

**5i 3/10/0799/FP – Extension to existing crematorium building and rest facility with associated car parking at Harwood Park Crematorium, Watton Road, Stevenage, SG2 8XT for Harwood Park Crematorium Limited.**

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**Date of Receipt:** 04.05.2010

**Type:** Full - Minor

**Parish:** DATCHWORTH

**Ward:** DATCHWORTH AND ASTON

**RECOMMENDATION**

That planning permission be **GRANTED** subject to the following conditions:-

1. Three year time limit (1T12)
2. Programme of archaeological work (2E02 – please delete ‘No development shall take place...’ and add ‘Construction of the extension to the main building shall not take place...’)
3. Matching materials (2E13 – please add ‘unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority’)
4. No external lighting (2E26)
5. Hedge retention and protection (4P06)
6. Landscaping design proposals (4P12 b,c,d,e,i,j,k)
7. Landscape works implementation (4P13)
8. Withdrawal of P.D. (Part 2 Class A) (2E21)
9. The presence of any significant unsuspected contamination that becomes evident during the development of the site shall be brought to the attention of the Local Planning Authority, and remediated in accordance with a scheme to be submitted and approved in writing.

**Reason:** To ensure adequate protection of human health, the environment and water courses in accordance with policy ENV20 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2010 and PPS23 ‘Planning and Pollution Control’.

**Directives**

1. Other legislation (01OL)

## 3/10/0799/FP

### Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, Minerals Local Plan, Waste Local Plan and the 'saved' policies of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007), and in particular policies GBC1, GBC14, TR7, ENV1, ENV2, ENV20, BH1 and PPS1, PPG2, PPS5 and PPS23. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies, and permission 3/98/1817/FP, is that permission should be granted.

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### **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The application site is shown on the attached OS extract and comprises an existing crematorium located in open surroundings in the Green Belt. The main building is mostly single storey but with a two storey section and large central chimney. It is formed of red brick with a red plain tiled hexagonal roof. Vehicular access is existing from Watton Road, and the existing car park is located to the north of the main building.
- 1.2 The site lies in the Metropolitan Green Belt and close to the boundaries with Stevenage Borough Council and North Herts District Council.
- 1.3 This application proposes a single storey extension to the main building to accommodate a larger office and reception area, and an additional 45 space car park to the south of the site with a detached restroom building.
- 1.4 The application is referred to Committee as a departure from the Local Plan.

### **2.0 Site History**

3/08/2112/FP	Natural cemetery.	Approved with Conditions 08-Apr-2009
3/01/0336/FP	Proposed memorial and tribute court.	Approved with Conditions 31-May-2001

### 3/10/0799/FP

3/00/1815/FO	Variation of conditions 2 and 3 of planning permission 3/98/1817/FP (woodland cemetery, maintenance and reception building, car park and access road).	Approved with Conditions 07-Feb-2001
3/00/0862/FP	Ornamental 'temple' with dome and balustrade.	Approved with Conditions 31-Jul-2000
3/98/1817/FP	Woodland cemetery, single-storey grounds maintenance and reception building, associated car parking and access road.	Approved with Conditions 25-Aug-1999
3/95/0347/RP	Crematorium, access roads, car parks and landscaping - approval of reserved matters in respect of outline permission granted under ref: 3/92/0716/OP.	Approved with Conditions 12-Jul-1995
3/92/0716/OP	Crematorium vehicular and pedestrian access, car park landscaping.	Refused 07-Oct-1992 Appeal Allowed 26-Jul-1993

### **3.0 Consultation Responses**

- 3.1 County Highways do not wish to restrict the grant of permission.
- 3.2 Environmental Health raise no objection subject to conditions on construction hours and soil decontamination.
- 3.3 The Council's Landscape Officer recommends refusal on the grounds of the juxtaposition of the extension to the access road and insufficient planting. The additional parking fails to integrate with the existing road layout in a visual and geometric sense. New planting will be an essential and integral part of the development and details should not be left until after permission has been granted.
- 3.4 The County Archaeological Officer comments that significant archaeological remains may be present on the site of the crematorium building so a condition is recommended to carry out a programme of archaeological work.

### **3/10/0799/FP**

#### **4.0 District/Parish Council Representations**

- 4.1 Datchworth Parish Council has no objection to the proposal.
- 4.2 No response has been received from Aston Parish Council.
- 4.3 North Herts District Council make no comment.
- 4.4 No response has been received from Stevenage Borough Council.
- 4.5 Knebworth Parish Council object to further Green Belt land being converted to car parking and the construction of a rest room which is inappropriate and not essential. There is no substantiated need for an over 50% increase in the number of parking spaces. The Parish Council question the purpose of the servery and patio area as essential facilities for a crematorium. The building, by reason of height and mass, would be detrimental to the appearance and rural character of the area. It is unclear whether policy GBC1(c) includes crematoria.

#### **5.0 Other Representations**

- 5.1 The applications have been advertised by way of discretionary site notice, and neighbour notification.
- 5.2 No letters of representation have been received.

#### **6.0 Policy**

- 6.1 The relevant saved Local Plan policies in this application include the following:-

GBC1	Appropriate Development in the Green Belt
GBC14	Landscape Character
TR7	Car Parking - Standards
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
ENV20	Groundwater Protection
BH1	Archaeology and New Development
BH2	Archaeological Evaluations and Assessments
BH3	Archaeological Conditions and Agreements

- 6.2 In addition to the above it is considered that Planning Policy Statement 1, (Delivering Sustainable Development), Planning Policy Guidance 2 'Green Belts', PPS5 'Planning for the Historic Environment' and PPS23 'Planning and Pollution Control' are considerations in the determination of this application.

## **7.0 Considerations**

### **Principle of Development**

- 7.1 The site lies in the Metropolitan Green Belt wherein inappropriate development will not be permitted. Policy GBC1(c) includes as appropriate development "essential facilities for cemeteries and other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt". This also follows the wording of PPG2.
- 7.2 However, Officers do not consider that this reference to cemeteries can reasonably be considered to include crematorium. This follows the previous Inspector's decision in 1993 (3/92/0716/OP) which originally allowed the construction of a crematorium in this location. The Inspector based his view on a comparison of the need for buildings to support a crematorium use, as opposed to the use of the land that constitutes a cemetery.
- 7.3 Officers therefore do not consider the proposal to fall within the definition of appropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore very special circumstances must be demonstrated that clearly outweigh the harm caused by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm.

### **Very Special Circumstances and Impact on Green Belt**

- 7.4 The applicant states that the existing office and interview room provision is undersized. They identify a need for a second interview room, and at present there are no toilet facilities in the reception area. The office extension will measure approximately 7.2m in width by 4.8m in depth with a gable pitched roof up to 5.5m to match the existing building. The design will reflect an existing gable projection to the north of the building, including side triangular bay windows. Internally, the extension will provide a 28.9m<sup>2</sup> office, and the existing layout would be amended to incorporate a disabled toilet and a second interview room in place of the existing office.
- 7.5 Overall, it is acknowledged that this extension is large; however Officers consider that these facilities are reasonable necessary for the functioning of the business, bearing in mind the extensions of a woodland cemetery and natural cemetery that have been approved in recent years (3/08/2112/FP and 3/98/1817/FP). In terms of impact, the extension is considered to be

### 3/10/0799/FP

appropriate in scale and design, and will not appear out of character; given its location away from the main road and against an existing larger building it will not impact adversely on the openness of the Green Belt.

- 7.6 It is noted that the Council's Landscape Officer has objected to this aspect of the proposal on the grounds of an uncomfortable juxtaposition between the extension and the service road. However, Officers do not consider that this amounts to a reason to refuse the application. It is agreed that the design would be improved by reducing the projection of the extension, but the existing building abuts the service road in several areas, and sufficient space would remain for planting to the front of the building.
- 7.7 The additional car park will provide an extra 45 no. parking spaces over and above the existing 79 no. spaces. In determining whether this is acceptable, regard is had to previous consents at the site, as there are no adopted parking standards for crematoria. 45 no. spaces were originally approved in this location in 1998 (reference 3/98/1817/FP) as part of a woodland cemetery extension. This woodland cemetery has not been provided, but a further natural cemetery area was approved in 2009 to the east of the site. Overall, therefore, the parking provision has not been increased despite consents for extensions to the burial/memorial grounds.
- 7.8 It is noted that Knebworth Parish Council do not consider this additional parking to be justified. However, substantial weight must be given to the 1998 consent for 45 no. spaces in this location, which it appears may have been implemented through the construction of an access, and could therefore be completed at any time. This parking will be suitably screened by existing bunds to the south and west, and additional planting will be required to the north and east by way of a planning condition.
- 7.9 Further, in order to control the amenity of this open area, it is considered reasonable and necessary to restrict the provision of any external lighting, and also to remove Part 2 Class A permitted development rights to control the provision of fences, and walls. On this basis, it is considered that the additional car park will not materially impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and it is noted that the Council's Landscape Officer has not objected to the principle of this additional car park in terms of impact on the surrounding Landscape Character Area.
- 7.10 A rest facility is also proposed in the car park to provide a toilet and rest accommodation for people to shelter in whilst they visit the memorial gardens. This will measure approximately 4.7m by 4.7m with a hipped roof to a height of 4.4m. It will be formed of red brick with a red tiled roof with glazing to much of the north and east elevations. This is considered to provide essential facilities, and is considered to be appropriate in its scale

### **3/10/0799/FP**

and design. A detailed planting scheme to include screening of this building will be required by way of planning condition in order to mitigate impact on the openness of the surrounding Green Belt.

- 7.11 The 1998 permission referred to above (3/98/1817/FP), which may have been implemented within the 5 year time period included a much larger maintenance building to the east of this overflow car park; however the Council has not confirmed the lawfulness of this implementation through a Lawful Development Certificate. The applicant has now confirmed that he does not wish to complete this consent; however the permission has not been formally revoked and should therefore be taken into consideration.
- 7.12 The previously approved maintenance building was to be located to the east of the car park, and would link into the proposed access road. A scheme of bunding and planting was approved under that consent, and this would serve to screen this larger building. Officers do not consider that the cumulative effect of the previously approved maintenance building, and the now proposed small rest facility would be unacceptable. Officers therefore do not consider it necessary to formally revoke the 1998 consent by way of a legal agreement.

#### **Landscaping**

- 7.13 The existing bunds along the south and west of the car park site adjacent to Watton Road would serve to screen the car park from the surrounding Green Belt. Further planting would be required to the north and east in order to mitigate the visual impact of the car park from the wider area. A condition for detailed planting schemes and implementation is therefore recommended. A condition is also recommended to ensure that existing hedging along the boundary with Watton Road is protected during the course of construction, and retained thereafter. This is important to mitigate the visual impact of the car park from Watton Road, and maintain the rural character of this road and surrounding area.

#### **Vehicular Access**

- 7.14 There are no highway implications as a result of this development. The existing vehicular access has been described by Highways as 'perfectly adequate', and it is not considered that the increase in car parking spaces would result in unacceptable volumes of traffic on local rural roads.

#### **Archaeology**

- 7.15 A condition is recommended to require a programme of archaeological work to be undertaken. This is due to the likelihood that some significant remains may be uncovered during the construction of the extension to the main

building. Substantial parts of the site for the car park and rest facility were the subject of archaeological evaluations carried out in 1993, 1994 and 1998 prior to the construction of the crematorium, and these revealed nationally important Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age remains. In 2004 (under reference 3/00/1815/FO), further archaeological investigations revealed further remains. No archaeological investigations have been carried out on the site of the crematorium building and therefore a condition is recommended for a programme of archaeological work to be submitted and approved in accordance with policy BH1 and PPS5.

### **Other Matters**

- 7.16 There are no immediate neighbours to be affected by this proposal.
- 7.17 Environmental Health have recommended a condition to bring any unsuspected contamination to our attention, and this is considered reasonable and necessary in accordance with PPS23. A condition to restrict construction hours of working is not considered necessary given the lack of immediate neighbours.

### **8.0 Conclusion**

- 8.1 Overall, the development is considered to amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it does not fall within the categories of appropriate development set out in GBC1 and PPG2. However, in assessing the impact of the extension, car park and rest facility, Officers do not consider that harm would arise to the openness of the Green Belt. The visual impact of the car park and rest facility can be suitably mitigated by existing bunds and additional planting.
- 8.2 The applicant has set out a need for the additional office space, and in terms of the car park and rest facility, weight is given to the previous 1998 consent. Very special circumstances are therefore considered to be evident that outweigh the in principle harm to the Green Belt.
- 8.3 The application is therefore recommended for approval subject to the conditions set out above.