

# The Planning and Design Bureau Ltd

Land-Use Planning and Architecture

20<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Braintree District Council,  
Development Services,  
Causeway House,  
Bocking End,  
Braintree,  
Essex,  
**CM7 9HB**

Dear Sir or Madam,

## **Application for Outline Planning Permission (Some Matters Reserved) by CCC Property**

**Cease Car Wash Use, Demolish Part Single, Part Two-Storey Console Building,  
Workshop and Flat, Remove Canopy and Hardstanding, Erect 2No. Detached and 2No.  
Semi-Detached Dwellings and Associated Car Ports, Adjust Ground Levels and Lay  
Out Parking, Amenity Areas, Private Drive and Landscaping (Landscape Only  
Reserved)**

**Former Ambrose Garage, 7-9 Colchester Road, Bures Hamlet, Essex, CO8 5AE**

## **Heritage Asset Assessment – Statement of Significance**

I would be grateful if this letter is accepted by the LPA as a Heritage Asset Assessment (Statement of Significance) in relation to this application for outline planning permission.

The NPPF advises:

*"In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary."*

Accompanying the application is a Planning Statement, which provides a factual description of the application site and surrounding land and buildings, together with a description of the development sought planning permission and the planning policy context within which the application must be determined. Although this application is submitted in outline form, all matters are submitted for agreement now, with the exception of soft landscaping. Accordingly, a full suite of drawings, including a proposed site layout plan, floor plans,

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elevations, streetscene and site section drawings have been submitted. In addition, a Design and Access Statement, prepared by the scheme Architect, has been submitted, which explains the rationale for the layout of the site and the design of the buildings. This Statement should be considered in the light of those documents together with the following;

- Document 1: Historic Photographs;
- Document 2: The Wider Gas Works Site History;
- Document 3: The Smithy History;
- Document 4: River House History;
- Document 5: The Colchester Road or Ambrise Garage History;
- Document 6: Listing Descriptions;
- Document 8: Historic Ordnance Survey Maps (1876-1887, 1904, 1956 – 1961, 1961 – 1991, 1986);
- Document 9: Conservation Area map.

The excellent local history site [www.Bures-online.co.uk](http://www.Bures-online.co.uk) contains a wealth of information regarding the development of Bures and Bures St Mary and is a very useful heritage resource. It contains many old photographs and accounts from past and present residents concerning life in the villages in times past. This website is commended to the reader and I am grateful to the operators and contributors of the website for the assistance that it has provided in this case.

### **The Site and Surroundings**

A description of the site and surroundings is provided in the Planning Statement. This section of the Assessment intends to describe the history of the site and adjacent buildings to inform a judgement regarding the effects of the proposed development on the setting of the listed buildings and the impact on the special character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

The Historic Ordnance Survey plans at Document 8 and The Wider Gas Works Site History at Document 2 explain that from about 1859 until 1940 the application site formed a part of a larger site comprising the village's Gas Works. Town gas was produced from coal, with creosote a by-product. The gas was used for lighting – both in private houses and to illuminate the village's streets. Coal was brought to the site by barges on the River Stour and an unloading dock and inlet were located to the north of the current application site. Land to the south (now *River House* and its curtilage and beyond) also fell within the gas works site. Indeed, the 1876 and 1904 Ordnance Survey plans suggest that a substantial portion of the land lying between the Colchester Road and the River Stour at this point was in a single ownership.

The wider gas works site contained two gasometers situated on land to the north, the first constructed by 1876/1887 and a second appearing before 1904: the latter one partially overlapping the current application site.

The eastern part of the site, close to the river and set well back from the street frontage, contained a T-shaped building with open canopy on the rear. A chimney rose from this building and was visible over a long distance. Photographs at Document 1 show the gasometers and chimney from vantage points beyond the site.

The demand for town gas reduced and in the 1930's the site fell vacant. The buildings and structures associated with it were demolished in 1940 and nothing now appears to survive on the application site from the former gas works use.

On the north-western (front) corner of the application site a Smithy or blacksmith's forge



existed in a rectangular plan, pitched roofed building with double doors onto Colchester Road. It was used to shoe horses and for general smithy work, and also provided a wheelwright service (see sign visible on the gable - Photograph 4 at Document 1). It is not clear when this building was erected, and the matter is confused by the existence of a blacksmith's opposite within the curtilage of *The Eight Bells Hotel* (public house). Nevertheless, it was in existence in the late 1870's as evidenced by the First Edition Ordnance Survey map and remained throughout the Gas Works phase of use, and is still visible on the 1956 Ordnance Survey plan. However, local anecdotal evidence suggests that the last farrier Bert Cansdale ceased working there by about 1954. By 1961 the Smithy building had been demolished and the current phase of development commenced at the site. Nevertheless, a building existed directly on the boundary with *Blacksmiths Cottage* for a considerable period of time in the past.

Local history (Document 5) suggests that the motor vehicle garage currently on the site was constructed in the early 1960's. It first appears, on the 1956-1961 Ordnance Survey map, as a rectangular building oriented across the width of the site with the current petrol station forecourt canopy erected by this date. The building was set deeper into the site than the adjacent buildings – presumably to allow petrol pumps to be installed on the forecourt so that vehicles could refuel clear of the highway. The 1961-1991 Ordnance Survey map shows the building as it exists today – with a part-single, part two-storey rear extension having been added to form an enlarged vehicle repair workshop and a first floor flat.

The single-storey, flat roofed former hairdressers shop situated on the south-west (front) corner of the application site was constructed in the 1960's as a waiting room to the doctor's surgery then operating in the adjacent *River House*. This building is not visible on the 1956-1961 Ordnance Survey map but appears on the 1961-1991 version.

#### **Listed Buildings and the Special Character and Appearance of the Conservation Area**

Adjacent to the site of the former Smithy the aptly named, Grade II listed *Blacksmiths Cottage* adjoins. The listing description for this property is appended at Document 6. This building, actually a pair of cottages Nos. 3 and 5 Colchester Road, is constructed tight to the back edge of the pavement in Colchester Road and about 1 metre off the northern boundary of the application site. It is of diminutive scale and appears to have changed little in the last 100 years or so based upon its present appearance and that shown in the photographs at Document 1. The cottages form a terrace with the unlisted No.1 Colchester Road.

*River House*, to the south of the application site and unlisted, has an interesting history as set out in Document 4. It is a single family dwellinghouse but was once used as the doctor's surgery and dwelling until the 1960s. This property appears to date from the early C19 but is of grander scale than the cottages to the north. In times past it had a large outbuilding attached to the rear according to the Ordnance Survey drawings of 1876/1887 and 1904. Photograph 3 at Document 1 appears to show a two-storey building projecting towards the river at the rear of *River House* that formed a part of the gas works site but now no longer exists (demolished by 1956).

*Blacksmiths Cottage* and *River House* form the immediate context for development at the application site.

The Grade II listed *Eight Bells Public House* lies across the road from the application site. A copy of the listing description is at Document 6. The early Ordnance Survey drawings at Document 8 and the oral history related at Bures-online.co.uk indicate that outbuildings to the rear and the side of the then hotel existed and were used as a blacksmiths and later as a petrol filling station/vehicle repair garage. To the west of the public house lies Hamlet Court – a cul-de-sac set on rising ground and containing modern dwellings (and one much older

property). The application site is prominent to public view from Hamlet Court.

Insofar as the author has been able to establish, there is no current conservation area appraisal for Bures Hamlet. The extent of the conservation area is shown on the accompanying map at Document 9 (green line). Listed buildings are shown coloured in blue on the same map. The conservation area covers the historic core of Bures Hamlet centred upon the junction of Bridge Street, Colchester Road and Station Hill, and including Water Lane, New Cut and Hamlet Court. The conservation area extends southwards along Colchester Road for about 210 metres south of the application site.

The streetscene on the east side of Colchester Road contains two terraces of dwellings – both of two-storeys in height but the one containing the listed buildings considerably smaller in scale than the later mid C20 one to the south (Nos. 23-29 Colchester Road). However, terraced dwellings do not define the street. Historically the land between the road and the river was occupied by mixture of semi-detached and detached houses and a row of cottages constructed perpendicular to the highway and projecting longways towards the river. These cottages were numbered 15, 17, 19 and 21 (No.21 being extended towards the river at some point between 1904 and 1956 - see Ordnance Survey plans). Photograph 12 at Document 1 shows Nos. 15 and 17 in the early C19 in the background to *River House*. However, Nos. 15, 17, and 19 appear to have been since combined and are now a single dwelling (called No.15). No.21 evidently went out of use and in 1999 the LPA granted planning permission for the demolition of the by then uninhabited dwelling and for the erection of the detached dwelling now known as *Riverside* (LPA application reference 99/00063/FUL).

A number of outbuildings also existed in between the houses, and accesses between buildings are clearly evident on the Ordnance Survey plans at Document 8.

It is not the case then that this part of the conservation area is defined historically by terraced housing fronting the road. Whilst some buildings did closely address the highway others, notably the gas works buildings and gasometers and the terrace at 15-21 did not and were located in backland positions. Large buildings, such as that at the rear of *River House*, and smaller outbuildings such as those adjacent No.15 also existed in the street block. Gaps between buildings have always existed and continue to do so, although some have been infilled with dwellings over the last 100 years (such as *Riverside*). Notwithstanding this, other than the application site, buildings tend to address the street with shallow front gardens. Plot widths vary: there is no defining or clear characteristic width to curtilages in the street.

Buildings tend to be created by principal forms with additive elements of both two-storeys and one and a half storeys. Gables are prevalent – both facing the highway and perpendicular to it. Roofs span the shortest distance and gambrel roof forms exist in the area. As would be expected in an historic Essex village, traditional detailing such as dormer windows, chimneys and steeply pitched roofs are common features. Materials are drawn from the traditional Essex palette and in the vicinity include facing brickwork, painted render – some pargetted, plain tiles and, to a lesser extent slate to roofs.

The buildings at the application site date from the 1960's, are of no architectural merit and clearly detract from the special character and appearance of the conservation area and from the setting of the listed building adjacent and across the road. Their demolition would improve the character and appearance of the conservation area.

### **Heritage Asset Significance and Development Impact**

There is clearly architectural and historic significance to the two adjacent listed buildings, but there is also an intrinsic historic interest generated by virtue of their traditional appearance,

diminutive scale and group value in the centre of Bures Hamlet. These latter factors are also considered to represent the key issues when considering the effects of the development on the character and appearance of the conservation area. It is the setting of the listed buildings and effects of the development upon their historic significance and that of the conservation area that are at issue in this case.

Considering the proposed layout, historically a wide gap in the streetscene, with buildings set deep within it, has existed here for the last 150 years. However, the loss of this gap and its infilling with dwellings would not result in harm to the character of the conservation area. This is because it is the only space of its size in the vicinity and so is not a characteristic feature of the street.

The proposed development intends to create a street frontage close to the back edge of the highway approximately following a building line curved to follow the pavement and struck between the adjacent properties. This proximity to the highway respects the character of this part of the street and the centre of Bures Hamlet/conservation area. Placing a building next to *Blacksmiths Cottage*, as a matter of principle, is also not considered to be harmful to its setting (a smithy existed here historically). The gap proposed between the two new dwellings to carry the private drive into the site is not out of character in the street: there is no historic precedent for terraces or for an entirely enclosed street frontage. A gap of the magnitude proposed to the sides of older buildings exist in the streetscene and have done so historically. Similarly, the gaps between the proposed buildings and those adjacent reflect those found elsewhere in the street.

Whilst there are no incidences of dwellings to the rear of frontage houses in the manner now proposed, there have historically been outbuildings situated in backland positions, including the substantial buildings associated with the former gas works and outbuildings to the rear of *The Eight Bells Public House*. Elsewhere in the core of the village outbuildings, probably former stables, bake houses and the like are visible on early Ordnance Survey maps. The pair of rear semi's now proposed to the rear of the frontage houses would be situated approximately on the footprint of, and are of a similar form and size to, the gas works building containing the chimney seen on early Ordnance Survey maps. The intention of the designer is to create service-like buildings at the rear that might be perceived in the glimpsed view between the frontage dwellings, as stables or other outhouses. It is not hard to imagine that the T-shaped gas works building had not been demolished but instead converted into a pair of cottages. Later on, a pair of cottages may well have been erected to the street frontage, or gas works offices located there and subsequently converted. In an intimate and evolving townscape such as is found between the river and the road, this would not be unthinkable or even unlikely. What is being proposed now is that possible 'evolution' but in a single event (an oxymoron but it illustrates the point).

Accordingly, as a matter of principle, it is not considered that two houses to the rear of the front pair would be intrinsically harmful to either the setting of listed buildings or to the character or appearance of the conservation area (effects upon living conditions are addressed in the accompanying Planning Statement). Indeed, glimpsing the rear dwellings, through the private drive would add interest to the streetscene and reflect the traditional character at the heart of an Essex village.

Turning now to building form, it would be difficult to create a modern dwelling using the storey heights of the diminutive adjacent *Blacksmiths Cottage* as a benchmark. A new single-storey building would look mean and under-scaled in this context and a fully two-storey building would unacceptably dominate the listed building. The scheme Architect has instead opted to utilise a gambrel roof form on a one-and-a-half storey building of a slightly larger vertical scale than the historic cottage. This strikes a reasonable balance between creating a modern standard of accommodation whilst preserving the setting of the listed

building. The use of taller, perpendicular building elements set away from the listed cottage to accentuate the access drive is similarly considered to be acceptable. The traditional T-shaped plan forms using additive architecture and the scale of the new frontage dwellings is therefore considered to be appropriate to the setting of the listed buildings and the conservation area. The spans of building elements on all four dwellings generally falls below 5.5m - that advocated by the Essex Design Guide as being a traditional maximum (rarely exceeded). The exceptions are the gambrel elements, which might historically be slightly wider in any case. Traditional detailing such as vertically proportioned windows, substantial chimneys, open porches, rude brick arches, painted timber fascias and barge boards is proposed. Materials are intended to reflect those found nearby, with facing brickwork and weatherboarding forming the principal walling materials and hanging tile (or painted render if preferred by the LPA) used to add interest and visually explain the jettied projections to the frontage dwellings. Parking provision for the dwellings is concealed from public view and from impact on the setting of the listed buildings and conservation area.

Thus, the proposed layout of the site, and the form, appearance, detailing and materials of the proposed dwellings are considered to be acceptable and to respond to the historic surroundings. The setting of the listed buildings and the special character of the conservation area would be enhanced by the demolition of the existing buildings and the redevelopment of the site in the manner proposed.

If you wish to discuss any matters raised or the application in general please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



**Stewart Rowe**, Dip TP, MRTPI

Encl. Documents as set out  
CC CCC Property