

ONLINE CONSULTEE RESPONSE ON PLANNING APPLICATION 21/10938

Location	Former POLICE STATION, SOUTHAMPTON ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9GH
Received Date	11 August 2021
Comment Only received from	NFDC Conservation

I have visited site and reviewed the submitted information and plans. The proposal seeks to replace the existing Police Station which sits on a prominent corner site, adjacent to the Lymington Conservation Area along Southampton Road. The replacement building would occupy this corner plot with 4 and 3 storey elements and associated access and parking areas to the side and rear of the built form.

The Existing Site

The site is currently occupied by a well-designed mid-20th century police station of brick with framed windows and pitched pan tile roof. The structure is typical of the classically influenced police stations of this era most likely designed by the county architect of the time. It is a slim and elegant brick structure with a range of low outbuildings sitting to the rear. The former police house to the rear in Queen Elizabeth Avenue has historically been separated away from the existing station site.

The current site is occupied by a building I feel is of notable architectural merit which adds positively to the site and its context. Its narrow frontage form is a well-proportioned two storey height with increased first floor height and parapet roof detail. In general, the form and later additions are broken up across the site. The current building maintains a more open character to the front with space around and behind the building. The verdant edges of the site are quite important and assist with this positive response to the street.

The submitted heritage assessment concludes that this is a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) in line with previous advice given by the conservation team on this site. Its loss is regrettable and will need to be assessed against paragraph 203 (recently changed para number) of the NPPF in relation to non-designated heritage assets.

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

As the proposal is for total loss of the asset this sits at the highest end of the harm scale and as such the benefits of any scheme should be equally balanced.

Existing Context

The site lies directly on the edge of the Lymington Conservation Area. It is visible in views away from and into the conservation area. There are listed buildings seen in the context of the site along Southampton Road. The closest are 81-83 Southampton Road and there is another between 5-57 Southampton Road. They form a defined frontage set of terraces to the street along this western edge.

The character of the site is a changing one with a tighter grain along Southampton Road, Western Road and Middle Road. To the north and north east of the site the block arrangement loosens up and becomes more dispersed in terms of grain, plot layout and building size. This is illustrated in the Lymington Local Distinctiveness SPD (LLDSPD), with areas 1, 2 and 7 in close proximity. This character variation is evident along The Avenue, Queen Elizabeth Avenue and further north along Southampton Road. There are two larger building blocks in the immediate area. One is Buckland House immediately south of the proposal and Farringford Court on the opposite side of the street. These have some wider footprints and some significant scale and massing. While larger in form these structures are broken up with recessed gaps along the frontages. Additionally, these buildings have some significant and positive articulation and roof form which matches the form and layout of the architecture.

The surrounding architecture is generally residential in scale with runs of terraces interspersed with small and large individual dwellings. As far as the prevailing grain the plot depths are generally narrow with built form articulated well and a variety of interesting roof forms. As one moves away from the town centre along Southampton Road this part of the wider surrounding context becomes much more dispersed in its layout and grain.

In terms of identified designated and non-designated heritage assets there are a number in the locality. The Lymington Conservation Area boundary runs along the southern edge of the site and encompasses the length of terraces along Southampton Road. Here there are two groups of listed terraces at 81-83 Southampton Road and further along at 5-57. The unlisted terraces in this group are identified at 59-75 (odd numbers) and 85/87. While not listed their perceptible setting is the same as the listed terraces. The site sits within Character Area 1 of the Lymington Local Distinctiveness SPD

In terms of significance this part of the conservation area seeks to encompass this higher density element of the historic development along Southampton Road. The route itself remains one of the key historic entry points into the town. The conservation area defines the important architectural and historic form along this route making a definition between this and the later development to the east and the north. Outside the conservation area there is a mixture of massing and building arrangements which while including more suburban development has some larger structures also.

The Scheme

The proposal seeks a large retirement home with a deep form, large massing and wide planform. There is a large 4 storey block to the main frontage with the 4th storey set within a

faux mansard roof. This 4 storey element continues along the north elevation then dropping to 3 storey to the rear next to the former police house. An area of hardstanding parking and access route sit to the back of the site running off Queen Elizabeth Avenue.

Comments on the Proposal

The proposed scheme will be seen in views into and out of the conservation area and wider views of its built form and roof depth are gained from a number of points around the site. These will be from along Southampton Road, from the junction with Avenue Road and along Eastern Road. As set out this area has a prevailing local character, grain and built form which any new development should respond to.

The impacts along the main Southampton Road looking to the north will be negligible due to the set back and the mature frontage screening. When looking south into the conservation area the impact will be more noticeable and seen within the context of Buckland House and the terraces along Southampton Road. In addition, views from the rear across an open gap behind Buckland House from Eastern Road will also be impacted upon.

As submitted the proposal does not articulate the massing particularly successfully or make any attempt to try and mitigate its dominant bulk as has been achieved with Buckland House and Farringford Court. In terms of design and contextual response the combined issues of layout, footprint, bulk, massing and design of the development would, as submitted, create some harm to the prevailing character of the area and have a degree of impact on the setting and significance of the adjacent conservation area.

In terms of how this impact effects setting, it is felt that the wide depth of the structure, its massing and the boxy nature of the design are all issues which erode what could be a more contextually designed building. One would expect that in moving from a higher to a lower density character this building would also become more of a transition with greater attempts to articulate the frontage, create a more contextual roof form and reduce the perceived depth of the building.

The proposal has a much deeper planform than the prevailing grain and massing around it leading to overly wide built form, awkward roof arrangements and a more dominant building than the context in which it sits. This will be visible from the street and views gained into the site from around the adjacent streets. For example, the end elevations to the south and the west are visible from Eastern Road and Queen Elizabeth Avenue respectively. The scale and mass of the envisaged structure would impact on the balance of built form to space in the local area. It would change the character of the site from one with a recessive and architecturally attractive building to one which dominates the plot with a building of a non-contextual architectural appearance.

The architectural approach is disappointing with an elevational design stretched uncomfortably around an overly large form. The building elevations have been changed but it's unclear what design influence these are using and how this style of building has been arrived at. Rather than picking up on the more vertical window proportions from the local context the square openings do little to enhance the elevations. From the design and access statement

this appears to be a collection of building elements gathered together rather than a cohesively designed composition.

However, this building will be viewed in the context of other nearby buildings where they add to a more varied and built up nature. Larger buildings at Buckland House and Farringford Court have begun to erode the more suburban forms which occupied these plots previously. Additionally, these buildings have some quite deep plans. The context of Area 1 – Town Centre also sets out a character a higher density of building form within this area. These larger buildings also need to be read in the context of the proposal and to a degree have an influence on the character of the area and are noted within the LLDSPD.

The impacts upon the setting of the listed buildings along Southampton Road looking to the north will be negligible due to the set back of the proposal and the extant mature frontage screening. When looking south towards the listed buildings the impact will be more noticeable but the significance of the buildings setting as a terrace is unlikely to be affected to any great degree. As such there is felt to be little or no harm to the listed buildings however the impact on the grouping of buildings as part of the conservation area is felt to be greater.

The key areas of concern are the impacts of the building design in views from the north, the opposite side of the road and those gained from Eastern Road to the side and rear of the proposal. The first two views will have some limited mitigation with regard to the mature planting which will remain along the frontage of the scheme. The views from Eastern Road while important and having some significance would not be set out as key views. It is felt in light of these mitigating factors that the harm to significance would be at a lower level on this scale.

Some of this impact especially along the frontage could be mitigated by ensuring some changes to the proposal. I feel that the currently minimal breaks within the building frontage should be defined more clearly in the architecture/materiality. The roof form could introduce elements which formed better pitches even if these went a little higher to achieve this. Here the scheme could borrow from Farringford Court and how it seeks transition as it moves towards the more suburban housing. Alternatively, the depth element is one which might be better arranged within a more contemporary looking building where the current faux pitch would then not be required. This would mean the 4th storey could be better handled without being squeezed into a restrictive mansard. In a more contemporary form, the setting back of this upper floor would allow rooms to have small balcony elements and better natural light. The elevations overall could be enhanced with the use of more vertical proportions for windows and both end elevations would benefit from better articulation and proportional arrangement.

Summary

I could not support the proposed scheme as presented for the reasons given above. With regard to design issues, I have suggested some elevational and design changes could be considered to help mitigate the harm presented by the submitted proposals.

Impact on the Former Police Station

The loss of this building is regrettable and will need to be assessed against paragraph 203 (recently changed para number) of the NPPF in relation to non-designated heritage assets.

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

As the proposal is for total loss of the asset this sits at the highest end of the harm scale and as such the benefits of the scheme should be equally balanced.

Impacts on the listed buildings along Southampton Road

While there are some changes in longer views it is not felt that this causes any meaningful degree of harm to the setting of the listed buildings which forms part of their significance.

Impacts on the setting of the conservation area.

In its current form my judgement under the NPPF is a finding of less than substantial harm to the setting of the conservation area and its significance for the reasons given above. This said the northern and eastern surroundings of the site are varied and have other large developments within the context. The harm identified is, to a degree, mitigated a little by mature trees and lower when considered in light of the wider overall significance of the conservation area. I would therefore suggest that the harm is at the lower end of the scale and therefore suggest as set out in paragraph 202 of the NPPF, that 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.

Warren Lever

Senior Conservation and Building Design Officer