

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE DATE: 8 JULY 2015

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| APPLICATION REF. NO: | 15/00279/FUL |
| STATUTORY DECISION DATE: | 21 May 2015 |
| WARD/PARISH: | HEIGHINGTON AND CONISCLIFFE |
| LOCATION: | Methodist Church, The Green, Piercebridge |
| DESCRIPTION: | Conversion of former Methodist church to dwelling, demolition of outbuilding to rear (additional screening assessment received 22 April 2015 and additional bat risk assessment report received 15 May 2015) |
| APPLICANT: | LORD BARNARD |

APPLICATION AND SITE DESCRIPTION

Planning permission is sought for the change of use and alteration of the former Methodist church to provide a three-bedroom dwelling over two floors. A single storey outbuilding to the rear of the property is to be demolished. The main alterations to the property would involve the removal of the existing full length windows in the front and rear elevations and the insertion of four smaller windows in each of the elevations to facilitate the insertion of a first floor. It is also proposed to render and white wash the front elevation of the building in keeping with other Raby Estate buildings.

The lawned area to the front of the property would be partially hard surfaced with a granular hardstanding to provide two off-street parking spaces to serve the property. The pedestrian gate in the centre of the front boundary hedge would be removed and replaced with a wider opening at the northern end. A smaller area of lawn would be retained to the front of the property. A small area of garden would be provided to the rear.

The application property is a mid-terraced former Methodist Chapel located on the west side of The Green in Piercebridge. It is a double height property although is bounded by residential properties either side. It was last used as a place of worship in January 2014. The site is located within the Piercebridge Conservation Area and is also located within the area of the Roman fort Scheduled Ancient Monument site. The application property is also located within Flood Zone 2. A Heritage Statement and Flood Risk Assessment have been submitted with the application.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no planning history relevant to this application.

PLANNING POLICY BACKGROUND

The following policies are relevant to consideration of the application:

Saved Policies of the Darlington Local Plan 1997

- Saved Policy E2 (Development Limits)

Darlington Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2011

- CS2 (Achieving High Quality, Sustainable Design)
- CS9 (District and Local Centres and Local Shops and Services)
- CS14 (Promoting Local Character and Distinctiveness)
- CS15 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geodiversity)

National Planning Policy Framework

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION AND PUBLICITY

Highway Engineer – Parking for 2 no. vehicles will be created within the curtilage which is an acceptable level for a proposed 3 bedroom dwelling. Raise no highway objection.

Conservation Officer – Ideally existing window and door openings, particularly the two on the front elevation would remain unchanged. This would however prevent the installation of a first floor to make better use of internal space for residential use. It is more important that conversion can take place without extension or other overtly residential additions. The alterations proposed will not substantially harm the significance of the Piercebridge Conservation Area. There may be a small amount of harm in the loss of original features, including the rendering of the property, but it will be outweighed by securing the optimum, viable use of the building. Request conditions are attached to secure the use of timber windows and doors and details of the render. Also request that permitted development rights be removed to limit any further alterations to the property.

Environmental Health Officer - The screening assessment form does not highlight any significant contamination issues at the site.

Ecology Officer – Requests a bat risk assessment be submitted for the roofspace works and outbuilding demolition as the location and age/type of building would suggest at least a medium bat risk.

Archaeology Officer – No archaeological issues with this application.

Piercebridge Parish Council – Recommend approval subject to a change of windows due to the impact on the building and a change to the front boundary to widen the central opening and extend the width for cars. Ideally would prefer that the unique characteristics of the exterior of the chapel were retained, including the two large windows. However if there had to be four windows, that the window height was dropped so that there was a lintel above the top windows.

No comments received as a result of the neighbour notification/publicity exercise.

PLANNING ISSUES

The following issues are relevant to consideration of the application:

- Planning Policy
- Impact on significance of designated heritage assets
- Residential amenity
- Highway issues
- Ecology Issues
- Flood Risk

Planning Policy

The application property is located within the village of Piercebridge within development limits as defined by the proposals map accompanying Saved Policy E2 (Development Limits) of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan 1997. Paragraph 55 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the viability of rural communities. The paragraph states that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances such as where development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of a heritage asset or where the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and lead to an enhancement to the immediate setting. While the former Methodist Church is not located in open countryside, this indicates support to the principle of converting redundant or disused buildings to residential use to promote sustainable development in rural areas.

Core Strategy Policy CS9 (District and Local Centres and Local Shops and Services) states that individual local shops, leisure uses and services and small neighbourhood clusters of them which meet the day-to-day needs of nearby residents without the need to use a car will be protected and promoted. Paragraph 70 of the NPPF seeks to guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services (including places of worship). The building was last used as a Methodist Church in January 2014 and it is understood that the Church closed due to declining congregation numbers. The church was part of the Darlington Methodist Circuit of which there are currently 10 Methodist churches within the Darlington area, the nearest of which to the application site is Elm Ridge Methodist Church. While the loss of the church within the village is regrettable it would appear that falling congregations have made it unviable to keep the church open. There are other Methodist churches and chapels within the Darlington area which are available as alternative places of worship. No objections have been received to the application on the basis of a loss of the former Methodist Church.

It is not clear whether the former church was used for meeting purposes. A Section 106 Agreement, which formed part of the planning permission for the change of use and alteration of the former village hall to a dwelling in 2012 (12/00100/FUL), secured the proceeds from the sale of the hall to be used to improve facilities at the village church, St Mary's Church, to be used as a meeting space. A planning application for these works has been received (15/00516/FUL) and is currently awaiting determination however, if approved, will provide replacement community facilities and a meeting space to serve the village. In view of alternative worship facilities being available elsewhere within the Darlington area and as proposals are in place to provide alternative community facilities/meeting place it is not considered that the loss of the church would be contrary to Core Strategy Policy CS9 (District and Local Centres and Local Shops and Services) or the requirements of the NPPF.

Impact on significance of designated heritage assets

The application property is located within the Piercebridge Conservation Area and also lies within the site of the Piercebridge Roman Fort Scheduled Ancient Monument. A Heritage Statement has been submitted with the application. Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the assets' conservation. Paragraph 134 also states that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use. Core Strategy Policy CS14 (Promoting Local Character and Distinctiveness) states that the distinctive character of the Borough's built, historic, natural and environmental townscapes, landscapes and strong sense of place will be protected and enhanced by protecting, enhancing and promoting the quality and integrity of Darlington's distinctive designated national or nationally significant built heritage and archaeology. Policy CS2 (Achieving High Quality, Sustainable Design) also states that high quality, safe, sustainable and inclusive design will be promoted in all new developments.

Whilst the Methodist Church is located in close proximity to parts of the scheduled areas of the Roman Fort, the buildings surrounding The Green, and their gardens, are specifically excluded. The Heritage Statement submitted with the application concludes that the proposal will have no direct impact upon the scheduled area. The County Archaeologist has advised that there are no archaeological issues associated with the proposed change of use and alteration of the former Methodist Church.

The conversion of the Methodist Church proposes a number of significant internal and external changes to the building, most notably the removal of the full length windows in the front and rear elevations to accommodate a first floor and the rendering of the front elevation of the building. The replacement windows will be timber, sliding sash windows, two in the ground floor and two at first floor above in both the front and rear elevations. The existing door openings in the front elevation at either end of the building would remain unchanged. While ideally the window openings in the more prominent front elevation would remain unchanged to protect the simple architectural form of the building, this would prevent the installation of a first floor in the property and ultimately the re-use of the building. The Parish Council has requested that the first floor windows be repositioned to allow a lintel to be inserted above these windows; however the position of the windows is determined by the position of the first floor and the limited height of the building. If the windows were to be lowered this would result in them having a very cramped appearance which is considered to be more harmful to the appearance of the building than the lack of lintels above the first floor windows.

The rendering of the front elevation of the building is considered necessary to cover scars to the brickwork which are likely to arise from the alterations to the window openings. The agent has advised that the original bricks are difficult to match and any attempt to match the bricks will be clearly visible. The rear elevation of the building is constructed of stone which is easier to match. The rendering of the building will not be out of place in Piercebridge and evidences the Raby Estate ownership of the building. Subject to a condition requiring the use of breathable, lime-based render, to protect the building and the retention of the plaque to evidence the building's former ecclesiastical use, this aspect of the proposal is considered to be acceptable.

Although the proposed changes will result in some harm to the Conservation Area in the loss of traditional features, this needs to be weighed against the benefits of the proposal in accordance with the NPPF. It is not considered that the proposed changes will result in substantial harm to

the significance of the Piercebridge Conservation Area. The limited harm will be outweighed by securing the optimum, viable use of the building in accordance with paragraph 134 of the NPPF. A condition removing permitted development rights from the building is attached so that the Local Planning Authority retains control over any further alterations to the building.

The outbuilding to be demolished is a mono-pitched stone built coal-shed. Being located to the rear of the property it has little impact upon the character and appearance of the Piercebridge Conservation Area therefore its loss will not be harmful to the significance of the area.

Residential amenity

The property is a mid-terraced property bounded by residential properties either side. The proposed residential use of the building should not therefore give rise to any issues prejudicial to the amenities of existing properties. Alterations to the building are limited to the insertion of additional windows in the front and rear elevations, in connection with the insertion of a first floor in the property, and will not result in any loss of privacy due to overlooking of the adjoining properties either side. Likewise the relationship of existing properties relative to the Methodist Church will not prejudice the amenities of the proposed dwelling either. Sufficient amenity space is to be provided to the front and rear of the property.

Highway issues

Off-street parking will be provided at the front of the property for 2 no. vehicles. The existing pedestrian gate located centrally within the front boundary hedge will be removed and a new, wider opening will be created at the northern end of the boundary wall. The Highway Engineer considers that this is an acceptable level of provision for the proposed 3 bedroom dwelling and raises no highway objection. The Parish Council considers that the existing pedestrian opening should be widened to allow easier access to the front garden for vehicles. The proposed access arrangements would allow sufficient space for the access, parking and turning of vehicles within the site while enabling an area of lawn to be retained to the front of the building.

Ecology Issues

Core Strategy Policy CS15 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geodiversity) states that new development should not result in any net loss of existing biodiversity value by protecting and enhancing priority habitats, biodiversity features and the geological network through the design of new development. A Bat Risk Assessment has been submitted at the request of the Council's Ecology Officer to assess the impact of the proposed work within the roofspace and the demolition of the outbuilding. The assessment concludes that the building was checked both internally and externally however there was no physical evidence at the site to show that bats use the building for roosting purposes.

Flood Risk

The application site is located in Flood Zone 2 and the proposed change of use would result in a 'more vulnerable' form of development. A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted with the application which falls to be assessed against the Environment Agency's Standing Advice. Policy CS16 (Protecting Environmental Resources, Human Health and Safety) states that new development should protect and, where possible, improve environmental resources, whilst ensuring there is no detrimental impact on the environment, general amenity and the health and safety of the community. With specific regard to flooding, development should comply with national planning guidance and statutory environmental quality standards for areas at risk from flooding along the main rivers, including the River Tees.

The FRA concludes that the proposed development does not increase the existing impermeable area within the site. Foul drainage is to be dealt with by the public sewer. The proposed ground floor level of development is estimated to be 3.92 metres higher than the recorded flood levels of the River Tees, based on published EA data. The EA recommends that ground floor level should be a minimum of 600mm above the estimated river flood level, making an allowance of 20 – 30% for climate change. Under these circumstances the FFL would be approximately 3.32m above recorded flood levels. In accordance with the Standing Advice, details of flood resilience proposals are also set out in the FRA. The proposed development does not therefore result in any increase in flood risk.

SECTION 17 OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

The proposed development has been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. The proposed development does not give rise to crime and disorder issues.

CONCLUSION

The proposed change of use and alterations to the former Methodist Church to form a dwelling is considered to be acceptable in principle. Although the proposed change of use would result in the loss of a place of worship, the building is no longer used as a place of worship due to declining congregation numbers and alternative provision for worship is available in other Methodist Churches and Chapels elsewhere within the Darlington Area. The proposal will not have any impact on the Piercebridge Roman Fort Scheduled Ancient Monument site and although some limited harm may arise as a result of the proposed alterations to the building on the significance of the Piercebridge Conservation Area, this is not considered to be substantial harm and is outweighed by securing the optimum, viable use of the building in accordance with paragraph 134 of the NPPF. The proposal does not give rise to any issues of highway safety or residential amenity and is therefore considered to comply with Saved Policy E2 (Development Limits) of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan 1997 and Policies CS2 (Achieving High Quality, Sustainable Design), CS9 (District and Local Centres and Local Shops and Services), CS14 (Promoting Local Character and Distinctiveness), CS15 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geodiversity) and CS16 (Protecting Environmental Resources, Human Health and Safety) of the Darlington Core Strategy Development Plan Document and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

RECOMMENDATION

THAT PLANNING PERMISSION BE GRANTED SUBJECT TO THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS:

1. A3 (Standard 3 year time limit)
2. Notwithstanding any description of the design and fitting of any windows and doors in the application all windows and doors shall be of timber construction and thereafter be so maintained. Precise details of all windows and doors, including details of the proposed stonework reveal and colour finish shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority in writing prior to the commencement of the development. All windows and doors shall be installed in accordance with the details as approved and thereafter be so maintained.

REASON – In the interest of visual amenity.

3. Prior to the commencement of development hereby permitted, details of the render to be used on the front elevation of the property shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The render shall be lime-based and breathable to protect the building. Details should also include the retention of the plaque on the front elevation of the property.

REASON – In the interest of visual amenity.

4. C5 (Removal of permitted development rights)
5. B5 (Development in accordance with the approved plans)

THE FOLLOWING POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS WERE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN CONSIDERATION OF THE APPLICATION:

Saved Policies of the Darlington Local Plan 1997

- Saved Policy E2 (Development Limits)

Darlington Core Strategy Development Plan Document 2011

- CS2 (Achieving High Quality, Sustainable Design)
- CS9 (District and Local Centres and Local Shops and Services)
- CS14 (Promoting Local Character and Distinctiveness)
- CS15 (Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and Geodiversity)
- CS16 (Protecting Environmental Resources, Human Health and Safety)

National Planning Policy Framework