
APPLICATION No: EPF/1480/04

Report Item No: 2

SITE ADDRESS:

PARISH: Ongar

ONGAR MOTORS & TRANSPORT CO, THE BOROUGH,
GREENSTED ROAD, ONGAR

APPLICANT: General Practice Investment Corporation

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL:

Erection of medical and day care centre with associated parking facilities.

RECOMMENDED DECISION: Refuse

1. The proposal would result in an increased risk of flooding on this and adjacent sites in a Flood Zone 3 floodplain as defined in Government Guidance PPG25 and modelled by the Environment Agency to be within a 1 in 100 year flood event. The mitigating measures put forward by the applicant do not adequately or appropriately prevent such a flood measure occurring and therefore the proposal will be contrary to policies U2 and U3 of the adopted Local Plan and Government Guidance PPG25 (Development and Flood Risk).
2. The proposal includes development in close proximity to an ordinary watercourse. This will prejudice the environmental obligations of the Environment Agency and preclude the provision of an adequate buffer zone, contrary to policy U3 of the adopted Local Plan.

Description of Proposal:

`L'-shaped large, part two, part single storey building with hardstanding on three sides providing access road from southern boundary as currently exists and 60 space car park. Proposal to provide group practice doctors' surgeries and elderly person day care centre, plus other community health service related facilities (clinics, optician, dentist, pharmacy etc) totalling 2,140 square metres of floor space on a footprint of about 1,200 square metres.

The building will have a shallow curved roof profile at a maximum height of 9.5m and externally composed of a mix of contrasting brick and render, with a pitched roof centrally glazed area as the main entrance to the building.

Description of Site:

A 0.55 ha irregular shape site currently leased to Epping Forest District by Essex County Council for use as a lorry park, with access off The Borough. There is a belt of trees on the eastern boundary, which Cripsey Brook and a footpath runs through, north to south. On the western boundary are 5 residential properties; to the north is open land.

The site is in the Metropolitan Green Belt and adjoins a Conservation Area to the northeast.

Relevant History:

Long history of use of land for parking of lorries since 1950s. In 1978 planning permission was granted for a car and lorry park, which was renewed in 1984.

Policies Applied:

Structure Plan - C2 (Green Belt constraint), BE1 (re-use of urban sites), T12 (vehicle parking).

Local Plan - GB2 (Green Belt restraint), HC6 (affect on Conservation Area), CF2 (location of health care centres), CF9 (access available for all user groups), U2 (resist development in areas at risk from flooding), U3 (resist development resulting in increase risk of flooding), DBE1 (scale and appearance of building), DBE2 (detriment to neighbouring property), DBE4 (new buildings in the Green Belt respect surroundings), DBE9 (residential amenity of neighbouring properties), LL10 (retention of trees), LL11 (provision for landscaping), T12 (resist loss of lorry park), T14 (adequate on-site parking), T17 (traffic accessibility, congestion and highway safety).

Issues and Considerations:

The main issues in this case are:

1. whether development within the Green Belt in this case will be harmful to its openness;
2. acceptability of losing a lorry park;
3. relationship to the surrounding area;
4. impact upon the amenities of occupiers of adjacent residential properties;
5. highway issues;
6. trees and landscaping issues; and
7. development within a flood plain.

Background

The applicants state the doctors surgeries in Basons Lane and The Ongar Surgery in the High Street are sub-standard and do not meet the needs of a modern health service or the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The practices have been searching for a suitable alternative building or site in Ongar and consider this to be the only available site of this size and location. In addition, under a NHS initiative, Primary Care Trusts have been advised to bring their community services, which may include GP services, pharmacy, dentistry, optical services, minor surgery and social care services together under one roof in new-build projects with primary health care moving out of hospitals and into community care centres. A new health centre will provide these facilities as well as other community care services (child health, chiropody, health visitors, school nurses etc).

Essex County Council have also been looking for a suitable location for a replacement facility for Day Care for Older People, currently provided at the Ongar War Memorial Hospital, which again does not meet operational standards.

A twenty place day care centre, together with expanded surgery facilities and community care staff into a new purpose built building has resulted in the proposal of this size and floor area to serve its community. The existing doctors' surgeries in Ongar do not have the facility or site area to provide the facilities now required in primary care. The proposed new building would provide 10 consulting rooms, nurse clinics and treatment room, dispensing area and administration/waiting rooms on the ground floor. The rest of the ground floor (350m²) will be the day care centre dining/sitting room, treatment room and administration plus a conservatory. Community health service facilities will be located on the first floor (physio, chiropodist x 2, child health, nurse treatment room, minor injuries rooms, speech therapist office, training room/meeting room and other offices).

1. Metropolitan Green Belt

There is an assumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Only a few developments are appropriate as defined in Government advice, Structure Plan and the Local Plan. This is not one of those few developments.

However, should very special circumstances outweigh the harm to the openness of the Green Belt then there can be a justification for building in the Green Belt.

In considering this, it should be noted that the site does not add positively to the openness of the Green Belt. It is predominantly made up of a large hardstanding and in the past

has been occupied by large lorries for overnight stay and storage purposes. There is built development immediately adjacent to it and that part of the site containing Cripsey Brook and footpath will retain its vegetation where necessary, although replacement tree planting is considered necessary.

The other main point to consider is the need for the facility. This has been outlined above and the main difficulty has been in finding a suitable, sustainable location for a catchment area that not only includes Chipping Ongar, but outlying villages and rural areas. In this part of the town it is close to the southern end of the town centre, a large residential area and close proximity to public transport (bus stops). There is difficulty in finding a similar size, suitable site which is also available in Ongar and not in the Green Belt.

In summary on this point, it is felt that the very special circumstances do outweigh the harm to one of the main functions of the Green Belt, i.e. its openness, and furthermore, the site is hemmed in by built development, such that losing this part of the Green Belt to a community facility building of benefit to its population, would not be so out of keeping with its surroundings. It therefore complies with Structure Plan policy C2 and Local Plan policy GB2. The Parish Council is, however, also concerned with the use of land north of the application site as a potential Nature Reserve. This development may jeopardise any future provision, but a judgement of priority need has to be made based on what is best for the community.

2. Loss of Lorry Park

Policy T12 of the Local Plan states that the Council will resist the loss of the existing lorry park until an adequate, suitably located alternative is available. This policy is somewhat dated, having been drawn up some 10 years ago and the County Council have declared the land surplus to highway requirements, and whilst daytime parking does take place, the number of lorries present are few overnight. The County Council have no plans to continue to lease this to Epping Forest for this purpose. Furthermore, this is not neighbourly development set as it is immediately adjacent residential properties.

The loss of the lorry park therefore is accepted in this case, given the greater community benefits derived from a health and day care centre than an under-used lorry park.

3. Scale, Design and Appearance

Whilst the footprint of the building would be large, its height has been stepped down and the roof broken to reduce its bulk and massing. Contrasting external materials would add interest to its overall design and its height would be a little higher than the average house ridge level adjacent the site (which are about 8-8.5m). The site will be opened up to the High Street,

and in general the new building would have a positive, albeit a dramatic changeable impact upon the visual amenities of the street and on the adjacent Conservation Area.

The proposal therefore complies with policy DBE1 and HC6 of the Local Plan.

4. Living Conditions of Adjacent Residential Occupants

The building is large compared with adjacent residential properties to the west, which include a pair of bungalows at 6 and 7 Oakland Mews alongside parking off the entrance road, and larger two storey timber-clad homes at No's. 18 and 19 Turners Close. The building, however, will primarily be located on the opposite side of the site towards Cripsey Brook and being in the northern part of the site, it would not extend as far as the bungalows.

The residents of No. 18 Turner Close, and to a lesser extent, No. 19, will be most affected by the development. This is where the proposal will be closest at a distance of about 10m from the main rear wall of their house. Dense undergrowth will also be removed from here to provide vehicular access to parking at the rear end of the site. However, that part of the proposal in direct view from these two houses would be single storey at this point and in conclusion, the proposal would not be overbearing or visually intrusive to these occupiers.

Windows on the facing elevation will serve treatment rooms and clinic rooms, but the use of obscure glazing there would safeguard against overlooking and possible loss of privacy. Other windows facing on the far side limb of the building are more than 30m away, which is a significant distance of separation to not cause undue loss of amenity.

The proposal therefore complies with policies DBE2 and 9 of the Local Plan.

5. Highway Issues

Parking provision is commensurate for a building of this content and in this location. It is close to a residential area, in walking distance for many of its residents. Bus stops are also close by. The amount of activity at the site, including vehicles coming and going are likely to increase, however, this is compared with the low use of a lorry park, which potentially could be a greater source of nuisance from large vehicle movements if used to its full capacity.

The Highway Authority have withdrawn their initial objection and are satisfied that the development can proceed without harm to traffic and pedestrian movement, following the applicants submission of a highway capacity and safety assessment. However, this will be subject to the developers funding access improvements at the road junction between The Borough and

the A128 High Street.

Highway officers have also recommended the following:-

- the provision of 4 uncontrolled crossings each with a dropped kerb/tactile paving at the A128 High Street/The Borough junction,
- the bringing up to current Essex County Council standards of both bus stops located at the same junction,
- a financial contribution to cover the cost of providing a foot/cycle path along the alignment of Footpath 14 (located on the north and north-east boundary of the site which links Rodney Road with the High Street),
- a contribution towards an A128 Route Study (incident black spots, pedestrian safety etc)
- a Travel Plan.

The applicant's have agreed to these highway improvements and should Members recommend that planning permission is granted, it would be subject to a Section 106 Agreement covering these points.

6. Trees and Landscaping

A tree survey and planting schedule has been submitted with this application. There will be a fairly dramatic change to the eastern boundary. The current footpath and brook will not be affected, but around 13 Poplar trees are proposed to be removed because of the close proximity of the proposed building. Whilst these are visually important, they are short lifespan trees, which are too closely located to each other to develop properly. Many are structurally unsound and diseased and there is evidence of gale damage.

The Council's arboriculturist has advised that a more positive planting scheme be submitted showing replacement planting for the Poplar trees and new hedge/shrub/tree planting to soften the extent of the large area of car parking. Larger existing specimen trees also along this boundary are shown to be retained.

It is considered that whilst the removal of the Poplar trees will open up the boundary, it has the benefit of the building being partially viewed from the High Street. Overall the proposal complies with policies LL10 and LL11 of the Local Plan.

7. Flooding

The site is located in a floodplain and the Environment Agency have objected to the development because it is at risk from flooding from Cripsey Brook. It lies within a Flood Zone 3 as defined in Government guidance PPG25 and modelled to be within a 1 flood in 100 year event or, to put another way, has 1% chance each year of being flooded. It also has a history of

flooding. It is a previously non-developed site, possibly because of this. Also, because it is a building designed to attract the public, especially for young children and old people, it can also be considered as development for vulnerable occupancy. In the event of a 1:100 year flood, flooding could potentially be to a depth of 0.5m - 0.7m.

The applicants, aware that the site is in a floodplain, have designed the building to be on stilts and voids and submitted a flood risk assessment document. The design of the proposed building does show the ground floor of the building raised by approximately 1.2m from natural ground level and infilled by grilles to allow water to move through with access to the building via long ramps.

However, the Environment Agency maintain their objection. They do not find this method acceptable and there are risks of the grilles becoming blocked, therefore impeding flood flow. This would affect flood storage volume and there is the risk of flooding, as a result, occurring to other residents in the area. Also the proposed building is too close to Cripsey Brook and an adequate buffer zone cannot be provided alongside this watercourse. The scale of the building and/or its siting is not acceptable in respect of this issue.

The frequency of flooding may be low but the Government Agency, taking advice of PPG25, state that when it occurs more people are generally affected by rarer floods, with potentially greater risk to life to those frequenting the proposed development, particularly the very old, infirm, disabled and long-term sick, which is likely to be more common in association with this than other types of development.

The Environment Agency believe the site to be wholly inappropriate for the development proposed. Officers feel uneasy about taking an opposite view, in view of recent flood events across the country, despite the mitigating measures proposed by the applicant, which includes a willingness to enter a legal agreement/planning conditions undertaking the regular inspection of the void area underneath the whole of the proposed building, keeping the area clear and not used for storage purposes and an hours of use control (no person on the site between 10pm and 6am).

Policy U2 of the Local Plan aims to safeguard against the risk of flooding either on site or elsewhere. The clear advice from the Environment Agency is that there is a fear that flooding may occur as a result of the development on neighbouring residential sites.

Policy U3 also states that the Council will not permit development resulting in an increased risk of flooding unless it is satisfied that there are adequate and appropriate attenuation measures to minimise this risk. Given the Environment Agency guidance, the suggested mitigating measures

will be inadequate and extremely difficult to enforce in order to ensure against the risk of flooding.

Summary

In most respects this is an acceptable form of development. This appears to be the best possible provision of health care related facilities in a purpose built building and on an available site in Ongar, which has so far proved difficult to locate elsewhere and still be available generally for the public community it will serve. The Epping Forest Primary Health Trust is supportive of the new location and there is no available alternative similar size site in a more central location in Ongar.

However, Officers conclude that despite these plus factors, building in the floodplain where no building previously existed would increase flooding to adjacent sites and be a threat to the future occupiers and users of the site. On balance, therefore, the application is recommended for refusal on this point and secondly, because of being too close to Cripsey Brook without an adequate buffer zone.

Should the Committee support the planning application, as it is contrary to flooding policy, it would need to be reported to District Development Control Committee for a final decision.

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS:

PARISH COUNCIL - Object, support the notion of this development, but object on the following grounds:- Development is too large due to inclusion of the day care facility, will lead to increased traffic and hazard for pedestrians. Increase traffic volumes and site is some distance from the population base with the most requirement for this facility, i.e. the Shelley area, and will increase traffic flow through Ongar, Need to redesign the access of the road junction to Greensted Road to improve site access, Parish Council have been long committed to develop the area north as a Nature Reserve and therefore require clarification as to the effect of this scheme on these longer term issues. The existing footpath within the site boundary should remain and there are serious concerns as to the inadequacy of parking given the inclusion of the day centre within the plans, soft landscaping details are insufficient to allow this building to be adequately screened.

4 THE SPINNEY - Location on this site in this part of Ongar will be a wonderful asset and remove the ugly eyesore of the current site.

VINE HOUSE, ONGAR - No general objection, worried that if an alternative lorry park site is not found that traffic will start parking in lay-bys and on the street, Jewsons use the site for lorry to wait until their warehouse is ready, hope parking is for all and not to be charged, site will be

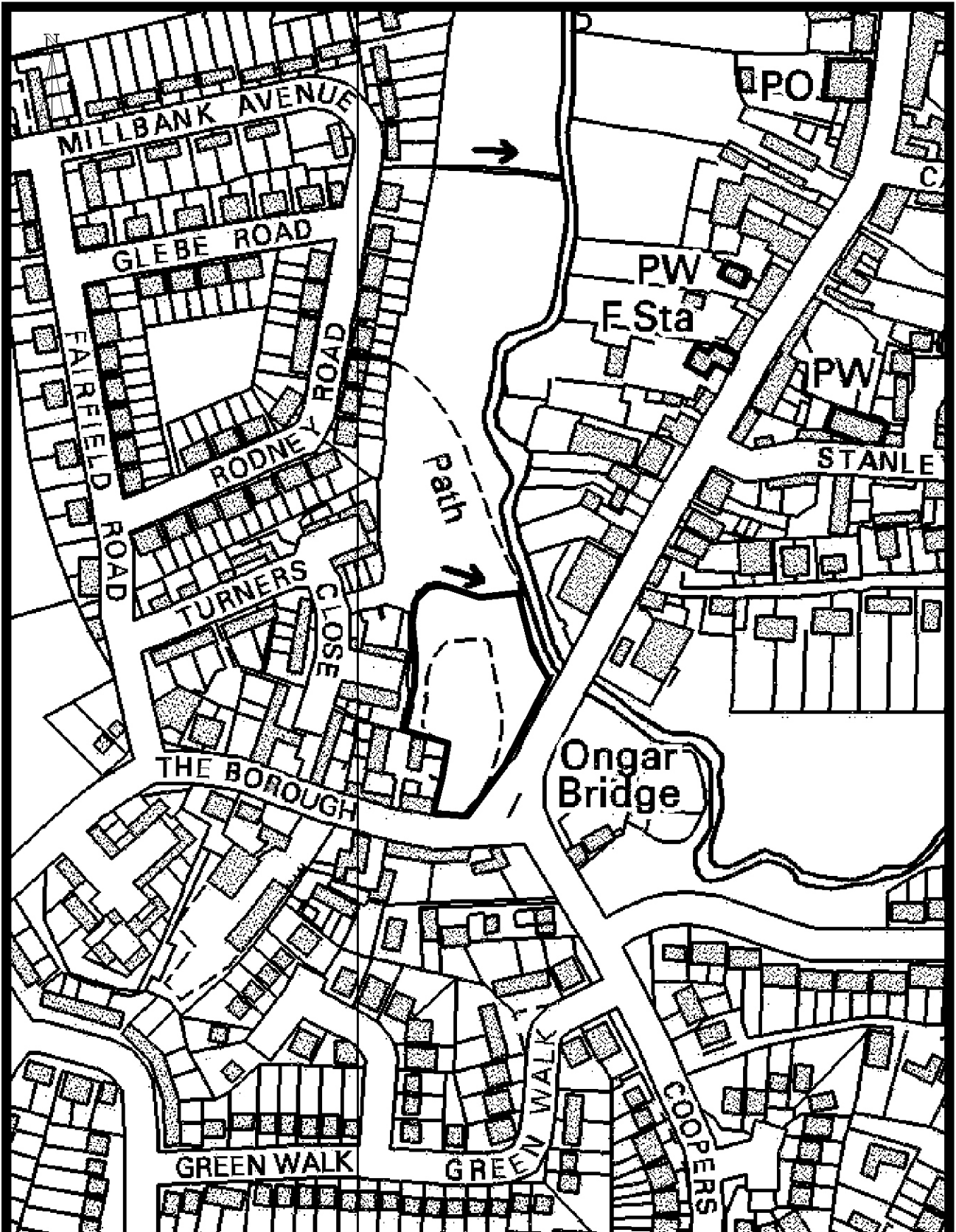
contaminated, site access not good near a traffic island between the High Street and The Borough.

10 KETTLEBURY WAY - Site is contaminated (can smell gas), in a flood plain and having lived here for 40 years I have known the site to flood at least 3 times, cutting down trees will make the area less stable and remove the beautiful screening, proposed building is out of keeping, a more central site is required because this is located at one end of the town.

6 OAKLAND MEWS - Proposal will add to the drainage problems that exist in the area, should provide increased capacity for foul and surface water drainage, concern this will become a 24 hour, 365 days of the year facility which is inappropriate for a residential area, hours of use condition is required, headlights of cars disturb local residents entering the car park, traffic movement will seriously affect access to Oakland Mews and other residencies around The Borough, controls on lighting and signage.

7 OAKLAND MEWS - Low rise building which will not adversely affect our property, improve the area which is currently a dump for untaxed vehicles, overnight parking, fly tipping. car parking will be against the rear wall of our garden and concerned over noise pollution, would want a planted garden against this wall.

9 OAKLAND MEWS - Not sure this is the right site, should be attached to St Margarets Hospital in Epping or the War Memorial Hospital in Ongar or expand Basons Lane surgery and make better use of other sites. Residents and traders use the site for parking and need rear access to their houses. Is alternative lorry parking to be made? Site is in a flood plain.



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