

Ashford Borough Council: Planning Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Ashford on **14th July 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Burgess (Chairman);

Cllr Blanford (Vice-Chairman);

Ankorn, Bell (ex-Officio, non-voting), Chilton, Clokie, Forest, Harman, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Mulholland, Ovenden, Shorter, Sparks, Wright.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c) Cllr. Forest attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Howard.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Howard, C. Suddards.

In Attendance:

Head of Planning and Development; Acting Strategic Development & Delivery Manager Deputy Team Leader – Planning Applications; Principal Solicitor (Strategic Development); Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

74 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bell	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.	
Blanford	Made a Voluntary Announcement as she was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.	
Burgess	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.	
Clokie	Made a Voluntary Announcement as he was a Member of the Weald of Kent Protection Society.	

75 Public Participation

The Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer advised that at this meeting registered public speakers had been invited either to address the Committee in person, or to have their speeches read out by a designated Council Officer, not from the Planning Department. On this occasion, three speakers had registered, one of whom had chosen to have her speech read out on her behalf. The other two speakers were in attendance at the meeting and would deliver their speeches in person.

76 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 16th June 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

77 Information/Monitoring items: Appeal Decisions Received between January 2021 and June 2021

The Head of Planning and Development introduced the report on appeal decisions received between January 2021 and June 2021. He explained that the situation in relation to Stodmarsh could be seen to have influenced both Council planning application decisions and Inspectorate decisions at appeal, and it appeared that the Inspectorate was taking the same line as the Council.

The Chairman noted that the figures provided were well within the Government guidelines.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

78 Schedule of Applications

Resolved:

That following consideration of (a), (b) and (c) below,

- (a) Private representations (number of consultation letters sent/number of representations received)**
- (b) The Parish/Town/Community Council's views**
- (c) The views of Statutory Consultees and Amenity Societies etc. (abbreviation for consultee/society stated)**

Supports 'S', objects 'R', no objections/no comments 'X', still awaited '+', not applicable/none received '-'

Application Number	20/00610/AS
Location	Withy Farm, Goldups Lane, Chilham CT4 8JG
Grid Reference	604072 / 154350
Parish Council	Chilham
Ward	Downs North Ward
Application Description	Part change of use of land from agricultural to residential and erection of detached ancillary annexe accommodation.
Applicant	Mr H Digby-Baker
Site Area	0.01 hectares
(a) 10/5R/7S	(b) Parish Council R (c)

The Deputy Team Leader – Planning Applications gave a presentation. He advised Members that subsequent to the information provided in the Update Report, Chilham Parish Council had confirmed its original objection.

The Chairman read out a note in which Cllr Mrs Bell, who was acting as the 'caretaker Ward Member', had indicated to the Chairman, prior to the meeting, that she supported the application.

Resolved:

Permit

Subject to the following Conditions and Notes, with delegated authority to the Strategic Development and Delivery Manager or Development Management Manager to make or approve changes to the planning conditions (for the avoidance of doubt including additions, amendments and deletions) as she/he sees fit:

1. Standard time condition
2. In accordance with approved plans

3. Materials to be approved
4. Rooflight to be sensitive to Dark Skies
5. Ancillary residential accommodation only (the building hereby permitted shall not be occupied at any time other than for purposes ancillary to the residential use of the dwelling known as Withy Farm and as garage space for purposes incidental to the enjoyment of the dwelling known as Withy Farm, both as shown on the approved floor plan)
6. External lighting
7. Foul drainage
8. Approved development available for inspection

Note to Applicant

1. Working with the Applicant

In accordance with paragraph 38 of the NPPF Ashford Borough Council (ABC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. ABC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by;

- offering a pre-application advice service,
- as appropriate updating applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application
- where possible suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome,
- informing applicants/agents of any likely recommendation of refusal prior to a decision and,
- by adhering to the requirements of the Development Management Customer Charter.

In this instance:

- The application was considered by the Planning Committee where the applicant/agent had the opportunity to speak to the committee and promote the application.

Application Number	20/00711/AS
Location	Swanton House, Elwick Road, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1NN
Parish Council	Central Ashford
Ward	Victoria

Application Description	Demolition of existing building and erection of two buildings comprising 34 apartments with associated access, parking and landscaping.
Applicant	A Better Choice for Property Development Ltd c/o agent
Agent	Mrs Emma Hawkes, DHA Planning, Eclipse House Sittingbourne Road Maidstone ME14 3EN
Site Area	0.26ha

(a) / 15 R	(b) CACF R	(c) Ashford Access X, Env Prot. X, Street scene X, Culture X, UKPN X, NR X, Kent Fire X, Ashford College X, HE X, KCC Ecol X, KCC Dev Contribs X, KCC Flooding X, KCC Heritage X, KH&T X, K.Pol X, NHS X, Baby Memorial Charity X, Boyer Planning R,
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The Acting Strategic Development & Delivery Manager gave a presentation and drew Members' attention to the Update Report which highlighted errata, insertions and clarifications to the report. He also advised that the word 'negative' should be deleted from paragraph 154(a), and that the 'benchmark land value' figure in paragraph 154(b) should read £290,000 and not £133,849.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3, Ms Krawczyk, a local resident, had registered to speak in objection to the application. Her speech was read to the Committee by the Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer and is attached to these Minutes at Appendix A.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3, Ms Hawkes, the agent, had registered to speak in support of the application. She addressed the meeting in person and her speech as submitted in advance of the meeting is attached to these Minutes at Appendix B.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 9.3, Mr Mathews, on behalf of the Central Ashford Community Forum, had registered to speak in objection to the application. He addressed the meeting in person and his speech as submitted in advance of the meeting is attached to these Minutes at Appendix C.

A statement was read out from one of the Ward Members, who had given apologies for absence from the meeting, in objection to the application.

Resolved:

To defer for the applicant to amend the application to achieve a design that would be more in keeping with, and would enhance, the character of the area, with the amended application to be presented back to the Committee no sooner than 3 months from the date of deferral.

Queries concerning these Minutes?

Please contact membersservices@ashford.gov.uk

Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: <https://.ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

APPENDIX A**Speech by Ms Krawczyk – local resident**

I am not opposed to development on this site. Swanton House as it stands is a dangerous eyesore on our community and something needs to be done with the site. I would highlight the Ashford Town Centre conservation area review, undertaken by ABC in 2015 recommends if “planning permission to demolish Swanton House lapses, the building should be retained if feasible.” Which is the situation we find ourselves in. However, even if you disregard your own recommendation to retain this building, I encourage you not to approve this application.

The Design Panel raised issues and opined the site was “sensitive and would be challenging to develop in an acceptable manner” and requested the developer consider: 1) a variety of design strategies and layout options to test to justify the most appropriate solution, 2) a variety of home types to help establish a unique residential offer, and 3) a reduction in the number of units to alleviate pressure on the edges of the site and spatial qualities of the proposal. The developer didn’t undertake any of the design panel’s recommendations.

What you have is an application that disregards the considerations for new development in a conservation area as laid out in ABC’s Local Plan 2030 which states:

“**Innovative design** can be appropriate, provided that it is of the **highest quality** and is **sensitive** to the context of the site and **its setting** within the Conservation Area. Therefore, development proposals coming forward within Conservation Areas should have regard to the layout and grain of buildings, streets and spaces and should **reflect** and wherever possible **enhance local distinctiveness** ...”

The proposal does none of these things.

Ask yourself: Is this an innovated design? Is this of the highest quality? Is this development sensitive to the site and context of the conservation area? Does it reflect or ideally enhance the Ashford’s local distinctiveness?

The answer to all of these questions is ‘no’. You are presented two uninspiring, unimaginative, mediocre square boxes of flats with no innovation in the way green credentials or design, no sensitivity to the conservation area, and adds nothing to local distinctiveness.

This development does not meet your standard for development in a conservation area and therefore should not be approved. The developer should present this committee a high quality, innovative design that enhances Ashford – that is the standard the council has set, the town deserves and you should uphold.

APPENDIX B

Speech by Emma Hawkes, DHA Planning, Agent for Planning Application 20/00711/AS)

A Better Choice for Property Development Ltd has worked closely with Officers, Members and consultees throughout the pre-application and application process to develop a high quality development on this derelict site within the Town's Conservation Area. The current proposal is the culmination of over 2 years work.

Swanton House has been vacant for in excess of 17 years and is in a poor state of repair. The site was included within the Ashford College Campus redevelopment which was granted planning consent in 2015. However, the Elwick Road wing will not now come forward and the site was acquired from KCC by A Better Choice for Property Development Ltd in 2018.

Pre-application discussions on Swanton House took place in January and July 2019 and a Members Briefing arranged in July 2019 to seek the informal views of Officers and Members prior to the submission of a formal planning application. At the Members Briefing, Councillors advised that they were happy to see the existing building demolished.

In November 2019, the draft scheme was considered by the Design Review Panel which recommended a detailed and historical analysis of the existing building and Conservation Area be carried out. Panel Members also felt that the onerous parking standards should not be required in accordance with exceptions to the policy. The proposed scheme comprises two apartment blocks of 3 to 4 storeys. The scheme's green credentials include electric vehicle charging points, extensive cycle storage in both blocks and the incorporation of sustainable building techniques.

A viability study has been submitted as part of the planning application which has been reviewed by the Council's consultants and which demonstrates that the retention and conversion of the existing building is not viable.

On balance this proposal represents an exciting opportunity to visually improve a derelict, vacant and unsightly brownfield site in Ashford Town Centre and to continue the regeneration of Elwick Road. The proposal has been sensitively designed in relation to its context within the Conservation Area, the Memorial Gardens and the College campus in terms of its scale, massing and proposed materials. In addition, there would be no adverse impact on the local highway network and the proposed level of parking can be treated as an exception to the Council's adopted parking policy. The proposal is in accordance with local and national planning policies and in light of this, we respectfully ask that the application be granted permission.

APPENDIX C

Ashford Borough Council

Central Ashford Community Forum
c/o 14, Upper Queens Road
Ashford,
Kent
TN248HF**SWANTON VILLA:DEMOLITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF SITE-20\711.**

Spokesperson – Geoffrey Mathews.

We have little space to deal with this – please also refer to the detailed submissions from Trustees Davies and Krawczyk.

FLATS.

The Pandemic has turned the market towards houses, with space to work at home, and access to a private garden. If flats have to be built, we would prefer fewer 1 bedroom flats, and more 3 or 4 bedroom flats, to improve the offer in the town centre.

INFRASTRUCTURE

North Street was closed for a month because flat development overused an inadequate sewage system. Council must examine these plans to ensure this does not happen here.

PARKING.

2 electrical charge points is inadequate; the requirement to add a substation to support more should fall on the developer, not future residents.

The proposal for 0.8 parking spaces per flat is inadequate and does not adhere to ABC policy. You have a clear policy for town centre parking. Please do not erode that.

APPEARANCE.

The documents consistently state that these blocks reflect the architectural environment. This is a false statement, repeated many times in hopes that you will believe it.

As an example, Planning Statement 4:4:1 states *“Policy SP6 in the adopted Local Plan encourages **high quality, inclusive, sustainable designs.** Paragraph 124 of the NPPF highlights the importance of **good design** within development. Developments should function well, add to the **overall quality of the area** and establish a **strong sense of place.**”* This proposal isn't **high quality**, it isn't **inclusive**, it's not **good**, it wouldn't add to the **quality of the area**, and it **diminishes the sense of place**.

Every other building nearby has softnesses, curves and slopes. Please look again at this gaunt unhospitable design, and reject it.

LANDSCAPING.

Trees in Conservation Areas are protected under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and we would like to see you address that. Please alter the specification to read “native species only”.

CONSERVATION AREA.

This proposed development is in the conservation area. The application argues it's on the edge, as if that means it doesn't really count. Each building-loss in this area detracts from **your** policy, until there is nothing left to conserve. Swanton House belongs to the Borough, through its property development company, but conserving it has been dismissed. This contravenes Ashford Town Centre Area Action Plan 2010 Policy TC6.

GENERAL

This is a very worrying application. The council has policies which are directly contravened in this application.