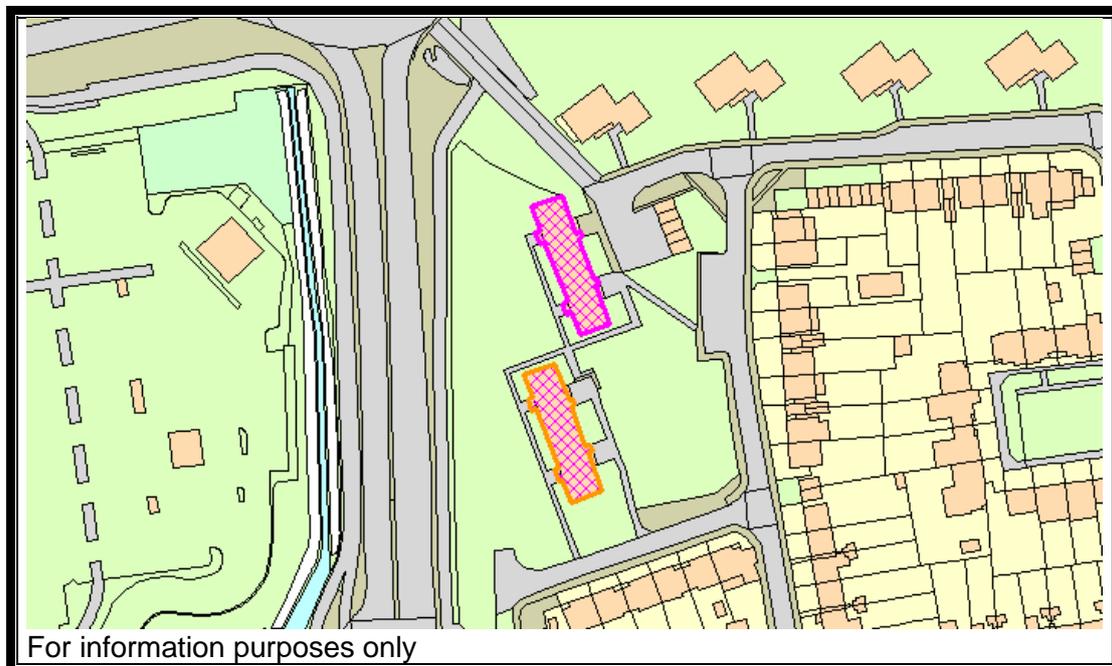


Meeting:	Planning and Development Committee	Agenda Item:
Date:	9 January 2024	
Author:	Linda Sparrow	07931 863551
Lead Officer:	Zayd Al-Jawad	01438 245257
Contact Officer:	Linda Sparrow	07931 863551

Application No :	23/00900/FP
Location :	2-24 and 26-48 Buckthorn Avenue, Stevenage, Herts
Proposal :	Installation of external wall insulation and associated external finish, installation of solar PV array system; replacement roof tiles; replacement of external windows and doors, alteration to external ventilation.
Drawing Nos.:	7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4103; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4104; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4101; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4102; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4503; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4504; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4505; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4506; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4507; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4403; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4404; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4405;
Applicant :	Stevenage Borough Council
Date Valid:	28 November 2023
Recommendation :	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION



1. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 1.1. The application site comprises two buildings on the western side of Buckthorn Avenue. Residential dwellings of Buckthorn Avenue lie to the east and south, 4no. flatted developments of Walden End lie to the north, and the main highway of Monkswood Way lies to the west.

1.2. Each building is three storeys, with a dual pitched tiled roof and contain 12no. flats each. The buildings are constructed with white painted render to the upper floors with red-multi bricks to the ground floor. Windows and doors are modern white uPVC framing. The buildings have a post-war appearance typical of properties constructed in this neighbourhood. There is an extensive area of communal open space to the front of the properties with some areas of communal car parking.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISORY

2.1 None relevant.

3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

3.1 This application seeks planning permission for the redevelopment of the two blocks of flats comprising:

- Replacement external wall insulation with 'Winter White' render to upper floors;
- Replacement external wall insulation with 'Sanded Slate Grey' brick effect render to ground floor;
- Window and door replacements;
- Solar PV panels on rear roof slope;
- Replacement roof with grey concrete interlocking tiles;
- Upgrading of loft insulation;
- Upgrading ventilation systems.

3.2 The retrofit of the properties is being undertaken by the Council to improve the energy efficiency of the buildings. The proposal will result in the properties having a minimum EPC rating of C and an energy consumption of 90KWh/M2 per annum. This will contribute to the achievement of the Council's carbon emissions targets. It will also improve the lives of occupiers by reducing their energy bills and improve affordable warmth, thereby tackling fuel poverty.

3.3 This application comes before the Planning and Development Committee because the applicant is Stevenage Borough Council. Therefore, in line with the Council's constitution, this application is being referred to the aforementioned committee for its decision.

4. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Following notification of the application via letters to neighbouring properties, no comments were received.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1. No statutory consultations were necessary for this application.

6. RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

6.1. Background to the Development Plan

6.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that the decision on the planning application should be in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Stevenage the statutory development plan comprises:

- The Stevenage Borough Council Local Plan 2011-2031
- Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework 2012 and Hertfordshire Waste Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 2012 and 2014); and
- Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan 2002 – 2016 (adopted 2007).

6.2 Central Government Advice

6.2.1 A revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2023. This made significant changes to the September 2023 version and revised policy with respect to the following:

- maintaining supply and delivery of housing.
- making effective use of land with the allowance of mansard roof extensions to suitable properties.
- significant uplift in the average density of residential development can be seen as being inappropriate if the built form is out of character.
- strengthening policies around achieving well-designed and beautiful places.
- requirement for councils to prepare Local Design Codes.
- no longer a requirement to review or change Green Belt boundaries when plans are being prepared or updated.
- local planning authorities should now give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic.
- change to policies on Biodiversity.

6.2.2 The Council are content that the policies in the Local Plan are in conformity with the revised NPPF and that the Local Plan should be considered up to date for the purpose of determining planning applications. The NPPF provides that proposals which accord with an up-to-date development plan should be approved without delay (para.11) and that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan, permission should not usually be granted (para.12).

6.3 Planning Practice Guidance

6.3.1 The PPG contains guidance supplementing the NPPF and with which Members are fully familiar. The PPG is a material consideration to be taken into account together with the National Design Guide (2019) which has the same status as the PPG.

6.4 National Design Guide

6.4.1 The National Design Guide 2019 is Government guidance on the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It has the same status as the PPG and should similarly be taken into account when determining planning applications.

6.5 Adopted Local Plan (2019)

6.5.1 The policies set out below are relevant in the determination of this application:

Policy SP8: Good design;
Policy GD1: High quality design;

6.6 Supplementary Planning Documents

Stevenage Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document January 2023.

6.7 Community Infrastructure Levy

6.7.1 Stevenage Borough Council adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule in 2020. This allows the Council to collect a levy to fund infrastructure projects based on the type, location and floorspace of a development.

7. APPRAISAL

7.1.1 The only issue in the assessment of the application is the impact on the character and appearance of the area. There are no changes to the number of units within the building and no enlargement of the buildings or number and locations of fenestrations so there will be no change to the car parking provision nor any changes to existing impacts on neighbouring properties.

7.1.2 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that all planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.2 Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

7.2.1 In terms of design, paragraph 131 of the NPPF (2023) states that achieving high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to the planning and development process and that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. Further, paragraph 135 of the NPPF (2023) stipulates that planning decisions should ensure developments function well and adds to the overall quality of the area, not just in the short term but over the lifetime of the development. It also sets out that developments should be visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping is sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting.

7.2.2 Paragraph 139 of the NPPF (2023) states that permission should be refused especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design (such as the National Design Guide), taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight be given to:

- a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or

- b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as the fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

7.2.3 Policy GD1 of the Local Plan (2019) generally requires all forms of development to meet a high standard of design which includes form of built development, elevational treatment and materials along with how the development would integrate with the urban fabric, its relationship between buildings, landscape design and relevant aspects of sustainable design.

7.2.4 Policy SP8 of the adopted Local Plan (2019) requires new development to achieve the highest standards of design and sustainability which can deliver substantial improvements to the image and quality of the towns' built fabric. Policy GD1 of the Local Plan generally requires all forms of development to meet a high standard of design which includes form of built development, elevational treatment and materials along with how the development would integrate with the urban fabric, its relationship between buildings, landscape design and relevant aspects of sustainable design.

7.2.5 The National Design Guide (2019) which was published by National Government is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. It sets out that Buildings are an important component of places and proposals for built development are a focus of the development management system. However, good design involves careful attention to other important components of places. These include:

- the context for places and buildings;
- hard and soft landscape;
- technical infrastructure – transport, utilities, services such as drainage; and
- social infrastructure – social, commercial, leisure uses and activities.

7.2.7 A well-designed place is unlikely to be achieved by focusing only on the appearance, materials and detailing of buildings. It comes about through making the right choices at all levels, including:

- the layout;
- the form and scale of buildings;
- their appearance;
- landscape;
- materials; and
- their detailing.

7.2.8 The Guide further iterates that all developments are made up of these components put together in a particular way. As such, the choices made in the design process contribute towards achieving the ten characteristics and shape the character of a place. For reference, these ten characteristics are as follows:-

- Context – enhances the surroundings;
- Identity – attractive and distinctive;
- Built form – a coherent pattern of built form;
- Movement – accessible and easy to move around;
- Nature – enhanced and optimised;
- Public spaces – safe, social and inclusive;
- Uses – mixed and integrated;
- Homes and buildings – functional, healthy and sustainable;
- Resources – efficient and resilient;
- Lifespan – made to last.

7.2.9 Paragraph 40 of the National Design Guide states that well-designed places are:

- Based on a sound understanding of the features of the site and the surrounding context, using baseline studies as a starting point for design;
- Integrated into their surroundings so they relate well to them;
- Influenced by and influence their context positively; and
- Responsive to local history, culture and heritage.

7.2.10 The Council recently adopted an updated Design Guide SPD (Jan 2023). An understanding and analysis of the original New Town design concepts led to some key issues becoming apparent. These have been used as key themes, which run throughout the entirety of this guidance. Considering these concepts at all stages of the development process will provide a good basis for the creation of a successful place; based on the recognised principles of urban design, but also building on the existing fabric of the town without taking away from Stevenage's history as Britain's first Mark One New Town. The themes have been identified as follows:

- Sustainability – incorporate principles of sustainable development from a town-wide perspective to measures incorporated into an individual property;
- Increasing densities – encourage high densities in accessible locations;
- Respecting existing characteristics – respect local characteristics and preserve and enhance existing features, where appropriate;
- Legibility – provide landmark developments at nodal points;
- Design innovation – showcase Stevenage as an example of high-quality design, creating safer places through urban design techniques.

7.2.11 The two buildings are located on the western side of Buckthorn Avenue and are highly prominent from a number of different public vantage points both to the front and the rear. There is a modest amount of soft landscaping in the form of shrubs and trees around the buildings.

7.2.12 The buildings are constructed with white painted render to the upper floors and brick to the ground floor and concrete roof tiles. Windows and doors are modern white uPVC framing. There is an extensive area of communal open space to the front of the properties.

7.2.13 Neighbouring properties are constructed with a variety of materials, including concrete render, white render, red brickwork, grey roof tiles and red/brown concrete roof tiles.

7.2.14 The proposed replacement materials, whilst not like-for-like, would have a very similar finish to surrounding properties. The development would therefore refurbish the building without having any significant impact on the character and appearance of the wider area. Having regard to the above, it is considered that the proposed development would have an acceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area. In this respect, the proposal accords with Policies SP8 and GD1 of the Local Plan 2019, which together require development to be of a high quality and sympathetic to its surroundings.

7.3 Other Matters

Climate Change

7.3.1 Paragraph 164 of the NPPF (2023) states that in determining planning applications, local planning authorities should give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic (including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights).

7.3.2 Policy FP1 of the Local Plan (2019) states that planning permission will be granted for development that can incorporate measures to address adaptation to climate change. The

adopted Design Guide SPD (2023) states that all developments are required to make efforts to minimise energy usage and to incorporate methods of using renewable energy, including:-

- reducing energy demand;
- using passive environmental systems, e.g. natural ventilation;
- daylighting and passive solar gains;
- using high levels of insulation and air tightness in the fabric of the building;
- specifying energy efficient services, controls and appliances;
- implementing water recycling and the provision of water butts;
- using renewable energy;
- using low/zero carbon technologies to provide as much of the energy load as is technically and economically feasible, minimising use of fossil fuels; and
- using efficient fossil fuel technologies, such as Combined Heat and Power and condensing boilers.

7.3.3 The proposal will significantly improve the energy efficiency of the flats. The proposal will be PAS2035 compliant which specifies the requirements needing to be met when retrofitting buildings for improved energy efficiency and will ensure that the energy demand within the two buildings is significantly reduced.

7.3.4 The proposal will exceed Department for Energy Security and Net Zero Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund standards with a minimum EPC rating of C and an energy consumption of 90KWh/M2 per annum. This will contribute to the achievement of the Council's carbon emissions targets. It will also improve the lives of occupiers by reducing their energy bills and improve affordable warmth, thereby tackling fuel poverty.

Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

7.3.5 Consideration has been given to Articles 1 and 8 of the First Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not considered that the decision would result in a violation of any person's rights under the Convention.

7.3.6 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

7.3.7 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the Council's obligations under the Public Sector Equalities Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

7.3.8 The Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

7.3.9 Measures will be put in place during the construction phase of the development to minimise harm to neighbouring properties arising from noise and dust. Residential dwellings are not considered to be a noise-based use. Accordingly, it is not considered that the development would contravene the Human Rights Act by way of preventing or hindering the right to peaceful enjoyment of a home.

7.3.10 It is considered that the decision has had regard to this duty. The development would not conflict with either Stevenage Borough Council's Equality Policy or the commitments set out in

our Equality Objectives and would support the Council in meeting its statutory equality responsibilities.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The proposal is considered to be in accordance with the development plan and in the absence of any other material considerations which indicate that permission should be refused, it is recommended that planning permission be granted.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions and informatives:
- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4103; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4104; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4101;
7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4102; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4503; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4504;
7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4505; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4506; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4507;
7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4403; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4404; 7059-CTS-00-000-L-A-4405;
REASON:- For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning
 - 2 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
REASON:- To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
 - 3 The external materials used in the development to which this permission relates shall be those detailed on the approved plans and in the accompanying planning submission documents unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.
REASON:- To ensure a satisfactory appearance upon completion of the development.

The Council has acted Pro-Actively for the following reason:-

- 1 Planning permission has been granted for this proposal. Discussion with the applicant to seek an acceptable solution was not necessary in this instance. The Council has therefore acted pro-actively in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 38) and in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

INFORMATIVE

- 1 **Public Information on Planning Applications**
Warning: all information provided on your planning application is now publicly available. Individuals and organisations offering their services may contact you. The Council does not endorse or approve any builders, surveyors, trades persons or other supplier, and advises householders to obtain quotes/references, and check the legitimacy of any contractor who contacts them before making payment.
- 2 **Community Infrastructure Levy**
Stevenage Borough Council adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule at Full Council on 27 January 2020 and started implementing CIL on 01 April 2020.

This application may be liable for CIL payments and you are advised to contact the CIL Team for clarification with regard to this. If your development is CIL liable, even if you are granted an exemption from the levy, please be advised that it is a requirement under Regulation 67 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) that CIL Form 6 (Commencement Notice) must be completed, returned and acknowledged by Stevenage Borough Council before building works start. Failure to do so will mean you risk losing the right to payment by instalments and a surcharge will be imposed. NB, please note that a Commencement Notice is not required for residential extensions if relief has been granted.

Stevenage's adopted CIL Charging Schedule and further details of CIL can be found on the Council's webpages at www.stevenage.gov.uk/CIL or by contacting the Council's CIL Team at CIL@Stevenage.gov.uk.

3 **Building Regulations**

To obtain advice regarding current Building Regulations please contact Hertfordshire Building Control Ltd. by emailing us at building.control@hertfordshirebc.co.uk or phoning us on 01438 879990.

To make a building regulations application please apply through our website portal at <https://www.hertfordshirebc.co.uk/contact-us/> payment can be made online or by phoning the above number after the application has been uploaded. Please phone Hertfordshire Building Control for fees guidance on 01438 879990.

Hertfordshire Building Control can also be contacted by post at Hertfordshire Building Control Ltd, 4th Floor, Campus West, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6BX.

Once a building regulations application has been deposited with relevant drawings and fee building work may commence. You will be advised in their acknowledgement letter of the work stages we need to inspect but in most instances these are usually:

- Excavation for foundations
- Damp proof course
- Concrete oversite
- Insulation
- Drains (when laid or tested)
- Floor and Roof construction
- Work relating to fire safety
- Work affecting access and facilities for disabled people
- Completion

Please phone Hertfordshire Building Control on 01438 879990 before 10.00am to ensure a same day inspection (Mon - Fri).

4 **Party Wall etc. Act 1996**

Any work that affects a party wall, including foundations dug within 3.0m of a neighbouring building, may be controllable under the Act and may require approval from the adjoining owner(s). Party Wall Act matters are always civil matters and it is neither Stevenage Borough Council's nor Hertfordshire Building Control Ltd's remit to control or enforce Party Wall act matters. Please refer to the Government's explanatory booklet The Party Wall etc. Act 1996, a copy of which is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-party-wall-etc-act-1996-revised-explanatory-booklet>.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.
2. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Stevenage Design Guide adopted January 2023.
3. Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031 adopted 2019.
4. Responses to consultations with statutory undertakers and other interested parties referred to in this report.
5. Central Government advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework December 2023 and Planning Practice Guidance.