

I refer to your Pre Application submission received at the council offices on 16th June 2017 and our subsequent meeting on 5th July at the Billericay Town Council offices in Billericay with site visit to Chantry Way.

The site in question is located within the Billericay Conservation Area, adjacent Billericay Town Centre. The land slopes gradually down to the west. The site lies at the transitional point between the commercial High Street and residential area of Chantry Way.

In assessing a planning application for the redevelopment of the site, I advised that Basildon Council would have regard to the following:

#### NATIONAL POLICY:

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into effect on the 27th March 2012 and sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It also introduced a new 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Those aspects relating to Section 2: Ensuring the vitality of town centres, Section 7: Requiring good design, Section 8: Promoting healthy communities and Section 12: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

With regard to ensuring the vitality of town centres the NPPF states that:

Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality and locate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of tourism, cultural, community development (amongst others) needed in town centres.

With regard to good design, the NPPF states that:

The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people. It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.

Planning decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness. Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

In respect of promoting healthy communities, the NPPF advocates that:

To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning decisions should:

- plan positively for the provision and use of community facilities (such as meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;

- guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;
- ensure that established facilities and services are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community; and
- ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of community facilities and services.

Finally with regard to conserving and enhancing the historic environment the NPPF states that: In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of (amongst other factors) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Although strictly relating to proposals for new residential development, at the local level, saved Policy BAS BE12 (Development Control) of the Basildon Local Plan further states that planning permission for development will be refused if it causes material harm to the character of the surrounding area, including the street scene; overlooking; noise or disturbance to the occupants of neighbouring dwellings; overshadowing or over-dominance; and traffic danger or congestion.

As the site is within the Billericay Conservation Area, particular consideration will be given to the Billericay Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, along with any relevant guidance contained in the Billericay Shopfront and Design Guide. The Essex Parking Standards 2009 would also be used in the assessment.

The Billericay CA Character Appraisal identifies that the present building has a neutral impact on the conservation area, is located to the rear of Grade II listed buildings 38 to 42 High Street and is seen in the context of a positive view out from the High Street looking east and adjacent to an important tree.

The Billericay CA Management Plan advocates that:

Basildon Borough Council will not permit development in the Conservation Area which detracts from its character or appearance in terms of height, bulk, scale, form, detailing and material. The Council will not approve the demolition of buildings which detract, without clear and appropriate proposals for their replacement. The Council will not permit the demolition of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

Whenever the opportunity arises, Basildon Borough Council will encourage and support schemes which improve the appearance of buildings in the Conservation Area. However, the Council will not support the use of concrete tiles, artificial slate, panels of concrete, plate glass or stretcher bond brickwork. Where traditional style sash or casement windows are proposed, they will be expected to be of timber and where sashes are intended, they should have narrow glazing bars and be set in sufficient reveals.

Pages 24 to 25 of the Billericay CA Management Plan provides additional details on appropriate design.

The Billericay Shopfront and Design Guide largely replicates the guidance contained in the conservation area management plan.

The site itself comprises a single storey portakabin style structure, originally granted temporary planning permission in the 1960s, retained and extended thereafter. A surface car park serving

adjacent commercial premises surround the site, though is primarily to the rear of it with several sycamore trees along the common boundary. To the east is a modern terrace of five dwelling houses, opposite the site to the south are detached and semi-detached houses. Vehicular access to the site is obtained from High Street down a narrow lane. Prior to the erection of the current structure, old maps identify that a narrow building (Chantry Cottage) likely dating to the 18th or 19th Centuries, previously existed on the site, archaeological evidence of which may still exist. The High Street and associated backland is generally associated with medieval period. Accordingly an archaeological investigation condition is likely to be sought in relation to the redevelopment of the site.

Whilst the building is considered neutral in the CA Character Appraisal, the building is of temporary construction, which has a tired, somewhat negative appearance and does not relate particularly well to the established character of the High Street and is viewed outside of its context. It is understood the building has reached the end of its useful life expectancy and the principle of its replacement is therefore considered acceptable.

A proposed replacement community building comprising relocated Billericay Town Council offices was presented. This would comprise a main hall, with ancillary offices, meeting rooms, kitchen and toilet facilities over two ancillary floors and is intended to act as a new community hub providing more facilities than offered currently. The building would have a contemporary appearance comprising opposing mono-pitched roof elements and is intended to be finished in diagonal Trespa solid grade laminate panels with contrasting yellow brickwork to the ancillary elements. The rear north facing elevation would comprise some relief to break up the otherwise blank façade. I advised that the building would likely have an acceptable appearance given its street scene context to the rear of the High Street and at the end of Chancery Way, subject to the use of quality material finishes, having regard to its conservation area context where a higher standard of design would be expected. The sloping roof with subservient single storey kitchen wing appeared to respect the setting of the adjacent modern terrace to the east, thereby minimising the opportunities for overlooking or overshadowing, and in view of the intervening strip of land associated with the car park to the rear of the site. A design and access statement/heritage statement should be provided with the application to demonstrate how the design has been brought about, why a new building is being sought, what the building is intended to be used for and how it is designed to fit within its street scene context - respecting adjacent designated heritage assets (the listed buildings in High Street), the positive view out from High Street and the general conservation area. The removal of any redundant telegraph poles/other redundant street furniture in the vicinity to facilitate the development would also be welcomed.

A principle concern seemed to be several sycamore trees that existed on the site boundary or fell just within the neighbouring site. These are presently protected by the conservation area designation and provide some visual amenity to the wider area as a backdrop to the site. I suggested an Arboricultural assessment be provided in a future application to evaluate the condition of the trees and that a suitable landscaping scheme be provided with the new scheme providing compensatory tree planting in the site or wider setting of the site. Consent to the felling of the trees should also be sought from the land owner. It was noted that lights and associated wiring had been installed in the trees to illuminate the car park to the rear of the site. You may consider permitting lighting to be installed on the north rear flank of the proposed community facility to provide replacement illumination of the car park, to offset the owners concerns.

With regard to car parking, I advised that the Council would have regard to the Council's modern standards set out in the Essex Parking standards 2009, and that the parking spaces proposed appeared under size and did not appear independently accessible, particularly given the position of the front boundary and adjacent grass verge which I understand falls outside of the applicant's

ownership. I advised that the parking layout be revised to enable larger independently accessible spaces (minimum 2.5m by 5m), which in turn could allow for some additional landscaping to be provided along the front boundary. Consideration could also be given to acquiring the wall/some of the grass verge to the front of the site for access/additional landscaping, which may assist in improving the amount of parking. As an end destination facility located adjacent Billericay Town Centre, within walking distance of town centre car parks, bus stops and the railway station, it would be regarded as a sustainable location where a low level of car parking provision would be considered acceptable, particularly having regard to the current limited provision on the site. Secure cycle parking would also be welcomed.

Low level halo illumination or external illumination of the proposed signage/town council logo would also be advocated.

Essex County Council's historic buildings and conservation officer would be consulted on any future application and I understand that the County also offer separate listed building and conservation pre-application advice. Essex County Council's Highways and Archaeology Services would also be consulted along with Basildon Council's Environmental Health Service, Arboricultural service and refuse service on a future application.

Opportunities for sustainable urban drainage systems and provision of renewable energy would also be welcomed in a future development scheme to minimise the surface water impact of the development and to improve the energy efficiency of the building. Designing out crime should also be considered, by avoiding non-overlooked or unlit areas, limiting opportunities for access to the roofs from ground level/avoiding graffiti etc. The Council's Environmental Health service may request that the site also be investigated for contamination depending on the previous uses and materials used on the site.

All applications are dealt with on their individual merits. This advice is given without prejudice to any formal determination of the Council on the matter.

I hope this information is of assistance.

Kind regards,

Gordon Humphries

**Gordon Humphries BA MA MRTPI**

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