

| Name of Applicant Type of Certificate | Proposal | Map/Plan Policy | Plan Ref. Expiry Date |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Redwood Care Homes Ltd 'A' | Extensions and alterations to nursing home to provide additional guest and staff accommodation (as augmented by information received 05.02.2010) - Foresters Nursing Home, Walton Pool, Clent, DY9 9RP | GB LPA | 09/0983-MT 24.05.2010 |

RECOMMENDATION: that planning permission is **REFUSED**.

Consultations

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| WH | No objection 04.12.2009. |
| Strategic Planning | Comments received 04.01.2010: Proposal would represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt. It is necessary for the applicant to demonstrate any very special circumstances to outweigh the material harm to the openness of the Green Belt. It is important to assess the landscape impact and sustainability implications of the proposal. |
| Tree Officer | Consulted: 30.12.2009: no comments received to date. |
| Drainage Engineer | Comments received 04.01.2010: no objection. |
| Clent PC | Comments received 21.01.2010: no objection. |
| WCC Public Rights of Way | Consulted: 30.12.2009: No comments received to date. |
| Ramblers | Consulted: 30.12.2009: No comments received to date. |
| WCC Minerals | Consulted: 30.12.2009: No comments received to date. |
| Publicity | 2 letters received: concerns raised in relation to overdevelopment, visual amenity and increased traffic demands on local infrastructure. 1 Neighbour notification letter posted 18.01.2010; expired 08.02.2010 Site Notice Posted 23.02.2010; expired 16.03.2010. Press Notice published 25.02.2010; expired 18.03.2010. |

The site and its surroundings

The application site contains a number of buildings including the main nursing home, a separate single storey building used for ancillary offices and a static caravan used for ancillary staff accommodation. The buildings are set within spacious landscaped gardens.

There is a small cluster of residential development forming the hamlet of Walton Pool to the north east boundary of the site. The remainder of the site is surrounded by open fields. The site is in the Green Belt and within a Landscape Protection Area.

Proposal

It is proposed to erect a large extension to the east side elevation of the building. The extension would provide an external floor area of 1005m² across three stories. An additional 11 bedrooms would be provided along with a communal living area, kitchen and ancillary storage space. The proposal would increase the total bed space provision of the home from 28 to 39. The extension would also provide four staff bedrooms, a staff lounge and a staff kitchen.

Relevant Policies

WMSS QE3
WCSP SD.4, SD.8, CTC.1, D.38, D.39
BDLP DS2, DS13, C1, C4, C17
Others PPS1, PPG2, PPS4, PPG13, SPG1

Relevant Planning History

B/2007/0968 Use of existing static caravan as ancillary staff accommodation (up to 3 staff) in association with Foresters Nursing Home - Granted 30.01.2007.
B/2006/0210 Use of existing caravan as ancillary staff accommodation (up to 3 staff) in association with Foresters Nursing Home - Granted 21.06.2006.
B/2005/0869 Amendment to B/2005/0394 to include retention of existing greenhouse / store to rear - Granted 10.11.2005.
B/2005/0394 Change of use from stables to ancillary use of the Foresters Nursing Home - Granted 20.06.2005
B/1997/0633 Two storey first floor and single storey extensions - Granted 26.09.1997
B/1996/0838 Extensions and Alterations - Refused 10.12.1996

Notes

I consider that the main issues to consider in the determination of this application are those related to Green Belt policy. Would the proposal be an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt and, if not, are there any very special circumstances to justify its approval? It is also important to consider the design of the proposal, its impact on the character of the street scene, its impact on the amenity of the occupiers of the nearby residential properties and its effect on the character of this protected landscape. Furthermore, the proposal would increase travel demand and in this isolated rural location it is important to ensure that this can be achieved through sustainable means. I will deal with each matter under a separate heading below:

Green Belt

The construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate development unless it is for one of the purposes set out at policy DS2 of the BDLP and at paragraph 3.4 of PPG2. The extension of a nursing home does not feature on these lists and as such the proposal is considered to be an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt. PPG2 provides that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very

special circumstances. Such circumstances will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The extension would clearly cause harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness. It is also considered that the additional floor space and volume that would be created by the proposal would significantly increase the built form of the site to the detriment of Green Belt openness.

The applicant's agent has put forward a case for very special circumstances within their Planning Design & Access Statement. In summary the following assertions have been put forward to support the approval of the scheme:

- There is an on-going need in the Bromsgrove area for new and enlarged nursing home facilities, as a result of its aging population. There are no available nursing home beds in the local area.
- Foresters Nursing Home fails to meet the minimum standards set by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI).
- Without on-site staff accommodation, an inadequate and unreliable supply of nursing staff will result, thereby jeopardising the existence of the nursing home.

I will consider each of these circumstances under separate headings below.

Need

The applicant argues that there is a need for new and enlarged nursing home facilities in the area due to the District's aging population. Reference is made to the Council's District Level Housing Market Assessment (October 2008). This identifies a projected growth of 8,000 households between 2006 and 2016. Of these, 4,800 are expected to be pensioner households aged 65 - 84 and 1,575 are expected to be households for the older elderly in greatest need of housing with care (85+). Having regard to this document I would agree with the applicant's statement that the District has an ageing population.

It is inferred from these statistics that there is a high demand for accommodation for the elderly in the District. Moreover it is argued that this demand cannot be met by the existing nursing home facilities in the area. A survey of existing nursing homes within a 10 mile radius of Bromsgrove Town Centre has been provided in support of this argument. The survey indicates that there are 27 nursing homes within the search area however information is only provided for 11 of these. Of these 11 homes there were a total of 10 vacant bed spaces out of 452 equating to an average occupancy of 97.7%. The results of this survey would indicate that there are limited bed spaces available in the local area.

It is therefore argued that the demand for nursing home facilities cannot be met in the local area and this justifies increasing provision through the proposed extension at Foresters Nursing Home.

I consider that this argument has a number of limitations. Firstly, it is a well publicised fact that the proportion of the national population falling into the very elderly group is rapidly increasing and I have no evidence to prove that the District of Bromsgrove is in any way unusual in this regard. Therefore this issue is not unexpected and this argument

could consequently be repeated across the country. I therefore do not consider this issue to be "very special".

Secondly, no specific evidence is provided to support the assertion that there is currently a high demand for new nursing home facilities in the District. Instead this is based on an assumption that the forecasted increase in elderly households will result in an increased demand for nursing home facilities. Although I accept that this is a safe assumption to make to a certain extent, I am also mindful of related developments in healthcare and the government's emphasis towards care in the community meaning that elderly people can stay in their own homes for longer (Sources: 'Independence, well-being and choice', Department of Health, 2005; 'Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services', Department of Health, 2006). The fact that the District has an ageing population does not necessarily translate into a demand for new nursing home facilities.

Thirdly, I am not convinced that there is a lack of bed vacancies in the local area. The applicant's definition of the 'local area' is limited to a 10 mile radius of Bromsgrove Town Centre. I consider this to be too small and I would expect data to be provided at a sub regional level including the whole of the Bromsgrove District and the near parts of the West Midlands conurbation and adjoining Worcestershire districts. It would seem reasonable for relatives / friends to travel within such an area to visit nursing home residents. It is also noted that information is only provided for less than half of the homes within the 10 mile area. It cannot therefore be concluded that there are a lack of available bed spaces in the area. Furthermore, Members will be aware that planning permission was granted in 2009 for an extension to Moundsley Hall Care Home providing an additional 105 bed spaces (B/2008/0748). This site is located within the applicant's search area. Although it is understood that this permission has not yet been implemented, the potential contribution this extension would make to the supply of bed spaces in the District would certainly weaken the applicant's assertion that there are a lack of bed vacancies in the local area. On the above basis, I am not convinced that the alleged need for nursing home facilities could not be met in the wider area with particular regard to non-Green Belt locations.

In conclusion it is considered that the asserted need for new nursing home facilities in the area is based on somewhat anecdotal evidence. Furthermore, there is no clear case for accommodating the asserted need at Foresters Nursing Home rather than in non Green Belt locations around the area. It is therefore considered that this inappropriate form of development cannot be justified on the basis of need.

CSCI Standards

It is argued that Foresters Nursing Home fails to meet the minimum standards set by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The CSCI is a regulatory body set up by the Department of Health to inspect and licence any premises where care provision is offered. The CSCI impose national minimum standards on care homes. These are set out in the document 'Care Homes for Older People - National Minimum Standards' (2003).

As Foresters Nursing Home is 'pre-existing' there is no statutory requirement for it to comply with the provisions of the national minimum standards. There is however strong government encouragement to increase the quality of care homes and it is argued that

the level of care provided at Foresters Nursing Home is substandard. It is also argued that there is limited scope for improvement within the physical infrastructure of the existing building and additional space is required to bring the existing facilities up to standard.

I have reviewed the relevant standards and it would appear that some of the existing facilities at the home are not in compliance. It is perhaps accepted therefore that a certain amount of additional space may be required in order to meet the CSCI standards. This would however only amount to a small extension and this matter would not justify the application proposal.

On site staff accommodation

It is argued that without on-site staff accommodation an inadequate and unreliable supply of nursing staff will result, thereby jeopardising the existence of the nursing home.

The applicant argues that the home has problems attracting and retaining staff due its isolated rural location. If staff cannot live at Foresters they must travel to the site from nearby urban areas. The site is poorly served by public transport and most staff do not have access to a car as nursing and carer salaries are commonly below the national average. It is argued that the cost and time associated with commuting is a disincentive to employment. Furthermore it is argued that the cost of housing in the local area is very high and well beyond the financial capabilities of nursing and care staff.

It is argued that staffing shortages may lead to the closure of the home if the level of care provided falls below the CSCI national minimum standards. The applicant also refers to various other benefits of on site staff accommodation including a reduced need to travel (sustainability benefits) and convenient access to staff to cover absences.

Members should be aware that a temporary planning permission was granted in 2006 (B/2006/0210) to use a caravan on the site for staff accommodation for 3 people. This was renewed in 2007 under application ref B/2007/0968. That permission expired on 15th October 2009. In both of these cases the Council accepted that there was a demonstrable need for on site staff accommodation based on the same circumstances described above. This was not however put forward as a very special circumstance but as justification for approving the scheme contrary to the Council's policy of housing restraint (formerly SPG10). Nonetheless these cases would confirm that there is an existing need for on site staff accommodation. It is however noted that the proposed extension would accommodate 4 nurses whereas the existing caravan provides accommodation for 3 employees. The applicant does not provide any justification as to why an increased amount of accommodation is required. Nonetheless details aside it is not considered that this argument would outweigh the harm caused to the Green Belt by an extension of the proposed scale.

Design / Impact on street scene

It is considered that the form and general design of the extension would respect that of the main building and I do not have any concerns on this issue. Given the siting of the extension and the dense row of conifers running along the north eastern boundary of the site I am not of the view that any harm would result to the character of the street scene.

Impact on residential amenity

The windows in the side elevation of the extension would face the site boundary with the private garden to the adjoining dwelling. It is not however considered that the extension would cause a loss of privacy to the occupiers of this property due to the tall row of conifers running along this boundary. In any case, notwithstanding the conifers there would be distance of 16 metres between the windows and the boundary. Having regard to the guidance contained in SPG1 it is not considered that any unacceptable overlooking would occur.

Impact on the landscape

Due to the topography of the site the existing building occupies a fairly prominent position in the landscape. The extension however would be set at a lower level to the main building and it would not be visible from the lower land to the north and west of the site due to the tall boundary hedges. In any event, regardless of the boundary hedges it is considered that any views gained of the extension from the surrounding land would be set against the existing home and adjoining development. I do not therefore consider that any adverse landscape impact would result.

Sustainability

The applicant has identified the fact that the site is in an unsustainable location that is poorly served by public transport. Whilst it is accepted that the additional residents resulting from the extension would not increase the need to travel directly, it is noted that 6 additional employees would be created and it is considered that the new residents would attract visitors. The proposed extension would therefore increase the need to travel and given the site poor accessibility by public transport I consider that this would involve journeys by the private car. I am mindful of the government's objective of reducing the need to travel by private car advocated in PPS1 and PPG13, but I also note the recognition these documents give of the difficulty associated with achieving this objective in a rural area.

Paragraph 44 of PPG13 advises that *'In determining the appropriate strategy for employment in rural areas it is important to consider the scale, impact and likely catchment area of developments. Local authorities will need to weigh up the policy concerns but in general terms the larger the number of staff employed on site the greater the need to ensure the development is accessible by public transport, walking and cycling'*.

The guidance contained in PPS4 would also apply to this development as it would provide employment opportunities. Policy EC12 of PPS4 advises local planning authorities to *'support small-scale economic development where it provides the most sustainable option in villages, or other locations, that are remote from local service centres, recognising that a site may be an acceptable location for development even though it may not be readily accessible by public transport'*.

When considering the scale of the development in employment terms it should be noted that the proposal would increase the number of people employed at the site from 26 to 32. I consider this to be a relatively modest increase and I do not do not consider that the

proposal would materially affect the travel demands of the site. Furthermore, it is not considered that the additional vehicle journeys attributed to the visitors of the 11 additional residents would involve a material change to the travel demands of the site. The Highways Authority has been specifically consulted on the matter of travel demand and sustainable transport and no objection has been raised. On this basis I do not consider that any transport related concerns can be substantiated.

Conclusion

The proposed extension would be an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt that would cause clear harm to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt. It is not considered that the special circumstances put forward by the applicant would outweigh this harm. Thus, in accordance with policies D.38 and D.39 of the WCSP, policy DS2 of the BDLP and the advice contained in PPG2 I recommend that planning permission is refused.

RECOMMENDATION: that planning permission is **REFUSED**.

The proposed extension would represent an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt contrary to policies D.38 and D.39 of the Worcestershire County Structure Plan 2001, policy DS2 of the Bromsgrove District Local Plan 2004 and the advice contained in PPG2: Green Belts. The proposal would cause clear harm to the openness and visual amenities of the Green Belt and it is not considered that any very special circumstances exist to outweigh this harm.