

ITEM NO.

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COMMITTEE DATE: 21/04/2008

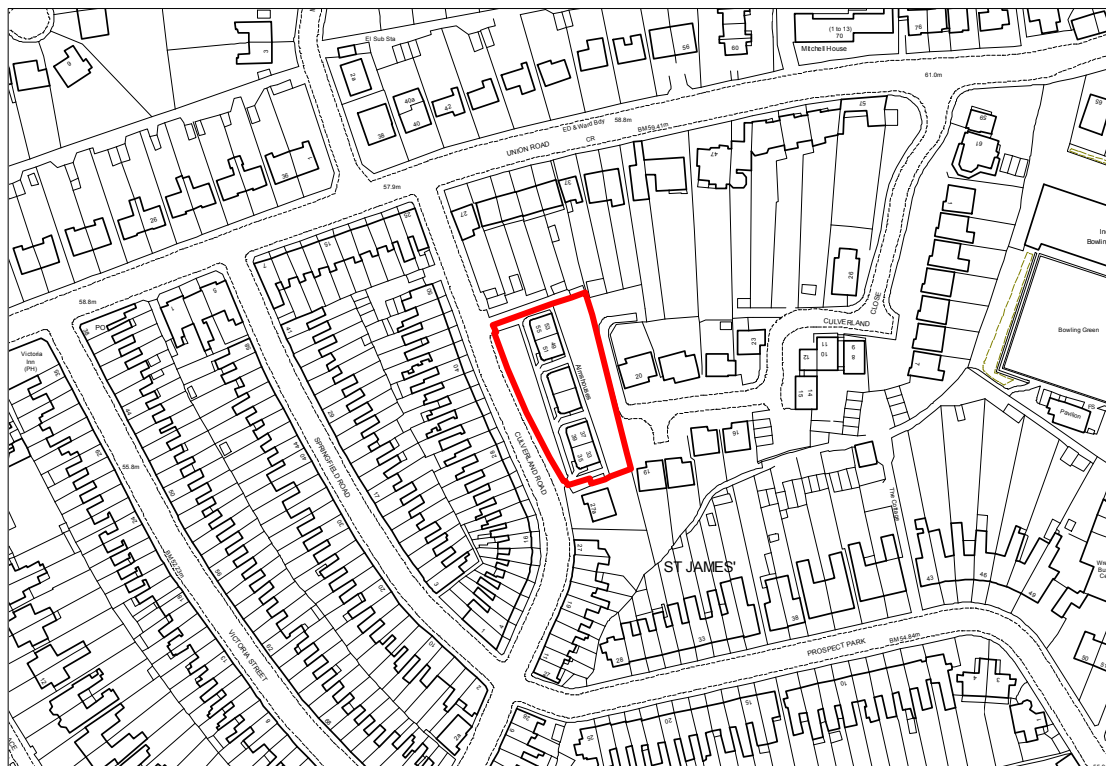
APPLICATION NO: 08/0344/01 **ADVERTISEMENT APPLICATION**

APPLICANT: Mr M King BA FRICS
Exeter Municipal Charities

PROPOSAL: Redevelopment to provide 24 self-contained flats (all matters reserved for future consideration)

LOCATION: 33-55 Culverland Road, Exeter, EX4 6JJ

REGISTRATION DATE: 14/02/2008



Scale 1:2500

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE/PROPOSAL

The site currently comprises 12 almshouses in three two-storey blocks, set between 7m and 12m back from the highway, with gardens and a mature hedge to the front. The buildings date from the 1930s. The remainder of Culverland Road is characterised by Victorian terraced town houses set close to the highway.

Outline planning permission is sought to demolish the buildings and replace them with 24 new almshouses. All matters are reserved for future consideration. Illustrative material submitted in support of the proposal indicates that the proposal could take the form of a three-storey terrace set closer to Culverland Road than the existing buildings. The proposed terrace would be similar in height to other terraced housing in Culverland Road. Vehicular access to the site would be at the southern end, with six car parking spaces being provided.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE APPLICANT

1. At present the site contains 12 almshouses in 3 separate detached blocks which are located centrally within the plot. The design, massing and form of these blocks is out of character with the remainder of Culverland Road, and does not maximise the potential of the site for social housing of this type. It is proposed, therefore, to increase the number of units to 24.
2. To be more in keeping with other houses in Culverland Road the almshouses will be built as a terrace located much closer to the pavement. There will be 8 flats per floor with 4 communal front and rear entrances, the former via short paths from the pavement. Vehicles will enter the site via a new entrance at the southern end, located at the point of best visibility. Parking spaces to the standards required in the local plan for occupants aged 55 or over will be provided. By bringing the almshouses nearer the road much more usable space is created at the rear for communal gardens larger than the minimum requirement of the local plan. Each group of 6 flats will have its own refuse storage area and these are sited to be convenient for residents and avoid nuisance to neighbouring properties.
3. The width and length of the development has been mentioned earlier and, as well as matching other properties in Culverland Road, it will have less impact on neighbouring properties in Culverland Close. The flats will have 3 storeys but the second floor flats will be within the form of the roof, with dormer windows. This will echo the design of houses opposite and ensure that the levels of the roof ridges are not significantly higher than the ridges on the existing 3 blocks.
4. The gardens for the almshouses will be professionally landscaped and planted as part of the development proposals. Initial ideas for hard and soft landscaping are shown with the submitted plans.
5. The site is conveniently located for public transport. It is the intention that all the flats will be fully accessible for residents and visitors of all abilities, and lifts and staircases will be provided to all floors.
6. It is not possible to modernise the existing almshouses to current standards, particularly with regard to sound insulation. The trustees have installed sound reduction underlay and ceilings in an attempt to improve matters but problems remain. The flats also need other extensive remedial works including new windows, and the costs of these would equate to those of new housing to current standards. For these reasons and a desire to maximise the potential of the site, it is intended to replace these 12 defective flats with 24 good new ones.

REPRESENTATIONS

Objections: 10. Principal planning issues raised:

1. There is no justification for the loss of the existing buildings which are structurally sound.
2. The buildings are of a distinctive architectural style which contributes to the character of the area.
3. The proposal would result in a loss of light, space and greenery which currently characterises this part of Culverland Road.
4. The proposal would result in the loss of the mature hedge across the site frontage with implications for biodiversity in the area.
5. The proposal will result in a loss of privacy for existing residents.
6. The proposal would create a poor standard of amenity for the occupants of the development.
7. Risk of flooding.
8. Lack of parking.
9. Overdevelopment of the site.

CONSULTATIONS

The views of the County Director of Environment, Economy and Culture are awaited.

The Head of Leisure and Museums requests a contribution towards improving Devonshire Place Play Area.

The Head of Environmental Health Services recommends conditions relating to the hours of construction and details of refuse storage.

PLANNING POLICIES/POLICY GUIDANCE

Devon County Structure Plan 2001-2016

CO7 - Historic Settlements and Buildings

CO6 - Quality of New Development

Exeter Local Plan First Review 1995-2011

H1 - Search Sequence

H2 - Location Priorities

H7 - Housing for Disabled People

H6 - Affordable Housing

T1 - Hierarchy of Modes

T2 - Accessibility Criteria

T3 - Encouraging Use of Sustainable Modes

T10 - Car Parking Standards

DG1 - Objectives of Urban Design

DG4 - Residential Layout and Amenity

DG6 - Vehicle Circulation and Car Parking in Residential Development

DG7 - Crime Prevention and Safety

OBSERVATIONS

In assessing the current application special regard must be had to the merits of the properties that exist on site both architecturally and historically and in terms of their contribution to the street scene and the character of the area in general. Balanced against this members should consider the merits of the applicant's scheme in terms of meeting an identified housing need and comments on the condition of the existing properties. Another key consideration should be the impact of a much more dense form of development than exists on site at present particularly in terms of car parking and the effect on the streetscene.

The almshouses themselves were designed in 1932 and built for Exeter Municipal Charities. It is very rare to find buildings of this age in such original condition - externally they are completely unspoilt. What is also notable is that they are in such good condition, having been maintained to a high standard by EMC. Not only does the development reflect the garden suburb design philosophy of that age, but it also complies with typical almshouse layouts found elsewhere in the city - i.e. set back from the road, with good enclosure on the boundary. This form of development contrasts with the rest of Culverland Road, and indeed much of the surrounding area which is characterised by 2-storey-with-dormer Victorian properties running in a continuous terrace along the back of the pavement. This character is typical of Victorian suburban development and creates an enclosed feel that is, in this instance, relieved by the open aspect of the Almshouses, which provide a complementary contrast and add quality to the townscape. Many local residents commenting on the planning application refer to the positive contribution that both the buildings and the site as a whole make to the character of the area.

Illustrative material submitted in support of the proposal indicates that the proposal is likely to take the form of a three-storey terrace set closer to Culverland Road than the existing buildings. This would represent a significant change in the character of the street and would result in the loss of the open interlude within the townscape that the existing pattern of development provides. Combined with the loss of the attractive hedge that bounds the site, which provides a rare and important soft landscape element within the street, it is considered that this form of development would detract from the character and appearance of the area. The proximity of the development to the highway would also result in an inferior level of amenity for the future occupiers of the properties (compared to the existing situation) through disturbance from passing traffic and pedestrians and the reduced privacy to rooms fronting the street. The level of amenity for future residents is particularly important given that the occupiers would be elderly and therefore likely to spend a considerable amount of time at home. Furthermore the introduction of a new vehicular access along with a parking and manoeuvring area to the rear of the site would have a negative impact on the existing character of the area.

The current use of the site for residential accommodation would suggest that in principle there is no objection to its redevelopment with flats but it is clear that the development proposed would harm the existing character and appearance of the area. The applicant's argument that the existing properties do not maximise the potential of the site is not accepted for the reasons outlined above and there is no compelling case made that the existing buildings are in any way unfit for purpose. It is therefore recommended that the application be refused.

NORTHERN AREA WORKING PARTY

Members recognised the quality of the buildings and the positive contribution they make to the character and appearance of the local area and considered that their demolition and replacement should be resisted. They recognised the contribution the site including the hedge makes to the streetscape and the important visual relief it provides in an otherwise area of high density development. They did not consider that the form of development suggested in the illustrative material accompanying the application was appropriate for the area.

RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE for the following reasons:

- 1) The proposal would be contrary to Policies ST1, CO6 and C1 of the Devon Structure Plan 2001 to 2016 and Policies DG1 and DG4 of the Exeter Local Plan First Review because the loss of both important historic buildings of significant architectural merit and the open interlude within the townscape that the existing pattern of development provides will be detrimental to the character and appearance of the local area.

Local Government (Access to Information) 1985 (as amended).

Background papers used in compiling the report:

Files of planning applications available for inspection from the Customer Service Centre, Civic Centre, Paris Street, Exeter: Telephone 01392 265223