
Planning Statement

Proposal: Change of use of surplus convent buildings Hillside and Rydal into two 6-bedroom townhouses; replacing the existing single-storey extensions to the west with a 2-bedroom attached bungalow. Works include a reorganisation of the convent car park, alterations to create a front entrance to Rydal, the addition of two single-storey bays to the rear elevation, dividing up the existing garden, and forming a new driveway to access the gardens to the rear.

Address: Convent of Mercy, Hillside Drive, Gravesend DA12 1NY

Date: 15 November 2024

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1.0 Introduction and background

This Planning Statement is prepared by C.B.Wright & Associates Ltd. on behalf of the applicant Sisters of Mercy.

The convent is now too large for their needs, and costly to run and maintain. Planning permission (reference 20231319) was granted in March 2024 to enable the downsizing of the Convent to occupy just half the buildings (Theydon, the chapel and the 50s block), now underway and due to be completed around the end of the year.

This Planning Statement should be read in conjunction with the more detailed Design & Access Statement produced by Clay Architecture Ltd. that provides detail of the site history, how it has developed over the years, background to the Sisters of Mercy and their charitable work locally, information regarding the current buildings and that has led to the rationale for the current proposals for buildings and land immediately adjoining as well as information regarding the private drive. The premise of the application is creating an environment commensurate with the quality of Hillside Drive.

Planning permission is sought to redevelop surplus convent buildings into two six bedroomed townhouses and to replace single storey buildings attached to its western side with a two bedroom attached bungalow and supporting works to begin improving the local infrastructure in the control of the Convent as per the description and submitted plans.

This Planning Statement drawings submitted with the application and the other reports prepared by specialist consultants including:

1. Application Form
2. Certificate D Notice advertised in Kent Messenger
3. Letter sent to all 23 known residents of Hillside Drive
4. Planning Statement
5. Design & Access Statement, including site history and development
6. Transport Statement
7. Biodiversity Reports: Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain
8. Ordnance Survey Site Location Plans
9. Drawings: existing and proposed site layout, existing and proposed plans and elevations

A second planning application is to follow shortly. This will be a full planning application to develop the currently open gardens to the front of the Chapel (north) for a further 4 new-build dwellings of 4/5 bedrooms each. The Council advised upon this administrative approach, without prejudice to their eventual decision, of splitting the application proposals between conversion and new build. The Transport Statement has assessed both proposals and makes clear recommendations for each proposal whilst considering their combined effect and which follows the standard methodology now included within the revised National Planning Policy Framework published 12 December 2024.

2.0 Pre-planning application activity

A meeting was held in the Convent to advise the residents of Hillside Drive, a private road, of the forthcoming changes and to hear their initial feedback.

Residents' initial feedback and Gravesham Borough Council's pre-application advice is detailed on page 10 of Clay Architecture's Design and Access Statement attached with this application.

Some of the shared driveway is untitled and therefore a Certificate D Notice has been published in the Kent Messenger newspaper prior to submitting this application. Additionally all residents using the Drive, that are known, were advised of the application by letter prior to submission.

3.0 Site Description

The application site comprises a large building that was once one dwelling and then converted into three dwellings. The whole building is currently used as a convent. The site is accessed via a private road, Hillside Drive, and is situated in large grounds at the end of the Drive.

The character of the existing dwellings along Hillside Drive comprises a pleasant mix of construction periods, design and sizes of dwellings.

4.0 Local Planning Policy

The Development Plan for Gravesham Borough currently comprises:

- Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy and Policies Map, September 2014
- Saved policies in the Gravesham Local Plan First Review, November 1994
- The Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013 - 2030 (July 2016, revised 2020).

In addition to the adopted policies regarding sustainable development, transport, green infrastructure and design, this proposal has had particular regard to:-

- SPG2 – Residential Layout Guidelines (2020)
- SPG4 – KCC Parking Standards (2006)

5.0 Principle of development

The Convent of Mercy is located within the built up area of Gravesend where Policy SC1 of the Adopted Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014) provides for a presumption in favour of development, stating “When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and in this Core Strategy”.

6.0 Hillside Drive – private road and potential transport impacts

Hydrock (now Stantec) was commissioned to provide transport consultancy services for the conversion of part of the convent building to provide three residential dwellings, see separate report. Within this study and report it reviewed the combined effects of both this application for change of use and the forthcoming full planning application (yet to be submitted) for the construction of four detached dwellings within the grounds of the convent.

The design proposals incorporate the recommendations within their report.

Page 10 of the Design and Access Statement refers specifically to Hillside Drive, its maintenance fund and multi-ownership. The Sisters contribute the largest portion to the maintenance fund to maintain the drive.

Many of the residents assume that the existing car park in front of the convent is common land but except for a small patch which is unregistered but has ‘a caution against first registration’ submitted on behalf of the Sisters, most of this is in fact convent land. The applicants intend improving this turning area as part of the proposals.

The turning area T1 in front of the convent has been improved and can accommodate turning for a 10.5m refuse vehicle, a Scania P280 fire tender, and a 7.5t box van.

The rationalisation of parking spaces to create an improved turning area will provide a betterment compared to the existing situation.

The scheme accommodates deliveries, servicing and parking in an improved manner. This will also benefit residents on the drive.

The transport assessment demonstrates that the number of new vehicle trips generated would not represent a significant increase when compared with the existing traffic flows and the trip generation of the currently consented land use. It considers that Hillside Drive has sufficient capacity to accommodate the proposed development.

7.0 Environment

Please refer to the detailed Design and Access Statement for Sustainable Design Principles, Energy and Carbon Reduction Methods, Water Efficiency, Waste Reduction and Biodiversity Net Gain.

Combined with the approved scheme for downsizing the convent, the proposals in this application will improve the building's thermal efficiency and restore the mansion back to its former glory, whilst adapting and updating the properties comprising it, named as Hillside and Rydal, for 21st Century family life.

An Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out by a qualified ecologist, see separate report. The scheme includes a proposal for a managed habitat area to the south of the site; the significant mature trees which lend the site much of its character will be retained.

Once avoidance, mitigation, and compensation measures have been taken into account, the ecologist impacts of the planned development upon biodiversity will be negligible and non-significant.

The site is within the zone of influence (6km) of the Thames Estuary and Marshes Special Protection Area, Medway Estuary and its associated Wetland(s) of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (Ramsar Site). Therefore additional recreational impacts on the designated sites need to be managed and adequate means to be in place to secure the mitigation before first occupation. The applicants agree to fund their part and agree to the Council's required SAMMs payment.

8.0 Concluding remarks

This Statement, drawing from the supporting studies, has demonstrated that the proposed development complies with the relevant policies of the development plan.

We trust that the information submitted is in order and ask that the Local Authority grant planning permission for the change of use back into houses and the bungalow.

Yours sincerely



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