

Parish:	Dersingham	
Proposal:	Retrospective Change of Use from Hotel to Funeral Directors at ground floor and Residential Flat at first floor.	
Location:	Ashdene House Bed & Breakfast 60 Hunstanton Road Dersingham King's Lynn	
Applicant:	Thornalley Funeral Services	
Case No:	22/00534/F (Full Application)	
Case Officer:	Connor Smalls	Date for Determination: 17 June 2022 Extension of Time Expiry Date: 20 July 2022

Reason for Referral to Planning Committee – Called in by Councillor Collingham

Neighbourhood Plan: No

Case Summary

The application site consists of Ashdene House and the associated plot, a former Bed and Breakfast in the centre of Dersingham. This is a prominent corner plot in the centre of the village at the junction with Chapel Road, Hunstanton Road and Station Road. The site is outside, but on the edge of the Conservation Area. The site is located within the development boundary of Dersingham which is a Key Rural Service Centre as defined by Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2011.

The proposal seeks retrospective permission for a Funeral Directors at ground floor, residential apartment at first floor and minor alterations and additions to the fabric of the building and associated parking area and landscaping.

Key Issues

- Principle of Development
- Form and Character
- Impact on Neighbouring Amenity
- Highway safety and parking
- Any other material considerations

Recommendation

APPROVE

THE APPLICATION

This application is located within the development boundary of Dersingham, a Key Rural Service Centre as detailed in Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2011. Consisting of Ashdene House and its plot, the site is located on a prominent corner plot at a key junction in the village which is currently a mix of commercial and residential uses with the Conservation Area. The main building faces onto Hunstanton Road with a notable side elevation and access facing onto Chapel Road. The plot is set with attractive planting to the front alongside ample planting throughout the plot. Parking is located to the rear and side of the main building within the plot. Located within the centre of the village, neighbouring residential properties are located to the east and south boundaries.

The proposal is for retrospective permission for the use of the ground floor as a Funeral Directors and a residential flat at first floor. Minor alterations have been made to the fabric of the main building however these are limited and include the alterations and infilling of openings. Alongside this, minor additions are proposed including an area of fencing to the rear as well as an increased car parking area.

SUPPORTING CASE Taken from supporting public comments from the applicants:

Having carefully read through all the comments posted in relation to our application to open a Funeral Home in Dersingham, we feel we would like to address some of the points raised by answering honestly and truthfully. It is not our intention to cause upset or distress to anyone, this really is the last thing we would wish to do.

John Lincoln closed his business on 31st December 2021 with only about 4 weeks' notice and even though we were already conducting funerals from Dersingham and surrounding areas, we are now doing even more which is putting great pressure on our funeral home in King's Lynn. We approached the Lincoln family with an offer to buy their existing premises, but they weren't willing to sell at that time as they were intending to develop the property.

Funeral Directors are situated in residential areas all over the country, a few local examples of this would include Heacham, Hunstanton, King's Lynn and Wisbech and further afield at Swaffham, Dereham and Norwich, all of which are on main roads in residential areas and many without their own private car parks. Our own funeral home in King's Lynn is not on an industrial estate as mentioned in a comment below, but is located on Austin Street, a residential area with flats across the road and houses just a few yards away from our car park.

Our wish is to provide Dersingham with a local Funeral Director where loved ones can rest locally whilst waiting for their funeral, Ashdene House gives us an excellent opportunity to provide this service. We will not be changing the appearance of the front of the property, and we have already screened the back entrance to prevent families and neighbours observing funeral cars being loaded and unloaded. The site is on a main road, and easily accessible with a large private car park meaning no on-road parking. As this property has been a commercial building for over 140 years, it's very possible a business could trade from that premises which would have considerably more traffic and noise, i.e. a restaurant. A Funeral Home is a quiet and respectable place, and this is exactly what our business will be.

It has also been mentioned in a comment below that there is a concern that the village will lose a B&B. We have looked into this, and we know of 2 hotels/pubs and 5 B&B's within Dersingham alone.

Ashdene House was a seven-bedroom bed and breakfast establishment. The very nature of this business would see guests arriving at any time of the day or night and not always quietly, vehicle engines running and doors banging. A Funeral Home will involve none of this.

We really would welcome any person to take a walk into our car park to see for themselves how the site is screened. This has been done sensitively and discreetly to ensure that no offence is caused to anyone, not even our closest neighbours. If our neighbour against our carpark wishes for a hedge to be planted next to our fence, then we are willing to do this.

Some of the negative comments are saying the Funeral Home is located in the wrong place. Speaking to other business owners in the village of Dersingham and many residents, they have all said what a perfect location we have chosen for a funeral home, centrally in the village and on the main road with easy access for pedestrians and plenty of parking.

As mentioned in previous comments, many Funeral Homes are located in residential areas. For example King's Lynn, Hunstanton, Heacham, Fakenham, Wisbech, Swaffham and Dereham are ALL in residential areas.

It has been mentioned about losing a Bed & Breakfast business in the area. Ashdene House was for sale for quite some time as no one could see a future in taking on this business (please read comment mentioned below 14th May for reasons why).

Many comments have been made about the traffic. I have been to Ashdene House numerous times since January and have not witnessed any more than 3/4 cars at any one time waiting for the traffic lights to change to green (mostly less). Surely that is normal to wait at red traffic lights! The traffic movement to and from Ashdene House, especially after working hours, will be far less than when it was a guest house.

There is a lot less traffic parked in the vicinity now than would have been when the butchers shop was operating next door.

The resident who owns the house and one holiday let at the rear of the property is screened by a high fence and trees. The area where the hearse will be loaded is screened by another tasteful screen. Can I refer you to our last comment from Thornalley Funeral Services on the 11th May 2022. If anyone would like to have a look at the layout of the screening of the external premises please feel free to look for yourselves.

With reference to the comment placed on the 13th May about odours/noise and extractor fans, I can confirm we have no intention to put a commercial extractor fan anywhere on the property as there are no odours to emit.

Regarding bin collection, of course there will be a bin collection as there was when it was a guest house.

PLANNING HISTORY

N/A

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

Parish Council: OBJECT:

Dersingham Parish Council wishes to object to the above application. The Council feels that to put a funeral home in a residential area in the heart of the village is not a good location. This will impact on the residents living close by and there is a holiday home next door. The Council is concerned regarding the loss of a long-standing bed and breakfast establishment in the village and as such a loss of tourism which will affect the village economy.

Highways Authority: NO OBJECTION:

A condition is recommended and would be attached to any approval.

Arboricultural Officer: NO OBJECTION

Community Safety and Neighbourhood Nuisance (CSNN): NO OBJECTION

Following the submission of further information CSNN raise no objection.

I have measured the distance from the external chiller unit to the site boundary on Uniform. This is in the region of 7.20 metres. Given the close boarded fence and additional separation distance of around 5.88 metres to the adjacent dwelling, and noting the noise level of the unit at 10 metres of 30 dB(A), I have no concerns over this.

The detailed information in respect of use of the building has satisfied me that all reasonable steps will be taken to limit noise impacts on neighbours. I no longer recommend re-surfacing the driveway. Lighting would appear to be suitable – should the applicants decide additional lighting is required in the future, we recommend this is angled down or of a style which does not throw light outwards.

Conservation Officer: NO OBJECTION:

No conservation objections. Joinery should be conditioned, especially the door to the fire escape. The window opening proposed for blocking up to the south elevation is modern, but recessed bricking and an arch over will not cause further harm. Sample panel of brickwork should be conditioned, given the blocking of this window and the window to the north gable which is historic.

REPRESENTATIONS

SIXTY FIVE public **SUPPORT** comments (not including two support comments from the applicants) regarding:

- Central location, providing an essential service for the village and wider area.
- “High quality, professional business”.
- Good use of prominent building.
- Little change to the outside, the business will be conducted discreetly to the rear and is screened by fencing.
- Not unusual to have this type of business in the centre of a community.
- No neighbouring impacts.
- Village has lost a funeral directors recently.
- Less traffic than previous B&B use.

TWENTY TWO public **OBJECTION** comments regarding:

- The retrospective nature of the application.
- Significant business operation and the nature of funeral directors within a residential area.
- Waste of a prominent building that should remain a Bed & Breakfast.
- Location in the centre of the village, opposite playing area and field.
- Loss of an important asset in village regarding the Bed & Breakfast use.
- Potential detrimental impact on neighbouring holiday let business.
- Lack of information regarding details of hours of deliveries have been provided which could have a harmful impact in terms of noise. No details about any ventilation have been provided, I am worried there may be odour impacts and whether this would require a separate hazardous waste collection. There are also no details about the frequency of events; will there be people visiting the office/chapel all day Monday-Friday, or will it only be a couple of times a week?
- Parking provision and highways impact.
- Impact on neighbours amenity- views of funeral operations.

LDF CORE STRATEGY POLICIES

CS01 - Spatial Strategy

CS02 - The Settlement Hierarchy

CS06 - Development in Rural Areas

CS08 - Sustainable Development

CS10 - The Economy

CS12 - Environmental Assets

SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES PLAN 2016

DM1 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

DM2 – Development Boundaries

DM9 - Community Facilities

DM15 – Environment, Design and Amenity

DM15 – Environment, Design and Amenity

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

National Planning Policy Framework – sets out the Government’s planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

National Planning Practice Guidance - Provides National Planning Practice Guidance, in support of and in addition to the NPPF

Planning Committee
20 July 2022

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The main considerations are:

Principle of Development
Form and Character
Impact on Neighbouring Amenity
Highway safety and parking
Any other material considerations

Principle of Development

The application site is located within the development boundary of Dersingham, a Key Rural Service Centre as defined by Policy CS02 of the Core Strategy 2011. Within this development boundary development is generally supported in principle subject to local and national policy requirements. This is further expanded on by Policy CS02; “limited growth of a scale and nature appropriate to secure the sustainability of each settlement, will be supported within the Development Limits of the Key Rural Service Centres.”

Policy CS06 of the Core Strategy 2011 sets out the aims for rural development, the strategy is to:

- promote sustainable communities and sustainable patterns of development to ensure strong, diverse, economic activity;
- maintain local character and a high quality environment; focus most new development in key rural service centres selected from the Settlement Hierarchy Policy CS02;
- ensure employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities are provided in close proximity.

Policy CS06 goes on to state that within all centres and villages, priority will be given to retaining local business sites. This is further supported by Policy CS10 of the Core Strategy where it outlines that proposals aiding in job growth and supporting the rural economy will be supported.

Policy DM9 – Community Facilities of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016 states that “the Council will encourage the retention of existing community facilities and the provision of new facilities, particularly in areas with poor levels of provision and in areas of major growth.”

The village of Dersingham recently lost its Funeral Directors and there is currently no provision in the village. This development seeks to replace the one that closed last year and provide this much needed community service in the centre of the village. This is fully supported by the provision of policy DM9.

This application proposes a viable business use within an existing business site, providing a key community service, within a key village/rural centre alongside a single three bedroom residential unit. It is considered that this is a principle that is fully supported by policy aims detailed above and therefore, the principle of development is acceptable.

Form and Character

The application site is located adjacent to the Conservation Area and Ashdene House is a locally significant and prominent building within the street scene. However, the external works proposed are limited and include only minor alterations and additions leaving the existing character intact. The front elevation has had no changes or additions. To the northern side elevation facing onto Chapel Road, a ground floor window on the main part of the building will be blocked up using matching brickwork with a 15mm set back. To the single storey rear projection (outside of public view) two windows and a door will be blocked up on the northern elevation.

To the rear (east) the existing door and metal staircase will be replaced, leading to the first floor residential unit. The existing loft access is blocked in, again with matching brick. A new boiler flue will be installed to next to the first-floor door. At ground floor to the rear of the single storey projection, a chiller unit is shown. To the south, a ground floor window to the main building is blocked up with matching brick and a 15mm inset. A side door on the single storey rear projection will be increased in size and a 1.8m close board fence is installed in front of this door and immediate area to screen and create the unloading bay. Further along this elevation an existing double door will be reduced to single and the other half blocked up.

The turning and parking area to the south of the main building will be increased in size from the previous arrangement providing 7 parking spaces for both the business and residential unit. The established vegetation and landscaping to the plot will otherwise remain. Bins for the funeral use will be provided by the screened loading area whilst to the north of the plot, the flat will benefit from a screened private outdoor area including bin storage.

The works as a whole are limited in regards to their wider visual impact. The form of the building remains mostly as existing and the majority of works are to the south, include screening and have limited wider views that are also screened. Where these views aren't screened, it is not considered that there is any unacceptable or adverse impact. The Conservation Officer raises no objection to the scheme based on the visual impact and wider impact on the adjacent Conservation Area. This in accordance with Policy CS08, CS12 and CS10 of the Core Strategy 2011 and DM15 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016.

Impact on Neighbour Amenity

It is not considered that there will any significant or adverse neighbouring impacts as a result of this application. The site is an established business use and the use of the building and plot as a Funeral Directors continues this, supported by local policy.

The Community Safety and Neighbourhood Nuisance (CSNN) Team have assessed the details of the scheme and raise no objection. The office hours and hours of opening to the public shall be between the hours of 09:00 and 17:00 Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays, Bank or Public Holidays, this would be secured by condition on any approval. The use of the site as a Bed & Breakfast would likely have had guest arriving outside of these hours so this is considered a reasonable restriction in order to enable a viable business and prevent out of hours noise to neighbours.

There will be a limited number of out of hours callouts outside of these core working hours, and these are detailed below. These would be considered to be outside the scope of the condition relating to normal office hours and public opening times, given their sporadic nature, and necessity.

Information has been submitted that there will be approx. 150 funerals a year from this proposed funeral home. It is anticipated that there will be approximately two out of hours callouts per month. "The staff would drive from their home address to our King's Lynn funeral home and collect a private ambulance from there. They would then conduct the removal and then go to the Dersingham funeral home to take the deceased into the mortuary. The private ambulance would only be on site for around 15 minutes as the head office at King's Lynn is where the majority of callouts occur." Based on this limited out of hours use CSNN raise no objection and are happy with the gravel surfacing to the parking and turning area and the associated noise. There will be no noise from taking a stretcher out of the private ambulance which will be reversed on to a tarmac surface (screened loading area) the deck in the ambulance has the same rubber rollers as a hearse does and these do not make any noise, stretchers all have rubber wheels too. No concerns are raised regarding the proposed lighting to either the business or residential use, and any consent would include the condition preventing further lighting to be installed on site without the permission of the Local Planning Authority.

With regard to the external chiller unit, this is approximately 7.20 metres to the nearest boundary. Given the close boarded fence and additional separation distance of around 5.88 metres to the adjacent dwelling, and noting the noise level of the unit at 10 metres of 30 dB(A), CSNN have no concerns over this element. There is close board fencing on boundaries with neighbours. The neighbour to the rear has an adjoining fence, along with trellis and established vegetation.

Overall, it is considered that with appropriate conditions there will be a suitable neighbour relationship and the operation of this business will not impact the amenity of neighbouring properties or the proposed residential flat at first floor in an unacceptable manner. This in accordance with Policy CS08 of the Core Strategy 2011 and DM15 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016.

Highway Safety and Parking

Norfolk County Council Highways raise no objection regarding parking provision, access or associated highways impact. As such, it is regarded that the highways impact on the locality will be acceptable.

Other Considerations

Conservation's requested conditions are not applicable as the works carried out are fully acceptable.

Comments raised by the Parish Council have been addressed in the above report.

Public Objections

Regarding the retrospective nature of the application, this a valid function of the planning system and retrospective applications are provided for within planning legislation.

Regarding the location of the development, highways and parking, loss of Bed & Breakfast use, impact on the locality including the prominence of the building and Conservation Area as well as neighbouring amenity and business impacts, these issues have been addressed in the above report.

Details of the opening hours and out of hours use have been provided in the above report. No ventilation is to be provided.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the application preserves a business use on site as well as providing a viable business, a needed community facility and a new unit of residential accommodation within the village centre of a Key Rural Service Centre. The local rural economy is supported, and new jobs are created in line with policy aims for rural areas both within Policy CS06 and CS10 of the Core Strategy 2011. The form and character impacts on the building, wider locality and adjacent Conservation Area are very limited. The additions and alterations to the main building are limited with little visual change, the wider plot will also see little visual alterations which in turn ensure a suitable and acceptable impact on the adjacent Conservation Area.

The site is within the centre of the village, as such there are nearby residential properties. However, it has been shown to the satisfaction of officers that the proposed use will not have a significant or adverse amenity impact, subject to suitable conditions. The proposal therefore is in accordance with Policy CS08, CS12 and CS10 of the Core Strategy 2011 and DM9 and DM15 of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Plan 2016.

RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE subject to the imposition of the following condition(s):

- 1 Condition: The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans: PROPOSED FLOOR PLANS, Drawing Number: 2470-02D, EXISTING & PROPOSED SITE PLANS, Drawing Number: 2470-05B and EXISTING & PROPOSED ELEVATIONS, Drawing Number: 2470-03E.
- 1 Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.
- 2 Condition: Prior to the first use of the development hereby permitted the proposed on-site car parking/servicing/loading/unloading/turning/waiting area shall be laid out, levelled, surfaced and drained in accordance with the approved plan and retained thereafter available for that specific use.
- 2 Reason: To ensure the permanent availability of the parking/manoeuvring areas, in the interests of satisfactory development and highway safety.
- 3 Condition: The office hours and hours of opening to the public shall be between the hours of 09:00 and 17:00 Monday to Friday, 09:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays, Bank or Public Holidays, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- 3 Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority may retain control over the development in the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with the NPPF.
- 4 Condition: No lighting shall be installed other than as hereby permitted on approved plans, unless otherwise approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
- 4 Reason: In order that the Local Planning Authority may retain control over the development in the interests of the amenities of the locality in accordance with the NPPF.