

Report from Planning Advisory Group for the WPC Meeting dated 13 May 2019

Planning application no. DC/19/1680/FUL

Elphinston Corner, Stocks Lane

Construction of ground and first floor extensions to existing dwelling

1 The Planning Advisory Group considers that the extensions proposed in this application are not appropriate to the location nor to the particular existing building and should be rejected.

2 Elphinston Corner (formerly Oak Barn) is the last house at the south-east corner of Stocks Lane. The area is residential in character with a variety of dwelling types. The house itself lies within a large garden, is a two storey property of timber framed construction with exposed timbers and render infill panels, the main roof is thatched and hipped to the southern end over an existing two storey window bay. To the east are modern single storey extensions, including a conservatory. A detached garage is located close to the west entrance.

3 There are three separate references in the Archives of the Walberswick Local History Group, all to the effect that the house was reconstructed from a barn by the architect Ernst Freud (1892-1970) in the mid thirties. The painter and author Richard Scott, who knew Ernst Freud when the latter was his close neighbour and living in Hidden House, says that he has never been in any doubt that Freud was the architect for the reconstruction.

Ernst was the son of Sigmund Freud and had built in Austria, Berlin and London. The clients for Elphinston were Mr and Mrs Fritz Hess for whom Freud had worked in London. The house is particularly interesting in that it is an example of an English vernacular style with Baltic and Bauhaus-like overtones.

The property is not listed but we understand that it has been identified by Planning Officers as potentially a non-designated heritage asset. The PAG firmly consider that this identification is appropriate for the following reasons (under categories taken from East Suffolk's criteria)

(a) Because of its intrinsic design value; derived as it is from a vernacular style within which are integrated more modern elements, such as the double height bay of Crittall windows. This gives it a distinctive Walberswick characteristic.

(b) Ernst Freud is an internationally known architect and Elphinston is representative of what the architectural historian Volker Welter, in his book "Ernst L Freud, Architect" has described as Freud's aim in achieving the "Modern Bourgeois Home". Freud sought to avoid what was often the aridness of the Modern Movements Buildings while still wanting to build in a way characteristic of his own times.

(c) Elphinston is an attractive house and extremely prominent when looking from the very open south-east coastal side of the village.

(d) The building enjoys a significant historical association of local or national noteworthiness. Freud's clients included Melanie Klein, Ernest Jones, Stephen Spender, Julian Huxley among many others, and Elphinston is one of only a handful of his English buildings outside London. Freud also converted from a barn, and lived in,

Hidden House in the Village, which was similar in style to Elphinston. This is a result of the openness of Suffolk to welcome refugees from the traumas in Europe during the Thirties. Interestingly Crittall himself also lived in Walberswick and although there was at one time a considerable number of his windows in Walberswick very few remain, which makes the splendid bay of Elphinston particularly significant.

4 The application is for a brick-built flat roofed single storey extension together with a large two storey thatched and timber boarded extension; indeed larger than the house itself and dominating it.

Item 2.2 of the applicant's design statement says that the site is well screened from public view due to the presence of existing substantial frontage planting and landscaping. Whereas this is true of the street side, from the south and east it is immediately adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is extremely exposed. Indeed the house can be seen from as far away as the sea wall. It is in close proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest and can be seen in relation to the nearby Conservation Area. Furthermore the proposed extension comes to within about five feet of the boundary which will prohibit any substantial planting to soften its effect. Of historic interest is the WW2 Pill Box situated in the garden

5 East Suffolk Policy DM21 states *(d) in order for extensions to existing buildings to be acceptable, particularly on those that are considered to be architecturally and historically important (including vernacular architecture) and those located in sensitive locations, the extension shall be visually 'recessive' and its size and design shall be such that the original building will remain the more dominant feature on the site*

As we have set out above, the existing building is indeed architecturally and historically important and is in a sensitive location. Far from being 'recessive' the proposal dwarfs the existing house and would seriously compromise its character were it to be built. The proposal to attempt to reproduce the character of the existing building in a larger form would have the effect of detracting from the original.

The Applicant's 'Design and Heritage Statement' refers to the National Planning Policy Framework 3.1 February 2019 (NPPF) which establishes the Governments planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied. 3.2 Paragraph 127 refers to design of new development stating:

"Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities); d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;"

Again the PAG considers that the overwhelming nature of the proposal in relation to the existing attractive and historically important house is in contradiction of these policies.

6 One member of PAG declared an interest and took no part in the discussions.