

Planning Committee: 12 July 2005

Item Number: 11

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Town/Parish Council: Blackdown

Expiry Date: 17/03/2004

Case Officer: Alan Coleman

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The Quality Hotel, Leamington Road, Chesford, Kenilworth, CV8 2LN

(1) Extensions to the Quality Hotel to provide additional bedrooms and a new leisure facility following demolition of existing bungalow.

(2) Change of use of meadow from agriculture to woodland/leisure.

(3) Replacement sewage treatment works.

(Resubmission of W20020736 including submission of updated Tourism Study). FOR Mr A Smith

This application is reported to the Planning Committee as it represents a departure from the Development Plan and will need to be referred to the Government Office for a decision on whether to 'call-in' the application and also since the Parish Council raise objection.

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

These comments are in response to the **original** plans.

Parish Council: Object on the grounds that the proposal would constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt, contrary to national and Development Plan policies in relation to the principle of development and tourism, leisure and recreational development, and; harm by reason of traffic generation, the size, scale, mass and visual impact of the development on the site and surrounding rural area.

WCC (Planning): Object on grounds of inappropriate development within the Green Belt by reason of the increase in the bulk of buildings on the site reducing the openness of the Green Belt and encroachment of hotel uses onto farmland to the detriment of its character and appearance, contrary to Structure Plan policy.

Highway Authority: No objection.

WCC (Ecology): No objection, subject to details of grassland and woodland management proposals.

WCC (Archaeology): No objection, subject to a condition on the submission of a programme of archaeological work.

WCC (Fire & Safety): No objection, subject to standard condition on provision of water supplies and fire hydrants.

WDC (Leisure & Amenities): No objection.

Environment Agency: No objection, subject to conditions on building/ground levels within the flood plain and foul/surface water drainage.

CPRE: Object on the grounds of inappropriate development within the Green Belt and Special Landscape Area; poor quality of design, and; conversion of agricultural land to part of hotel grounds.

In response to amended plans, the Parish Council reiterate their original objections and the Highway Authority continue to raise no objection.

RELEVANT POLICIES

(DW) ENV1 - Definition of the Green Belt (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV3 - Development Principles (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV3A - Sustainable Development and Energy Conservation (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV26 - The Implementation of Tree Planting Schemes (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) ENV27 - Ecological Development (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) C1 - Conservation of the Landscape (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) C2 - Diversification of the Rural Economy (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) C8 - Special Landscape Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) C11 - Improvement to Access to the Countryside (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) IMP2 - Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) TO1 - Improvement of Tourist Facilities (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

(DW) TO5 - Extension of Existing Hotels and Guest Houses (Warwick District Local Plan 1995)

DP1 - Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP2 - Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP3 - Natural Environment (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP6 - Access (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP7 - Traffic Generation (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP8 - Parking (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP10 - Flooding (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DP14 - Accessibility and Inclusion (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

RAP1 - Development within Rural Areas (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

RAP16 - Directing New Visitor Accommodation (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DAP1 - Protecting the Green Belt (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

DAP3 - Protecting Special Landscape Areas (Warwick District 1996 - 2011 First Deposit Version)

Policies GD.3, GD.5, GD.6, T.2 and I.8 of the Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996 - 2011.

Planning Policy Statement 1: *Delivering Sustainable Development*

Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: *Green Belts*

Planning Policy Statement 7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*

Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: *Transport*

Planning Policy Guidance Note 21: *Tourism*

Planning Policy Guidance Note 6: *Town Centres and Retail Development*

PLANNING HISTORY

The site has an extensive planning history that dates back to 1948 and includes a number of applications submitted over the past 20 years that I consider are of relevance to the current proposals:

- W89/1086: Erection of extension and refurbishment and alteration to existing property to form bedroom and leisure area (Approved 10 December 1991).
- W95/0237: Alterations to elevations, construction of new path and landscaping incorporating water jets at front of hotel after removal of car parking (Approved 10 May 1995).
- W96/1397: Erection of extensions to function room and dining room (Approved 28 February 1997).
- W97/0167: Extensions to restaurant and function room (Approved).
- W2000/0947: Erection of single storey office extension (Temporary permission granted 1 September 2000 for 5 years).
- W2002/0736: Extension to hotel to provide additional bedrooms and a new leisure facility; change of use of meadow from agriculture to woodland/leisure, and; replacement sewage treatment works (Withdrawn 18 September 2003 to allow consideration of the current application).

Also of relevance to the current proposals is application W99/0520 for development at the adjacent Chesford Grange Hotel site. A proposal for the erection of a four storey extension to provide conference rooms, a conference hall and a total of 28 no. bedrooms was called-in for a decision by the Secretary of State who subsequently granted planning permission on 19 July 2000 following an Inquiry. Since then planning permission has also been granted for a two-storey extension to an events hall (W2001/1304), a four storey extension to provide new leisure facilities and 12 bedrooms (W2002/0456), a restaurant extension (W2003/0873) and a function suite entrance (W2003/1412).

KEY ISSUES

The Site and its Location

The site is situated in the Warwickshire Green Belt and Special Landscape Area where it occupies a site of some 3.7 hectares on the southern side of the A452, approximately 2 miles to the south-east of Kenilworth town centre. The general character of the area is of open countryside and woodland within the River Avon valley.

To the west is the River Avon, beyond which is the Chesford Grange Hotel. To the north is Chesford Bridge, which is the A452 Kenilworth-Leamington Road which forms the north-eastern boundary of the site. There is open countryside beyond it on the opposite side of the road and to the east, together with a bungalow known as 'Quest Avon'.

Vehicular access to the site was improved a number of years ago by the provision of a roundabout approximately 100 metres to the east of the site at the junction with the main A429 and Bericote Road, which connects to Cubbington and the northern part of Leamington Spa. Vehicular access to the hotel is now by means of a new road from this roundabout. There are coach/bus stops outside the hotel that are funded by the applicant that provide direct links to a regular public transport service running between Leamington Spa and Kenilworth. The hotel is also in a Transport Corridor defined in the Structure Plan where measures will be implemented to improve the choice and quality of transport options.

The site comprises the Quality Hotel and its immediate environs, which includes a large field to the rear that adjoins the River Avon. The hotel is essentially a two-storey extended building that has a frontage onto the A452, which is visible on approach from either direction.

The existing hotel contains 48 bedrooms, 4 conference rooms with a combined capacity of 330 persons, including The Garden Suite which has a seating capacity of 160 persons and a public entertainment licence for 165 persons, 2 restaurants and a bar. At present there are approximately 11 full-time and 31 part-time staff employed at the hotel. There is a large car park to the rear of the hotel and a parking bay to the front which together provide some 140 parking spaces, including coach spaces.

A detached bungalow also stands to the west of the hotel, which was formerly used as an office and is currently vacant.

Details of the Development

The current proposal is for:

- the provision of an additional 25 bedrooms
- the provision of leisure facilities
- the demolition of the existing bungalow fronting the A452
- the removal of The Garden Suite conference/public entertainment facility

- the change of use of the adjoining meadow from agriculture to woodland/leisure to provide a range of activities, including a picnic area and additional children's facilities
- a replacement sewage treatment plant

Initially it was proposed to accommodate the additional bedrooms and leisure facilities within a two-storey extension to the western elevation of the existing hotel by the removal of the existing bungalow and main conference/entertainment suite (The Garden Room). As proposed, the extension would have an overall width to the A452 of some 28 metres and an overall depth of approximately 27 metres. The site of the extension would be excavated so that the finished floor would be set some 1350mm below the floor level of the adjoining hotel building.

The leisure complex within the proposal is intended to be primarily ancillary to the use of the hotel and to be a facility aimed at supporting the sale of hotel rooms especially in the off peak winter months. Use of it, however, would also be available to the public through membership of a health club. The facility is relatively modest (about 500 sq.m in total), and would comprise, primarily, a swimming pool, with a sauna, Jacuzzi, shower, gymnasium and treatment room.

In order to reduce the size, scale, mass and bulk of the proposed extension the scheme has now been amended to reduce the width by approximately 7 metres. This would displace 10 no. of the proposed bedrooms, which are now proposed to be accommodated within a pitched roof extension to an existing bedroom block at the rear of the hotel. The height of this extension would correspond with the higher part of the hotel. The proposed extensions would also be within the footprint of the existing hotel and detached bungalow to the west.

The proposed woodland planting on the meadow at the rear of the hotel has been developed with the Forestry Commission in consultation with the Environment Agency and WCC Ecologist. The Forestry Commission has also agreed to provide a grant for the planting scheme. The planted area would extend up to the western side elevation of the proposed extension and across its frontage to screen it from the highway.

Assessment

I consider the application raises the following key issues:-

1. whether 'very special circumstances' to justify departing from Green Belt Policy have been demonstrated;
2. the physical impact of the development in the Green Belt;
3. the weight to be attached to other policies which encourage tourism, and;
4. other issues, such as highway impact, flooding and loss of agricultural land.

Green Belt Policy

The site is situated within the Green Belt wherein there is a presumption against inappropriate development. The proposal does not comprise any of the categories of built development acceptable in the Green Belt, as established by Development Plan and emerging policies, which generally reflect the advice in PPG2: *Green Belts*. Included within the policies, however, is the proviso that very special circumstances could justify other forms of built development. I therefore consider the principal issue in this case is whether it has been demonstrated that such very special circumstances exist.

In support of the proposals it is stated that the need to provide additional bedroom accommodation has arisen in response to demand, particularly from the short-breaks, groups and coach holiday markets. *"At present it is only economic for one coach load of overnight visitors to utilize the premises because of the limited number of bedrooms and facilities available. The proposed increase in the number of bedrooms and additional facilities would greatly improve the flexibility of provision at the hotel and it would enable two coach loads of guests to be accommodated at any one time. It would also provide greater flexibility in accommodating residential conferences, some of which have to be turned away at the present time."*

The applicant has submitted a comprehensive report by Humberts Leisure assessing the need for the proposed extension. This has been supplemented by evidence relating to the Quality Hotel which demonstrates a significant level of turnaway and a significant number of days when other hotels in the area are also full.

"The current average occupancy rate at the Quality Hotel of 69% is a good rate in the industry, but there are fluctuations. The evidence we have submitted shows a substantial level of 'turn-aways', where bookings have been declined, in part reflecting the inability to accommodate coach parties. The data submitted with my letter of 16 July 2004 shows that in the year April 2003/April 2004 the total turnaway was 30.7% of the potential occupancy of the hotel. However, subsequent information submitted with this letter, indicates a much higher turnaway when data from the Quality Hotels central reservations systems are taken into account. They indicate a turnaway, or loss of potential business, amounting to 65% of occupancy. Put another way, the demand would not be fully met even with the proposed additional accommodation to the hotel.

The pressure on accommodation is exacerbated by the closure of local hotels in recent years (the Woolpack and Westgate Arms in Warwick and the Manor House Hotel in Leamington Spa), where the cost of upgrading inadequate accommodation and facilities to keep the hotels in use are outweighed by the value of alternative uses."

I consider this report and supplementary evidence provides a reasonable basis upon which to conclude that there is a need for additional bedroom accommodation in the area, at a location that is unable, at present, to cater for all existing demand.

The applicant has also indicated that the proposal would generate 14 additional full time jobs and a further 12 part time jobs which it is anticipated would be taken from the local community. This cannot be guaranteed and I consider the number of jobs would have limited direct employment benefits. However, it would help stabilise existing positions due to the level of investment associated with the proposed enhancement of the hotel, together with indirect employment provided by local suppliers who serve the requirements of the hotel.

Visual Impact

The extension would increase the footprint of the hotel and would result in a reduction, by encroachment, in the openness of the Green Belt. However, I consider this reduction should be considered against the significant physical impact of the existing hotel. In my opinion, the level of encroachment would be limited. As amended, the scheme would amount to less than a 30% increase in the footprint of the existing hotel. This would be offset by the removal of the existing bungalow from a visible location in the site frontage, the setting of the extensions within the existing footprint of the hotel and bungalow and by the nature and extent of landscaping proposed.

As amended, the proposed extension to the western side elevation would be subservient in scale and nature to the main body of the hotel and would be linked to it by a single storey mainly glass structure, which would also act as a visual break between the buildings' facades. I consider these factors would also combine to break up the mass of the frontage whilst the inclusion of dormer windows in both elements of the scheme would result in greater uniformity of design and appearance of the building as a whole, with the added benefit of removing an unattractive expanse of flat roof at the rear of the hotel. The implementation of an extensive landscaping scheme would also reduce the visual impact of the development, particularly when viewed on approach from the west along the A452 and from the River Avon and adjacent public footpath to the rear.

For these reasons I consider the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt would be limited.

Tourism

The general intention of the Development Plan is to encourage tourism development reflecting the advice in PPG21, which indicates the benefits that may arise from moderate extensions to an existing hotel. The most relevant policy of the Local Plan is Policy TO5, which encourages such development as long as it would :

- not result in a significant intensification in the use of the site or in the establishment of new uses which are not strictly ancillary to the normal business of the hotel;
- not detract from the local environment;

- satisfy appropriate parking standards, and;
- not have a detrimental impact on the local road network.

Intensification: The proposals would result in a 52% increase in the number of bedrooms and the provision of new leisure facilities. These facilities would comprise, primarily, a swimming pool with a sauna, Jacuzzi, shower, gymnasium and treatment room and would be available to guests and the public through membership of a health club. This facility is primarily aimed at supporting the sale of hotel rooms, especially in the off-peak winter months.

Nevertheless, PPG6: *Town Centres and Retail Development* requires a sequential approach to be taken to the location of new leisure facilities with preference given to town centre sites in order to meet sustainability objectives. This is reflected in Policy RAP16 of the emerging Local Plan that permits extensions to existing visitor accommodation where these do not significantly intensify the use of the site or establish new uses which are not ancillary to the normal business of the visitor accommodation.

In my opinion, the proposed leisure facility would be relatively modest, both in itself and in relation to the size of the hotel (about 500 sq.m in total). As such, I consider it would be primarily ancillary to the use of the hotel. Although the proposals would undoubtedly generate an increase in activity on site, nevertheless I do not consider that this would necessarily equate to an intensification in the use of the site, particularly in terms of vehicle trips to the hotel. A significant factor here is that meeting demand from groups and the coach tour market is a primary aim of the proposal and, to the extent that it would be used by non-guests, the site is well served by public transport. Thus, although the capacity of the hotel would be increased, I do not consider it would result in a change in the character of the use of the site. In my view there would also be a balance between the provision of additional bedroom accommodation and leisure facilities and the removal of existing conference/public entertainment facilities provided by The Garden Suite.

Local Environment: By reason of its size and established use, the hotel already has an impact on the local environment. However, I consider the extensive new landscaping proposals will assist in improving the amenity of the locality whilst the siting, size, scale, design and appearance of the proposed extensions would, when seen in the context of the characteristics of the site as a whole, have a limited impact upon the local environment.

Parking: No extension to the existing car parking areas is proposed which I consider would provide an acceptable level of car parking to serve the development.

Road network: There is no highway objection to the proposals.

For these reasons I consider the proposals would satisfy the requirements of Policy TO5.

Other Issues

With regard to the proposed use of the adjacent agricultural land to woodland/leisure use I do not consider this would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt. This aspect of the scheme has also been developed in consultation with the Forestry Commission, County Ecologist and the Environment Agency who fully support the proposals, subject to the provision of a management plan and conditions to ensure no increase in land levels within the flood plain. The scheme would also be supported by a grant from the Forestry Commission. In my opinion, this aspect of the proposals would enhance the environmental character, appearance and amenity of the site and Special Landscape Area.

In relation to the loss of quality agricultural land, its size and location within the flood plain clearly limits its usefulness and the fact that the land could be returned to agriculture would appear to override any policy objection on these grounds.

In my opinion, the scheme is also acceptable in terms of car parking and highway safety. The lack of objection from the Highway Authority reinforces my view on this issue.

In terms of the sustainability of the site to accommodate the proposed development a regular public transport service running between Leamington and Kenilworth stops at a new bus stop outside the hotel, which is funded by the applicant, who also intends to provide a mini-bus service based at the hotel. The hotel is also in a Transport Corridor defined in the Structure Plan where measures will be implemented to improve the choice and quality of transport options. A Travel Plan has also been requested by the Highway Authority which I consider would be appropriate to request as a condition of development, as set out below.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

Whilst the proposal does not comprise any of the categories of built development that the Development Plan establishes as acceptable in the Green Belt, nevertheless the relevant policies provide for exceptions where very special circumstances exist. It is considered that these have been established in this case to justify departing from Green Belt Policy. It is also considered that the proposal is acceptable in terms of the requirements of the Development Plan and national planning advice regarding the accessibility of the site, the reduction in intensification of the use of the site, particularly by private motor car, through the removal of the main conference/entertainment facility, provision for the use of means of transport other than the private motor car, tourism development and the provision of tourist accommodation and the enhancement of the Special Landscape Area.

RECOMMENDATION

GRANT following referral to the Secretary of State as a departure from the Development Plan, subject to the following conditions :

- 1 The development hereby permitted must be begun not later than the expiration of five years from the date of this permission.
REASON : To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out strictly in accordance with the details shown on the approved drawings 8204/1 and 111-707, and specification contained therein, submitted on 21 January 2004 and approved drawings 223/01E, 02C, 03D, 04D, 07B, 08C and 09, and specification contained therein, submitted on 16 June 2005 unless first agreed otherwise in writing by the District Planning Authority.
REASON : For the avoidance of doubt and to secure a satisfactory form of development in accordance with Local Plan Policy ENV3.
- 3 Samples of all external facing, roofing and surfacing materials to be used for the construction of the development hereby permitted, shall be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority before any constructional works are commenced. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.
REASON : To ensure that the visual amenities of the area are protected, and to satisfy the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
- 4 Notwithstanding the details shown on Drawing number 223/01E full details of the following matters shall be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority before the development hereby permitted is commenced:
 1. a landscaping scheme incorporating all new tree and grassland planting for the whole of those parts of the site not to be covered by buildings;
 2. a scheme for the creation of the proposed otter holts, and;
 3. a management plan for the future maintenance of each of these areas.Such approved schemes shall be completed, in all respects, not later than the first planting season following the completion of the development hereby permitted, and thereafter shall be retained in accordance with the approved management plans. Any trees removed, dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within five years of planting, shall be replaced by trees of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted.
REASON : To protect and enhance the amenities of the area, and to satisfy the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
- 5 No development shall be carried out on the site which is the subject of this permission, until details of the following matters have been submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority. The development shall not be carried out otherwise than in full accordance with such approved details:
 1. the proposed children's play area, including play equipment, surfacing materials, fencing and colour finishes, and;
 2. means of construction and surface treatment of the proposed river and woodland walk pathways.

REASON : Insufficient details were submitted for these matters to be considered in respect of the approval hereby granted.

- 6 A Travel Plan comprising the following details shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the District Planning Authority, in consultation with the Highway Authority, within 3 months of the date of the first occupation of the development hereby approved and should include the following:-
(i) a target for the proportion of employees who will travel by means other than single car occupancy;
(ii) a strategy for achieving the target(s);
(iii) management programme;
(iv) a process for monitoring the process towards achieving the target(s), and;
(v) measures should targets not be achieved.
Thereafter the use of the site shall operate in strict accordance with the approved Travel Plan, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the District Planning Authority, in consultation with the Highway Authority.
REASON : To satisfy the aims of PPG13 in reducing reliance on the use of private motor vehicles in order to promote sustainable transport choices to the site.
- 7 There shall be no building or raising of ground levels within the floodplain as defined by the Environment Agency's modelled 1 in 100 year flood level of 52.05 metres above Ordnance Datum.
REASON : To protect the development from flooding.
- 8 Details of the means of disposal of storm water and foul sewage from the development shall be submitted to and approved by the District Planning Authority before the development hereby permitted is commenced and the development shall not be carried out other than in strict accordance with such approved details.
REASON : To ensure satisfactory provision is made for the disposal of storm water and foul sewage.
- 9 All surface water drainage shall be passed through an oil interceptor designed and constructed in accordance with BS 8301:1985 and of a capacity compatible with the site being drained, prior to being discharged into any watercourse, surface water sewer or soakaway system. Roof water should not be passed through the interceptor.
REASON : To prevent pollution of the Water Environment.
- 10 The development hereby permitted shall not be commenced until a scheme for the provision of adequate water supplies and fire hydrants, necessary for fire fighting purposes at the site, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the District Planning Authority. The development shall not then be occupied until the scheme has been implemented to the satisfaction of the District Planning Authority.
REASON : In the interests of fire safety.
- 11 No lighting shall be fixed to the external walls or roofs of the development

hereby permitted, or on any open land within the application site without the written consent of the District Planning Authority.

REASON : To ensure that the visual amenities of the area are protected, and to satisfy the requirements of Policy ENV3 of the Warwick District Local Plan.
