

**New Blockley Community Shop & Café**

**Planning Application & Conservation Area Consent  
Application submitted by Blockley Cooperative Association Ltd (BCA)  
Youell garage site, Bell Lane, Blockley, Gloucestershire**

**Planning Statement  
May 2011**

**Blockley Cooperative Association Ltd (BCA)  
The Old Coach House  
Post Office Square  
Blockley  
Gloucestershire GL56 9BB**

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 A meeting was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 to discuss a site for the new Blockley Community Shop & Café and at which Iain Smith Conservation Officer CDC, Martin Perks Development Officer CDC, Alan Thornton of the Blockley Shop Committee, Geoff Thompson Architect of Leslie Burton Limited, and Nigel Moor Planning Advisor were present.
- 1.2 At the meeting Geoff Thompson outlined the background and nature of the proposals. Alan Thornton amplified the business justification and the problems of the existing building. Iain Smith made it clear at the outset that he could not support a new building of any description on the proposed site because of its impact on views of the Church and the Conservation Area generally. He referred to the Listed Buildings & Conservation Area Act 1990 and the obligations that this placed on CDC. Nigel Moor pointed out that nonetheless Conservation Area status was not a bar to new development, and Iain Smith agreed.

The discussion then revolved around alternative sites and Iain Smith explained the need to set out clearly an exhaustive list of alternative sites within the village using a number of pre-determined criteria. Martin Perks confirmed that there was no policy objection to a new community shop, but the issues were mainly to do with the impact on the Conservation Area.

The possibility of demolishing the existing bowls pavilion and constructing a new building on the south western side of the bowls green incorporating a new pavilion and a new village shop was suggested by the officers and discussed. Iain Smith explained that this could receive his support because of the visual enhancement that this could achieve within the Conservation Area. Alan Thornton undertook to pursue this as well as any other sites that might be feasible.

In conclusion there was CDC officer support for the principle of a new community shop within the village, but the impact on the views of the Church and the Conservation Area generally were the over-riding issues that would influence the planning decision.

- 1.3 Subsequently Nigel Moor wrote to Martin Perks on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 advising as to progress on alternative sites. Blockley Cooperative Association Ltd (BCA) had considered a range of alternative sites and each had a range of strengths and weaknesses but none were viable options. In particular there was a resounding rejection by the Bowls Club of the option suggested by Mr. Smith. BCA had come to the firm conclusion that the demolition of the existing lavatory block and its replacement by a well designed building to include a new shop and replacement toilets would answer all of the operational needs of the community business, and represented the optimum solution from environmental and community perspectives.
- 1.4 On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010 Martin Perks replied to Nigel Moor. Firstly he reiterated that CDC was sympathetic to the desire of the Shop Committee to provide new facilities for the village. Notwithstanding this, CDC obviously had a statutory duty to seek to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area and the setting of nearby listed buildings. In this particular instance the proposed site was located in one of the most sensitive locations in the village. The redevelopment of the site would potentially have implications for the setting of the adjacent church and listed buildings and also the well-being of a number of attractive trees. There were also a number of walls and hedges in the vicinity of the site that were identified in the Blockley Conservation Area Statement as being of importance. In the light of the sensitivity of the site in heritage terms CDC would have strong reservations about the suitability of the site for redevelopment with a larger building.

If the redevelopment of the bowls club was not possible, Martin Perks recommended that BCA considered siting a new building on land adjacent to the primary school/ St George's Hall on Park Road. Permission had previously been granted for a heritage centre on the site. It did not appear that this development would proceed, thereby leaving a large development space with good parking and accessibility to local residents. It also had fewer constraints than the currently proposed site and could provide space to expand in the longer term. Martin Perks went on to say that if BCA proceeded with an application for the redevelopment of the toilet site, BCA would need to provide a strong heritage analysis/ justification in accordance with PPS5. CDC would also wish to see arboricultural and ecological reports/

surveys submitted with the application, and would recommend that BCA contacted the Council's Tree Officer to establish whether the development of the site would be acceptable from an arboricultural perspective. Furthermore, contact should be made with Gloucestershire County Council to establish whether an archaeological investigation would be required.

1.5 Subsequently Nigel Moor replied on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010, apologising for the delay in responding, but he had wanted to wait until firm instructions had been given to the architects and a programme had been agreed. This had now been done. The Committee had examined a range of alternative sites as suggested, but for a series of conservation, planning, commercial and property related criteria, the site shown to Martin Perks remained the preferred site and the others had been firmly ruled out. BCA would include in the planning application a full report setting out this examination of alternative sites. BCA noted the various studies identified that should accompany their application, and these were in hand. The toilets were owned by CDC, and alternative facilities would be provided in the new shop and café. BCA did not propose to explore this issue with CDC at the moment, as it would be premature in advance of the grant of planning permission and conservation area consent. Subsequently shortly before the applications were submitted, BCA made contact with the property section at CDC and a positive response was forthcoming and negotiations are underway.

1.6 On 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010 Martin Perks replied to Nigel Moor and reiterated his previous concerns about the suitability of the site for the proposed development. In his view the area around the site was one of the most sensitive locations in the village in both aesthetic and heritage terms, and any development of the site would undoubtedly have implications for the setting of the church, nearby listed buildings, Blockley Conservation Area and the well-being of adjacent trees. Martin Perks said that he would have significant concerns about any development that increased the height, mass or scale of the existing building.

Notwithstanding the above, Martin Perks said that if BCA wished to pursue an application they would need to provide a detailed Design and Access Statement including a heritage assessment in accordance with PPS5. BCA should speak to Matthew Reid at CDC regarding the arboricultural

implications of development, who would be able to advise further on the level of information required. It was likely that an arboricultural survey, arboricultural method statement, root and tree protection plans in accordance with BS5837 would need to be submitted. Charles Parry at Gloucestershire County Council should be able to provide advice on any potential archaeological issues. Details of the site selection process should also be submitted. It should incorporate details of other sites that have been considered and the reasons for their exclusion. Subsequently on the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2011 representatives of BCA met Justin Ayton English Heritage Inspector on site in order to provide an informal background to the BCA application. Cotswold District Council Officers Ian Smith and Martin Perks were also in attendance.

1.7 In the light of the advice obtained from CDC the following documents are submitted in support of the application in addition to the application forms and plans:

- i) Design and Access Statement
- ii) Examination of Alternative Sites
- iii) Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey
- iv) Transport Statement
- v) Flood Risk Assessment
- vi) Heritage and Townscape Assessment
- vii) Blockley Village Retail Assessment
- viii) Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
- ix) The Financial Imperative For New Premises
- x) Tree Report & Arboricultural Method Statement
- xi) Landscape Impact Assessment
- xii) BCA Communications Strategy

Summarising these reports we conclude as follows:

## **2.0 Design & Access**

- 2.1 The objective of the architect has been to design a contemporary high quality low key building which nonetheless draws its inspiration from the heritage setting of its location, and pays respect to the advice contained in the Cotswold Design Guide. The building will be highly insulated by using the latest technologies for heating and ventilation together with recycling of water, air and where possible materials used in the build. The shop and café will be an innovative, eco friendly contemporary building and provide a positive new element in the Conservation Area. The palette of materials, the scale, siting and build quality will provide a visual highlight to the locality.
- 2.2 Pedestrian access is provided from Bell Lane and delivery vehicles will access in a manner similar to that at the existing shop. The level site and the generous circulation areas ensure that the building can cater for the access requirements of the disabled.

### **3.0 Examination of Alternative Sites**

- 3.1 A range of nine sites has been examined, and for a variety of reasons eight of these have been rejected. These are fully explained in our report. The preferred site also involves the purchase of the toilet block from CDC. Plans for the new shop and café show that alternative public toilets will be made available in the new premises. Although terms have yet to be agreed, demolition of the toilet block and its replacement by modern toilets, including disabled access, will not only benefit Blockley residents and visitors, but also show reduced maintenance costs for CDC.

### **4.0 Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey**

- 4.1 The site comprises a number of features, namely a building, dry stone walls and a tree which have some potential to be used by roosting bats. All UK species of bat are protected as are their roost sites, hence it is recommended that further surveys for bats are undertaken prior to the demolition of the building, the removal of the apple tree or the removal of sections of dry stone wall. This survey should include a more detailed survey of the building.

Following the results of that assessment, bat activity surveys may need to be undertaken in the summer months (May to August) to assess the use of the site by bats and the possibility that bats (particularly crevice roosting species) could be utilising features on the site.

- 4.2 There is the potential for breeding birds to be present in the shrubs and trees present on the site or in gaps in dry stone walls. Any works that affect the walls, shrub area or the trees should ideally be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (March to August inclusive) or if this is not possible, these features should be checked first by a competent ecologist before it is removed.
  
- 4.3 There is a small pond on the site that has some potential for amphibians, and the dry stone walls surrounding the site provide good refuge for amphibians. Widespread species of amphibian such as common frog, common toad and smooth newt are protected under legislation from sale only. However should these species be encountered during the development, a rescue programme should be implemented. If sections of dry stone wall are to be removed, this should be done by hand and any amphibians rescued, and either released on a suitable safe nearby site (during the period February to October) or placed within a purpose built hibernaculum (stones removed from the dry stone wall can be used) in an undisturbed corner of the site. If the pond is to be in-filled, then this work should ideally be timed for the period August to January, otherwise the pond should be netted before infilling or draining, and any amphibian larvae caught or eggs found should be placed in a bucket of the pond water and transferred to the closest available pond.
  
- 4.4 If trees are to be retained on site, protection measures will be required to protect both the above ground extent of the tree and its root protection zone. Canopies of trees growing close to the site boundary in the churchyard and the adjacent private garden may need to be cut back to the site boundary to reduce the risk of accidental damage by plant, and measures to protect the root zones of these trees will also have to be agreed with the council's arborist.

## **5.0 Transport Statement**

- 5.1 Blockley village is compact and nearly all of the population live within less than one kilometre of the shop. It is expected that most shoppers will come on foot. The hilly terrain will discourage many people from cycling although there may be some demand from people touring the area. Because of the low demand, short duration of stay and the low risk of theft, there appears to be no need for formal cycle parking facilities, however these could be provided if required by the local highway authority.
- 5.2 It is not expected that many shoppers will travel by public transport but the nearest bus stop is about 150 metres away.
- 5.3 There is parking for about seven cars in front of the existing and proposed shop, which is consistent with adopted parking standards. This appears adequate for the existing shop and no major increase in customer numbers is expected. Although manoeuvring space is limited, traffic levels are low and there are no grounds to expect any additional traffic problems in the vicinity.
- 5.4 The shop offers a valuable local service in an area where providing access to food shops is designated a priority for action. In this respect it is fully compliant with the Local Transport Plan Accessibility Strategy, Gloucestershire's First's Food Vision, the Cotswold Sustainable Community Strategy and the Cotswold District Local Plan. By offering local facilities, it reduces the need for travel to other towns or villages and hence the burden on providing subsidised transport.
- 5.5 It is concluded that transport arrangements for the proposed relocated shop are adequate and do not constitute grounds for refusing planning permission.

## **6.0 Flood Risk Assessment**

- 6.1 The site currently consists of a small building and a soft landscaped area, and the proposal is to develop it into a village cooperative shop and café. The Environment Agency's indicative flood map shows that the site has a low probability of fluvial flooding as it lies in Zone 1. From published geological mapping the use of infiltration techniques to BRE365 are precluded.
- 6.2 The development site is brownfield and at 180 sq m very small. It is considered that the increase in runoff from the proposed development is negligible, and trying to restrict the flows to the current levels would be impractical. Hence it is proposed to use the run off from the roof to feed the root systems of the trees below the raft section of the building.
- 6.3 This PPS25 compliant FRA has considered the impact of the proposed development on flooding within and outside the site boundaries and found that the proposals for the site will not adversely affect its future occupants or downstream areas. Based on the above factors, it is considered that there are no reasons why the development should not proceed from a flood risk basis.

## **7.0 Heritage and Townscape Assessment**

- 7.1 The scale, proportion and positioning of the proposed shop and café in relation to the street and other buildings respects the character of its immediate area. The high quality, low-key contemporary architectural response is appropriate to locate the building within the 21<sup>st</sup> century whilst reflecting key elements of Blockley architecture.
- 7.2 The building contributes to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and forms a positive new element in the setting of the surrounding listed buildings.
- 7.3 The proposals comply with both the policy set out in PPS5 to protect the significance of heritage assets and local plan policies to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

## **8.0 Blockley Village Retail Assessment**

- 8.1 National and local policy supports the provision of appropriate scale local shopping facilities in villages, and policies seek to protect local shops. Improvements to local shopping provision in villages is encouraged.
- 8.2 The existing village shop is an important facility both attracting local residents and catering for tourist visitors. However its market share of convenience goods expenditure within the local catchment area is relatively small, and there is significant potential to increase this market share. The proposed enlarged replacement shop will result in a modest increase in the village's market share, and this increase will bring sustainability benefits in terms of reduced car travel.
- 8.3 If the village shop closes and is not replaced then this will have a significant adverse impact. It will undermine local residents' access to vital day to day shopping facilities and will result in longer top-up shopping trips to surrounding settlements.
- 8.4 If the village shop is improved it will reduce car mileages as well as improving choice and the range of goods available locally. The affect of not replacing the shop will be a significant increase in overall car mileage.
- 8.5 The increase in shop size proposed is modest and is appropriate in terms of use, size, scale and function; it is highly consistent with national and local planning policy; it will safeguard and enhance the village's viability and help meet the needs of the local community.
- 8.6 Overall, it is a particularly sustainable project in terms of providing for the day to day needs of residents/ visitors, maintaining a focus within the village and saving unnecessary travel by car.

## **9.0 Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment**

- 9.1 This assessment has been carried out following a brief provided by the County Archaeological Service. Only two findspots of prehistoric flints are recorded within the study area, and there is no evidence of Roman activity. There is thus a low potential for currently unrecorded archaeological remains of these periods within the site.
- 9.2 Saxon inhumations are recorded 70 metres south-west of the site, suggesting that a separate burial area existed that pre-dated the later churchyard. There is no further evidence for earlier medieval settlement, and no evidence for Saxon burials to extend towards the site.
- 9.3 The site was located within the medieval core of the village of Blockley within close proximity to the church and the Manor House that lie to the south. The site is adjacent to the churchyard and church, and there is no evidence that it was ever part of the church grounds. Maps from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards indicate that the churchyard boundary was well established at an early date, and field-name evidence suggests the site formed part of the lands of the nearby mill, rather than a connection with the church. No buildings are depicted within the site on the historic maps.
- 9.4 A leat running to the mill pond to the east of the site is recorded on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps as running through the site. By 1902 there is no evidence of the leat on historic maps, and it appears to have been infilled and diverted to the culverted course to the north. Any remains of the course of the former leat are likely to comprise a heritage asset of archaeological interest of negligible significance.
- 9.5 There is one standing building within the site, the public conveniences, first recorded on aerial photographs of 1972. This building is not considered to comprise a heritage asset.
- 9.6 The construction of the public conveniences in the early 1970s is likely to have had an impact upon any currently unrecorded archaeological remains in that location. It is also likely that adjacent areas were landscaped at the same time, which may also have had an impact.

9.7 On March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 the desk – based assessment was supplied to Mr Charles Parry Senior Archaeological Officer for Gloucestershire County Council who notwithstanding the contents of the assessment, insisted on the excavation of a single trench in the site, in order to provide further information as to the archaeological significance of the site. Intrusive investigations on the site are hampered by root protection areas, the presence of dry stone walls without foundations, and the presence of a concrete pond and tree stumps. Mr Parry has been advised that it is possible to excavate a single test pit within the impact area of the new development and he has agreed that this would be adequate to give an advance view of the archaeological potential of the site. The work will be carried out in the immediate future and the resultant report will be submitted as further information in support of the application.

## **10.0 The Financial Imperative For New Premises**

10.1 This document shows that a new enlarged store can increase its share of the convenience goods expenditure in Blockley's local catchment area, and thus safeguard an important local facility.

## **11.0 Tree Report & Arboricultural Method Statement and Landscape Impact Assessment**

11.1 An arboricultural survey has been carried out which has informed the Landscape Impact Assessment.

11.2 The Landscape Impact Assessment finds that , notwithstanding the sensitivity of the location, it is only visible from relatively few public viewpoints. In most instances the trees along the site's southern boundary with the churchyard play a major visual screening role. Key to the success of the proposed development will be the retention of the trees on the southern boundary of the site and the assessment sets out the basis for this retention. Existing stone walls will be repaired, relocated and or incorporated into the new building. When viewed as a package these proposals are in line with the

objectives of the Blockley Conservation Area Statement which provides guidance on how the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of Blockley Conservation Area can be achieved.

## **12.0 BCA Communications Strategy**

12.1 Through publicity material in the shop and café, its web site on the internet, its newsletter and a well-attended public meeting, BCA has encouraged a wide and extensive discussion of its proposals. Through an on-line petition web site and a petition in the shop and café, BCA has provided the means by which people can express their support for these proposals. These opportunities will remain available during the progress of the planning application towards determination, but already some 55% of voters in Blockley ward support the proposals. This is in line with the proposals in the Localism Bill, and we believe it is one of the first examples where the principles of the new legislation have been tested. Together with support from Blockley Parish outside the ward, together with visitors and tourists and a wide range of organisations within the parish including the Blockley Parish Council and the Blockley with Aston Magna PCC, there is overwhelming support for the scheme. It is also in accord with the Parish Plan. The Blockley Parish Plan 2010 sought the views of respondents on retail business in the village, and the results indicated that 78 wanted an increase, 69 stay the same and none sought a decrease.

12.2 The Blockley with Aston Magna Parochial Church Council, by letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> March 2011 to the BCA, has indicated that the PCC is unanimously in favour of the proposals for a new shop and café. The PCC finds that the views of the Church through the entrance gates will not be in any way obstructed and points out that the new facility will contribute greatly to that spirit of local solidarity and co-operation that the Church seeks to foster. In addition the PCC points out that old people and those without private transport cannot

manage without such an amenity. It is envisaged that other organisations within the village community will register their support once the planning application is lodged with Cotswold District Council.