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Previous Pre-Application Advice
Dated January 2017

- **Sittingbourne Adult Education Centre, College Road, Sittingbourne**
- **Planning Option Report – January 2017**

Background

Sittingbourne former Adult Education Centre lies to the western edge of Sittingbourne town, fronting College Road. The building on site dates from 1878 and was first established as Borden Grammar School. The building is Grade 2 listed.

The site extends to approximately 1.91ha (4.74 acres) and the building is circa 2,585sqm (27,827sqft). To the north west of the building is an open area which was historically playing fields. This is now maintained grassland with hedgerow and trees to the boundary.

Adjacent to the site to the north and west are extensive allotments. To the south and east residential.

The site is now surplus for KCC and a disposal route is sought to generate “best value”.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) Process

The whole site was put forward back in 2008 to Swale’s SHLAA. In 2010 the wider grassland was excluded from the assessment of the site and hence the existing building and an area with temporary classrooms only was taken forward. In 2012 the site was removed from the SHLAA recommendation this was due to the listed building being within the confines of Sittingbourne built area and therefore conversion of it could be dealt with by general development management policies. Regarding the grassland Swale stated “insufficient evidence” to be able to assess the impact of development on this heritage asset.

Pre-application advice

Pre-application discussions have been held with Policy and Development Control officers at Swale based on redevelopment of the existing building and c.10 low density residential units to the rear on the grassland. During this discussion no over-riding concerns were raised regarding the impact on heritage asset (subject to detailed design) and informally agreed with DC that a low-density scheme could be acceptable. Policy officers raised concerns that the site isn’t suitable for development as represents an important green gap between Borden and Sittingbourne and refer to the draft Policy DM25 (Important Local Countryside Gaps) of the emerging Plan.

Current Planning Status

The emerging Plan is going to examination 31st January 2017 which will include determining it for soundness. It’s likely the Inspector will report back by early Summer.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires Districts to have a 5-year housing supply, Swale don’t currently have one. Without one the Plan and relevant policies in it (even if recently adopted) will be considered out of date. This is particularly important as the NPPF states that where relevant policies are out of date permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts outweigh the benefits,

NPPF (para 10). So if no deliverable 5-year housing supply the Borough is at risk, even with an adopted Plan.

In the draft Plan the grassland area sits outside the built area, in this “Important Local Countryside Gap” (ILCG). If the Plan is found sound and subsequently adopted it will be a challenge to get private residential on this area as it will be deemed to be new homes in the countryside which have stringent criteria to meet including innovative design and exceptional architecture as well as being highly sustainable (NPPF para 55). It isn’t impossible but the time and cost of it is likely to not make the development profitable in this location. If there is a need affordable housing will be easier to get planning consent for – but limited (if any) land value.

If the draft Plan isn’t found to be sound and adoption is delayed there is a greater chance of a planning consent being granted based on the lack of 5 year housing supply, this site being available and deliverable for redevelopment and adjoining the built up area of Sittingbourne.

Planning Options

Bearing in mind the time constraints with the EIP commencing late January any planning application should be submitted at the soonest opportunity.

As detailed above if the Plan is adopted and the 5 year housing supply is met there is only minimum redevelopment potential for the site – the redevelopment of the existing Listed building and any out-buildings. There will be no further development in this Plan period. This will reduce the market for any disposal of the site as it will only appeal to those with a specialism and knowledge of converting listed buildings (which can be costly, over-run budget and appeal to a limited end user), it will have an effect on value of the site and likely to be a longer marketing period which will mean increased costs of holding and securing the property.

If a planning application is submitted at the soonest opportunity it shows clear intention of the site’s disposal and availability for redevelopment and adding to the housing supply numbers.

GEN2 would recommend submitting an application for the whole site, including the grassland, as per the pre-application scheme (attached). It isn’t the right time of the year for ecological and bio-diversity survey work (which will be needed) so we’d recommend a scheme subject to these surveys being undertaken at a later date (if Swale would be willing to validate the application with that caveat). It’s likely we would be able to submit a planning application within 6 weeks from getting approval to proceed. Highway information will be needed and we’d recommend an outline application with detail for the listed building and highway access, all other aspects to be determined at a later stage. Note affordable housing in rural area can be 40%, in Sittingbourne 10% - depending on viability. In this location and to costs to redevelop the listed building we’d put the case forward for reduced affordable provision.

The fall back position is just redevelopment of the existing buildings which shouldn’t be met with any objection, so the key is to work on the grassland and get consent there, prior to any disposal.

Once submitted and validated planning applications should be determined within 8 weeks. As this is

outside draft Policy it's likely to take longer and go to committee.

Recommendation

It's recommended to proceed to an outline planning consent for residential use for the whole site – conversion of the existing listed building and low density new homes on the former grassland.

Time is of the essence as the consequence of not submitting an application and the emerging Plan being adopted means that any redevelopment will be limited to the existing building, market for disposal is limited, holding costs will increase and “best value” will decrease.

Katy Jarvis

11 January 2017