

4th July 2016

Regeneration and Environment, Town Hall, Wallasey.

Dear Mrs Day,

Ref. No: APP/16/00782

Axholme, 76 THURSTASTON ROAD, HESWALL, CH60 4SA

Demolition of existing two storey five bedroom house and associated out buildings. Construction of new three storey apartment building containing eight apartments, each with three bedrooms, balcony terraces or garden access, basement and ground level parking spaces, and associated external landscaping.

Thank you for consulting The Heswall Society on this application. The site is a triangular plot, the remnant of a much larger plot, parts of which have already been developed by the building of two bungalows.

1 Existing House

1.1 The existing house present an interesting and varied mix of eaves levels and ridges and gables which rises about 4 metres above ground level to the eaves on the both west and south east elevations. The ground floor windows are contained within this height and first floor windows are set in dormers and gables which rise about half way to the main ridge which, in turn, rises to a height of about 8 metres above ground level. The whole effect is enhanced by the front porch and other features. This is an attractive, asymmetrical Arts and Craft House, with clear yet interesting and varied forms which would be a loss to the setting of the Heswall Lower Village Conservation Area and the area outside the Conservation Area, if demolished.

1.2 The Heritage Statement says in 6.3 that Axholme's contribution to the setting of the Conservation Area is considered to be neutral rather than positive and suggests that "it figures in only one positive view, which is overwhelmed by the largely detractive 1960's buildings of St Peter's School". It should be noted that the Council's Appraisal and Management Plan identifies this view despite the impact of St Peter's School. Furthermore, there is work in hand to improve West Grove. Para 6.4.1 of the Appraisal and Management Plan says that recent school buildings have a form which pay more respect to local tradition. The School predates the Conservation Area and as it changes over the years we will argue for a gradual improvement of the school - rather than surrender the future of this part of the Conservation Area we feel it is important to set a level which should be maintained when the opportunity arises. There is a current application to extend the nursery which is part of the school buildings and the Council has our comments on this. Currently, Richmond Hall on the corner of West Grove, is undergoing welcome restoration as part of its conversion to a dwelling and care is being taken with the consideration of the development of the former allotment site alongside St Peter's School.

1.3 It is, of course, Thurstaston Road where the impact will be greatest on the setting of the Conservation Area and indeed on the area in general. Under the heading of "Green Spaces and Planting", Para 3.4.7 of the Appraisal and Management Plan draws attention to the school playing field which lies opposite the proposed apartments. It says The School Playing Fields lie on the north east side of Thurstaston Road which is the main point of view for most observers. The openness of the school fields then sets the contrast prior to the enclosure of the narrow cutting and old village centre beyond.

1.4 I would draw attention to the Council's Supplementary Planning Document, SPD2 - Designing for Self Contained Flat Development and Conversions which supplements UDP Policies HS4 and HS13. Para 4.2 says

“applications for new buildings that would involve the demolition of sound property of architectural or historical interest, such as large older buildings of character in established residential areas, would be unlikely to be approved unless the applicant can provide a justification to show why retention would not be viable.”

1.5 Despite the school building, which is set well back, Axholme, which lies on a prominent corner, does make a useful contribution to the approach to the original Lower Village Centre - unlike the proposed apartment building which is over dominant. I would draw attention to concerns expressed in the Appraisal and Management Plan (section 6.2) which includes over-development of sites amongst the identified negative factors. These apartments would not, of course, lie within the Conservation Area but they would have a negative impact upon it; over-development of this site would be harmful to its setting and to the surrounding area in general.

2 Proposed Apartments

2.1 Scale, Height and massing

2.1.1 The Design and Access Statement refers to the proposal as an “Arts and Crafts style apartment building”.

2.1.2 The proposed apartments comprise one symmetrical, monolithic block of institutional appearance; the ridge is some 10 metres above ground level and some 2 metres above that of the present house. The ridge line itself is unbroken and relieved only by a hip at each end. The intermediate roof gables on the south west elevation rise to full ridge height, those on the north east elevation rise somewhat more than half way up the roof. Seen from near-by these gables do a little to interrupt the ridge line but do not give an interesting roofscape especially so when seen from higher ground and the overall impression is of the monolithic block behind the gables.

2.1.3 The proposed eaves level is about 2.5 metres above that of the existing house (about the same height as the gables on its south east elevation); the walls to eaves level contain both ground and first floor windows with second floor windows set in dormers and gables whereas in the existing house the much lower walls to eaves contain the ground floor windows with first floor windows in the dormers. This 2.5 metre increase to eaves adds to the extent to which the building dominates its surroundings. It would be exacerbated by the building approaching much close to its boundary and by its much greater length and depth.

2.1.4 SPD2 says:

“The bulk of large buildings can be reduced through variations in the footprint, height and roof form of the building as well as the spacing in relation to neighbouring properties. For example, elevations and roofs with varied shapes can reduce the overall massing of a larger block of flats because the use of multiple components will not appear as big as a single large component. The design of large buildings as a single block is not likely to be acceptable”.

2.1.5 The apartment block would extend to within 1 to 2 metres of the boundary with Sunnyhurst, 2 Herberts Lane and would dominate the bungalow.

2.1.6 The south west elevation presents an apparent add-on of tiers of balconies which add to the monolithic form of the building and its harmful impact on the character of the area.

2.1.7 Irrespective of the form of the roof, the whole mass of the building, its length, depth and height of walls and to ridge, are excessive for this location and its surroundings

2.1.8 This proposal would be in conflict with HS4 and CH2.

2.2 Landscaping and Grounds, Parking and Traffic.

2.2.1 The Heritage Assessment says that public views of the [existing] building are limited by planting along the boundary of the site, it makes further references to these “tall hedges”. This proposal would result in much of this existing planting being lost and although it is proposed to landscape, there is no guarantee of the future height of the boundary hedges or of the effective screening of the much higher walls and roof and deciduous trees lose their leaves. Furthermore, access openings to the site would be much larger with an additional substantial opening onto Farr Hall Road. The apartments, with their additional height, would be clearly visible from Thurstaston Road, Farr Hall Road, West Grove and, through the new access, from Church Meadow Lane.

2.2.2 We note that it is proposed to remove tree T25 see Drawing 3976 SK12 F. The Tree Survey says that this tree has a good basal area and stem with a fair crown (excessive epicormic growth); it is given an ERC of 20 to 40 years. The reason for the loss of this tree, which is important to the boundary landscaping, would appear to be to provide a parking place. We object to this loss.

2.2.3 Accompanying this letter is a Highway Report prepared by Mr Colin Simpson BTech CEng MICE MCIHT of Highway Planning Services, Whitchurch Road, Chester. You will see that Mr Simpson makes a number of points 3.1 to 3.6 about the proposal: _

Para 3.1 The red line boundary shown on the location plan and the visibility splay drawing excludes the area of the boundary hedge along Farr Hall Road - an area of land essential for the provision of visibility splays.

Para 3.3 The Society has serious concerns regarding the inadequacy visibility splays (and land ownership).

Para 3.4 Traffic Speeds. We are concerned about the number of vehicles travelling at excessive speed, a particular concern during the daytime period when there is a likelihood of school children being present.

Para 3.5 Parking and turning. The lack of provision for additional parking for visitors / maintenance / cleaning contractors.

Para 3.6 There would seem to be inadequate provision for two bins for each household.

This area is much congested during school start and finish times. Farr Hall Road and Thurstaston Road are narrow and there is a lack of footpaths and the Society and local people are very concerned about the proposed new access arrangements.

2.3 Locations for Self Contained Flats

2.3.1 The site does not meet the requirements of SPD2 paras 3.4 to 3.6 (including the frequency of bus services). It says:

3.4 All sites for self contained flats must also be accessible by good transport links to and from main employment areas, schools, shops,

health, and leisure and entertainment facilities. Walking and cycling are the most sustainable forms of transport but proximity to main bus routes and railway stations is important if public transport is to be a viable option to the motor car for longer journeys.

3.5 Public transport will only be considered as a feasible alternative if there is a regular service to a range of destinations. Sites for self contained flats should, therefore, also be within 400 metres safe and convenient walking distance of a bus stop with a regular service with a frequency of 20 minutes or within 400 metres of a railway station that provides a regular service.

3.6 Walking distances should be measured over a practical, safe and well lit route without significant barriers to pedestrians, including those with disabilities, such as:

- a lack of dropped kerbs;
- pavements less than 1.35 metres wide; and
- the lack of a formal crossing, where there is heavy traffic.

3 Conclusion

To justify this project the Design and Access Statement puts forward the argument that in value / developable terms the site requires 8 no residential units, all 3 double bedroom, 2 bathrooms with river views and balconies. This proposition is based upon a view of the value of the land which it would seem requires a wholly unsatisfactory and unrealistic overdevelopment to achieve. Everything has its price and in our view if the price were right, this plot would sell for development in keeping with the area - we have experience of considering applications for applications for older Heswall properties to be developed in a sympathetic manner, some retaining the original building and others that will be demolished and rebuilt on a one for one or two for one basis.

The Heswall Society objects to this Application on the grounds that:-

The present building is a characterful old building in a residential area which is beneficial to the setting of the Conservation Area and to the area in general and should be retained.

The mass of the proposed apartments results in over-dominance in this location; it will also dominate 2 Herberts lane. The monolithic form of the building and its unrelieved ridge are unacceptable.

Existing trees and hedges will be lost and the building will be opened up to view by the proposed accesses.

There are deficiencies in the proposed highway access arrangements as detailed in the highway report

The provision of apartments in this location would be in conflict with Section 3 of SPD2 regarding the locations for self contained flats.

This application would be in conflict with UDP HS4, CH2 and SPD2 and I would ask that permission be refused.

Yours sincerely,

Dennis Clegg,
Planning Officer,
The Heswall Society.