

# TONY THORPE ASSOCIATES

## CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

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Our ref:- AJT/SB/1079  
LPA ref:- F/2007/3103

## **DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

### **PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:-**

ERECTION OF ONE DETACHED THREE BEDROOM DWELLING.

### **SITE LOCATION:-**

Land adjoining 7, South Drive, Sonning, Berkshire, RG4 6GB.

### **PLANS AND DOCUMENTS:-**

1:1250 OS extract showing application site. 00085600.  
1:500 OS extract showing application site. AJT/01.  
1:100 Block Plan showing proposed dwelling and surroundings. 2008/7/P2.  
1:100 Composite plan showing proposed elevations and floor plans. 2008/7/P1.  
1:100 Topographical Survey. 7415-100-001.

Photographs of the site.

### **Introduction and summary:**

This statement has been prepared by Tony Thorpe Associates on behalf of the applicant Dr A.P. Cowling. The statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and supporting documents and that have been submitted with the application as listed above.

The purpose of this statement is to explain **"...the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the proposed development and how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with."** (Para 80. DCLG Circular 01/2006).

In essence the applicant wishes to erect one detached house on a brownfield site that was formerly the side garden of the adjoining residential property number 7 South Drive. The site lies within the defined settlement boundary and in connection with an earlier application the planning officer has confirmed that there is no objection in principle to residential development, subject to normal planning considerations.

A previous application for a zero-carbon house was refused permission in March 2008 (WBC Ref:- F/2007/3103, Hayley Bickerstaffe). The proposed eco-design was advanced in concept and its form followed its function to the extent that it appeared visually incongruous in an area characterised by more conservative house designs. The proposal was refused on grounds of detrimental siting and design together with potential overlooking and lack of CIL contributions.

The Case Officer's report concluded that the principle of infill development was acceptable, that the proposal provided sufficient usable garden space and that it would not have an overbearing or loss of light impact on adjoining properties. However the report also highlighted four principal concerns with the original design and layout, namely:-

- 1) Because of its rotation and orientation towards the sun the aspect of the proposed dwelling was no longer in line with the established building line and thus appeared visually incongruous.
- 2) The design of the proposed dwelling (in particular its extended ridge-to-floor solar panel roof) was bland, featureless and had no resonance or reference to locally distinctive design details.
- 3) The solar panels mounted on the front roof were visually dominant and overbearing. No attempt had been made to blend them into the overall appearance of the dwelling.
- 4) The extended front roof necessitated additional compensatory rear first-floor windows. These had a potential for overlooking the private rear amenity space of the adjoining dwelling 8, South Drive.

The response to these concerns has resulted in a number of improvements being made to the original scheme as follows:-

- 1) The building is now oriented directly in line with the established building line.
- 2) The solar panel roof has been abandoned and replaced by a conventional tiled hipped roof. Revised elevations mirror local design characteristics and feature brick banding and timber-framing with lime rendered infill.
- 3) The prominent solar panels have been deleted so there is no need to blend them into the overall design.
- 4) The use of conventional front windows allows a significant reduction in the need for rear first-floor windows. There are now only two rear first-floor windows. One is a central bathroom window the other is a bedroom window located furthest away from the boundary with number 8 to minimise any potential for overlooking.

The eco-credentials of the building remain unchanged and in terms of building fabric it continues to feature substantially thicker walls, additional insulation and detailed control of ventilation. The inclusion of a basement ensures that heat losses by conduction into the ground are minimised.

In our submission the proposal represents a moderate and proportionate infill building which causes no demonstrable harm to the amenities of adjoining properties and brings greater order to the established street scene. The proposal overcomes previous objections, complies with established local and national policy and now merits a favourable determination. Overlooking issues are addressed by the accompanying photographs. These show that the rear windows face only the garage, turning area and driveway of number 8 and that the view is fully screened by the substantial Laurel hedge and high fence.

## **1) Appraisal of Immediate and Wider Context**

### **Physical characteristics.**

The site has an irregular roughly triangular shape with an original area of some 0.057 hectares. It lies within the defined settlement on the north side of the main A4 Bath Road from which it is separated by a narrow, tree-lined service road known as South Drive which curves in an arc from north to north-east. The area is predominantly residential in character with moderate sized dwellings sited on conventional plots with an average density of some 10dph.

The principal aspect of the site is north-west to south-east. Immediately to the north is a two-storey dwelling known as number 8 South Drive. This property is separated from the application site by an access driveway bounded by a 2m close-boarded fence, behind which is a 3-4m wide dense evergreen Laurel hedge in the applicant's control (see appended photograph). The established hedge and trees screen views from the application site towards 8 South Drive. The view from the rear elevation of the proposed dwelling is of the garage roof and turning area of number 8; not the 'private rear amenity space' originally asserted by the Case Officer.

The principal ecological feature of the site is that it is an overgrown former side garden bounded by a significant Laurel hedge (to be retained). There are no landscape or archaeological features of any significance. The side garden contains a redundant garage, areas of hardstanding used for storage and is crossed by low fences. Access to the side garden and abandoned garage is via two in-out vehicular accesses linked by a curved driveway. Number 7 has its own independent access, side garage and parking area for three cars.

### **Social and economic characteristics.**

The social and economic development of the area has resulted in some larger plots, side gardens and long back gardens no longer being relevant to modern needs. Inevitably there has been pressure to sub-divide and make more efficient use of underused brownfield land by an increase in built density in line with local and national policy.

### **Local and National Planning Policy**

The site is located within the defined settlement boundary as designated under the Wokingham District Local Plan. Therefore the proposal accords with the infilling requirements of WOS2 and the exhortation to use brownfield land set out in WOS5. The proposal has been informed by WOS1, WOS3, WOS4, WOS9, WBE1, WLL3, WT6, WT7. Together with PPS1, PPS3, and the Sonning Parish Design Statement. The principle source of detailed design guidance is the Borough Design Guide 2007. We can confirm that the project evolved using this guidance and fully complies with its requirements. For example maximum rear garden length is now 16.5m.

Both local and national policy seeks to ensure the most efficient use of underused brownfield sites. Development in the area is predominantly two-storey development that sets a clear and unambiguous precedent for the development of the application site by a conventional two-storey frontage detached house.

The proposal is in sympathy with the appearance and character of the local environment and will be appropriate in terms of scale, mass, design, materials, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views. The ridge line accords with the precedent set by the adjoining two-storey dwelling number 7. Accordingly it is our submission that the proposal is in sympathy with the appearance and character of the local environment and is appropriate in terms of scale, mass, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views.

PPS3 (Housing) advocates a minimum density of 30 dwellings per hectare, providing this is in keeping with the pattern and character of development in the area. In this case the proposed density, taken with the original dwelling, is 35 dwelling per hectare which accords with minimum acceptable density, taking into account the pattern and character of local development. The proposed density is therefore supported by both local and national policy and fully complies with both the spirit and purpose of the local and national policies set out above.

### **Community and LPA pre-application involvement.**

A previous application for a zero-carbon house was refused permission in March 2008 (WBC Ref:- F/2007/3103, Hayley Bickerstaffe). The proposed eco-design was alleged to be visually incongruous in an area characterised by traditional post-war design. The proposal was refused on grounds of detrimental siting and design together with potential overlooking and lack of CIL contributions.

### **Evaluation of outcome and resultant modification to scheme**

Pre-application advice provided by the Case Officer's report has led to the evolution of the current redesigned scheme for one detached house. The four principal objections and our Architect's design response to them are set out above in the Introduction and Summary section.

### **Appropriateness of use**

This is an application for residential development on established residential 'brownfield' land within the defined settlement and therefore the use is deemed to be appropriate.

## **2) Identifying the Design Principles and Solutions**

### **Number of proposed units**

The number of proposed residential units is one.

### **Justification of number of units**

By applying the PPG3 criteria the original 0.057ha site can accommodate two to three dwellings. However the higher density would represent a significant increase compared to that in the immediate locality and would fail to preserve the existing development pattern and urban character. To comply with this requirement the layout mirrors as far as possible the pattern and character of adjoining development resulting in two dwellings in total on the original site with a density of some 35 dwellings per hectare.

The choice of two dwellings in total on the original site balances the competing aims of preserving the pattern and general amenity of the local built environment with national policy to make the most efficient use of underdeveloped land. This modest development will not place an unacceptable burden on neighbourhood services, neither does it extend the built up area or lead to 'town cramming'.

### **Distribution across the site**

Distribution follows the pattern set by adjoining property and complies with the established front and rear building lines whilst allowing an 8m set-back from the edge of the service road. The layout has the minimal effect on the amenity of neighbouring properties due to overlooking or loss of light.

### **Relationship to the site's surroundings.**

The immediate area is characterised by moderate sized dwellings sited on conventional plots in a mature, weel-treed setting. The proposed relationship with existing and proposed development offers the 'best fit' with the sites surroundings. The restrained scale of the proposed development together with the retention of reasonable space between buildings both reflects and relates well to surrounding adjoining development.

### **Accessibility for users to and between parts of the development.**

This is a compact development that maximises accessibility between constituent parts of the development commensurate with the need to protect privacy. General accessibility issues are dealt with in section 3) below.

### **Layout**

The external layout links in well with the existing building. In particular the two dwellings have the same orientation and adhere to the same front building line. Internally the layout is conventional with a ground floor living room linking the front and rear aspects, a kitchen/breakfast room and front hall and stairs. At first floor level are three bedrooms, one with en-suite and a shared bathroom. At basement level there are two storerooms lit by borrowed light to avoid the need for energy-consuming artificial light.

The existing detached garage is unattractive and has not been retained. Instead the layout provides for three parking spaces in the front garden over a permeable surface surrounded by a mixture of new planting and retained shrubs and trees. The existing low brick frontage wall with piers is retained to aid assimilation in the streetscene.

The layout of the proposed scheme is essentially secure by design with a private rear and side garden and a fully surveilled defensible frontage that includes front garden, parking area and side access. Satisfactory parking provision has been made for vehicles, for the parking of cycles and for charging facilities for the new generation of 'plug-in' vehicles.

### **Scale**

The scale of the proposal is a function of the available plot size, the need to ensure that the proposal matches the general character and massing of the existing dwelling (with which it will be read), and compliance with the space criteria set out in the WDC Borough Design Guide 2007. The ridge line matches that of the existing dwelling, the eaves line intentionally does not because the existing dwelling, number 7, utilises a curb roof with low eaves.

The scale and massing of the proposed additional dwelling ensures that the new building does not compete with the original building and that it is perceived as an equal in terms of scale, massing and appearance in the established streetscene.

### **Landscaping and Tree Protection**

This is a mature residential plot composed of overgrown grass and shrubs amongst hardstanding, fences and an old garage embraced by an overgrown apple tree. The only tree of any significance is the maple directly to the north of the proposed dwelling. It is rooted in the garden of the adjoining property number 8. The proposal will have no effect on the long-term health and stability of this tree. In particular no part of the development encroaches beneath its crown spread. The area under the crown spread will of course be protected during construction.

The existing overgrown laurel hedge that screens the site from number 8 South Drive will be retained and trimmed back to a more reasonable size commensurate with the need to retain its screening ability. The low apple tree growing over the roof of the detached concrete sectional garage will be removed along with a number of poorly-positioned conifers. Other soft 'Personal preference' internal landscaping adjoining the new dwellings will no doubt be carried out when the development is completed. A new group of conifers and cherry will be located in east corner of the plot to fill-in the old entrance gap.

### **Appearance**

The immediate area is characterised by moderate sized dwellings sited on conventional frontage plots in a mature well-treed setting. The essence of the proposed design is that it mirrors a number of attractive features used on nearby dwellings. The curb roof design of the adjoining dwelling was however not used because given the previous reason for refusal anything other than a hipped roof concept might prove too adventurous a design feature.

The front elevation features a gabled asymmetric projecting entrance bay with a first-floor timber frame infilled with lime render over a brick base divided by horizontal brick banding. The design of the principal bay is echoed by the frontage lucarne to bedroom 1. Facing brick is the predominant elevational material under a plain tiled roof with bonnet hips. A horizontal brick band at first floor level provides relief to the south west elevation which has no fenestration. As this is an eco-house there is no requirement for a chimney.

The proposal is in sympathy with the appearance and character of the local environment and will be appropriate in terms of scale, mass, design, materials, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views. The ridge line and front building line accord with the precedent set by the adjoining two-storey dwelling number 7.

Accordingly it is our submission that the proposal is in sympathy with the appearance and character of the local environment and appropriate in terms of appearance, scale, mass, layout and siting, both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views.

### **3) Access Principles and Solutions**

The existing property has three separate vehicular accesses on to South Drive. The southernmost is retained and will continue to provide for the existing side garage and 3-car hardstanding currently serving number 7. The remaining two accesses serve an in-out driveway giving access to the side garden and abandoned garage on which the proposed dwelling will be built. The central one of these accesses will be abandoned and the remaining access repositioned to allow easier admittance and internal manoeuvring. On site parking is provided to adopted standards and so far as we are aware the proposal raises no highway safety issues.

### **4) Compliance with Ecological and Climate Controls**

The site lies reasonably close to open spaces to the north and east with an existing well-developed network of public access. So far as we are aware on-site there are no habitats of protected species, no ponds or evidence of use by protected species therefore no specific mitigation is necessary. So far as we are aware the site does not lie in an area of archaeological potential. The site is well above the floodplain, is not contaminated or tipped or liable to subsidence due to underground workings.

We can confirm that the proposed development will incorporate on-site renewable energy and/or an efficient supply of heat, cooling and power in accord with the BREEAM/Ecohomes standard. Provision will be made for the charging of the new generation of 'plug-in' electric vehicles and equipment from renewable resources. Building materials will be obtained from sustainable sources.

### **5) Final Comments**

We have assessed the proposals full receiving context, including its location within the settlement, status as a brownfield site, physical, social and economic characteristics together with relevant local and national planning policy. We have demonstrated how we have undertaken pre-application consultation and through a rigorous assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process have used the result to inform the final design.

Residential use by means of two dwelling (one new, one retained) is the most appropriate form and density of development and can be fully supported by neighbourhood services. All private spaces are adaptable, secure and inviting and both the building and its constituent parts will sit comfortably with their surroundings.

The development relates well in visual terms to its surroundings. The development will be safe and easy for everyone to move around and makes the most of its links to the surrounding movement network.

For these reasons the proposal merits support and we look forward to a favourable determination.

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