

20 November 2023

Isaac Stringer
Planning Officer
Babergh/Mid Suffolk District Councils
Endeavour House
Ipswich IP1 2BX

Dear Mr Stringer,

DC/23/0486 Householder Application - Erection of single-storey extension, alterations and the erection of new outbuilding and double garage

1 Fir Tree Cottages, Harkstead Road, Holbrook, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP9 2RF.

I am writing on behalf of the Suffolk Preservation Society regarding the proposed extension, alterations, new outbuilding and double garage at 1 Fir Tree Cottages, a small semi-detached cottage located within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB. The application site is located on, and visible from, the road linking Holbrook and Lower Holbrook and is visible from a public right of way to the west. Whilst SPS supports high quality contemporary design, the scale of the extension and the additional buildings on the site will appear incongruous in this sensitive landscape setting and the extension is disproportionately large in comparison to its host. 1 Fir Tree Cottages is one of a pair of modest late 19th century cottages conceivably built as agricultural workers' cottages. Their principal (east) elevation has a pleasing symmetry which the proposed extension will seriously unbalance. SPS notes that a separate application has been submitted by the same applicant for a much smaller and more sympathetic extension to 2 Fir Tree Cottages, to which we are not objecting (DC/23/04869).

Policy Context

Para. 176 of the NPPF states that the scale and extent of development within an AONB should be restricted. This is embodied in local policy, both in the saved policies CR02 (AONB Landscapes) and HS33 (residential extensions), and CN01 (design standards) which call for well-designed development that respects its location and its neighbours in terms of size and setting. The emerging Joint Local Plan at policies LP19 (Landscape), LP21 (AONB) and LP26 (Design and Residential Amenity) are all relevant in the assessment of this case.

The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB Management Plan makes clear that the statutory duty to conserve the natural beauty of the AONB, as set out in the CROW Act 2000, also relates to sustainable development, acknowledging that any development within the designated landscape should be carefully balanced against the competing demands of conserving and enhancing the

natural beauty of the AONB. The need for proper constraint within a designated landscape imposes legitimate limits on the degree and extent of development that should be permitted. The Holbrook Neighbourhood Plan (at referendum Nov 2023) similarly acknowledges the sensitive landscape within the parish. Its policy HNP01 seeks to limit development beyond the defined settlement boundaries and policy HNP05 stipulates that new design should reflect and enhance the quality of Holbrook's local distinctiveness and character, and should respect the scale, materials, form, function, and character of the existing and surrounding buildings in the area.

The proposal

The Design and Access statement states that the existing cottage has a floor area of 76m². The extension will see this area increase by nearly 2½ times to 181m². The application also includes proposals for a new outbuilding and double garage, which together represent a further 84m² of new development on the site. While it is noted that the proposed extension is single storey, the main east/west roof structure is higher than the eaves of the cottage and the nature of the ground plan and massing of the individual components of the extension make it visually dominant in comparison with its host.

The existing cottage, like its pair, is constructed from red brick, some of which has been painted or rendered over, with a roof of red pantiles. The extension is to be clad in vertical cedar boarding painted grey, with a slate roof and black-painted windows. The outbuilding and garage are to be finished with vertical metal cladding and a slate roof. The cladding and roofing materials are a significant departure from the local vernacular and will add to the development's visual dominance. Furthermore, the extent of glazing proposed on the west and south elevations of the extension will be prominent during the evening and winter months, particularly when the interior is lit. While the site is screened from the south and west in summertime by mature trees, the winter months will afford less screening and the landscape impact of the extension will be significantly increased. Dark skies are a key indicator of the special qualities of the AONB, and light pollution from all sources, including domestic properties, should be carefully restricted.

Conclusion

A very short section within the Design and Access statement (section 4.0) addresses the proposals' impact on the AONB and concludes that the impact will be low. The application is not supported by a separate landscape and visual impact assessment which, given the scale, design and location within a sensitive landscape, would be helpful to properly demonstrate the extent of the likely impacts.

On the basis of the information submitted, the SPS considers that the proposal will have a significant impact on the character of the landscape and the 19th century host cottage (and its pair). We urge that the application is resisted in its current form in favour of a more modest and sensitive scheme. I hope that you will find these comments helpful, and would ask that we are re-consulted on any forthcoming amendments.

Yours sincerely,

Anna Forrest

BA (Hons) MA FSA

Heritage and Research Officer

Ccs:

Ward Councillor

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Heritage Team

Holbrook Parish Council

Beverley McClean, Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB