

Planning Applications Committee  
11th June 2009  
Section B

<b>Agenda Number:</b>	B5
<b>Section/Area:</b>	Outer
<b>Ward:</b>	Crome
<b>Officer:</b>	Lee Cook
<b>Valid Date:</b>	24th March 2009
<b>Application Number:</b>	09/00249/F
<b>Site Address :</b>	Heartsease Lane, Norwich. NR7 9NT
<b>Proposal:</b>	Erection of replacement church building (temporary).
<b>Applicant:</b>	<b>Norwich Family Life Church</b>
<b>Agent:</b>	<b>Chaplin Farrant Ltd</b>

## THE SITE

The application site forms part of open land to the south of Heartsease Lane, this roadway forms part of the outer ring road. The site was previously occupied by a Church building sited adjacent to the roadway. The site has been enclosed and used for a number of years for community uses and now temporarily holds classroom and office facilities in a small group of portakabins on the eastern side of the site. The car park for the former church also remains on the northern part of the site.

The land in question also has various green spaces which are allocated in the Local Plan and the provision and appearance of these spaces links with other green spaces to the south and north of Heartsease Lane to form an open and attractive vista. The site also forms part of the approach and setting of Mousehold Heath to the south and west.

## PLANNING HISTORY

The site lies towards the top of Mousehold Heath and historically (in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>C) has been used for military purposes. The areas surrounding the site also historically formed part of gravel workings in this area. More recently the site was

used by the Gothic Social Club and areas of green space as now marked on the Local Plan reflect the areas of bowling green; rifle range and sports pitch on various parts of the site.

Application **4/1989/0859** for change of use from social club (Class D2) to a creche and community centre (Class D1) was approved in November 1989. This was followed by application **4/1991/0529** for the erection of church/community centre with associated access and parking which was refused by Committee in August 1991. The application was refused on grounds of visual impact and prominent building; poor landscape setting; design and materials; and lack of public access to/from adjacent areas. Members, however, accepted the principle of community use and encouraged further negotiation for an alternative scheme.

Application **4/1992/0105** for the erection of a revised church building/community centre with associated access and parking was approved by Committee in January 1994. The building had a smaller bulk and single storey elements surrounding a central hall. Application **4/2003/0155** for an amendment to the parking layout was approved in June 2003. Following construction and a period of occupation of the site the church was struck by lightning and burnt down. Following an approach to the Council for a means of reintroducing church activities on the site application **06/00323/F** for the temporary standing of portable classrooms and office building on site was granted temporary permission in May 2006. The permission expired on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2009 and, despite the buildings being shown on the layout for the proposed temporary church, no application for renewal has been submitted.

A meeting was held in August 2006 with representatives of the Church and their architect to discuss a scheme for redevelopment of the Heartsease site with new church facilities. A new meeting was held in May 2008 following the approach to Council some 2 years previous. In this interim period the Church had sought permission for a replacement building in the Broadland area and had obtained a grant of planning permission.

The Church has explained that they are involved in the community with voluntary care and local involvement as part of their ethos. The current pre-school facilities are popular and provide a useful local facility. They find it difficult to operate 2 sites and are now not willing to pursue development other than on the Heartsease site. The continuation of a community use on the site has not been questioned and previous Members have indicated they would like to see such provision. However, an earlier scheme was refused for a larger church due to the height, bulk and industrial design of the proposal. The Church has however come back to the City Council to explore the possibility of a larger replacement church and community facility on their Norwich site. The fundamental issues which required resolution were explained to them and include: scale of development; design; bulk; proximity to road; impact on green space; impact on the surrounding area (amenity and habitat); traffic impacts and assessment; travel plan; and links for pedestrians.

The Church prepared some additional information which together with their 3 alternative schemes, and with their agreement, these were presented to planning officers in June 2008. Several concerns were expressed about the extent and nature of redevelopment and that the above issues had not been adequately addressed.

The applicant appointed a firm of architects who met with the Head of Planning and Officers in January and February 2009. They have been advised that it would be difficult to accommodate a further temporary building on site and, as no commitment appears to be in place to build a permanent replacement in the short term, advice has also been given that an open ended temporary permission would also not be acceptable. The site appears to be too small for a large church building and further information has consistently been requested to address the issues identified above. The suggestion has also been made by Officers that a permanent building could be built in a phased manner to enable a managed and sustainable redevelopment which could be extended when funds became available.

## **THE PROPOSAL**

Erection of replacement church building (temporary).

## **CONSULTATIONS**

Advertised on site and in the press and nearby neighbouring uses notified.

**Neighbours:** 8 letters received: -

**4 supporting the scheme** expressing that: use will benefit the community including a wide range of groups and ages; the fire was a disaster for Heartsease; the facility is missed by local people; it provides for both physical and spiritual needs; the alternative journey to Drayton is difficult; the venue is open at lots of times for lots of events; this scheme will provide a smaller building; crime was lower in Heartsease when community facilities and clubs were provided on site; construction time will be short and will minimise inconvenience to local residents.

**1 expressing hope for expansion** of community services from the church into the Heathgate area and enhancement of community gardening.

**3 objecting to the scheme** expressing that: noise disturbance occurs from evening events (Friday afternoon/evening identified); the Church lacked concern for neighbours complaints; the Church is noisier than other faith congregations; noise meant residents were unable to use gardens or open windows in summertime; problems have arisen from youths who have visited the site and then causing vandalism and disturbance and undertaking theft on their way home; the Church should consider neighbours and be controlled to reduce problems; problems have gone since the Church was lost.

**Norwich Society:** Accepting the current problems of the Church as outlined in the application, the Society is fearful that to keep this building for other purposes after the permanent Church is built may be a temptation which must be resisted.

**Environment Agency:** Have no objection to the proposal but offer advice on surface water drainage, groundwater contamination, sustainable construction and energy efficiency measures which the developer should adhere to.

**Norfolk County Council:** Note proposal is for a temporary building to replace previous facilities and in circumstances do not wish to raise a highway objection but will leave for Council officers/engineers to provide any appropriate highway conditions.

**Norfolk Landscape Archaeology:** The development sits within a former prisoner of war camp and prior to this the site was used as a military training area. The Heath itself is of archaeological interest as containing prehistoric remains. Any areas of deposits not disturbed by the use of the site as a training area will, therefore, be well preserved. If planning permission is granted they ask that this is subject to a condition for a programme of archaeological work.

**Environmental Health:** Although this proposal is on an area of land historically used as a cavalry exercise/drill ground, the proposed use is not a sensitive one and the building is temporary and a site investigation will not be required at this time. Should any contamination be discovered during construction, information would be required on how this contamination is to be dealt with prior to further work being carried out however.

Potential nuisance from noise etc

- Dust control and work times are specifically mentioned, and the details of these issues can be discussed with the relevant contractors if necessary.
- The site is fairly remote from nearby residential premises, which is beneficial in reducing the likelihood of nuisance being caused during the construction phase and the likelihood of complaints associated with the functions of the church, including the ongoing use of plant and machinery etc.
- No special conditions are suggested in relation to these issues.

**Policy:**

The site has been in use for several years by the Norwich Family Life Church and although the location on the Outer Ring Road is not within an existing centre it is generally consistent with Local Plan policy AEC2. The main issue is the acceptability, in principle, of a temporary church development. Relocating the church back to this site could reduce the need to travel and a locally based place of worship would also tend to promote community cohesion.

- However, both these objectives could be secured by providing a permanent building on site which was of an appropriately high quality for this sensitive and prominent location adjoining Mousehold Heath.

- The development would not be appropriate to the setting, landscape character and environmental quality of Mousehold Heath, contrary to NE1, NE7 and HBE12.
- It would not enhance the townscape quality of key routes and approaches to the City as required by the emerging Joint Core Strategy policies, and RSS at policy ENV7.
- Without a firm programme or funding for a permanent church there is no guarantee that this temporary feature would not remain for a considerable length of time.

These issues would outweigh the community benefits of the proposal.

### **Conservation and Design:**

The siting of the building results in an awkward relationship with the rest of the site, and there is little in the way of landscaping, above the proposal relying partly on the planting of existing Leylandii, which sits uneasy with the traditional landscaping of Mousehold Heath. There may be scope for improving the design through looking at breaking the building down into two parts to address the issues of bulk and massing. In many ways this approach has been adopted on industrial estates where the building frontages contain offices/the rear contains the larger industrial spaces, and there is adequate landscaping around the building.

- The building is very large and there has been little attempt to reduce the overall impact of its bulk and scale through articulating principle elevations. The treatment of the front elevation is particularly disappointing.
- Apart from introducing a design feature to welcome car users, the rest of the building is poorly articulated and rather bland in appearance, particularly when viewed from the street.
- Concerned that any associated flues and vents etc are likely be in the front elevation of the building.
- It is suggested that any building has a more active frontage and appropriate landscaping and any entrance feature should ideally face/address the road rather than the car park.
- Although the application is for a 'temporary' building it is not temporary in the same respect as a portacabin which can be easily be moved on and off site, and has a degree of permanence and is capable of lasting decades rather than years.

**Transportation:** The structure is of some substance, and is therefore likely to be in use for a number of years. Therefore, in terms of the transport requirements, it should be an aim to provide these as required for a permanent structure, so far as that is possible. No objection in principle to the re-establishment of the Church in this location given the established use of the site for this purpose. In transport terms, however, it is not the best location for such a facility with a dispersed congregation.

- Access to the site and its associated visibility are acceptable
- Car parking on site is very generous but existing facilities should be retained pending review of the final scheme on site and potential expansion of facilities on this site in due course.

- There should be formal provision for cycle parking. Standards would suggest 27 spaces for 'customers' and 13 spaces for staff.
- A facility of this scale should have a Travel Plan covering both the congregation and the staff on site.
- As the facility is smaller than the previous building, it is not believed that a Transport Contribution is warranted for this application.

## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Relevant Policies:**

#### **National Planning Policy**

PPS1	Delivering Sustainable Development
PPS9	Biodiversity and Geological Conservation
PPG13	Transport
PPG16	Archaeology and Planning
PPS22	Renewable Energy

#### **East of England Plan Policies:**

SS1	Achieving Sustainable Development
SS2	Overall Spatial Strategy
ENG1	Carbon Dioxide Emissions and Energy Performance
ENV7	Quality in the Built Environment
NR1	Norwich Key Centre for Development and Change
WM6	Waste Management in Development

#### **City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan saved policies**

AEC2	Local Community Facilities - criteria
EP16	Water conservation and sustainable drainage systems
EP18	High standard of energy efficiency for new development
EP20	Sustainable use of Materials
EP22	Amenity
HBE12	High quality of design, with special attention to height, scale, massing and form of development
HBE19	Designs for Safety and Security including minimising crime
NE1	Protection of Environmental Assets from inappropriate development
NE7	Protection of locally designated sites of nature conservation interest
NE9	Landscaping of new development
SR3	Criteria for development on Urban Greenspace/PAROS
TRA6	Maximum parking standards
TRA7	Cycle storage
TRA8	Servicing standards
TRA11	Contributions for transport improvements in wider area
TRA12	Travel plans for employers and organisations in the City

**Principle of development**

The site has been used for several years by the Norwich Family Life Church and although the location on the Outer Ring Road is not within an existing centre it has accessibility to the nearby district shopping centre, community facilities in Heartsease and bus and cycle routes. Albeit that a good, safe crossing facility on the Ring Road is limited the location is generally consistent with Local Plan policy AEC2.

Relocating the church back to this site could reduce the need to travel given that the majority of the existing local congregation are also required to travel to the alternative site in Drayton. A locally based place of worship would also tend to promote community cohesion consistent with Corporate Policy aimed at social inclusion and full participation for all groups in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the city. However, both these objectives could be secured by providing a permanent building on site which was of an appropriately high quality for this sensitive and prominent location adjoining Mousehold Heath.

Although the application is for a 'temporary' building it is not temporary in the same respect as other forms of building which can be easily be moved on and off site, and it is considered that it will have a degree of permanence. Whilst permanent redevelopment is the eventual intention, there seems to be neither a firm timescale nor identified funding for the church replacement at present. An assessment of the likely position in five years time and availability of funds to build a final scheme is therefore required.

Moreover, the temporary offices and play area adjoining were given permission for a limited time on the understanding that the buildings would be removed and the urban greenspace on which they were sited would be reinstated once a permanent church was in place. The reasoning behind this application is appreciated and it is to be hoped that a permanent replacement for the church can be built either here or on an alternative location. Discussion has been ongoing but the Church have not invested in investigating or submitting a scheme for a permanent building which addresses areas of concern which have been identified in relation to the capacity of development on this site. The result of the proposal, however, would mean that not only would the existing portakabin buildings be required to remain for an indefinite further period but a much larger building would also be introduced onto a sensitive site with further loss of green space still with no firm proposals for a permanent replacement.

These issues would tend to outweigh the community benefits of the proposal. The applicant has belatedly offered the use of a Unilateral Undertaking to seek to ensure the removal of the building in five years; however, the document proposed would not adequately secure such an outcome and in this approach fails to meet the relevant tests for securing such an agreement. The outcome of this scheme would be piecemeal development incrementally adding to temporary buildings on this site to the detriment of the area.

## **Landscaping**

There is little in the way of landscaping, with the proposal relying partly on the planting screen on the eastern boundary of existing leylandii, a species which sits uneasy with the traditional landscaping of Mousehold Heath. Given the impact of the building on their root zones the future health of this planting is also not guaranteed to provide a softening of the building.

The surrounding area in question is very open to both sides of the road when travelling towards Mousehold Heath. The new Open Academy building has been negotiated to be set back from the road to reduce its bulk but also in layout has been designed to enable additional landscaping and enhancement of tree planting towards the junction with Salhouse Road. This provision will add to the setting of the Heath. The church application scheme now proposes some additional planting but this provision is not well thought out in terms of the character of the area and provided solely as an afterthought to obscure the building. This approach is not appropriate or viable in the long term and any new landscaping should be part of a comprehensive assessment of the redevelopment of site

## **Site layout**

There appears to be little reasoning behind the proposed location of the building, except possibly in order to allow future development in the remaining area. Consequently the siting of the building results in an awkward relationship with the rest of the site. The entrance is located at the side for convenient access to the car park, rather than addressing the road frontage to create a relationship with the setting and making access attractive for pedestrians or public transport users.

The internal layout of the building will also mean that any associated flues and vents etc are likely to be in the front elevation of the building. These issues gives emphasis for the need for an application for a permanent scheme which is appropriately designed and laid out on site, which has a more active frontage and is provided with appropriate and adequate long term landscaping around the building. Certainly in contemporary church building the public face of the building remains very important. Alternative approaches to design and construction should be explored which could be made sustainable, cost effective and achievable.

## **Design**

Although historically there has been a tradition of low cost churches and chapels using corrugated iron as the main material for construction – the so called ‘tin tabernacles’ - these were of relative modest domestic scale, and in the majority of cases included design features to create a more acceptable aesthetic. In contrast the proposed church here is much larger in its overall size and there has been little attempt to reduce the overall impact of its bulk and scale through articulating principle elevations. Apart from introducing a design feature to welcome car users, the rest of the building is poorly articulated and rather bland



in appearance, particularly when viewed from the street. Although changes have been suggested, the bulk and scale and the treatment of the front elevation are still particularly disappointing and remain industrial in nature.

This large, essentially industrial “shed” type structure, with a conspicuous illuminated feature on the building, would not be appropriate to the setting of Mousehold Heath even on a temporary basis, and would detract from its landscape character and environmental quality, contrary to NE1, NE7 and HBE12. Neither would it enhance the townscape quality of key routes and approaches to the City as required by the emerging Joint Core Strategy policies, nor meet the requirement for an overall improvement in design quality now required by RSS policy ENV7. Without a firm programme or funding for permanent replacement of the church there is no guarantee that this supposedly temporary feature would not remain for a considerable length of time.

The scheme also raises issues of sustainability in terms of building construction and re-use of materials. Even if deemed to be of energy-efficient construction the sustainable use of materials and availability of a scheme which will fit parts of the temporary structure and enable reuse of materials is questionable and further indicates the poorly thought out process of bringing this proposal forward.

### **Transport, parking and servicing**

There is no objection in principle to the re-establishment of the Church in this location given the established use of the site for this purpose. In transport terms, however, it is not the best location for a facility such as this with a dispersed congregation and raises issues of accessibility, with the proposal also appearing to appeal to a wider catchment than the local area. To assess the impact of development on this site long term, further information on numbers and uses and assessment of the impact on main ring road would also be required. Whilst the proposal is intended to be temporary, the structure is of some substance, and is therefore likely to be in use for a number of years. Therefore, in terms of the transport requirements, the scheme should aim to provide or identify these as required for a permanent structure, so far as that is possible. As the facility is smaller than the previous building, it is not believed that a Transport Contribution is warranted in this case. Access to the site and its associated visibility are acceptable for the scheme proposed.

The current car park was designed to accommodate a Church building in an urban location. The car park will not be dug up but as it is uncertain how future development will take place and as there could be an expansion of facilities on this site in due course further assessment is required on car parking and access arrangements. A facility of this scale should also have a Travel Plan covering both the congregation and the staff on site. There should be formal provision for cycle parking. Standards would suggest 27 spaces for ‘customers’ and 13 spaces for staff, although this customer requirement could be inadequate for this use and a Travel Plan would better inform the appropriate provision. No firm indication of bin storage or collection has been identified in the scheme.

## CONCLUSION

The site is very open to the surrounding area, has an attractive setting and links into the nearby Heath, is adjacent to a main transport route and has the potential for enhancing community uses and green space provision in this part of the City. The main issues arising from new development are the need to assess traffic impact, highway and pedestrian links; to ensure that an attractive and well designed building is provided; to limit the extent of any future use to the capacity of the site and adjacent networks; to ensure protection of green space on site (as defined in the Local Plan); and to ensure a sustainable and well thought out scheme is provided. Discussions with the Church have taken place for over a year now concerning the hope of bringing the church, in some form, back onto the site. In terms of bringing the use back this requires a managed approach to what is likely to be a phased redevelopment of the site. A scheme of phased development in relation to permission for a permanent building is likely to be the best solution for redevelopment of the site. This has the added benefit of identifying the limits of the site and provides opportunity to expand Church activities as and when funds become available.

The building as now proposed does not appear to be temporary and no assurance is given as to its removal in the future should permission be granted now. The proposal is for a large industrial style building squeezed onto one area of the site adjacent to the car park. The design is inappropriate for the area and in design and layout is unlikely to promote community activities on site. The building sits partly on designated green space and does not identify alternative provision for this loss. In addition the proposal does not seek to rationalise the use of the site or the use of portakabins on site. The temporary permission for the portakabins has now expired. The portakabin buildings were placed temporarily on site in 2006 to enable a continued presence in the area for the church and time to decide the way forward for relocation of church activities, either here or more permanently in Drayton, following the grant of outline planning permission by Broadland District Council.

The scheme does not provide details of a travel plan or assessment or provide archaeological information. Despite discussions no progress has been made in the permanent redevelopment of the site in a managed and sustainable way. The proposal therefore appears as further piecemeal development on site to the detriment of the surrounding area.

Therefore, on balance, it is considered that the community benefits that could be achieved by the reintroduction of the church on the site would be outweighed by the piecemeal nature of the development of the site and lack of a comprehensive overall scheme, the unsuitable and unsympathetic design of the building proposed and lack of an appropriate landscaping scheme for the proposal, the loss of urban green space associated with the development and the lack of a travel plan or the provision of information relating to the potential archaeological importance of the site.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION for the following reasons:

1. It is considered that the proposed development does not demonstrate that the building will not be required to be retained on site long term or provide sufficient information to assess impacts on the potential for future redevelopment of the site. The development would add to the number and site coverage of temporary buildings on site and in its inception, design and construction will not provide for a sustainable development of the site and would therefore result in a piecemeal development of the site out of character with the area to the detriment of the amenities and safety of the area. The development would therefore be contrary to PPS1, East of England Plan policy SS1 and City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004 saved policies EP20, NE7.
2. It is considered that the siting, scale and design of the building in relation to the character of the site, street frontage and surrounding area; the industrial form of the development; and the use of unsympathetic materials are unacceptable and that the development as proposed would have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the area and the setting of the adjoining Mousehold Heath. The design of the proposed building would not integrate successfully or harmonise within this environment and consequently the proposal would be out of keeping with its surroundings. The development would therefore be contrary to PPS1, East of England Plan policy ENV7 and City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004 saved policies HBE12, NE1.
3. It is considered that the proposal does not include an acceptable form of landscaping for the development and that the landscaping proposed as part of the scheme would not enhance the appearance and character of the built and natural environment of the site and its surroundings contrary to PPS1, PPS9 and the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan saved policies NE1, NE7, NE9.
4. It is considered that the development as proposed would result in the loss of further designated green space on this site and within this part of the City and the development does not provide an appropriate assessment of the rationalisation or replacement of green space on site or in the surrounding area. Therefore the development as proposed is considered to represent an unacceptable form of development on this restricted site which would be detrimental to the amenities and general character of the area contrary to PPS1, PPS9 and the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004 saved policy SR3.

5. The proposal does not provide a travel plan for future operation of the site or demonstrate that adequate cycle stores and refuse stores or future facilities for car parking can be provided on-site and that the operation of the site would not therefore create problems within the adjacent part of Norwich highway network and is therefore contrary to PPG13 and the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004 saved policies TRA7, TRA8 and TRA12.
6. The site is located within an area identified as having Archaeological Interest by Norfolk Landscape archaeology. The proposal does not include an appropriate assessment of the archaeological significance of the site and is therefore contrary to PPG16 and the City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan 2004 saved policy HBE4.



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Planning Application No - 09/00249/F

Site Address - Norwich Family Life Church, Heartsease Lane, Norwich

Scale - 1:2500



**NORWICH**  
City Council

DIRECTORATE OF REGENERATION  
AND DEVELOPMENT

