Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING & HERITAGE STATEMENT

HIGHFIELDS HOUSE, LEEK

FEBRUARY 2019

Site Address:
Highfields House, Highfield, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 8SG

Applicant:
Rudyard Developments Ltd.

Proposal:
Erection of 4no. detached dwellings (Reserved Matters)

Planning & Heritage Statement:
Date Issued: 7th February 2019
Job Reference: RDP/2019/017

Report Prepared By:
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1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Rudyard Developments Ltd. to submit a Reserved Matters application for the erection of four detached dwellings on a parcel of land to the northeast of Highfields House, Highfields, Leek.

1.2 The application is submitted pursuant to the grant of outline planning consent under application SMD/2017/0707. That application approved matters of means of access only, and consequently this application now seeks approval of matters of layout, scale, appearance and landscaping.

1.3 Plot 1 will encompass a 2½ storey dwelling occupying a footprint of 206m^2, set within a plot which extends to some 1558m^2. Its accommodation will comprise of a kitchen, lounge, sitting room, utility, w.c. and integral double garage at ground floor, five bedrooms (two ensuite) and family bathroom at first floor, with a guest suite at second floor.

1.4 Plot 2 will encompass a 2½ storey dwelling occupying a footprint of 138m^2, set within a plot which extends to some 786m^2. Its accommodation will comprise of a kitchen / diner, dining room, sitting room, hallway, utility and w.c. at ground floor, four bedrooms (one ensuite) and bathroom at first floor, with a further ensuite bedroom at second floor within the roofspace. A detached single garage with store occupying a footprint of 63m^2 is also proposed.

1.5 Plot 3 will encompass a 2½ storey dwelling occupying a footprint of 201m^2, set within a plot which extends to some 682m^2. Its accommodation will comprise of a kitchen, utility, dining room, lounge, study, w.c., hallway and

integral double garage and store at ground floor, with five bedrooms (two ensuite) and bathroom at first floor.

1.6 Plot 4 will encompass a 2½ storey dwelling occupying a footprint of 129m^2, set within a plot which extends to some 705m^2. Its accommodation will comprise of a kitchen, dining room, utility, lounge and w.c. at ground floor, with four bedrooms (two ensuite) and bathroom at first floor. A detached garage occupying a footprint of 62m^2 is also proposed.

2 Site & Surroundings

2.1 The application site is located within the rural area, and encompasses a parcel of land located to the northeast of the site of the former Highfield Hall, which was demolished in the 1940s. The site is enclosed on its northwestern and northeastern boundaries by a high wall that formed part of the former walled garden to Highfield Hall. Scattered residential development is located to the west and southwest of the site, with planning consent recently granted nearby for the erection of two dwellings to the south of the site (SMD/2016/0376). The southeastern boundary of the site benefits from a substantial band of mature trees, with further mature trees located along the northeastern boundary of the site beyond the existing boundary wall. This vegetation and the boundary walls provide a strong sense of enclosure to the site in this elevated, hill top location.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. The Development Plan for this area comprises the

Stafford Moorlands Core Strategy DPD (2014) of which the following policies are of relevance:

3.2 Policy SS1a of the Core Strategy states that when considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. It will always work pro-actively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area. Planning applications that accord with the policies in the Core Strategy will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

- *Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole;*

  or

- *specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted.*

3.3 Policy DC1 of the Core Strategy states that new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. Proposals should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance. Development should also protect

the amenity of the area, including residential amenity in terms of satisfactory daylight, sunlight, outlook, privacy and soft landscaping.

3.4 Policy DC2 of the Core Strategy relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that the Council will safeguard and, where possible, enhance the historic environment, areas of historic landscape character and interests of acknowledged importance, including in particular scheduled ancient monuments, significant buildings (both statutory listed and on a local register), the settings of designated assets, conservation areas, registered historic parks and gardens, registered battlefields and archaeological remains by, *inter-alia*:

- *Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the special character and historic heritage of the District's towns and villages and those interests of acknowledged importance.*

- *Promoting development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance.*

3.5 Policy DC3 of the Core Strategy relates to 'Landscape and Settlement Setting' and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

- *Resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape or the setting of a settlement and important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;*

- *Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment;*

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018)

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on promoting sustainable development and seeks to significantly boost the supply of housing nationally. It also sets out guidance in respect of various planning matters, including securing high quality design and safeguarding heritage assets. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application and is discussed in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

Staffordshire Moorlands Urban Design SPD

4.2 This document sets out guidance aimed at securing good quality design, and confirms that the architectural style of new development should be guided through an assessment and understanding of the character and context of the area, going on to confirm that sites may be capable of accommodating both contemporary and traditional forms of development that are high quality and functional. The content of the SPD was taken into consideration in the preparation of the application and is referred to in more detail within the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

5.1 The principle of development has already been established through the grant of outline consent (SMD/2017/0707), with the development being found to constitute a sustainable form of development. The main issues to be considered at this Reserved Matters stage are the layout, scale, appearance and landscaping of the development, which will now be considered.

Layout

5.2 The originally submitted outline application for the site had sought approval of matters of layout, and encompassed a site plan showing a broadly linear pattern of development, with attached integral garaging, arranged around a turning head to create a fairly formal cul-de-sac arrangement. The Local Authority expressed concerns that the layout appeared too suburban in appearance, and not in keeping with the rural walled garden setting of the site. Matters of layout were therefore removed from consideration at the outline stage.

5.3 Following on from the grant of outline consent, the proposed site layout has been revisited, and now encompasses the erection of four dwellings in a more informal, rural style. As one approaches the site along the approved access, Plot 1 will stand in the background. The road will then bend westwards towards a shared turning head, with the three other dwellings set around it. The originally proposed linear pattern of development has been abandoned in line with the recommendations of the Local Authority, in favour of a less regimented, informal layout. A mixture of dry stone walls and brick boundary treatments are proposed, and these will provide a strong sense of enclosure to each plot, reflecting the strong sense of enclosure that

already exists around this site. Soft landscaping within the site will also ensure that the development is not suburban in appearance.

5.4 The application proposes the retention of the existing mature trees along the southeastern boundary (aside from those recommended for removal on safety grounds), and will safeguard and retain the existing wall which encloses the northwestern and northeastern boundaries of the site. The wall is regarded by the Local Authority as a non-designated heritage asset. It will however be retained and will continue to provide a pleasing sense of enclosure to the site. As a consequence the proposed layout of the development will not give rise to any material harm to the significance of this feature as a heritage asset and is therefore in accordance with the provisions of policy DC2 of the Core Strategy.

5.5 Owing to the strong visual enclosure to the site that the existing trees and boundary walls provide, wider views of the development will be heavily screened and filtered. The strong sense of enclosure extends also to the northeastern boundary of the site, which is also enclosed by mature trees, beyond the existing high brick wall. Built development then encloses the site to the northwest and southwest. For these reasons, the erection of the proposed dwellings will not give rise to any significant adverse impacts to the character and appearance of the surrounding area or the wider landscape.

5.6 Each dwelling will benefit from a large area of private amenity space that exceeds the minimum standards set out within the Local Authority's informal space about dwellings standards. Similarly, the disposition of the buildings in relation to one another means there will be no conflict with the minimum interface distances set out within the same guidance document. The proposed development will therefore not give rise to any adverse impacts to neighbouring residential amenity, and will furthermore ensure an adequate

level of residential amenity for future occupants. The proposed layout of the site is therefore in accordance with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Core Strategy.

Scale

5.7 The adopted Design SPD states that a new dwelling should respect the scale of those surrounding it. The surrounding area exhibits a variety of scale of development, but has a notable predominance of two storey developments. The proposed dwellings will have ridge heights that range between 8.4 metres and 8.8 metres, and this is considered to be appropriate to the character of the area, having regard to the well enclosed nature of the site and the scale of developments in the surrounding vicinity, including Highfield House, and the recently approved dwellings within the Cricket Club site. The proposed scale of development is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Core Strategy, and the adopted Design SPD.

Appearance

5.8 The character of the surrounding area is varied, and exhibits a mixture of more traditional developments, including Highfield House and Home Farm Cottage, as well as more recent developments, in particular the dwellings located to the south of the site at the Cricket Club, which are very suburban in character.

5.9 The proposed development seeks to achieve a high quality end product, and achieve a rural / village appearance, with properties of differing designs working harmoniously with one another. There has been a deliberate intent to provide points of differentiation between the dwellings in the interests of avoiding a uniform, suburban appearance, an issue which was highlighted as a concern during the determination of the outline application. Whilst the

house types differ from one another, they each reflect the broader characteristics and design of Moorlands development, having regard to the provisions of the adopted Design SPD, as will now be discussed.

5.10 The Design SPD sets out a number of parameters to guide the appearance of new development. The submitted proposal encompasses dwellings which are all horizontal in form, with strong eaves and ridge lines. Each dwelling also achieves a two-thirds elevation / one-third roof proportions, which is traditional of the Moorlands. The majority of the dwellings also encompass a high solid to void ratio as per the objectives of the Design SPD, with window patterns generally arranged in columns rather than randomly placed. The proposed windows are furthermore to be accentuated by cill and header detailing, with the timber frames to be recessed into the elevations. The roof form of each dwelling is also simple, with dominant roof lines, and the majority emphasised by gables and spanning the shorter side of the roof, in line with the requirements of the Design SPD. The proposed dwellings will also be constructed from a mixture of facing materials (red brick, stone, Staffordshire blue tiles and slate tiles) to reflect the varied character of the surrounding area.

5.11 As a consequence of the above, it is submitted that the appearance of the proposed development is acceptable and will not derive any significant and demonstrable adverse impacts to the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and thus accords with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Core Strategy and the adopted Design SPD.

Landscaping

5.12 The original outline application was accompanied by a tree survey prepared by Tree Heritage which assessed the quality and significance of the numerous trees on the site. The band of trees forming the southeastern boundary of

the site were considered to be particularly impressive and they provide a strong sense of enclosure to this site. The tree survey identified that a large number of these mature trees are of fairly poor quality (Category C), with better quality trees located towards the southernmost corner of the site. However, it remains the applicant's intention to retain the trees along the southeastern boundary as they consider them important to the character of the site. The submitted layout avoids any encroachment of built development into the root protection areas of these trees and consequently they will continue to be safeguarded in line with the objectives set out at the application stage.

5.13 Additional landscaping is also to be undertaken within the site, including the provision of new Beech hedgerows, flanking either side of the new access drive, and wildflower planting in the areas beneath the crown spread of the existing trees. Two new trees are proposed to be planted in the central part of the site (Apple and Cherry) and these will contribute positively to the character of the site. Areas of seeded grass are also proposed both within plots and within the central shared part of the site, giving it a pleasing rural character. The proposed landscaping is therefore considered to be appropriate for the site, and accords with the provisions of policies DC1 and DC3 of the Core Strategy.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal is considered to be acceptable in planning terms having regard to the following conclusions:

- *The proposed layout of the development is in keeping with its rural surroundings and will not result in significant and demonstrable adverse impacts to the character and appearance of the area;*

- *The proposed layout of the development will not give rise to any material loss of significance to the existing boundary wall which is regarded as a non-designated heritage asset;*

- *The proposed layout will not adversely impact on neighbouring residential properties, and will derive an appropriate level of residential amenity for future occupiers of the dwellings;*

- *The proposed scale of the dwellings will be in keeping with its general surroundings, having regard also to the strong enclosure of the site, and will not result in significant and demonstrable adverse impacts to the local landscape;*

- *The proposed appearance of the dwellings in in keeping with the character and appearance of the area, and accords with the objectives of the Design SPD. The deliberate use of individual house types serves to avoid a suburban appearance to the development;*

- *The proposed landscaping of the site will compliment and enhance the appearance of the development, with the existing tree line to the southeastern boundary preserved;*

6.2 It is therefore considered that the proposed development accords with the provisions of policies DC1, DC2 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and adopted Design SPD.

6.3 The Local Planning Authority is therefore respectfully requested to grant approval of these Reserved Matters.