

DC/24/1242/FUL

Hérons, Church Field, Walberswick, Southwold, Suffolk IP18 6TG

“Replace existing dwelling with new sustainable dwelling and landscaped gardens”.

09.05.24

1. Opinion

In the opinion of PAG, this application should be **refused**.

2. Description

The proposal seeks to demolish an existing three-bedroom bungalow known as ‘Hérons’ and replace it with a five-bedroom two storey property. The proposed property will sit at right angles to the footprint of the existing property, filling the site from South to North. The scheme also includes parking, an integrated garage, swimming pool, pond and associated landscaping.

Hérons occupies a plot on Church Field, an unadopted road, where modest houses sit in large gardens. Its neighbours are Brackenside, Commonsides and Shearwater. Commonsides has recently undergone a similar scheme of demolition and rebuild, whilst Brackenside and Shearwater remain largely unaltered and are set centrally in large plots. Brackenside is a bungalow.

Hérons is a 1960s bungalow by Colt & Sons; a Kent based company who pioneered the design and supply of pre-fabricated buildings. Typically, the walls and roof of a Colt house were clad in Cedar, however Herons is clad in brick. Coupled with simple forms and detailing, this ensured such buildings were unpretentious. Herons is one of a cluster of five houses by Colt.

Hérons has a low-lying form which is particularly suited to its sensitive site, which forms a backdrop to the Common. Several of the houses on Church Field are also single storey with large gardens and this creates an open and spacious quality that is particularly evident around Herons and the properties to the West and South. Hedges and trees make a positive contribution to the quiet rural character of the lane.

3. Comment

3.1 Impact

Although Herons lies outside the Conservation Area, the provisions of Section 8 of the Conservation Area Appraisal (Countryside Setting) are relevant. Section 8 refers to the visibility of the perimeter of the village and the importance of taking this into account ‘*when considering any planning application which might affect views from outside the village*’ (pages 16 - 18 of the Appraisal).

The two-storey proposal is located approximately 15m closer to the public footpath / track and Common than the existing bungalow. The additional storey, combined with this increased proximity will have an overbearing impact on those using these public spaces. In addition, the siting of the new dwelling is far outside the established building line.

There are other properties in the village that have sought permission to replace dwellings, often bungalows with large, two-storey properties. The approval of such applications sets a precedent within the village and erodes the provision of bungalows for those in need in the locality. The stock of bungalows and reasonably sized properties is being eroded, forcing long-standing residents or those with specific needs to move out of the village. The Parish Plan recorded the widely expressed housing need for small and affordable dwellings, not the large five-bedroom dwelling proposed here.

The proposal fills the sit from South to North, giving the impression that this building has been crammed in in order to meet the client's brief, without due regard or respect for its setting. No visuals have been provided to demonstrate the proposals impact from either Church Field or the public footpath.

The site is adjacent to the Minsmere Heaths and Marshes Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Minsmere – Walberswick Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Walberswick – Minsmere Ramsar site. The Preliminary Ecological Assessment pays scant regard to the potential impacts from this very prominent proposal on these designations. It suggests that because it is only one dwelling the impacts will be minimal. This ignores the size, massing, orientation, and extensive first floor glazing. Therefore, a Habitat Regulations Assessment should be carried out by East Suffolk Council to determine the detailed impact of this proposal on these European sites.

Should the application be considered appropriate for approval by the local authority, a Lighting Plan should be conditioned prior to commencement on site or occupation to ensure appropriate lighting is installed to limit the impact on neighbouring dwellings, inhabitants, wildlife and the special sites identified above.

3.2 Design Quality

The proposed scheme has been submitted for a two storey house with a gross floor area of approximately 380 m² including the garage and five double bedrooms. The form of the house is rectangular in plan, and turned 90 degrees in its orientation from the existing dwelling, and breaks the building line of the adjacent properties. The development will include a garage for a single car and three additional parking spaces will be provided in the large entrance forecourt. An open air swimming pool of 45m² will be constructed towards the western boundary of the plot.

The scale of the proposed development significantly exceeds the area and volume of the existing house: the amount of habitable space is more than doubled and by turning the house through 90 degrees has a massive visual impact on the common and neighbours.

Considered together with the extensive parking forecourt, the swimming pool and the dominant roof scape, the extent of development is detrimental to the low key, rural setting of the site. In such a sensitive location, adjacent to the common, design considerations are paramount. The following points relate to the clauses in SCLP 11.1, particularly b), c), d) and e).

The Design and Access Statement concludes with the assertion that the development will provide a cutting edge contemporary house that is reflective and influenced by its immediate and wider context, with a design that carefully integrates into the existing setting, and the

house will enhance the area and provide a 'much needed' energy efficient self build home in Walberswick.

In contrast to the statement, the proposal is not reflective of its immediate or wider context, does not integrate within its setting, and does not enhance the area, nor does it take account of the findings of the Parish Plan, which recorded the widely expressed need for small and affordable dwellings in the village to ensure its sustainability, rather than five bedroom luxury homes such as proposed here.

The Local Plan at para 5.20 states that:

5.20 In relation to replacement dwellings, the impact of the new dwelling on the landscape when compared to the existing dwelling will be a key consideration. In this respect, particular consideration will be given to height, screening, footprint, design and materials. Opportunities to enhance the appearance of the dwelling in the landscape should be taken where feasible.

These aspects are perhaps best captured in considering the Herons proposal against policy SCLP 11.1 as outlined below.

Policy SCLP11.1: Design Quality

The Council will support locally distinctive and high quality design that clearly demonstrates an understanding of the key features of local character and seeks to enhance these features through innovative and creative means. In so doing, permission will be granted where proposals:

- a) Support inclusive design environments which are legible, distinctive, accessible, comfortable, and safe, and adopt the principles of dementia friendly design;*
- b) Demonstrate a clear understanding of the character of the built, historic and natural environment and use this understanding to complement local character and distinctiveness through robust evidence, informed sources and site specific context and analysis;*
- c) Respond to local context and the form of surrounding buildings in relation to the following criteria:
 - i. the overall scale and character...*
 - ii. the layout should fit in well with the existing neighbourhood...*
 - iii. the height and massing of developments should be well related to that of their surroundings;*
 - iv. there should be a clear relationship between buildings and spaces and the wider street scene or townscape; and v. high quality materials appropriate to the local context should be used;**
- d) Take account of any important landscape or topographical features and retain and/or enhance existing landscaping and natural and semi-natural features on site;*
- e) Protect the amenity of the wider environment, neighbouring uses and provide a good standard of amenity for future occupiers of the proposed development;*
- f) Take into account the need to promote public safety and deter crime and disorder through well lit neighbourhoods and development of public spaces that are overlooked;*
- g) Create permeable and legible developments which are easily accessed, throughout the site and connections outside the site, and used by all, regardless of age, mobility and disability;*
- h) Provide highway layouts with well integrated car parking and landscaping which create a high quality public realm and avoid the perception of a car dominated environment. In doing so, proposals will be expected to prioritise safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle movement;*

- i) Include hard and soft landscaping schemes to aid the integration of the development into its surroundings;*
- j) Ensure that the layout and design incorporates adequate provision for the storage and collection of waste and recycling bins in a way which does not detract from the appearance of the development*

3.3 Materials

The elongated rectangular form and the dominating gables, extensive glazing, balconies and chosen materials of Zinc standing seam roofing and black timber cladding, project a harsh formality on the house which is alien to the character of its surroundings.

The chosen materials of an orange brick at ground floor level is in keeping with the local vernacular as a whole, but combined with the first floor black cladding punctured with out of character large format windows and doors in the East, West & North elevations at first floor level. These are the main living areas of the house, and together with the glass balustrading of first floor balcony on the North and West elevation overlooking the adjoining gardens of Commonsides and Brackensides, is more suited to a location at the harbour, than tucked at the northern end of the village overlooking neighbouring properties and the common.

The Zinc roofing again is a foreign material in this locality and is out of keeping with the surrounding palette of materials.

Unfortunately the Design and Access Statement misrepresents the immediate adjacent material palette, and instead draws from other areas of the village with different materiality than this location.

3.4 Amenity

Policy SCLP11.2: Residential Amenity

When considering the impact of development on residential amenity, the Council will have regard to the following:

- a) Privacy/overlooking;*
- b) Outlook;*
- c) Access to daylight and sunlight;*
- d) Noise and disturbance;*
- e) The resulting physical relationship with other properties;*
- f) Light spillage;*
- g) Air quality and other forms of pollution; and*
- h) Safety and security. Development will provide for adequate living conditions for future occupiers and will not cause an unacceptable loss of amenity for existing or future occupiers of development in the vicinity.*

As can be seen from the description of the current dwelling (see section 2 above) and proposed dwelling, there is a significant change planned for the site. The change from one to two storeys, and the change in orientation of the proposed house will have significantly detrimental effects on surrounding properties, particularly Brackensides to the West.

As proposed, Herons will now have the entire length of the house facing both Commonsides and Brackensides, rather than as currently just the blank gable ends. This will cause particular issues as the proposed house is to be 2-storey. The proposed elevations show significant areas of floor to ceiling glazing on the first floor, facing both East and West towards Commonsides and Brackensides respectively. The potential for light pollution from this

first floor glazing is very high. (The impact on the designated nature conservation sites from light spill is referenced above).

In addition, a large balcony is proposed facing West (Brackenside). Notwithstanding the original pre-application comments and amendments made by the applicants there will be significant overlooking and potential noise and disturbance to the private garden at Brackenside.

The siting of the swimming pool may also harm the amenity of the adjoining garden unless adequate screening is provided.

In terms of the Local Plan policy the application as presented is considered to be contrary to SCLP 11.2, clauses a), d), e), and h). These are considered to be strong reasons for refusal.

4. Summary

A summary of the key points discussed above shows:

- The proposal conflicts with the Conservation Area Appraisal at Section 8, where the importance of the rural setting of the Conservation Area is outlined.
- There is a detrimental impact on the character and potential enjoyment of the footpath adjacent to the site.
- The stock of smaller dwellings, especially bungalows, is severely depleted in Walberswick due to the unchecked permissions given for massive extensions or re-builds. This is causing stresses within the housing market.
- The proposed new north / south orientation has little regard for the current setting of the dwellings adjacent.
- The Preliminary Ecological Assessment is inadequate. It does not properly address the potential impacts of the proposed dwelling on the adjacent SAC / SPA designations.
- If considered for approval a Lighting Plan should be conditioned to mitigate potential impacts on neighbouring dwellings, inhabitants, wildlife and the special sites identified.
- The size proposed, (double the existing), the orientation, and height will result in unacceptable visual impacts.
- The dominant roofscape, extensive forecourt parking, and siting of the swimming pool are out of place in this low key rural setting.
- The materials for the first floor, roof and the large format windows are ill suited to this location.
- The residential amenity of adjacent properties is severely compromised by the 2-storey format, extensive glazing, and large glass fronted balcony.
- In summary the proposal contravenes a significant number of the clauses of policies SCLP 11.1 and SCLP 11.2