

5k 3/10/1601/FP – Maintenance and material storage compound including metal containers and covered maintenance vehicle storage at Harwood Park Crematorium, Stevenage, SG2 8XT for Harwood Park Crematorium Ltd.

Date of Receipt: 08.09.2010

Type: Full - Minor

Parish: DATCHWORTH

Ward: DATCHWORTH AND ASTON

RECOMMENDATION

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

1. Approved Plans (2E10 - 6038 A900, 6038 A901, 6038 A902 A).
2. A planted screen to the east and south of the compound fence shall be retained for the lifetime of the development, and full details shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority within 1 month of the date of this decision, including (a) Planting plans (b) Written specifications (c) Schedules of plants, noting species, planting sizes and proposed numbers/densities, where appropriate.

Reason: To ensure the provision of amenity afforded by appropriate landscape design, in accordance with policy ENV2 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

3. All soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details and to a reasonable standard in accordance with the relevant recommendations of appropriate British Standards or other recognised Codes of Good Practice. The works shall be carried out in accordance with a timetable to be agreed with the Local Planning Authority. Any trees or plants that, within a period of five years after planting, are removed, die or become, in the opinion of the Local Planning Authority, seriously damaged or defective, shall be replaced as soon as is reasonably practicable with others of species, size and number as originally approved, unless the Local Planning Authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure the provision, establishment and maintenance of a reasonable standard of landscaping in accordance with the approved designs, in accordance with policy ENV2 of the East Herts Local Plan Second Review April 2007.

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Directives

1. Other legislation (01OL)
2. This permission relates solely to the land edged in red on the site plan. Any storage of materials or equipment beyond the site boundary would also require planning consent, and the applicant is advised that the Council would be concerned over further encroachment into the countryside.

Summary of Reasons for Decision

The proposal has been considered with regard to the policies of the Development Plan (East of England Plan May 2008, 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 GBC1, GBC14, ENV1, ENV2 and BH1. The balance of the considerations having regard to those policies is that permission should be granted.

_____ (160110FP.HI)

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 to the southeast of Stevenage. The site comprises a central building and car park with memorial plots and gardens surrounding.
- 1.2 Members may recall that permission was granted at Committee on 28th July 2010 for an extension to the crematorium building along with the construction of a rest facility and additional car parking.
- 1.3 This application is retrospective for a grounds maintenance yard including 3 no. storage containers, a covered vehicle storage structure, and perimeter fencing to the east and part to the south. The site measures some 20m by 23m and is screened to the north and west by existing landscaped bunds. The applicant states that the containers have been in place since 2007. This application has been received after coming to the attention of the Enforcement team.
- 1.4 The application is referred to Committee as a departure from the Local Plan.

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2.0 Site History

3/10/0799/FP	Extension to existing crematorium building and rest facility with associated car parking.	Approved with Conditions 28-Jul-2010
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
3/00/1815/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 No consultation responses have been received.

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4.0 Parish Council Representations

- 4.1 No response has been received from Datchworth Parish Council.
- 4.2 Late consultations have been sent to Stevenage Borough Council, North Herts District Council, Aston Parish Council and Knebworth Parish Council. Any comments received will be updated to Members at Committee.

5.0 Other Representations

- 5.1 The application has been advertised by way of site notice. There are no immediate neighbours to be notified.
- 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
ENV1	Design and Environmental Quality
ENV2	Landscaping
BH1	Archaeology and New Development

- 6.2 In addition to the above it is considered that Planning Policy Statement 1, (Delivering Sustainable Development), and Planning Policy Guidance 2 'Green Belts' are considerations in determining 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 in PPG2.
- 7.2 However, Officers do not consider that this reference to cemeteries can reasonably be considered to include crematorium due to the additional built form required. This follows the previous Inspector's assessment in 1993 (3/92/0716/OP), which originally allowed the construction of a crematorium

in this location. 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

- 7.3 The storage compound and maintenance yard is required in connection with the maintenance of the crematorium grounds. The site extends to a total of some 9.88 hectares, and 4 no. groundsmen are employed on a full-time basis in order to maintain this land. This inevitably requires space for the storage of associated equipment and materials.
- 7.4 A small service yard was originally approved within the main crematorium building in 1992; however this was apparently deemed inadequate during the first year of operation. This service area remains to the south of the building but is used in connection with the main function of the crematorium rather than maintenance of the grounds.
- 7.5 It is also material to note that a large detached maintenance building was previously approved in 1998 (reference 3/98/1817/FP) in a more exposed location to the east of this existing compound. Whilst this permission has not been carried out, it may have been implemented within the 5 year time period. However, the applicant has again confirmed that he does not wish to complete this earlier consent, and it is therefore not considered reasonable to require a legal agreement to formally revoke this earlier consent.
- 7.6 Overall Officers consider that there is a justified need for this storage and maintenance area for the proper functioning of the crematorium and its extensive grounds. The containers and vehicle storage structure are well-screened, as discussed further below, and will have very little impact on the openness or visual amenity of the Green Belt.

Landscaping

- 7.7 The existing bunds to the north and west of the maintenance compound serve to screen the development from the road. The compound is also screened to the east, and part to the south, by fencing and planting; however the planting does not satisfactorily screen the fence and should therefore be enhanced. A condition is recommended to require further details, and to ensure satisfactory implementation and retention of this screening. Whilst there is a public bridleway approximately 60m to the south of the site, there are no wider views of the compound due to vegetation screening and the topography of the land.

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- 7.8 The site lies in Landscape Character Area 37 'Datchworth Settled Slopes', which is characterised by undulating open farmland with large blocks of woodland to the south. Given the screening of this development, Officers do not consider that any harm would arise to the landscape character of the surrounding area, nor would any further planting be required to mitigate against the development, other than that discussed above.

Archaeology

- 7.9 Although the site does not lie within an Area of Archaeological Significance there is a history of archaeological finds on site. However, given that this application does not propose any groundworks, it is not considered reasonable or necessary to require any further information.

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 storage compound on the openness of the Green Belt and appearance of the surrounding countryside and landscape character area, Officers do not consider that any undue harm would arise, subject to a landscaping condition.
- 8.2 The need for a storage area to maintain the extensive crematorium grounds is considered to amount to a very special circumstance in this case that outweighs the in-principle objection.
- 8.3 The application is therefore recommended for approval subject to the conditions set out above.