



Planning Advice

Ref No. PRE/0204/17

Date: 6 July 2017

Name: Chris Elliot

Site Address:

- (i) Hayes Field, Widecombe in the Moor
- (ii) Parish Field, Widecombe in the Moor
- (iii) Fair Field, Widecombe in the Moor

Description of proposed development:

Erection of new village hall

Policy references;

Core Strategy: COR1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 21,

DMD: DMD1a, 1b, 3, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13, 14, 19, 31, 38, 39,

Dartmoor National Park Design Guide

Widecombe in the Moor Conservation Area Appraisal

Officer advice:

Thank you for meeting with and showing us the sites that you wish to explore for the siting of a new village hall. The deficiencies of the existing parish hall facilities at Leusdon Memorial Hall are acknowledged in respect of its relative isolation within the parish, reliance on car travel and parking problems. Whilst there is a first floor community space in Church House in the centre of the settlement of Widecombe, this is a restricted space and does not meet accessibility standards for all members of the community, which would be difficult to address in a way that conserves the historic building.

We are keen to work with you to explore whether a new village hall can remedy the deficiencies of existing facilities and help to provide a facility which will support the vitality of the community.

This would be supported in principle by the policies of the Development Plan which seek to sustain and improve the range and quality of community services and facilities.

Whilst I acknowledge at this stage that we have no detailed information on the scale of the proposed building and level of associated infrastructure (amenity space, parking etc), I can offer comments in principle on the three sites proposed. It will be important for you to explore in more detail the scale and nature of facilities required to meet community needs which will help to shape the proposed project. This will enable us to comment in more detail and hopefully help to guide you to a positive outcome.

(i) Parish Field

This field is steeply sloping in parts and comprises distinct and intimate areas, separated by landscape features. This site would, I feel, be sensitive to new development, with strong potential to adversely impact on the character and appearance of this immediate landscape and setting of the Village. If a small building was proposed on the more level plateau immediately to the east of the car park then this could potentially merit further discussion/consideration, albeit I anticipate that this might not serve your needs. However, a larger development on the land would necessitate extension into the lower parts of the field, requiring new infrastructure to access and service a building which would not be well related to the built-up area/pattern of existing development and with potential to impact adversely on local landscape.

For these reasons, I would discourage further consideration of this site.

(ii) Hayes Field

This site is well related to the centre of the settlement with good connection on foot to existing car parks and community sports facilities.

This site has potential to be archaeologically sensitive as it likely forms part of the outer curia of North Hall Manor and is likely to contain fish ponds and other features related to the manor as identified in the archaeological walkover survey in 2009. There may be some further archaeological investigation planned on this land to be led by DNPA this year, which would help to inform consideration of this site in more detail. I would recommend speaking direct with our archaeologist Andy Crabb (01626 831077) for further information on this.

The wettest areas of this field, half way down along the eastern boundary, are of greatest diversity value for vegetation. There are other areas of lesser value and

biodiversity interests should not preclude a development within the field. There would be opportunities to mitigate any ecological impact by further enhancing wet grasslands, ponds and boundaries. With any application, a preliminary ecological assessment would be required to enable consideration of biodiversity impact and potential for appropriate mitigation. Careful consideration would need to be given to the scale of the development in this respect.

This is a historic field enclosure with an attractive bank and stream running along the front of the site adjacent to the highway which contributes positively to the setting of the Conservation Area. The stream along the front of the site is also understood to be of historical significance for its association with wheelwrights.

My feeling is that this boundary should not be breached by a new vehicular access and that it would be better to explore a new building in the north west corner, or to the west of the existing tennis court and ancillary structures. This could enable good integration with the existing sports facilities and make use of existing access and parking facilities, thereby reducing the potential scale and impact of a new development on this site. There could also be opportunity to extend parking into the area to the north of the tennis courts and make provision for disabled parking in this area or within a smaller footprint of new development in the field. I recall from our meeting on site that this is the tug of war training area and I wonder whether discussion could be initiated to explore whether this area could be relocated in the field and incorporated into a holistic development for this site.

The recreation field is owned by the DNPA and leased to the Parish Council. Andrew Watson, Head of Recreation and Estates, has advised informally that he can see no reason why this arrangement could not be altered to allow for access to a new hall, if desired.

(iii) Fair Field

This site is further from the centre of the settlement and there is a lack of pavement leading to the site so not necessarily an ideal candidate. This may also lead to the desire for additional car parking facilities and therefore require a larger land take for the development as well as potentially increasing overall costs. In addition, it is also adjacent to the village school where there are congestion issues at drop off and collection times. The field is used for the Widecombe Fair and there is a small utility block in the north west corner with two access gates onto the road. If this site is to be pursued, the block should be considered for demolition and new facilities incorporated within a new build. It is understood that there is a right of access to the south west water utility infrastructure situated in the north east corner of the field from this access.

The land within the site slopes up toward the southern end of the field where the land is more visually exposed in the wider landscape and from iconic views down into the village from the surrounding high ground. This part of the site would not in my view be appropriate for development for this reason and because of its divorced relationship from the existing development pattern.

It may be that a development in the north west corner of the field could be explored, subject to a consideration of scale, access, topography (extent of groundworks/engineering) and consideration of the infrastructure and parking needed to support such a development. At the present time we do not have detailed information on any of these matters. It was acknowledged that there could be a community and highway safety benefit to providing a modest area of car parking for the school (or a flexible area for this use) within a development to try to resolve existing problems. We would, however, need to understand more clearly how this would work in practice, how conflicts would be addressed at peak times such as school pick up and the impact on the overall scale and layout of the development. We would also need to explore the detail in consultation with the Highway Authority to understand how best to achieve this.

The field comprises moderately species-rich neutral grassland 'hay meadow' but this would not preclude development of a small area of the land and there could be opportunity for biodiversity enhancement. We would likely require a preliminary ecological assessment with a proposal.

All the sites proposed border the Conservation Area and any development will need to follow good design principles and ensure that the setting of the Conservation Area is conserved; however, this would be a matter for more detailed consideration as your proposals emerge. Please keep in contact as we would be keen to help input on your project and advise on more detailed planning considerations.

The advice set out above is based on the information submitted, without the benefit of a site visit, and is made without prejudice to the consideration of any application. The advice offered will not prejudice the final recommendation of the Director of Planning and Planning Team Managers, nor the final views and determination of Members of the Development Management Committee should the application be referred to them for a decision. Whilst advice offered may suggest a negative recommendation from planning officers this does not prevent you from submitting an application to test this opinion.