

Case No: 0802703FUL (FULL PLANNING APPLICATION)

Proposal: ALTERATIONS AND CHANGE OF USE OF CHAPEL TO A DWELLING

Location: TOSELAND METHODIST CHURCH, HIGH STREET

Applicant: ST NEOTS AND HUNTINGDON METHODIST CHURCH CIRCUIT

Grid Ref: 523917 262578

Date of Registration: 18.09.2008

Parish: TOSELAND

RECOMMENDATION - APPROVE

1. DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

- 1.1 This application relates to a Methodist Church building located at the western edge of Toseland village. A low level wall marks the front boundary of the site and mixed planting encloses the site on all other boundaries. The building has a single storey extension to the rear and is surrounded by land laid to grass.
- 1.2 The site is located on the northern side of the High Street. Residential properties lie directly to the east and south, and open fields lay beyond, to the west and north. 'Green Farm' lies further to the northwest of the site.
- 1.3 The building at present lies empty and ceased to be used for worship in 2007. The building is a prominent feature and is structurally intact. It has stone features, an attractive front entrance and long narrow windows.
- 1.4 The proposal seeks to convert the Methodist Church building into a dwelling and to remove part of the low level wall to provide a vehicular access with two parking spaces.
- 1.5 The external appearance will remain mostly as existing, apart from the insertion of conservation roof lights on the eastern and western roof slope, and additional fenestration to be inserted on the eastern and western elevations of the ground floor element to the rear.

2. NATIONAL GUIDANCE

- 2.1 **PPS 1 – Delivering sustainable development (2005)**
- 2.2 **PPS 3 – Housing (2006)**

2.3 **PPS 7 – Sustainable development in rural areas (2004)**

For full details visit the government website <http://www.communities.gov.uk> and follow the links to planning, Building and Environment, Planning, Planning Policy.

3. **PLANNING POLICIES**

Further information on the role of planning policies in deciding planning applications can also be found at the following website: <http://www.communities.gov.uk> then follow links Planning, Building and Environment, Planning, Planning Information and Guidance, Planning Guidance and Advice and then Creating and Better Place to Live

3.1 **East of England Plan - Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy (May 2008)**

Policies viewable at <http://www.go-east.gov.uk> then follow links to Planning, Regional Planning then Related Documents

- **ENV7** - requires new development to be of high quality, which complements the distinctive character and best qualities of the local area and promotes urban renaissance and regeneration.
- **SS1** – Achieving sustainable development.

3.2 **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan (2003)**

Saved policies from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 are relevant and viewable at <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk> follow the links to environment, planning, planning policy and Structure Plan 2003.

- None relevant

3.3 **Huntingdonshire Local Plan (1995)**

Saved policies from the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995 are relevant and viewable at www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/localplan95

- **En17** – Development outside of defined environmental limits will generally be restricted to that which is essential to the efficient operation of local agriculture, horticulture, forestry, permitted mineral extraction, outdoor recreation or public utility services.
- **En18** – Protection of important site features such as trees and hedges.
- **En20** - Landscaping Scheme - Wherever appropriate a development will be subject to the conditions requiring the execution of a landscaping scheme.
- **En25** – development should respect the scale, form, materials and design of buildings in the area.

- **H23** - there is a general presumption against new houses in the open countryside unless it is required for the efficient management of agriculture etc.
- **H29** - Existing Buildings in the Countryside - provides criteria for the proposed conversion of buildings in the countryside to residential use.
- **H31** - Residential privacy and amenity standards – Indicates that new dwellings will only be permitted where appropriate standards of privacy can be maintained and adequate parking provided.

3.4 **Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alterations (2002)**

Saved policies from the Huntingdon Local Plan Alterations 2002 are relevant and viewable at www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/localplan - Then click on "Local Plan Alteration (2002)

- Toseland village was not included in the settlement policies and is considered as a hamlet for the purposes of the Development Plan
- **HL7** – Reusing Brownfield Land and Buildings - indicates that the District Council will seek to maximise the re-use of previously developed land.

3.5 **Huntingdonshire Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007**

Policies from the Huntingdonshire Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007 are relevant and viewable at <http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk> click on Environment and Planning, then Planning then Planning+Policy then Informal policy statements where there is a link to Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007

- **G2** – Landscape Character - development proposals should respect and respond appropriately to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.
- **G3** – Trees, hedgerows and Other Environmental Features - development proposals should minimise risk of harm to trees, hedgerows or other environmental features of visual, historic or nature conservation value.
- **B1** – Design Quality - developments should demonstrate a high quality of design in terms of layout, form and contribution to the character of the area.
- **B4** – Amenity - developments should not have an unacceptable impact upon amenity of existing or future occupiers.
- **B6** - Re-use and Redevelopment of Buildings in the Countryside – subject to certain criteria, a proposal to re-use or redevelop an existing building in the countryside for economic purposes will be preferable to the re-use of an existing building for residential purposes.

- **E8** – Retention of key local services and facilities – A development proposal should not result in an unacceptable reduction in the availability of key services and facilities in a settlement.
- **T1** - Transport Impacts - development proposals should be capable of being served by safe convenient access to the transport network and should not give rise to traffic volumes that exceed the capacity of the local transport network.

3.6 **Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Submission Core Strategy 2008**

Policies from the Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Submission Core Strategy 2008 are relevant and viewable at <http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk> click on Environment and Planning then click on Planning and then click on Planning Policy where there is a link to the Local Development Framework Core Strategy.

- **CS1** Sustainable development in Huntingdonshire – all developments will contribute to the pursuit of sustainable development, having regard to social, environmental and economic issues. All aspects will be considered including design, implementation and function of development.
- **CS3** The Settlement Hierarchy - The settlement hierarchy identifies Toseland as a smaller settlement within which the development of a small site within the built up area by up to three dwellings will be appropriate.

3.7 **Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD 2007**

4. **PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 9701109FUL – Demolition of rear extension and re-build of another extension approved 11th June 1998

5. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 5.1 **Toseland Parish Council – OBJECTION (copy attached).**
- 5.2 **Highway Authority - NO OBJECTION** subject to conditions.
- 5.3 Environmental Health - **NO OBJECTIONS** received as of the 21st January 2009.

6. **REPRESENTATIONS**

- 6.1 **TWO** letters of representation have been received. The concerns raised are:
- Incorrect measurements for parking area;
 - No existing driveway, highway safety;
 - Overlooking;
 - Velux windows an eyesore;
 - Occupancy should be restricted, limited on site parking; and,

- Parking and turning, highway safety

7. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

- 7.1 The main issues to consider are the principle of the development, the impact the change may have on the character of the area, neighbour amenity and highway safety.

Principle

- 7.2 The village of Toseland is noted as a hamlet in the Local Plan Alteration 2002, and in the open countryside for the purposes of the Development Plan. However, Toseland village is defined as a smaller settlement in the settlement policies in the Core Strategy 2008, where infill housing development is considered acceptable in principle.
- 7.3 The building is located at the edge of the village directly adjacent to the existing residential properties, within the built form of the village.
- 7.4 Part of the Parish Council's reasons for objection suggest the building is used as a community centre for village meetings, including Parish Meetings and as a polling station, and Policy E8 of HIPPS 2007, does state that a development proposal should not result in an unacceptable reduction in the availability of key services and facilities in a settlement. The information submitted with the application confirms the building has not been used for worship for approximately two years and only used occasionally for village meetings as a goodwill gesture. However, the Church finances are now completely exhausted. The Parish Council was invited to take ownership of the building, but declined due to lack of funds. The opportunity for worship will be maintained for villagers, as St Michaels Church close by. There is also a village hall reasonably close by, in the village of Yelling.
- 7.5 PPS3 and Policy HL7 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration 2002 both seek to maximise the re-use of previously developed land and supports the re-use of empty properties, and the conversion of underused buildings, into housing use.
- 7.6 The proposal to convert this building to residential accords with Policy B6 of the Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007 in that, the building is in good condition and the minor changes proposed will conserve the character of the existing building. It is considered that the building would not be suitable for business use as this would generate significantly more vehicular movements than the residential use.
- 7.7 While the proposal does not fully meet the requirements of sustainable development, in terms of the location of the site and additional car movements, this argument should be weighed up against the fact this is an existing building which contributes to the character of the village. If a new use for the building is not found, there is a strong possibility of it remaining unused, and deteriorating to the detriment of the immediate and wider character of the village.
- 7.8 The principle of the change of use is acceptable and the proposal accords with Policies HL7 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration 2002 and E8 and B6 of the Huntingdonshire Interim

Planning Policy Statement 2007 and CS3 of the Submission Core Strategy 2008.

Impact on the surrounding countryside and the character of the area

- 7.9 The existing building is a prominent feature on the approach to the village and makes a valuable contribution to its character. The conservation roof lights have been kept to a minimum on the western roof to reduce the appearance of the domestic use. There are no changes proposed to the external appearance of the openings to the building, thus maintaining the character of the building.
- 7.10 The main alterations are the changes to the access to the site, by means of part removal of the low level wall. It is clear that the wall was not constructed at the time of the building and does nothing to enhance the character of the building. Therefore removing a section to allow for vehicles to access the site will not detract from the building or the wider character of the site.
- 7.11 The plans submitted with the proposal confirm the hedges surrounding the site will be retained. However a condition should be appended to the decision notice to clarify the hard and soft landscaping proposed at the site, and to ensure the trees and hedges are protected as their long term retention will help maintain appearance of the site from the surrounding countryside.
- 7.12 Conditions should be imposed to confirm the position of bin storage, and to remove permitted development rights to ensure the amenity space around the building is retained and the neighbour's amenities maintained.
- 7.13 The proposal meets the requirements of policy En18, En20 and En25 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995, Policy G1, G2, and B1 of the Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007.

Neighbour amenity

- 7.14 The letters received from the two neighbours mainly express concern about privacy and highway safety.

Privacy

- 7.15 The openings on the eastern side will remain as the existing situation, apart from one additional opening proposed on the ground floor of the rear extension. The hedge will be maintained along this boundary and the neighbours could erect two metre fencing if it was felt necessary. The roof lights are positioned high enough not to raise concern and the agent has confirmed the windows at first floor on the eastern elevation will be covered internally. The first floor rooms on the eastern side will take light from the roof lights. Conditions should be appended to the decision to ensure detailed sections of the internal arrangement are provided, and details of the internal works to the 1st floor windows should be approved in writing before the residential use commences at the site.

Parking

- 7.16 The residential property to the east of the site, 'October Cottage' has a parking arrangement that allows for cars to park on the western side of the dwelling, with no on site turning. One parking space alongside the hedge will not be unduly harmful to the amenities of the neighbour in terms of additional noise and disturbance, mainly due to the existing parking situation at the neighbouring property.
- 7.17 Highway safety matters are discussed below; the Agent has submitted parking plans and confirmed the measurements at the site to be as originally submitted. The confusion appears to be the point the measurements have been taken.
- 7.18 If the building were to remain unused this may encourage anti social behaviour. The additional windows and the parking of vehicles is not considered to be unduly harmful to the amenities of the neighbouring properties and the proposal meets the requirements of Policy H31 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995 and B4 of the interim Planning Policy Statement 2007.

Highway Safety

- 7.19 The Highways officer has considered the proposal and as the change of use is unlikely to give rise to any significant levels of additional traffic he has not objected to the proposal.
- 7.20 The agent has however submitted three options for parking at the site, option two, which shows one parking space to the side and one to the front of the property appears to be the most workable in terms parking and manoeuvring. The details of this can be secured by condition.

Conclusion

- 7.21 The principle to use the existing building as a dwelling is acceptable and the proposal due to the limited changes proposed will not have an adverse impact on the immediate or wider character of the open countryside. The imposition of suitable conditions will ensure the proposal will not unduly impact on the amenities of the neighbouring properties. Therefore having regard to applicable national and local planning policies, and having taken all relevant consideration into account, it is recommended that planning permission should be approved in this instance.

8. **RECOMMENDATION – APPROVE**, subject to conditions to include the following:

- 02003 - Time Limit (3yrs)
- Nonstand** - Sections
- Nonstand** - Details of internal window 1st floor
- Nonstand** - Tree and hedge protection
- Nonstand** - Hard and soft landscape

- Nonstand** - No dig access
- Nonstand** - Service trenches
- Nonstand** - Details sections rooflights
- Nonstand** - PD removal extensions
- Nonstand** - PD removal outbuildings
- Nonstand** - Position of bins
- Nonstand** - PD removal fencing
- Nonstand** - Parking

Background Papers:

Planning Application File Reference: 0802703FUL
East of England Plan – Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy May 2008
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, 2003
Huntingdonshire Local Plan, 1995
Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration, 2002
Huntingdonshire Interim Planning Policy Statement 2007
Huntingdonshire Local Development Framework Submission Core Strategy
2008

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