

West Malling **568175 158085** **21 August 2007** **TM/07/00294/FL**
West Malling And
Leybourne

Proposal: Extension to existing building to provide office and training
 accommodation
Location: 31 Town Hill West Malling Kent ME19 6QL
Applicant: St Johns Kent

1. Description:

- 1.1 The proposal is for an extension to the existing building to provide office and training accommodation for St Johns Kent (part of the St Johns Ambulance organisation) at 31 Town Hill, West Malling, resulting in the construction of a two storey 418sqm extension to the existing two storey 340sqm building. The proposed extension is two storeys with a pitched roof and dormers on the east and west roof slopes; and will contain 4 training rooms, offices, meeting rooms, storage, foyers, toilets and kitchenette facilities.
- 1.2 Car parking and the site layout will be reconfigured, resulting in a total of 29 formalised car parking spaces. Access to the site will remain via the sole access from Nevill Court.
- 1.3 The principal use of the current building is office space, with the site acting as the administrative centre for St Johns Kent. The site is also used for other associated activities including training, meetings and volunteer work. This proposal will intensify the use of the site as a training facility and office base.
- 1.4 At present a total of 17 full time equivalent staff use the site as their normal place of work, with up to 17 additional students/staff/volunteers involved in training and other activities on the site on a regular basis. The proposal will result in 27 full time equivalent staff using the site as their normal place of work. At full training capacity (consisting of 4 simultaneous courses on site at any one time involving trainers, students, assessors, and patients) an additional 68 people will be on site.
- 1.5 The normal hours of operation for the site are 9am – 5pm, with occasional training sessions and meetings occurring between 5pm – 10pm.
- 1.6 The applicant has provided an updated Travel Plan proposal/assessment which has been circulated for consultation and commented on.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The site is a corner site located on the north east junction of Town Hill and Nevill Court, with vehicle access to the site gained solely from a shared access to Nevill Court. A two storey building containing the existing St Johns Kent administrative and limited training facility exists on the site. Unmarked car parking exists to the

rear of the existing building, with a landscape/grassed strip running the length of the eastern boundary. The area to the front of the existing building is a car parking area that is outside the ownership of the applicant and serves office use in the building (Malling Place) opposite – this area does not form part of the application site.

- 2.2 The site is relatively flat, however the site sits considerably higher than the sloping (downhill from south to north) Town Hill - approximately 2.5m above the level of Town Hill at Section A-A as shown on plan 267.05/B.007 submitted by the applicant. A retaining wall is located within the site with an approximately 5m high brick wall bounding Town Hill screening the site from the road. The topography of the adjoining area slopes up to the east/south of the site, and down to the west/north of the site.
- 2.3 Adjoining the site to the east are the Nevill Court retirement dwellings with the rear elevation of several two storey dwellings and associated access and parking area immediately adjoining the boundary of the site; to the south is the Grade II Listed Building Malling Place (office use); to the west is Town Hill with residential properties facing the site; and to the north is undeveloped woodland.
- 2.4 The site is located within the confines of West Malling, a Rural Service Centre, and the Conservation Area.

3. Planning History:

TM/90/11572/OUT Refuse 13 June 1990

Outline application for two storey offices with parking and access.

TM/92/00939/OA Grant with conditions 24 March 1993

Outline application for two detached dwellings and garages

TM/97/01487/FL Grant With Conditions 31 October 1997

Single storey extension and alterations to existing office premises with associated car parking

TM/97/01905/ORM No Objection 7 January 1998

Alterations to design submitted pursuant to permission TM/97/1487/FL

4. Consultees:

4.1 PC: Objection in part. Members had no objection to the proposal in principle but do object because of the lack of adequate parking provision. It was felt that training courses of the nature proposed would inevitably attract additional vehicular traffic for which no provision seems to be made on site, and which certainly cannot be accommodated within West Malling itself. Members would hope that the applicant may put forward alternative proposals to address these issues. Furthermore, members would object to any construction traffic accessing the site from West Malling centre, which was likely to be the case. Members were aware of the concerns of some residents of Nevill Court to the difficult access which would particularly be the case for any construction traffic.

4.1.1 Following the submission of a Travel Plan the PC commented further as follows: The Travel Plan as submitted encourages car sharing, cycling, use of public transport, etc, all of which Members support. However, the PC has been notified by the Arriva bus company that the bus services referred to in the Travel Plan will no longer travel along Town Hill and indeed we understand that the 76 service is to be withdrawn completely. As the proposal refers to 85 trainees being on site at any one time, this would suggest that, with the inclusion of tutors and support staff, there may potentially be approximately 50 vehicles a day using the site. Members have expressed concern about additional traffic both during construction and once the facility is in use. Members appreciate that steps are being taken to address concerns but do not feel that this has been entirely achieved.

4.1.2 Following submission of the updated Travel Plan proposal the PC commented as follows: Whilst supporting the objectives set out in the Travel Plan, members nonetheless feel that account must be taken of the fact that the bus routes serving Town Hill have been considerably reduced. Members would like to be kept informed of the monitoring of the Travel Plan.

4.2 KCC (Highways): On balance, support. The existing total floor area is stated at 340sqm. This is made up of mainly office with one room shown to accommodate meetings and training. Taking it all as offices this could attract the provision of 17 off street parking spaces. The site is currently served by an open area of parking that the applicant says can accommodate 25 vehicles. I am not aware of any adverse highway issues associated with the existing arrangements.

4.2.1 The proposal provides for an extension of some 418sq m, more than doubling the floor area. This extension is to accommodate mainly offices and four training rooms. I assess that the office element is in the order of 250sq m and could attract a provision of 13 spaces. KVPS is not prescriptive for training rooms. Class D1 does not specifically mention training rooms. Based on the number of students and staff using the room at any one time I would find the provision of 4 spaces per room acceptable i.e. $4 \times 4 = 16$. This results in a total parking requirement of 29 spaces.

- 4.2.2 My assessment is therefore a total of $17 + 29 = 46$ spaces. The applicant's assessment is close to this at 43 spaces. The applicant has submitted a plan, number 267.05/B.005 Rev 2, showing a layout of a total of 29 spaces including two disabled bays, a shortfall, on my assessment, of 17 spaces.
- 4.2.3 This significant shortfall does raise concerns. Without an adequate level of off street parking provision, this may lead to unacceptable parking in Nevill Court or result in circulating manoeuvres on the public highway with drivers looking for parking. There is a long stay car park in close proximity, however it is already over subscribed with no spare capacity.
- 4.2.4 Although the current ethos is to reduce car dependency this does depend on viable alternatives being available. The success of this proposal relies heavily on the use of alternative modes of transport or the likes of car sharing to offset the shortfall in parking. The site is located close to the centre of West Malling and the opportunities for using other modes of transport and the applicant is proposing some initiatives to promote a reduction in car use. However, the incentives are stated to be 'under consideration', nothing in concrete. I am of the opinion that the proposed Travel Plan is not suitably advanced to consider it. I understand that travel arrangements are dependant on where the clients are coming from but I think that the Travel Plan needs more consideration and detail before making final comment.
- 4.2.4 Following submission of the updated Travel Plan proposal, Kent Highways comment further as follows: Revised travel plan submitted, states that the amended car parking layout includes four additional spaces, including two disabled spaces. However, drawing no. 267.05/B005 rev. 2 seems to be the same as the previous plan. Therefore, confirmation of the additional spaces to be provided before final comment.
- 4.2.5 The travel plan generally covers the overall concept suggesting the provision/use of alternative transport options. However, this may not always be appropriate and could be difficult to enforce/maintain. The applicant to be advised to liaise with TMBC who manage the local on street and off street parking regime for advice. The applicant is also to be advised to have the structural integrity of the boundary wall checked as it is unlikely it was originally designed for the proposed use.
- 4.2.6 On balance I would raise no objections, subject to confirmation of the additional parking.
- 4.3 KCC (Highways) – Travel Planning Team: It should be noted that the comments below relate only to the content of the Travel Plan and should not prejudice any other responses from KHS re wider traffic/transportation issues.
- 4.3.1 Generally speaking, this 'framework' plan provides a good base to take the Travel Plan forward. Most of the key building blocks are in place, including key aspects like the appointment of a Travel Plan Co-ordinator to drive initiatives. It is

encouraging to see acknowledgement that the development of the final plan will be an iterative process involving further consultation with TMBC and KHS. As it stands however, the plan reads as a bit of a 'tick box' exercise with no explicit commitment on behalf of the applicant to deliver.

4.3.2 Section 2.8 Targets – These are very vague and generic and, whilst acknowledging that the exact nature and scale of activities on the site are as yet unknown, it would be desirable to see some projected quantitative targets. These should be based on the estimated trip generation in any accompanying Transport Statement or Transport Assessment. The Travel Plan should be integral to the Transport Assessment and is effectively the delivery mechanism by which the agreed trip rates are to be achieved. The consultant should be able to advise the applicant as to the likely reduction in car trips which might be achievable following the successful implementation of the various proposed initiatives.

4.3.3 Section 3.8 Car sharing – It would be desirable to promote Kentcarshare.com as the method for taking forward any planned car sharing schemes and promotion.

4.3.4 Section 7 Recommendations – The main problem with this section is that it reads as a consultants report aimed at St John Ambulance, rather than a document owned by the applicant and a statement of committed aims and objectives. This section needs to be reworked so that it reads as a clear statement of objectives and intentions, together with a conclusion setting out the commitment of the applicant to deliver against them. There should also be a table setting out a clear programme for delivery, i.e. taking the various targets and initiatives proposed and setting out timescales for delivery, ownership and responsibility.

4.3.5 Monitoring and enforcement – In this case, it sounds as if appropriate clauses should be included to ensure that the Travel Plan remains binding for all future occupiers. KHS would be glad to advise both TMBC and the Travel Plan Co-ordinator as the site develops, with ownership of the Travel Plan, as an integral part of the sustainable development of the site, remaining with the LPA.

4.4 DHH: No objection.

4.5 Private reps: (19/OX/47R/0S + Art 8). Responses in objection include 3 responses 'objection in part', and 2 petition responses with 8 and 38 signatories. It is noted that some consultees have submitted more than one letter via the petitions and their own letters, and through the re-consultation process on the travel plan.

4.5.1 Points raised in objection as follows:

- Large size of the proposed extension, inappropriate adjacent to residential development and detrimental to the character of the area.

- Adverse effect on the Conservation Area – large modern building will detract from the Conservation Area.
- The current building has already been significantly increased in size.
- Proposal will result in overdevelopment of the site.
- Loss of privacy and increased overlooking to adjoining residential properties on both Nevill Court and Town Hill.
- Proposal will restrict views of the North Downs from adjoining properties.
- Proposed building will dominate outlook from adjoining Nevill Court properties.
- Devaluation of adjoining properties.
- Increase in staff/visitors on site will increase noise levels and disturbance to adjoining residents.
- Construction noise and traffic will reduce amenity of neighbours.
- Access unsuitable for construction traffic – safety and disturbance issues.
- Increased traffic and use of Nevill Court will impact on the safety of elderly residents.
- Increased stress to elderly residents.
- Use of the site for intensified office and training facilities is inappropriate in a residential environment.
- Location of a business of this size should be in a business area such as Kings Hill.
- Application states that there will be an increase in the training courses run on the site.
- Hours of operation including late nights and weekends will result in disturbance and further loss of privacy to adjoining residents.
- Hours of operation including late nights and weekends will further impede traffic problems experienced by residents in West Malling.
- Possible lightspill to adjoining properties from late night activities on the site.
- On-site parking provision is inadequate.

- Proposal will compound existing acute traffic congestion in West Malling, and particularly within Town Hill/Nevill Court.
- Proposal will compound existing acute parking shortage in West Malling, and particularly within Town Hill/Nevill Court.
- Parking overflow from the proposal/application site will be in congested area of Nevill Court/Town Hill where it is important for emergency/health care access to be maintained.
- Nevill Court/Town Hill intersection is a traffic hazard due to poor sightlines and the imposed speed limits and weight limits being ignored. Proposal will exacerbate traffic hazards particularly as many visitors to the site will not know the area and be looking for parking spaces etc.
- Alternative transport methods identified in the Travel Plan are unrealistic, impractical and unlikely to be achieved as they are recommendations that can only be *encouraged* rather than required/enforced. A company 'Park and Ride' is only being *considered*.
- Car sharing, bus services and train connections are not always possible or timely when people come from all over Kent.
- Travel Plan will not be implemented until 3 months after the completion of development on the site.
- The travel plan now presented in greater detail is comprehensive, interesting and challenging but is unrealistic and over optimistic in view of current public transport provision in the area and people's transport needs and habits. The plan is detailed in its strategies to get people out of their cars and it is to be commended for these but, in our view, it remains irrelevant to this application.
- The travel plan concludes with three types of recommendations: those that the applicants might be required to implement as part of any planning consent; those that the applicants might incorporate into the management of their site and personnel; and those that would attempt to compel the users of the site not to travel by private car or park on site – which will only exacerbate the acute parking problems in the immediate vicinity. There is little sanction for the recommendations to be followed.
- The revised travel plan consists of a set of promises which although praiseworthy may not be achieved. Neither does it address the other concerns raised by the original application, and only limited concern for the residents of Nevill Court.

- It seems clear that the requirements of this site have outgrown its capabilities. With the availability of Kings Hill and other business sites in the area, the Council should be encouraging the applicant to move to a more suitable location.
- The revised plan does not address the concerns over future increased parking issues. Realistically the car culture is here to stay and once the problems start to occur, it will only add to the existing parking issues present in West Malling.
- What will be the Council's response should the travel plan objectives not succeed? Would the Council have the building un-developed if it had accepted the plan on a promise to try and reduce traffic and parking?

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 The application site is located within the Rural Service Centre confines of West Malling where employment development is generally permitted under the terms of policy CP12 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Core Strategy 2007. Accordingly, the proposed development is deemed acceptable in principle, subject to fulfilling the requirements of other relevant policies.
- 5.2 Therefore, the key issues relating to this proposal are whether the proposal will be detrimental to the amenities of adjoining residents/properties, the character and amenity of the area and the safety and functioning of the traffic environment.
- 5.3 The proposed extension will result in a significant 418sqm increase in built form on the site; more than double what currently exists. Although this is a significant increase, I consider that the two storey form of the building is relatively modest in its scale and bulk. I note that the ridgeline of the extension is approximately 7.3m in height, approximately 400mm lower than the ridgeline of the existing building. The majority of the first floor is located within the pitched roofline of the building, utilising dormers, and thus minimising the potential bulk of the building. In my opinion, the proposal will not result in undue visual dominance or outlook effects on adjoining sites due to the design of the building and its location central to the site away from neighbouring boundaries.
- 5.4 With regard to the window-to-window separation between the extension and adjoining residential properties in Nevill Court, I note that a separation distance of 21m is maintained. Furthermore, it is noted that on the Nevill Court properties to the east, immediately adjoining the common boundary with the application site, is a shared access and car parking area, with the rear elevations of the residential units beyond. Although the application site sits higher than adjoining properties to the west on Town Hill, I consider that the proposal will not result in undue overlooking to these properties due to the change in level to Town Hill and the setback of the extension from the western site boundary. For these reasons, I consider that the proposal will not result in undue loss of privacy or overlooking effects to adjoining residential properties.

- 5.5 The application site is located within the West Malling CA and thus any development on the site must preserve or enhance the character and amenity of the area in accordance with PPG15 and policy QL6 of the KMSP 2006. As discussed above, the proposed extension is large, however it has been designed to minimise bulk and incorporates materials and features common on residential properties such as dormers. I note that the surrounding area is characterised by high density residential and commercial development and I consider that an increase in density within the application site is not out of character with the area. The siting of the building away from site boundaries, particularly the Town Hill wall adjacent to the western boundary of the site which is a feature of the CA and also serves to screen the application site, preserves the character of the area. Accordingly, I consider that the proposal is acceptable in these terms.
- 5.6 The proposal will result in an increase in the number of staff and visitors on the site, which has the potential to adversely affect the amenity of nearby neighbours through an increase in noise and disturbance associated with arrival/departure to the site. It is noted that a similar amount of car parking to that existing is to be provided on the site, and thus it is reasonable to assume that a similar level of noise/disturbance will be generated as a result of cars arriving/departing the site. The applicant has stated that the key hours of operation for the site are 9am – 5pm weekdays, with some training courses and meetings occurring on occasion from 5pm – 10pm and at weekends. Accordingly, the proposal may adversely affect the amenity of nearby residents outside of normal business hours. However, DHH has assessed the proposal and raise no objections on noise grounds.
- 5.7 Kent Highways has assessed the parking and traffic impacts of the application and note that a total of 46 parking spaces could be required on the site based on KVPS; consisting of 17 spaces required for the existing operations and an additional 29 spaces for the proposed office and training facility extension. 29 parking spaces are to be provided on the site which results in an on-site parking shortfall of 17 spaces. Without an adequate level of off street parking the proposal may lead to an increased overflow parking pressure on the West Malling parking facilities generally, and more locally with Neville Court, or result in circulating manoeuvres on the public highway as drivers look for parking spaces.
- 5.8 In line with sustainable transport principles, PPG 13: Transport, policy TP3 of the KMSP 2006 and policy CP2 of the TMBCS 2007, the use of alternative methods of transport and the appropriate siting of development in existing centres should aim to reduce car dependency. The applicant has provided a Travel Plan which encourages and recommends staff and visitors to adopt alternative means of transport to the site, utilising West Malling's good rail, bus, cycle and pedestrian links.
- 5.9 In consideration of the practicality of methods of alternative transport to the site it is important to note the characteristics of likely groups of visitors and the nature of

activities on the site. The applicant has stated that approximately 27 full time equivalent staff will be based at the site with additional assessors, patients and volunteers involved in the training activities. At full capacity, 4 training rooms containing up to 12 students per room will be run simultaneously. The nature of training courses is that participants may visit the site once; or repetitively over a relatively small number of days. Combined with the fact that visitors to the site will come from all over Kent and may not be familiar with the area, and transport links may not be available or timely for all participants, the likelihood is that car dependency, and accordingly parking demand, will remain high.

- 5.10 With regard to the parking shortfall and likely impacts on the traffic environment, Kent Highways conclude that the proposals in the Travel Plan assessment can overcome the parking shortfall and therefore, on balance, the application can be supported.
- 5.11 The Kent Highways Travel Planning team has also assessed the Travel Plan framework/assessment provided with the application. It has been concluded that the information provided generally meets the framework requirements for the formulation of a final Travel Plan document, but recommended that further consultation and liaison take place between the applicant/site occupier and Kent Highways and TMBC to determine the final document.
- 5.12 Conditions can be imposed to ensure that the final detail of the document is approved by TMBC in liaison with Kent Highway Services, who are able to provide specialist advice on this issue, and that a programme for monitoring and enforcement of the plan is confirmed. A further condition requiring any future occupiers of the site to prepare and submit a Travel Plan is also recommended, should the proposed use of the site by St John not continue at some time in the future.
- 5.12 As discussed above, the principle of development on the site is generally acceptable given the existing use of the site and its Rural Service Centre location. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposal will not result in any adverse effects on the amenity of adjoining neighbours or the CA relating to scale, bulk, visual dominance, outlook, privacy or character. In keeping with sustainable development/transport principles the applicant has provided a travel plan outlining alternative means of transport and methods of promotion and implementation of the travel plan. However, on balance, the parking shortfall of 17 spaces and its associated impacts on the traffic environment of West Malling can be sufficiently overcome by the proposals in the travel plan.

6. Recommendation:

6.1 **Grant Planning Permission** as detailed in the following submitted details: Transport Assessment dated 29.01.2007, Letter TON/24/CS dated 29.01.2007, Location Plan dated 29.01.2007, Design and Access Statement TON/24/CS dated 29.01.2007, Floor Plan 267.05.B.001 0 dated 29.01.2007, Floor Plan 267.05/B/002 2 dated 29.01.2007, Elevations 267.05/B.003 2 dated 29.01.2007, Elevations 267.05/B.004 2 dated 29.01.2007, Block Plan 267.05/B.005 2 dated 29.01.2007, Letter TON/24/CS dated 21.08.2007, Section 267.05/B.007 0 dated 21.08.2007, Travel Plan Framework dated 17.03.2008 subject to compliance with the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2. All materials used externally shall accord with the approved plans, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the development does not harm the character and appearance of the existing building or visual amenity of the locality.

3. The use shall not be commenced, nor the premises occupied, until the area shown on the submitted layout as vehicle parking space has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking or re-enacting that Order) shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved parking space.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate accommodation for the parking of vehicles is likely to lead to hazardous on-street parking.

4. No building shall be occupied until the area shown on the submitted plan as turning area has been provided, surfaced and drained. Thereafter it shall be kept available for such use and no permanent development, whether or not permitted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (or any order amending, revoking and re-enacting that Order), shall be carried out on the land so shown or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved turning area.

Reason: Development without provision of adequate turning facilities is likely to give rise to hazardous conditions in the public highway.

5. No development shall be commenced until a Travel Plan has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority that is acceptable to the Local Planning Authority and the Transport Authority.

The Travel Plan shall include:

- (a) A clear statement of targets, including clear quantitative targets, and objectives.
- (b) An assessment of existing transport infrastructure and facilities serving the site or 'site audit'.
- (c) An assessment of the travel needs that will be generated by the site.
- (d) A programme of measures which will improve accessibility, promote sustainable travel options and reduce traffic impact. These should include the appointment of an individual to act as Travel Plan Co-ordinator, who must have the full support of the site management and will be responsible for the implementation of the travel plan.
- (e) A programme for implementation of the Travel Plan, giving details of the dates by which the various measures will be put in place, who will be responsible for the various actions and how funding will be provided.
- (f) Details of a regime to monitor the success of the Travel Plan in meeting the stipulated targets (including the timescales and responsibility for such monitoring), and provisions to modify or develop the Plan in the future if this is necessary to achieve its targets.

The Travel Plan shall be implemented in accordance with the approved timetabled programme and monitoring arrangements. If the Plan requires measures to be in place prior to the building being occupied, the building shall not be occupied until those measures are in place.

Reason: Development without provision of a Travel Plan will be detrimental to the local traffic and parking environment and the amenity of nearby residents.

6. Should the proposed occupation of the site by St John cease, any subsequent proposed occupiers shall submit a Travel Plan to the Local Planning Authority for approval prior to any change in occupation taking place. Any such Travel Plan shall include the requirements set out in Condition 5, and shall be subject to like requirements, including those relating to the timing of implementation, and monitoring.

Reason: Development without provision of a Travel Plan will be detrimental to the local traffic and parking environment and the amenity of nearby residents.

Contact: Kathryn Stapleton