
Proposal:	Outline Application: Demolition of existing pair of semi-detached dwellings and construction of 6 no. 1 bed apartments, 12 no. 2 bed houses and 4 no. 3 bed houses
Location:	56 and 57 Rectory Lane Netherton
Applicant:	Executors of Mr A Resident

1. Description:

- 1.1 This application is in outline form with all matters other than means of access and siting reserved for future consideration. The submitted plans show that the 6 apartments would be located within a two-storey building towards the front of the site, just forward of the front elevation of the existing dwellings within this site. The terraced housing would be arranged in three blocks of four houses, one would be to the rear of the apartment block and the other two would be located at the southern end of the site broadly aligned with the existing houses on the adjacent land to the east. Two pairs of semi detached houses would be located within the central part of the site. A site plan showing an indicative layout is attached.
- 1.2 The application includes the creation of a new road junction onto Rectory Lane that would incorporate improvements to the existing footway on this side of the road, which is currently substandard in width. 25 dedicated car parking spaces would be provided to serve this development.
- 1.3 The site area measures 0.45 hectares (ha) and 22 units are proposed. The net density of the proposed development is therefore 48 units per ha.

2. The Site:

- 2.1 The site lies within the urban area confines, on the south side of Rectory Lane. The site is long and narrow, measuring between 23-30m in width and approx. 160m in length. It is currently occupied by a pair of semi-detached, late nineteenth Century houses, located close to the road frontage and having long rear gardens.
- 2.2 To the east lies an estate of terraced and semi-detached housing developed by the former Urban District Council in the 1950s. To the west, on slightly higher ground, lies an area of low density housing, comprising mainly Edwardian villas, many of which sit in substantial grounds with mature landscaping. To the south are the playing fields for the Secondary School, this land lying outside the urban confines.
- 2.3 The site is situated about half a mile from the Town Centre, with its main line railway station and a full range of retail and leisure facilities. Rectory Lane itself is a 'B' classified secondary distributor road. The Secondary School and Youth Centre are about 400m to the east of the application site.

3. Planning History:

3.1 None directly relevant.

4. Consultees:

4.1 Highway Authority:

- Welcomes the footway improvements on Rectory Lane, especially as this is a popular pedestrian route used by large numbers of pupils attending the nearby school.
- With these improvements, the junction onto Rectory Lane is acceptable in highway terms and no problem is perceived in relation to the levels of traffic generation.
- The parking provision complies with the nationally advocated maximum of 1.5 spaces per dwelling, but falls short of the total that might be permissible under this policy. Nevertheless, there are clear opportunities for providing additional informal parking within the development, over and above the spaces formally identified, and there should be no spill-over of parking outside the site, because of parking restrictions on the main road.

4.2 Environmental Health Officer:

The environmental health issue raised by this application is road traffic noise.

The apartment building at the front of the site falls into Noise Exposure Category 'C' for both day- and night-time due to road traffic noise. In accordance with Local Plan Policy P3/17, planning permission should not normally be granted in these circumstances. However, I recognise that the existing dwellings also suffer from this and it should be possible to achieve a satisfactory internal noise climate for the proposed apartments, if this issue is taken into account when the detailed design is drawn up.

If, in balancing the various planning issues, you are minded to support the grant of planning permission, I recommend that a suitable worded condition be used to minimise the degree of detriment to aural amenity.

4.3 Chief Leisure Officer:

As the development exceeds the 0.4ha threshold, provision should be made for Open Playing Space (OPS), under Policy P8/2 of the Local Plan.

The level of on-site OPS provision should be 60 m² per dwelling and, therefore, for a development of 18 units this would equate to 1,080 m².

It appears at present that the layout currently shows only one area of amenity space, surrounding the flats to the front of the development. Due to the nature of this it is considered inappropriate to qualify as OPS as it is not conducive to children's play or organised outdoor sport. The issue of OPS will, therefore, need to be addressed by the applicant.

If it is impractical/inappropriate to provide OPS on the development itself, then alternative means of provision will be considered to offer the equivalent benefit. This should be in the form of a contribution toward the provision or improvement of off-site facilities.

4.4 KCC (Education and Community Facilities Contributions):

The development as proposed would create the demand for extra primary and secondary school places. At present, the additional requirement for the primary places can be accommodated within local schools, however, the secondary places cannot.

A need has also been identified for contribution towards Libraries and Youth & Community facilities.

4.5 Private Representations:

Twelve letters have been received from local residents as a result of direct consultation and newspaper and site notices. These letters raise objections to the application on the following grounds:

- The proposal would generate additional traffic movements on Rectory Lane, which is already very busy and would, therefore, be hazardous to highway and pedestrian safety.
- The applicant fails to recognise that twice a day a significant number of children pass the frontage of the site as they walk to both primary and secondary schools.
- Too many houses are proposed on this long, thin site and this cannot fail to have an adverse impact on the pleasant ambience, of the high quality of the character of the residential area to the west.
- In recent years this part of the town has seen a significant increase in housing density with a number of housing schemes being approved. Such incremental increases slowly put a strain on the local infrastructure, both physical and social.
- Concern about massing of the development and close proximity to adjacent dwellings which would result in loss of privacy.

- The whole scheme falls short of the Government target of 1.5 parking spaces per dwelling. Any mitigating circumstances must bear in mind that cars cannot be parked other than on the site itself (there is no other off road parking available).
- The proposed use of the site lacks imagination with no benefit to the community as a whole.

5. Determining Issues:

- 5.1 The main issues raised by this application are the principle of the scale and density of residential development proposed, whether the layout is acceptable in terms of its impact on the character of the area and immediately adjoining residents, highway safety and parking issues, and the appropriateness of any developer contributions.
- 5.2 Turning first to the issue of principle, the site is previously developed land lying within the urban boundary as identified in the Local Plan and within relatively easy walking distance of the town centre. In the broadest of terms, there can be no objection to residential development on this site. Current Government guidance with regard to housing development is contained within Planning Policy Statement 3: (PPS3) Housing. The Government's objectives towards housing aim to:
- Provide wider housing opportunity and choice and a better mix in the size, type and location of housing than is currently available.
 - Provide sufficient housing land but give priority to re-using previously developed land within urban areas, in preference to the development of green field sites.
 - Create more sustainable patterns of development by building in ways which exploit and deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education and health facilities, shopping, leisure and local services.
 - Make more efficient use of land.
- 5.3 The site is located close to the town centre and a number of regular bus routes pass the site on Rectory Lane. It is also close to a range of existing community facilities, including primary and secondary schools.
- 5.4 The site is surrounded by existing residential development on all sides, apart from its narrow, southern boundary. When seen from the road frontage, the existing houses on the site relate in visual terms to neither the former Council housing estate to the east, nor the lower density residential area to the west. Within the site, its openness gives it more affinity with the land to the west, but it does not possess the same quality of mature landscaping, having in the most part been used for vegetable production prior to more recent neglect.

- 5.5 The proposal would have a density of 48 dwellings to the hectare, which is toward the upper end of the range expected by Government. The proposal, whilst in outline form, is for a mixture of 1 bedroom flats, 2 and 3 bedroom houses. In light of this, I consider that in terms of the proposed density and overall amount of development, the proposal meets the Government's objectives concerning housing provision and is therefore acceptable in principle.
- 5.6 Turning to the more local impacts of the proposed development, the layout proposed is not particularly imaginative but opportunities to improve upon this are, to a large extent, constrained by the shape of the site itself. Notwithstanding this issue, the layout does not give the impression of being unduly cramped, there being reasonably sized gardens for the proposed houses. The layout has been designed taking account of the position and orientation of houses on the adjoining land to both east and west, and there should be no unacceptably adverse impact in terms of loss of privacy, overlooking or loss of light. There will inevitably be some impact on the outlook from existing dwellings, particularly those to the east which are, by and large, situated closer to the common boundary. However, this is not such as to justify refusal, in my opinion. Any impact on outlook from the houses to the west will be mitigated by the substantial landscaping that exists within the gardens there.
- 5.7 Some residents have submitted that the layout and density of the proposal will have a detrimental effect on the 'special' character of the area, particularly to the west of the site. Whilst PPS3 does give the opportunity for such matters to be taken into account it must be supported by clear evidence that there will be a real noticeable impact on the area as a whole and that is considerable doubt that this can be practically demonstrated.
- 5.8 A major concern of local residents regarding this development relates to highway and pedestrian safety. Rectory Lane is a busy secondary distributor road and other road junctions are located in close proximity to the site. The footway on the south side of the road that passes in front of the site is a major thoroughfare for local residents to access the town centre and the local primary and secondary schools. However, the Highway Authority is satisfied that no major problems will arise as a result of the additional traffic generated by this development, and the proposal to widen the footway across the site frontage will not only ensure that adequate sight lines are secured, but will also bring a positive benefit in pedestrian safety terms, a benefit that might be difficult to achieve in the absence of a redevelopment of this site.
- 5.9 With regard to car parking, I note the local concerns that the development has insufficient car parking provision. However, under PPS 3, the standard of 1.5 car parking spaces per dwelling is the **maximum** number that should be provided, not the minimum. In this instance, the 22 dwellings would be served by 25 car parking spaces, in accordance with current Government advice. The site is on regular bus routes and within easy walking distance of many facilities, including primary and

secondary schools. In light of these factors and that the Highway Authority has not objected to the proposed car parking provision in this instance, I consider the parking arrangements to be acceptable.

- 5.10 Due to the size of the site (0.45ha) it is subject to local plan policy P8/2, which relates to the provision of open play space within residential developments. Normally, the open play space would be provided within the confines of the site area. However, the policy also states that where this would be impracticable or inappropriate due to site characteristics or the nature of the development, the Borough Council will consider alternative means of provision by the developer where this is of equivalent benefit to the provision of open playing space within the site. In this particular case, the site area is only marginally larger than the 0.4 ha threshold and, as has been stated above, is very long and narrow in shape. Consequently due to the particular characteristics of this site, it would not be practical to require the physical provision of open play space within this site. It is therefore appropriate to seek a financial contribution to the improvement of play facilities locally, and a number of small schemes have been identified that it would be appropriate to support in this way.
- 5.11 Members will note that the County Council is seeking contributions towards the provision of secondary school places, and youth and community facilities. I am satisfied that the evidence presented by the County Council justifies the secondary school contribution. However, no specific schemes have been identified that the youth and community contribution could be put towards and, in the light of the fact that the recently constructed nearby Youth Centre was fully funded by Government, lottery and European funds, I can see no justification for supporting this request.
- 5.12 In light of the above, I believe this scheme to be acceptable in planning terms subject to the applicant entering into a legal agreement concerning the proposed alterations to the public highway and a financial contribution towards improving local playing space facilities and the provision of secondary school places.

6. Recommendation:

- 6.1 **Grant Planning Permission** subject to the applicant entering into a Section 106 legal agreement, and a comprehensive range of appropriate conditions.