Planning Committee: 10 November 2015 **Item Number: 20**

Application No: W/15/1738

Registration Date: 20/10/15
Town/Parish Council: Offchurch **Expiry Date:** 15/12/15
Case Officer: Rob Young
01926 456535 rob.young@warwickdc.gov.uk

Offa House, Village Street, Offchurch, Leamington Spa, CV33 9AP
Change of use from Diocesan retreat house to short term residential accommodation for refugees (for a temporary period of up to five years) FOR Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance

---

This application has been requested to be presented to Committee by Councillor Doody.

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Committee are recommended to delegate authority to the Head of Development Services to GRANT planning permission after the end of the consultation period on 16 November 2015, provided that no significant new issues are raised in any further consultation responses received prior to that date.

The application is being brought to Committee prior to the end of the consultation period because there is an urgent need for the accommodation to be available to receive refugees prior to Christmas. Delaying the application until the December Planning Committee would make it impossible to meet this deadline.

DETAILS OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The application proposes a change of use from a Diocesan retreat house to short term residential accommodation for refugees. The refugees would be selected from UNHCR refugee camps and then initially housed in Offa House for a period of 1 to 2 weeks while they are registered. They would then be settled in more permanent accommodation elsewhere.

The application seeks temporary permission for a period of 5 years. No physical alterations to the external appearance of the building are proposed.

THE SITE AND ITS LOCATION

The application relates to a Diocesan retreat house situated within the village of Offchurch. The property is a Grade II Listed Building situated within the Offchurch Conservation Area. The site is within the Green Belt, with open countryside adjoining the site to the north and west. St. Gregory's church is situated to the east of the site and the Lodge to Offa House is situated to the

south. The next nearest dwellings are situated further to the south, on the opposite side of Village Street.

There is a vehicular access and driveway to the site from Village Street. This leads to a parking area to the front and side of the property.

PLANNING HISTORY

There have been a number of previous applications over the years relating to alterations associated with the use of Offa House as a retreat house. None of these are relevant to the consideration of the current proposals.

RELEVANT POLICIES

- National Planning Policy Framework
- The Current Local Plan
- DP1 - Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP2 - Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP6 - Access (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP8 - Parking (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DP13 - Renewable Energy Developments (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DAP4 - Protection of Listed Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DAP5 - Changes of Use of Listed Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- DAP8 - Protection of Conservation Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 1996 - 2011)
- The Emerging Local Plan
- DS5 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- DS19 - Green Belt (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- SC0 - Sustainable Communities (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- BE1 - Layout and Design (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- BE3 - Amenity (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- BE4 - Converting Rural Buildings (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- TR1 - Access and Choice (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- TR4 - Parking (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- CC1 - Planning for Climate Change Adaptation (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- CC3 - Buildings Standards Requirements (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- HE1 - Protection of Statutory Heritage Assets (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)

- HE2 - Protection of Conservation Areas (Warwick District Local Plan 2011-2029 - Publication Draft April 2014)
- Guidance Documents
- Sustainable Buildings (Supplementary Planning Document - December 2008)
- Vehicle Parking Standards (Supplementary Planning Document)

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

Parish Council: Comments awaited.

Public Response: 2 objections have been received, raising the following concerns:

- the property is not suitable for housing refugees;
- the property does not reach health and safety standards and would be costly to upgrade;
- this is not a suitable location for this use, there are no schools, shops or public transport; and
- this is a very quiet village and an influx of refugees would change the mood of the village, not in a good way.

Cllr Doody: Not against the application, but would like it to go to Planning Committee to sort out a number of small points, such as:

- length of time before the property reverts back to its present function;
- length of time refugees would stay;
- what financial input will be needed and by whom; and
- what will happen to the refugees when they leave.

ASSESSMENT

The main issues relevant to the consideration of this application are as follows:

- whether this is a suitable location for the proposed use;
- the impact on the living conditions of nearby dwellings;
- the impact on the character and appearance of the Listed Building and the Conservation Area; and
- health and wellbeing.

Whether this is a suitable location for the proposed use

Whilst there are limited facilities in Offchurch, the refugees would only be resident here for a short period before being settled permanently elsewhere. As a result, the absence of any significant facilities in the immediate vicinity is not considered to be a major issue. The quiet secluded nature of the locality could also be beneficial as it would provide a quiet and peaceful introduction to life in the UK.

The proposals would introduce a not insignificant number of short term residents into what is a relatively small village. This would undoubtedly have some impact on the character of the village. However, it is important to remember that this would be a temporary impact, with the applicant only seeking planning

permission for a temporary period of 5 years. Furthermore, the lawful use of the premises as a religious retreat house would accommodate short term occupants, albeit this is likely to be a less intensive operation. It is also of note that the property occupies a relatively secluded position within the village, set well back from the road and not readily visible from public vantage points. Taking all these factors into account, it is not considered that the proposed temporary change of use would cause unacceptable harm to the character of the village.

Impact on the living conditions of nearby dwellings

Whilst the proposals would result in an intensification of use, the premises are situated well away from neighbouring dwellings. Therefore the proposals are unlikely to result in a material increase in noise and disturbance for existing residents. It is also important to remember that, as a residential use, this is the type of use that is normally considered to be appropriate within a residential area. Therefore it has been concluded that the proposals would have an acceptable impact on the living conditions of neighbouring dwellings.

Impact on the character and appearance of the Listed Building and the Conservation Area

The proposals would not have any significant implications for the character and appearance of the Listed Building or the Conservation Area. No physical alterations are proposed.

Health and wellbeing

The proposals would have positive impacts on health and wellbeing in terms of providing assistance to refugees.

Other Matters

The premises have a large car park which would provide sufficient parking and servicing for the proposed use.

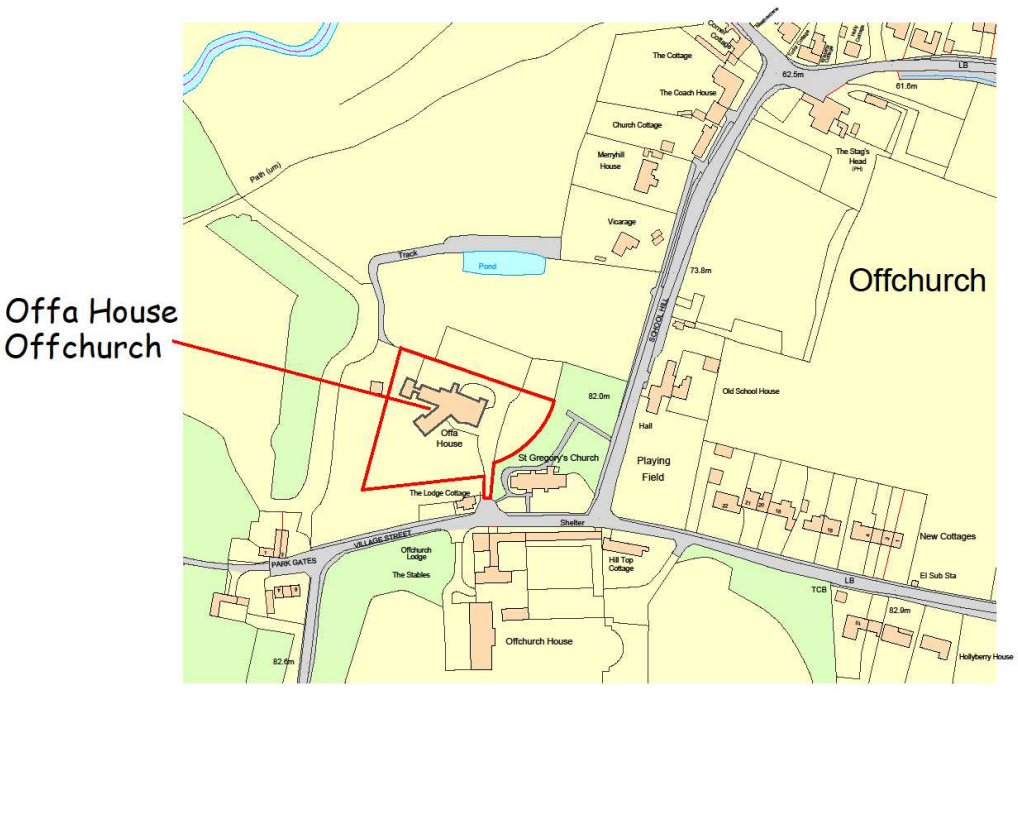
After the temporary planning permission expires, the lawful use of the site will revert back to the current use as a retreat house.

With regard to funding, it is understood that this will be provided by the Home Office. However, the financing of development is not a planning matter.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

This is a suitable location for the proposed use and the proposals would have an acceptable impact on the living conditions of neighbouring dwellings. Furthermore, the proposals would preserve the character and appearance of the Listed Building and the Conservation Area. Therefore it is recommended that planning permission is granted.

CONDITIONS

1 The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this permission. **REASON:** To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

2 The use hereby permitted shall be discontinued on or before 10/11/20. **REASON:** Since planning permission has been granted on the grounds that there is a temporary need for refugee accommodation.