

4.3 – SE/14/01561/FUL Date expired 28 July 2014

PROPOSAL: Planning permission for demolition of existing buildings and structures in a conservation area.

LOCATION: Wildernesse House, Wildernesse Avenue, Sevenoaks  
TN15 0EB

WARD(S): Seal & Weald

### **ITEM FOR DECISION**

This application has been referred to the Development Control Committee at the request of Councillor Hogarth who is of the view that the proposal should be considered in conjunction with planning application SE/14/01562/OUT so that the development can be considered as a whole.

RECOMMENDATION: That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions:-

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

In pursuance of section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: 5433/P/001 and A2111-A-ZO-(00) P101.

For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

3) The demolition hereby permitted shall not be undertaken before a contract for the carrying out of the works of redevelopment of the site has been made and planning permission has been granted for the redevelopment for which the contract provides.

To ensure that the demolition is carried out as a continuous operation with the redevelopment of the site in the interests of visual amenity.

### **Note to Applicant**

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the NPPF Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals. SDC works with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner, by;

- Offering a duty officer service to provide initial planning advice,
- Providing a pre-application advice service,
- When appropriate, updating applicants/agents of any small scale issues that may arise in the processing of their application,
- Where possible and appropriate suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome,
- Allowing applicants to keep up to date with their application and viewing all consultees comments on line

([www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/environment/planning/planning\\_services\\_online/654.asp](http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/environment/planning/planning_services_online/654.asp)),

- By providing a regular forum for planning agents,
- Working in line with the NPPF to encourage developments that improve the improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area,
- Providing easy on line access to planning policies and guidance, and
- Encouraging them to seek professional advice whenever appropriate.

In this instance the applicant/agent:

- 1) Was provided with pre-application advice.
- 2) Was updated on the progress of the planning application.

### Description of Proposal

- 1 The application seeks the approval of the demolition of a number of existing buildings and structures serving the former Dorton House site within the Wildernesse Conservation Area. These include the buildings to the north of the main house, and the former school building, former nursery and dwellings to the south of the main house as well as the cottage buildings to the west. The structures to be removed also relate to the former educational use of the site.

### Description of Site

- 2 Wildernesse House is a large Grade II Listed Building set within landscaped grounds and gardens of the historic Wildernesse Estate. The site was recently known as Dorton House. The general landscape is undulating and within the site boundary has been terraced and remodelled over time to create the estate gardens and accommodate the requirements of the late 20th century school.
- 3 The site is currently occupied by Wildernesse House, associated gardens and service buildings, tarmaced car parking areas and driveways and a series of mid to late 20th century buildings including a teaching block, nursery, 3 terraced dwellings and a detached dwelling and buildings that make up the college site on the opposite side of Wildernesse Avenue set amid landscaped grounds.
- 4 A large number of historic features survive to varying degrees of legibility within the grounds These include parkland planting, pathways, ornamental features (fountains, formal gardens, sun dial), structures (ice house, stable block) and boundaries (walls, railings, hedges).

### Constraints

- 5 The application site lies within the Wildernesse Conservation Area.

## Policies

### *Sevenoaks District Core Strategy*

6 Policy – SP1

### *Sevenoaks District Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP)*

7 Policies – EN3 and EN4

### *Other*

8 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

9 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

10 Wildernesse Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan

## Planning History

11 SE/14/01562/OUT - Development comprising (a) detailed permission for the demolition of existing buildings and structures and the construction of new/replacement floorspace, extra care accommodation for older people (sui generis use). Conversion of the existing grade II listed Wildernesse House to provide extra care accommodation (sui generis use) to comprise extra care units, staff accommodation and communal facilities, including a kitchen, restaurant/bar, a gym and treatment rooms, communal lounge/library and storage facilities. Car parking for up to 118 cars for residents, visitors and staff of the extra care community. The creation of a new vehicular access onto Park Lane and an access driveway. A comprehensive landscape strategy comprising communal and private spaces and gardens for use by residents of the proposed extra care community and the provision of new/replacement storage structure to house plant, maintenance equipment, mobility scooters and cycles and (b) outline permission, with all matters reserved, for the erection of three residential units (class C3). Description amended 12th Dec 2014 and 6th Feb 2015. Pending consideration.

12 SE/14/01563/LBCALT - The partial demolition of and alterations to the grade II listed Wildernesse House. Pending consideration.

## Consultations

### *Seal Parish Council – 07.07.14*

13 ‘No objection.’

### *Sevenoaks Town Council – 08.07.14*

14 ‘Sevenoaks Town Council recommended refusal on the following grounds:

- Overdevelopment of the site
- The design of the proposed care accommodation is unsympathetic to Wildernesse House, and inappropriate in the setting of a Grade II listed property

- The proposal would be detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area
- Inappropriate development within the Green Belt
- Concerns with regards to management of construction traffic
- Lack of information on the proposed design of the 3no residential units on the college site.'

*Conservation Officer – 02.04.15*

15 'The scheme has been the subject of extensive pre-application discussions and as such I do not wish to raise objection to the proposals.'

### Representations

16 Twenty-nine letters of representation have been received highlighting the following concerns to the proposal –

- Density;
- Overlooking;
- Light pollution;
- Loss of privacy;
- Impact on trees and hedges;
- Vehicular access during and after construction;
- Impact of the proposed development on the conservation area;
- Increase in traffic movements;
- Impact of the proposed development on the Green Belt;
- Change of use contrary to established use;
- Hours of operation;
- Design of new units;
- Parking provision;
- Impact of the proposed development on the listed building;
- Impact of the proposed development on the character of the area;
- Hours of construction work;
- Violation of laws, historic agreements and covenants;
- Highways safety;
- Damage to road surfaces; and
- Method of community involvement prior to the submission of the application.

## Chief Planning Officer's Appraisal

- 17 The main issue in the consideration of the application is the harm that the proposed demolition works would have to the significance of the conservation area. Other issues comprise the majority of issues raised by Sevenoaks Town Council, the representations received and relate the planning merits of the outline application SE/14/01562.

### Main Issue

- 18 Harm to the conservation area –
- 19 Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on a local planning authority, in considering development in a conservation area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.
- 20 The NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (para. 132).
- 21 The NPPF also states 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, including securing its optimum viable use (para.133).
- 22 Policy SP1 of the Core Strategy states that the District's heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas, will be protected and enhanced.
- 23 Policy EN3 of the ADMP states that proposals involving the demolition of a non-listed building in Conservation Areas will be assessed against the contribution to the architectural or historic interest of the area made by that building.
- 24 Buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area should be conserved. Where a building makes no significant contribution to the area, consent for demolition will be given subject to submission and approval of a detailed plan for redevelopment or after use of the site.
- 25 Policy EN4 of the ADMP states that proposals that affect a Heritage Asset, or its setting, will be permitted where the development conserves or enhances the character, appearance and setting of the asset.
- 26 Wildernesse House is widely referred to in the conservation area appraisal as being the first building erected within the established conservation area. The building is described in the conservation area appraisal as being the most visible and distinguished building in the conservation area, and remains the focal point of the northern part of the estate. Its stone walling, classical composition, prominent setting and open aspect contrasts with the surrounding area.
- 27 The area to the south of the site, between the more modern school building and dwellings, is identified as a detractor and described as bland and stark with little planting reflecting the character of the historic area. Inappropriate concrete kerbs are also noted, where there is a prevalent character and lack of kerbs throughout much of the conservation area.

- 28 The applicant has submitted a detailed heritage impact assessment, which includes an extensive assessment of the significance of the conservation area and the harm that the proposed works would have on this significance.
- 29 The assessment categorises the historic and aesthetic value of the area as being high, identifies many elements of the area that have significance and also some that detract from the significance of the area. However, the assessment does not conclude on the question of harm to the conservation area as a result of the demolition works. The 1980's & 1990's school buildings are prominent structures and their removal will enhance the conservation area.
- 30 Views of the existing buildings to the north of the main house are readily available from Wildernesse Avenue, which is adjacent to these buildings, and fleeting views of the buildings to the south are available along Dorton Drive from Woodlands Rise.
- 31 Although the buildings and structures reflect the recent use of the site, and therefore clearly indicated part of the evolution of the site and this part of the conservation area, the buildings are generally unsympathetic to the character and appearance of the area and hold little significance in the conservation area. Indeed, the conservation area appraisal highlights the area in between the main buildings to the south of the site as a detractor to the significance of the conservation area. The removal of these buildings would enhance the character of the conservation area, their loss would not be resisted.
- 32 This is with the exception of the curtilage listed buildings to the north of the main house, which possess significance in terms of the historic link to the main house. It is therefore the case that there would be some harm associated with this element of the scheme. However, the significance of these buildings is not great as the buildings possess no historic fabric or character.
- 33 Since the proposal would result in the loss of curtilage listed buildings visible from within the conservation area I would conclude that the proposal represents less than substantial since the overall harm that would result from the proposed works would not be significant.
- 34 Given this conclusion and the content of paragraph 133 of the NPPF, it is necessary to assess the public benefits of the proposal. I would argue that the proposed works would serve to enhance the significance of the conservation area by removing a number of buildings that currently detract from it. This in turn would support the long term conservation of the area. The works would also ensure the retention of interest in the conservation area. These public benefits would, in my mind outweigh the less than substantial harm that the works represent.
- 35 Finally, the Council's Conservation Officer has raised no objection to the proposed demolition works and an application is currently being considered for the redevelopment of the site with buildings proposed to replace those to be demolished.
- 36 In conclusion, I believe that the proposed demolition works would result in less than substantial harm to the conservation area, which is outweighed by public benefits. It is therefore the case that the proposed works would be in accordance with the NPPF, policy SP1 of the Core Strategy and policies EN3 and EN4 of the ADMP.

## Other Issues

Comments received from Sevenoaks Town Council and local residents' representations –

- 37 It is only possible to consider matters that would affect the conservation area, which would result from the demolition of the existing buildings, as part of this application. The comments received mainly refer to the development proposed to be erected that is within and adjacent to the conservation area, under planning application SE/14/01562/OUT, and are therefore not relevant to this application. However, these matters will be considered in detail as part of the assessment of the associated outline planning application.

Demolition Method Statement –

- 38 At the time of writing this report a Demolition Method Statement, relating to the proposed demolition works to the buildings to the north and the south of the main house, is being considered and views on this will be reported to the Committee as part of the late observations.

## **Conclusion**

- 39 The proposed works would result in less than substantial harm to the conservation area, which is outweighed by public benefits in favour of the enhancement to the conservation area. Consequently the proposal is in accordance with the development plan and therefore the Officer's recommendation is to approve.

## **Background Papers**

Site plans.

Contact Officer(s): Mr M Holmes Extension: 7406

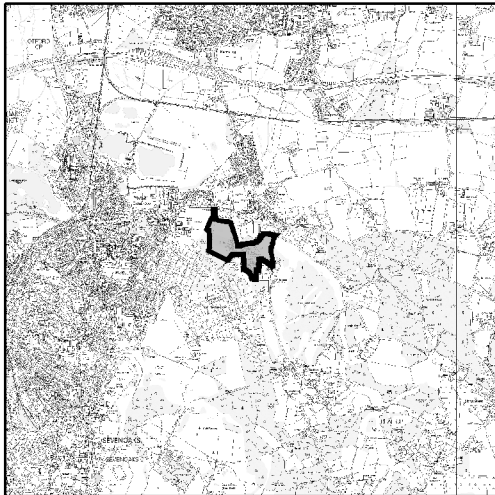
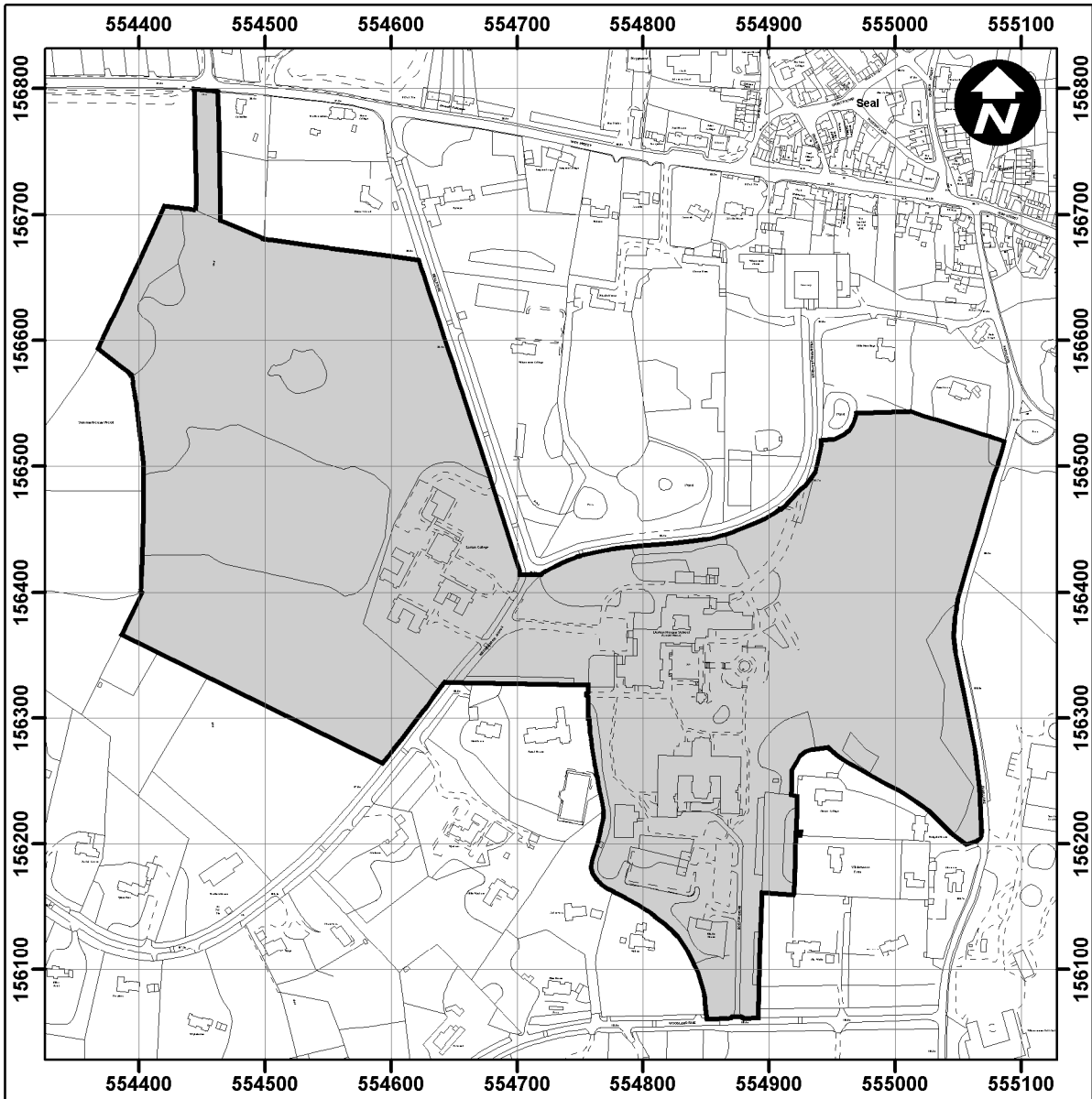
**Richard Morris**  
**Chief Planning Officer**

Link to application details:

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=N5VERGBK0L000>

Link to associated documents:

<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=N5VERGBK0L000>



# Site Plan

**Scale** 1:5,500

**Date** 14/04/2015



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