

**10 DCSE2004/2614/F - NEW ACCESS AT ST. JOSEPHS  
CONVENT, WALFORD ROAD, ROSS-ON-WYE,  
HEREFORDSHIRE, HR9 5PQ**

**For: Woodfield Developments Ltd. per James  
Spreckley MRICS FAAV, Brinsop House, Brinsop,  
Herefordshire, HR4 7AS**

**Date Received: 14th July, 2004      Ward: Ross-on-Wye East      Grid Ref: 59826, 23543**

**Expiry Date: 8th September, 2004**

Local Members: Councillor Mrs. A.E. Gray and Councillor Mrs. C.J. Davis

## **1. Site Description and Proposal**

1.1 St Joseph's Convent is on the east side of Walford Road, Ross-on-Wye. The main part of the Convent is a former Victorian villa, but substantial additional accommodation has been erected to the north of the house. The Convent adjoins St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School to the east, with the Conservative Club occupying the former villa to the north and an old people's home that to the south. Other nearby properties along Walford Road are residential.

1.2 The access to the Convent off Walford Road is at the northern end of the site. The access is relatively narrow (about 3m wide) and marked by 4 attractive stone pillars with elaborated caps : two set wide apart in the stone boundary wall and two marking the narrower entrance with curving stone walls joining each pair of pillars. It is proposed to close this access by building a new stone wall and forming a new access towards the southern end of the frontage. This section of the frontage has a modern re-constituted stone wall which would be re-built using natural stone at the back of the visibility splays for the new access. The rear pair of pillars would be used to delineate the new entrance which would be about 9m wide including footways. The new access would require removal of thick screen of shrubs and a landscaping scheme is proposed. It is understood that the Convent is to close and an application for change of use will be submitted but as this scheme has not yet been fully developed only the new access has been submitted at this stage.

## **2. Policies**

### **2.1 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan**

Policy CTC1      -      Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

### **2.2 South Herefordshire District Local Plan**

Policy C23      -      New Development affecting Conservation Areas  
Policy C24      -      Demolition in Conservation Areas  
GD1              -      General Development Criteria  
Policy T3       -      Highway safety requirements

### 3. Planning History

- 3.1 SH800191PF Dormitory block. - Approved  
23.04.80

### 4. Consultation Summary

#### Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 No statutory or non-statutory consultations required.

#### Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 Head of Engineering and Transportation recommends that any permission granted includes conditions regarding the access.
- 4.3 Chief Conservation Officer is concerned that there would be loss of historic fabric in attempting to re-use the piers and suggests the following:
1. Retain piers and curved walls as existing with suitable designed fixed gate/screen across entrance.
  2. Designing new opening/piers in materials and detailing to complement nature of original.

### 5. Representations

- 5.1 The applicant's agent points out that:

- (1) the detailed arrangements for the new access, including carriageway width and visibility splays have been agreed on site
- (2) the application is supported by a Tree Survey and Arboricultural Assessment carried out by Jerry Ross Arboricultural Consultancy.

The conclusion of the latter is included in an appendix to this report.

Although a detailed landscaping scheme has not been submitted the aim is described as follows:

The landscaping proposal is intended to both preserve the current aesthetic qualities of the site and complement the proposed access alterations.

In essence, all of the most prominent and healthy trees shall be retained, whilst much of the bank of dense evergreen foliage shall be removed, or trimmed back to lighten the appearance of the boundary planting to Walford Road. In its place, we propose to introduce a Yew hedge behind the boundary wall to provide low level screening to the bouse. Between the large, retained specimens we shall introduce small to medium specimen trees with vibrant foliage to contrast the dark appearance of the retained conifers.

Much of the existing shrubs shall be removed and replaced within a refined strategic approach for the site.

- 5.2 The Town Council's comments are awaited.

5.3 One letter has been received from Ashcote expressing objections to the proposal on the basis of 4 primary issues and 1 secondary issue:

1. General observations: the drawings are now out of date (new house opposite) and photographs are misleading (minimal traffic).

Photographs included with the letter of objection were taken at 14.30 on August 31st, probably a low - medium time in terms of traffic movements and were all taken from a height of 1.5m and as close as possible to the boundary line.

2. Redundancy: unnecessary as low volume of vehicular use by the Sisters and access is destructive of habitat and architecture without bringing any benefit.
3. Unsuitability of proposed access as an exit: Visibility to the right is somewhat improved but visibility to the left is severely restricted by the vehicles that are regularly parked outside Lawfords. Also the partially obscured exit from Palmerston Road is heavily used by school buses and private cars.

Although traffic surmounting the hill brow (at the junction with The Avenue) cannot be seen, this is offset as there are no entrances to properties along this section of Walford Road and no parking.

4. Unlikelihood that the existing flanking pillars can be moved: This property is of considerable local interest as it was constructed by Sir Thomas Blake who also funded the rebuilding of the Baptist Church. One of these features is the repeated marble pillar motif found on the inner gate pillars.

It is unlikely that the existing pillars can be moved because of the extreme friability of the local sandstone from which they are constructed. The marble insets on the inner pillars are more robust.

5. Further loss of tree habitat: Whilst no important trees would be lost the somewhat untidy shrubs provide a hunting ground for bats and owls.
6. Conflict with current traffic calming proposals: Queried whether necessary but a consensus about the desirability of calming at the 'Prince of Wales' junctions, which would reduce speeds toward the existing entrance. But there will be a large pavement extension immediately opposite the proposed new access causing a further, confusing hazard.
7. We, therefore, feel that a new access is unnecessary and undesirable on the above grounds but if approved advise that better to retain the existing access as an exit and construct a new, single vehicle width entrance to the property.

5.4 Ross on Wye and District Civic Society consider that all 4 pillars should be retained.

The full text of these letters can be inspected at Southern Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

## 6. Officers Appraisal

- 6.1 There are considered to be two main issues relating to this proposal : highway safety and the effect on the character and appearance of Ross on Wye Conservation Area and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. On the first issue it should be noted that a visibility splay of 2.4m x 90m would be achieved. This fully meets standards for a 30 mph speed limit and the proposed traffic calming along Walford Road by the Council may well further reduce traffic speeds. A modification to that scheme would be necessary if permission is granted for the new access but it is understood that this would not compromise traffic calming. The traffic calming scheme allows on-street parking at appropriate locations only. The level of traffic to and from the Convent does not appear to be great. If an application for development of the site is submitted the suitability of the new access can be considered at that time. It is not considered therefore that the proposed access would be inimical to highway safety.
- 6.2 The pillars are attractive and important features in the street scene. In view of their condition it would seem more prudent to retain them in situ, as recommended by the Chief Conservation Officer, and construct new pillars for the new access. This has been agreed in principle by the applicant and amended drawings are awaited. The wider new access and loss on existing planting would make the site more open. Nevertheless this planting is not of intrinsic merit, with all the important trees being retained. The main building is very attractive and would be better seen from the street. The new landscaping although creating a different feel need not be less attractive. It is concluded therefore that the character and appearance of the Conservation Area would not be harmed.
- 6.3 The loss of habitat is also mentioned in the representations. This would be partly compensated by the new planting once this matures. Nevertheless it is not considered that the residual harm is sufficient to justify refusal of permission.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That subject to the receipt of suitably amended plans, the officers named in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be authorised to issue planning permission subject to the following conditions and any additional conditions considered necessary by officers:**

**1 A01 (Time limit for commencement (full permission))**

**Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.**

**2 G04 (Landscaping scheme (general))**

**Reason: In order to protect the visual amenities of the area.**

**3 G05 (Implementation of landscaping scheme (general))**

**Reason: In order to protect the visual amenities of the area.**

**4 G18 (Protection of trees)**

**Reason: To ensure adequate protection to existing trees which are to be retained, in the interests of the character and amenities of the area.**

**5 H03 (Visibility splays)**

**Reason: In the interests of highway safety.**

**6 H05 (Access gates)**

**Reason: In the interests of highway safety.**

**7 H06 (Vehicular access construction)**

**Reason: In the interests of highway safety.**

**8 H08 (Access closure)**

**Reason: To ensure the safe and free flow of traffic using the adjoining County highway.**

**INFORMATIVES:**

**1 HN01 - Mud on highway**

**2 HN04 - Private apparatus within highway**

**3 HN05 - Works within the highway**

**4 HN10 - No drainage to discharge to highway**

**5 HN19 - Disabled needs**

**6 N15 - Reason(s) for the Grant of Planning Permission.**

Decision: .....

Notes: .....

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**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies.