

Delegated Report

Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20231319

Location: St Josephs Convent Of Mercy Hillside Drive Gravesend Kent

Description: Alterations to the convent to include; proposed installation of new entrance at Theydon, closing of the party wall between Theydon and Hillside, extension to the staircase, alterations to the existing 1950s block to include cladding, re-glazing and re-roofing. Addition of a first floor to the chapel with roof lights and re-ordering of rooms and new lift.

Applicant: Sister A O'Connell

Site Visit Date: 23/11/2023

Submitted Documents/Plans

Application Form

5285/PL/100 – Location and Block Plan

5285/PL/110 – Lower Ground Floor Plan

5285/PL/111 – Existing Ground Floor Plan

5285/PL/112 – Existing First Floor Plan

5285/PL/113 – Existing Second Floor Plan

5285/PL/114 – Existing Roof Plan

5285/PL/120 – Existing Elevations 1 & 2

5285/PL/121 – Existing Elevations 3 & 4

5285/PL/122 – Existing Elevations 5 & 6

5285/PL/123 – Existing Sections/Elevations 7 & 8

5258/PL/130 A – Proposed Lower Ground Floor Plan

5258/PL/131 A – Proposed Ground Floor Plan

5258/PL/132 A – Proposed First Floor Plan

5258/PL/133 B – Proposed Second Floor Plan

5258/PL/134 A – Proposed Roof Plan

5258/PL/140 A – Proposed Elevations 1 & 2

5258/PL/141 A – Proposed Elevations 3 & 4

5258/PL/142 A – Proposed Sections/Elevations 5 & 6

5258/PL/143 A – Proposed Sections/Elevations 7 & 8

Design and Access Statement

Relevant Planning History

No relevant planning history.

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (September 2014):

- CS01 – Sustainable Development

- CS02 – Scale & Distribution of Development
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Development & Design Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2023) sets out that policies within adopted local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years, and should then be updated as necessary. Such reviews are also a legal requirement as set out in Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) England Regulations 2012.

The Council undertook such a review in September 2019 and found that the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy is in need of a partial review in terms of Policy CS02, due to the increased need for housing since the Local Plan Core Strategy was adopted and the need to ensure that a sufficient land supply exists to meet this need. Whilst saved policies from the Local Plan 1st Review (1994) generally conform with the NPPF (2023), the Council will also seek to replace these.

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

- Section 2 – Achieving Sustainable Development
- Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG 2 - Residential layout guidelines including Housing Standards Policy Statement October 2015 Adopted 1996 – amended June 2020;
- Technical Housing Standards – nationally described space standard (2015);
- SPG 4 - KCC Parking Standards (2006);
- Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guide (2021); and
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

Consultees

Ward Councillors: No comments received.

GBC Environmental Protection:

No objection to this application. The following to be considered:

Code of Practice on Construction and Demolition:

Please apply as appropriate to minimise the impact on the conversion/construction works on the area.

Asbestos:

Prior to any alterations to the existing buildings an appropriate Asbestos survey of the buildings should be undertaken, and a scheme implemented to remove and safely dispose of any asbestos-containing materials in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and the applicant's/developer's Waste duty of care.

GBC Highways Officer:

It is noted that the application form states 11 parking spaces exist and will be retained.

The Design and Access reference to cycle parking is noted, but the applicant needs to note, it is for cycles

including adaptive and not bicycles. It therefore includes tricycles and electric assisted cycles as well as bicycles and could provide cycle parking for staff as well as residents.

It is therefore suggested the applicant is required to submit a parking plan for the parking of 11 Kent standard parking spaces as defined in KCC SPG4, it should be noted that there is an increase in width if a vehicle is parked adjacent to an enclosing boundary. Plus secure cycle parking for a minimum of 2 cycles, including an electrical connection for battery cycles.

It is also suggested that the permission is restricted to the Sisters of Mercy, to allow the Council the opportunity of considering any possible changes as a result of a change of occupier.

GBC Waste and Recycling Manager:

No comments received.

KCC Heritage:

No comments received.

Natural England:

No comments received.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service:

Following my assessment of Fire and Rescue Service emergency access provisions for a screening opinion application number 20231319 I would like to make the following observations.

It appears that the emergency access requirements for the Fire and Rescue Service, under the above 1981 Act, would be met. However, applicants should be aware that in the event of planning permission being granted the Fire and Rescue Service would require emergency access, as required under the Building Regulations 2010, to be established.

Fire Service access and facility provisions are a requirement under B5 of the Building Regulations 2010 and must be complied with to the satisfaction of the Building Control Authority. A full plans submission should be made to the relevant building control body who have a statutory obligation to consult with the Fire and Rescue Service.

Neighbouring properties

A site notice was placed on 25th January 2024. 40 surrounding properties were consulted, and 2 comments were received from members of the public; neither objecting or supporting the scheme. These comments are summarised as follows:

- No objections raised to alterations which would allow the sisters to have appropriate living accommodation to suit their needs and be comfortable.
- It is understood that the works and development are necessary to raise funds for the sisters charity.
- The road is narrow with no pavement and no lighting, and so safety is a concern especially if there would be increased traffic.

Officer Notes:

- One of the comments were querying the reference to Theydon. A response was sent to this neighbour advising that the building had once been split into 3 properties, one of which was called Theydon.
- Concerns were raised in the comments regarding the future development of land adjoining the convent. As no such development is incorporated into this scheme, this comment cannot be

considered in this assessment. Members of the public are encouraged to submit their concerns and comments on such a development if/when a planning application is submitted in the future so that the assessing officer may consider those comments in their assessment.

Officer's Analysis

Principle of Development

This site is located inside the Urban Boundary, where development is considered to be in a sustainable location as per Policy CS02: Scale and Distribution of Development.

However, all other relevant matters should be considered. In this instance, the main points to consider would be the potential impact on; Visual Amenity (Design, Character and Appearance), Amenity of Future Occupiers, Residential Amenity of neighbours and Parking and Highways.

Design, Character and Appearance

The proposed scheme seeks to downsize the large mansion into the area of the building formerly known as Theydon. Prior to becoming a convent, the mansion was subdivided into three separate residents and the application proposes the reinstatement of one of these properties. As part of these works a number of alterations to the Eastern end of the building and the chapel are proposed. The works to the convent proposed by this scheme would include:

- Creation of a new entrance
- Erection of a staircase extension
- Conversion of first floor within the chapel with addition of rooflights.
- Altered cladding
- New glazing
- Replacement roof to 1950's block
- Internal alterations including subdivision between Theydon and Hillside

The building is not Listed. However, given its historic presence within Gravesend there may be some merit to its consideration as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. In considering this application, given the history and changes which have taken place to this building and the surrounding area over time, it is useful to provide a brief summary of these changes, which are also described in further detail in the Design and Access Statement.

The mansion that forms the main building was built on land formerly known as Hillside in 1895 by Lord John Russell, local brewer and Mayor of Gravesend between 1876 and 1898, with few other dwellinghouses in the nearby vicinity. In 1940, the mansion has been divided into 3 houses, Theydon, Hillside and Rydal. By 1952, residential development had been undertaken nearby and a number of dwellinghouse appear on the maps. The sisters acquired and moved into Theydon and Rydal in 1951 and also acquired the middle house, Hillside sometime between 1950 and 1961. The chapel was built between 1950 and 1951 and the three storey, flat roof block behind the mansion and chapel was completed in 1959. This site has been relatively unchanged since and is surrounded by housing to all sides.

The below image taken from the Design and Access identifies the various elements as described above.



Visually the main changes externally would be the altered entrance, staircase extension, rooflights to the chapel and altered materials.

In terms of footprint, the overall footprint of the mansion would be relatively unchanged, with exception of the proposed new entrance and staircase addition.

The new entrance would provide a ramped access to 'Theydon' and would appear somewhat symmetrical to the entrance at Hillside, with similarly sized doors and entryway, whilst the use of the decorative cross atop would align both entrances heights. The replacement of the less aesthetically pleasing flat roof would be preferable and would also allow for a better visual of the large stained-glass window. The section of flat roof to the front which would be removed would be approximately 2.85m² and the proposed entrance would be 6.84m², therefore resulting in an increased floorspace of 3.99m², a minor increase.

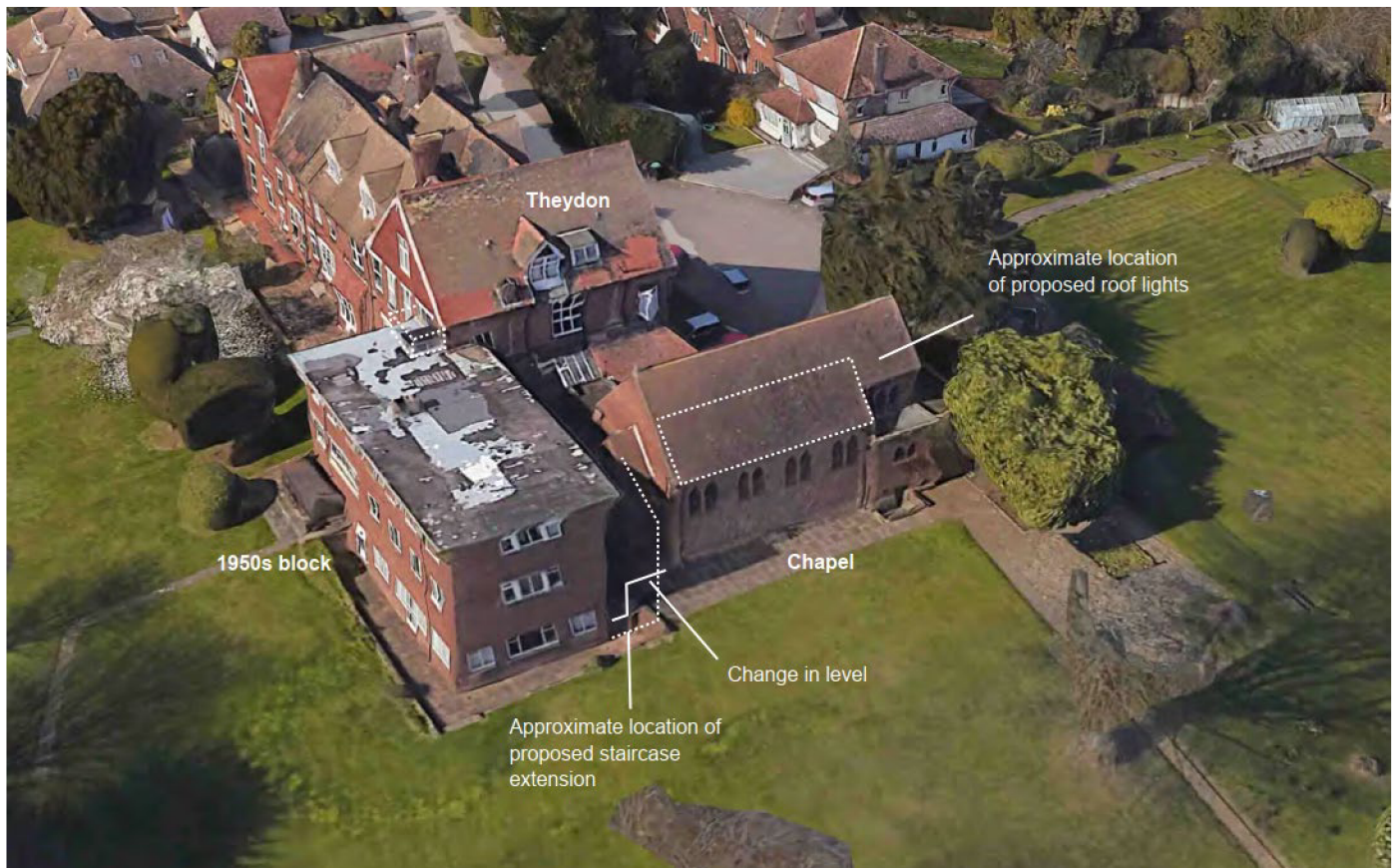


Existing 1950s extension in front of entrance to Theydon



Proposed new entrance to Theydon

The proposed staircase extension would be located between the chapel and the 1950's block. It would have a floorspace of 28.4m² and would allow entrance to the first floor of the chapel as proposed to be converted from the 1950's block. It would be located to the east inward towards the vast land which forms part of the site. There are dwellinghouses beyond this, but a number of trees and varied land levels prevents direct views. And so, this extension would not be readily visibility to the public and would not form part of the streetscene. Its design, however, is somewhat sympathetic to the mixed designs of the chapel and 1950's block to which it would be linked, with the use of cladding to match the 1950's block at ground floor and similar roofing material to the chapel above this. The retention of a similar height to the chapel would also aid visual integration.



The proposed chapel would also be subject to internal conversion. The chapel, despite being a later addition, provides a visual connection to the use of the building as a convent and this provides a positive connection to the use of the site and its history. Its simplistic frame with high pitch and traditional windows, has a positive impact on the character of the area. Therefore, given that much of the chapel would be unchanged with exception to the staircase attachment to the rear and rooflight additions, the building would continue to provide a positive impact on the character of the area, subject to the details of the windows to be used in the roof, which would be required by condition.

To the west and east elevations, there would be a number of changes to the openings on the 1950's block. The resultant openings would be appropriate in number, size and overall design.

The roof to the 1950's block would be replaced using black EPDM single ply membrane. Given that the roof is flat and that the 1950's flat and that this would not be substantially visually different from the existing roof, this would be acceptable. The proposed cork render would be restricted to the 1950's block and new staircase extension and would not significantly harm the character, given that the existing 1950's block is a modern, flat roof brick building of no particular visual merit. The standing seam zinc roofing, to the chapel is also considered appropriate as it would provide a neutral appearance.

On balance, the proposed development would comply with the requirements of Policy CS19 of the Core

Strategy 2014 and paragraph 135 of the NPPF (2023) in terms of design, character and appearance.

Amenity of Future Occupiers

The NPPF (2023) states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users. The impact on amenity is also considered with regard to the criteria with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy, which states that new development should be located, designed and constructed to safeguard the amenity, including privacy, daylight and sunlight, of its occupants, and those of neighbouring properties and land. The impact on neighbours will be assessed in the next section of the report.

The rooms provided would comply with the National Amenity Standards requirements for dwellinghouses. However, it is noted that this building is not a dwellinghouse, but no such standards are allocated for nunnery use and so it would be the most appropriate comparable. The resultant alterations would provide a more appropriate use of space and larger room accommodation for the remaining nuns. The land associated is also vast and would continue to provide adequate external amenity space.

Neighbouring Amenity

As outlined above, it is important that any development safeguards the amenity of neighbouring properties and land. Following a period of consultation with neighbouring properties, no objection to the proposal was received.

The proposed changes would result in minor extensions to the eastern end of the mansion. This would be 36.3m from dwellinghouses to the east, which are also obscured by a line of trees, 29 metres from neighbour to the west, 40 metres from neighbours to the south and 20 metres from the nearest neighbour to the north. Given the distances from these properties, the additions would not result in overbearing impact or overshadowing to neighbouring properties. There would also be no direct overlooking, given the distance and existing placement of windows.

The proposal is therefore considered to safeguard the amenity of neighbouring properties in compliance with policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014.

Parking and Highways

The GBC Highways Officer has requested the provision of a parking plan to assess whether adequate parking spaces are available for the proposed development. However, the proposal would not alter the existing parking arrangement nor would it alter the likely vehicle traffic to the convent. Whilst there would be reason to consider parking arrangements should the use of the building be changed, in this case the use would remain the same and it would be unreasonable to condition a parking plan or refuse the scheme without one, where no parking changes are proposed, and no intensification of use is proposed.

Adequate vehicle and cycle parking provision is therefore available in accordance with paragraphs 110 to 113 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2023), Saved Policies T1 and P3 of the Local Plan First Review (1994) and Policies CS11 and CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 subject to further details of cycle parking provision.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The proposed development would comply with all relevant national and local planning policies, subject to conditions. The recommendation is to approve.

(For detailed conditions / reasons for refusal and informatives, see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mrs Lisa Fisher	Team Leader:	Miss Faye Hobbs
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Signed:		Signed:	
Dated:	21st February 2024	Dated:	01 March 2024