

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
CASTLE MORPETH LOCAL AREA COUNCIL

At the meeting of the **Castle Morpeth Local Area Council** held at Meeting Space - Block 1, Floor 2 - County Hall on Monday, 10 January 2022 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

J Beynon (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

D Bawn
S Dickinson
J Foster
M Murphy
R Wearmouth

L Darwin
R Dodd
V Jones
G Sanderson

OFFICERS

G Binning
D Brown
T Crowe
S Daniell

P Hedley
M King
L Little
R Little
E Sinnamon
R Soulsby
S Wardle

Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Strategic Performance & Risk Officer
Solicitor
Community Safety Department Team Leader
Chief Fire Officer
Highways Delivery Area Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Assistant Democratic Services Officer
Development Service Manager
Planning Officer
Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager

Around 9 members of the press and public were present.

70 PROCEDURE AT PLANNING MEETINGS

J Foster, Vice-Chair (Planning) (in the Chair) outlined the procedure which would be followed at the meeting.

71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dunn and Towns.

72 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Castle Morpeth Local Area Council held on Monday 11 October 2021 as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and be signed by the Chair.

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73 **DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Murphy advised that she had a non-prejudicial interest in application 21/01614/FUL as she had friends who lived in Thorpe Avenue.

74 **DETERMINATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The report requested the Committee to decide the planning applications attached to the report using the powers delegated to it. Members were reminded of the principles which should govern their consideration of the applications, the procedure for handling representations, the requirement of conditions and the need for justifiable reasons for the granting of permission or refusal of planning applications.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

75 **21/01614/FUL**

**Construction of 5 residential apartments with undercroft parking and associated landscaping (amended plans received 02/09/21 - design changes, further amendments 01/11/21)
High End, 22 Thorp Avenue, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 1JR**

R Soulsby provided an introduction to the application with the aid of a power point presentation, advising that the application had been deferred from the previous meeting in order to allow a site visit to be undertaken.

A Welsh and C Routledge addressed the Committee speaking in objection to the application. Their comments included the following information:

- Mr Welsh lived at 21 Thorp Avenue with Ms Routledge living at 24 and they were speaking on behalf of 50 other local residents in objection to the application.
- They would be happy to see development on the site but it should be appropriate and comply with planning guidance.
- This application should be refused for being inappropriate, too high, too big and too intrusive and did not comply with planning guidance. It was not compatible with the locality which was comprised of single family homes.
- The development contravened multiple policies such as Castle Morpeth Development Plan H15; Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan DES1; SUS1 and HOU9 and QOP1 of the Northumberland Neighbourhood Plan. It did not achieve a sense of place by protecting or enhancing the character and distinctiveness of the settlement; it did not contribute to a sense of place which supported community identity and pride; and did not make a positive contribution to the local character.
- The huge block of flats seriously violated the policies and its enormous size contravened the DES1 requirement that development must enhance the character of the site and its surroundings.
- DES1 also forbid adverse impacts on occupants of neighbouring properties and QOP2 forbid unacceptable impact on users. The impact

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on existing residents would be immense. The report stated that there would be no harm to the street scene or the wider area however over people in the community disagreed. The overbearing development would not only harm the privacy, but also the safety of residents due to increased traffic and on-street parking, along with increased noise levels. The report did not sufficiently address concerns from objectors regarding separation distances, which were stated as being acceptable and had been compared to Greystoke site which it was felt was misleading due to the raised height and domineering height of the development.

- Trees had been felled and the existing property demolished on the site and this was the third planning iteration with only minor tweaks being made which were insubstantial against the enormous overdevelopment.
- The proposed development was more than twice the footprint and twice the number of floors of the original dwelling, creating a top floor of 10m above the eaves of number 20 and 1m below the eaves of number 24, therefore overpowering and dominating neighbouring properties, overwhelming residents' amenity.
- The development would be overbearing and intrusive and contrary to the report would contravene both Articles 1 and 8 of the Human Rights Act which stated that a person had a right to peaceful enjoyment of all their possessions including their home and land and a substantive right to respect for their private family life. Outdoor movements of residents, family and friends at number 20, which only had a front garden and the south aspect of number 24 would be permanently and completely on view.
- Overlooking noise would be magnified by the close proximity of the balconies on the upper two floors.
- The population density increase would multiply vehicle movements and adhoc street parking escalate the danger to all street users.
- The application was contentious with objections from the community and Morpeth Town Council and Members were asked to use their discretion and do their duty to give consideration of each of the material considerations which had been raised by their constituents.
- The development would be too big a mass; too dominant, intrusive and overlooking; severely impacts residential amenity; and did not comply with planning legislation. The substantial material planning objections and adverse impacts were so great that the application should be refused.

Councillor A Byard addressed the Committee speaking on behalf of Morpeth Town Council in objection to the application. Her comments included the following:-

- She was speaking as Chair of the Planning and Transport Committee for Morpeth Town Council (MTC).
- A large number of residents of Morpeth had objected to these proposals and the Town Council wished to support their concerns.
- The changes in response to concerns regarding the height and overlooking along with the proposed widening of the road entrance splay had been noted, however MTC still objected to the development of 5 flats rather than the single detached dwelling as was there before. It

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might be in the same use class but was a huge difference with up to 10 additional cars and visitors coming and going in Thorpe Avenue, a quiet residential cul-de-sac of residential homes first built in 1895.

- The existing properties were varied however this proposed development was very big and not in keeping with the street scene and constituted over development.
- The high hill top location, which was recognised in the report, would be readily visible from neighbouring viewpoints and partially visible from areas further afield.
- The large size of the development would result in over-massing, have an adverse impact on the street scene and would dominate the surrounding area.
- The development would contravene Policy SUS1.5 of the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan (MNP) as it did not follow the good design which protected the character of the setting of the development and surrounding area; and policy DES1, paragraph B which stated that developments should make a positive contribution respecting or enhancing the character of the site and surrounding area in terms of proposal/ form/ massing/ density/ height/ size/ scale/ materials and detailed design features.
- MTC were concerned regarding comparisons made by the Officer to the other large block of 5 luxury flats at the site of the former Greystoke surgery. MTC would not like to see any precedent set for any large homes to be demolished to make way for blocks of flats which would be inappropriate in a market town.
- There was no housing need for this type of development in Morpeth, which has undergone a rapid expansion in recent years. NCC had recently acknowledged to MTC that they were well over the figure for required housing need and were already plenty of luxury flats in the town centre including retirement flats at William Turner Court and new flats at the old Registry Office which had not sold and the development at Cottingwood Lane.
- Paragraph 130(A) of the NPPF expected developments to function well and add to the overall quality of the area over the lifetime of the development. MTC support the views of residents that both during construction and occupation of the 5 flats on a difficult and sloping site on a blind bend would prove to be a significant reduction to their amenity and possible road safety. MTC requested that the application be refused.

D Nicholson, applicant addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. His comments included the following:-

- Himself along with his wife were the owners of 22 Thorp Avenue and whilst currently living in a big house in the country were looking to relocate to Morpeth to a suitable property which would meet the needs of their advancing years. The property would need to be centrally located within walking distance of all the amenities and have no stairs. They had looked at what was available in Morpeth but had not found anything which was suitable and therefore looked at development opportunities.

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- 22 Thorp Avenue had been on the market for some time and had failed to sell. They had looked at the property and had been impressed with the size of the site, its location and magnificent views.
- The property was on a large elevated site, one of the largest plots on Thorp Avenue, the front door of the house being 6m higher than Thorp Avenue itself which gave the property its superb views.
- The design concept was to create a small up-market apartment scheme with a roof line no higher than the previous property which would be achieved by demolishing the existing house and garage and by the removal of the small hill located on the plot. This would also allow for safe access to the site as well as providing generous car parking within the curtilage of the property and also provide some considerable development gain.
- The pre-application process was used to see if the Planning Department agreed with their views and their response and recommendations used to submit a full planning application.
- The full planning application generated a number of objections which in the main appeared to be the negative view of any apartment development on Thorp Avenue. They had tried to reach a compromise with the objectors and, at the suggestion of the planning officer, had amended their drawings four times to try to help allay their concerns, which had significantly reduced the number of objections.
- It was intended that they would live in one of the apartments, together with four other families who were in a similar position to themselves.
- The apartments would be of a high quality and it was believed would be of significant architectural merit. There was a huge demand for properties of this type due to the aging population and developments such as this were happening all over the Country, including Morpeth and he questioned why Thorp Avenue should be any different. He advised that a different developer might take the view that the site was big enough for 10 or 12 McCarthy & Stone type apartments, for which there was a proven demand.
- If Members agreed with the Officer recommendation they would be voting to help meet the recognised demand for this type of property and would also free up 5 large family homes for people who needed them in addition to generating more Council Tax revenue.

K Pimblott a Director at Acanthus Derbyshire Architects also addressed the Committee speaking in support of the application. Her comments included the following:-

- The Company had worked with Mr Nicholson on a number of successful commercial developments within Morpeth town centre but this was a one with a personal view; a wish for her client to relocate to the town centre and reside in a high quality, modern, energy efficient apartment property with access to all facilities that town centre living offered.
- The Planning Officer report was very thorough.
- The plot was a very individual plot and was unlike any other plot on the street and hoped you were able to appreciate this at the site visit which had been undertaken.
- Though the proposed scheme was larger in footprint than the previous house which occupied the site, the site was a large plot and due to its

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elevated position presented the opportunity to create direct level access into an underground parking allowing for three stories of accommodation critically within the ridge height of the previous house.

- They had worked with the Planning Department through the planning process from pre-application through to full planning and had taken on board comments received from consultees and local residents with the scheme modified.

In response to comments from Members of the Committee the following information was provided:-

- The starting point for consideration of the development was SET1 of the (MNP). This application was within the settlement boundary of Morpeth and directs development in an already well developed densely populated location with good links to the town centre. A different offering of residential use on the site was acceptable. There was nothing in policy which separated whether it should be 1 residential unit or 5 residential units. Members could consider whether the application met design and visual character policies in terms of design, scale, form, massing, e.
- The bulk of the objections had been received during the first consultation. Amended plans had been submitted and a further consultation had taken place, objectors did not have to submit further objections to the revised plans, however the initial objections still stand.
- There were 10 undercroft parking spaces to be provided which provided 2 spaces per apartment. Highways had confirmed that the number of visitor parking spaces was within acceptable parking standards of 1 visitor parking place for 4 dwellings which would equate to 1.2 parking spaces with the application including provision for 2 parking spaces.
- Policy H15 of the CMDLP stated that there should be a minimum distance of 20m between primary facing elevations i.e. front and rear elevations. Due to the orientation of the site and neighbouring dwellings there were no facing elevations and a separation distance of 8m would be retained from the outside terrace area to the south of 20 Thorp Avenue and 11.3m from the built form to the north. There would be 12m separation distance between the apartment block and the southern gable of 24 Thorp Avenue and a minimum separation distance of 5m between the proposed building and the shared boundary.
- The ridge height of the proposed apartment block now matched the height of the previous dwelling.
- Northumbrian Water had been consulted and it was confirmed that foul and surface water drainage would be provided by the existing mains system and the applicant would be required to agree discharge rates with Northumbrian water prior to the commencement of the development, however this would be dealt with outside of the planning process.

Councillor Dodd proposed acceptance of the recommendation to grant permission as outlined in the Officer report, which was seconded by Councillor Jones.

Members expressed opinions that the proposal was an overdevelopment of the site and was not in keeping with the character of the area which was of red brick

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dwelling with sandstone lintels. Concerns were also expressed regarding potential problems with car parking should residents choose not to park in the undercroft parking area, however it was recognised that the number of spaces accorded with policy and would not stand up as a reason for refusal. The potential precedent being set for developers to out-bid purchasers for other family dwellings on large sites such as this in order to build apartments was also highlighted and examples of this happening in other parts of the County had been seen with appeals being lost when they had been refused by the Planning Authority.

In response to a question on whether the applicant would work with the Planning Department on proposals for a reduction on the number of apartments to 4, Members were advised that would need to be a separate planning application.

The Development Service Manager advised that the large site was in a residential area and whilst the proposal was for a change from a large single residential unit into a small block of apartments the residential use would continue. Members were directed to consider if the proposal was in keeping with the character of the area which was predominantly large single residential dwellings. It was made clear that Planning policies did not stipulate the type of residential properties to be provided and on such a large site as this then an applicant might have come forward with a request to provide more than 5 apartments. Regarding other issues raised it was advised that Highways Development Management had confirmed that the level of car parking met the standards and policies and therefore this would not be a safe reason for a refusal. The separation standards between the proposed apartment block and neighbouring properties were also acceptable and in accordance with policies and plans. Members were advised that they could give further consideration to the impact on character, and design scale and massing, however they would need to give justification should they be minded to go against the recommendation.

A vote was taken on the proposal to accept the recommendation to grant permission as outlined in the report as follows: FOR 3; AGAINST 2; ABSTENSIONS 4.

RESOLVED that the application be **GRANTED** permission for the reasons and with the conditions as outlined in the report.

76 **APPEALS UPDATE**

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

A short recess was taken at this point with Councillors Bawn and Dickinson leaving the meeting. The meeting recommenced with Councillor J Beynon in the Chair.

77 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

No questions had been submitted.

78 **PETITIONS**

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No new petitions had been submitted and there were no updates on previously considered petitions.

79 **LOCAL SERVICES ISSUES**

Neighbourhood Services

S Wardle, Neighbourhood Services Divisional Manager advised that front line staff had continued to deliver services throughout a very busy and challenging year and provided updates as follows:

- Refuse collection had continued across the Christmas period with an amended schedule with operatives working across the period to ensure litter bins were emptied and streets remained clean and tidy.
- Grounds maintenance crews continued to work on damage caused by Storm Arwen and winter maintenance activities with the Trees Team continuing to work on the devastation from the Storm. The priority immediately after the storm was to assist in the clearance of the road network with Highways teams, then moving on to cemeteries and other places of high footfall. The teams would move to woodland spaces and other areas in due course, however recovery would take a long time. The huge efforts of the front line teams were recognised and staff thanked for all their work.
- There had been 519 tonnes of refuse collected over the Christmas period which was 85 tonnes (or 20%) more than the previous two weeks. Glass bring sites were well used with 30 tonnes (or 37%) more collected during that period compared with the previous two weeks.
- Street cleaning teams had made a great contribution to the post Arwen clean up.
- Grounds maintenance programme had been severely impacted by the Storm, however they were working to recover schedules and complete on schedule.
- Leaf clearance was close to being completed with additional sweepers in the area following the storm.
- Members were asked to report any areas of concern.

The Chair thanked all staff involved for their efforts in relation to Storm Arwen. It was confirmed that following negotiations with the operators, there had been a relaxation in the rules for the waste recycling centres for residents to allow with the clean up following the storm, with this possibly being extended into February.

Highways

M King, Highways Delivery Area Manager advised that there had been a tightening up of guidelines in respect of Covid following a sharp rise in cases with 7 members of staff testing positive between Christmas and the date of the meeting. He provided updates as follows:-

- Town Centres had been inspected in respect of Covid signage with replacements provided as necessary.
- A lot of work had been placed on hold following the storm to allow resources to be directed to the clear up following the significant damage

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within the Castle Morpeth area. It was expected that it would be a few months before the road network would be fully opened as problems were still being identified.

- There had been a knock on effect with debris being washed into the drainage system and with blocked ditches and culverts and work was being prioritised as best as officers could. Extra gully and sweeping machines had been deployed with assistance being provided by Grounds Maintenance to try to stop debris entering the drainage system. Staff had been working 6 days a week with cover initially being provided 24/7 in the aftermath of the storm.
- Efforts were being made to get back on track in respect of the LTP with resurfacing works needing to be completed by the end of the year, but it was a balancing act with trying to keep the network open and do other reactive work.
- Covid had not impacted winter services at the current time, however the Council were part of a North East group in case of any large scale issues with drivers reporting as sick. Work had continued as far as possible with grit bins being refilled etc and additional teams working over weekends.
- It was inevitable that some things would slip during this period as priorities changed on a daily basis, however all resources were being used for the clear up. Staff had also assisted with the emergency response with colleagues from the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service along with other agencies.

The Chair once again thanked the staff and Councillors involved for the efforts made during the aftermath of the storm. The scale of devastation could not be underestimated with a view that it would take years for the County to recover.

In response to a query regarding road markings at the Throckley junction of the A69, Mr King advised he would chase this up with the Road Safety Team.

The Officers were thanked for their updates.

80 **BUDGET 2022-23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

Councillor Sanderson, Leader and Councillor Wearmouth, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services provided a power point presentation advising that this provided initial thoughts on the budget although no specific new initiative announcements would be made as these would come out closer to the budget being presented to Council. A copy of the presentation would be attached to the signed minutes and provided with the meeting documents on the Council's website.

It was highlighted that key services had continued through the second year of the pandemic and Councillor Sanderson stated that he was immensely proud to be the Leader of the Council in a County which looked as good as Northumberland despite the effects of Covid and Storm Arwen. He took the opportunity to thank all front line staff for their continued work stating he was very proud of them. He continued by advising that it was hoped that no cuts to any front line services would be made during the budget process as a thanks to the staff across the services. The way services had continued to be run through the pandemic had

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been exemplary.

It was stated that the pandemic should have been a huge economic shock, however due to the Government funding with furlough and business support grants this had not been the case within Northumberland, with no increase in unemployment which was better than the national and regional averages. There was a strong economy with the increase in staycations and the ability of businesses to keep going, along with major investors coming into the County such as BritishVolt and JDR Cable. The Corporate Plan's vision and aims were outlined with the overarching priorities of driving economic recovery, through growth, investment and jobs; and, tackling health inequalities in our communities through addressing the wider determinants, including income, education, housing and environment highlighted.

The overall funding context for the 2022/23 budget was provided with it being highlighted that any increase in Council Tax precept remained at 2% without holding a referendum with an additional 1% for Adult Social Care for the next three years. Details were also provided on how the Council would continue to invest in the future of the County.

In line with previous practice the Budget for the next year and the MTFP model had been reviewed. A savings requirement of £9.704 million had been identified as required to balance the budget for 2022-23. A provisional savings requirement of £28 million had been calculated as necessary for the following two financial years. The approach to identifying spend and savings within the budget were outlined and details provided on proposed savings by Portfolio Holder.

Members were advised that 200 comments had been made on the public consultation on the budget proposals which would be fed into proposals along with the views of Overview and Scrutiny Committees before final proposals were put to full Council on 23 February 2022.

Councillor Dodd advised of concerns regarding proposals for tree planting and re-wilding of the countryside and problems the latter could pose for Farmers in trying to grow good crops and support themselves, especially when it effects the delicately balanced uplands of the County. He also advised of the importance of providing shelter belts to protect against storms. Councillor Sanderson advised that agriculture was a very important part of the County's economy and recognised the serious concerns in relation to Government proposals for farming stating it was vitally important for the Council to listen and find a balance between environmental issues and becoming self-sufficient. He advised of meetings being held involving the North of Tyne Combined Authority, tenant farms, National Farmers Union, National Park along with the Council's Environmental team to come up with proposals to send to George Eustice and DEFRA highlighting the importance of that balance. Councillor Wearmouth also advised of the importance of sensitive planning and management of forestry and the need for good training facilities within the County.

The opportunity was once again taken to sincerely thank all staff across all services along with County Councillors for their efforts during and in the aftermath of Storm Arwen.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

81 **YOUTH SERVICE**

The Chair advised that this item was being deferred as the Officers were unable to attend due to Covid impacts on the service.

82 **NORTHUMBERLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-26 CONSULTATION**

The report provided information on the public consultation and details of the draft Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Paul Hedley, Chief Fire Officer provided a power point presentation, a copy of which would be attached to the signed minutes and made available with the papers for this meeting on the Council's website. It was explained that it was a statutory requirement under the Fire Service National Framework Document (NFD) for each Fire and Rescue Authority to have a CRMP. The NFD detailed how each authority should discharge its functions, with the most relevant aspects to the CRMP highlighted as "identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks in their area" and "be accountable to communities for the service they provide".

A wide ranging public consultation exercise was now underway on the draft of the CRMP. Members were advised that each plan must reflect up to date risk analyses; demonstrate how prevention, protection and response activities would best be used holistically to best prevent and mitigate the impact of identified risks on its communities. Separate strategies were in place for emergency response, protection and prevention which sat beneath the CRMP which all identified how strands of delivery complement and help risk reduction. The CRMP must also cover a minimum three year time span, reflect effective consultation throughout its development and be easily accessible and publicly available.

Reassurance was provided that this was not a plan set in stone and would be flexible in order to respond not only to new and emerging risks but also unforeseen circumstances and impact. An annual update would take place where achievements and performance would be looked at along with what was needed for the forthcoming year, in order to assess if any changes to risk or service delivery models were required. If anything in this update required further public consultation then this would be undertaken. A range of partners, including a specialist risk modelling company had also been involved in the production of the CRMP which had included providing simulation models to predict what the impact of potential changes on community risk and resilience would look like. This allowed greater confidence that these were defined and communicated across the area and how resources would be matched.

The purpose of the CRMP was to provide assurance that the right resources were in the right places to respond effectively to the risks within Northumberland. It was important that communities understood the process undertaken to analyse risk. It was explained that risk was a combination of the likelihood and consequence of a hazardous event and the NFRS had a duty to work with communities and partners to minimise or prevent the likelihood of these

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happening. In the last ten years there had been a 21% reduction in incidents attended, with 10 incident types identified as responsible for 90% of the events. It was explained that there was a correlation between outdoor fires and crime deprivation and good work was underway with Northumbria Police to work collaboratively with partners to reduce these risks.

Data was provided on incidents of dwelling fires and information was provided on what was currently done to reduce this risk and what was planned to further reduce incidents of this nature. Emerging risks were also identified and with the significant strain and challenge put on the service in responding to the pandemic and recent storms there was a need to ensure that the service would be able to meet future demands on the service. The Council's corporate plan was also used to look at how future development might impact on the service or increase risk to ascertain if any changes would be required in order to provide assurance of a suitable response.

The consultation would be wide ranging with sessions to be provided at all Local Area Councils along with a significant media and social media campaign providing links to the consultation document.

Members highlighted and welcomed the positive changes made to the NFRS over the years and recognised that they were called out to deal with a wide range of incidents along with providing assistance to a range of other services. In response Members were advised that whilst they were the smallest fire service within the mainland UK they would continue to be ambitious and add value wherever they could.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and presentation, advising that their work was much appreciated.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

83 **LOCAL AREA COUNCIL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair advised that this was for information and should Members wish to ask for any items to be added to the agenda, then they contact either himself or Democratic Services.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR.....

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