

DC/20/4965/FUL | General upgrade and additions to a dated and modest detached property. | 4 Blyth Road Southwold Suffolk IP18 6AZ.

Recommendation: Refusal

Summary

This is a full re-make of a modest two story detached social housing dwelling to create a new three story “statement” dwelling. The Town Council strongly objects based on the quality of design, and the impact on the Conservation Area and AONB landscape.

Context

Blyth Road is the northwest settlement boundary of Southwold. It is a short bit of public highway that turns into an unmade up road, owned by the Common Trust, which is a footpath connecting Southwold to Walberswick. The road/footpath is on high ground which slopes north to the Millennium Field, and the Buss Creek marshes. There are a small number of houses on both sides of the public highway. (A few, such as this site, have become market housing.) This part of Southwold has the typical character of edge of settlement rural housing.

On the north side, the social housing consists of three former “police houses” built in the 1960’s to rent to police and their families immediately next to the police station. This site is the police house closest to the police station. All have the same footprint and are set-back from the road with generous front gardens. To their immediate west is a terrace of 1970’s social housing. Across the road, there are three Edwardian cottages (Stanley Cottages) built by Southwold Corporation in the early 20th century, followed by 4 early 21st century cottages built by Hastoe Housing Association on land donated by the Common Trust and Southwold Town Council. When the Common Trust and Town Council provided the land, it was on condition that development would be kept at two story because of landscape impact, and to fit in with the character of the rest of the housing on the road – all modest scale and two story.

The Site Merits High Quality Design

The site has high visibility from the Common; the Millennium Foundation field; the Buss Creek footpath (connecting the Harbour to the Pier). This degree of open landscape visibility means that the site’s development will impact on the AONB. See pictures at the end of the text.

It also has high visibility from the junction of Pier Avenue and the Blyth Road Hotel – a key townscape view. The two story building is higher than the one story police station, and the proposed scheme would be the dominant feature of this junction until the police station is redeveloped. This may not happen for a number of years.

For the same reasons that 8 Cautley Road was considered as part of the setting of the Conservation Area in Planning Application DC/17/3157/FUL, this site should be considered as part of the setting of the Conservation Area, whose boundary takes in the dilapidated industrial area (Station Yard), which fronts onto Blyth Road, and the locally listed Stanley Cottages. Redevelopment of Station Yard is imminent with demolition scheduled to begin in Feb-March 2021.

The site is next door to the area designated for high quality design development based on the Ingleton Wood Design Framework adopted by the Town Council in 2017 and included in the emerging NP's design policy. (The Regulation 14 Consultation produced no negative comments on the IW Design Framework and the Framework has been used by the LPA to influence previous development in this area.) The IW Framework covers all development sites at the entrance to the town from Mights Bridge to Station Yard

The IW Framework is the basis for the design of: 1) Station Yard (planning consent given in 2019, DC/18/2406/FUL, see visual at the end of the text); 2) the development of a visitor centre (designed by Ingleton Wood) on the Millennium Field; and 3) the proposed design for the Fire Station Site by Hastoe Housing Association (10 affordable homes and 2 market houses), which Hastoe intends to put out to pre-app public consultation in early 2021.

Why This Scheme Is Not High Quality Design

The follow elements make this design unacceptable for this location.

- The height – three stories – breaks with the rooflines of the adjoining housing, all of the same roof height.
- The third story and the upper balcony will over-look the social housing proposed for the fire station site, impacting the privacy of its future residents;
- It may also over-look the social housing to the west.
- The design is for a “statement building” that does not fit harmoniously with the modest social housing context because of its mass, height, scale, amount of fenestration, materials, and relationship to the street. It will stick out like a sore thumb in the small road.
- Both in the use of different materials, fenestration, and the way that forms are “stuck together,” it is a design hodge-podge that lacks a coherent architectural vision.
- Due to its high visibility, it will become a landmark “eye sore”.
- It will have an over-bearing impact on the residents of this small social housing enclave, who will be forced to see it every day when they go about their daily lives. It will have a negative impact on their quality of life.

In sum, this proposal runs contrary to everything that the Town Council is seeking to achieve in the development of the Gateway Area – high quality design that reflects and enhances the character of the town and its landscape, and the lives of its residents. It is exactly the type of design that WLP Design 8.22, the NPPF, and the National Design Guide are seeking to prevent.

The Town Council would not object to a two story scheme that extended the house into the back garden, and was based on the design guidance provided by the IW Design Framework. This is available on the Town Council's website. The National Design Guide recommends pre-app consultation with parish councils. This is the type of site where the LPA could encourage such consultation, with positive outcomes for everyone.

Figure 1 View of 5 Blyth Road from Millennium Field – the view is similar from the Buss Creek footpath. The proposed building would be more dominant than the locally listed landmark, the Blyth Hotel – building at the far left of the photograph.



Figure 2 View of the site (to the left of the police station) from the Common Trust



Figure 3 Visual of Station Yard elevations on Blyth Road when redeveloped. Note the two story scale of the buildings next to Stanley Cottages, and the harmony of the fenestration.



Building 1 3d View 1



Building 1 3d View 2



Building 2 View 2



Building 1 3d View 3

Figure 4 Google Street view of Pier Avenue junction showing the visibility of the site and how the current design would dominate the streetscape at this key viewpoint. The green hoarding surrounds the fire station site being developed by Hastoe Housing Association.

