

5h 3/11/2156/FP - Erection of scout hut and associated external works at Rear of 14 – 21 Kecksy's, Sawbridgeworth for 1st Sawbridgeworth Scout Group

Date of Receipt: 21.12.2011

Type: Full – Minor

Parish: SAWBRIDGEWORTH

Ward: SAWBRIDGEWORTH

RECOMMENDATION:

That planning permission be **REFUSED** for the following reason:

1. The proposed development of a Scout hut and associated external works represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Other harm is caused by the development by virtue of the noise and disturbance associated with the use of the site and the impact on the visual amenity of existing neighbouring residential properties to the west of the site. Whilst it is accepted that the building and use does result in social and community benefit, it is not considered that such weight can be assigned to these benefits such that the harm to the green belt and other harm is clearly outweighed. The proposed development is therefore contrary to policies GBC1 and ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007 and Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts.

_____ (215611FP.SE)

1.0 Background:

- 1.1 The application site is shown on the attached OS extract.
- 1.2 This proposal is for the development of a Scout Hut and associated external works on land to the rear of 14 – 21 Kecksy's, Sawbridgeworth. The land is currently open and has a gradient that slopes downwards from the properties at Kecksy's eastwards towards the River Stort. The site forms the top part of an agricultural field that is bound to the north and south by mature hedging. To the southeast of the site lies allotments, and to the north lies further agricultural land. The access to the site is through a current opening sited between numbers 20/21 Kecksy's and number 1 Reedings Way.
- 1.3 The proposed Scout Hut is of a simple gable design measuring 22 metres in length, 10.7 metres in width, 2.3 metres in height to the eaves, and 5.8 metres in height to the ridge. It is to be sited approximately 15 - 17 metres to the rear of the properties in Kecky's but only some 4-5m

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distant from their property boundaries. The proposal will involve the engineering of the land resulting in the excavation of approximately 1 metre depth of soil and the creation of a level slab.

- 1.4 The external works include the creation of a dropped kerb at the access to the estate road, the creation of an accessway, turning and parking facilities for 4 cars, 1 disabled space, 6 bicycles, and 1 bus space, together with the erection of boundary fencing.

2.0 Site History:

- 2.1 There is no planning history related to this site.

3.0 Consultation Responses:

- 3.1 County Highways does not wish to restrict the grant of permission subject to conditions relating to parking and access details; the construction of visibility splays; provision of wheel washing facilities; details of hardsurfacing materials; and the provision of cycle storage.
- 3.2 In considering the proposal Highways have commented that as the Scout group attracts children as young as 6 years old it is recommended that a footpath link is provided along the northern edge of the proposed access to the site, in the interest of pedestrian safety. It comments that a minimum access width of 4.1m should be provided in accordance with guidance in Manual for Streets and Roads in Hertfordshire. It states that although no information with regard to trip generation for the Scout Hut and use of the adjacent field has been submitted, the 210sqm Scout Hut is unlikely to generate a significant increase in vehicle trips. It comments that parents are also likely to drop off/pick up their children rather than park for a prolonged period, and that travel by sustainable modes such as walking and cycling should also be encouraged given the proximity of the site to local schools. In conclusion it comments that it has no grounds to raise and sustain an objection to planning permission being granted.
- 3.3 Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre has commented that it does not have any biological records – habitats or species – for the site. As a result, it concludes that there should not be any ecological constraints with regard to the proposed development.

4.0 Town Council Representations:

- 4.1 Sawbridgeworth Town Council has raised no objections to this proposal.

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5.0 Other Representations:

5.1 The application has been advertised by way of press notice, site notice and neighbour notification.

5.2 18 letters of objection have been received (from 11 households) which raise the following matters:

- Impact on peace and tranquillity of the site;
- Impact on wildlife;
- Concern at how the volume of traffic associated with the development could be accommodated in what is already a congested area;
- Impact on the Green Belt;
- Lack of parking;
- Impact on existing views;
- Noise and disturbance from use;
- The site is within a flood plain;
- Impact of glare from lighting;
- The existing scout hut could be updated;
- Loss of sunlight to properties;
- The appearance of the building is out of keeping with existing buildings in the immediate area;
- Impact on access for emergency vehicles;

5.3 A petition signed by 31 people objecting to the proposal has also been received.

5.4 Two letters of support have been received, together with a petition signed by 64 people who support the need for a new Scout hut.

6.0 Policy:

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

- GBC1 Green Belt
- ENV1 Design and Environmental Quality
- ENV2 Landscaping
- ENV24 Noise Generating Development
- TR7 Car Parking – Standards
- TR13 Cycling – Facilities Provision (Non-Residential)

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6.2 In addition, the following National policy guidance is relevant:-

PPG2 – Green Belts

7.0 Considerations:

7.1 This application site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt wherein policy GBC1 of the Local Plan sets out the types of development which are considered to be appropriate. The construction of new buildings on land falling within the Green Belt will be inappropriate unless it is of a type specified in the policy. The policy states that permission will not be given for inappropriate development.

7.2 The relevance ‘test’ in relation to this application is to consider whether the development is, by definition, ‘inappropriate development’, having regard to the exceptions in PPG2 and Policy GBC1, and whether there is any other harm caused by the development. If this is the case it must be assessed whether there are any other material considerations to which such weight can be attached that the identified harm is clearly outweighed. If that is the case ‘very special circumstances’ exist.

Impact on the Green Belt

7.3 A scout hut is not development which is deemed to be appropriate in the Green Belt, and the proposal is therefore considered to represent inappropriate development which is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. The site is currently open and its character is very much that of a rural site. It is considered that the proposed Scout hut building, area of hardstanding and parking and the associated uses on the site would appear as an urban intrusion into the countryside and would harm the openness and rural character of this part of the Green Belt, contrary to PPG2 and policy GBC1. It is clearly harmful in green belt terms.

Other Harm

7.4 Paragraph 3.2 of PPG2 also requires that consideration is given to ‘any other harm’ which must also be considered in the case of this application. This is considered below.

7.5 Siting and appearance: The siting of the proposed development will clearly result in a change to the outlook which the occupants of nos. 14-21 Kecky’s currently benefit from. However, in considering this impact regard must be had to the size of the proposed building and surrounding land levels. The building is proposed to be a maximum height of approximately 5.8 metres (2.3 metres to the eaves), and would be sited

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between 15 and 17 metres from the rear elevation of the properties in Kecky's. Furthermore, from the properties in Kecky's the land falls from west to east, and as a consequence the land on which the new building is proposed to be constructed is approximately 3 metres lower than the ground floor level of the properties in Kecky's.

- 7.6 Taking into account the above it is considered that whilst the proposed development would result in an impact on the outlook of the occupiers of those properties, this would be toward a simply designed building. The length of the building and its proximity will ensure that it does have some prominence in the current outlook from the properties. However, in some cases, the properties currently have limited rear enclosure, taking advantage of current open views to the east. If conventional enclosure were to be in place the impact of the new building would be less. It is concluded that modest weight can be assigned to the impact of the proposed on the outlook from the existing properties in harmful terms.
- 7.7 Activity: The statement provided by the Scout Group indicates that the group currently has 157 persons (boys and girls) and 26 adult leaders, and has plans to grow to over 200 young people. It is also stated that the Scout Hut will be used during late afternoons and evenings on weekdays and carry out outdoor activities during the summer months. It is not uncommon for Scout huts to be located within urban areas for reasons of accessibility and because they represent a community use. The introduction of such a level of activity in this location would result in a harmful impact on the amenity of the occupiers of nearby dwellings. It is not considered reasonable that conditions could be imposed on any grant of permission to restrict the use of the building and site such that the noise and disturbance created by the use would be at an acceptable level. This will result in some additional harm to nearby residents.
- 7.8 Access, parking and highway safety: The comments of County Highways are that it has no grounds to raise and sustain an objection to planning permission being granted. It comments that the proposed Scout hut is unlikely to generate a significant increase in vehicle trips, and that travel by sustainable modes such as walking and cycling should be encouraged. Furthermore, it comments that parents are also likely to drop off/pick up their children rather than park for a prolonged period. Whilst Officer's acknowledge the concerns of local residents in respect of these issues, it is not considered that the traffic generation or parking associated with the use will be to such a degree that would result in significant implications for road safety or parking conditions.

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- 7.9 Having regard to the above considerations, it is the opinion of Officers that the proposed development would result in harm to the Green Belt and additional harm by virtue of the siting of the proposed building and the activity the use will create. It therefore falls to be considered whether there are any other matters to which such weight can be attached that the harmful impacts are clearly outweighed.
- 7.10 The Planning Statement accompanying this application sets out matters which the Applicant considers such weight should be given to. These can be summarised as follows:
- Need for the proposal;
 - Absence of suitable and available sites within the built-up area of Sawbridgeworth;
 - Urban fringe location of the proposal site;
 - Outdoor sport/recreation related;
 - Location and design of building.
- 7.11 The difficulty the Scout group has faced in finding alternative premises is well documented. The Group has been searching for new premises for the last 12 years. The existing Scout Hut in Springhall Lane is over 90 years old, and the Group have confirmed that the building is in a poor condition, and the continued use of the hut by the Group is in jeopardy due to the condition of the building. Planning permission was granted in 2005 for a new Scout hut to be constructed on a site in Bullfields (ref. 3/04/2378/FP), however this was not constructed due to the landowner withdrawing their consent. A further application was made in 2008 for the erection of a Scout Hut on part of the recreation ground at Vantorts Close (ref. 3/08/0830/FP) which was refused and dismissed on Appeal (reference APP/J1915/A/08/2085394).
- 7.12 The difficulty the Group has experienced in finding a suitable site within the built up area is acknowledged. It is evident from the letters of representation and petition received which support the application, that there is a need and demand for the Scout group. The need for new premises for the Group is important to the future success and existence of the Group. The benefits of the use in social and community terms have to be acknowledged as do the likelihood that the activity and visual impact will be caused on any alternative site which may be identified near to residential uses. It is also acknowledged that such a site must be preferred both for accessibility reasons and because of the location of the demand base for the use.

8.0 Conclusion:

- 8.1 Having regard to the above considerations, it is clear that the proposed development of a Scout hut and associated external works represents inappropriate development within the Green Belt. It has a harmful impact on openness and, by definition, this is harmful. Additional harm is caused by virtue of the impact on the outlook of neighbouring residential uses and the activity that is associated with the use. It is considered that only limited weight should be applied to this additional harm.
- 8.2 In its favour, it is accepted that there is a need for a replacement Scout hut building. The use is accepted as a valuable social and community benefit. The users have attempted to identify a number of alternative locations where a building could be secured, without success to date. It is likely that, what ever location is identified, there will be issues of visual and activity impact given the desire to be located in or near to an urban area.
- 8.3 Ultimately it is considered that, on balance, in this case the clear green belt impact and the modest weight that can be assigned to additional harm, is not clearly outweighed by the beneficial impacts. The proposed development is therefore considered to be contrary to policies GBC1 and ENV1 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007 and Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts.
- 8.4 For this reason it is recommended that planning permission be refused.