

PLANNING COMMITTEE – 15 OCTOBER 2015

PART 3

Report of the Head of Planning

PART 3

Applications for which **REFUSAL** is recommended

3.1 & 3.2 REFERENCE Nos - 15/504946/FULL and 15/504931/FULL		
APPLICATION PROPOSAL Installation of an external wall insulation system to all external walls of property		
ADDRESSES: 1 and 2 Valley Cottages Stalisfield Road Stalisfield Kent ME13 0HU		
RECOMMENDATION - REFUSAL		
REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE Stalisfield Parish Council have supported the application.		
WARD East Downs Ward	PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL Stalisfield	APPLICANT C/O Agent AGENT Amicus Horizon
DECISION DUE DATE 14/09/15	PUBLICITY EXPIRY DATE 14/08/15	

THIS REPORT RELATES TO TWO SEPARATE APPLICATIONS BUT THEY ARE REPORTED TOGETHER AS THE SAME ISSUES ARISE. EACH APPLICATION SHOULD BE DETERMINED ON ITS OWN MERITS.

1.0 DESCRIPTION OF SITES

- 1.01 These two separate planning applications relate to two attached semi-detached, two-storey dwellings on Stalisfield Road, Stalisfield. The properties sit in a small row of dwellings to the north of Stalisfield Green. The sites are bounded by dwellings to the north and south, by Stalisfield Road to the east, with agricultural land beyond, and by Gravel Hill to the west with agricultural land beyond. The site is within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 1.02 The properties have large rear gardens, and are set back from the road with large front gardens. They are constructed in locally distinctive yellow stock brick finish with contrasting red brick soldier courses above the windows. They are of a similar size and style to the others in the immediate vicinity. Number 2 already has solar panels fitted to the front facing roof slope.
- 1.03 The application sites are outside the built-up area boundary, where development is normally subject to special scrutiny and restraint.

2.0 PROPOSALS

2.01 The application is for the installation of an external wall insulation system on all external walls of both houses. The proposal is to thermally insulate the houses from the outside, as both cavity wall and internal insulation solutions have been deemed ineffective due to the hard-to-treat nature of the walls.

2.02 The proposal comprises of insulated render with a coloured top coat. The alterations will maintain the brick soldier detail above the windows, with the introduction of quoins to separate the rendered facades where they join at external corner points.

2.03 The applications are supported by a Design and Access Statement (which also refers to a pair of former Airey Houses elsewhere) and by an Air Leakage Summary report from which I have taken the following points;

- The proposals are designed to improve the energy efficiency of the properties, reducing heating costs by up to 40%
- Constructed in the 1940s or 1950s the properties are system built and provide very little thermal comfort
- The properties benefit from new renewable heating systems which replace the solid fuel systems to reduce carbon emissions
- It is proposed to thermally insulate the properties from the outside as both cavity wall and “internal insulation solutions have been deemed ineffective due to the hard to treat nature of the walls”.
- “The effectiveness of the renewable heating system requires a good level of insulation to remain cost effective to the resident.”
- The works are part of a nationwide scheme to improve energy efficiency of existing housing stock
- The properties have concrete stairs and flooring and show internal condensation with mould in bathrooms and wetrooms, and they are particularly difficult to draught proof. The scheme should reduce maintenance costs
- Residents are generally retired and so are at home much of the time, and on low incomes
- The prosed treatment is a recommended measure following Green Deal Assessment Reports and as well as improving thermal performance can transform the appearance of a property which can help to regenerate communities

3.0 PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty KENT DOWNS

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) are relevant in terms of encouraging good design standards and minimising the potential impact on protected landscapes. At

paragraph 95 the NPPF encourages Local Planning Authorities to actively support energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings.

The adopted Swale Borough Local Plan 2008 implements the NPPF on a local scale, and the following saved policies are of particular relevance with regard to the application:

- Policy E1 - General Development Criteria
- Policy E6 - The Countryside
- Policy E9 - Protecting the Quality and character of the Borough's Landscape
- Policy E19 - Achieving High Quality Design and Distinctiveness
- Policy U3 – Renewable Energy

5.0 LOCAL REPRESENTATIONS

None

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 6.01 Stalisfield Parish Council supports these applications on the grounds that they will enhance the exterior aesthetics of the property whilst also providing energy saving benefits.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PLANS

- 7.01 Application papers for applications 15/504946/FULL and 15/504931/FULL

8.0 APPRAISAL

- 8.01 The primary concerns about this application are its impact on the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and on the wider rural area set against the clear energy efficiency benefits that the schemes could bring.
- 8.02 The proposals will result in a material change to the external appearance of these dwellings, and have the potential to have a negative impact on the Kent Downs AONB and the wider rural setting. In the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), the priority is the long-term conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and this national asset over other planning considerations. This is achieved by ensuring that development is appropriate to its context making the best use of texture, colour and durability of materials.
- 8.03 With regard to development within the Kent Downs AONB and the countryside, special consideration must be given to ensure that proposals do not harm the special character and appearance of this area. It is perhaps notable that Government regulations specifically prohibit external changes to houses in conservation areas and in AONBs involving the application of render from benefitting from Permitted Development rights, which is not the case all over the country.

- 8.04 There is a consistent style to the locality in which the application site lies. The existing appearance of the properties is consistent with the buildings surrounding it in having locally distinctive yellow stock brick exteriors, which enhances the special character and appearance of the AONB and the wider countryside.
- 8.05 The application proposes to materially change the external appearance of the dwelling. The covering up of the brickwork with uniform coloured render will in my view present an alien appearance and will cause demonstrable harm to the visual amenity of the area, the countryside setting and the AONB.
- 8.06 Development proposals are expected to enrich the qualities of the existing environment, reinforce local distinctiveness and strengthen the sense of place. This proposal would result in a material change to the visual amenity and setting of the AONB and countryside. Although I recognise that energy efficiency is an important factor in all development, and not least here, I do believe that the proposed rendering of these properties will not be in keeping with the surrounding area and would have a negative impact on the rural setting, failing to protect the existing environment.
- 8.07 The applications do propose to incorporate soldier course brick heads and exposed brick corner quoins to sympathise with the area, but in my view these details do not overcome the objection to the significant harm arising from the proposed render treatment.
- 8.08 The Kent Downs AONB Management Plan sets in place clear aims, policies and actions for the conservation management and enhancement of the AONB. One of the key aims with regard to historic and cultural heritage is for new developments to respect and reinforce the traditions of the past, whilst integrating sustainable technologies and sensitive new design. The proposal would cover the existing exterior brick which is an established and consistent element of the locality. Although the application intends to introduce sustainable technology into the area, the development would conflict with the traditional style and is considered to be insensitive in its design. The proposal would cause demonstrable harm to the AONB, and is unacceptable in its proposed location.

9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.01 The existing dwellings are in keeping with the surrounding area and maintain the Kent vernacular style. However, covering up of the exterior brickwork with plain render is considered to be a material change in the appearance of the dwelling which will be alien to the evolved environment and rural setting. This is considered to cause demonstrable harm to visual amenity, AONB and the countryside, and is unacceptable in this location. In my view these factors outweigh the energy efficiency benefits envisaged and I have no information on why other methods of improving the insulation and energy efficiency of these properties cannot be successfully deployed

10.0 RECOMMENDATION –REFUSE both applications for the following reasons:

REASON

- 1 The proposed installation of an external wall insulation system to all external walls would by virtue of its design, materials and colour have an adverse impact on the visual amenities of the area and would fail to protect the quality and character of the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the countryside, contrary to polices E1, E6, E9 and E19 of the Swale Borough Local Plan 2008.

The Council's approach to this applications:

In accordance with paragraphs 186 and 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council takes a positive and proactive approach to development proposals focused on solutions. We work with applicants/agents in a positive and proactive manner by:

- Offering pre-application advice.
- Where possible, suggesting solutions to secure a successful outcome.
- As appropriate, updating applicants/agents of any issues that may arise in the processing of their application.

In this instance:

This application was not considered to comply with the provisions of the Development Plan and NPPF as submitted, and would have required substantial changes such that a new application would be required.

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.