Objection to planning application

Alan and Janet Dingley
Ingledene,
High St.
Alton.
Location: semi-detached property attached to Old Police House
Date: 24th October 17

APPLICATION
Application Number :SMD/2017/0552
Aplicants name: Mr Carl Jenkinson
Location: Old Police House High St. Alton
Proposed development: Formation of car parking area including partial demolition of front wall

Dear Sir,

We are objecting to the proposed application based on a number of grounds. Whilst we do have sympathy with the applicants frustration over parking on the street (a problem shared with most other residents) we feel that the benefits do not outweigh the loss of an existing old and attractive wall. In addition we feel there are other factors which should be taken into account.

With reference to the applicants heritage statement.

Our understanding is that the purpose of a conservation area is to "enhance and preserve".
To this effect Section 4.2 quotes from Policy DC2 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy.

3. Preventing the loss of buildings and features which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate reuse and sensitive development, including enabling development, unless their retention is not viable or there would be substantial planning benefits to outweigh the loss.

The above statement states that to gain approval there should be *substantial planning benefits to outweigh the loss.*

Losses
The wall
We would argue that the wall is a feature which makes a positive contribution to the character and heritage of the street and to demolish part of it would be a significant loss.
The statement in 5.8 appears to clearly be an attempt to downplay the significance of this wall. The wall is worked sandstone of ashlar block construction and at least as old as the house. It is most definitely not modern concrete faked to look like stone. It has been a significant feature of the High St. for at least 110 years which contributes to its character and also 'provides context' for Vyze House (see 5.11). Admittedly the style is unusual for the village with the closest similarity with the castle gates (all be it on a smaller scale). The applicants wall does not exist in isolation but is one half of a wall which fronts both sides of the semi-detached properties as it was originally designed to. It is unlikely that any replacement stone walling will match (it is not stated what the stone would be matched to) and also the symmetry of the existing wall will be lost.
If there is any question as to the age or the material of this wall we would hope that this is confirmed beyond doubt before any decisions are made and that the planners are not mislead into believing that the wall is not stone or of modern construction.

Benefits
The applicant argues that these benefits would be:

Improvement to the context of Vyze House
The applicant argues that the area would be enhanced by the removal of a parked car thus improving the view of Vyze House which is a designated heritage asset, however such a parked car does not have any permanent visual effect nor does it hide any significant architectural or attractive features of this house. In any case there would be nothing to prevent the applicant parking further cars there anyway which completely negates this argument. It is difficult to see that the proposals would in any way enhance the view or context of Vyze House. The proposal would only provide an uninterrupted view of the applicants parking bay.

Precedent.
Precedent is hinted at (5.9) by mention of other off street access. At present there is no similar off street parking on residential frontages. There is a car park adjoining our property which was completed over 12 years ago. This utilised a barren plot with minimal removal of existing walling (ie. widening an existing gateway) and created 5 spaces which are partially obscured by hedging with the loss of none (the road is too narrow at this point) from the high street. Great lengths were taken to ensure the development was in keeping with the street. Benefit therefore far outweighed loss and is not equivalent to the proposal.
If this application were approved there are a number of other properties on the street including our own which could conceivably feel entitled to request the same which would very much change the character of the street and render the conservation area designation meaningless.

Improvement to parking
The proposal states that only one parking space would be lost (5.11). However it seems to us that it would actually remove two publicly available parking spaces (10m) from this side of the road whilst only providing space for the applicants car which would still be visible. It could be argued therefore that the parking situation would be made worse. It could also be argued that the applicant could park two further cars across the front of the opening and in doing so gain exclusive use of two spaces that are otherwise public.

Benefit
5.13 The only benefits will be to the applicant, to claim any other benefits is absurd.

Omissions from plans
Dividing wall
The plans appear to show a dividing wall between the font gardens of our property (Ingledene) and the applicants which does not exist apart from a short section next to the gate, the rest of which is a jointly owned, well established boundary hedge. Our assumption is therefore that the proposed plans would apparently require the removal of this hedge and the construction of a substantial retaining party wall.
From our understanding of section six of the Party Wall Act 1996 the applicant will not be permitted to build the retaining wall astride the boundary line without our permission which so far has not been sought nor would be granted. Therefore such a wall would have to be built wholly on the applicants side. The position and width of this wall cannot be specified by the applicant with certainty until our agreement under Section six is obtained as any excavations will be below and within 3m of our house foundations. We would not give this until satisfied by an independent structural survey report that there is no risk of subsidence to our house or the risk is mitigated.

None of these details are included on the proposals which makes it difficult to comment on them without making assumptions. As the position and size of this wall could have a significant impact on the final result surely they should have been included on the plans.

Sewage

Also not marked on the plans (although other manholes are marked) is (to the best of our knowledge) a joint sewage inspection pit in the area to be removed which serves both properties (Ingledene and The Old Police House). This is well above street level and would require extensive revision including the joint section which is the responsibility of the water authority which is classed as a public sewer. It is not clear from the application documents or the reply from STW (16th October) that the applicant, or the water authorities are aware of this.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is our contention that the creation of a residential parking space does not warrant the loss of two public spaces and the demolition of part of a stone wall which has been an attractive feature of of the high street for over 110 years. In addition there are aspects of the application that we believe are incomplete or misleading and make it difficult to render a true idea of the final outcome. In particular the central argument that the wall is modern and concrete is incorrect and means that the arguments put forward in the heritage statement are based on a false premise with no evidence provided.

Alan and Janet Dingley