

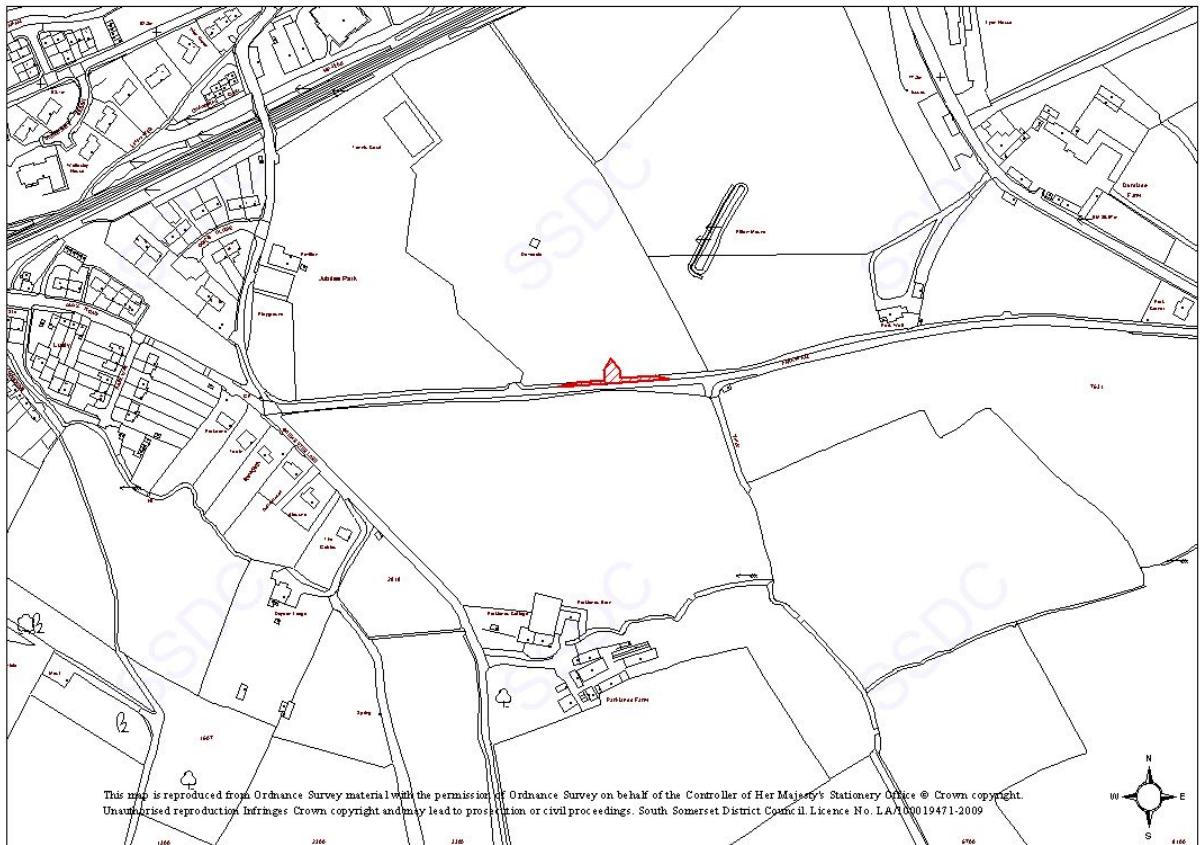
JOINT AREA COMMITTEES IN SOUTH SOMERSET
Officer Report On Planning Application: 08/03334/FUL

Proposal :	Change of use to form car park, rebuilding of walls/fences, alterations to access and formation of footpath to dovecote (GR 368382/134420)
Site Address:	Land Adjacent To Dovecote Park Wall Bruton
Parish:	Bruton
Ward : (SSDC Member)	BRUTON A M Groskop (Cllr)
Division (SCC Member)	BRUTON A M Groskop (Cllr)
Recommending Case Officer:	Simon Fox Tel: (01935) 462509 Email: simon.fox@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	11th June 2009
Applicant :	Mrs K McCarthy
Agent: (no agent if blank)	
Application Type :	Minor Other less than 1,000 sq.m or 1ha

Reason For Referral

In consultation with the Chairman this application has been referred to the Joint Area East Committee due to the fact that the applicant is the Town Council supported by the Bruton Trust and has, in principle, support for implementation in the Area Development Plan.

Site Description And Proposal



The site is located off Park Wall which is a lane forming the southern edge of Bruton.

Located within the walled area of an historic priory is the C16 Grade II* listed Dovecote (also a scheduled ancient monument) and Jubilee Park. Jubilee Park contains Bruton's main recreational space, the Pavilion (used amongst other things as sports hut and pre-school/Nursery). The Park Wall (approx 1-2m high stone wall) surrounding the Jubilee Park and Dovecote grounds runs along the edges of Godminster Lane, Park Wall and Station Road and forms part of the boundary of the Conservation Area. The Dovecote is separated from the site of the Augustinian Priory to the north by the railway line.

The proposal seeks to create a dedicated parking area for visitors to the Dovecote. Managed by the National Trust the Dovecote can be presently accessed from Park Wall through a gateway to Jubilee Park, as well as from Station Road. This gateway acts as a maintenance route to the park and is formed by a recessed section of (poorly) rebuilt stonework. The proposal seeks to create eight spaces within an area of approximately 250m². To achieve the necessary visibility splays, sections of wall either side of a remodelled access require demolition and rebuilding on a new tangent.

History

Various applications permitted at Jubilee Park, including floodlighting of tennis/netball courts, extensions and improvements to the Pavilion, and cricket nets.

Most recently:

05/02564/COU: Extension of Jubilee Park for leisure and recreation to include the erection of a 3-6 ramp skateboard facility: Application permitted with conditions: 19/04/2006.

Policy

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decisions must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise,

Relevant Development Plan Documents

Regional Spatial Strategy

Vis 1 - Expressing the Vision

Vis 2 - Principles for Future Development

EN3 - The Historic Environment

Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (Adopted 2000)

STR1 - Sustainable Development

STR6 - Development Outside Towns, Rural Centres and Villages

Policy 8 - Outstanding Heritage Settlements

Policy 9 - The Built Historic Environment

Policy 11 - Areas of High Archaeological Potential

Policy 23 - Tourism Development in the Countryside

Policy 49 - Transport Requirements of New Development

South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted April 2006)

ST1 - Rural Centres

ST5 - General Principles of Development

ST6 - The Quality of Development

ST9 - Crime Prevention

EH1 - Conservation Areas
EH5 - Development Proposals Affecting the Setting of Listed Buildings
EH11 - Archaeological Sites of National Importance (Scheduled Ancient Monuments)
EH12 - Areas Of High Archaeological Potential And Other Areas Of Archaeological Interest
EC3 - Landscape Character

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development
Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport
Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment

Sustainable Community Strategy Goals
Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11 and 12.

Consultations

Bruton Town Council - The Town Council has submitted this application.

County Highways -

"You will recall that I attended a meeting on site where various solutions to the access to the car parking area were aired. You will be aware that I did offer the idea that the existing highway carriageway could be extended further south so as to provide the necessary visibility splays whilst retaining the majority of the historic walls.

I note that that option has not been adopted in preference to rebuilding a vast section of the wall. In view of the use that this car park will have and the fact that there is an existing access gate - albeit only used infrequently for maintenance purposes - I am content, in an effort to retain the historic walls to accept a lesser visibility splay.

This will have the advantage of keeping a long section of wall intact and have less impact on its historic line.

I suggest therefore that a visibility of 2.4m x 45m in each direction is appropriate in this location. This effectively means that there will only be 60m of wall rebuilding rather than the 110m shown - this, together with the existing verges [when cleared of undergrowth and brambles] will give much improved visibility splays here.

I trust that this is helpful and that revised plans will be forthcoming in due course".

English Heritage - Inspector of Ancient Monuments:

"This proposal for a car park is outside of the scheduled area and a little way from the listed dovecot so should not have a direct impact and is generally to be welcomed as a facility for visitors. The new pathway cuts through some of the historic earthworks, outside the scheduled area, but I assume that it will have very little impact. However I am not sure if the removal of the boundary wall for the new visibility splay should be of concern; the wall is not designated but this area of land does have a historic park wall surrounding it at least in certain sections".

"The application should be determined in accordance with national and local policy guidance, and on the basis of your specialist conservation advice".

Landscape Architect -

"I note the planning submission seeking to create a car park area to the south of the Dovecote, by the Park Wall, Bruton. The proposal intends a formalised parking area; pedestrian access arrangements; a substantial rebuilding of the Park Wall to enable car access; and an increase in both the development footprint, and the level of activity in this rural location.

I consider the following policies relevant in consideration of this proposal;

EH 1 - preservation or enhancement of the Conservation Area

EH 2 - demolition of structures within a Conservation Area

EH 5 - effect of development upon the setting of a Listed Building, or its contribution to the local scene.

EH 11 - impact upon the setting of a Scheduled Ancient Monument

ST 5 (paragraphs 3 and 4) - development criteria

Park Wall is a little-used rural narrow lane that runs to the south of Bruton, indirectly linking the A359 at Lusty with the B3081 Wincanton Road, to the south of both the town and the intervening rail-line. The lane's north side is bounded by a stone wall, which has a particular historic relevance to the town, in that it demarcates both the medieval abbey precinct, and the southern extent of the town's Conservation area. From Park Wall, the ground rises steeply toward the Dovecote, which is both listed building and scheduled ancient monument (SAM) and is viewed as an iconic structure from both within the town, and its surrounds. From the raised position of the Dovecote, the visitor can look north over the town, whilst to the south, the view takes in its wider rural context, with the Park Wall - and the proposed parking area - directly in the foreground.

Hence the parking proposal site is clearly sensitive. Park Wall lane is rural and is not characterised by development. The wall itself is a historic boundary, marking part of the abbey precinct, which significance has determined its delineating the town's Conservation Area's southern boundary. The Dovecote has a close visual relationship with the site, and its setting clearly includes the proposed car park area.

The proposal introduces a developed element to the south of the Dovecote in a location that is not characterised by development. To facilitate the car park, a section of the historic wall would have to be demolished, and whilst it is proposed to rebuild it, the line of the new wall would be at variance with the historic alignment and thus no longer representative of the town's historic heritage. In being aligned to conform with visibility requirements, the integrity of the walls alignment is distorted to conform with highway standards, which are also incongruous in this rural context. The introduction of formalised parking areas and access to the Dovecote field, introduces an element of development and level of activity which again is contrary to character. Whilst the Dovecote is characterised by development to its northern side, its southern side is very much its rural, undeveloped side, thus even a relatively low-key proposal is an erosion of site character, and as such the level of development can be viewed as adversely impacting upon its (listed building and SAM) setting.

With the many levels of environmental protection applying to this site, I believe there are clear policy grounds upon which to base a refusal. I understand that the proposal has local support, but simply, this is not the site for such a project. We have looked at other options, and I am not convinced that additional car parking could not be formed by the Jubilee Pavillion. Neither have I seen other options presented as part of a clear and detailed sequential appraisal. In an attempt to find a compromise position at the application site, whilst I maintained an in-principle objection, we met with other interested parties to agree that a solution might be feasible that shifted the highway alignment sufficiently to the south to achieve forward visibility from the access to thus enable the Park Wall to remain untouched on its historic alignment. Even this compromise option has not come forward. Consequently, in view of the clear adverse impacts upon the local heritage, and the lack of potential options being presented, I would advise refusal of this application, and invite a holistic review of the alternative options that may be available to the town".

On amended plans:

"The proposed changes do not alter the landscape evaluation, my comments remain as previously stated.

One point on the proposal, should this project go forward, note that it is not 'grascrete' that provides least intrusive parking surface, but a polyethylene cellular grid, which are now manufactured by a number of companies, and have superseded the concrete equivalent".

Conservation Officer -

"I note the comments from Robert Archer, Landscape Officer, and agree with the views he has expressed.

It is disappointing that suggestions put forward at our meeting earlier this year have not been pursued as part of this application. The application still proposes the removal and re-alignment of large sections of walls. County Highways have suggested that a reduced visibility splay could be accepted; however it would still require the re-alignment of a significant area of wall. I accept that sections of the wall in this location have been rebuilt; however, apart from areas immediately adjacent to the existing opening, the wall does still occupy an historic position parallel and close to the edge of the road. The presence of this wall, and its consistent position along this southern boundary is of great importance to the rural character of the conservation area edge, and to the setting of the Dovecote.

At the meeting earlier in the year we also discussed the potential to site the parking area elsewhere. The parking area at the west of the park was discussed but has been briefly and quickly dismissed in the application. The interest of visiting an historic building such as the Dovecote is surely not derived from getting to the structure as quickly as possible, but instead is more about the overall experience of being able to appreciate the building in its wider setting, enjoy differing views of the structure upon approach, and then, once the destination has been reached, to be able to appreciate the detail of the building and views from it. The view from the existing car park to the west is dramatic and surely of interest. Extending a parking area here to provide parking provision for visitors of the Dovecote would have much less impact on the setting of the building (as a LB and SAM) and impact on the rural character of the conservation area, but could also give the opportunity for an enhanced overall visitor experience. A detailed and robust appraisal of this and any other possible sites needs to be carried out, so it can be demonstrated that the proposal before us is the only feasible option.

I recommend refusal of the application, due to the affect of the proposal on the rural character of the conservation area, and on the setting of the Dovecote as a Grade II* Listed Building and a Scheduled Ancient Monument".

On amended plans:

"The visibility splay appears to have been reduced in length, however I'm afraid this doesn't overcome the concerns I put forward in my earlier comments. Therefore I still object to the proposal.

Comments have been received from English Heritage. Although they are not objecting in terms of the impact of the proposal on the setting of the building, they have expressed concern over the demolition of the wall. Further to this, the EH response doesn't address the impact on the character of the conservation area; as this was not our reason for consulting them".

Bruton Trust - Welcome the proposal the improved parking facility will be an asset to visitors to the scheduled monument and to the hill tops and flower-rich meadows. The scheme is very important to promoting the educational value of the historic park. Will aid working with different bodies across Bruton.

County Archaeology - No implications.

Police Architectural Liaison Officer -

"I have attended the site which again is very isolated. If the car park is granted I would ask that walls are not used to reduce the risk of miscreants being able to hide by parked vehicles. Stock proof fencing would allow visitors to be able to view their vehicles from a distance. Rural car parks can be a crime generator".

Area Development Team (also acting as agent for the application) -

"This scheme forms a key element in the delivery of environmental improvements identified in Bruton The Way Forward Community Plan. As a result it also forms part of a bigger programme of work, which has attracted resources through the Corporate Capital Programme and so has, in principle, support for implementation in the Area Development Plan.

In taking account of the objections of Conservation and Landscape Officers to the principle of this development, we have been involved with Bruton representatives and in consultations with the Bruton Trust, Jubilee Pavilion Trustees, Town Council and others. Each has supported the detailed plans, while rejecting the alternative proposal to extend the Jubilee Pavilion car park.

After having consulted with Mike Sendall, County Highways, the Conservation Officer and Landscape Officer, we found that Bev Norman and Scott Davies at County Highways would have been opposed to the road changes suggested by Mike Sendall. We were therefore pleased to find that Mike Sendall has, as a consequence of these consultations, been willing to reduce the requirements for a visibility splay at the Dovecote from 100m to 60m, which is reflected in the revised AE/084/002.application document

We believe that the Town Council has done all that is possible to respond to the comments of Officers regarding effects on visibility, and to minimise any adverse landscape and conservation effects of this welcome development. The sensitive alteration of this area we feel offers considerable community benefits whilst respecting the status of the area and helping to improve access to the historic Dovecote site. It is supported by National Trust, Bruton Town Council, Bruton Trust and we fully support this application."

Technical Services - Surface water disposal via porous materials as stated.

Representations

A site notice was erected on site and an advert placed in the local press. No representations were received.

Considerations

This application represents a dilemma in reaching a recommendation when balancing the benefits against the disadvantages.

On one side there are the advantages of promoting more access to the Dovecote as outlined by the Bruton Trust and Area Development Team. On the other side is the envisaged impact on the landscape and the setting of the Dovecote, as outlined by the Conservation Officer and Landscape Architect.

It has been stated that visitors to the Dovecote use the current recessed maintenance gateway to Jubilee Park for parking, as there is a stile and access to Park Wall. It is certainly the most convenient place to establish a new car park but is it the best place in terms of protecting the very thing visitors have come to see?

The application includes no explanation as to why this site was specifically chosen or how it protects the rural setting or that of the Dovecote. There is no sequential approach to see whether other sites would be as suitable without so much intervention and impact. At a meeting held on site whilst the application remained invalid officers suggested that the existing Jubilee Park car park should be considered. It was stated that the car park was too far away and could not be extended enough to meet this additional need. Whilst practical constraints are accepted the distance argument is not. The car park to Alfred's Tower is set some distance away and the approach through the clearing is part of the

experience of visiting the historic monument. The car park at Stourhead is also not located immediately adjacent to the Pantheon for example! It has not been demonstrated that the proposal before us is the only feasible option. Although no formal pre-application discussions took place, if they had we would have been suggesting other sites be investigated, not even necessarily within the Jubilee Park, walled park area. A car park on the town side of the Dovecote may have had the affect of enticing people into the town centre rather than kept out on the periphery. A more thorough sequential approach would have enabled the brief to be met, the landscape pattern respected and the monument setting preserved.

The main impacts are the additional structures required to facilitate the use, extra gates and fences plus the change in character of cars parking more regularly so close the base of the Dovecote. Another significant impact is the requirement to realign sections of historic wall either side of the entrance to allow adequate visibility splays. A suggestion was initially made by the Highway Officer, which would have negated any need to touch the wall, but the scheme was too expensive and likely to have taken time to go through highway audit. As a compromise the required splay has been reduced meaning less of the wall needs realigning but the overall impact is still significant.

The comments of the Conservation Officer and Landscape Architect should be noted. It is considered there is a significant impact on the setting of the Dovecote (as a Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument) and on the rural character of the conservation area. Particularly, "The proposal introduces a developed element to the south of the Dovecote in a location that is not characterised by development. To facilitate the car park, a section of the historic wall would have to be demolished, and whilst it is proposed to rebuild it, the line of the new wall would be at variance with the historic alignment and thus no longer representative of the town's historic heritage. In being aligned to conform with visibility requirements, the integrity of the walls alignment is distorted to conform with highway standards, which are also incongruous in this rural context".

The footpath link shown to the Dovecote from the car park is simply a mown path through the grass at a steady gradient. It does not involve any engineering operation or the laying of any hard surfacing.

The car park is also located in an area distant from public surveillance and therefore the comments of the Police Architectural Liaison Officer are noted.

Recommendation

Refuse permission for the following reason:

01. The proposal to create a car park in close proximity to the Dovecote would increase the built footprint along a rural lane not characterised by development and would have a significant impact on the setting of the Dovecote (a Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monument) and on the rural character of the conservation area. The proposal to realign the historic Park Wall to meet highway authority standards is at variance to its historic alignment and integrity and is incongruous in the rural context. The proposal is therefore contrary to the advice and guidance contained with Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment and policies STR6, 8 and 9 of the Somerset and Exmoor National Park Joint Structure Plan (Adopted 2000) and policies ST5, ST6, EH1, EH5 and EC3 of the South Somerset Local Plan (Adopted April 2006).