

**PLANNING
COMMITTEE**

1st March 2023

Planning Application 22/01401/FUL

Partial demolition of existing building, the construction of two ground floor extensions and the construction of a new upper floor. External works including excavation of the site, a new outdoor play and gardening area, and partial reconfiguration of the existing car park area.

Bryant Place, Bengrove Close, Redditch, Worcestershire, B98 7SX.

**Applicant: Mr Jordan Cooke (Your Ideas Ltd)
Ward: Greenlands Ward**

(see additional papers for site plan)

The case officer of this application is Charlotte Wood, Planning Officer (DM), who can be contacted on Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3412 Email: Charlotte.Wood@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk for more information.

Site Description

The application site lies on the corner of Woodrow North and Bengrove Close in the Greenlands ward of Redditch. The site is occupied by a one and a half storey brick building, which was constructed in the 1990's. The building has most recently been used as a community centre. The site area measures approximately 950 square metres and has an existing vehicular access off Bengrove Close on the eastern side of the site. The existing parking area is located to the south of the building and the remainder of the site is incidental open space, predominantly grassed with some mature trees on the western side. To the east of the site, on the other side of Bengrove Close, is designated Primarily Open Space which includes a children's play area. The application site is shown as 'white land' on the proposals map in the Borough of Redditch Local Plan no. 4 (BoRLP 4) indicating that is within the urban area of Redditch. There are nearby houses to the south and to the east of the application site, the nearest of which is 39/40 Bengrove Close, approximately 15 metres from the south west boundary of the site. There are also some notable land level changes across the site with land sloping downwards from north to south. The existing building on site has been cut into the land so that it sits slightly below the road level of Woodrow North.

Proposal Description

The current application seeks planning permission for extensions and alterations to the existing building on site so that it can be used to provide a number of services and activities which would be targeted towards youths. The development would include a substantial two storey side extension on the south east side of the building, a smaller two storey front extension on the north east side of the building, and a first floor extension above the existing part of the building to create additional useable space at upper floor level. The existing floor area of the building is approximately 97 square metres and following extensions the floor area would measure approximately 297 square metres. With regards to other external changes to the building, whilst the main entrance of the building will remain on the north east side of the building, facing Bengrove Close, there

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would be further alterations including new windows, the addition of white cladding to the upper part of all elevations and a new profiled metal roof with solar panels installed on the south west roof slope. With regards to the external area of the site, there would be engineering operations to excavate land predominantly on the south west side of the building in order to create an outdoor games and gardening area. This would comprise of a hard paved tarmac area in the centre, with the outer area of land stepping upwards towards Woodrow North. The steps would be created using stone filled gabion baskets with areas of grass and shrub planting proposed at each stepped level. The existing parking area would also be reconfigured to provide a new layout which would contain five parking spaces, including one disabled parking space.

The application has been submitted by Your Ideas Youth and Community Project, who aim to support individuals with a range of needs including those who are out of education, have behavioural difficulties, are on the autism spectrum, or are at risk of crime or antisocial behaviour. Further information outlining the weekly sessions that are expected to run from the redeveloped site have been provided. These sessions include junior and senior youth clubs, education provision for children who have been excluded from school, clubs for individuals with disabilities and autism, community sports and fitness clubs, gaming clubs and counselling support sessions. The building would also provide a space for art and for learning life skills such as cooking, and to provide advice and support for young people and their families.

The application is required go before planning committee as the building and land to which the application relates in owned by Redditch Borough Council. The project will be funded by a grant from the Youth Investment Fund. The funding process remains separate to the planning process.

Relevant Policies :

Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4

Policy 1: Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

Policy 2: Settlement Hierarchy

Policy 14: Protection of Incidental Open Space

Policy 17: Flood Risk Management

Policy 20: Transport Requirements for New Development

Policy 39: Built Environment

Policy 40: High Quality Design and Safer Communities

Policy 43: Leisure, Tourism and Abbey Stadium

Others

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

NPPG National Planning Practice Guidance

Redditch High Quality Design SPD

Relevant Planning History

No relevant planning history

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Consultations

Community Safety Officer

No objection to the proposal, however a number of suggestions have been made relating to the specification of external doors and cycle stores, the design of boundary treatments, and the installation of security lights and CCTV.

North Worcestershire Water Management

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and it is not considered at risk of flooding, however to ensure that any impacts are mitigated, a condition for a surface water drainage scheme is recommended.

Highways Redditch

No objections to the proposal following receipt of speed surveys which confirmed that the revised site access can provide the appropriate visibility splays, and additional information relating to the intended use and staff levels of the building, in order to ensure that the parking provision on site was satisfactory.

WRS - Noise

No objections

Tree Officer

No objections

Public Consultation Response

No comments from the public have been received following publicising this planning application.

Assessment of Proposal

Principle of Development

The Borough of Redditch Local Plan Proposals Map indicates that the application site lies in the main urban area of Redditch. Policy 2 of the BORLP 4 states that the urban area is the main settlement of Redditch and is the focus for development. Having regards to policy 14 of the BoRLP 4, as the land surrounding the community centre is not designated 'Primarily Open Space' it should be considered 'Incidental Open Space'. Policy 14.2 acknowledges that it may be necessary to develop some areas of Incidental Open Space, however it should be resisted unless:

- i. the need for the development outweighs the need to protect the incidental open space;
- ii. the site does not make an important contribution to the Green Infrastructure Network, local amenity or wildlife conservation value;
- iii. the site does not have a strategic function separating clearly defined developed areas or acting as a buffer between different land uses;

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- iv. there is alternative provision of equivalent/greater community benefit provided in an accessible locality; and
- v. the incidental open space does not play an important role in the character of the area.

Having regard to criterion (i) and the need for the development, the proposal would improve a community facility which would offer public benefits. The host building is within walking distance to many residential properties, as well as being accessible by bus services. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is supportive of development that provides for community needs. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community and ensure that established facilities and services are able to develop and modernise and are retained for the benefit of the community. The expansion and improvement of the existing community facility would assist with meeting these objectives.

With regards to criterion (iii) it is not considered that the site has a strategic function to separate different land uses.

In terms of criterion (iv), there is an alternative provision of Open Space on the other side of the road, which is larger in size and includes a play area.

Having regard to the above principle of the proposed development is acceptable subject to it preserving the existing character and appearance of the area (criterion (v)) as well as local amenity and conservation value (criterion (ii)). Residential amenity, highway safety and other technical matters will also need to be considered.

Design

Policy 39 of the BoRLP4 requires development to contribute positively to the local character of the area, responding to and integrating with the distinctive features of the surrounding environment. Further to this, Policy 40 of the BoRLP seeks development that contributes to both public and private spaces and expects proposals to be of a high-quality design, of an appropriate siting and layout, which protects and enhances key vistas. Additionally, the Borough of Redditch High Quality Design SPD provides more detailed advice and whilst it distinguishes between residential and non-residential development, the guidance for non-residential development focusses on commercial and agricultural/equestrian development. Notwithstanding this there are some key points that are repeated in the guidance for both residential and non-residential development, including that development should be in scale with surrounding developments and should not be visually intrusive due to its scale and massing and should use materials which are in keeping with the local character.

With regards to character and appearance, the host building is situated on the corner of Woodrow North and Bengrove Close, and Woodrow North is characterised by its wide green highway verge and mature trees. Although local housing within the area is generally of a high density, it is well set back from the main road, which helps to maintain the green and open appearance of the area. Whilst the host building is positioned closer

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to the road than the nearby houses, its current modest height and asymmetric roof design, together with its integration into the land levels, reduces its visual impact. The materials of the existing building means that it also integrates with the appearance of the residential dwellings which are predominantly red brick.

The proposed extensions would approximately double the footprint of the existing community building and would see a substantial increase to its height through raising the roof upwards. The proposed two storey extensions off the north east and south east elevations, together with the first floor extension would dominate and engulf the footprint of the host building. Due to its isolated location and its proximity to Woodrow North, the additional volume and massing of the building would appear prominent from views along this road. The alterations to the existing low lying roof to create a taller building would be particularly visually intrusive from this viewpoint. The proposed two storey extensions would also bring the edge of the building closer Bengrove Close, which due to the scale of the proposal, would appear dominant when viewed from this road also. Furthermore, this increase to the size of the building, together with the proposed groundworks around the building would harm the green and open appearance of the site, which currently makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. In respect of the proposed materials, whilst the addition of white cladding would reflect some of the houses on Bushley Close to the east of the site, this alteration together with the replacement of the roof tiles with a profiled metal roof and the enlargement of the building would further increase its dominant appearance and would result in a building that integrates less successfully into the existing residential area compared to the current building.

Having regard to the above and the aims of the design policies in the BoRLP 4 it is not considered that the proposal would provide a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area, nor integrate with the surrounding environment.

Drainage

The Drainage Officer has commented that the proposal site falls within flood zone 1 and is not at any significant risk of fluvial flooding. Whilst risk of surface water flooding is minimal, drainage details have not been provided with the application. As correctly designed drainage would mitigate against any surface water flood risk on the site and in the surrounding area, the Drainage Officer has advised that a surface water drainage scheme, including a drainage plan, the extent and materials of any new areas of hardstanding and appropriate levels of attenuation, should be requested by planning condition.

Highways

Worcestershire County Council Highways have also reviewed the proposal and have noted that the site is located within a sustainable location, in walking distance of amenities and bus routes. Whilst the existing vehicular access is considered to have acceptable visibility in both directions, the Highways Officer originally raised concerns that the proposed extensions would impede the visibility to the left on exiting the car park. Due to the increase in floor area, he suggested that the proposal could create additional

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vehicle trips to the site and this would intensify the use of a substandard access. The Highways Officer therefore considered that the access should be suitable to accept any additional trips and in order to assess this further, he requested that a speed survey was carried out.

Speed surveys were conducted at the site over a number of days and these concluded relatively low average speeds. It was therefore demonstrated that the associated visibility splays required for these speeds could be provided on site and would not be impeded by the proposed extensions and therefore the access would be suitable for use.

In addition to this, the Highways Officer raised other initial concerns raised that the revised parking layout, which included five parking spaces, may be insufficient to serve the extended building due to matters such as an increase in the number of employees. Further information was provided during the course of the application which outlined a timetable of how the building is anticipated to be used throughout the week. The applicant has also confirmed that whilst they expect that overall staff numbers would increase as a result of an enlarged facility, not all of the posts would be full time, and the working hours of staff would be spread across different times of the day and activities would be co-ordinated so that no more than five parking spaces would be required during any given period. Whilst this cannot be easily controlled by planning condition, it is noted that the applicant has given this matter consideration. The information submitted also states that walking and cycling to work schemes would be incentivised.

Following submission of the above further information, the Highways Officer has stated that he no longer has concerns with the parking layout or provision. He has however suggested a number of conditions should planning permission be granted. These relate to the surfacing of the access with a bound material, providing visibility splays on site, providing parking and turning facilities on site (including one disabled access space) and providing cycle parking and electric vehicle charging points on site.

Noise, Nuisances, and Residential Amenity

Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) have reviewed the proposal and have raised no objections with regards to noise and nuisances.

Community Safety

Comments in relation to the proposal have been received from the Community Safety Officer. Whilst they have not objected to the principle of the development, after reviewing details of the proposal, they have made a number of recommendations to enhance the safety of the site. These relate to the design and specification of boundary treatments, cycle stores and external doors of the building. They have also recommended the installation of security lighting and CCTV. Should planning permission be granted, these recommendations can be suggested to the applicant through informatives, however it is not considered that it would be reasonable to request these items by planning condition.

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Trees and Ecology

The application form indicates that there are no trees to be removed as part of the proposal and the Council's Tree Officer has been consulted and has raised no tree related issues. The proposed site plan shows that a number of trees would be planted in small groups, mainly on the south west side of the building. Some of these would provide screening to the application site when travelling west to east along Woodrow North, they would also provide benefits to local biodiversity. Whilst the retention of these trees cannot be guaranteed indefinitely, in the event that the permission is granted, a suitably worded planning condition can ensure that these are initially planted. It is noted, however, that even with the presence of these trees, views of the site and the proposed development would be visible from public vantage points.

Public Consultation

No comments have been received from members of the public as a result of publicising the application, however as part of the submission the applicant provided a number of comments from third parties, which broadly support the work of Your Ideas Youth and Community Project as well as the current proposal to extend the community centre. These include comments from the local MP and local councillors, the YMCA, West Mercia Police, and Worcestershire Children First, Get Safe Team. Although not received directly from the individuals, these comments have been noted.

Conclusion

This application proposes extensions and alterations to an existing community facility, in order to improve the indoor and outdoor space so that a number of clubs and services can be offered to the local community. National planning policy supports planning decisions that improve local health and social facilities and allow them to develop and modernise so that they can be retained for the community. However, as the site is located on incidental open space, local plan policy 14 is only supportive of development provided: the need of the proposal outweighs the need to protect the open space; there is a suitable alternative provision of open space; the site does not have an important strategic function or make an important contribution to local amenity and wildlife conservation; and the site does not play an important role in the character of the area. Whilst the assessment of the proposal has raised no concerns with most of these criteria, it has identified that there would be harm arising to the character of the area, as the scale and massing of the extensions would result in a dominant form of development that would overwhelm the host building, detrimentally affect the green and open appearance of the site and fail to integrate with the local residential area. Whilst reducing the size of the proposal has been suggested to the applicant, they have confirmed that they would not be able to amend the proposal sufficiently whilst also providing the floor area required for the intended use of the building. Whilst concerns from highways have been addressed during the application process, and no other technical issues have been raised, officers consider that the harm arising to the character and appearance of the area outweighs the need for the proposal and therefore the application is recommended for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION:

That having regard to the development plan and to all other material

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considerations, planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reason:

Reasons for Refusal

Having regards to the prominent location of the site and its open character, the cumulative impact of the proposed two storey extensions and the proposed increase to the height of the building would result in a dominant form of development that would overwhelm the host building. The additional height, volume and massing of the building would have a detrimental impact to the green and open appearance of the site and the size and form of the extended building, together with the change to the materials of the building and the proposed external groundworks would fail to integrate with the character of the residential area and would therefore be contrary to Policies 39 and 40, together with Policy 14.2(v) of the Borough of Redditch Local Plan 4.

Procedural matters

This application is being reported to the Planning Committee because the application site relates to a building and land which belongs to Redditch Borough Council. As such the application falls outside the scheme of delegation to Officers.