
APPLICATION NO.	P08/E0680
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL
REGISTERED	26.06.2008
PARISH	SONNING COMMON
WARD MEMBER(S)	Mr Paul Harrison Mr Alan Rooke
APPLICANT	Caring Homes Healthcare Group Limited
SITE	Abbeycrest Nursing Home Essex Way Kennylands Road Sonning Common
PROPOSAL	Erection of care home with 66 bedrooms and 5 suites, 6 staff rooms and 4 'close care' apartments.
AMENDMENTS	As amplified by plans and details accompanying letter from DWA dated 27 August 2008.
GRID REFERENCE	471265/179320
OFFICER	Mr M.Moore

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application is referred to Planning Committee because the recommendation conflicts with the views of the Sonning Common Parish Council.

2.0 THE SITE

- 2.1 The site, which is identified on the **attached** plan, lies to the south of the settlement of Sonning Common adjoining a large area of public open space to the south. This has been created recently and is known as the Millennium Field. To the north of the site is Essex Way which is a cul de sac, comprising mostly bungalows constructed in the 1970's in red brick and plain clay tile. These bungalows are controlled by planning restrictions requiring occupation by people in excess of 55 years of age. At the end of Essex Way is a care home. To the east of the site is an open area, which is linked visually to the Millennium Field, whilst to the west is a ribbon of properties of a variety of styles and ages.
- 2.2 The site is generally flat and has an area of some 0.85 hectares. At the Kennylands Road edge of the site, there are 4 fir trees in a group protected by a Tree Preservation Order. On the eastern side of the site there is a further group of trees also protected by a Tree Preservation Order.
- 2.3 On the site itself is a two storey building currently in use as a 24 bed nursing home. It was built in the 1960's as a boys' dormitory in association with the school which used to be on the site. Nearby there is a gym which was also part of the school although it is now a little distance away and any connection with the former use has gone. The existing nursing home is constructed in brick and white plastic shiplap boarding with a concrete tiled roof. This building is of very limited architectural merit.
- 2.4 Some clearance work has recently taken place and some of the site is presently enclosed by a temporary hoarding.

3.0 THE APPLICATION

- 3.1 The application proposes the demolition of all existing buildings on the site and their replacement with a 66 bed care home as a single building together with 5 suites and 6 staff rooms and the various dining rooms and lounges associated with such a building.

Copies of the site layout and principal elevations are **attached** to this report. This principal building would have a width of just under 14 metres and an overall length of some 75 metres. The roof would be a flat roof hidden behind a raised ridge.

- 3.2 Within the grounds there would be an additional 4 ‘close care’ units comprising two bed bungalows each having a footprint of some 68 sq.m. The application makes it clear that these units would be used in association with the care home on the site.
- 3.3 Access is proposed be taken off Essex Way to a staff car park and servicing area and an additional 11 car parking spaces for visitors to both the close care units and the principal care home. In addition there are 2 parking spaces for disabled drivers and an ambulance space.
- 3.4 A lengthy design and access statement was submitted with the application and a letter in support from the planning agent is **attached**.
- 3.5 As can be seen from the planning history below, planning permission was granted for a similar scheme in April this year. This scheme differs from the approved scheme in the following respects:

There is now no basement. The ‘lost’ accommodation is now contained within the roof space. The approved scheme had a double pitched roof. This has now been changed to be a flat roof hidden behind the pitched roof and ridge. The ‘crank’ of the building has been reduced to ensure that all building works are wholly contained within the area of land owned by the applicant.

4.0 **CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

- 4.1 Sonning Common Parish Council - Objection ‘building too large for the site. Insufficient allocation of parking spaces’.
- Letters of support (2) - They comment that there is a need for such accommodation and that there would be considerable visual improvement to the general area.
- OCC (Highways) - No objection subject to conditions.
- OCC (Developer Funding Officer) - Requires a contribution towards library provision.
- Forestry Officer - No objection. Requires tree protection measures.
- Environmental Health - No objection.
- Thames Water - Requires conditions.

- Neighbours (7) - Objection. Concerns are expressed about the prominence of the development to the edge of Sonning Common, over development, would extend the limits of development, there is no environmental assessment, concerns over traffic and parking, loss of privacy and some recognition of the improvements that this would bring but not sufficient to justify an approval.

5.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 5.1 As mentioned earlier in the report, planning permission was granted in the 1970's for the use of an existing boys' dormitory on the site as a care home for the elderly.
- 5.2 In 1999 (P98/S0247) planning permission was allowed at appeal for extensions and alterations to the existing nursing home to provide 63 bedroomed accommodation in the form of a care home to include the provision of a children's day nursery and a day centre for the elderly. That permission comprised some 1613 sq.m. of building and some 1262 sq.m. of hardstandings/parking areas. This would have resulted in a total site coverage of some 2875 sq.m. A subsequent application (P00/S0861) for a larger building was dismissed at appeal. The principal concern was the impact on the visual amenity of Kennylands Road.
- 5.3 In June 2006 (P06/E0262) an application for a 60 bed nursing home and 10 close care units was refused under delegated powers. A subsequent appeal was dismissed in April 2007 and a copy of the appeal decision is **attached**.
- 5.4 Following a visit to the site, Members granted planning permission in December 2006 (P06/E1038) for the demolition of the existing care home and the erection of a 65 bed care home with 7 staff rooms, various dining rooms and lounges and 4 'close care' units in the grounds.
- 5.5 In April this year, planning permission was granted (P07/E1599) for a care home with 66 bedrooms, 5 suites, 5 staff rooms and 4 close care units. Works started on implementing that permission. It became apparent that the applicant did not own all the land to which that application related. A 4m strip adjoining the millennium field was owned by the owners of the millennium field. Work stopped on site.
- 5.6 In order to assist, the following table provides a number of key measurements to allow comparison:

	Dismissed at appeal March 2007 P06/E0262	Approved December 2006 P06/E1038	Approved Scheme P07/E1599	Current Scheme
Length along Kennylands Road	34 m plus 3 m bay	25 m	27 m	27 m
Footprint of all buildings	2180 sq.m.	1769 sq.m.	1864 sq.m.	1835 sq.m.
Hardstandings/ car parks Access/footpaths	1779 sq.m.	1112 sq.m.	1023 sq.m.	1120 sq.m.
Total site coverage	3959 sq.m.	2881 sq.m.	2887 sq.m.	2955 sq.m.

6.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

6.1 The adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 Policies:

- G2 – Protect district from adverse development
- G4 – Protection of countryside
- G6 – Appropriateness of development to its site and surroundings
- D1 – Principles of good design
- D8 – Conservation and efficient use of energy
- D11 – Infrastructure and services secured
- C1 – Landscape character
- C9 – Loss of landscape features
- H6 – Restraint on new houses in the countryside
- H9 – Provision of affordable housing
- CF2 – Provision of additional community facilities
- E9 – Extensions to existing structures
- T1 – Transport requirements
- EP1 – Preventing polluting emissions
- EP3 – Light pollution
- EP4 – Protection of water resources

South Oxfordshire Design Guide

7.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

7.1 The main issues in this case are considered to be:

- i) Whether the principle of development is acceptable
- ii) Design particularly with reference to the impact on the area generally
- iii) Affordable housing
- iv) Traffic
- v) Impact on neighbours
- vi) Impact on trees
- vii) Sustainability
- viii) Provision of infrastructure
- ix) Ecology

i) Principle

7.2 The policies in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan, particularly G4 and E9 seek to restrict development which would extend the existing limits of built development. In this case the proposals are wholly contained within the existing curtilage of the nursing home currently on the site. Policy E9 does permit the extension of existing institutions in the countryside to meet operational requirements. In this case, although not an extension, officers consider that due regard must be paid to the existence of the present use of the site and to the extant planning permission (P06/E1038 and P07/E1599) which allows for a more intensive use of the site.

7.3 It has been demonstrated that there is a demand for this type of development. In addition, Policy CF2 of the Local Plan supports the provision of additional of community facilities provided there are no conflicts with other policies in the Local Plan.

7.4 In view of the planning history, the existence of a smaller nursing home already at the site, and to the identified need for these type of facilities, officers consider that the principle of a new care home is acceptable.

ii) Design

- 7.5 The site currently accommodates a care home. The existing building on the site at present is not attractive and indeed detracts from the area. The application proposal is for a substantial new building. Such homes tend to be substantial in size in order to make them economically viable, given the high standard of care which is required. In this case, the height has been reduced through the use of a cropped roof and the building has a number of features which are considered to reduce the bulk and massing of the building. It is cranked at its eastern end and there are a number of projections on each elevation which assist in articulating the considerable length. Where a previous Inspector dismissed an appeal (see history) for a large extension to the existing nursing home, his principal concern related to the impact on the Kennylands Road frontage. That scheme extended 23m along the frontage with Kennylands Road and removed the fir trees now protected with a TPO. The present scheme presents some 27m of building length but retains the principal TPO trees which means that the building will, to a large extent, be screened from public views from both Kennylands Road and Essex Way. New landscaping is also proposed on the junction of Essex Way with Kennylands Road. On the Millennium Field boundary, there are already some trees which were planted a little while ago by the Millennium Trust. However, at the moment that boundary is open and the building will be clearly visible in views from the Millennium Field. With the scale broken up in the manner described above, Officers consider that the impact on the visual amenities of the area would be less than the unimplemented scheme approved at appeal in 1999. The present scheme also has the benefit of removing in total the existing former boys' dormitory.

iii) Affordable Housing

- 7.6 The present scheme proposes a principal building comprising a care home falling within Class C2 of the Use Classes Order. Therefore, affordable housing is not required. The staff accommodation proposed is within the principal building and is ancillary to this principal use. The 'close care' units in the grounds would fall within Class C3 (residential). However, only 4 units are proposed which falls below the threshold for affordable housing.

iv) Traffic

- 7.7 It should be stressed, that the application seeks permission for a C2 use which comprises 'residential schools and colleges, hospitals and convalescent/nursing homes'. The occupiers/residents of the building will be requiring close care and will not be in a position to drive. Consequently, the parking spaces are required for visitor parking and staff only. The County Surveyor and Engineer has examined the current situation and does not object to the proposals.
- 7.8 There will be some service vehicles using the existing access but vision splays etc are entirely adequate for the type of use envisaged.

v) Impact on neighbours

- 7.9 The 4 close care units in the grounds will be a little closer to one property in Essex Way than the existing nursing home. However, it should be noted that they are single storey and Officers consider that the impact of the close care units on the residential amenity of occupiers' properties in Essex Way would not be significant. With the removal of the existing nursing home which is two storeys, the impact will, if anything, be reduced. With regard to the principal building on the site, it is some 46 metres away from the curtilage of the nearest property and officers consider that the impact is insufficient to justify a refusal of planning permission. That part of the building fronting Kennylands Road, will be a minimum of 14.5 metres back from the carriageway of

Kennylands Road and with the intervening screen of trees and bushes, there would be limited impact on the front of the properties of Kennylands Road, which would be a minimum of some 39 metres away.

vi) Trees

- 7.10 This proposal has been designed to keep the principal TPO trees on the site. There would be sufficient space around the trees to allow them to grow and form important focal features within the site. Officers consider that there is also sufficient space for delivery vehicles, construction compounds etc during the construction phase. Conditions will be required to ensure that the trees are safeguarded during this period.

vii) Sustainability

- 7.11 As can be seen from the statement **attached** to this report, there will be a variety of measures to ensure minimal energy consumption including the use of solar power which can be provided on lowered roofs. In addition, the applicants will be using grey water storage which again will be relatively straightforward given the hidden gutter. Such matters can, in this case, be covered through condition.

viii) Contributions

- 7.12 The County Council have requested contributions towards library provision and it is understood that by the time Members consider this application, a unilateral undertaking will be in place to make such provision. This report will be updated as necessary at the meeting.

ix) Ecology

- 7.13 There is a derelict air raid shelter in the south east corner of the site. However, the plans indicate no impact on it and the Countryside Officer has no objection.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The scheme dismissed at appeal in March 2007 (P06/E0262) is relevant in the consideration of this application. The Inspector dismissed the appeal principally because of the amount of site coverage and the loss of important trees. There was also an issue about affordable housing. As discussed above, this issue is not considered relevant to this application.
- 8.2 The building has been designed to reflect its location and use. It provides for private close care accommodation of which there is a known shortage in the district. Officers consider the scheme will improve the visual amenities of the area through new landscaping and the removal of the existing nursing home building on the site. Although on a smaller site than the approved scheme, officers consider that in practice the current proposal would appear very similar to the previous given the relationship to the public footpath which adjoins the site to the south. With appropriate conditions, the buildings will represent a more sustainable alternative to the existing and not result in an unneighbourly form of development.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 **That, subject to the prior completion of a unilateral undertaking to secure contributions towards adequate off-site library provision, planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Commencement date 3 years**
2. **Samples of all new materials**
3. **Details of brick wall**
4. **Landscaping scheme (to include details of retained planting)**
5. **Tree protection**

6. Use of the principal building as nursing home only
7. Close care units in association with care home only
8. Details of grey water harvesting, solar panels and other energy saving measures to be agreed. The scheme will include a pre-construction assessment of the close care units
9. Details of lighting scheme to be agreed
10. Contamination investigation
11. Limit hours of construction
12. Surface water drainage scheme
13. Remove permitted development re: fences
14. Demolish existing care home
15. Parking in accordance with approved plan
16. Provision of fire hydrant
17. Foul drainage scheme
18. Staff travel plan
19. Details of rainwater goods to be submitted

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