

CONSERVATION RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION

App ref No:	2019/2976/FUL
Site Address:	Fortescue Fields, Phase II, Norton St Philip
DM Case Officer:	James U'Dell

No Objection or comments	
No Objection subject to conditions described below	
Object/Scope for revision.	
Object/Recommend refusal.	Y

Level of Harm	No Harm	
	Less than Substantial Harm	Y
	Substantial Harm	Y (verging on)

Comments:

This application is for full planning permission for the erection of 38 no. dwellings, a multi-use community building, new public open spaces incorporating additional footpath links and landscape enhancements, soft and hard landscaping, access, car and cycle parking, and associated works.

The location is a sweep of land to the west, south and east of the recently built Fortescue Fields development and divided in the application into three discrete sites – West, South and East.

The majority of the site lies immediately south of the boundary of the Norton St Philip Conservation Area, while part of the East site lies within the Conservation Area, and is within the heart of this important historic village. The site also has the potential to impact upon the setting of a number of Grade I, II* and II listed buildings.

An appeal for a similar, albeit lesser, scheme - split over two applications - was refused in 2014 and dismissed at appeal in 2015, and I cannot see how the considerations in terms of the impact on heritage assets would substantially differ.

I have some major concerns with the application.

Norton St Philip is characterised by two distinct historic settlements: one is focused along the High Street and The Plain with the Grade I listed George Inn at its centre; the other area to the west developed around the Grade II* Church of St Philip and St James. These two areas have a strong historic relationship and are visually linked yet separated by the area of open ground, Church Mead, immediately north of the proposal site.

The submitted Heritage Statement recognises this important relationship but argue that 20th-century infill development has diluted the historic grain of the village, deteriorating the distinction between the two historic cores of the village and altering its character. This is partly true; however, the distinct separation of the two areas is still legible due to the fact that Church Mead has remained undeveloped.

The proposal site to the west makes a strong contribution to this arrangement and links the heart of the village to the open countryside to the south and south-west, reinforcing its rural character. To develop it would enclose the recreation ground on all sides, going against the historic pattern of development and cutting off its link to the surrounding countryside. As a result, significant harm would be caused to the important relationship between the two most important historic areas of the village and the setting of Church Mead. The legibility of the village's historic settlement pattern and links to the open countryside to the west both make positive contributions to the Conservation Area's significance and both would be negatively affected by this proposal.

The proposed development to the west would impact upon the setting of the Grade I listed George Inn and various Grade II listed properties on the southern side of the High Street. Views to the west from these designated heritage assets would be affected by the proposals, as their visual link to the open countryside beyond would be interrupted by the development, resulting in the increasing urbanisation of their setting.

Parts of the development would also be visible from the churchyard of the Grade II* Church of St Philip and St James. This would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the churchyard and the way in which it is experienced and enjoyed by users.

The impact of the development of the south area of the site would take away a further area of countryside from around the existing development and increase the suburbanisation of Mackley Lane; however, due to the distance from the Conservation Area boundary it is not considered to cause substantive harm to its setting.

The east area (known as the Laverton Triangle) was previously the subject of a Section 106 agreement which required the planting of a 15m-wide belt of trees to screen the now existing development on the approach towards the Conservation Area from the south-east. I understand that this obligation has been met but the current application would require the removal of these trees and some alternative planting along the site boundary. This cannot provide the same level of screening as the 15m-wide tree band and, furthermore, would be required to screen the newly proposed development within this triangle. The Inspector concluded that the restored state of the triangle with the 15m tree band would continue to play a role in allowing for an appreciation of the significance of the Conservation Area, contributing to its significance. The proposed development of this triangle site would negatively impact upon the rural landscape setting of the Conservation Area including the historic approach through that setting, thereby causing harm.

It is also important that this development is not seen in isolation, but for what it actually is, a continuation of the Fortescue site. If approved, the resultant scale of both developments would not be commensurate with the size of the existing village, and would increase the estate's prominence, especially in long distance views from the south. This would have a detrimental impact on the setting of the Conservation Area and would dilute the historic significance of the village.

Information submitted within the application identifies all of these concerns, but states that the thick boundary of the existing mature tree line to the southern boundary of Church Mead will provide adequate screening, plus there is now proposed to be a gap within the building line through which the open countryside can be viewed and so it is claimed that this link from Church Mead would be maintained. This gap would not be readily discerned from most viewpoints within Church Mead and from many angles the gap would "disappear" due to development behind it becoming more visible. This acceptance of the importance of a link to countryside from Church Mead and the allowance of a gap does not mitigate the harm that would be caused to the Conservation Area due to the impact upon its setting.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, the proposal would cause harm to a number of designated heritage assets by its detrimental impact upon their settings, and would dilute the significance of one of the most important historic villages in the district. The appeal Inspector previously found that the level of harm caused to the Conservation Area by

the development of the west site was “verging on substantial” and in the case of the Laverton Triangle site to the east it was “less than substantial” due to the impact on its setting. Considering the current proposal, and taking into account that the amount of development has been reduced from that considered at appeal, I would maintain that on the sliding scale of harm, the harm caused to the Conservation Area due to the effect on its setting by the proposal on the Laverton Triangle would be 'less than substantial'. The impact of the west site proposal on the setting of the Conservation Area would not be significantly less than the “verging on substantial” harm which the Inspector found previously, as the allowance of a gap between the buildings to the countryside does not adequately mitigate this development.

Considering these findings of harm with no heritage benefits identified I would strongly recommend that the application be refused.

Name:

Jayne Boldy
Conservation Officer

Date:

9th June 2020