

**DCNC2007/0667/O - SITE FOR THE ERECTION OF AN
ADDITIONAL BUILDING FOR PROVISION OF CARE TO
THE ELDERLY MENTALLY INFIRM AT PENCOMBE
HALL, PENCOMBE, BROMYARD, HEREFORDSHIRE,
HR7 4RL**

**For: Mr N Williams per Wall, James & Davies 15-23
Hagley Road Stourbridge West Midlands DY8 1QW**

Date Received:
2nd March 2007

Ward:
Bromyard

Grid Ref:
60224, 52072

Expiry Date:
27th April 2007

Local Members: Councillor A Seldon and Councillor B Hunt

Introduction

The application was reported to the meeting of the Northern Area Planning Sub-Committee on 29th May 2007 when it was deferred for a Committee site visit. The site visit took place on 14th June 2007. The application was then reported back to the Northern Area Planning Sub-Committee on 27th June 2007. At that meeting the Sub-Committee resolved to grant planning permission contrary to the recommendation of the report. This decision was accordingly referred to the Head of Planning Services to determine if it should be reported to the Planning Committee for further consideration.

At its meeting on 27th June 2007 the Northern Area Planning Sub-Committee was recommended to refuse this application for the following reason:

The proposal represents the provision of a new residential care facilities in an open countryside location outside locations where new residential development would be acceptable. Its location is unsustainable by virtue of its remoteness from public transport facilities and services and the development would thereby increase the need to travel by private transport. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that there are sufficient material planning considerations to outweigh these factors and therefore the proposal is contrary to Policies S1, DR2 and CF7 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan 2007 and the guidance in Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

In the debate the members of the Area Sub-Committee discussed the likely future demand for accommodation for the frail elderly including "EMI" units and concluded that there was a need for this facility. They considered that policy CF7 was directed to new developments and not extensions of existing facilities. They also felt that the site was well run and that the development would not be unduly prominent in the landscape.

It was resolved to grant planning permission.

The proposal raises the following issues:

1. The site is in a highly unsustainable location, remote from services and public transport facilities. Development here was well outside any suitable location for new residential development and consequently the site failed the tests set out in policy CF7.
2. The extension of the use was to provide a new building for 40 bedrooms. The existing facility has only 30. Consequently the proposal is of a much greater scale than would normally be implied by the term "Extension". It was, in effect, a substantial new development in open countryside (for which there is no established need).
3. Whilst the Northern Area Planning Sub-Committee gave significant weight to the argument that there is an increasing need for facilities for the frail elderly, it was pointed out in the debate that there is currently no shortage of EMI beds in Herefordshire. There is a shortage in Worcestershire and Shropshire and therefore, if this scheme goes ahead, it is quite likely to serve the needs of those two counties initially. There is no proven need for such a facility in Herefordshire at the moment and, if there were, this would not be the most suitable place for it. The proposals do not relate to the needs of Pencombe and the surrounding countryside. If a need arises in the future in Herefordshire as a whole then that can be addressed through the emerging LDF and/or other policy initiatives. At present there is no need for this facility.
4. The lack of adverse impact on the wider landscape does not overcome the objection, in principle, to this type of development in a remote countryside location.
5. Given the absence of public transport links, and the absence of a sizeable local population from which to recruit staff, any additional employment will inevitably give rise to increased commuting by car. The remoteness of the site will also require visiting professional and visitors to the patients to travel by private transport – to the detriment of the Council's policies on sustainable development and sustainable transport.

In the light of the above arguments it can be seen that the proposal conflicts with the development plan policies which seek to restrict new development in the open countryside without special justification. Consequently, the application has been referred to this meeting of the Planning Committee for further consideration.

The report to the 27th June Northern Area Planning Sub-Committee follows.

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 Pencombe Hall is a large Victorian house that is currently in use as a 30 bed care home for the elderly. It is an impressive building of stone construction with a slate roof, set within landscaped grounds with a number of mature specimen trees surrounding. The land slopes down to the north-west to a tennis court and is bounded to the south west by the Little Cowarne to Pencombe road, onto which the property has two points of access. The former coach house lies to the north-east and is now occupied as an entirely independent dwelling.
- 1.2 The property occupies a raised position in the landscape with extensive views to the north towards Pencombe village.
- 1.3 The application is made in outline with all matters reserved for future consideration and is for the erection of a building for the provision of care for elderly and mentally infirm people. The application is accompanied by indicative plans which suggest the erection of a split level single/two storey building to be located to the north west of the existing building, partly on the site of the tennis court. The building will provide 40 bedroom

accommodation and also incorporates facilities such as medical areas, staff rooms and day rooms for residents.

2. Policies

2.1 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan

S1 – Sustainable development
DR1 – Design
DR2 – Land use and activity
LA2 – Landscape character and areas least resilient to change
LA3 – Setting of settlements
LA5 – Protection of trees, woodlands and hedgerows
CF7 – Residential nursing and care homes

3. Planning History

None identified.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

4.1 None required

Internal Council Consultations

4.2 Transportation Manager – No objection subject to conditions

4.3 Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager – No objections

4.4 Forward Planning Manager - The application should be assessed against policy CF7 of the UDP. The proposed care home is a new development and is considered to fall within the category of a residential use. Pencombe is a rural open countryside location where there are strict controls on new residential development as far as the UDP is concerned. Policy CF7 states that proposals for the provision of residential nursing and care homes will be permitted in areas where new residential development is acceptable. Therefore policy H7 is applicable and this application does not meet any of the set criteria in this policy. The proposal is contrary to policy.

Conservation Manager

4.5 Historic Buildings - This appears to be the right place to site an extension being set down at the back of the house. It is however of a significant size and its essentially linear shape makes it stretch out into the countryside, fronting onto public footways. It might have been preferable to set it round an enclosed courtyard and reduce its size so that it is clearly subservient to the main house reading more as a group of ancillary buildings rather than a major building in its own right, which competes with the main house, particularly when viewed from the north.

4.6 Landscape - None of the trees on or adjacent to the site are protected by a TPO and the proposed application would have no direct impact on trees within or adjacent to the site.

- 4.7 I am concerned that the proposed development would result in a dramatic increase in the volume of building in the area. The proposal dramatically extends the building into the lawned element of the site and would visually encroach into open countryside. The landscape character (Timbered Plateau Farmlands) surrounding the site is defined by wooded valleys and dingles and distinct boundary hedges and would generally be considered unable to accommodate significant development. The settlement pattern in this landscape is of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets and the clearly defined enclosure pattern relates to the historic integrity of this landscape.
- 4.8 Whilst not an old or listed building the historic and cultural relationship of Pencombe Hall to the village should be considered important. I consider the development overly large and intrusive in relation to the existing buildings, landscaped grounds and the relationship of the hall to the nearby village.
- 4.9 I would recommend the application be refused as contrary to policies DR1 and LA2 of the UDP.

5. Representations

- 5.1 Little Cowarne Parish Council – Raise concerns regarding poor water supply and in respect to the treatment of sewerage. Conclude that as the proposal is within the existing grounds there is no objection to the siting of the new building.

- 5.2 Three letters of objection have been received from the following:

Mr P. Mitchell, Gable Cottage, Bredenbury

Mr & Mrs Tilling, Glebe House, Pencombe

B.G. Potter, The Coach House, Pencombe

In summary the points raised are as follows:

1. A large building would detract from the setting and importance of Pencombe Hall.
 2. The property is in a rural area and is not accessible and would be better placed in a town.
 3. The increase in traffic would have an adverse impact on the road network.
 4. No access to mains sewers. The existing septic tank is inadequate and causes a nuisance.
- 5.3 One letter of support has also been received from Mrs Williams, The Finches, Wellington, whose father is presently a resident at Pencombe Hall. She is concerned that he continues to receive a high level of care and is concerned that he would have to move to another home if his condition continues to deteriorate.
- 5.4 The application is supported by a statement submitted on behalf of the applicant by his agent. This advises of the need for specialist elderly mentally infirm (EMI) in light of the fact that Herefordshire has the second oldest population in England.

- 5.5 It goes on to say that a report published by Herefordshire Council in conjunction with the NHS Primary Care Trust notes “*a shortage of beds for people with mental health problems.*” And, in addition that there appears to be a shortage of Nursing/EMI places.
- 5.6 The applicant has a particular interest in this type of care and Pencombe Hall already has a high reputation in this field. One of the advantages of locating a new specialist unit at Pencombe Hall is that residents would be able to transfer from a home providing residential care to one providing nursing care without enduring the disturbance of moving at a time of greatest need.
- 5.7 The statement concludes that the advantages of the proposal would be that it would:
- a) make a significant contribution and investment to counter the shortfall in this type of care.
 - b) Go hand in hand with the established facilities at Pencombe Hall.
 - c) Represent a sensitive addition to the existing facilities which would blend comfortably with the architectural design of Pencombe Hall.
- 5.8 The full text of these letters can be inspected at Northern Planning Services, Garrick House, Widemarsh Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

6. Officer’s Appraisal

- 6.1 The key consideration with this proposal is whether it is acceptable as a matter of principle. Policy CF7 of the UDP refers specifically to residential nursing and care homes and states that:

Proposals for the provision of residential nursing and care homes will be permitted in areas where new residential development is acceptable or where they involve the environmentally acceptable conversion of existing buildings...”

- 6.2 The site lies in an area of open countryside where there would be a presumption against further residential development and therefore the proposal fails the policy test. Consequently it falls to be considered whether there are any other material planning considerations that outweigh the policy.
- 6.3 The applicant’s agent has identified the lack of specialist EMI care and the fact that Pencombe Hall already has a background in providing it, and this forms the basis of their exceptional justification for the proposal.
- 6.4 It remains the case that Pencombe is only identified as a smaller settlement and that the application site is some way outside of the village. It does not represent a sustainable location in terms of access to services or in terms of minimising people’s need to travel. Policies such as S1 and DR2 reinforce the principle of sustainable development and this is a key theme of the UDP.
- 6.5 For a site on the fringes of a larger settlement with access to services and/or public transport, there may be greater justification for setting aside the provisions of CF7. However, this application site is so remote that the issues of sustainability cannot be set aside and therefore are not outweighed by the material considerations described by the applicant’s agent.
- 6.6 The indicative plans give an idea of the scale of the proposal. The Historic Buildings Officer has opined that the site is appropriate, but raises some reservations over the

form of the new building. It is considered that this could be addressed at the reserved matters stage through negotiation and an informed design. The changes in levels across the site would assist in reducing the perceived scale of any development and the siting of the proposal also takes advantage of this.

- 6.7 The Landscape Officer considers that the scheme would have an unacceptable visual impact on its surroundings. However, the site is well screened by the mature trees that surround the site and his comments acknowledge that the scheme would have no impact upon these. It is your Officer’s opinion that the proposal would have a limited visual impact. An assessment has been made of this in the wider area and the site is not at all prominent from Pencombe village. The retention of surrounding trees would help to ensure that this remains the case, as would a design that makes full use in the changes in levels across the site. The proposal could therefore be considered to be acceptable in its visual impact.
- 6.8 Matters relating to existing drainage problems and inadequacy of an existing septic tank are addressed by the submission which includes details of a replacement to serve the new development.
- 6.9 Overall, however, the proposal is contrary to the UDP policy which seeks to direct new residential development to main settlements, and avoid new housing in isolated locations such as this one. The site has no public transport links and is only accessible along small country lanes. In that regard it is highly unsustainable. Any increase in activity on the site will inevitably lead to additional journeys by private transport for visitors and staff alike. The fact that there is an existing establishment on the site, and the extent to which detailed concerns over drainage and design can be addressed do not of themselves outweigh the over-riding policy objection. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be refused for the following reason:

The proposal represents the provision of a new residential care facilities in an open countryside location outside locations where new residential development would be acceptable. Its location is unsustainable by virtue of its remoteness from public transport facilities and services and the development would thereby increase the need to travel by private transport. The applicant has failed to demonstrate that there are sufficient material planning considerations to outweigh these factors and therefore the proposal is contrary to Policies S1, DR2 and CF7 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan 2007 and the guidance in Planning Policy Statement 7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.

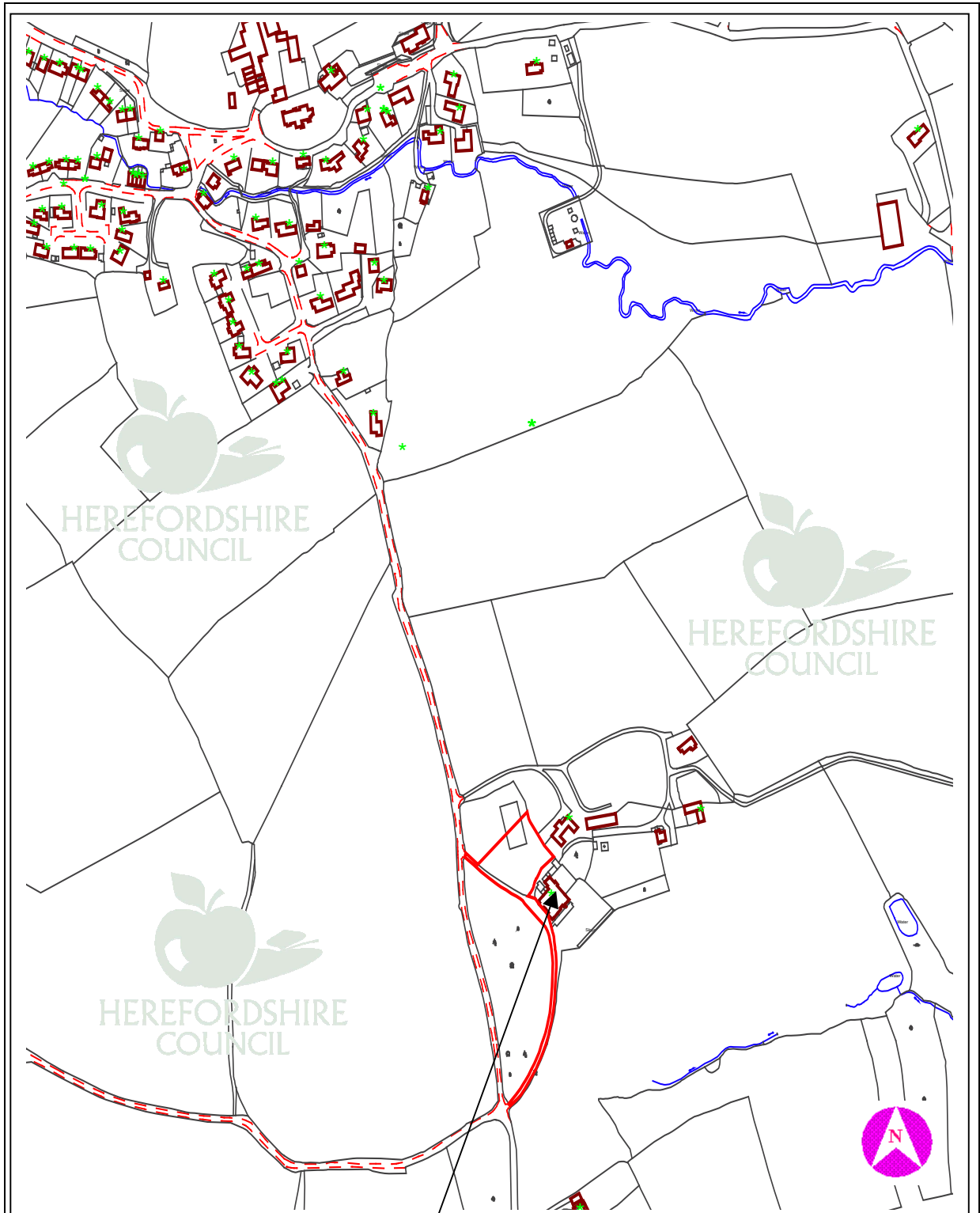
Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.



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APPLICATION NO: DCNG2007/0667/O

SCALE : 1 : 5000

SITE ADDRESS : Pencombe Hall, Pencombe, Bromyard, Herefordshire, HR7 4RL

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