

Planning Advisory Group: report to Walberswick Parish Council

DC/22/4176/FUL

“Alterations and extensions”

Longwood, Church Field, Walberswick, Suffolk, IP18 6TG

06/11/2022

1.0 Summary and Opinion

The PAG have concerns regarding this application, specifically:

- Impact on the setting of the church, churchyard and conservation area
- Design quality
- Materials
- Residential amenity

The proposal would not preserve the setting of the church and the Walberswick Conservation Area and should be **refused**.

2.0 Description

Longwood is an attractively understated single storey dwelling of c1964, designed and manufactured by Colt Houses, Kent. Open space surrounds the house, as is typical of the properties to the north end of Church Field.

The site is within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The southern boundary of the site abuts the boundary of the Walberswick Conservation Area and to the immediate south is the Grade I listed St Andrews Church and its picturesque churchyard.

Longwood is highly visible in views from the conservation area, church ruins and churchyard (see photo, end of report).

This proposal is closely related to an application withdrawn during August 2022 (DC/22/1776/FUL), now resubmitted with the following revisions:

- Removal of the PV tiles from the south elevation of the house (the south facing PV tiles to the ‘Parking Barn’ have not been removed).
- Replacement of ‘Hardiplank’ cladding, synthetic tiles and zinc in favour of slate and painted timber cladding.
- Minor alterations to the footprint, including slight reduction of the bay window projection to the south elevation, and a re-shuffling of the proposed extension to the north.

A library/hall, study/gym, a secondary entrance (providing independent access to the new accommodation) and a large secondary sitting room are proposed in addition to the remodelled existing accommodation. The number of bedrooms will increase from 3 to 5, with 4 ensuite bathrooms.

Vehicular access to the site will be relocated. A single timber garage and store will be replaced by a workshop/store and an additional double ‘Parking Barn’ with PV array will be constructed.

3.0 Comment and Policy

The site has a varied planning history including a refusal (at Appeal) for two dwellings. Previous applications have attracted considerable local opposition in addition to comments from the Suffolk Preservation Society and Historic England.

The highly sensitive nature of this site, and the positive visual relationship it shares with the Church and Churchyard, is established.

Large gardens give this part of Church Field a spacious and dispersed quality, with plot boundaries defined by mature trees and hedges.

3.1 Impact

Doubling the footprint of a property will inevitably result in some form of impact. In the case of Longwood this impact affects the setting of the church, conservation area, neighbouring properties and the character of Church Field. However, the application fails to address this other than the Design & Access Statement stating: *“We do not believe the revised proposal...will have a negative impact on the locale, but preserve the setting of the church and conservation area”*. This view is not shared, nor is it validated by explanation.

While the PV tiles to the house have been removed from the proposal, they remain to the church facing roof slope of the ‘Parking Barn’. The same reasoning that removed them from the house would also apply to the ‘Parking Barn’.

The increased areas of south facing glazing and addition of a large pair of French doors would increase overlooking / light / noise pollution between Longwood and the church / churchyard.

No assessment has been made, or illustrated, showing the combined visual impact of the altered house alongside the ‘Parking Barn’. Both structures will be visible from The Street and churchyard, to the detriment of the church and conservation area.

For the reasons stated above this proposal does not satisfy the criteria of NPPF (para 195) and SCLP 11.3: Historic Environment.

3.2 Design quality

Comments regarding Longwood, and the positive contribution it makes, were made by ESC’s Principal Design & Conservation Officer within his report for DC/22/1776/FUL:

“the existing site and its single storey building contributes positively as part of the setting to the church and this was due to its low profile, setback position, dark cladding and overall effect of being discreet when seen in views from the churchyard”

The Conservation Officer comments regarding the withdrawn scheme remain relevant as the proposal retains the elements referred to in the comments:

“the design of the single storey extension to the existing building reads very much as two dwellings conjoined – there is simply no other way to explain the floor plan with the doubling up of public and private rooms; nor the differing elevational treatment of the extension to the bungalow. This does not make it wrong, of course – there may be justifiable functional reasons for this arrangement – but I consider that the effect represents poor quality design, in that the extension is substantially over-scaled and

that the overall design lacks coherence. Surely all extensions should integrate with their host dwelling – this scheme fails this basic design test”.

The application continues to read as two dwellings and the doubling of accommodation and strikingly different external treatment serves to reinforce this point of concern.

The Principal Design & Conservation Officer also stated:

“The alterations to the existing bungalow are charmless and remove the qualities that it has which the Inspector and I identified as ensuring its recessive quality within the church’s setting – allied to its modest scale. The proposed over-scaled extension (and) poor quality design... will combine to erode the positive qualities of the existing building and fail to preserve the setting of the church and Walberswick Conservation Area.”

The detailing and mass of the scheme remains largely as per the withdrawn scheme, with the resubmitted design lacking coherency while challenging the main house.

Doubling the size of Longwood would create a cluttered and cramped aesthetic close to the north boundary. This fails to accord with the established spatial forms evident to the north end of Church Field. The combination of house and ‘Parking Barn’ increases the mass and visual intrusion seen from the church / churchyard / street.

The proposed design does not satisfy the criteria of SCLP 5.7 (Infill and Garden Development) and SCLP 11.1 (Design Quality).

3.3 *Materials*

The existing house has a quiet character, achieved partly from its simple form and partly from a limited material palate, with cedar cladding (now painted) to the walls and timber shingles to the roof. This is characteristic of a Colt House, and forms part of their distinctive detailing.

Slate is now proposed to all roofs, but slate is not found surrounding the site and is rarely seen within the village. It also does not have the gentle recessive quality of roof shingles.

The proposed mid grey weatherboard reflects what exists, but not what existed prior to the refurbishment of the property by the applicant.

The dual character of the proposal, created by contrasting the materials of the existing house and the addition, would cause harm to the quiet and modest character of Church Field where such variety is not found on a single site.

The proposal does not relate well to neighbouring properties in terms of scale or design.

The proposed materials fail to accord with SCLP 5.7 (Infill and Garden Development)

3.4 *Residential amenity*

Doubling the size of the property and increasing the areas of glazing to the south elevation, coupled with a total of 6 rooflights to the north and west, will result in increased levels of light spillage and noise pollution.

Slightly reducing the projection of the proposed south facing bay window does not address the concern that increasing the glazing to the elevation, and the addition of glazed French doors, will

negatively impact the sense of privacy for funerals and those tending graves along the southern boundary.

Site access will be repositioned closer to Half Acre (and an existing telegraph pole), accessed off a tight bend in the lane, and destroying a productive orchard. The drive, parking, new wing and workshop/store will result in unacceptable levels of disturbance and light pollution close to the boundary with Half Acre. It will also create an unbalanced and cluttered spatial quality between the two sites.

The proposed scheme does not satisfy the criteria of SCLP 11.2 (Residential Amenity)

4.0 Conclusion

The existing south (church facing) elevation of Longwood is low-lying and uncomplicated, with a gentle and balanced rhythm. The pair of gables to the north (entrance) elevation are modest and the ridges are set a considerable distance below the main ridge. The design of the existing house is simple but skilled, and by understanding and responding to its site the house successfully integrates with its surroundings. The proposal possesses none of these qualities.

The application is deficient in assessing the impact development would have on a Grade I listed church, a frequently visited churchyard, a conservation area, four neighbouring properties and the character of a quiet lane.

The over-provision of living space, entrances and ancillary structures is unusual and raises a concern regarding the potential to create a second home, either attached or detached from the host dwelling.

The application would cause harm to:

- The Walberswick Conservation Area (a designated heritage asset).
- The setting of St Andrews Church (Grade I listed).
- The residential amenity of neighbouring properties.
- The spatial qualities of Church Field.
- The privacy of those visiting graves located close to the boundary with Longwood.



Longwood, seen from The Street and the churchyard, with the church and ruins to the left