

**Parish: HARTEST**

**Location: The Former Telephone Exchange**

**Proposal: Alteration of former BT exchange to form cart-lodge/outbuilding (part amended scheme to that approved under B/10/00121/FUL)**

**Applicant: Mr Morgan**

**Case Officer: Graham Chamberlain**

**Date for Determination: 22/06/10**

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**The application is reported to committee at the request of Cllr Kemp. A Panel of Members inspected the site on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 2010.**

**RECOMMENDATION: Refuse**

**THE SITE**

1. The site is the former telephone exchange to the east of the Green in Hartest. The modern telephone exchange is located immediately to the east of the site. To the north of the site is The Paddock, which is a detached dwelling. A newly constructed wall separates the site from the garden of The Paddock. The western boundary of the site is marked by the river. On the western side of the river there are the rear gardens of the properties which front the Green. To the south west of the site is a small brick built bridge which is an interesting feature and a landmark with the Conservation Area. The church is located on the south western side of the bridge. To the east of the site there are residential properties arranged around a cross road. There are important views of the site from Hartest Hill and from the bridge. The site is part of a 'gateway' to the Green, which is the centre of the Conservation Area.
2. The site is located within the Hartest Conservation Area. The western section of the site is flood zone. There is an archaeological site to the north. The properties to the west and south west are listed. The site is within the Special Landscape Area. There are bat sightings noted in the area.

**THE PROPOSAL**

3. The proposal is for alterations to the telephone exchange to create an outbuilding with accommodation in the roof. The alterations would increase the height of the building from 3.8m to 6.2m and would involve the insertion of dormer windows, roof lights and first floor windows. The telephone exchange would also be extended to create space for a double garage and workshop.
4. The application is supported by a Design and Access Statement.
5. (The application documents can be viewed on line via the planning pages on the District Council's website).

**RELEVANT HISTORY**

6. B/02/00468 - Conversion of telephone exchange to two storey dwelling – Planning Permission refused and dismissed on appeal.

7. This proposal was to retain the telephone exchange and extend it by creating a first floor. This application was refused due to the impact on the character of the area and the impact on highway safety. Officers and the Planning Inspectorate were concerned, in part, by the resultant prominence of the building if an additional floor was added. The Inspector concluded, that

- The Telephone Exchange is prominently located and does not fit the prevailing pattern of development
- The addition of another storey would exacerbate the fact that the building is out of keeping with the prevailing pattern of development, making it more prominent
- The converted structure would not be in keeping with the 'grain' of the Conservation Area
- The increase in height would result in tree works which would make the building more prominent.

8. B/03/00856 - Conversion of telephone exchange to dwelling – Refused.

This was a scaled down version of the above, but did not satisfactorily address the above concerns (first floor extension).

9. B/09/01120 - Erection of detached two storey dwelling - Refused

This was refused as the proposed dwelling would have been located too close to the sycamore tree located at the centre of the site.

10. B/09/01219/CAC - Demolition existing of storage building - Granted

This related to a small timber building which was of no significance. The building has already been removed.

11. B/10/00121 - Erection of detached dwelling - Granted

This was a resubmission of application reference B/09/01120 with the building relocated to safeguard the tree. This permission included the conversion of the telephone exchange to a single storey garage/workshop. Storage was provided in the roof void.

## **NATIONAL GUIDANCE**

12. **PPS1** - Delivering Sustainable Development (PPS1)

13. **PPS5** - Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5)

## **PLANNING POLICIES**

14. The Development Plan comprises saved policies in the Suffolk Structure Plan, adopted 2001, and saved policies in the Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No. 2) adopted 2006. The following policies are relevant to this proposal:

### **Babergh Local Plan (Alteration No.2) 2006**

- **CN01** Maintaining Local Distinctiveness
- **CN08** Conservation Areas

- **CN06** Listed Buildings

**The relevant policies can be viewed on line. Please see Page 3 for details.**

## **CONSULTATIONS**

15. Hartest Parish Council - No objection provided there is no harm from over looking and the first floor is restricted to storage and not temporary accommodation (as stated in the D & A Statement).

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

16. None received.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Design, Layout and Impact on the Conservation Area**

17. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (c. 9) imposes a duty on Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to designate as Conservation Areas any 'areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.
18. The site is located in a prominent position within Hartest Conservation Area.
19. It is important to note that although the building has a simple, pleasing design (believed to be 1950s in origin), the telephone exchange itself is of little architectural/historic merit. However, it is protected in part by its inclusion in the Conservation Area. The significance of the site lays in its setting and layout, and the spaciousness of the plot, as well as the contribution to views and the setting of surrounding buildings and structures, including the church and bridge.
20. The Government has recently introduced PPS5. PPS5 has changed the assessments involved in development affecting a heritage asset (a Conservation Area, listed building or archaeology). The same tests apply to all heritage assets. PPS5 has enabled the government guidance to catch up with good practice. There has consequently been a change in policy which gives a clear, robust process to the assessment of proposals which affect heritage assets.
21. The most relevant sections of PPS5 to this case are Paragraph 7, which sets out the governments over arching aims for Heritage Assets explaining that such assets 'contribute to our knowledge and understanding of our past...and should be conserved and enjoyed for the quality of life they bring to this and future generations' and Policies HE7 and HE9. These are discussed in more detail below. As part of the Hartest Conservation Area, the site is part of a designated heritage asset.
22. Policy HE9 states that '*There should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets and the more significant the designated heritage asset, the greater the presumption in favour of its conservation should be*'.
23. Saved Policy CN08 of the Babergh District Local Plan relates to Conservation Areas. This Policy (*inter alia*) requires proposals to preserve or enhance the Conservation Area, include fenestration which respects its setting and be of an appropriate scale, form and detailed design to harmonise with its setting. Policy CN01 is also relevant as it requires high standards of design by requiring applicants to pay particular attention to the scale, form and detailed design of the proposal.

24. The site is located within a prominent location of the Hartest Conservation Area at the entrance/exit to the village green abutting a pleasing bridge. There is an important vista along the road towards the village green and looking out from the village green towards the bridge. The telephone exchange is a single storey, simple building which blends into the background. This single storey appearance and lack of prominence is significant to the character of the Conservation Area as it ensures the building does not interrupt views or stand out in the street scene.
25. Officers are of the opinion that the proposed alterations would be detrimental to the Conservation Area's character by introducing a poorly designed and disproportionately scaled modern addition into the street harming the historic character of the area. The justification submitted in the Design and Access does not demonstrate that the harm is outweighed by a public benefit or that the works are necessary.
26. Policy HE7.2 of PPS5 states that *'In considering the impact of a proposal on any heritage asset, local planning authorities should take into account the particular nature of the significance of the heritage asset and the value that it holds for this and future generations. This understanding should be used by the local planning authority to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposals.*
27. Policy HE9.1 states that *'There should be a presumption in favour of the conservation of designated heritage assets..... Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Loss affecting any designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.*
28. For the following reasons the proposed development will harm the significance of the Conservation Area and also fails the tests set out in Policies CN08 and CN01.
- Roof extensions in Conservation Areas are specifically controlled by the General Permitted Development Order. The site history shows that the principle of drawing attention to the building, by the provision of a first floor/roof extension, was not supported as it is not in character with the prevailing pattern of development.
  - The telephone exchange is 3.8m high with a gable span that is 3m in width. The approved scheme increased the height (in part) to 5.2m with a gable spanning 5.2m. The increase was considered reasonable as it allowed garage space on the site and put the telephone exchange to a beneficial use (it may have been removed otherwise). The proposal now seeks to increase the height by another 1m to 6.2m. The massing is also being altered with the removal of the hip in lieu of a gable end. The increase in height and alteration to the shape (form) of the building will give it a greater presence and mass in the street scene, altering the character and spatial layout of the area and diminishing the quality of the approved scheme.
  - The dormer windows compound the harm and perception of scale. The dormer windows are poorly designed being out of scale with the roof plane. The dormer windows are almost equal to the height of the roof plane. They would be a bulky and unduly prominent addition to the roof scape. The roof lights add to the clutter of the roof slope and would be out of proportion with the roof and represent a bulky addition.

- The bulk of the dormer windows will draw unnecessary attention to the building. The dormers in isolation are relatively well designed; they do not however, fit the scale of the roof of the building.
  - The increase in height and massing, the provision of dormer windows and the other alterations proposed will result in the building being more prominent and dominant in the street scene. The prominence of the building will alter the street scene and the relationship of the site and Conservation Area. The dwelling recently approved was set back in the site so as to reduce the prominence and retain a sense of openness to the front of the site. The converted telephone exchange was designed to retain a single storey appearance so that it did not erode the openness of the front of the site.
  - The telephone exchange has been restricted to a single storey building so that there would be a clear hierarchy to the built form of the site. The proposal would blur this.
  - The approved scheme was considered to be the maximum that could be approved on this site given the buildings location at the front of the site given its prominence in the street scene.
  - The dormer windows will change the perception and character of the building. Instead of 'reading' it as a single storey building (as approved B/10/00121) the building will read as a two storey structure/dwelling. This alters the spatial character of the area as it would no longer read as a subservient cart lodge type building serving the approved house. This is similar to the concerns which related to the 2002 and 2003 refused schemes. The approved house is high quality in design and the approved cart lodge is a good use of the telephone exchange, which retains the subservient scale and appearance (by being single storey). Due to the proposed alterations which include dormers, roof lights, first floor windows, domestic style windows, a 'front door' (in south elevation) and integral parking, the building will read as a separate dwelling house to the front of the approved dwelling and have a poor relationship with it.
  - The building would read as an uncomfortable, awkward addition to the street scene and is a retrograde step when compared to the approved conversion of the building.
29. To conclude the proposal would not preserve or enhance the Conservation Area - in particular it would have inappropriate fenestration (a test in Policy CN08) and would not harmonise with the character of the area. It also fails when considered against Policy CN01 due to its poor spatial relationship and the adverse impact in the street scene.
30. Whilst there is evidence of dormer windows in the Conservation Area (the property across the road has dormer windows) they are not common place on outbuildings. Houses tend to have dormer windows; this is part of the hierarchy of built form. If dormers were to be approved on this structure it would disrupt this hierarchy and unacceptably alter its character.
31. Policy HE9.2 of PPS5 states that '*Where the application will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance local planning authorities should refuse consent...*' (Unless criteria can be demonstrated).

32. Officers are of the opinion that there is harm to the character of the Conservation Area (for the reasons stated above), but not 'substantial harm' i.e. an important building is not been demolished. Consequently the test in Policy HE9.4 is of more relevance.
33. Policy HE9.4 states that *'Where a proposal has a harmful impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset which is less than substantial harm, in all cases local planning authorities should:*
- (i) weigh the public benefit of the proposal (for example, that it helps to secure the optimum viable use of the heritage asset in the interests of its long-term conservation) against the harm; and*
  - (ii) recognise that the greater the harm to the significance of the heritage asset the greater the justification will be needed for any loss.'*
34. To conclude the proposed works are not necessary for safeguarding the heritage asset. There is no public benefit from the proposal. The site already has planning permission for a dwelling with the telephone exchange being converted to a garage, workshop and store, which is well designed and reads as a subservient outbuilding. There is nothing which outweighs the harm identified.
35. Therefore, when balancing the harm against other considerations it is important to note that there is a viable alternative which would provide adequate storage accommodation (the approved scheme), there is no public benefit and the alterations are not necessary (to safeguard the Conservation Area). The proposal would result in the building appearing more prominent in the street scene drawing undue attention to itself. The proposal would lack subservience and would incorporate insensitive detailing in the form of dormer windows etc. and alter the spatial character of the area as the outbuilding would read as a dwelling to the front of the approved house.
36. As the proposal is contrary to Policies CN06, CN01 and HS33 and national guidance in PPS1 and PPS5, the recommendation is one of refusal.

### **Other Issues**

37. **Trees** - The increase in height will conflict with the canopy of a tree on the boundary of the site. The Arboricultural Officer is assessing whether the increase in height now proposed would adversely impact on the tree. Members will be updated at the meeting.
38. **Impact on neighbour amenity** - the distance from neighbouring properties and the orientation is sufficient to ensure there would be no harm by way of over looking.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Subject to the conclusion of the outstanding assessment of the proposal in respect of the canopy of the tree (on the boundary of the site) the Chief Planning Control Officer be authorised to refuse planning permission for the following reasons:

- Adverse impact on the character of the area, street scene and conservation area contrary to policies CN01 and CN06 and national guidance in PPS5.
- Any as required relating to the outstanding assessment in relation to the canopy of the nearby tree.