OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00478/FUL **Full Planning Application**

Proposal: **Demolition of Earith village hall and installation of grass grid parking area with 9 new parking bays. Removal of 6 parking bays adjacent to the river and expansion of existing amenity area.**

Location: **Car Park Village Hall High Street**

Applicant: **Mrs Mandy Pink**

Grid Ref: **538481 274739**

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

The application site is located on the south-side of High Street within the settlement of Earith. The site is located within the Earith Conservation Area and is in close proximity to a number of Grade II Listed Buildings, including the Telephone Kiosk and Nos. 52, 54, 56, 58 and 60 and 73 High Street, Earith. The application site is also located on land within Flood Zones 2 and 3 on the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning and Flood Zones 2, 3a and 3b in Huntingdonshire's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2024.

The site currently comprises the existing village hall and car park to the south of the High Street and north of the River Great Ouse. The existing village hall is a single storey building with simple pitch roof design. There is a mature tree to the front of the site in between the existing accesses which is protected by virtue of its size and siting in the Earith Conservation Area.

This application seeks approval for the demolition of the existing Earith Village Hall and the installation of a grass grid parking area with nine new parking bays, the removal of six parking bays adjacent to the river and the expansion of the existing amenity area.

This is a revised application following the previously refused application (Ref: 22/02465/FUL) which sought demolition of the existing village hall on the High Street to be replaced with additional parking bays and the construction of a new village hall on the southern edge of Earith Recreational Fields.

The application has been accompanied by the following:

- Planning Statement;
- Heritage Statement;
- Structural Condition Report;
- Flood Risk Assessment;
- Tree Survey;
- Tree Protection Scheme (including Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan);
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment; and
- Further Bat Survey Report (including Dusk Emergence Surveys).

Officers have scrutinised the plans and have familiarised themselves with the site and surrounding area.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2024 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* building a strong, competitive economy;
* achieving well-designed, beautiful and safe places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 - adopted May 2019

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP5: Flood Risk
LP6: Waste Water Management
LP9: Small Settlements
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP16: Sustainable Travel
LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP22: Local Services and Community Facilities
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows
LP34: Heritage Assets and their Settings

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Guidance:

Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (2024)
Huntingdonshire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2017
Developer Contributions SPD 2011
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD (2022)
Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD 2017
Earith Conservation Area Character Assessment (June 2008)

The National Design Guide (2021)

* C1 - Understand and relate well to the site, its local and wider context

* I1 - Respond to existing local character and identity
* I2 - Well-designed, high quality and attractive
* B2 - Appropriate building types and forms
*M3 - Well-considered parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users
* N3 - Support rich and varied biodiversity
* H1 - Healthy, comfortable and safe internal and external environment
* H2 - Well-related to external amenity and public spaces
* H3 - Attention to detail: storage, waste, servicing and utilities

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY

25/00172/TRCA - T1 and T2 Willow - Crown lift from 6m from ground level - Approved.

22/02465/FUL - Demolition of existing village hall on the High Street to be replaced with additional parking bays. Construction of new village hall on the southern edge of Earith Recreation Fields - Refused.

17/01930/TRCA - London Plane Tree - Reduction work to the canopy by 2-3m. Crown Lift to 5m and remove deadwood - Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Earith Parish Council - No objections. The Village needs the amenity space and adding to the parking area within the High Street will greatly benefit the Village. The Council have made this application because it was requested by the Residents following a Village Survey and it was thought that the suggested development would be the best use for the site of the old Village Hall that is now a redundant building.

Environment Agency - No objection to the proposed development but strongly recommend that the mitigation measures proposed in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment are adhered to. In particular, the FRA recommends that benches/tables will be appropriately anchored to the ground to ensure that they would not be washed away in the event that a flood occurs. The car park has been relocated further north of the site outside of flood zone 3, reducing the risk to parked cars during the event of a flood. This is providing betterment in terms of reducing the risk on site.

Cambridgeshire County Council Highway Authority - It was noted that the scheme will result in three additional parking spaces on the site. The tracking indicates that there is adequate turning within the proposed new parking area. Also, the visibility from both accesses is adequate.
Therefore, no significant adverse effect upon the Public Highway should result from this proposal should it gain benefit of planning permission. However, it would be beneficial to designate the accesses as an 'In' and 'Out' to minimise the risk of conflict within the site and at the accesses.

Cambridgeshire County Council Archaeology - The development is likely to have a limited subsurface impact and the site is likely to have been disturbed by construction of the existing village hall, therefore no comments in relation to this application.

Huntingdonshire District Council Conservation Officer - This application would satisfy statutory protections for listed buildings and conservation areas. The proposals would respect National Planning Policies and accord with LP34. There are no objections to the application on heritage grounds.

Huntingdonshire District Council Emergency Planning - This application does not meet the threshold requirement for comment.

Huntingdonshire District Council Arboricultural Officer - Support the application but request that consideration is given to altering the design slightly.

REPRESENTATIONS

Two letters of representation were received during the course of the application supporting the proposal in principle, subject to ensuring the access points operate a one-way system, appropriate signage is in place, no blocking of the access to No. 60 High Street, the relocation of the existing telephone box and adequate provision of waste bins.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

When determining planning applications, it is necessary to establish what weight should be given to each plan's policies in order to come to a decision. The following legislation, government policy and guidance outline how this should be done.

As set out within the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 38(6)) and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (Section 70(2)) in dealing with planning applications the Local Planning Authority shall have regard to have provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. This is reiterated within paragraph 48 of the NPPF (2024). The development plan is defined in Section 38(3)(b) of the 2004 Act as "the development plan documents (taken as a whole) that have been adopted or approved in that area".

In Huntingdonshire the Development Plan consists of:

o Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (2019)
o Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2021)
o St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029
o Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan (2017)
o Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan (2018)
o Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan (2019)
o Bury Village Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Buckden Neighbourhood Plan (2021)
o Grafham and Ellington Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036 (2022)
o Great Gransden Neighbourhood Plan 2021 to 2036 (2023)
o The Stukeleys Neighbourhood Plan 2022 to 2036 (2023)
o Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan 2022 to 2036 (2023)

The statutory term 'material considerations' has been broadly construed to include any consideration relevant in the circumstances which bears on the use or development of the land: Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government & Anor [2011] EWHC 97 (Admin); [2011] 1 P. & C.R. 22, per Lindblom J. Whilst accepting that the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the Development Plan, paragraph 2 confirms that it is a material consideration and significant weight is given to this in determining applications.

The main issues to consider are:

o The Principle of Development
o Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on Heritage Assets
o Residential Amenity
o Highway Safety, Access and Parking Provision
o Flood Risk and Surface Water
o Biodiversity
o Trees

*The Principle of the Development

The site is located within the built-up area of the settlement of Earith, which the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 identifies as a 'Small Settlement'. As such, Policy LP9 (Small Settlements) is considered to be relevant in this instance.

Policy LP9 of the adopted Local Plan states that a proposal that is located within a built-up area of a Small Settlement will be supported where the amount and location of development proposed is sustainable in relation to:

(a) the level of service and infrastructure provision within the settlement;
(b) opportunities for users of the proposed development to access everyday services and facilities by sustainable modes of travel including walking, cycling and public transport; and
(c) effect on the character of the immediate locality and the settlement as a whole.

Given the scale and nature of the proposed development, the Local Planning Authority consider that the proposal would satisfy criteria (a) of Policy LP9. As the proposal seeks to provide additional off-street car parking for the settlement of Earith, Policy LP9 (b) is not considered relevant in this instance. It is noted however, that the proposal involves the provision of cycle parking - both at the main parking area and at the amenity area. Furthermore, as discussed in following sections of this report, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied the proposal meets the criteria of Policy LP9 (c).

The proposed development involves the demolition of the existing village hall and as such, Policy LP22 (Local Services and Community Facilities) is also considered relevant.

Policy LP22 states that a proposal which involves the loss of a local service or community facility will only be supported where:
(d) an equivalent service or community facility will be provided in a location with an equal or better level of accessibility for the community it is intended to serve; or
(e) it demonstrates that there is no reasonable prospect of that service or facility being retained or restored because either
(i) there is insufficient community support for its continuation; or
(ii) reasonable steps have been taken to effectively market the property for its current use without success.

This application has been accompanied by a Planning Statement which states that the village hall closed in March 2023 due to a number of long standing structural and building regulation issues. The Hall is a temporary structure with limited lifespan and the presence of a large tree at the frontage of the site made its continued use or repair unviable. A structural survey and report has been prepared to demonstrate that the lengths required to make the existing building suitable for continued use make its retention on the site unviable.
All services and community facilities previously provided by the village hall have been successfully relocated to alternate locations (including Rectors Hall, St Mary's Church and ETE Pavilion) and there has been a lack of public support for the continuation of the village hall. The Local Planning Authority are satisfied with the information provided and the loss of the village hall would not be significantly detrimental to the vitality and viability of the settlement. The provision of a public amenity space with direct view to the river will also provide the village with additional outside public amenity space, providing an area for local residents to sit or gather in the centre of the village.

Overall, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable in this instance, subject to all other planning matters being addressed.

*Design, Visual Amenity and Impact on Heritage Assets

The Local Planning Authority is required to ensure that special regard is given to preserving the listed buildings and their settings in relation to Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Local Planning Authority is also required to ensure that with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area, through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 at Section 72. This is also reflected in Policy LP34 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and Section 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy LP11 of the Local Plan states that a proposal will be supported where it is demonstrated that it responds positively to its context. Policy LP12 states that new development will be expected to be well designed and that a proposal will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it contributes positively to the area's character and identity and successfully integrates with adjoining buildings and landscape. This is also reflected in the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

This application seeks approval for the demolition of the existing Earith Village Hall and the installation of a grass grid parking area with nine new parking bays, the removal of six parking bays adjacent to the river and the expansion of the existing amenity area at Earith Village Hall, High Street, Earith. The site is located within the Earith Conservation Area and is in close proximity to a number of Grade II Listed Buildings, including the Telephone Kiosk and Nos. 52, 54, 56, 58 and 60 and 73 High Street, Earith.

The existing village hall has a simple pitched roof design with rendered externals walls and a small rear brick lean-to element. The proposal will remove an unsightly, redundant building and therefore there is no objection to its demolition as it has little architectural merit and limited contribution to the street scene of High Street.

It is proposed to replace the building with 9 car parking spaces to expand the existing car parking area and try to relieve some of the parking pressure on High Street. The parking area will be finished with a grass grid permeable surface with stone edging. Specific details have not been provided for the proposed surfacing and means of delineating the car parking etc, however, the Local Planning Authority are satisfied that acceptable materials can be agreed as part of a suitably worded condition on any planning permission granted.

The Council's Conservation Officer has concluded that on balance, the demolition of the existing village hall would preserve the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings as the space between buildings would open up and better reflect their historic settings. Furthermore, the removal of the village hall would open up views to the river from High Street and create an amenity area, positively contributing to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The Earith Conservation Area Character Assessment refers to the site as:
"New Lode, now a car park, was once a busy landing point at the heart of the settlement where many public fairs were held." "New Lode […] would benefit from being returned to its previous use as a public open space […] today its importance as an historic public space is not recognised."

Whilst the continued use of the space as a car park does not fulfil the heritage potential as described in the character statement, the proposals are an improvement on the existing arrangements and the creation of a small public amenity space adjacent to the river with benches, planters and cycle parking goes some way to returning the site to its previous use.

Overall, the proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its design, would positively contribute to the character and appearance of the Earith Conservation Area and would preserve the setting of nearby Listed Buildings.

As such, the proposed development is deemed to be in accordance with Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Policies LP9, LP11, LP12 and LP34 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Sections 12 and 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Residential Amenity

Policy LP14 of the Local Plan to 2036 states a proposal will be supported where a high standard of amenity is provided for all users and occupiers of the proposed development and maintained for users and occupiers of neighbouring land and buildings.

Given the nature of the proposal, including the demolition of the existing village hall, the proposed development is not considered to result in any detrimental overbearing, overshadowing, overlooking or loss of light impacts on any neighbouring residential property.
Furthermore, the proposed change of use of the land to car parking and an amenity space, is not considered to result in any detrimental noise and disturbance impacts or additional comings and goings than what could be achieved with the existing use.

As such, the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on residential amenity and therefore accords with Policy LP14 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Highway Safety, Access and Parking Provision

Policies LP16 and LP17 of the Local Plan to 2036 seeks to ensure that new development incorporates appropriate space for vehicle movements, facilitates access for emergency vehicles and service vehicles and incorporates adequate parking for vehicles and cycles.

The proposed development would utilise the two existing vehicular access points off High Street, Earith. The existing access arrangements would remain unaltered as a result of the proposal and are considered to be of adequate dimensions with appropriate pedestrian and vehicular visibility splays in both directions. Following concerns raised by neighbouring properties and the Local Highway Authority, a condition would be imposed on any planning permission granted to ensure that a one-way system is provided with the two access points, including 'In' and 'Out' signs, to minimise conflict both within the site and the accesses.

The Local Planning Authority are satisfied with the provision and arrangement of off-street car parking, including adequate space within the site for vehicle turning to ensure vehicles enter the highway in a forward gear. Furthermore, given the loss of the village hall and the proposed use of the site, the Local Planning Authority do not consider the number of comings and goings to significantly increase as a result of the proposal.

Therefore, subject to appropriate conditions, the proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on highway safety and therefore accords with Policy LP17 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Flood Risk and Surface Water

Environment Agency Flood Mapping shows the northern area of the site to lie in Flood Zone 1, with the Flood Zone 2 extent being approximately to the southern edge of the village hall and the remainder of the site to the south indicated as Flood Zone 3. Given the scale and nature of the proposed development, sequential and exception tests are not required in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

This application has been accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment, which concludes that the overall risk of flooding from any artificial source occurring at the site is considered to be low. Furthermore, the development would use grasscrete surfacing to support surface water drainage following the removal of the impermeable roof area of the village hall.

The Environment Agency have been consulted on the application and have no objection to the proposed development. The car park has been relocated further north of the site outside of flood zone 3, reducing the risk to parked cars during the event of a flood. This is providing betterment in terms of reducing the risk on site. However, they strongly recommend that the mitigation measures proposed in the submitted Flood Risk Assessment are adhered to. In particular, the FRA recommends that benches/tables will be appropriately anchored to the ground to ensure that they would not be washed away in the event that a flood occurs. This is considered reasonable and necessary and such a condition will be imposed on any permission granted.

Therefore, subject to appropriate conditions the proposal is considered to be acceptable with regard to its impact on both flood risk and surface water and therefore accords with Policies LP5, LP6 and LP15 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Biodiversity

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (2024) states planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. Policy LP30 of the Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to demonstrate that all potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity have been investigated and ensure no net loss in biodiversity and provide a net gain where possible, through the planned retention, enhancement and creation of habitats and wildlife features, appropriate to the scale, type, and location of development.

This application has been accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and a Bat Survey Report.

The Bat Survey Report concludes that regular foraging and commuting by common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and noctule bats were recorded on the site. The bats were found to mostly be foraging in neighbouring gardens and crossing the site to get from one side to the other. No sustained foraging was recorded on the site. No bat roosts or roosting bats were found. The risk of presence and impact to roosting bats and local bat conservation from the proposed demolition and development was therefore considered negligible.

The submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal includes precautionary measures within the Recommendation section, which are considered to be appropriate and would be secured via a suitably worded condition on any planning permission granted. The appraisal also proposes enhancements in the form of a bird and bat box to be installed on the mature London Plane Tree, as well as a soft landscape scheme which will include native and wildlife attracting species. It is considered that these measures will help to provide a biodiversity net gain and can be secured by condition.

Overall, the proposed development is considered to be in accordance with Policy LP30 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 and Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) in this regard.

*Trees

Policy LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 states that a proposal will be required to demonstrate that the potential for adverse impacts on trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows has been investigated. A proposal will only be supported where it seeks to conserve

and enhance any existing tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of value that would be affected by the proposed development.
The site is located within the Earith Conservation Area and therefore the trees within and around the site are protected accordingly. This application has been accompanied by a Tree Survey and a Tree Protection Scheme (including an Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan).

To the north of the site is a large, mature London Plane tree and to the south-west are two large, mature Willow trees. The existing trees within the site would be retained as a result of the proposed development and the submitted documentation includes protection and care measures during the demolition and construction process.

The Council's Arboricultural Officer supports the application, noting an acceptable tree protection scheme and whilst it was recommended to relocate a seating area under the willow trees to avoid the need for pruning, it is noted that the pruning works have already been undertaken under a separate application (25/00172/TRCA). Whilst the Parish council confirmed that they had no objection in principle to adjusting the arrangement of furniture, the need to maintain vehicular access to the river alongside the seating area and the desire not to lose more parking bays meant that possible alternative locations were restricted. Accordingly such a change was not considered necessary in this instance.

As such, the proposed development is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact on trees and therefore in accordance with Policy LP31 of the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

*Conclusion

The proposed development is considered to be compliant with the relevant national and local policy as it is:

* Acceptable in principle
* Would not be harmful to the character or appearance of the area;
* Would not have a significantly detrimental impact upon the amenity of neighbours;
* Would not be detrimental to highway safety in the locality;
* Is acceptable with regards to the impact on biodiversity;
* There are no other material planning considerations which lead to the conclusion that the proposal is unacceptable.

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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