CASE OFFICER'S REPORT

Application Reference:	PL/2023/07900
Application Type:	Full planning permission
Site Inspection:	
Consultation ends:	20 October 2023
Case officer:	Helena Carney

Site Address:	Pumphouse Cottage, Crofton, Marlborough, SN8 3DW
Proposal:	Change of use from vacant, former cottage tied to pumping station employment, to Kennet & Avon Canal Trust administration office on upper floor with visitor refreshment facilities on ground floor.
Recommendation:	Approve with Conditions

Note: It is considered that the application can be determined without the need for a physical site visit. This is because the applicants have supplied photographs of the site from all relevant angles and the plans submitted clearly describe the extent of the development. It is therefore considered that there is sufficient information available to reach a decision.

POLICIES

Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted January 2015):
Core Policy 39: Tourist Development
Core Policy 48: Supporting Rural Life
Core Policy 51: Landscape
Core Policy 57: Ensuring High Quality Design & Place Shaping
Core Policy 58: Ensuring the Conservation of the Historic Environment
Core Policy 64: Demand Management

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

ISSUES

- Principle of development
- Impact upon amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties
- Impact upon the character and appearance of the area and upon the setting of heritage assets
- Impact upon parking provision
- Impact upon the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None

REPRESENTATIONS

Great Bedwyn Parish Council: no objection, but they attached their standard advice on sustainability

Wiltshire Council Environmental Health Officer: no comment received at time of writing

Wiltshire Council Highways Officer: no objection (full comment available on council website)

Third Party representations: none received at time of writing

ASSESSMENT

The application site relates to Pumphouse Cottage, a two-storey detached dwelling. The property is currently vacant but was used previously for residential accommodation tied to the Pumping Station employment.

The application site is located in a rural location approximately 1.5 miles south-west of the village of Great Bedwyn. To the western side of the application site lies an existing car park associated with the Pumping Station and a residential property lies to the south. There are a number of heritage assets adjacent to the application site; a Grade I Pumping Station to the east, a Grade II* flue (associated with the Pumping Station) to the north and a Grade II listed pillbox to the west.

To the east of the application site and beyond the Pumping Station lies a main railway line and the Kennet & Avon Canal. The application site is washed over by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The Proposals:
This application is seeking planning permission for the change of use from residential accommodation tied to the pumping station employment, to a Kennet & Avon Canal Trust administration office at first floor level and visitor refreshment facilities at ground floor level.

Principle of development:
This application is seeking planning permission for the change of use of an existing cottage to an office and café associated with the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust. The proposed change of use will result in the loss of a residential unit (tied to the operation of the Pumping Station) to provide an administration office for the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust and a café offering visitor refreshments.

The submitted Application Form states “The Cottage is currently vacant or temporarily used for storage. The wider site is operated by the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust as a visitor attraction to view the oldest working steam Beam Engines in the World, still in their original location and performing their original task. Temporary accommodation for site manager/ caretaker. This post

has since become discontinued. It is not feasible to occupy the cottage for any other purpose owing to the absence of any private space: the cottage being located within the grounds of the visitor attraction.

As the application site lies in a rural location, outside of the Principal Settlement boundary and given the that proposed use will provide tourist facilities (administration office for the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust and visitor refreshment café) Core Policy 39 (Tourist Development) and Core Policy 48 (Supporting Rural Life), of the adopted Wiltshire Core Policy (WCS) 2015 are relevant to this assessment.

For sites outside the Principal Settlements, Core Policy 39 of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) requires that tourist and visitor facilities should be located in or close to Local Service Centres or Large and Small Villages and, where practicable, be located in existing or replacement buildings.

In exceptional cases development may be supported away from the Principal Settlements, Market Towns, Local Service Centres and Large and Small Villages where it can be demonstrated that all of the following criteria are met:

i. There is evidence that the facilities are in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction.
ii. No suitable alternative existing buildings or sites exist which are available for reuse.
iii. The scale, design and use of the proposal is compatible with its wider landscape setting and would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas.
iv. The building is served by adequate access and infrastructure.
v. The site has reasonable access to local services and a local employment base. Extensions to existing facilities should be appropriate in scale to their location and help to ensure the future viability of the business, including farm diversification schemes”

The proposed development is considered to satisfy the above policy objectives. The application property is sited in close proximity to existing visitor attractions (The Crofton Beam Engines, the Kennet & Avon Canal and locally important heritage assets).

As stated by the applicant, the cottage was used for temporary accommodation for a site manager/caretaker but this post has since become discontinued. The applicant maintains that it is not feasible to occupy the cottage for any other purpose due the lack of private residential amenity space as the cottage is located within the grounds of an existing visitor attraction. Therefore, it is proposed to re-use the existing building to provide facilities to support existing tourism facilities and attractions.

There will be no change to the scale or design of the existing building as it is not proposed to make any external alterations or construct any extensions. Consequently, the proposed development will have a neutral impact upon the character and appearance of the landscape setting and will not result in a detrimental impact upon the amenities of the nearby residential property.

There will be no change to the existing access arrangements and as such the proposed development does not give rise to any highway safety issues. Furthermore, adequate parking will

be provided for users of the proposed office space and visitors, within the existing car park and in front of the property.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the application site and wider visitor attractions are located in a rural area, they are relatively small in scale. The villages of Great Bedwyn, Burbage and East Grafton are reasonably accessible from the application site (circa 1 – 1.5 miles away) and capable of providing workforce, ensuring the future viability of the business.

Core Policy 48 explains the approach that will be taken to support rural communities, outside the limits of development of Principal Settlements. The policy is based on the following key objectives:

• Protecting the countryside and maintaining its local distinctiveness.
• Supporting the sensitive reuse of built assets to help meet local needs.
• Supporting improved access between places and to services; and
• Supporting the community in taking ownership of local services.

Core Policy 48 generally supports proposals to re-use buildings for tourism uses provided that the proposals do not lead to subsequent applications for replacement buildings elsewhere. Core Policy 48 recognises that the insensitive re-use of rural buildings can be damaging to the character of the building and its rural setting and that additions and extensions should normally be avoided.

In this instance, the proposed development does not comprise any external alterations or extensions to the existing building and consequently the proposals will not harm the character of the building and its rural setting. The existing building is currently vacant and not in use, other than for the purposes of storage. The proposals involve the sensitive re-use of the building to meet local tourism requirements.

Given the above, it is concluded that the proposed development complies with Core Polices 39 and 48 of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and consequently the principle of development is considered acceptable.

Impact upon amenity of occupiers of neighbouring properties:
A residential property (Canal Cottage) lies to the south of the application property.

The proposals involve the change of use of an existing residential building to provide an office at first floor level and café offering visitor refreshments at ground floor level. The submitted plans indicate that there will be no external alterations or extensions to the existing building and as such it is considered that the proposed development will have a neutral impact upon the occupiers of Canal Cottage.

However, it is noted that the application proposes to provide visitor refreshments at ground floor level. The councils Environmental Health Officer was consulted on the proposals, but they have not commented. However, the proposed plans do not appear to include any extra extraction fans and in any event what is proposed appears to be small scale refreshments for visitors to this area. Furthermore, it is considered that there is sufficient separation distance between the application property and the neighbouring residential property to avoid any material loss of residential amenity.

Impact upon the character and appearance of the area and upon the setting of heritage assets:
The adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) Core Policy 57 requires a high standard of design in any new developments including alterations or extensions to a dwelling. Development is to create a strong sense of place through drawing on local context and being complementary to the locality. The policy seeks for any new development to positively respond to the existing townscape and landscape and effectively integrate into its settings.

The adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS) Core Policy 58 requires that designated heritage assets and their settings will be conserved and where possible enhanced.

Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires 'special regard' to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting.

The application property lies within the setting of a number of heritage assets; a Grade I Pumping Station to the east, a Grade II* flue (associated with the Pumping Station) to the north and a Grade II listed pillbox lie to the west.

The proposals involve the change of use of an existing residential building. The submitted plans indicate that there will be no external alterations or extensions to the existing building and as such it is considered that the proposed development will have a neutral impact upon the setting of heritage assets and upon the character and appearance of the area.

Impact upon parking provision:
The council's Highways Officer was consulted on the proposals and commented as follows "I note that the building to be converted for the alternative use is small in scale for the office use and the café use I would be looking to secure 3 parking spaces in total. I am assuming that patrons will have the use of the existing car park and if that is the case I am not going to ask the applicant to provide specific parking for this proposal. Therefore based on the information provided I am happy to offer no highway objection".

The above comment was brought to the attention of the applicant and they advised "the intention is that patrons of the cafe will use the Trust's car park opposite Pumphouse Cottage, which was built for use by visitors to the Beam Engines, and has a capacity in excess of 30 spaces. There are also two parking spaces immediately adjacent to the rear door of the cottage which will be used by the member(s) of staff using the first floor offices. The Trust also has an arrangement with a local landowner which can allow 'overflow parking' in the field above the car park on occasions (usually Bank Holidays) when attendance is particularly high".

Given the above, it is considered that there will be adequate parking provision for staff and visitors and as such the proposals do not give rise to any concerns from a highway perspective.

Impact upon the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB):
The proposals involve the change of use of an existing building and as there will be no external alterations or extensions and no encroachment into the open countryside, no harm will be caused to the special qualities of the AONB.

Other issues:

Whilst the Parish Council had no objection to the proposed development, they provided a Statement on Sustainability. Whilst the council encourages a sustainable approach to development, this is not currently enforceable due to a lack of local planning policies in this regard. However, it is considered reasonable to include an informative on the planning approval, drawing the applicant's attention to the Parish Council's Statement on Sustainability.

Conclusion:
In conclusion the proposals seem fitting with regards to scale, design and materials. The proposal is considered acceptable in the context of its surroundings and is in accordance with the general criteria set out in the aforementioned policies of the local development plan.

RECOMMENDATION:
Approve subject to conditions

Conditions: (2)

1 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

Application Form; Location Plan; 3. Pumphouse Cottage as Proposed Ground Floor Plan; 4. Pumphouse Cottage as Proposed First Floor Plan

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

Informatives: (1)

3 The applicants attention is drawn to the Statement on Sustainability from Great Bedwyn Parish Council.