

DC/25/1401/FUL

Hérons Church Field Walberswick Southwold Suffolk IP18 6TG

Replace existing dwelling with new sustainable dwelling (Self Build) and landscaped gardens

03.05.25

1. Opinion

In the opinion of PAG the application **can be approved** subject to the comments in the summary

2. Description

NB This application is a second application on the site of the current 'Hérons' bungalow. The first application DC/24/1242/FUL remains undetermined, despite having been considered by the East Suffolk Planning Committee in February. This application is being treated by PAG as a standalone application. The PAG view, on the merits of the application as submitted last year, remains that it should be refused. This current application has been assessed afresh, but will refer to points made previously where relevant for comparison purposes.

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 follow broadly the orientation of the existing property. Although its form is now a staggered line.

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, Commonside and Shearwater. Commonside 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. Herons 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. Herons 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 in approximately the same relationship to the public footpath / track and Common than the existing bungalow. The additional storey, will have some impact on those using these public spaces. The visuals provided do not demonstrate adequately the proposals impact from either Church Field or the public footpath.

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 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 concludes that it is unlikely that this proposal will cause a significant long or short term impacts on these designations. This is surprising. There is no mention of potential in-combination effects of large dwellings and large extensions to similar dwellings around the perimeter of the village. Therefore, a Habitat Regulations Assessment should be carried out by East Suffolk Council to determine the detailed impact of this proposal (in-combination with recent developments) 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. The proposal includes low visual light transmittance glass to all windows and all first floor windows all are to have blackout blinds on dusk sensor switch. This should be reinforced through conditions.

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 with a stagger to the plan form. 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 some 45m² will be constructed towards the western boundary of the plot. Amenity issues for adjacent residents is discussed in the next section.

The scale of the proposed development significantly exceeds the area and volume of the existing bungalow. The amount of habitable space is more than doubled in this two-storey house.

Considered together with the extensive parking forecourt, the swimming pool and the dominant roof scape to a two-storey building, 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 poorly reflective of its immediate or wider context. It 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.

3.3 Materials

The two-storey rectangular form and the now obvious gables, extensive glazing, and chosen materials of zinc standing seam roofing, project a harsh formality on the house which is at odds with the character of its surroundings. The change to natural timber cladding is softer than the previous application.

The chosen materials of a red brick at ground floor level is in keeping with the local vernacular as a whole, but combined with the first floor timber cladding punctured with out of character large format windows and doors there is a harsh appearance. These are perhaps 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 pallet 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

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, particularly the change from one to two storeys.

As previously proposed, Herons would have had the entire length of the house facing both Commonside and Brackenside, rather than as currently just the blank gable ends. This would have caused particular issues as the proposed house is to be 2-storey. As **now proposed** Brackenside and Commonside will be presented with gables (raised from the current bungalow heights). Apart from some visual intrusion the privacy aspects from windows and balconies has now been removed.

The proposed elevations show significant areas of glazing on the first floor, facing both East and West towards the Common and Shearwater respectively. The potential for light pollution from this first floor glazing is very high, although as noted above privacy glass is proposed for use. (The impact on the designated nature conservation sites from light spill is referenced above).

The siting of the swimming pool in the north west corner of the garden may also harm the amenity of the adjoining Brackenside garden unless adequate screening is provided. A better solution would be to move the pool to a more central location within the applicant's garden ensuring maximum distance as a courtesy to neighbours.

Amenity aspects which were significant in the recommendation for refusal by PAG on the original scheme have been mitigated to a large extent, but some concerns remain.

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 potential for detrimental impacts 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 rebuilds. This is causing stresses within the housing market.
- The Preliminary Ecological Assessment is inadequate. It does not properly address the potential impacts of the proposed dwelling on the adjacent SAC / SPA designations. An HRA should be undertaken.
- 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), and height will result in potential 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 roof and the large format windows are ill suited to this location.
- The residential amenity of adjacent properties is potentially compromised by the 2-storey format, extensive glazing, and swimming pool location.
- In summary the proposal contravenes a number of the clauses of policies SCLP 11.1 (Design Quality) and SCLP 11.2 (Amenity).

On balance if the amenity concerns outlined are addressed adequately through conditions the scheme could reasonably be considered for approval. In order to avoid undue confusion however the previous application should be withdrawn by the applicants.