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| <b>Planning application no.</b>                | 23/00984/OUT  |
| <b>Site</b>                                    | Beckminster House, Birches Barn Road, WV3 7BJ   |
| <b>Proposal</b>                                | Change of use of Beckminster House from offices to residential apartments, and construction of new apartment block. |
| <b>Ward</b>                                    | Graiseley (Outline Application)   |
| <b>Applicant</b>                               | Mrs Anita Kaur, GSP Developments Limited.   |
| <b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b> | Councillor Steve Simkins, Leader of the Council   |
| <b>Accountable Director</b>                    | Richard Lawrence, Director of Regeneration  |
| <b>Originating service</b>                     | Planning  |
| <b>Accountable employee</b>                    | Stephen Alexander<br>Head of City Planning<br>stephen.alexander@wolverhampton.gov.uk                                |

## 1.0 Summary recommendation

1.1 Approve outline consent.

## 2.0 Application site

- 2.1 Beckminster House was constructed in and around 1845. It has been a family residence, a school for children with special needs, a base for the local Home Guard during World War II and a training facility and offices run by Wolverhampton City Council.
- 2.2 Over the years there have been several additions to the property, the main one being the construction of a large two storey linked wing in the 1970's comprising of additional offices and training / meeting rooms.
- 2.3 In 1992 Beckminster House, together with the boundary wall fronting Birches Barn Road, were Grade II listed for their historical interest and architectural merit.
- 2.4 The site is in a predominantly residential area with a varied mix of housing, the majority of which is traditional detached and semi-detached properties built between the 1930s and the 1950s. Adjacent to the site is a recent development comprising two and three

storey semi-detached and terraced townhouses.

### **3.0 Application details**

- 3.1 This is an outline application with all matters reserved. This means, if this outline application is approved, further details would be subject to a “reserved matters” application.
- 3.2 The full description of the proposed development is “Redevelopment of existing site to include demolition of previous two storey office extension and various outbuildings, access from Birches Barn Road only (no access from Holly Grove). Change of use of Beckminster House from offices to residential apartments, construction of new apartment block and associated hard and soft landscaping. Application is a re-submission based upon amended details”.
- 3.3 The proposals include the conversion of Beckminster House to form six apartments, the demolition of extensions and outbuildings mainly carried out in the 1970s and the construction of a new staggered two and three storey apartment block to the rear portion of the site behind Beckminster House to form 30 apartments. In total 36 apartments are proposed: ten one-bedroom, 25 two-bedroom and one three-bedroom. The layouts of the apartments and the design of the elevations would be subject to a reserved matters application.
- 3.4 The access to the site will be from Birches Barn Road only. An earlier outline planning application, including an access from Holly Grove, was withdrawn by the applicant on the 8 July 2023.
- 3.5 The Lodge was granted planning permission in Dec 2022 for a change of use to a children’s care home for up to four children.

### **4.0 Relevant policy documents**

- 4.1 National Planning Policy Framework. This encourages high quality design and “beautiful” buildings. Paragraph 16, Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment, encourages the preservation and enhancement of listed buildings.
- 4.2 The Development Plan: Wolverhampton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the Black Country Core Strategy (BCCS).
- 4.3 UDP policy D8 “Scale - Massing” aims to ensure that proposals make a positive contribution to an area through appropriate scale buildings that do not harm people's amenities.
- 4.4 UDP policy D9 “Appearance” encourages high quality architecture, individual expression and a variety of architectural style. It is proper to reinforce local distinctiveness, but if a design is of a sufficiently high standard it will help create urban richness and diversity.

4.5 UDP policies HE13 “Development Affecting a Listed Building” and HE14 “Alterations and Extensions to a Listed Building” aim to preserve and enhance the internal and external appearance of the listed building and any development proposals should contribute towards the conservation and enhancement of the listed building.

4.6 BCCS policy ENV3 “Design Quality” aims to deliver a successful urban renaissance through high quality design that stimulates economic, social and environmental benefits.

## **5.0 Publicity**

5.1 Six representations have been received objecting to the proposal. Whilst the sympathetic restoration of Beckminster House is generally welcomed the objections to the planning application are on the following grounds:

- The three storey height of the proposed residential block to the rear of the site, overdevelopment, out of character with the surrounding area, overbearing impact on neighbouring properties in Holly Grove and the Minster, the site is higher than Holly Grove, overdominance of car parking;
- Overlooking of neighbouring properties, loss privacy;
- Loss of existing trees;
- Impact on wildlife and natural habitats;
- Security concerns;
- Noise disturbance, proximity of parking areas to neighbouring properties;
- Light pollution;
- Lack of detail, including landscaping, elevations, ecology matters, lighting and CCTV;
- Concerns about parking and highway safety issues in the area;
- Disturbance and impacts during construction period.

## **6.0 Consultees**

6.1 Transportation:

- The B4161 Birches Barn Road is a classified road that can attract high volumes of traffic throughout the entire day, but especially at peak traffic hours. This section of the B4161 Birches Barn Road is protected from inappropriate parking by existing ‘no waiting at any time’ restrictions, apart from an existing layby located outside of the development site.
- The proposal to have an in and out vehicle access arrangement between 115 and 117 Birches Barn Road can be supported. This vehicle access will be able to

accommodate refuse collection vehicles as well as the smaller sized vans that are likely to be used to service the apartments. The proposal to have a secondary exit for cars only adjacent to 115 Birches Barn Road can also be supported. This vehicle access will help to distribute the vehicle trips over both accesses rather than concentrating the vehicle trips over a single access. This should help minimise the impact that the proposed development will have on Birches Barn Road. The vehicle access arrangements via Birches Barn Road that are mentioned above, will need to be clearly signed both on the Birches Barn Road side and from within the development site.

- Acknowledges that the former Holly Grove access is to be ‘decommissioned’ with the existing gates being removed and a new wall and railings being provided as part of this proposal.
- Parking availability on Birches Barn Road is very limited and is already very heavily subscribed. For the proposed development of 36 apartments, 1.5 spaces per apartment is required in this case. Therefore, the proposed provision of 57 general car parking spaces for the proposed 36 apartments can be supported because it meets the required standard.
- The proposed car parking layout for the entire development including the proposed provision of five disabled parking spaces appears acceptable and can be supported. The disabled parking spaces are located throughout the entire development and are located so that they provide the disabled users with easy access to the proposed entrances to the buildings. Seven electric vehicle charging points would be required.

6.2 Police – comprehensive and detailed security comments including detailed design and construction phase advice.

## **7.0 Legal implications**

7.1 The legal implications arising from this report are set out below [KR/06112023/B].

## **8.0 Appraisal**

8.1 This is an outline application with all matters reserved. It seeks to establish whether the proposal is acceptable in principle. Further details, including the design and appearance of the proposed new residential block, would be subject to a “reserved matters” application. The principle of the proposed residential use is acceptable in this predominantly residential area and the provision of new homes makes a contribution to meeting the housing needs of the city.

8.2 The proposed restoration and reuse of the vacant listed building is welcome. The proposal involves the retention of the listed walls at the front of the site, and the retention and enhancement of the large, landscaped area in front of the listed building. The demolition of the extensions and outbuildings is also welcome and will enhance the

setting of the listed building, along with new areas of landscaping, the retention of mature trees and the provision of communal amenity space.

- 8.3 The proposed layout of the site and the position of the new apartment building has been carefully considered. The building is set in the middle of the site, well away from the boundaries with the neighbouring properties. The three storey element is in the middle of the site with two storey elements either side. The setting of the new building is spacious and includes areas of amenity space, landscaping and parking. The relationship with the historic building is acceptable, creating a formal well-defined space between the buildings and the creation of generous spaces either side of both buildings. The proposal will respect and enhance the setting of the listed building.
- 8.4 Whilst the proposed three storey height of part of the proposed residential block will be taller than the prevailing heights of the surrounding development, it is a free standing building set well away from the neighbouring properties in landscaped grounds. Also, substantial parts of Beckminster House and some of the recently built new houses to the west are three storeys. It would be set at a higher level than the properties on Holly Grove so enhanced screening is proposed on the boundary. It will not appear overbearing or obtrusive from the neighbouring properties, and it will not harm the character and appearance of the area.
- 8.5 Some of the neighbouring properties have relatively short rear gardens and some of the outbuildings that provide some existing screening will be demolished. However, the proposed new buildings, particularly the three storey elements, are set well away from the boundaries and the detailed design of the layouts and elevations can mitigate overlooking to an acceptable level in this suburban location. There would not be a significant loss of privacy that would justify a reason for refusal in this case. The retention of parts of existing outbuilding walls that form common boundaries may be appropriate and can be dealt with by condition.
- 8.6 An earlier application that proposed an access from Grove Lane attracted many objections. That application was withdrawn by the applicant and the scheme redesigned. The revised scheme has an access from Birched Barn Road only. The proposed level of parking and the access arrangements are acceptable.
- 8.7 A preliminary ecology appraisal was submitted with the application; this included an extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey. The recommendations of the report including further surveys required and opportunities for enhancement can be conditioned. The proposal represents an opportunity to improve the biodiversity of the site and is acceptable in principle.
- 8.8 There are mature trees subject to tree preservation orders towards the boundaries that will be retained and protected during construction. There will be some minor tree loss, but this will be more than compensated by new planting and landscaping within the site. The tree screen on the boundary with Holly Grove will be enhanced. An Arboricultural Impact

Assessment and an Arboricultural Method Statement which details how damage to the trees could be prevented during construction can be required by condition.

- 8.9 The established office use included extensive parking areas and would have been subject to vehicle movements that would have caused some noise. The proposed residential use of the site would be less intense overall than the previous use, albeit vehicle movements would occur at any time of the day or night, as would be expected in a suburban residential area. The front doors and windows of the proposed new apartments would be well away from the neighbouring properties. The proposed use, number of apartments and proposed car parking layout would not lead to noise disturbance that would justify a reason for refusal.
- 8.10 The Police have provided comprehensive and detailed security comments including design and construction phase advice. A condition can require the submission of a “secure by design” scheme and secure boundaries with the adjoining residential gardens will be required by condition. A lighting scheme will be required that can be designed to avoid unacceptable light spillage into the neighbouring properties.
- 8.11 Many of the detailed concerns raised by the neighbours relate to disturbance and impacts during construction period. This is understandable as people would prefer not to live next to a development site, however, it is well established in planning law that potential disturbance and impacts during construction cannot justify a reason for refusal. Temporary disbenefits during construction are outweighed by the long term benefits of the scheme. The concerns of residents can be mitigated to a degree by the submission of an acceptable Construction Management Plan.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

- 9.1 This is a welcome application that would restore a listed building, retain and enhance its landscaped frontage and provide new homes in a spacious setting. The scheme would provide significant benefits that outweigh any potential disbenefits, including all the relevant material planning considerations raised by objectors, and there are no justifiable reasons to refuse the application. The proposal is acceptable in accordance with the Development Plan subject to the submission of further details and conditions to mitigate the impacts of the development.

## **10.0 Detail recommendation**

- 10.1 Approve outline consent subject to a detailed reserved matters application, the signing of a S106 agreement for 25% “Affordable Housing” (unless this would make the development unviable) and any necessary conditions to cover the following matters:
- Reserved matters including landscaping, scale, design, appearance and means of access;
  - Retention and restoration of listed building and front walls;
  - Landscaping;
  - Materials;

- Boundary treatments including retention of outbuilding walls where appropriate;
- No access from Holly Grove;
- Parking layout, including disabled parking, and associated signage;
- Bin and cycle storage;
- Electric vehicle charging points;
- Lighting;
- Security;
- Construction method statement;
- Ecology;
- Retention and protection of existing trees, and new tree planting;
- Renewable energy;
- Sustainable drainage.

