

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2017

Head of Planning Services  
Ribble Valley Borough Council  
Council Offices  
Church Walk  
Clitheroe, BB7 2RA

**By email only**

Dear Sir

**HYBRID APPLICATION FOR RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT TO COMPRISE, IN FULL, THE ERECTION OF 3 NO. BUNGALOWS WITH ACCESS, CAR PARKING AND LANDSCAPING, AND IN OUTLINE WITH ALL MATTERS RESERVED EXCEPT ACCESS, THE ERECTION OF 1 NO. DWELLING AND GARAGE WITH CAR PARKING AND LANDSCAPING, ON LAND TO THE SOUTH OF SCHOOL HOUSE, PRESTON ROAD, ALSTON, LONGRIDGE**

We are instructed by the Parish of Our Lady and St Michael, also known as the Parish of Alston Lane, to submit a hybrid planning application for the above residential development on land to the south of School House, Preston Road, Alston. The application has been submitted via the Planning Portal (ref. PP-05803414) and comprises the following information with this supporting letter;

- Application form and ownership Certificate A
- Application fee of £1,925
- Location plan [drwg. 0902/11/09-002]
- Proposed site layout plan and street scene [drwg. 0902/11/09-001B]
- Proposed bungalow floorplans and elevations [drwg. 0902/11/09-102]
- Our Lady and St Michael's RC Parish Strategic Plan
- Design and access statement
- Ecology appraisal
- Arboricultural survey
- Transport statement

The proposed development is a significant project and investment for the future well-being and financial security of the Parish. It follows a pre-application enquiry and discussions with the local planning authority in February 2016, and the advice received has been carefully considered and taken into account in developing the proposal. The result is a modest and measured housing development that will deliver a range of long-term benefits for the Parish and the local community it serves. The application has genuine purpose and merit, and it is hoped the local planning authority will support it.

**Background to the application**

Our Lady and St Michael's Church belongs to the Lancaster RC Diocese. Together with the adjacent Alston Lane RC School, the Parish is an active and integral part of the local community and serves a mostly rural area extending from the edge of Preston to Hothersall, and including the whole of Grimsargh and Alston and the southern part of Longridge. The Church and school facilities are regularly used by a wide number of local community groups, societies and organisations for worship, meetings, adult education and fitness classes, community events and social functions.

Lancaster RC Diocese is facing a number of constraints and challenges in providing its mission to local communities due to changes in Catholic congregations, declining church attendance, falling incomes and the increased cost of maintaining its church and voluntary-aided school buildings and premises. It has therefore carried out a comprehensive review of its organisation and activity called the *'Fit for Mission Review'*, with the aim of protecting the sacramental and missionary life of the Diocese to ensure its Parishes can adapt to change and continue to operate and benefit future generations in the communities they serve.

Whilst church attendance at Alston Lane has been stable over recent years, the Parish cannot be complacent and prompted by the 'Fit for Mission' agenda, it must plan ahead to ensure its long term development and financial stability. The Parish has therefore prepared the Strategic Plan which accompanies this planning application, and has considered the means by which it can continue to provide sacramental and pastoral care to parishioners over the next 20 years, taking account of;

- i) Anticipated decline in future church attendance and income;
- ii) An ageing community and congregation;
- iii) Increased building maintenance and operating costs, and;
- iv) The expectation placed upon the Lancaster RC Diocese by the Charity Commission to fully utilise Parish assets and resources for maximum benefit.

Appendix B of the Strategic Plan contains the Parish Income and Expenditure Summary Report from 2007/08 to 2014/15. This shows that the Parish has faced a generally-worsening financial outlook for the past several years and currently, is just able to meet its financial expenditure commitments from its income, with a small surplus and limited reserve. Looking forward however, it is clear this will be insufficient to offset both anticipated reductions in income and increases in forecast expenditure.

The cost of property maintenance is a major commitment for the Parish and particularly the Church, due to its age and Grade II listing. Given the increasing levels of expenditure on maintenance and repairs in recent years, a Condition Report has been commissioned from JYM Partnership, Diocesan Architects and Surveyors, and is included in Appendix C of the Strategic Plan. The shows the Church is currently in good condition but major expenditure of at least £320,000 must be expected in the next 20 years to maintain its upkeep. There will also be repairs and refurbishment costs to the Presbytery, and Chapel House will require comprehensive refurbishment when the current tenancy ends.

The Parish will also become liable for 10% of the cost of major repair, alteration and extension works to the voluntary-aided Alston Lane RC School if the Diocese is unable to fund its contribution. The one-form entry school and nursery is fully subscribed for the next five years and the scale of recent, committed and proposed housebuilding in Grimsargh and Longridge is likely to result in the need for an additional classroom/s within the next 5 - 10 years. The expected construction budget cost of the outline scheme design is shown in Appendix E of the Strategic Plan.

The overall conclusion of the financial forecast is daunting and shows that the Parish will run at a deficit throughout the next 20 years, and is expected to reach nearly -£240,000 by 2035. The Parish cannot sustain this level of debt and it must therefore explore alternative means and sources of income to meet its long term commitments and operating costs and provide it with financial stability.

### **Parish land and property assets**

The land and properties owned by the Parish are shown within the blue land included on the Location Plan accompanying the planning application. They comprise;

- a) Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church
- b) The Presbytery
- c) The Parish Meeting Room (Caton Room)
- d) Cemetery
- e) Tenanted properties comprising;
  - i) Nos. 1 and 2 School House
  - ii) Chapel House
  - iii) Nos. 301 and 302 Preston Road, Grimsargh (not shown)
- f) Agricultural land south of the Church between Preston Road and Alston Lane
- g) Alston Lane RC School playing field (not shown)

The Parish has considered a number of long-term options including the sale and disposal of its land and property assets, and investing in its own development on its land. In terms of the sale of land, the Parish cannot dispose of the playing fields to the side of the Primary School as these are required by the school and local community. The agricultural field adjacent to the cemetery and south of Preston Road is rented for agricultural grazing and the part immediately adjacent to the cemetery is to be retained for a cemetery extension as burial fees are a major source of income for the Parish. The application site, comprising the triangular paddock and former orchard to the south of the access track to School House, is under used and suitable for sale, but its agricultural value is minimal.

Likewise, the rental income from the five residential properties owned by the Parish is of significant benefit to its long term financial stability, and moreover if any of the properties were sold, it is likely that all or much of the receipt would be retained by the Diocese. As such, the Parish properties should be retained as an investment and source of long term income.

### **Development of the application site**

The triangular application site described above to the south of the access track leading from Preston Road to School House, is surplus to current and future Parish needs and considered suitable for the proposed housing development. The site measures 0.35ha and is located at the southern corner of the Parish landholding, bordered by an unnamed track running southeast / northwest from Preston Road and Alston Lane to the rear. It was previously a former orchard and small paddock and is separated from the wider field by the access track to School House, and it is not currently farmed or grazed. It contains a number of trees and hedgerows along its boundary that will be retained where possible and vehicular access is provided via the existing track extending to Preston Road.

The site occupies a sustainable location. It is adjacent to Our Lady and St Michael's RC Church, the Parish Meeting Room and Alston Lane RC Primary School and nursery, and is within 250m of the bus stop and high-frequency (10 minute) service on Preston Road between Longridge, Grimsargh and Preston. The site is also within safe, level and lit walking and cycling distance of shops, the village hall and community facilities in Grimsargh. The sustainable location of the site was also confirmed by the Inspector determining the appeal<sup>1</sup> by Gladman Developments Ltd for the erection of 150 dwellings on land off Preston Road, approximately 150 metres southwest of the application site.

Planning permission is sought for the erection of four new houses to be offered for rent and sale, for local people, small households and a family. These comprise;

- a) 3 no. detached two-bedroom bungalows with associated access, car parking and landscaping, for which full planning permission is sought; and,

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<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 98 of appeal ref. APP/N2345/W/15/3007033 dated the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

- b) 1 no. detached two storey family dwelling and garage with car parking and landscaping, for which outline planning permission is sought, with all matters reserved except access.

The three detached bungalows are arranged on a common building line parallel to the south west boundary of the site. Each is located in a good-sized plot with front and rear gardens and in-curtilage driveway parking space for one or two vehicles. The bungalows are designed to appear similar to traditional almshouses and comprise a simple symmetrical design with windows to either side of a central entrance door and feature porch, with gable copings and chimneys standing proud of a slate pitched roof. The walls will be built of natural stone (or a good quality artificial product such as Forticrete or similar) in keeping with local style and appearance and adjacent buildings.

The two storey detached family dwelling is shown in plan form only for illustrative purposes and all details relating to its siting, scale, appearance and landscaping are reserved for future approval. It is expected that the dwelling would occupy a corner position that could be orientated at 45° to the bungalows to make best use of the corner plot.

All four dwellings will be accessed via the existing single-width driveway connecting to Preston Road. The first 30 metres of the track will be widened to allow two cars to pass, as shown in Figure 3 in the Transport Statement, and a further passing place will be provided adjacent to Plot 1. Refuse collection will be carried out from Preston Road, as at present for 1 and 2 School House and Chapel House.

The bungalows will be developed and retained by the Parish and offered for discounted rent to local people and their family members at 80% of the market rent and let on 12 month or longer leases. The bungalows will be built gradually as Parish funds permit and the construction cost of the first two will be enabled by the financial receipt generated from the sale of the single family dwelling plot with the benefit of outline planning permission.

### **Relevant planning policy**

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The adopted Ribble Valley development plan comprises the;

- Core Strategy 2008 - 2028
- Districtwide Local Plan Proposals Map 1998 (saved version)
- Joint Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2013

It confirms the application site is located in the countryside outside a defined settlement boundary and is not subject to any additional built or natural environmental designations. Core Strategy Policy DMG2 permits new development in the countryside that is essential to the local economy or social well-being of an area, and Policy DMH3 permits new housing development which meets an identified local need. All new development within the countryside is required to be in keeping with the character of the landscape and acknowledge the special qualities of the area by virtue of its size, design, use of materials, landscaping and siting.

It is demonstrated below that the proposed development of four houses by the Parish fully accords with the objectives of the development plan considered as a whole, and insofar as the relevant policies of the development plan are absent, silent or out-of-date, the significant long-term benefits of the development for the Parish and local community will not be significantly and demonstrably outweighed by any resulting harm from its approval, when assessed against the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework read as a whole.

## Planning assessment

### a) Compliance with the development plan

The proposed development by the Parish of Our Lady and St Michael, of three two bedroom bungalows to be made available to local parishioners and their family members for discounted rent, and a single family dwelling for open market sale, is fully compliant with the policy requirements of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy for the following reasons;

- i) Fundamentally, as explained in this supporting letter and the Strategic Plan accompanying the planning application, the housing development will provide the Parish with the additional source and security of long-term income it needs, to subsidise and diversify its declining traditional funding base and enable it to sustain its work in accordance with the Lancaster RC Diocese 'Fit for Mission Review', by making best and most appropriate use of its surplus land assets. The Parish has fundamental responsibilities to its parishioners and the local community, to ensure their welfare and social well-being, in terms of;
  - maintaining the vital sacramental and pastoral care and work it provides;
  - maintaining the Church, grounds and cemetery for the visiting public;
  - maintaining the upkeep and repair of the Church fabric as a Grade II listed building and the other historic buildings within its custody;
  - maintaining its support for Alston Lane RC Primary School and nursery, and;
  - maintaining the Parish Room and the support the Parish provides for local community users and events.
- ii) Secondly, the Parish of Our Lady and St Michael has a long, local tradition of providing subsidised housing for its parishioners and local people. It currently owns the five properties described in the Strategic Plan which are leased at discounted rents to local people and families in need of suitable housing within the Parish. The letter of support provided by Canon H Doyle submitted with the planning application, explains that none of the Parish properties have been vacant for more than one week at any time in the past 35 years and only then, due to necessary refurbishment. There is constant demand for the Parish properties although tenancies are seldom short term and opportunities are limited. Expressions of interest have already been received since the Parish discussed its proposals with the local community, and whilst it is not appropriate to disclose personal details at this stage, eligible interest is from typically older people living in unsuitable accommodation for their current needs and in most cases, at unaffordable rents. They are people already living within the Parish and/or whose families live in the area.

The proposed rental bungalows are therefore seen by the Parish as being akin to modern-day 'almshouses' and would serve an important and unique role in the local rural housing market in providing greater choice and meeting local needs. High-quality smaller bungalows for discounted rent are not available in Grimsargh or Longridge or the surrounding rural area, and are generally not provided by the market or registered social housing providers. The proposed development will therefore help to fill an important gap in meeting local housing needs in the local area.

Ribble Valley Borough Council planning and housing policy has recognised the need for purpose-built elderly accommodation and bungalows as a priority for many years, since the introduction of '*Addressing Housing Need in Ribble Valley*' in 2009. The Borough has an ageing population which is projected to increase by 49% in the next 15 years and a lower proportion of working age population (61%) compared to the UK average (65%), and a corresponding larger than average proportion of people of pensionable age (21.2%) compared to 16.3% nationally.

This is recognised in the Pennine Lancashire Housing Strategy 2009 to 2029 which the Council's Health and Housing Committee adopted on the 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010. Policy Aim 10 of the Strategy is to; *“develop proposals to meet the housing support and care needs of the ageing population.”*

The need for, and benefits of, elderly housing and especially smaller properties and bungalows, are also widely supported by Government policy in the recently published White Paper *Fixing our broken housing market*<sup>2</sup>, and previous ministerial announcements<sup>3</sup> and associated research<sup>4</sup>. The Government is proposing a range of targeted initiatives including;

- encouraging the market and housebuilding industry to take better account of the diverse housing needs of older people - to provide a better choice of suitable accommodation including smaller properties and bungalows where they can live during their retirement;
- encouraging diversification and new entrants and contributors to the housing market aside from developers and Registered Providers, and;
- promoting the 'down-sizing' benefits of helping older people to move at the right time, to improve their quality of life at the same time as freeing up larger homes for other buyers.

The proposed development of three smaller bungalows for discounted rent, provided and managed by the Parish of Our Lady and St Michael, meets all of these key national and local policy initiatives for older people's housing. It provides a unique opportunity to help meet the housing requirements of the local community, whilst ensuring the Parish has sufficient long-term financial resources to provide the level of pastoral care needed to support an aging community.

On this basis, the proposed development is in full accordance with the requirements of Policies DMG2 and DMH3 of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy in helping to meet local housing needs and, by enabling the Parish to maintain its work and role in the community, being essential to the social well-being of the local area. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the presumption in favour of sustainable development at Paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework, this means planning permission should therefore be granted without delay.

In addition, the Parish is aware that in January 2017, the local planning authority confirmed it could no longer demonstrate a minimum five year housing land supply, such that relevant Core Strategy policies for the supply of housing, including Policies DMG2 and DMH3, should not be considered up-to-date. On this basis, applying the presumption in favour of sustainable development under the second bullet point of Paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework where the development plan is either absent, silent or out-of-date, means that planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

This supporting letter and the application documents demonstrate that the proposed housing development occupies an accessible location and will deliver a wide range of important, long-term social and economic benefits to the Parish and the local community, and it will not result in any significant adverse environmental or other harm that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Nor do any specific policies of the Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

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<sup>2</sup> See Housing for our future population : paragraphs 4.42 to 4.44 of the White Paper - *Fixing our broken housing market*, Cm 9325, DCLG, February 2017

<sup>3</sup> *Better homes and bungalows for Britain's older people* : Ministerial Statement by the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis dated the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015

<sup>4</sup> *Future of an ageing population* : Government Office for Science, October 2016

By either of its possible applications, the presumption in favour of sustainable development clearly demonstrates that planning permission should therefore be granted.

### **Technical and environmental considerations**

The planning application is supported by a set of design, technical and environmental reports. These demonstrate that the proposed housing development adopts an appropriate high-quality design and appearance for the local area, and will not have an adverse impact on the amenity of the adjacent occupiers of 1 and 2 School House, the character of the surrounding area and the appearance of the Preston Road street scene. The development will also protect the retained trees and hedgerows within and surrounding the application site, and it will not have any adverse impact on any protected habitats or species.

The Transport Statement also confirms that the development can be provided with safe and suitable vehicular and pedestrian access from Preston Road and will not have a detrimental effect on highway safety and the efficient operation of the network. Development is therefore compliant with the relevant development management policies of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy and the Framework.

### **Conclusion**

This planning application made on behalf of the Parish of Our Lady and St Michael, proposes a small unobtrusive development of three detached bungalows and a single family dwelling, on surplus land owned by Parish in a suitable and sustainable location.

It will fulfil a dual purpose of firstly, helping to meet local rural housing needs within the Parish, by providing a valuable type and source of new housing for older people who cannot afford to buy or rent on the open market and/or who cannot find accommodation to suit their needs in Alston and Grimsargh, as well as making a small contribution to boosting the overall supply. Secondly, the Strategic Plan submitted with the application demonstrates the increasing financial challenges and constraints the Parish will face without finding an alternative source of income to give it the long-term financial stability and security it needs. Making full and beneficial use of its surplus assets in accordance with the Lancaster RC Diocese 'Fit for Mission Review' will enable the Parish to continue the upkeep of its buildings and the pastoral work, care and support it provides to the local community and future generations for the next 20 years.

The application is submitted by a pro-active and innovative RC Parish Church and represents genuine sustainable development in every sense of word. The case in support of the development is compelling and we ask the local planning authority to grant planning permission for this much-needed and beneficial project.

Yours sincerely

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cc: Parish of Our Lady and St Michael