
ITEM	APP/2007/6426	WARD Bidston and St James
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Location: Within the boundary of Beechwood Drive, Fender Way and Fifth Ave Beechwood Wirral CH43 7SY

Proposal: Improvements to hard and soft landscaping for Beechwood Commercial Centre. Most of the improvements based around tree planting.

Applicant: Beechwood & Ballantyne Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association 1 Beechwood Drive Beechwood Wirral CH43 7SY	Agent: Ainsley Gommon Architects 1 Price Street Hamilton Square Birkenhead Wirral CH41 6JN
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Development Plan allocation and policies: Primarily Commercial Area
RSS Policy DP3: Quality in New Development
PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development
GR5 - Landscaping and New Development
SPG16 - Landscaping and New Development

Planning History: None

Representations and consultations received: REPRESENTATIONS

31 letters of notification have been sent to properties in the area and 4 site notices where displayed by the planning officer on lampposts around the perimeter of the site.

At the time of writing this report the following objections have been received.

The Beechwood Community Trust objected to the proposal in a letter dated 9th August 2007.

These objections summarised are as follows:

The environmental improvements could lead to problems with regards to security and anti-social behaviour.

The trees could obscure natural light.

The Trust will no longer be able to use the site for fundraising.

There was a lack of public consultation.

In addition to this the Beechwood Community Trust have also submitted a qualifying petition which lists in total 85 individual names.

CONSULTATIONS

Director of Regeneration - Housing & Environmental Protection Division has no objection to the proposal.

Director of Technical Services - Traffic Management Division no objection to the proposal and concludes that there will be no significant Traffic Management Conditions.

Directors comments: PROPOSAL

The application seeks approval for some environmental improvements within the commercial area of the Beechwood housing estate. The areas within this confined area which are subject of this planning application consist mainly of open grassed areas. The proposed improvements would involve an extensive programme of tree and shrub planting of a variety of species along with some ancillary lighting and other street furniture.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The site is the Commercial Core of the Beechwood Housing Estate and it is pepper dashed with a number of low rise buildings each with their own function along with areas for parking and playing. The site has a central role in the community and it is vital for the community in accessing a range of services. The site despite being well used by the community is becoming tired and no longer contributes significantly to the built environment.

The surrounding area consists mostly of residential properties although there is a school located in a northerly direction on the opposite side of Beechwood Drive. To the west lies the boroughs major arterial transport routes which are the M53 motorway and the main railway.

POLICY CONTEXT

Policy GR5 sets out the main considerations that the local planning authority will take into account in assessing landscaping proposals. These primarily relate to the individual merits of the site, the location and the nature of the development proposed, and the protection of any characteristics greenspace features already present on the site or within the locality.

SPG16 despite being rather old summarises the Local Planning Authorities normal requirements for landscaping it, set out advice with regard to the presentation of proposals and indicates those areas where the local planning authority will wish to exercise special control.

PPS1 sets out the the overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system which includes the protection and enhancement of the environment.

PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

The principle of development is acceptable subject to the proposal complying with the above identified policies. The proposal must respect the character of the area, improve the general streetscene and ultimately contribute positively to the built environment. It must not also detract from the residential amenity of nor conflict with the aspirations of designing out crime.

ISSUES AND ASSESSMENT

Having assessed the proposal on site it is considered that the environmental scheme has been designed to make a significant design impact on the local centre in an attempt to bring new economic activity into the area whilst improving social inclusion. The applicant recognises that the Beechwood Estate already benefits from having a good supply of Urban greenspace and the local authority would tend to agree with this, although it has been indicated by the applicant that these areas or of poor quality which are not achieving their environmental potential.

The Local Planning Authority would welcome a proposal that seeks to improve and enhance the built environment, as such, proposals can greatly improve the well-being amongst communities whilst embracing a feeling of belonging and pride. This is in line with government policy. However the local planning authority is aware that such proposals must be executed in a sensitive manner as not to be over powering, oppressive or unduly unsympathetic. Such proposals must also not compromise the amenities of the local community.

It is considered that the proposed environmental improvements are appropriate in terms of scale, and the nature and location of the proposed planting would not have an adverse visual prominence that would detract from the character of the area. The proposal would not detract from the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.

The objections relating to crime and anti-social behaviour are unfounded and would not warrant the refusal of this application. The trees which are subject of this objection or those adjacent to the community centre, they are staggered, they have a light and see through foliage with quite a high canopy, it would not be possible for a prospective intruder to hide behind these trees. A meeting has taken place with the Council's

Police Architectural Liaison Officer and this raised no significant objections. There was an initial concern with regards to the height of certain trees, but it later became apparent that the trees would have a high level foliage would therefore not be a significant problem.

The Council recognises that the proposal will reduce the amount of ground in which the Community Trust can carry out their fund raising. However, in planning terms it is considered that a reason for refusal on these grounds cannot be substantiated. An area in which this activity can take place has been incorporated into the design albeit on a smaller scale.

Whilst the Local Planning Authority cannot insist on a level of public consultation prior to the application being submitted, the council has fulfilled its own consultation obligation by displaying a series of site notices and distributing neighbour notification letters to those residents who surround the site, the application could therefore not be refused on these grounds.

HIGHWAY IMPLICATIONS

The Director of Technical Services - Traffic management Division has no objection to the proposal and concludes that there are not significant highway management implication arising as a result of this application.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

The application has many positive attributes that promote sustainable development. Planting trees and other vegetation by its very nature is beneficial to the environment by helping reduce the amount of carbon dioxide there is in the atmosphere. Moreover, and on micro level good quality urban spaces can promote and improve wildlife diversity as trees and shrubs act as useful wildlife buffers and natural habitats to the benefit of wildlife activity.

Summary of Decision: The application is approved for the reasons that the proposal would have broader environmental benefits in line with the sustainability agenda, it would also have a minimal adverse impact on the character of the area and the proposal would not detract from residential amenity. It is considered that there would be no significant conflict with the objectives of Policy GR5 of the Wirral UDP and the application is therefore approved.

Recommendation: **Approve**

Condition(s):

- 1 Full planning permission: standard commencement date. (C03A)
- 2 All planting shall be maintained any any trees or plants which within a period of 5 years from the date of planting, are removed, die or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planing season with others of a similar size and species unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3 Notwithstanding the details on the proposed plan Job No. 1114C/020 no development shall commence until further elevations of the lighting columns and their exact location within the site be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details and retained as such thereafter.
- 4 Scheme for protection of trees to be submitted and agreed. (C11B)

Reason for conditions

- 1 Standard (CR86)
- 2 To ensure a satisfactory development and to protect the character of the area.
- 3 In the interests of residential amenity and to ensure a satisfactory development having regard to Policy GR5 of the UDP.
- 4 In the interests of amenity. (CR17)

Last Comments By: **20 September 2007**

56 Day Expires On: **03 September 2007**

Case Officer: Mr G McGowan

Notes:

INFORMATIVE:

Please note that this approval does not give permission for any advertisements that are proposed within the site. These would be subject to a separate assessment by the Local Planning Authority by way of an Advertisement Consent Application.