



Delegated Report

Full Planning Application

Planning Application No: 20220823

Location: Northfield House, Wrotham Road, Meopham, Gravesend

Description: Outline application for the demolition of Northfield House and outbuildings and the erection of three detached dwellings, with associated parking, access and amenity areas.

Applicant: Mr M Rossi

Site Visit Date: 21.09.2022

Submitted Documents/Plans

Application form
Supporting Planning Statement
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (ref. 2022/03/14)
Bat Survey (ref. 2022/03/14)
Drawing no. Oak_22-111 (Topographical Survey)
Drawing no. CAS/2022/128 (Aboriginal Constraints Plan)
Drawing no. P.2781.010.A (Site Location Plan)
Drawing no. P.2781.020.A (Existing Block Plan)
Drawing no. P.2781.021.A (Demolition Plan)
Drawing no. P.2781.030.A (Proposed Block Plan)
Drawing no. P.2781.060.A (Indicative Plans Dwelling 1)
Drawing no. P.2781.061.A (Indicative Plans Dwelling 2)
Drawing no. P.2781.062.A (Indicative Plans Dwelling 3)
Drawing no. P.2781.070.A (Indicative Elevations Dwelling 1)
Drawing no. P.2781.071.A (Indicative Elevations Dwelling 2)
Drawing no. P.2781.072.A (Indicative Elevations Dwelling 3)

Relevant Planning History

Reference	Description	Decision	Decision Date
20080188	Continued display of non-illuminated free-standing sign in front garden and wall mounted sign on side elevation of house.	Consent	27.03.2008
20070988	Outline application for the demolition of existing dwelling and erection of two detached two storey dwellings each with garage.	Permitted	10.01.2008
19900346	Change of use of part of the ground floor from shop to residential and alterations to the ground floor front elevation.	Permitted	07.06.1990
19550136	Erection of a dwelling	Refused	07.10.1955

Development Plan

Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy (2014)

- CS01 – Sustainable Development
- CS02 – Scale and Distribution of Development
- CS11 – Transport
- CS12 – Green Infrastructure
- CS14 – Housing Type and Size
- CS15 – Housing Density
- CS18 – Climate Change
- CS19 – Design and Development Principles

Gravesham Local Plan: First Review (1994)

- T1 – Impact of Development on Highway Network
- T5 – New Accesses onto Highway Network
- P3 – Vehicle Parking Standards

Paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2021) 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 (2021), the Council will also seek to replace these.

Given Gravesham's current inability to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, and as the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75%) that required by the Housing Delivery Test, the housing delivery element of Core Strategy Policy CS02 must be regarded to be out of date, as required by the Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF 2021. This requires that in regard to housing development, planning permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

In the Gravesham context, the policies referred to in paragraph 11(d)(i) above are those set out in the NPPF 2021 at footnote 7 (rather than those in development plans) relating to any of the following:

- Habitats sites (and those sites listed in NPPF 2021, paragraph 181)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- Green Belt;
- Local Green Space;
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Irreplaceable habitats;
- Designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest, see NPPF 2021, footnote 68); and
- Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

In determining applications for planning permission involving housing, the Council will therefore apply a weighted balance in favour of granting planning permission in accordance with relevant case law and

guidance, having regard to the acceptability or otherwise of the proposals when evaluated against development plan policy, the need to make efficient use of land (paragraph 121(c)) in context, the relative contribution the proposal makes towards the alleviation of any shortfall in housing delivery at that time and any other considerations material to the proposed development.

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

- 2 – Achieving sustainable development
- 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes
- 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
- 11 – Making effective use of land
- 12 – Achieving well-designed places
- 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance

- SPG2 – Residential layout guidelines including Housing Standards Policy Statement October 2015 Adopted 1996 (amended June 2020)
- SPG4 – KCC Parking Standards (2006)
- Planning Guidance Note 6 Vehicle Accesses on Classified Highways (2009)
- Householder Extensions/Alterations Design Guide (2021)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (2009)
- Technical Housing Standards – nationally described space standard (2015)

Consultations, Publicity and Representations

External Consultees

Dickens Country Protection Society

In the Society's view the proposal is overdevelopment, part of which is in the form of undesirable backland development.

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

Following the assessment of Fire and Rescue Service emergency access provisions the following observations are made:

- Please confirm that due to the estimated length of travel distance and dead-end conditions on the access road to the proposed premises at the rear of the site, that there are adequate turning facilities available for the appliance with a minimum radius of 16.8m.

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.

Meopham Parish Council

Meopham Parish Council objects to this planning application on the following grounds:

1. Putting a third dwelling on the site would be an over-intensive development. The amenity of all three proposed homes will be reduced. The third dwelling may well impact on the amenity of the residents of

the properties in the estate at the rear of the plot.

2. The opening of another access to Wrotham Road A227 close to the school is not appropriate given the traffic problems that already exist in this vicinity.
3. The Parish Council wishes to urge GBC to maintain the historic character of the village through the preservation of the Edwardian Villas.

Internal Consultees

GBC Highways

This proposal requires very careful consideration and comparison with the 2007 scheme.

The Council's adopted Planning Guidance 6 requires all properties to have on-site turning on 'A' and 'B' classified roads. Wrotham Road is the A227 and so on-site turning should be provided.

On **Schedule 1 roads**, the following additional considerations apply:-

- where an alternative means of vehicle access can be provided which does not affect the main road, a new access to the classified road will normally be refused;
- all applications will be expected to show on-site turning space - typically, this will require a minimum forecourt area of 7.5 metres width and 8 metres depth;
- exceptional circumstances will be needed to justify the creation of more than one means of access to a single residential property;
- all new entrances will have to have full sight-lines appropriate to the speed of passing traffic and all reasonable steps should be taken to design out any hazards arising from this access. This may entail further work in the highway.

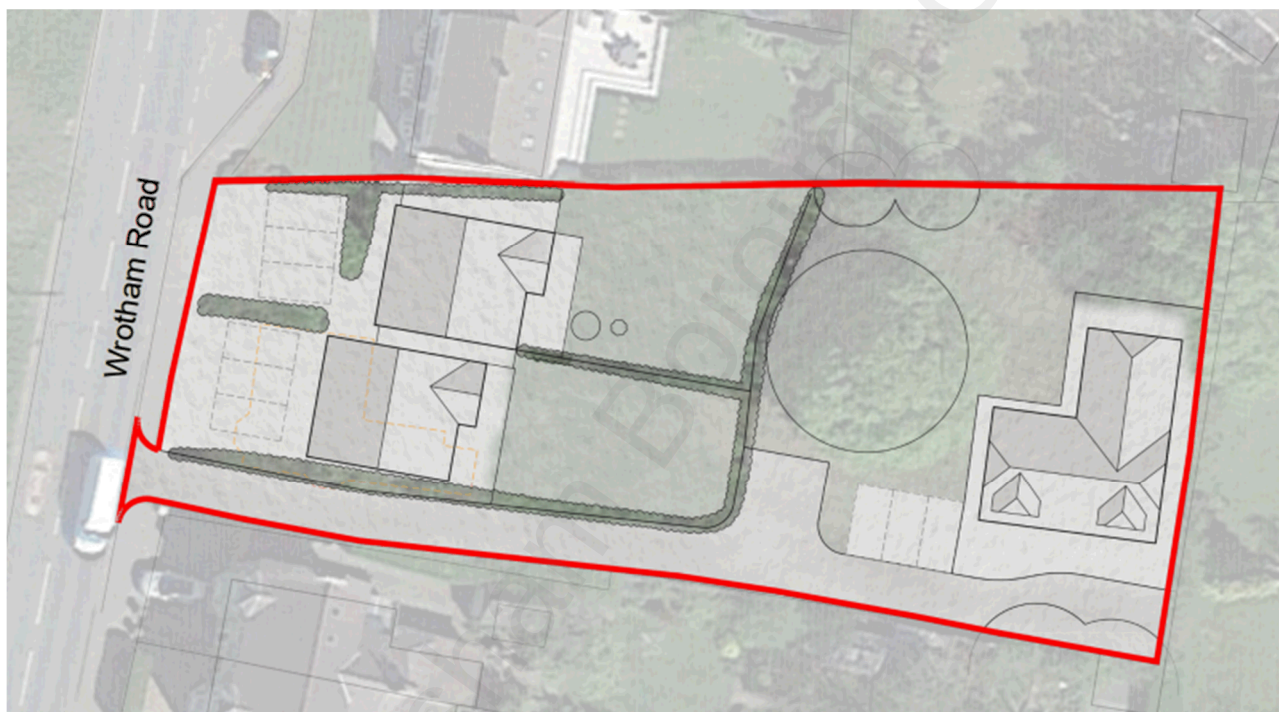
The existing dwelling has a large driveway along the flank of the building which should be more than adequate for on-site parking and turning.

Looking at the approved application 20070988, the proposal included provision for on-site turning given the communal access aisle serving the proposed properties.

Extracts from the drawings submitted with the 2007 application:



Here the current proposal has set the parking forward leaving insufficient space for on-site turning.



As adopted guidance is not followed, it is a reason for refusal as presented.

Considering the dwelling at the rear, the parking layout should have a 6 metre aisle to ensure there is adequate space for vehicle manoeuvring into and out of the parking bays. The turning head needs to be large enough to permit a long wheelbase panel van to turn to ensure delivery vehicles do not reverse onto the highway to the detriment of highway safety. As these requirements are not met and proven by tracked/swept path drawings, it is another reason for refusal.

From a highway point of view, it would be better to have all car parking at the rear of the frontage properties with on-site turning and an access aisle at least 4.1 metres wide to allow two cars to pass, widening to 6 metres where parking is perpendicular to it.

Neighbouring properties

The application has been advertised by individual neighbour letters to 9 properties, and on site. The consultation periods expired on 23 August and 2 September 2022 respectively.

Four letters of representation have been received from neighbouring properties, objecting on the following grounds:

- The front elevations of the houses will not be consistent with the character of the surrounding area.
- The rear house will be easily visible by neighbours and will result in overlooking.
- The proposal is out of place due to the size and backland nature of the proposal.
- The proposal would add another hazard to the busy A227 in terms of parking and additional traffic.
- It will be an additional drain on local services.
- New builds are spoiling the village.
- There is an old oak tree on the site that needs to be protected.
- Building works will cause noise issues and traffic congestion.

The Local Ward Councillors were also consulted, and no responses were received.

Officer's Analysis

Background

As set out in the planning history above, there has been an outline application granted for housing on this site (20070988).

The previous outline permission was for the demolition of the existing dwelling and the erection of two detached two storey dwellings, each with a garage. The approved drawing is not on the case file, but the following is an extract taken from the Delegated Officer's Report on the file, which clearly describes the proposed development:

Outline application for the demolition of existing dwelling and erection of two detached two storey dwellings each with a garage.

Proposal

It is proposed to demolish the existing dwelling on site and erect two detached dwellings each with a garage. The application is made in outline with layout and scale, appearance, access and landscaping to be reserved for future consideration. Illustrative layout plans are provided to demonstrate how the proposal could be appropriately accommodated on site with regard to layout. These indicate two dwellings side by side in line with the dwelling to the north (Negril). Both proposed properties have private garden space to the rear with garaging and parking space at the front.

Access is to be taken from the west site of the site running onto Wrotham Road. This proposed access way will be shared with both properties; the new formed access is envisaged to lead to a parking area in the frontage of the dwellings. Provision for two parking spaces per dwelling (one garaged, one on the drive), there are no visitor parking spaces shown on the plans.

Proposal

The current application is in outline, with all matters to be determined (access, appearance, landscaping, layout and scale). Nothing has been reserved for later consideration (this was amended in the initial description). The proposal is for the demolition of Northfield House and outbuildings and the erection of three two storey detached dwellings, with associated parking, access and amenity areas.

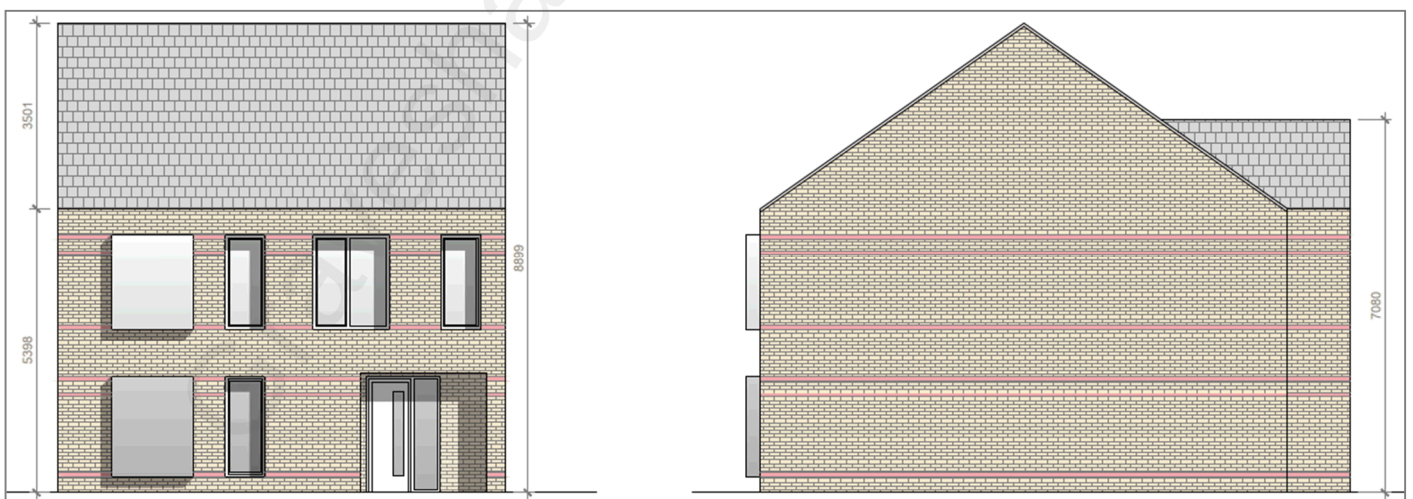
The proposed layout is as follows (*extract from proposed block plan*):



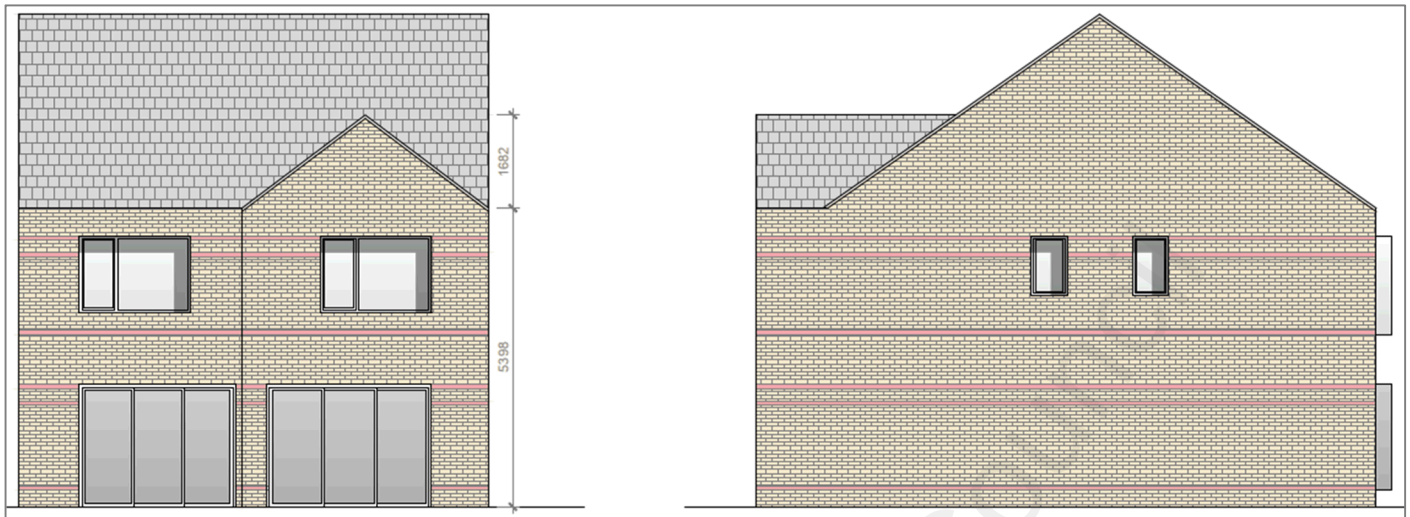
The two frontage houses would be of the same design, with four double bedrooms (one with an ensuite) and a bathroom on the first floor, and a living room, hallway and WC, open plan kitchen/dining area and a pantry and utility on the ground floor.

Proposed elevations of frontage houses:

Front and side

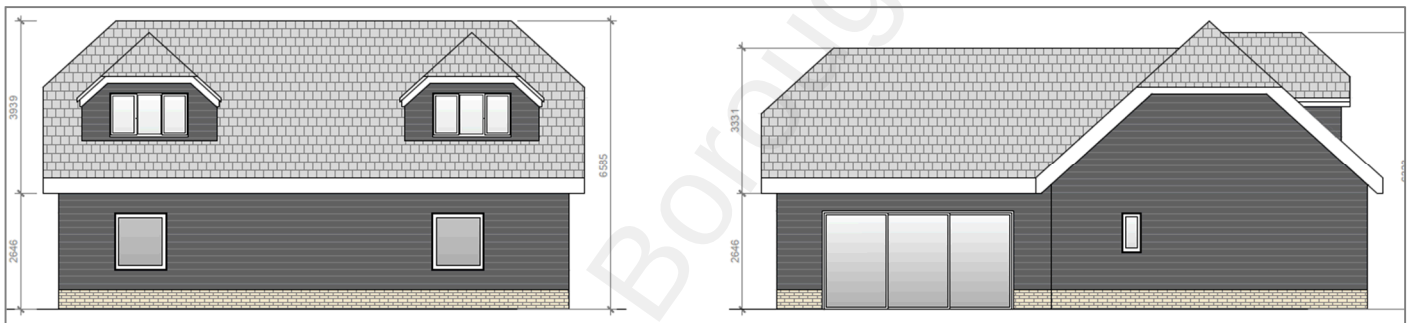


Rear and side

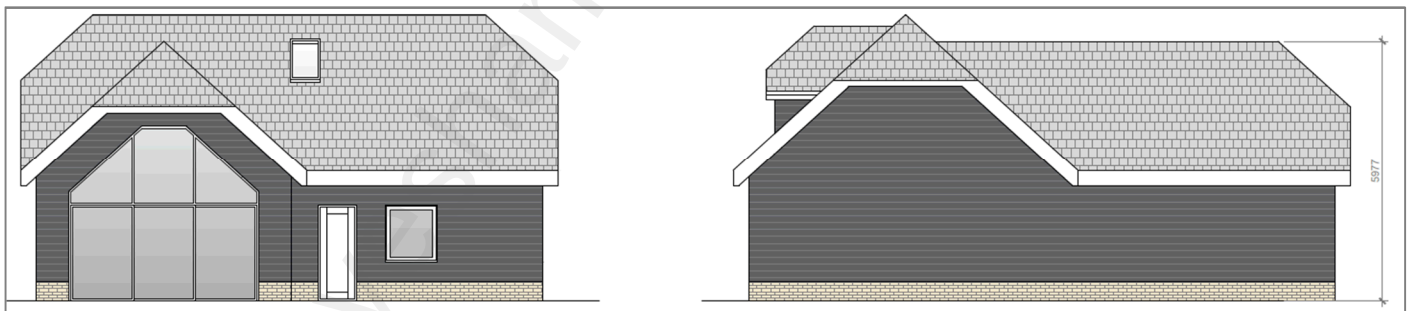


The proposed house at the rear would have an open plan living/kitchen/diner, a utility room, WC, hallway, study, and bedroom with ensuite on the ground floor and two further double bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. The proposed elevations are as follows:

Rear and side



Front and side



Parking will be accommodated to the front of each dwelling with a new access running along the southern boundary of the site.

Principle of Development

At the heart of the NPPF 2021 there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11), which for decision-taking means that planning permission for applications involving the provision of housing should be granted, unless, in line with the requirements of paragraph 11(d):

- i. the application of policies in this Framework (the NPPF) that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

In this case, the application site is not protected or of particular importance. It is defined on the Policies Map of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 as lying within the rural settlement boundary of Meopham, which is inset from the Green Belt. Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2014 states that in the rural area, development will be supported within those rural settlements inset from the Green Belt, providing all other policy considerations and principal issues are also deemed acceptable.

In light of these considerations, there is no objection to the broad principle of residential development on this site, and particularly with regards to a frontage development as previously established by the 20070988 permission, subject to the proposal being appropriate in terms of other planning issues.

Design, Character and Appearance

Whilst it is recognised that development which makes effective use of land should be supported (paragraph 119), this comes with the proviso that it should safeguard and improve the environment and not conflict with other policies in the NPPF. Relevant to this proposal, paragraph 124 of the NPPF states that developments that makes efficient use of land should be supported, taking into account the identified need for different types of housing, the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), and the importance of securing well-designed places.

The application proposes the subdivision of an existing residential plot, with the introduction of two dwellings at the front and a new dwelling within the garden at the back of the plot. With regards to the latter element of the proposal, whilst there are no specific local planning policies which prohibit backland development in either the Core Strategy 2014 or those saved policies from the Local Plan First Review 1994, at a national level the NPPF addresses the issue of garden grabbing in paragraph 71, and states "plans should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area." This provides the initial policy context for such development.

Consideration of the character of the area is a continuous thread throughout other policies relevant to this case. Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy 2014 sets out that new housing development is expected to provide a range of dwelling types and sizes, taking into account the existing character of the area as well as evidence of local need to create sustainable and balanced communities. The proposals include 3 and 4 bedroom detached dwellings in an area of similar sized properties and this would therefore be supported by Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy 2014, providing design and character is also acceptable.

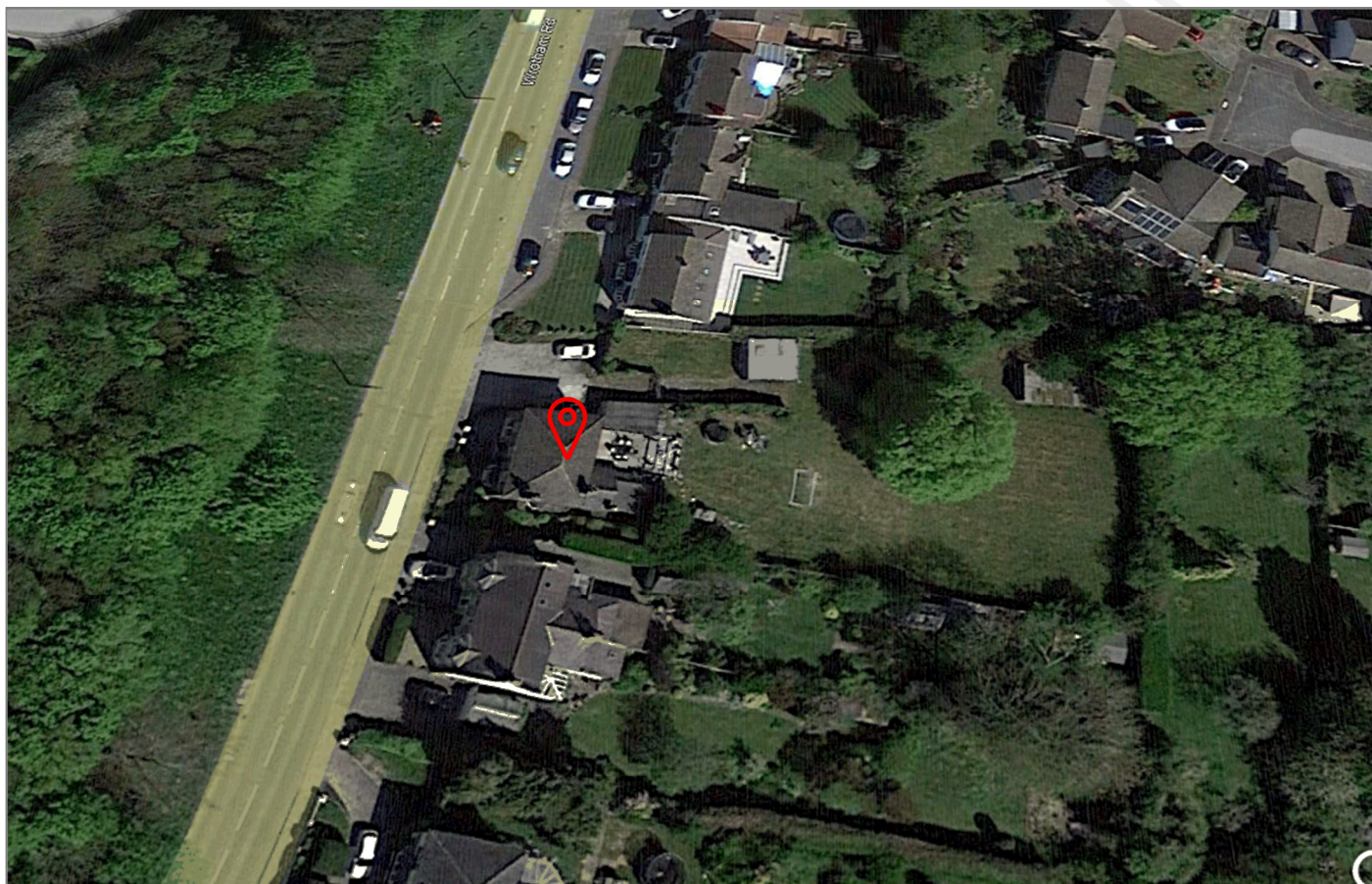
Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy seeks to achieve a minimum density for residential development in the rural area of 30 dwellings per hectare (dph), subject to the overriding consideration that it achieves good design and does not compromise the distinctive character of the area. In terms of the density of development currently proposed for this site, this would equate to 15dph; this is below the minimum requirement but given the character of the area, which is generally made up of detached houses in good size plots, a higher density would be out of keeping.

It is considered that the proposed size and density of the proposed dwellings alone could be acceptable, but their appearance and layout must be considered in the context of their surroundings.

Section 12 of the NPPF 2021 relates to achieving well-designed places and sets out the Government's requirements in relation to design issues. Paragraph 126 emphasises the importance of achieving high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Paragraph 130 of the NPPF 2021 seeks to ensure that development will add to the quality of an area, be visually attractive, and sympathetic to local character and history. Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 reflects these aims and requires that new development is well designed and respects the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

The existing site contains a detached dwelling, Northfield House, which is an historic building of some character, and though it is recognised it is not listed or within a Conservation Area, its loss remains unfortunate. However, it is accepted that this loss has previously been established. The property benefits from a large rear garden, of some 1400sqm, with a depth of at least 50m. This is characteristic of many of the houses along this part of Wrotham Road, particularly to the south of the site, where the most comparable properties are located.



With the plot being subdivided in the manner proposed, into two plots at the front and one at the rear, the garden sizes would be much reduced compared to the existing (at between approximately 200sqm gardens at the front and 430sqm at the rear) and compared to what has already been approved under application 20070988 (approximately 700sqm). This is compounded by the fact that such a subdivision into three plots in the manner proposed would be out of character with the area.

There is another site to the south (Graveney Lodge) where a detached dwelling has been allowed at the rear of the plot under application 20201100 (with a subsequent minor material amendment granted under application 20220265), but the plot and garden sizes of the existing and proposed dwellings remained generous and in keeping with the surrounding plot/garden sizes. This is not a comparable scheme to the current proposal, which proposes much smaller plots.

Extract from proposed block plan granted under application 20201100



The bulk, size and scale of a backland property was a concern with the previously dismissed appeal scheme at Graveney Lodge (20170632), and this is reflected in the current proposal. In that scheme, the Inspector considered the proposed backland and random siting to be uncharacteristic of the area, particularly given the size of and lack of space around the proposed dwelling.

The height of the proposed backland house in the current scheme is considered to be excessive, at a maximum of approximately 6.6m, which would be clearly visible over a general 2m high garden boundary. The proposed barn hip roof would add to the bulkiness of the design of the dwelling, and its scale is not considered to be appropriate in relation to its backland location, where more generally in such a location at the bottom of a garden, outbuildings would be the more common form of development.

With regards to the design of the frontage properties, whilst there would appear to be some reference to the existing Northfield House on the site with the brick type and banding detailing, the reference finishes there. The appearance of the proposed houses is bland and lacking in any interest. The proportion and appearance of the fenestration is poor, and the buildings would appear at odds within the street scene. They would certainly not add to the quality of the area, particularly considering the appearance of the existing building that is proposed to be removed.

In terms of landscaping, there is also a large amount of hardstanding proposed within and around the proposed development, with more than half of the plot being taken up by buildings and hardstanding, which would be out of character with the soft landscaped nature of the of the properties in the area. It is noted that trees and hedging are proposed to be maintained in and around the plot. However, certainly with regards to the larger tree in what will be the middle of the garden of the rear plot (shown as T05 on the submitted Arboricultural Constraints Plan) there would be a high possibility of post-development pressure to remove it. The proposal will unavoidably alter the current verdant nature of the site.

Overall, the backland siting of the proposal, accentuated by the bulk, height and scale of the rear dwelling in particular, would be uncharacteristic of the development in this part of Meopham, would fail to integrate into its surroundings and would not add to the quality of the area. The poor design and appearance of the frontage dwellings would further harm the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the requirements of Policies CS14, CS15, and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 and paragraphs 119, 124, 126 and 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework

2021.

Residential Amenity

The NPPF 2021 states that planning decisions should aim to secure a high standard of amenity for all existing and future users (paragraph 130f). The impact on amenity is also considered with regard to the criteria within Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014, 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, and avoid adverse environmental impacts from pollution, including noise, air and odour pollution.

Future Occupiers

The Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS) 2015 sets out the minimum gross internal floor area (GIFA) standard for new dwellings. The table below shows the minimum standard set out in the NDSS 2015 against the sizes of the proposed dwellings within the development:

Number of bedrooms (b)	Number of bedspaces (persons)	2 storey dwellings (NDSS) (m²)	Proposed dwellings GIFA (m²)
4b (x2)	8p	125	150
3b	6p	102	148

The proposal therefore complies with the national standards in terms of the size of accommodation proposed. It would also comply with the Council's residential layout guidelines for the proposed gardens. For a 4 bedroom house a minimum garden area of 100m² is required, with a minimum depth of 10m. The rear garden areas and depths would exceed this.

The layout of the proposed properties is such that sufficient distance would be maintained between the buildings (in excess of 30m) so as to ensure no adverse harm from overlooking or loss of light. Similarly, the closest buildings to the north (in Oakmead) and west (in Cheyne Walk) are in excess of 23m and 32m respectively so would be unlikely to have any significant effects on amenity.

There is therefore no conflict with the requirements of the SPG2 Residential Layout Guidelines (2020), Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 130 of the NPPF 2021 in respect of the standard of amenity and living conditions for future occupants of the proposed dwelling on the site.

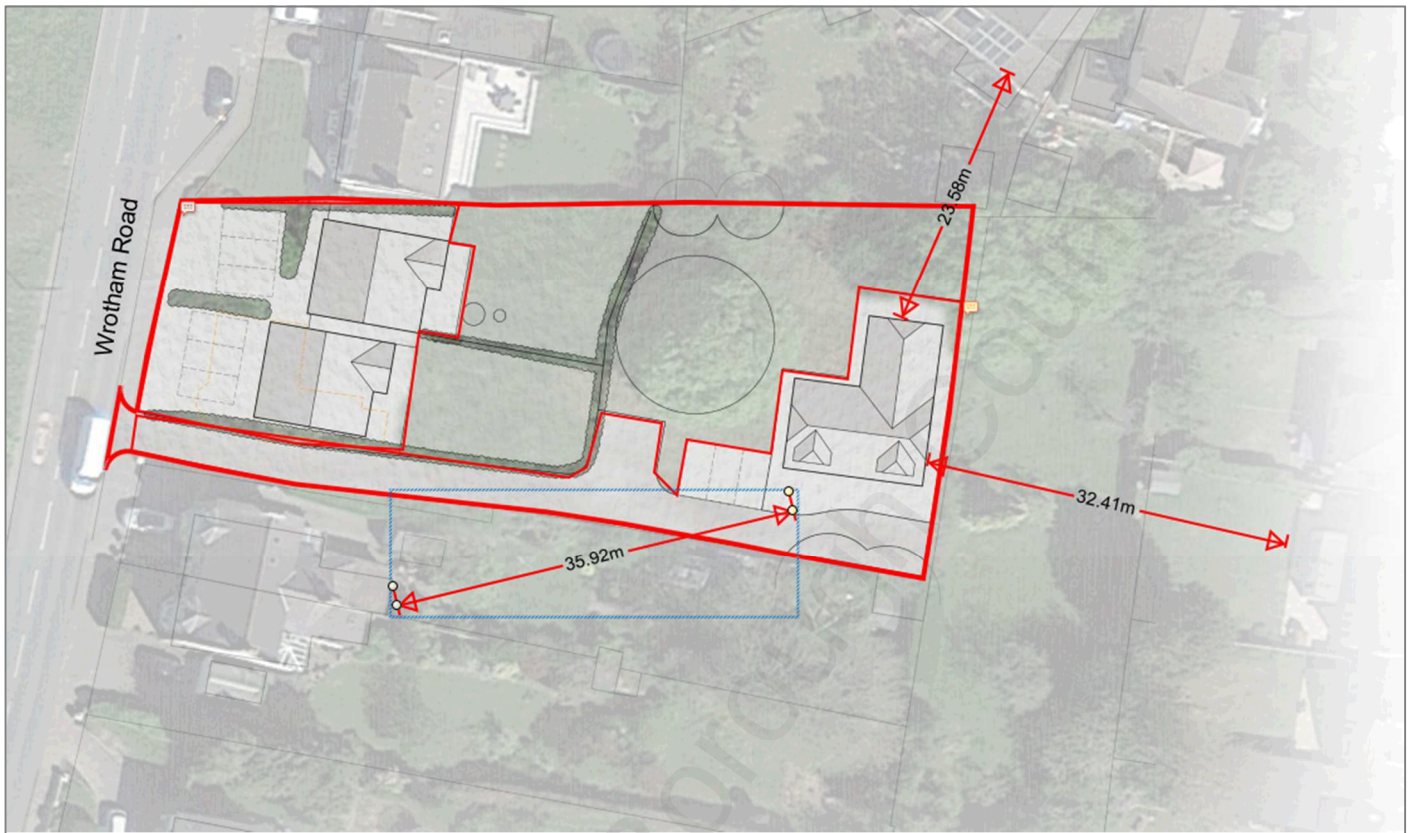
Neighbouring Properties

The main neighbouring properties likely to be affected by the proposal are those detached dwellings either side of the site to the north (Negril) and south (Blendon Villa). The impact on the properties to the east would be minimal given the separation distances involved between the existing and proposed properties (see image below).

In terms of the impact on Negril, the proposed frontage house next to it would be positioned much closer than the existing Northfield House. However, the proposed frontage buildings would be on the same building line and would not project excessively to the front or rear. Outlook and light for Negril would not be significantly or adversely affected. Furthermore, there are no windows proposed in the first floor flank elevations facing the existing dwellings to either side, and therefore there will be no direct overlooking of the immediately neighbouring properties, other than what would generally be expected in such a residential area.

For Blendon Villa to the south, the proposed frontage house next to it would be positioned further away than the existing Northfield House, providing more spacing between the buildings. The proposed house would be on a similar building line, so again light and outlook would not be seriously affected. The first floor bedroom windows within the proposed rear dwelling would face over the end portion of the rear garden of

Blendon Villa, but the distance between the buildings would be in excess of 35m at their closest point, and as views from the proposed dwelling towards Blendon Villa and its immediate rear garden would largely be at an oblique angle, outlook and privacy for Blendon Villa would not be significantly harmed.



The proposed dwelling would be in excess of 23m from the closest dwellings to it to the north in Oakmead and as there would be no first floor windows on this elevation, there would be no loss of privacy in relation to these properties.

The pedestrian and vehicular activity associated with an additional house at the front and the use of the proposed access along the southern boundary adjacent Blendon Villa would have the potential to generate some noise disturbance for neighbouring occupiers. However, the rear access would serve a single dwelling and the number of vehicle movements would therefore be limited. The noise associated with the comings and goings to the new dwellings would also be additional to the existing background levels, including traffic noise from the use of Wrotham Road. The intensity of the noise arising from the use of the access to the new dwelling in particular would not be at a level that would be harmful to the living conditions of the residents of the area.

Overall, it is considered that the design and layout of proposed dwellings would protect the amenities of existing and future occupiers, and the proposal is therefore acceptable in this regard and in accordance with the requirements of the SPG2 Residential Layout Guidelines (2020), Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 130 of the NPPF 2021.

Parking and Highways

Saved policies T1, T5 and P3 of the Local Plan 1994, Policy CS11 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 111 of the NPPF 2021 comprise the relevant highways considerations for this proposal. These policies ensure that development has an acceptable amount of parking, is not detrimental to the highway network and promotes sustainable transport methods.

Whilst sufficient parking for the dwellings could be met on the site, the Council's adopted Planning Guidance Note 6 also requires all properties to have on-site turning on 'A' and 'B' classified roads. Wrotham Road is the A227 and therefore on-site turning should be provided.

The existing dwelling has a large driveway at the front/side of the site that would appear to be more than adequate for on-site parking and turning. However, the current proposal for the frontage dwellings would set the parking forward, leaving insufficient space for on-site turning. As the proposal is contrary to adopted guidance, this element of the proposal is unacceptable.

In relation to the dwelling at the rear, the parking layout should have a 6m aisle to ensure there is adequate space for vehicle manoeuvring into and out of the parking bays. The turning head also needs to be large enough to permit a long wheelbase panel van to turn to ensure vehicles do not reverse onto the highway to the detriment of highway safety. This was also raised as an issue by Kent Fire and Rescue. As these requirements are not met, the proposal is also unacceptable on this basis.

Any Other Material Planning Considerations

Thames Estuary and Marshes Ramsar / Special Protection Area (SPA) – SAMMS Tariff:

As the application site is within 6km of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites and would provide additional residential accommodation, the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect, either alone or in-combination, on the coastal North Kent Special Protection Areas (SPAs)/Ramsar sites from recreational disturbance on the over-wintering bird interest. On this basis a tariff of £551.76 is required (given there would be two additional dwellings proposed on the site).

This tariff was not requested due to the recommendation for the application, and the applicant has therefore not paid this tariff. Without an agreement in place to secure this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the Local Planning Authority cannot be satisfied that the proposal would put in place adequate measures to mitigate potential significant adverse effects on the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites, which is contrary paragraphs 174 and 180 of the NPPF 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy 2014.

Biodiversity

Policy CS12 of the Core Strategy 2014 seeks to maintain important landscape features for their aesthetic and ecological benefits. This policy also states that there will be no net loss of biodiversity and that the overall landscape character of the Borough will be conserved, restored and enhanced. The Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) 2009 will be taken into account in determining applications.

There are well-established shrubs and trees on and around the site though they are not protected. Nevertheless, a tree survey and method statement would be considered important to assess the condition of the trees on the site and provide for their proper protection before any development takes place (ideally this should help inform the layout of development). This should be secured by condition.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Bat Survey have been undertaken and found no expected impact on amphibians, reptiles, dormice, badgers or bats. The PEA states that trees (habitats) should be adequately protected, and consideration should be given to the timing of clearance works in relation to nesting birds. Ecological enhancements should also be incorporated into the development. These matters could also be secured by condition.

The site is located within the Meopham Downs Landscape Character Area. Concerns have been raised above in relation to the loss of soft landscaping on the site; however, as the site comprises an existing residential property within the rural settlement boundary of Meopham, the proposal is unlikely to have any adverse impact on the wider landscape character of the area.

Archaeology

The site lies within an area of archaeological potential. However, it is considered unlikely that the proposals would have a significant below-ground archaeological impact. The proposal therefore complies with Policy CS20 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 197 of the NPPF 2021.

Environmental Protection

As an existing residential property in a residential area, the application would have a low environmental risk. A condition should be imposed relating to a watching brief and code of practice on construction and demolition. The proposal would therefore comply with Policy CS19 of the Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 185 of the NPPF 2021.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The proposed development would provide a net increase of 2 dwellings on the site and would offer a small contribution towards meeting general housing need in the Borough. Accordingly, this weighs in support of the application, particularly where evidence has shown that the Council cannot currently demonstrate a five year housing supply.

However, this has to be balanced against safeguarding and improving the environment and highway safety, matters which are sought throughout the NPPF 2021, including in particular in paragraphs 111, 119, 124, 126 and 130. In this case, as discussed above, there are concerns relating to these matters, and the application is therefore recommended for refusal on the following grounds:

1. The backland siting of the proposal, accentuated by the bulk, height and scale of the rear dwelling in particular, would be uncharacteristic of the development in this part of Meopham, would fail to integrate into its surroundings and would not add to the quality of the area. The poor design and appearance of the frontage dwellings would further harm the character and appearance of the area. The proposal would therefore be contrary to the requirements of Policies CS14, CS15, and CS19 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 and paragraphs 119, 124, 126 and 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.
2. The proposal has insufficient space for on-site turning and manoeuvring, which would result in vehicles reversing onto the A227 Wrotham Road to the detriment of highway safety, and which is contrary to Planning Guidance Note 6 Vehicle Accesses on Classified Highways, saved Policies T1 and T5 of the Gravesham Local Plan First Review 1994, Policy CS11 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014 and paragraph 111 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.
3. The proposal fails to secure a contribution towards strategic mitigation measures within the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA/Ramsar Sites to resolve disturbance issues to wintering birds, and in the absence of this contribution or any evidence to inform an appropriate assessment, the development fails to comply with the requirements of the Habitat Regulations and paragraphs 174 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CS12 of the Gravesham Local Plan Core Strategy 2014.

(For detailed reasons for refusal see draft Decision)

Case Officer:	Mrs Katherine Parkin	Team Leader:	Miss Faye Hobbs
Signed:	<i>K. Parkin</i>	Signed:	
Dated:	26th September 2022	Dated:	26 September 2022