

Land adjacent to All Saints Church, Church Lane, Awbridge SO51 0HN



Proposed development of four houses, car park and graveyard extension

Pre-app statement

May 2019

Paul Airey Planning Associates Ltd

1. Introduction

1.1 All Saints Church in Church Lane, is a popular and well used church which serves the village of Awbridge. The church is however located on a very narrow road and during major church events such as weddings and funerals in particular there are serious problems of congestion and parking along the road. At some events on street parking extends all the way to the junction with Danes Road. This is not only a problem and a safety issue for people wanting to access the church, but also causes irritation for residents along Church Lane. There is also a significant problem for access by emergency vehicles during periods of peak parking. The lack of parking is also restricting the options for wider use of the church by the community. The optimum solution would be to provide a car park adjacent to the church.

1.2 There is also a need to extend the graveyard to allow for the continuation of burials at the Church. This has long been an acknowledged issue and the church been looking for a way of resolving this problem and the lack of parking for some time. A number of options have been looked at including land on the other side of Church Lane but none have been practical or feasible.

1.3 The fact is there are very few realistic options for extending the curtilage of the Church to allow for the creation of a car park and an enlarged graveyard on land suitably convenient for the church, but recently the land immediately to the west has been offered to the Church by the landowner.

1.4 The land, which totals about 0.7 ha, is currently partly used as a plant nursery and this activity could be relocated within the site to free up the land immediately adjacent to the church.

1.5 The cost of buying the land needed, relocating the nursery, and laying out the car park and graveyard would be considerable, but it is proposed that this could be paid for by allowing a housing development on the residual part of the site.



Figure 1. The existing nursery entrance

2. Local support

2.1 The church had been in discussions with the Parish Council for over 18 months about the potential of a scheme on this land. It has been recognised that if the Parish Council support and promote this development then it could be considered under the provisions of COM 9 of the adopted Test Valley Local Plan. Policy COM 9 states the following:

Policy COM9: Community Led Development

Community led development will be permitted if:

- a) the proposal is supported by evidence that there is a need for the development to maintain or enhance the sustainability of the settlement through the delivery of community benefit; and*
- b) it is demonstrated that the community has been involved in the preparation of the proposal; and*
- c) it is demonstrated that the community supports the proposal; and*
- d) the proposal, if for residential development, helps meet the affordable housing need of the parish in accordance with the thresholds contained within policy COM7 and local evidence and restrictions contained within policy COM8.*

2.2 The explanatory text of the plan states the following:

The justification for the development should be comprehensive and demonstrate that the proposal would sustain existing community facilities or deliver new ones which maintain or enhance the sustainability of that community. Therefore, the policy can be applied to both those settlements identified in the hierarchy (see table 7) and those smaller undefined settlements. Evidence will be required from the Parish Council, or parties acting in partnership with the Parish Council, showing that there is a need for the proposal in order to sustain or deliver the community benefit and that this has been identified in a parish plan or through bespoke research. Some villages have prepared village or parish plans and these should be used to help inform and support proposals for development. Where Neighbourhood Plans are produced they should be referred to.

2.3 There is little doubt that the proposal would provide a significant community benefit both for the church and for residents of Church Lane. In addition, all residents of Awbridge would benefit from a more accessible church and one that is able to provide for the needs of the parishioners.

2.4 The proposal has now been discussed at the Parish Council on at least two separate occasions and on each occasion there was a unanimous vote to support the proposal. The minutes of the relevant meetings are attached to this document. These minutes provide clear evidence the Parish Council have been closely involved with the proposal during its formulation, and that there is strong local support for the proposals. The proposals have been developed by the church in concert with the Parish Council and it is proposed that further consultation on the scheme will be undertaken before it is finally submitted for consideration to the local planning authority.

2.5 The Parish Council is also in the process of producing a neighbourhood plan for the area and although it is in its early stages, the issue of All Saints Church and the lack of parking in Church Lane and the need for more graveyard space has been raised as a community concern.

2.6 It is considered therefore that clause a) of policy COM 9 has been met and that there would be distinct community benefit from the proposal. Clause b) requires that there has been community involvement in the preparation of proposal and this has occurred through the joint working of the Parish Church and the Parish Council and the respective representatives of these organisations.

2.7 Clause c) requires that evidence is provided that the community supports the proposal and this will be undertaken by way of a community consultation event as part of the wider planning application.

3. Affordable housing

3.1 Clause d) requires that if the proposal is for residential development it helps to meet the affordable housing needs of the Parish in accordance with the thresholds contained within policy COM 7 and local evidence and restrictions contained within policy COM 8. In this respect, it is proposed that addressing the affordable housing requirement will be made in accordance with, the provisions of COM 7 such that a financial contribution would be made equivalent to up to 10% of dwellings to be affordable, and these would be secured by a legal agreement.

3.2 It is also considered that the houses could be offered for sale to local residents of the Parish before being offered on the open market

4. The size of the car park

4.1 It is proposed that the car park will provide for 42 parking spaces and that there would be a facility for overflow parking to the north of the proposed parking area. The church can hold over 200 people and there are many occasions during the year when it is anticipated the overflow car park will come into operation. For normal services and for smaller weddings, funerals and christenings, the laid out car park will be sufficient, but it is certainly not too large for the anticipated demand.

5. Loss of the nursery use

5.1 It is proposed that the existing plant nursery would be relocated to the north of the existing site and access would be provided through the proposed car park. It is not anticipated that that would cause any conflict between the activities. It has been previously suggested that the nursery use is an employment site and as such would be impacted by policy LE 10 of the local plan which seeks the retention of such sites.



Figure 2 Looking across the nursery buildings to the church

5.2 In fact, as a horticultural activity, it is not considered that a plant nursery should be recognised as an employment site under the criteria of policy LE 10. Agricultural and horticultural are similar activities which are not usually regarded as employment sites in the same way as traditional industrial estates and sites. In any case, it is proposed that the nursery use will be relocated and the low level of employment provided would be maintained.

6. Proposed housing development

6.1 The proposed development needs to generate enough value to ensure that the scheme can be implemented without a direct impact on the church's resources, which are limited. A viability assessment has been undertaken to determine the level of development that is necessary which takes account of the aspirations of the landowner as well as the capacity of the site.

6.2 The viability assessment attached to the application has been prepared by John Newman and shows that a minimum of four detached houses need to be provided to provide sufficient value in the scheme for it to achieve its aims. Nonetheless, the proposed development is shown to potentially be in deficit to the tune of over £100K and is only

feasible because a local resident is prepared to guarantee the scheme. The viability assessment demonstrates that fewer houses than proposed would not be viable.

6.3 It must be recognised that the landowner does not have to sell his land and is only prepared to do so at a certain price. It is not unreasonable that the existing landowner should receive payment for the land which recognises its strategic importance to the church. The proposed land price represents a substantial discount on residential values and is not considered to be unreasonable.

6.4 The viability assessment has made modest assumptions on costs and builders profits and is considered soundly based. It is anticipated that the assessment will be considered by the District Valuer as part of the planning application process.

7. The site

7.1 The site slopes away from Church Lane and also down from the church. There are trees and gappy hedgerows fronting Church Lane but these are of varying quality. The land adjoining church Lane is used as a plant nursery with numerous Poly tunnels, storage sheds and containers dotted around the site. There are also significant number of vehicles associated with the site. Generally the site has an untidy appearance.



Figure 3. The frontage of the development site

8. Character of the development

8.1 The proposed four detached houses would be accessed directly from Church Lane. The creation of four separate driveways would have an impact on the existing frontage of the lane, but this would be mitigated by new planting and landscaping, which would reflect the situation in other parts of the Lane. The proposed scheme will avoid affecting any of the more significant trees on the frontage to Church Lane.

8.2 The buildings themselves would be constructed in a style which respects the diverse character of the properties in the surrounding area. While the density of the development is slightly higher than the overall surrounding densities, it is not considered that the proposed development would be out of character with the settlement pattern of the area. There are a number of examples of groups of dwellings in the area including a group of four dwellings opposite the development site. While some of these are set further back from the road, the amount of building frontage facing the road is very similar to the proposed development. In fact along much of Church Lane there are properties with long building frontages facing the road.



Figure 4. The housing opposite the site



Figure 5. The housing opposite the site

8.3 The layout of the site means that the buildings themselves will be low be below the level of the road and due to their set back and the potential for new landscaping is considered the development will fit well with the character of the area.



Figure 6. The Western end of the site from church Lane



Figure 7. Looking east across the site towards the church

8.4 The proposed development will not be out of place with the general pattern of development in the area and with good design it is considered the development would

complement both the church and the character of Church Lane. It is considered therefore that the development would not be in conflict with policies E1 and E2 of the local plan.

8.5 In assessing this application, it is highly significant that in the view of the Parish Council, the development is appropriate to the area and is supported.

9. Relationship of the development to the church

9.1 The church is grade 2 listed and any application must ensure there will be no harm to the setting of the listed building unless the public benefit the scheme outweigh the harm. It is considered that the proposed dwellings are sufficiently removed from the church to ensure that the integrity of that building is not affected. The church is located in its own space and surrounded by the graveyard and a strong line of trees to the west which will be retained. The proposed graveyard extension to the south of the site will be in character with the existing surroundings of the church, and the car park area, providing it is suitably landscaped and surfaced, has the potential to be an attractive development in its own right. It is important to recognise that the existing use of the land is not visually attractive and will be improved by the development.



Figure 8. The tree screen that will be retained between the church and the car park

9.2 In recent years a new house was built on the North side of the church and in full view from the church yard. The current scheme will be further away from the church and behind an existing row of trees and the proposed landscaped car park. As a result of this and as the development site falls away from the church, the proposed scheme is considered unlikely to have any detrimental impact on the setting of the listed building.



Figure 9. The new house adjacent to the church

10. Conclusion

10.1 The proposed scheme will provide significant benefits for the church and for the wider community of Awbridge. The applicants have been working on the proposal in conjunction with the parish Council for a considerable time and there is community support for the proposal.

10.2 The adopted local plan makes provision for schemes of this sort, which provide benefits for the community and which have community support, to be approved, and it is considered this application does meet the tests of the relevant policy.

10.3 This pre-app submission requests a formal response to the proposals from the local planning authority, and an assessment of any further information that may be needed to support the application.

PRA

May 2019