

Tim Glass
Good Easter Parish Council
The Village Hall
School Road
Good Easter
Chelmsford
Essex
CM1 4RT

Your ref:
My ref: 24/08103/PE
Please ask for: Sam George
Telephone: 01245 606826
Date: 24 May 2024

Dear Mr Glass

Playing Field, Souther Cross Road, Good Easter, Chelmsford Essex

Thank you for your recent enquiry regarding the construction of a new community building at the above address.

The playing fields and sports pavilion are located within the Rural Area and land designated as open space. In this type of location both national and local planning policies seek to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and also protect community facilities. The site is located adjacent to the Good Easter Conservation Area (the landscaped edge of the site is within the Conservation Area) and the roadside barn at Falconers Hall to the south is grade I listed on account of its exceptional interest due to its C12/C13 origins.

The proposal seeks to demolish the existing sports pavilion and construct a new community hall between the existing car park and sports pitches. As I understand it, the current sports pavilion is unsuitable for modern sporting purposes. Your enquiry also explains that to fund this project, the scheme needs to include the sale and redevelopment of the village hall located a short distance to the west.

The principle of replacing the current sports pavilion with a new and enhanced community building is supported by the Council. There are some clear challenges with the enabling part of the proposal however mainly ensuring that the new village hall is incorporated into the scheme and securing the two developments alongside one another.

The conversion or replacement of the village hall to provide a residential dwelling would be assessed against a number of planning policies and in particular planning policies seeking to protect community facilities (Policy DM21) and focusing new dwellings in a sustainable location (Policy S1).

Policy DM21 regarding the protection of community facilities says the change of use of premises or redevelopment of sites that provide valued community facilities or services will only be permitted where:

- I. the premises or site cannot be readily used for, or converted to, any other community facility; and
- II. the facility or service which will be lost will be adequately supplied or met by an existing or new facility in the locality or settlement concerned which shall be equivalent to or better than the facility that is being lost in terms of both quantity and quality.

The proposed community building would provide better village hall facilities than the current building in terms of both quantity and quality, however it is unclear why the village hall cannot be readily used for, or converted to, any other community facility, in line with criterion (I) above. This would need to be explored and explained as part of any planning application submission.

With regards to sustainability, the supporting text to Policy S1 says development will be focused at well connected locations for example along strategic transport corridors, close to existing local services and in areas with a good level of existing or proposed transport infrastructure including sustainable transport. This will help reduce the need to travel and encourage the use of non-car modes. Creating development that is accessible by different modes of transport, especially walking and cycling and the use of public transport is essential in promoting sustainable development as it reduces car dependency.

In addition paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out the three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental roles. The roles should not be undertaken in isolation because they are mutually dependent. To achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously.

Although the village hall itself is just located within the defined settlement boundary, the occupiers of a dwelling in this location would likely to be reliant on the private car to access a full range of community facilities such as shopping, healthcare, leisure and entertainment, given the distances to the nearest services.

With the above in mind, any planning application would need to demonstrate that the redevelopment of the village hall for housing would be sustainable development and complies with all the criterion of Policy DM21. This would likely to be quite challenging at face value and maybe the planning assessment needs to also look at the benefits to the village as a whole in terms of new and better community facilities which are enabled by the development of one house. Planning decisions are often a balancing act between conflicting issues and that's the situation that we have here.

Any new dwelling would need to have adequate parking provision, internal and external space, be suitably designed and reflective of the surrounding character, however in the absence of any drawings/supporting information this cannot be considered. The land on which the current village hall sits is very tight and in the absence of any plans it is hard to see whether parking and garden space can be adequately provided.

Without a new community building being secured and legally tied to the redevelopment of the pavillion/new community building, the loss of the village hall in isolation would be seen as the loss of a community building, which our policies do not support.

Neither the Parish Council or the City Council would wish to be in a position where the existing village hall is lost and there are several years with no replacement hall in place. I also have concerns whether the redevelopment of the small village hall for a small property would generate sufficient funds to support the construction of the large community building proposed. It is likely you would need to seek legal and financial advice to be able to produce supporting documentation to demonstrate that the scheme would be both realistic and financially feasible.

Despite the above, our heritage officer has provided feedback regarding the design of the community building and suggested some alterations to improve its appearance and ensure it would not be harmful to the setting of the heritage assets or the character of the area.

The 3D views indicate mostly brick, whereas the elevation show a mixture of brick and weatherboard. The option with weatherboard helps to break up the massing, draws reference to the context and gives a rural character, which is welcomed.

Good quality materials would be required including clay plain tiles and timber boarding. The elevations appear to indicate slate to the roof but given the steeply pitched roofs and the local character plain tiles would be better.

The blocks are very deep at 10.2m and 8.3m, giving a greater scale than the traditional buildings in the context. The span of the roofs should be broken down, this could be achieved by treating the shower room and the open porch on the western gable as catslides to a narrower main gable over the changing rooms. For the hall the covered area to the rear could be omitted or treated as a catslide.

The western gable has a steep pitch, which reflects the local context. The main hall has a slacker roof, which should be increased (in combination with the shallow depth noted above). Consideration could be given to a lower pitch roof over the changing rooms (i.e. 35 degrees with clay pan tiles), to give the character of an outbuilding attached to a main barn.

The store at the eastern ends roof spans the wider dimension given a narrow roof, this would be better treated as a lean-to.

The horizontal proportion windows would be better divided up or reorientated to give a vertical emphasis and proposals for external lighting would need to be carefully considered.

Energy planning policies in the Chelmsford Local plan will be requiring all future new buildings to be built to be Net Zero Carbon and you will need to be considering this at the earliest stages of your design.

It is unclear if the existing access and car park are adequate given the larger facility, however encroachment onto the front landscaped area would not be acceptable. If a planning application is submitted we would consult with Essex County Council as the Local Highway Authority. As you progress your plans you might wish to take advantage of the pre-planning advice services offered by the Highway Authority to understand any queries or concerns that they might have.

Any new facilities should also be sited in a manner that do not prejudice the use of any existing sports undertaken on the site i.e. football and cricket, ensuring that pitches are retained and of an adequate size. I would recommend that you liaise with Sport England as they would be a statutory consultee for any planning application. Early engagement with them would seem sensible and they may also be able to provide assistance with further funding options.

With the above in mind, the inclusion of the re-development of the village hall raises some legal challenges. Any future scheme would need to overcome all of the issues raised and demonstrate it is legally practical, financially feasible and achievable within a suitable time frame.

If you were able to secure funding elsewhere and not require the re-development of the village hall to fund the project, it would be a relatively unproblematic and straight forward scheme.

I would like to take the opportunity to apologise for the delay in providing the response and your patience regarding the matter.

Should you wish to submit an application below is a list relevant additional information, however I would advise seeking further written feedback as your project proceeds, in order to have the best chance of the being supported as a future planning application.

Other matters

Validation Requirements

Full details of all validation requirements for planning applications can be found on the Council's website:

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning>. Please note that existing floor plans and elevations, and photographs of the site, are required for householder applications. A completed biodiversity checklist must also be submitted with any application affecting sites where protected habitats and species are or likely to be present.

Biodiversity Net Gain

All development proposals should deliver a net gain in biodiversity by creating, restoring and enhancing habitats. This is a requirement of Policy DM16 of the Chelmsford Local Plan. From 12th February 2024 it is a requirement of the Environment Act 2021 for 'Major' development or developments on Priority Habitat Sites to achieve at least a 10% net gain. From 2nd April 2024 this is a requirement for 'small sites'. 'Small Sites' includes: For residential, where the number of dwellings to be provided is between one and nine inclusive on a site having an area of less than one hectare, or where the number of dwellings to be provided is not known, a site area of less than 0.5 hectares. For non-residential, where the floor space to be created is less than 1,000 square metres or where the site area is less than one hectare.

The most up-to-date Statutory Metric tool, published by DEFRA, must be completed with both pre-and post-development values, and submitted as an Excel file type, as well as a biodiversity net gain statement and draft BNG plan. See

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-metric-calculate-the-biodiversity-net-gain-of-a-project-or-development> for more information about the metric tool.

Applications submitted without the required documents will be made invalid.

Local Highway Authority Pre-application advice

If a planning application is submitted for your proposal we would consult with Essex County Council as the Local Highway Authority. If they have concerns regarding highway safety, this could result in your application being delayed or refused. You may therefore wish to contact Essex County Council Highways Department at an early stage for advice from them in respect of your proposal. Details of their pre-application advice service can be found on their website:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/Environment%20Planning/Development-in-Essex/Pages/Developer-information.aspx>

Surface Water Drainage

The Council would expect surface water from the proposed development to be disposed of using sustainable drainage systems and/or soakaways. Connection to main sewers would only be considered acceptable when evidence is provided to show that the surface water hierarchy has been followed. For

further details please view Anglian Water's SuDs policy
<http://www.anglianwater.co.uk/developers/suds.aspx>

Structural Survey

Any conversion scheme must be accompanied by a comprehensive structural survey. This must clearly detail whether the buildings are capable of conversion and the amount of fresh build that would be required to facilitate this. Clear and detailed information demonstrating the level of original fabric of the buildings which would be retained, and the amount of new/additional works required should be included.

Supplementary Planning Documents

Please note that we have adopted SPD's in relation to Planning Obligations and Making Places. These are available on our website:

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plan/supplementary-planning-documents-and-planning-advice-notes>

Tree Planting

The Council has an ambition to plant at least three new trees for every new home to assist in the Climate and Ecological Emergency. All new housing developments should plant three trees per net new dwelling. Where this is not possible due to site constraints, financial contributions towards off-site planting may be required. More information is available in our Tree Planting Planning Advice Note:

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plan/supplementary-planning-documents-and-planning-advice-notes/>

Planning Advice Notes

We have published some planning advice notes in response to common queries, changes in national policy or updated evidence. These cover matters such as First Homes, Affordable Housing for Rent, Open Space, Self & Custom Build, Specialist Residential Accommodation, Tree Planting, Community Led Housing and Wheelchair Accessible Homes. These may be relevant to your proposal. Planning Advice notes are published on our website at

<https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-local-plan/supplementary-planning-documents-and-planning-advice-notes/>

Please note that the information provided within this letter is not binding on any future decision that this Council might take. Should a planning application be submitted, the Council has to consider a number of factors not all of which are known at this stage. These may include the comments of the Parish Council, local residents and other consultees.

Yours sincerely

Sam George

Sam George
Planning Officer