



Report to East Buckinghamshire Area Planning Committee Deferred Application

Application Number:	PL/22/4074/FA
Proposal:	Redevelopment of the site to create a new multifunctional Parish Centre with cafe, day nursery building, replacement rectory with detached garage, 2 outbuildings to provide prayer room and substation/bin and bicycle store, associated parking and landscaping.
Site Address:	St Leonards Church Hall, Glebe Way, Chesham Bois, Buckinghamshire, HP6 5ND.
Applicant:	St Leonard's Parochial Church Council
Case Officer:	Melanie Beech
Ward affected:	Amersham and Chesham Bois
Parish-Town Council:	Chesham Bois Parish Council
Valid date:	13 December 2022
Determination date:	14 December 2023
Recommendation:	Conditional Permission

1.0 Matters for consideration

- 1.1 Members will recall that this application was heard by the Planning Committee at the meeting on 17th October 2023. The application was deferred for the following reason:

“To allow officers to consider further the implications of the proposed development on the integrity of the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The site lies within the Zone of Influence of the SAC and Members disagreed with Officers’ screening of the proposal that no likely significant effects would occur. They requested deferral of this planning application, subject to receipt of a satisfactory Appropriate Assessment for the site, considering potential usage against some different scenarios.”

- 1.2 This is the only matter for consideration. It is noted however that Chesham Bois Parish Council have submitted a further consultation response which is addressed later in this report.
- 1.3 The previous Planning Committee report is attached at Appendix A.

2.0 Evaluation

- 2.1 An Appropriate Assessment is informed by comments from Natural England. Natural England were consulted on 19th October 2023 and provided comments on 3rd November 2023. They concluded that “Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on statutory designated sites and has no objection.” Their full comments are attached at Appendix B.
- 2.2 Attached at Appendix C is a screening template which is used to screen for the likely significant effect on the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC. In consultation with Natural England, officer’s still conclude that there would not be a Likely Significant Effects ‘alone’ and/or ‘in-combination’ on features associated with the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation. Therefore officer’s consider that an Appropriate Assessment of the proposal is not necessary.
- 2.3 However, it is recognised that Members of the Planning Committee were clear in their request for an Appropriate Assessment to be carried out, which considers potential usage against different scenarios. The Appropriate Assessment is attached at Appendix D.

3.0 Conclusion on the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC

- 3.1 The Appropriate Assessment considers potential usage of the SAC against three different scenarios and concludes that it is unlikely that the proposed development would have a significant effect upon the integrity of the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC. This is because people using the new facilities on the site are visiting for a specific purpose and given the distance (11.3km) and travel time (25 minutes drive), as well as the availability of other open spaces in much closer proximity, it is unlikely that the proposal will increase recreational pressure on the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC.
- 3.2 The Appropriate Assessment has been informed by consultation with Natural England and therefore provides a robust analysis of the potential effects on the Beechwoods SAC.
- 3.3 Based on the Appropriate Assessment and comments from Natural England who raise no objection to the proposal, the recommendation remains to grant conditional permission.

4.0 Response to comments made by Chesham Bois Parish Council

- 4.1 Chesham Bois Parish Council have submitted a further letter in relation to this application, dated 20th November 2023 requesting that the application form, applicant’s documents and case officer report be reviewed. Their full comments are attached at Appendix E. They raise concern that some issues have not been addressed, including the scale and use of the proposed development, impact on heritage assets, traffic generation and parking

requirements, biodiversity, impact on the neighbouring property, anti-social behaviour, and the impact on the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC.

- 4.2 All of these issues have been addressed by the Planning Inspector in the appeal decision and in the previous Committee report. The application was deferred solely so that an Appropriate Assessment could be carried out and the impact on the Chiltern Beechwood SAC be further considered. As such, this is the only matter for consideration as no new substantive evidence or information has been submitted by the Parish Council or other interested party.
- 4.3 In their letter, Chesham Bois Parish Council also raise concerns over procedural matters such as opportunities to speak at Committee, IT issues and consideration of financial penalties (or “costs”) if the Council challenges the Inspectors decision. Officers are confident that the application has been assessed properly in a sound way, following proper procedure.

5.0 Recommendation

- 5.1 Grant planning permission subject to the conditions set out in the officer’s previous committee report.