

PROPOSED EXTENSION TO DWELLING

SILVERBIRCH COTTAGE

EAST LANE, ABBOTS LANGLEY, HERTFORDSHIRE. WD5 0NY

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

DECEMBER 2023

Preamble

This statement has been prepared following the wish to extend a property within an area designated as green belt in a fashion that slightly exceeds the recognized but not always prescribed 40% limit in order to progress the use of the site in a more effective and sustainable manner.

Prevailing Conditions

Silverbirch Cottage is set to the south of East Lane, opposite the cemetery, which was established for the residents of the Abbots Langley Asylum. An earlier cemetery lies to the eastern border of the site.

The asylum site opened circa 1870, and in 1880 the cemeteries were added, and at that time we must assume that the applicant building was included as this serves as admin accommodation for the cemetery and associated staff. The structure is formed as a T plan shape, with the staff (grave digger and mortuary staff) to the south of the structure whilst the northern end of the structure, separated by access, but maintained as an integral element of the structure, housed the Chapel of rest. The northern end of the chapel sits opposite the Lych Gate of the established remaining cemetery and utilizing the slope of the site, sits above the accommodation structures to the south.

With the closure of the Asylum 1997, the site no longer functioned as medical accommodation and was demolished, with the site, later converted to housing. However, preceding this, the chapel was converted to residential in 1979, and we must assume, ceased to be part of the overall Asylum complex. We have no record of any further applications for that site so we would accept that the footprint of the building is 137m², there has been a conservatory structure added to rear of the building, but we must assume that this was carried out under permitted development as there are no formal applications noting this.

The site is bordered to the north by East Lane, to the east by the first of the two cemeteries and Asylum administration structures occupied the site to the south east, (which we believe may have originally housed the sewage treatment works), arable farm fields to the west, and the footpath to the south, which runs between the arable field and Leavesden Country Park, which is formed from the Asylum gardens.

The site slopes steeply from East Lane boundary to the north, down to the public footpath boundary, to the south.

The overall site area is 5,300m², and has a high number of mature trees contained mainly, on its boundary.

The site also has an accompanying number of structures over the whole of the site, satisfying several residential uses.

The site has two access points off East Lane to the North, with both elements being within 10m of each other.

East Lane was a boundary point for the Parish of Abbots Langley running North to Bedmond, and whilst still accessible by vehicle to Silverbirch Cottage, it is now blocked to vehicles at the M25 underpass and is unpassable to vehicles beyond the cottage.

The current drive is a rough gravel / part tarmac finish.

The access to the house has been modified over the years, but is still a rather 'contrived' solution, clearly the property has two purposes, a living area and a chapel with the living area to the south, there has never been intentional direct access from East Lane to the living area. Historically, a road linked from East Lane, thru the Admin area, and approached the accommodation from the rear. The integrated accommodation, as standing, whilst providing good sized spaces, lack links with the only identifiable links to these spaces being external.



1 – View looking north to the rear of the property demonstrating the workers accommodation to the rear of the property and the later added conservatory.



2 – View looking south across the site, the brick Chapel sits to the foreground.



3 – Current access to the property is not visible from the approach and many visitors wander aimlessly around the site and enter in family areas.

Design

Brief

The overall use of the property is limited due to the items already discussed and whilst the footprint exceeds that of a six bedroomed 8 person house, it currently houses two bedrooms, with contrived links between these spaces. This creates a limited use of the site and an unsustainable solution to the current housing issues and land use.

The applicant would therefore like to expand the use of this site by increasing the accommodation levels improving the number of bedrooms to the host property, therefore we are looking to :-

- Increase bedroom accommodation.
- Improve access to the site.
- Improve circulation within the site.
- Identify the entrance to the building and create a readable architectural solution to navigating the site and building.
- Improve internal circulation.
- Improve the carbon footprint of the host dwelling by creating a more compact design.

Considerations

1. Principle of the Development

The application site lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and therefore falls with the Policy DM2 of the Current Development Management Plan.

This states

The fundamental aim of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Green Belts perform five important functions in: • Preventing urban sprawl • Preventing towns from merging into one another • Safeguarding the countryside from encroachment • Preserving the setting and character of the historic towns • Helping urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of under-used and outworn urban land and buildings.

The current building occupies a small area to the north of the site, and its T shape and scale, suggests a much larger building, than the accommodation within, clearly the Chapel of Rest is situated to be a prominent item to allow wayfinding.

The document further states that in the case of residential extension development.

b) Extensions to Buildings Extensions to buildings in the Green Belt that are disproportionate in size (individually or cumulatively) to the original building will not be permitted. The building's proximity and relationship to other buildings and whether it is already, or would become, prominent in the setting and whether it preserves the openness of the Green Belt will be taken into account.

Much of the construction work will take place in and around the existing building footprint so effect on the openness of the green belt is not an issue.

Further to this, we would confirm that the property designed in what appears a contrived form, as it hosted the 'grave digger' for the cemetery to the south of the structure, and the northern element of the property was originally the Chapel of Rest to house the deceased in state, prior to burial.

This creates a very awkward house shape as effectively; the chapel is set at distinctive and purposeful, offset angles to the worker accommodation with limited connection between them both, to avoid the elements of each, 'meeting', as it were when in use.

This has resulted in a building with limited bedroom accommodation on a footprint that modern house standards would demonstrate a six bed, 8 person property. The layout of the current house cannot support this, so the reason for this application is to unlock the potential of the site, and create a 5 bed 6 person property, as per the notes contained within planning legislation, which states that councils should look to :-

'promote and support the of under utilized land and buildings especially if this would help to meet the identified need for housing where land supply is constrained and available sites could be used more effectively'

So, the site could, and should support a larger family, and potentially provide space for multi generational occupation to cope with the poor supply of adequate housing for residents requirements, and promote a more sustainable solution.

Building around the footprint of an established structure does not affect the openness of the greenbelt, and would help 'compound', what is a straggling building form.

Therefore we feel that the proposals fall within the requirements of policy DM2.

2. Character and Appearance of the Area

There is no set 'character' for the area with neighbouring dwellings being formed of detached single story buildings with derelict building to the south east.

The character of the host dwelling has been maintained with the proposed works.

3. Amenity and Living Conditions of Occupiers of Neighbouring Dwellings

There are no immediate neighbours to the application site.

Amenity and Living Standards of Future Occupiers of the dwellings

The crux of this application is to bring an undersized historic conversion up to amenable standards that are set as a current standard within recognized space standards.

Car Parking, Highway Safety and Access

Access to the proposed development will remain unchanged but allowing an 'in and out' driveway will improve access to the site and from the site.

Other Considerations

Human Rights and Equality Act issues:

Based on information submitted there are no known issues raised in the context of Human Rights / The Equalities Act 2010 and as such there would be no relevant implication

Solution

Drawing 2337SK100, 200 and 201 demonstrates how we have addressed the brief. In summary the solution is:

- The building has been extended to incorporate better circulation and in doing so create accessible bedroom space to better use the site.
- The character of the site is maintained.
- The proposals are in and around the current footprint creating no detrimental effect on the openness of the greenbelt.
- The host dwelling was smaller and poorly proportions, making modern habitation difficult, the proposals address this and provide a

All land and alterations to the drive will be carried out or reinstated to the character of the area before the works are finished.

Access

The proposed access is maintained, and the site allows for an increased number of parking spaces per property.

Where possible, the site will be useable by ambulant disabled, but given the slope of the site, assistance will be required for wheelchair users.

Sustainability

As there is no demolition the houses cannot re-use existing materials. However, we propose to 'get the basics right' by creating a sealed building through robust details.

All elements of the extended building shell will benefit from high levels of insulation. The building perimeter/area has been improved by creating a deeper cross section. The resulting internal circulation spaces have been further improved by naturally lighting these areas through fenestration to avoid overuse of 'travel lighting'.

The client and the proposed contractor are keen to exploit the rich availability of local materials in realizing this project thus reducing the Carbon Footprint of the building construction.

Orientation of the building and location of living areas, maintains a high level of glazing onto the southern side and less to the North thus maximizing natural light and winter heat gains whilst avoiding unnecessary heat loss.

The proposal will use soakaways and permeable exterior surfacing to avoid surface water run off.

Conclusion

The proposals look to take a poorly laid out residential property with limited accommodation and create a better holistic design that creates better accommodation to satisfy the current residential needs.

In the report we have confirmed that the proposed structures will not detract or be out of keeping with the site and not be detrimental to the openness of the Greenbelt, that an aesthetic solution for parking has been planned and that an ecologically sound design maximizes the reduction in carbon footprint.

As such it is recommended to Three Rivers District Council for approval.