

Agenda Item A7	Committee Date 8 June 2009	Application Number 09/00158/FUL
Application Site Elms Hotel, Elms Road, Morecambe, Lancashire	Proposal Demolition of existing building and erection of new single building to house 44 two bedroom and 2 one bedroom assisted living apartments, 2 nurses' studios, an undercroft parking area and an undercroft storage facility for use of the apartments	
Name of Applicant Hay Carr Estates/Mitchells of Lancaster	Name of Agent Alastair Skelton North Quarry Office, North Quarry Business Park, Appley Bridge, Wigan WN6 9DB	
Decision Target Date 17 June 2009	Reason For Delay Not applicable.	
Case Officer	Peter Rivet	
Departure	No	
Summary of Recommendation	Approval	

1.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 1.1 The Elms Hotel originated as a country house (it is believed to be the work of either William Coultard of Lancaster, or George Webster of Kendal) on the east side of the village of Bare. It was converted into a hotel at the end of the nineteenth century and a series of extensions, many of them displaying little architectural imagination, has altered its character so that very little of the original building is recognisable as such. It is however an important landmark within this part of Morecambe.
- 1.2 The surrounding area is residential, but the site is within easy walking distance of the parade of shops in Princes Crescent which serves the needs of the local community.

2.0 The Proposal

- 2.1 The Elms has suffered from declining patronage in recent years and the applicants state that it is no longer viable as a hotel. They wish to redevelop the site with accommodation for the elderly. The small public house in the former lodge at the site entrance off Bare Lane (The Owl) is unaffected by the development and would be retained.
- 2.2 The proposal as submitted is similar to its predecessor (see below) but incorporates design amendments which grew out of negotiations with the applicants. The north east end of the building has been lowered from three to two storeys, and balconies which would have given rise to overlooking problems have been removed. The scheme in its present form is for a two and three storey block of flats occupying a slightly larger footprint than the existing hotel, though it would be moved slightly away from the south eastern site boundary. The 44 flats (all for over 55s) would be predominantly two bedroom ones, with a few one bedroom units, and would meet the City Council's usual standards for this kind of accommodation.

- 2.3 Seven of the apartments (three two bedroom and four one bedroom) are offered as affordable housing under a unilateral undertaking. These would be transferred to a Housing Association, and would be available on shared ownership leases.
- 2.4 The western end of the building, adjoining the car park, is shown as containing medical treatment facilities consisting of a reception area, four treatment areas and two "nurses' studios". Above it would be a terrace opening on to a small garden, which would retain some trees from that of the hotel garden at present on the site.
- 2.5 The general scale and massing of the development would be similar to that of the existing hotel, though its "footprint" would be larger, and the building would be of traditional appearance. The materials specified are stone and render for the walls, and slate for the roof.
- 2.6 A small garden area would be retained at the north east end of the site. Car parking (and an area for cycle parking) would be accommodated in the basement, with a new access off Elms Road. As first submitted, the proposal showed 36 spaces in total of which six would be laid out to wheelchair accessible standard. In response to the highways comments, the number of spaces in the basement has now been increased to 55. At the same time a ramped access has been included to the garden area, allowing wheelchair access to it. In addition to this six other spaces, one of them laid out for wheelchair use, would be available at ground level on the Elms Road frontage.
- 2.7 The supporting information provided with the application includes a desktop evaluation of the potential for contamination, and a bat survey. Neither of these raises any unexpected issues. The potential for contaminated material on the site is low, and no evidence of bat roosts was found.
- 2.8 In addition to a report covering design and access issues, the proposal is accompanied by a sustainability report. This states that the development will use energy efficient space heating and water heating equipment (though there is no mention of the potential for microgeneration), and that the building will provide high levels of insulation. It emphasises the accessibility of the site. It also states that materials from the existing building, when it is demolished, will where possible be salvaged for recycling.

3.0 Site History

- 3.1 The present proposal is effectively a resubmission of application 08/00354/FUL. This was refused consent in June 2008, when restrictions on the provision of new housing outside regeneration areas were still in force. These restrictions provided the first reason for refusal. The second one referred to the bulk and position of the new building in relation to the houses in Mount Gardens and Elms Drive.

Application Number	Proposal	Decision
08/00354/FUL	Demolition of existing building and erection of new single building to house 48 two bedroom and 2 one bedroom assisted living apartments, a one bedroom warden's flat and 2 nurses' studios with undercroft parking area and storage facilities	Refusal

4.0 Consultation Responses

- 4.1 The following responses have been received from consultees:

Consultees	Response
Morecambe Neighbourhood Council	Feel that the loss of this hotel will be detrimental to Morecambe's regeneration and that the proposed development is superfluous to Morecambe's accommodation needs. They also suggest that the development is out of proportion to its surroundings and the site.

Lancashire County Council highways	This application is very similar in highway terms to 08/00354/FUL which was refused on planning grounds last year. In general highway observations are unchanged. There are 35 parking spaces shown in the basement of which only 9 are exclusively for the residents of the 48 flats. This is inadequate given the demand for on street parking in Bare. Recommend a more flexible arrangement of unallocated parking with extra spaces if room can be found for them - this issue has been addressed in the amended plans. The number of residential units falls above the threshold for a developer contribution to transport provision; using an accessibility score of 33 points they would expect a sum of 48 x £770 = £36,060 to be used towards improving cycle, bus and pedestrian facilities in the area, secured by means of a section 106 agreement. Conditions should be attached to any consent covering the construction of a new access, the provision of garaging/car parking, cycle storage, and the protection of visibility splays either side of the access.
Lancashire County Council planning	No comments from a Strategic Planning point of view. Ecology unit - A bat survey has been undertaken and no bats have been found. Bats may occupy crevices in the building but provided the recommendations in the report are followed, and appropriate measures required by a condition, no objections.
Environmental Health	No comments to add to those on the previous application here, when they asked for a construction hours condition. They also recommended a scheme to control dust emissions from demolition work associated with the development. They asked for details to be provided of the ventilation arrangements (an underground car park is involved) and that any proposal for pile driving should be the subject of a scheme for noise control.
City Council (Direct Services)	No observations received at the time this report was prepared.
United Utilities	Comments as for the previous application for this development: no objections provided that the building is drained using a separated system. The developer will need to ensure that surface water runoff is not increased. Permeable paving, landscaping and other forms of sustainable drainage should be used. A water supply can be provided, but each unit will have to be provided with a meter at the developer's expense.
Police	No objections. They note that the development is intended for residents over 55 and recommend that "Secured by Design" principles should be adopted. This would affect the choice of access control system for the car park, the provision of adequate lighting, and the landscaping in a form which would allow natural surveillance. It is recommended that pedestrian access should be secured with the use of a key pad or a secure key fob.

5.0 Neighbour Representations

- 5.1 Nine letters and emails have been received from people living nearby, who object on the following grounds:
- The new building will be too large, and too close to the site boundary
 - The opportunity to design a "statement building" making better use of the site has been missed
 - The hotel is an important facility for the local community, and provides a meeting place for many community groups
 - Local roads are inadequate for the traffic which would be generated
 - The access on to Elms Road would be hazardous
 - Not enough off street parking is available
 - There are already enough flats and retirement homes in the area.
- 5.2 Geraldine Smith MP has written to ask that account should be taken of her constituents' concerns about the proposed development.
- 5.3 One email in support of the application has been received from a neighbour who considers that the proposed development is more appropriate than the hotel to a residential area. If permission is refused, the hotel will close and become derelict. The email also refers to problems with noise and unruly behaviour associated with the hotels' clientele.

6.0 Principal Development Plan Policies

- 6.1 Policy SC1 of the Core Strategy emphasises, in the interests of sustainability, the importance of locating development where it is convenient to walk, cycle and travel by public transport, where the site is previously developed, and where the site can be developed without loss of or harm to significant features of biodiversity, landscape, archaeological or built heritage importance. Policy SC2 states that 90% of new dwellings will be accommodated within the existing urban areas of Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth. Policy SC5 requires a high standard of design.
- 6.2 Of the "saved" policies in the Lancaster District Local Plan, the following are relevant
- H17, which states that proposals for sheltered housing will only be permitted where the site is convenient for a major bus route, local services and facilities.
 - H19, which sets out policies for residential development within the built up areas of Lancaster, Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth
 - R21, which requires development to make appropriate provision for people with disabilities.

7.0 Comment and Analysis

- 7.1 The Elms Hotel in its present form is of no architectural distinction. Nonetheless it is clearly regarded with affection by many people living in the surrounding area. It is popular as a venue for wedding receptions and other social events, and is used as a meeting place by a number of local organisations. Comments received from neighbours and from Morecambe Neighbourhood Council, reflect this view.
- 7.2 The loss of jobs represented by the closure of one of Morecambe's larger hotels is to be regretted. Despite this, neither the Core Strategy nor the policies set out in the Lancaster District Local Plan provide any arguments for retaining it. If the hotel is unable to pay its way, refusal of planning permission will not of itself change the position.
- 7.3 There is already a significant amount of accommodation for the elderly in the vicinity. Immediately to the west are the flats occupying the former Craig Home for Children, which is now known as The Parks. There is also a block of flats at Clarence Court, at the corner of Bare Lane and Mayfield Avenue, which was built by the specialist developers McCarthy & Stone. Further south, at Carr Lane in Middleton, there is a purpose built retirement village, though it must be conceded that this is a considerable distance from Bare and caters for a somewhat different market.
- 7.4 However, the proportion of elderly people in the population is increasing and this can be expected to result in a corresponding increase in the demand for sheltered accommodation. The location is in many ways very well suited for a sheltered housing development. It is within easy walking distance of a group of shops, including a post office. There is a frequent bus service, and a train service nearby at Bare Lane station. Although the site does not overlook the sea the Promenade is only a short distance away, as is Happy Mount Park. The requirements of policy H17 of the Local Plan are easily met.
- 7.5 The County Council's view that additional parking spaces are needed will be noted. There is a limited number of on street spaces in Bare. Even though a small car park associated with The Owl is to remain, it is important to ensure that the development does not result in illegal and possibly dangerous illegal parking. This issue has been addressed in the amended plans. The proposal in its final form offers 61 spaces (55 in the basement, 6 outside) and in the circumstances it does not seem necessary or appropriate to impose any specific condition about controlling it. The developers have confirmed that they are willing to enter into an agreement covering a contribution to public transport improvements, as requested by Lancashire County Council, as well as contributing to the stock of affordable housing.
- 7.6 It will be noted that the sustainability report referred to earlier does not contain any proposals for microgeneration of either electricity or hot water supplies. There is clearly potential for this, for example by placing solar panels on the south facing slope of the roof. This issue can be addressed with the use of a suitably worded condition.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The previous refusal was based primarily on the housing restrictions which applied to the area, as the development could not be linked to achieving regeneration objectives. This objection no longer applies.
- 8.2 Overall the proposal in its present form is considered satisfactory and it is recommended that permission should be granted, subject to the conditions set out below.

Recommendation

Subject to Legal Service confirmation that the Unilateral Undertaking is satisfactory that Planning Permission **BE GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:

1. Standard three year condition.
2. Amended plans 21 May 2009, showing alterations to car park and ramped access to garden.
3. Development to be carried out in accordance with the approved plans.
4. No development to take place until developers agree programme of public transport improvements.
5. No development to take place until developers have agreed provision of affordable housing.
6. Samples of materials to be agreed.
7. Scheme for microgeneration to be agreed.
8. Landscaping scheme to be agreed and implemented.
9. Trees to be protected from damage during construction.
10. Accommodation to be occupied by people over 55 only.
11. Construction and demolition to take place only between 08:00 - 18:00 Mondays to Fridays - no work on Sundays or officially recognised public holidays.
12. Details of ventilation from car park to be agreed.
13. Separated drainage system to be provided.

Human Rights Act

This recommendation has been reached after consideration of the provisions of The Human Rights Act. Unless otherwise stated in this report, the issues arising do not appear to be of such magnitude to override the responsibility of the City Council to regulate land use for the benefit of the community as a whole, in accordance with national law.

Background Papers

None