proposed car park and graveyard extension. As discussed, I am currently seeking fee proposals for the submitted viability assessment to be considered by an independent advisor. I will be in contact once I have these fee proposals to confirm whether you would wish to proceed and I would be happy to have further discussions in relation to this point.

Notwithstanding the above, if it can be demonstrated that there is a need for the proposed car park and graveyard (in compliance with policy COM9(a)) and that the provision of open market housing is the only way that this can be provided (any viability assessment would also need to demonstrate that it would not be viable to provide affordable housing – see above), then this would form part of the planning balance when considering an application.

### Loss of employment

The proposal would result in the relocation of the existing nursery on the site. Whilst such a use is not considered a 'traditional' employment site as an industrial use would be, the nursery nevertheless provides employment and as such policy LE10 of the RLP needs to be considered. Any formal application would therefore need to be accompanied by evidence which demonstrates that the land is no longer required to meet the economic development needs of the area (a); or that the current activity is causing, or could cause significant harm to the character of the area or the amenities of residents (b). It would also need to be demonstrated that the proposals would not have a significant detrimental impact on the operation of the remaining occupiers on the site (c). Whilst no information has been

submitted at this stage in relation to compliance with policy LE10, the relocation of the existing nursery would seem to demonstrate that the land is still required to meet the economic development needs of the area (as an alternative site is needed for the displaced use – contrary to point a). In addition, as the alternative site is in the same area as the proposed site, this would indicate that the current activity is not causing harm to the surrounding amenities of the area (contrary to point b) and that the proposals would displace the existing use into an area of undeveloped land to the north of the site (contrary to point c)), would the relocation of the nursery and structures need planning permission in its own right? Would the transition between the two sites impact on the business? If so how?

As a result of the above, the loss/relocation of the existing nursery use of the site would be a concern. At the moment, I cannot see how the proposals would comply with policy LE10 of the RLP. This would need to be fully addressed if a scheme is to come forward.

### Policy summary and the planning balance

Clearly there are many issues here that would need to be considered if a planning application is to be submitted. A lot more work and consideration needs to be undertaken if the application is to come forward as a policy COM9 scheme and there are other considerations, including viability, affordable housing and loss of employment that would need to form part of the planning balance when determining the application. It may well be that the proposals do not comply with any of the policies referred to under COM2 of the RLP. If this does turn out to be the case, clear justification/evidence would need to be included within any formal application to enable officers to balance the merits of the scheme against its departure from the RLP. At this moment in time, if an application were to be submitted on the basis of the pre-application submission, it would be unlikely to be supported by officers as the proposals would not comply with either point (a) or (b) of policy COM2 of the RLP.

### **Impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area**

When considering the character of appearance of the surrounding area I have looked at the eastern part of Church Lane from St Andrew's House/Fromefield eastwards. This is the area within which the site would be seen in context with. This area is rural in its nature, characterised by large houses, set in large plots in a generally linear form of development fronting Church Lane. There is not one constant building line in the immediate vicinity of the site. Some dwellings are set to the front of their plot, some to the back and some are centrally located, this gives a more sporadic development pattern on this part of Church Lane. The site is currently occupied by a nursery and includes structures associated with this use including polytunnels.

Whilst the overall appearance of the proposed dwellings is considered to be appropriate, it is not considered that the proposed layout of the dwellings would reflect the existing character in the immediate vicinity of the site in terms of density and layout. The proposed plot sizes of the properties would not respect plot sizes within immediate vicinity, being significantly smaller both in terms of width and depth. The proposed separation between the proposed dwellings would also not respect the spaces between existing dwellings around the site. In addition, whilst I note that the proposed dwellings would not follow the same building line, their positioning within their plots would be fairly uniform, which again, would not reflect the character of the immediate surrounding area. When considering the character of the immediate vicinity, it is considered that the proposed development would be relatively

cramped. Its layout would not integrate, respect or complement the character of the area and thus is considered to be contrary to policies E1 and E2 of the RLP.

It is noted that there are currently structures on the site, however these are not residential in their nature and form part of the rural character of the landscape. It is not considered that these structures on the site would justify proposed residential development here in visual terms.

Any planning application would also need to be consider what impact the proposed relocation of the nursery would have on the character and appearance of the surrounding area in cumulation with the proposed residential development, particularly if the existing polytunnel and other structures on the site are to be relocated. Further information on the proposed relocation would be required before I can provide any further comments on this.

The pre-application was discussed at the recent Design Review Panel. I have attached a copy of their comments for your information.

### **Heritage considerations**

The site is adjacent to All Saints Church which is grade II listed. The Council's conservation officer has been consulted as part of the pre-application advice request. They have objected to the proposals that have been submitted. The following is a summary of their comments.

#### Density/layout of the development

In relation to the proposed dwellings, it is considered the density of the development (being higher than surrounding existing development) and the linear layout of the proposed dwellings would not respect or integrate with the existing character of the surrounding area (see above). By failing to respect the surrounding character, the development would attract undue attention, and would detract from the setting of the church.

#### Extension to graveyard

The conservation officer would have no objections to the proposed extension to the graveyard as this should not harm the setting of the church, being a feature traditionally associated with churches and are part of the environment in which on expects to experience the building. There are numerous examples of churchyards being extended, both historically, and in the present day. It would be preferable if this were the more visually prominent element of the scheme, rather than the car park.

#### Car park

There are concerns in relation to the proposed car park. Formal car parks with their associated hardstanding, marked out bays, and other paraphernalia, can have a very urbanising effect which would harm the setting of the church. The proposed development would create a substantial area of hardstanding, with 42 marked out bays. This would look quite alien in the rural-lane, and also in the environs of the church.

## General comments

The Council's conservation officer accepts that the extension to the graveyard and provision of a car park would provide a public benefit, however, at this stage, it is not considered that the public benefit would be sufficient enough outweigh the harm on the setting of the church.

## Impact on Awbridge Danes

Though the distance between the proposed development site and Awbridge Danes house means it is unlikely that there would be significant views of the development from the house which would affect its setting, these views, and the effect on the views from the edge of its grounds need to be taken into account should a formal planning application be submitted. As noted above, the park is registered (Grade II) and note is made in the list entry of rides at the edge of the park – it is likely views from these would be affected by the proposed affordable housing and carpark. At present the setting of this edge of the park is quite well preserved, so any change could have quite a significant and harmful effect. Account also needs to be taken of the experience of the loggia at the northern point of the lake (listed at Grade II). There is also concern with regards to any indivisibility between the church and Awbridge Danes and whether the proposed development would affect this, particularly considering it would be the high density affordable units which would possibly be visible. The close-packed nature of this development is considered out of keeping with both the general layout of the lane, and the character of the parkland of Awbridge Danes.

## Documents to be submitted as part of a formal planning application

Any formal planning application for the above site should be accompanied by a thorough and robust heritage statement which should, as a bare minimum assess the following:

- Significance of the church and its setting
- Assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the above and the special interests of the building (in accordance with paragraph 128 of the NPPF).
- Assessment of the impact of the new dwellings and car park on appreciating the tranquillity of the churchyard.

## **Residential amenities**

It is noted that separation between the proposed dwellings and existing dwellings would result in their being limited impacts on surrounding residential amenities. In addition, due to the layout of the proposed dwellings as shown on the submitted drawings, it is considered unlikely that there would be any adverse impacts on residential amenities between the proposed new dwellings.

## **Highways**

My highways colleagues at Hampshire County Council have been consulted as part of the pre-application process. At the time of writing, a response had not been received. Any response from my colleagues will be forwarded to you directly once received.

### Accessibility of the site

Notwithstanding any comments from my highways colleagues, I have concerns over the overall sustainability of the site for residential development.

The site is isolated from the main part of the village and is accessed by a relatively narrow, unlit lane. It is therefore likely that there would be an overreliance on the private car to access nearby facilities and that there would be limited access to existing pedestrian, cycle and public transport links to key destinations

As a result of the above, it is not considered that the location of the site for residential development is appropriate. It is considered that the proposals would be contrary to policy T1 of the RLP in this regard.

## **Ecology**

### On-site ecology

The Council's ecologist has advised that the ecological report accompanying the pre-application advice request (Ecosupport, November 2018) would need some amendments to make it acceptable should a formal planning application be submitted. The following should be included with any further iterations of the report:

- Details regarding the proposed reptile receptor and potential impacts on tree roosting bats.
- Your ecologist should undertake a date search to ensure the assessment includes further ecological receptors which may be located within proximity of the site include stag beetle and locally designated sites. There are also a number of bat roosts which have been recorded locally and as such, the ecological assessment should also consider potential impacts on foraging and commuting bats which may utilise boundary habitats. These ecological receptors are missing from the current submission.
- Measures to enhance the site's biodiversity value should be included. The ecology report should include measures to provide ecological enhancements and these should be reflected in other application documents such as landscaping plans. Enhancements may include native and locally appropriate planting to provide habitat and food sources for species such as birds and invertebrates, creation of wildflower areas and other habitats, creation of ponds and other habitat features such as habitat (log piles) and provision of bird, bat and insect boxes.

### International sites

The development would result in a net increase in residential dwellings within 13.6km of the New Forest SPA. This distance defines the zone identified by recent research where new residents would be considered likely to visit the New Forest. The New Forest SPA supports a range of bird species that are vulnerable to impacts arising from increases in recreational use of the Forest that result from new housing development. It has been demonstrated through research, and agreed by Natural England that any net increase in dwellings would have a likely significant effect on the SPA when considered in combination with other plans and projects.

To address this issue, the Council has adopted an interim mitigation strategy whereby a scale of developer contributions per new dwelling has been agreed that would fund the delivery of a new strategic area of alternative recreational open space that would offer the same sort of recreational opportunities as those offered by the New Forest. Such a contribution would be £1300 per dwelling and this would be secured during the process of a formal planning application by either direct payment or through the completion of a Section 106 legal agreement.

## **Conclusion**

At this stage, considering the information that has been submitted with this pre-application advice request, I am not convinced that the proposals would be acceptable in principle. More work needs to be undertaken if it is to be satisfactorily demonstrated that the proposals would comply with policy COM9 of the RLP. There are also concerns relating to the provision of affordable housing on site and with the proposed loss/relocation of the existing nursery use.

With regards to viability, as discussed, I would be happy to look at this further with you once I have received the fee proposals for an independent review of the viability assessment. I will be in contact with you once I have received these to discuss further.

In addition to the above, there are also concerns that the proposed development would result in adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the surrounding area and on heritage assets. With regards to highways, I am waiting for comments from my colleagues at Hampshire County Council although I do have concerns in relation to the accessibility of the site. I would advise that the comments above in relation to ecology should be fully considered in any formal planning application.

I trust the above is of assistance, but please note that the above is an opinion of an Officer of this Council and is without prejudice to any formal decision taken in respect of the above site. As discussed, I would be happy to arrange a meeting to discuss the proposals further.

Yours faithfully

Sarah Appleton (Mrs)  
Senior Planning Officer (South)

Encs