



DM/25/3209 Cuckfield Cottage Homes

OBJECTION

We were approached by Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter, owner-occupiers of The Old Clergy House located immediately West of the application site, to undertake a detailed review and assessment of the proposed scheme DM/25/3209. Supported by our professional findings they are here objecting to the proposed scheme.

Background

Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter have been Cuckfield residents for 50+ years and the immediate neighbours of the Cottage Homes residents for more than half of that time. They have sought to be good neighbours of the residents, providing personal care and support when it has been necessary.

The Cuckfield Cottage Homes were founded in 1882 at which time the architecturally attractive building was provided and which remains today. The building sits within a peaceful setting within the Cuckfield Conservation Area.

On 3rd July 2024 two of the Trustees of the Cuckfield Cottage Homes Trust visited Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter to advise that the Trustees were contemplating some refurbishment of the Homes. At that time, the Homes had been through periods of vacancy when it had been difficult to find residents meeting the qualifying criteria of the Trust. Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter appreciated the visit even though no specific proposals or plans were tabled.

Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter are disappointed that the spirit of consultation ended there. Notification from MSDC of the current planning application – 18 months later - is the first they have seen or heard of the proposals and plans, despite no less than three preapp approaches to the LPA over the five preceding years.

In respect of the extant pre-app advice to which we are not yet privy, it is important to note that all the pre-app advice was provided prior to the felling of an established boundary Yew tree removed as a result of disease under DM/23/2037 determined 15 September 2023 (reference T1 in that application). This tree provided substantial screening of the neighbouring dwelling's private amenity space comprising patio and gardens to the South/South East of The Old Clergy House.

The tree was removed in November 2023 but is still present in selected application materials dated 2025. The nature and validity of any pre-app advice relied upon prior to the felling of this tree should be verified for pertinence.

Summary of Mr and Mrs Sewell-Rutter's Objections

1. Application material errors and inconsistencies

There are apparent errors in the drawn and supporting materials, including:

- failure to identify the proposals on the site location or block plans, in line with MSDC validation criteria requiring hatching/colouring or annotation;
- failure to identify bin storage and cycle parking locations within the site on the block plan
- failure to identify a key boundary treeline/hedge affecting the proposal; the application form erroneously states that no trees or hedges affecting the proposal are present,



which are later referred to and relied upon in the DAS for privacy screening. No BS5837 'Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction' report is provided which would have identified these trees, set the RPA zone, and provided a constraint which should have informed the design from the earliest stages. It is our view that the proposed extension and its footings will sit within the RPA of this established tree line, compromising its longevity, and exacerbating overlooking issues;

- the extent of the proposed enlarged flat roofed dormers which appear to be drawn smaller on the roof plan, and which themselves conflict with policy DG52;
- conflicts in window sizes between plans and elevations;
- aerial perspectives are dated 2025 but include trees removed in 2023 and therefore do not offer a true or fair representation of the proposal in context;
- There are concerns with regard to the completeness of the PEA, particularly the failure to identify ponds on neighbouring land (including The Old Clergy House), and others in close proximity (eg. Newbury Pond, The Old Vicarage), despite the site's location in a GCN red zone;
- There are concerns over the clarity of the description of the development which is manifestly 2-storey accommodation described as 1.5 storeys, proposed demolition of flat roofed dormers which is actually construction of larger flat roofed dormers in their place, and the ambivalence over demolition versus building atop the existing rear single-storey extensions used to justify the disproportionately large additions.

Our clients are concerned that by failing to adhere to the LPA's documentation requirements, the full impact of the application proposal cannot be properly assessed. The LPA is encouraged to request further and better particulars from the applicant to remedy before re-consultation.

2. Inappropriate scale, bulk and massing of the proposal

This includes the large first floor extensions to the rear, and particularly the significant two-storey extension to the south elevation proposed in close proximity to the site boundary. Notwithstanding the impact on their own private amenity space, the proposal occupies a key corner site within the Conservation Area and there is no evidence that sufficient consideration of the impact of the southern extension has been made or can be made from the application materials which pay scant regard to context generally. The proposal is considered an inappropriate and unneighbourly form of development in these respects.

3. Unacceptable intensification of overlooking and loss of privacy amenity

There are concerns over the intensification of overlooking and harm caused by the loss of privacy amenity resulting from the increased fenestration area on the proposal's west elevation, the repositioning of windows closer to the boundary, and the inclusion of large windows to the extended and new first floor flats 3A and 4A which due to their position south of The Old Clergy House give comprehensive views directly over its private rear garden and patio and into rear habitable rooms, conflicting with policy DG45. These sightlines have been accurately surveyed and modelled to scale to illustrate the issue and illustrations are included on following pages. The proposal is considered an inappropriate and unneighbourly form of development in this respect.

4. Reliance on unsecured boundary screening

The boundary screening between the proposal and The Old Clergy House is not declared on the



application plans nor is it within the ownership and control of the applicant. We highlight the established premise that unsecured verdant screening cannot be relied upon to justify unacceptable massing or overcome concerns of overlooking given the likelihood of and pressure from die-back, pruning or wholesale loss, the latter of which is a realistic outcome given the interference with the RPA occasioned by the proposal.

5. Parking demand and parking stress, trip generation

There are concerns arising from the increased parking demand and the conflicting narrative in the Design and Access Statement versus the Transport Report, coupled with errors in the parking stress results table. This all taken in the context of the LPA's own Cuckfield Conservation Area Appraisal of 2006 which highlighted pre-existing parking stress some 20 years ago. Given increased demand and no material changes in additional parking provision since, this can only be considered further compounded by the proposal.

The impact of the intensification of development is seemingly set aside; there is no trip generation data whether connected to future residents' or their visitors' travel, or the daily support visits from nurses, peripatetic carers, meals-on-wheels providers and the like which are prevalent in supporting the particular resident demographic.

6. Surface water runoff

The application raises concerns over the increased volume of surface water runoff arising from the significant increase in built form, which is proposed for disposal via the existing shared drainage infrastructure. The application makes no reference to any capacity checks nor does it consider or refer to the preferred hierarchy of managing surface water drainage from any development, which for the avoidance of doubt cites mains drainage as the last resort.

7. Development scale and size

There are concerns over the proposed size of the development as a whole. Individually, all units now exceed the national space standards requirements by c.20% which appears at odds with the funding issues noted in the Design and Access Statement, the diminutive size of the existing building and its capacity to accommodate such significant and bulky extensions within the sensitive and open Conservation Area context.

Headline analysis of the Gross Internal Areas scaled from the drawings confirms that the proposal at 411m² represents a 60%+ increase in floor area over the 254m² existing GIA.

8. Construction

There is a lack of any detail in respect of how the proposed works might be carried out. There is no construction management plan and the current access is described on the drawings as 'pedestrian only'. Given the constraints imposed by existing conditions within and around the site, some consideration of the practicalities of undertaking such extensive works may be appropriate at application stage.

9. Rationale

The application narrative gives us to understand that the rationale for the improvements is principally to provide sanitation facilities on the same storey as the bedrooms, to account for occupants with mobility issues, yet we are separately and bizarrely led to believe by the applicant that the same occupants do not rely on cars but use bicycles instead.



It is apparent from the planning statement that the new flats are required to trigger funding for the refurbishment and improvements to the existing six units, rather than to meet an existing need. Of particular note is the last Annual Report and Accounts submitted to the Charity Commission by The Cuckfield Cottage Homes Trust in August 2025 citing tenancy voids as one of two primary risks to the charity. It seems from the application documentation that the relaxation of eligibility criteria is in fact necessary to prevent tenancy voids in the existing six units of accommodation. Notwithstanding the issues we have identified with the acceptability of the proposal in planning terms, adding additional units here, particularly given the long and repeated pre-app process reinforcing the difficulty in finding a suitable scheme, seems counterintuitive when the need could reasonably be met elsewhere within the district or parish.

10. Design Guide policy conflicts

There are significant conflicts with the LPA's adopted design guide policies pertaining to the subservience of the proposal against the existing modest cottages, and particularly with reference to ridge and eaves heights bulk and massing, and the wraparound nature of the proposal which are contrary to policy DG49.

It is our opinion that the effect of the combined extensions engulfs and overwhelms the existing building, and the inclusion of new flat roofed dormers bridging the flats at the rear results in the loss of the original party wall firewall parapets which divided the dwellings originally, contributing to the sense of rhythm, scale and repetition in the design. In their own right, these dormers conflict with MSDC design guidance for dormers contained in DG52. The selection of a rubber roof with fake lead core rolls as lookalike lead is inappropriate in the Conservation Area context irrespective of their position on the rear elevation.

The side extension to the south, sized as a replica of the other first floor extensions (albeit projecting deeper from the rear elevation) results in an eaves height on the south elevation higher than any existing eaves height on the building. As a result the proposal is not subservient, and presents an almost flat, unfigured elevation to the public realm and is visually prominent in the Conservation Area and in views to the Church. This is in stark contrast to the existing East elevation which benefits from intricate traditional detailing, variation in dormer size, and a mix of inset and protruding architectural relief which gives it its character and controls the aesthetic scale.

The addition of the side extension, whilst narrow, disrupts the established rigorous symmetry of the East elevation. The blank extension to the north visible on the east elevation does little to ameliorate the imbalance and is merely a function of building on the footprint of the existing single-storey rear extension.

Conclusion

Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter would encourage a revised scheme developed sensitively and appropriately to mitigate the issues identified here. Despite the no doubt well-intentioned nature of the scheme, it falls short of policy requirements and for these reasons the LPA is requested to resist the proposal on the basis of the harm caused by the inappropriate form of development to neighbour amenity, the Conservation Area and setting of the Listed Building.

Jonathan Sewell-Rutter
Chartered Architect & Director
Dwell Architecture & Design Limited



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

In the absence of, and until full and comprehensive materials are received from the applicant, to aid officers' assessment of the proposal and to support Mr & Mrs Sewell-Rutter's objections we have prepared supporting illustrations documenting their concerns.

Enhanced Overlooking

Currently the four rear dormers on the west elevation of Cottage Homes overlook The Old Clergy House. Where these modest existing dormer windows at first floor are set comfortably back from the site boundary, these are proposed to be replaced with larger barn hipped extensions with openings set some 3.5m closer to and looking directly over and into The Old Clergy House. In addition, new flat roofed dormers are proposed interlinking these new roof extensions.

The total area of fenestration at first floor level of the west elevation of the existing Cottage Homes is 5.2m². In the proposal this is more than doubled to 11.7m².

The position and elevation of the proposed new first floor flat to the south of the existing buildings offers grandstand views into two rear bedrooms at first floor level, two living rooms at ground floor level, and into and over private garden spaces of The Old Clergy House.

This design approach appears confused severalfold, given the harm caused to neighbouring privacy amenity, the missed opportunity of capturing the superb view towards the South Downs constrained by the smaller windows to the southern elevation of the proposal, and the opportunity to deliver a fitting scheme which recognises the significance of the corner site and the openness of the southern boundary offering inbound views from the churchyard and beyond.

Despite there being no mention of the boundary screening on the plans, paragraph 3.5 of the Design and Access Statement specifically refers to the mature trees on the boundary with The Old Clergy House. Paragraph 6.79 further states that the existing boundary trees will be retained for screening, however these are not within the application site or control of the applicant and cannot be relied upon for secured screening. Accordingly, the proposal should be assessed without these in situ, and we have prepared materials to enable officers to do so.

On following pages we illustrate views taken from the proposed first floor windows in the west elevation of the extended Cottage Homes.

Methodology

To ensure that the views are accurate and representative, we have prepared a terrestrial laser scanned survey of The Old Clergy House and its context, accurately positioning Cottage Homes and The Old Clergy House in situ. We have developed views from the proposed windows at Cottage Homes using the scaled plans provided with the planning application to set the height and position and replicated the window opening sizes to frame the outlook from the new windows.

We have removed the Yew tree hedge as it cannot be relied upon for visual screening, as set out earlier in this objection.



Outbound Views from Flat 4A (in the southern extension)



Elevated view back into 2no. bedrooms and 2no. living rooms of The Old Clergy House (12.6m window-window distance)



Comprehensive elevated overlooking of private patio and rear garden



Outbound Views from Flat 3A (from the new rear extension)



Elevated overlooking of eastern morning terrace and oblique views into bay windowed habitable rooms (13.5m window-window)



Elevated views directly onto main terrace and garden



Outbound Views from Flat 2A (from the new rear extension)



Oblique elevated views into rear garden

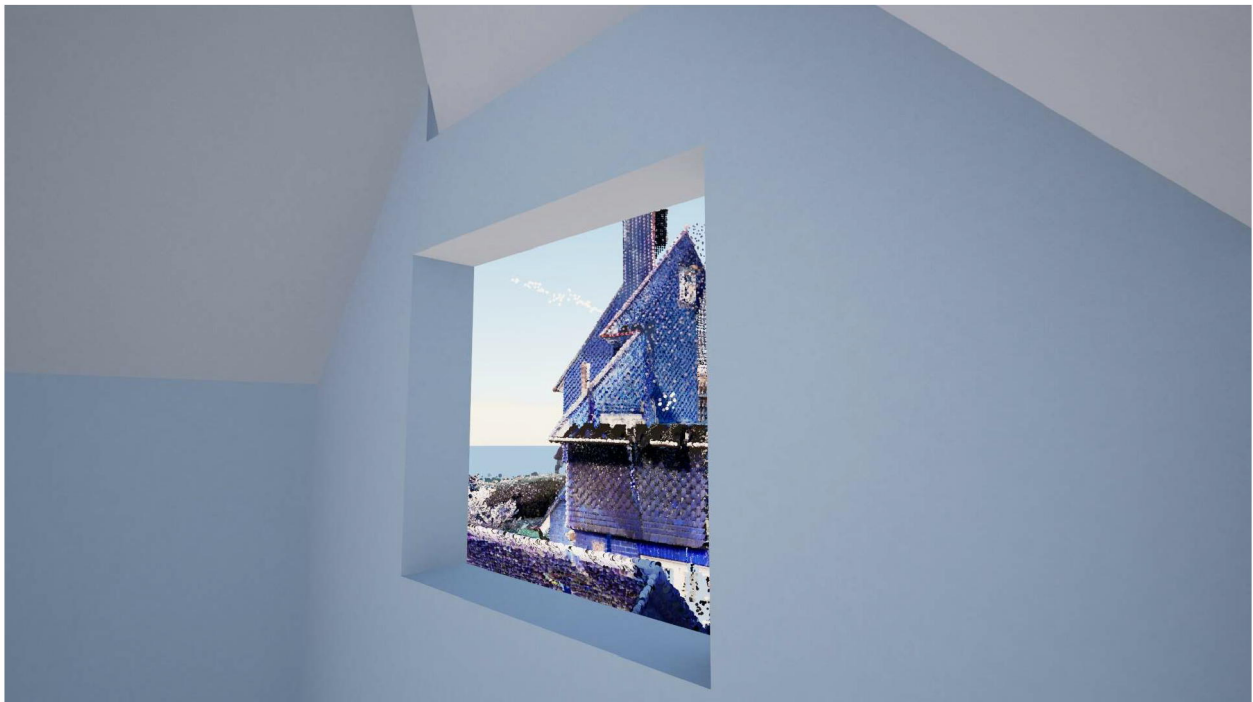




Outbound Views from Flat 1A (from the new rear extension)



Outbound views over driveway to public realm



Oblique views into back garden



Design, bulk, massing and Conservation Area Context

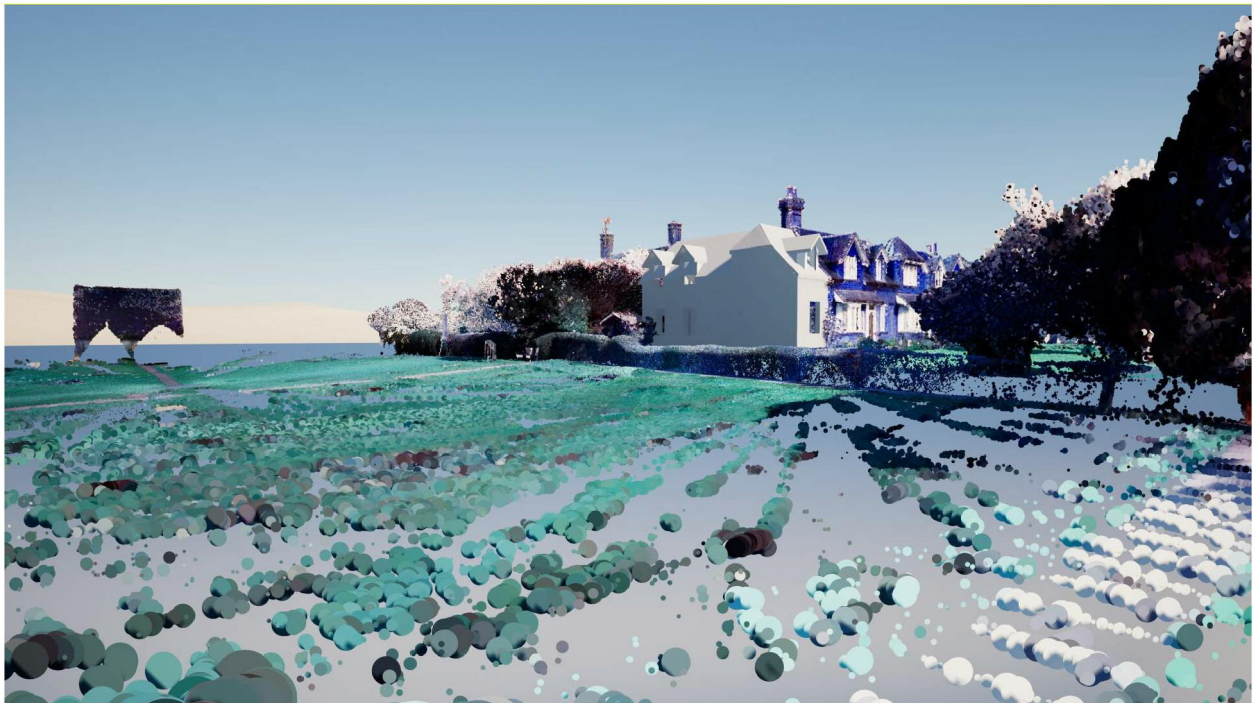
There is little contextual design information within the application which is unusual given the openness of the context and the prominence of the application site.

Importantly, the established character of the neighbouring houses (Church House and The Old Clergy House) is typified by buildings set back from their southern site boundaries, with breathing space and vegetation mitigating the impact of these two large structures. In contrast, the proposal is located close to its Southern site boundary and is offered with limited remaining garden space for compensatory planting.

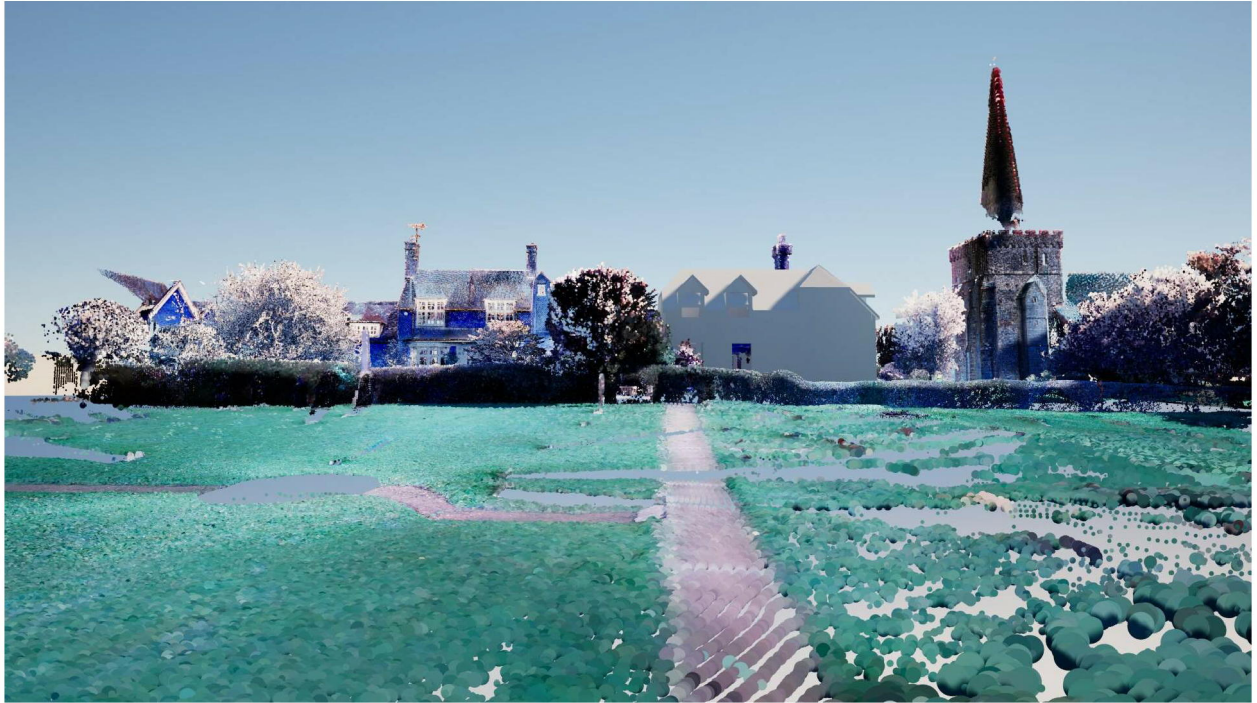
The application includes 'as existing' and 'as proposed' sketch 3D impressions. Whilst we appreciate that they have been positioned from the North West to show the first floor rear extensions as well as the two storey extension masked with vegetation, no representation of the view from the South, South East or South West has been offered, which would show the proposal in the context of the open churchyard, occupying the prominent corner immediately adjacent the church.

We offer these views utilising our point cloud survey data and CAD model which is an independently prepared representation derived from dimensional information contained in the publicly available planning drawings. It does not reproduce the applicant's drawings and is provided solely for the purpose of assessment and comment.

A scaled context elevation drawing generated from the same data is provided separately, number 1412 GA 01.



View North West from the churchyard illustrating the low boundary treatment and unforgiving, largely blank South elevation of the proposal



Looking due North from the churchyard



Looking North East, view towards the church obscured by proposal