

2.8 REFERENCE NO - 20/502127/FULL		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL Erection of a first floor extension to existing Masonic Hall and changes to fenestration.		
ADDRESS Masonic Hall, The Boat Yard, Upper Brents, Faversham, Kent ME13 7DL		
RECOMMENDATION – Grant subject to conditions		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE Town Council objection		
WARD Priory	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL Faversham Town	APPLICANT Kent Masonic Property Company Ltd AGENT Woodstock Associates
DECISION DUE DATE 15/07/20	PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE 25/06/20	

Planning History

SW/93/0843

Elevational alterations to existing building
Approved Decision date: 08.11.1993

SW/93/0021

Change of use to Masonic Hall
Approved Decision date: 27.10.1993

This planning permission included only the following conditions in addition to the standard commencement period condition:

- (ii) *The permission shall ensure solely for the benefit of the Kent Masonic Property Co. Ltd. and for no other persons or body.*

In the interests of highway safety and residential amenity.

- (iii) *The area shown on the submitted plan as parking space shall be used for or be available for such use at all times when the premises are in use and no development, whether permitted by the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 or not, shall be carried out on that area of land or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to this reserved area; such land and access thereto shall be provided prior to the commencement of use hereby permitted.*

The development without the provision of the parking space would be detrimental to amenity and likely to lead to inconvenience and danger to road users by virtue of vehicles parked on the public highway

It does not contain any condition restricting hours of use, or the number or frequency of meetings, or restricting the numbers attending meetings. Nor does it prevent any future change of use, or use by others, once the initial change of use was made.

SW/92/0990

Change of use to Masonic Hall
Refused Decision date: 04.01.1993

The reason for refusal was related to lack of parking spaces.

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE

- 1.1 The Masonic Hall is a modern building located in Upper Brents within the conservation area of Faversham, approximately 0.5km from Faversham Town Centre. It is accessed via Upper Brents which continues on to serve a number of terraced residential properties and then the Upper Brents Industrial Estate.
- 1.2 The location is largely residential, but to the east is the Upper Brents Industrial Estate, and to the south west is a large area of open space adjacent to the Creek. To the rear of the site is a public footpath beyond which is the live-work estate of Faversham Reach.
- 1.3 The existing single storey building is set to the rear (the lowest part) of the site and is finished in brick under a concrete tiled roof, with very limited uPVC fenestration. It measures 10.0m wide and 18.0m long with an eaves height of 2.48m above ground level at the front and 2.85m above ground at the rear. The ridge is 4.0m above ground level at the front and set low into the ground, the building being below the level of Upper Brents. The meeting hall itself is to the rear of the building.
- 1.4 Eight, mainly sycamore, trees lie to the south of the site and provide a screening from the residential properties in Faversham Reach. To the south west, a large area of designated Local Green Space extends to the banks of Faversham Creek and is interspersed with a mixture of mature trees and bushes; it is a well-used area of public open space.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1 The proposed development includes raising the central part of roof of the building to two storeys over the front part of the hall, constructing a first floor extension across the middle part of the building which will project sideways at first floor level (with clear space beneath) to create a T shaped plan, and internal alterations. The new roofs are shown to be pitched with gable ends; the new front gable housing the new stairs will be glazed to full height, and this will include the new front entrance. No works are proposed at the rear near to the trees, although crown lifting of some trees is recommended.
- 2.2 The new extension to the hall will be clad with black weatherboarding similar to the adjacent Faversham Reach properties. The new roof will be surfaced with slate, and the remaining single storey roofs re-covered to match. The existing brickwork will be rendered in a similar manner to the houses opposite on Upper Brents. New windows will be in grey aluminium.
- 2.3 The extensions and internal alterations will provide a revised layout and the principal entrance will now be located at the front of the building. The internal lobby will lead to changing rooms, sanitary facilities, a kitchen and hall on the ground floor, with further changing rooms and sanitary facilities and a new meeting room (Temple) on the first floor.
- 2.4 The proposed first floor extension will have an eaves height of 5.2m above ground level at the front to a maximum of 7.5m in ridge height. The ridge height of the main roof over the temple will be 8.4m above ground level and the width and depth of the first floor extension will be 16.4m wide and its depth 7.6m.

- 2.5 The application is accompanied by a Flood Report, Tree Survey, Heritage Statement and a Design and Access Statement.

3. PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Potential Archaeological Importance

Environment Agency Flood Zone 3 141081

4. POLICY AND CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paras 11, 39, 92, 124 and 196.

Development Plan: Bearing Fruits 2031: The Swale Borough Local Plan 2017 policies ST1(Sustainability), CP4 (Requiring good design), CP8 (Conserving and enhancing the historic environment), DM7 (Vehicle parking), DM14 (General development criteria), DM19 (Sustainable design and construction) and DM33 (Development affecting a conservation area)

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG): Conservation Areas.

5. LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

- 5.1 Four local letters of objection have been received and their contents are summarised below:

- Before lockdown two to three meetings were being held almost every week with 20 to 30 cars arriving to each meeting, starting around 3pm and staying until around 8-9PM resulting in parking spaces for local residents being taken before they arrived home from work.
- The early start time resulted in difficulty with lorries getting through from the industrial estate The industrial area has become extremely busy with more businesses operating than ever before and however pedestrians are already facing dangers and problems
- There is simply not enough parking space for the number of vehicles already using the industrial estate. Vans and trucks are already parking across the footpath such that people are forced to walk in the road
- When the hall is in use, the parking becomes untenable and very dangerous for pedestrians.
- Doubling the size of the proposed building inherently means increased capacity usage and more frequent usage. This will inevitably lead to more parking problems in the immediate area of Upper Brents to the detriment of residents
- I am sure that when they first moved in there was a limit put on the amount of meetings that would be able to take place each month.
- The applicant claims that the use of the building will very likely be no more than at present and by very few more users; but no undertaking is given to this effect. If this is in fact the case, the amount it will probably take to realise the applicant's proposals would not appear to be economically cost-effective.

- If this extension means more meetings and more people turning up I strongly object to permission being given.
- The area is designated as a conservation area, in other words keeping the location as it is at present as much as possible. Residents have been refused permission for alterations to their homes because of this, either a conservation area is what it says on the tin or it isn't.
- The existing building is a very low profile structure lying at the bottom of a slope and mercifully obscured by tall railings as it is of no architectural merit, doubling it would mean it would obtrusively dominate the site.
- The existing building is an eyesore; to add another storey to this makes it overbearing and is irresponsible. A new building could be sensitively designed, a single storey building, would be much more economic, new design might also provide an opportunity to produce a solution which did not require an extremely unsightly steel palisade fence to surround it
- The logical solution would be to demolish the existing substandard, inefficient building and to rebuild from scratch. There would be considerable advantages in a demolish and rebuild approach.
- A new design could give an opportunity to rationalise better and more car parking on site
- A new design could meet not just current energy performance criteria but anticipate those required for zero-carbon performance by 2035
- The proposed structure will be of absolutely no social benefit or enhancement to the area but is merely intended for the use of a single organisation
- The actual location, although possibly once owned by the shipyard, was formerly used for agricultural allotments. The environment of the location now is of wooded park land surrounded by comparatively good quality residential development.

5.2 In response the applicant commented in summary below:

- *We would strongly reiterate that the purpose of extending the current building, is to increase the amenity area for our members, to update the current lack of disabled facilities for our aging members, and to drastically improve the energy efficiency of the existing building. We do not envisage any increase in numbers, this is not the intention of the increased floor space.*
- *We acknowledge that the area surrounding the building is designated as a conservation area, and understand the frustration when residents wish to make trivial alterations to their own properties. Our understanding is that a conservation area is one of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, the main feature being the character of the area, rather than individual buildings. We feel therefore, that by enhancing the external appearance of the existing building without demolishing it entirely we are acting within these guidelines. We disagree with the point raised regarding no enhancement to the area, as the current building is undoubtedly an eyesore to the area!*

- *We would again stress, that we do not envisage any increase in numbers.*
- *Regarding the issue of no assessment re parking. This is not required by Swale Borough Council and, as we have stated in previous responses, we do not anticipate any change to the numbers using the hall. This objection appears to be directed at the Industrial Estate rather than the Masonic Hall.*
- *With regard to the proposal being considered “not being economically cost-effective”, the Kent Masonic Property Company, (the owners of the building) are paid an annual rent for the use of the hall, it is used solely for the Organisation and not offered to the public for rental. All monies raised within the meetings are donated to the charities we support. Any shortfall of income is always supported by the members.*
- *The proposal will result in outgoing costs relating to heating, water etc. being significantly reduced.*
- *Consideration was given to demolishing the existing building, however, we are mindful that this would have environmental implications in respect of disposal of materials, increased lorries with “muck-away loads” and landfill.*
- *We agree that the current building is extremely ugly and an eyesore, and this has been addressed externally with the inclusion of the additional floor.*
- *The suggestion of a single storey, would reduce the parking capacity within our curtilage, as we require more internal space for our existing members*
- *We are unable to comment regarding day to day traffic relating to the nearby Industrial Estate.*

6. CONSULTATIONS

6.1 Faversham Town Council objected to the original submission stating:

- 1) Insufficient detail on why the extension was needed and what it would be used for.
- 2) There is no traffic assessment. It is unclear how this proposal would impact traffic to the site in the future.
- 3) No energy efficiency improvement to the building.
- 4) No environmental mitigation.
- 5) Climate and Biodiversity not taken into account.

6.2 The applicant responded to each point raised with the following comments, summarised below:

- *The current building does not allow adequate facilities for the existing members, the vast majority having to change clothes in a very small confined area and each rank within the organisation requiring separate changing areas. The current building requires considerable updating due to damp issues and ventilation. Disabled facilities need to be improved for those who require assistance. The*

current downstairs room doubles up as both a meeting room and dining room, requiring much effort to change over and a permanent dining room would ease this.

- *We have no reason to believe the number of meetings or number of attendees will increase with the addition of the upper floor. The hall is not used by any other organisation or activity. The maximum number within the meeting room will in all probability never exceed 45 and some meetings do not exceed 20.*
- *There is no traffic assessment as the use of the hall will continue with no increase in attendees. There are 58-60 meetings a year between beginning of September and the end of July. With the exception of approximately three meeting a year (which commence at 4pm) the meetings commence at 6.30pm or 7pm. Members are reminded to use the hall's car park and to only park adjacent to the green and under no circumstances outside residents' houses.*
- *We understand the concern over the lorries from the industrial estate, but by the time the meetings commence this has long since closed. We note that cars from the industrial estate frequently park on the road and often in front of the gates to the Masonic Hall.*
- *The current energy efficiency of the building is very poor with an inefficient boiler and uninsulated cavity walls and roof. The energy efficiency of the building will increase substantially with the proposal.*
- *Environmental mitigation is difficult to quantify on this building with its intermittent use, however currently there is inefficient building fabric and outdated sanitaryware, resulting in high heat loss and excessive water consumption. The demolition of the existing structure would have environmental implications, including additional site traffic with disposal of materials to land fill. The upgrading of the existing building will reduce the carbon footprint of this building.*
- *It is difficult to increase biodiversity on the site given the size on the building within the plot and the car parking space. However, it was considered which resulted in the first floor being rotated through 90 degrees to protect the tree canopies and the retention and protection of the trees immediately adjacent to the site is secured. Bird and bat nesting boxes would also be considered.*

6.3 Following the submission of the additional information from the applicant's agent, and confirmation that a traffic assessment was not a requirement for this development, the Town Council considered the application again and still object for two reasons:

- 1) The proposal has a detrimental effect on the residential amenity of the area.
- 2) Parking is a problem in the area, with pedestrians being forced into the road by parked vehicles.

They further commented that it is disappointing that the proposal does not include car charging points or grey water harvesting.

6.4 To which the applicant further responded, in summary below

- *Visually, the overall quality, views and outlooks for local residents will be greatly improved by this extension, however, with the permission of Swale Borough*

Council we are more than happy to plant a full line of Evergreen Laurels to the South West boundary to mask the security fencing. We do not believe that there will be any detrimental effect with the inclusion of a first floor and feel that by constructing with materials similar to that of Faversham Reach, vast improvements will be seen. As shown in the Design and Access Statement submitted with the planning application.

- *Parking is a problem in the area, with pedestrians being forced into the road by parked vehicles.*
- *In addressing the parking objection we do not anticipate any increase in numbers attending the hall which is why they are only improving the dressing areas and disabled facilities for the existing members, they do not envisage the parking situation changing irrespective of whether this extension is completed or not. All members are requested to park within the property, and they police this very carefully. They are also advised that if the necessity arises to park in the public road, they are to park adjacent to the green, and under no circumstances in front of local resident's homes. They note the comment re pedestrians being forced into the road, but with no pathway adjacent to the green they believe this would happen regardless of parked vehicles.*

6.5 Natural England had no comments to make on the proposal

6.6 The Council's Tree Consultant has said that the applicant's arboricultural report is acceptable and suggests that the suggested tree protection measures are followed.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PLANS

7.1 Papers for application 20/502127FULL.

8. APPRAISAL

8.1 The key issues to consider in this application are the principle of extending the building and the impact on the surrounding area, including the impact on the character of the conservation area.

8.2 This proposal is for an extension to an existing building located in Faversham and whilst the extension is significant in relation to the current appearance of the host building, it is of a design I consider to be appropriate and in keeping with the area. I am mindful that it will also facilitate an improvement to the appearance of the existing building which, to be generous, is an unattractive, inefficient, aging, utilitarian building.

8.3 Whilst the current building does share some design cues from the industrial estate to the east its position by the large boarded quayside properties of Faversham Reach and the brick terraced properties of Upper Brents finds it somewhat in a "no man's land" regarding design.

8.4 However, I consider that the proposed replacement materials of slate, stained wooden cladding and render, and the new glazed front elevation, better relates the building to the more attractive residential properties surrounding it, as well as to Faversham reach to the rear, and I consider that it will be an attractive and appropriate development, as required by adopted Local Plan policies. I do not share the local objectors' view that a newly constructed building is the only option here.

- 8.5 The building's location within the conservation area does require that careful consideration needs to be given when assessing the proposal, to ensure the new development preserves or enhances the character of the area. Given the negative impact the current building has on the area's special character, my view is that the improvements proposed here will indeed result in an enhancement to the character of the conservation area. I cannot agree with a local objector who considers that the designation means that the area should stay as it is, particularly in the case of this building.
- 8.6 The proposed extension aims to provide the additional space the applicants require and they have stated this is not with an eye to increasing the use of the site, but to ensure the facilities are improved for those already using it. Essentially, the works provide for single use rooms to save using the same space for dining and other activities.
- 8.7 In terms of landscaping there is no substantial change proposed to the existing area surrounding the new building, given the existing site constraints. Also the existing parking area is to be retained at its present size and will continue to service the building. The palisade boundary fencing has been in place around the site for many years now and has provided adequate security to the building. However, I agree that in the wider context of the site it does appear jarring particularly along with the large area of concrete on the south west boundary adjacent to the green open space. I note the applicants' offer to provide additional planting and as such I have included a condition to require a landscape plan to be submitted to address this to produce a softer elevation.
- 8.8 The tree survey accompanying the application covers the eight trees in the immediate vicinity of the site and each was individually assessed with the report concluding that whilst seven were recommended for removal on arboricultural grounds, that is not the intention of the proposal and it will be that their canopies can be lifted to 5.2 m to accommodate the proposal. I am advised by our Tree Consultant that this assessment is acceptable and I have included a condition to ensure tree protection measures during construction works.
- 8.9 I note the comments from local residents regarding parking by users of the hall. The use of the hall was granted planning permission in 1993 and the proposed increase in the size of the building, given it is to provide more comfortable facilities for its current users, will not lead to a change in the circumstances under which it was originally approved and for how it has subsequently been used. The agent's submission is that, apart from three early meetings a year, these meetings are routinely taking place in the evening and visitors are using the car park, or they park on the nearby on street parking as they and others are permitted to do so. There are no special local parking restrictions close to the site.
- 8.10 To address the parking issue the applicants have agreed to a planning condition limiting the use of the building to themselves. This means that it will be only their own activities that will carry on, and that there is no reason to see any increase in traffic or parking arising from the proposals. This is a significant safeguard which does not exist at present.
- 8.11 I also note that there are no allocated resident parking areas on Upper Brents and the comments appear to refer to parking in publicly available areas and on street parking

which is available for all to use. I appreciate that not having a designated parking space, or on occasion not being able to park where you wish, can be inconvenient but it is not altogether clear that the hall and its use is the sole reason for this. Additionally, this proposal would not impact on whether this could happen at any other day of the week or time of the day by others visiting the area, other residential properties, or the Industrial Estate.

- 8.12 I note the issues local residents raise in relation to the increasing number of vehicles, of all sizes, coming and going from the industrial estate and the associated parking and pedestrian safety issues with the increased activity there. This is a busy, vibrant, employment site and provides an important service and level of employment to the town which has been here for many years. The only access is from Upper Brents and vehicles are routinely seen parked on both sides of the road. This is the nature of the area and whilst bad driving or inconsiderate parking is not condoned this is not an issue for consideration here as this is all out of the control of the applicants.
- 8.13 There were suggestions made by local residents as to how the expansion of the facilities here should have progressed, but it is the proposal before you that is to be considered.
- 8.14 I note the comments from the Town Council regarding additional sustainable energy measures here, but these must be considered in line with the scale and nature of the proposal. As it currently stands the proposal will result in increased energy efficiency, thermal performance, and a reduction in carbon emissions and will make significant efficiency savings to an ageing and inefficient building.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The proposal is to improve the facilities currently available to the ladies using the Masonic Hall. The design and size of the proposed extension is appropriate to the building and the areas and the resultant improvements to the appearance of the building as a whole will lead to an enhancement in the character of the conservation area. I do not consider the proposed improvements would cause any additional harm to the residential amenity of the local residents and as such I recommend that planning approval be granted subject to conditions.

10. RECOMMENDATION – Grant subject to the following conditions

CONDITIONS

- (1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning with the date on which the permission is granted.

Reason: In pursuance of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

- (2) The development hereby approved shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved drawings: MA/19/152.02, MA/19/152.03, MA/19/152.04, and MA/19/152.06

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

- (3) All new external facing materials shall be in accordance with details which have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and conserving the character of the conservation area

- (4) All new windows and external doors used shall be in accordance with manufacturer's details that have first been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity and conserving the character of the conservation area

- (5) No development other than the construction of foundations for the new first floor extension shall take place until details have been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority, which set out what measures have been taken to ensure that the development improves the energy efficiency of, and reduces the carbon emissions from, the building by means such as better insulation, sustainable construction techniques and the inclusion of renewable energy production such as the inclusion of solar thermal or solar photo voltaic installations. The approved details shall be incorporated into the development.

Reason: In the interest of promoting energy efficiency and sustainable development.

- (6) No development other than the construction of foundations for the new first floor extension shall take place until full details of both hard and soft landscape works have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. These details shall include existing trees, shrubs and other features, planting schedules of plants, noting species (which shall be native species and of a type that will encourage wildlife and biodiversity), plant sizes and numbers where appropriate, means of enclosure, hard surfacing materials, and an implementation programme.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenities of the area and encouraging wildlife and biodiversity.

- (7) All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details. The works shall be carried out prior to the occupation of any part of the extensions hereby permitted, or in accordance with the programme agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenities of the area and encouraging wildlife and biodiversity.

- (8) Upon completion of the approved landscaping scheme, any trees or shrubs that are removed, dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within five years of planting shall be replaced with trees or shrubs of such size and species as may be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority, and within whatever planting season is agreed.

Reason: In the interests of the visual amenities of the area and encouraging wildlife and biodiversity.

- (9) All trees to be retained on the site must be protected during construction works by suitable fencing of a height not less than 1.2m at a distance as specified in Table 1 or Figure 2 of BS 5837 (2012) 'Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction' before any equipment, machinery or materials are brought on to the site and this

fencing shall be maintained until all equipment, machinery and surplus materials have been removed from the site. Nothing shall be stored or placed, nor fires lit, within any of the area fenced in accordance with this condition, and the ground levels within those areas shall not be altered, nor shall any excavation be made, without the written consent of the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To safeguard the existing trees to be retained and to ensure a satisfactory setting and external appearance to the development.

- (10) All suitable hard surfaced areas of the site not occupied by a building at ground floor level shall be kept clear at all times as parking space, and these areas shall all be kept available for such use at all times when the premises are in use. No development, whether permitted by The Town and Country Planning (General Development Development)(England) Order 2015 (as amended) or not, shall be carried out on such areas or in such a position as to preclude vehicular access to such areas.

Reason: The development without the provision of the parking space would be detrimental to amenity and likely to lead to inconvenience and danger to road users

- (11) Upon completion of the extension, the use of the building shall be restricted to use only by the Kent Masonic Property Co. Ltd. and for no other persons or body.

Reasons: In the interests of highway safety and residential amenity.

The Council's approach to the application

In accordance with paragraph 38 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), February 2019 the Council takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. We work with applicants/agents in a positive and creative way by offering a pre-application advice service, where possible, suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome and as appropriate, updating applicants / agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application.

In this instance:

The applicant/agent was provided with formal pre-application advice.

The application was considered by the Planning Committee where the applicant/agent had the opportunity to speak to the Committee and promote the application.

NB For full details of all papers submitted with this application please refer to the relevant Public Access pages on the council's website.

The conditions set out in the report may be subject to such reasonable change as is necessary to ensure accuracy and enforceability.

