

Crawley Borough Council

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee 30 June 2014

Report to Cabinet 2 July 2014

'Leacroft', 117 Ifield Road, West Green

Report of the Head of Strategic Housing and Planning Services
Report No: SHAP 38

1. Purpose

- 1.1 In response to a petition submitted to the Council in February 2014, this report will consider the heritage value of 'Leacroft' 117 Ifield Road, West Green (hereafter referred to as 'Leacroft') and whether it should be locally listed or statutory listed, assess what it could be used for, and consider whether the Borough Council should consider purchasing the building. The report will also suggest how the council might support Leacroft Medical Practice with their current re-location problems.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Cabinet is recommended to agree that:
- i) while 'Leacroft' does have some merits as a building and is well regarded by residents it does not on balance meet the criteria for local listing
 - ii) a new conservation area designation is not warranted in the area as it is not of sufficient special architectural or historical value
 - iii) Ifield Road does not merit designation as an Area of Special Local Character
 - iv) the Council should not purchase the building for community use
 - v) the Council will work with Leacroft Medical Practice, NHS England South and Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group to ensure continuity and access to NHS health services for patients in West Green and Langley Green over the next twelve months.
 - vi) the Council will with our health partners to investigate restoring access to a GP service in West Green
 - viii) the Council will work with Metrobus to investigate improving public transport links between West Green and Langley Green in the longer term as the practice is currently located in the town centre.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 Detailed investigation of the interior and exterior of the building has shown that, whilst it has an attractive roof and chimneys, the building overall is of modest quality and does not meet the threshold to merit inclusion on the Council's local list. A

request for consideration for statutory listing has been sent to English Heritage but this is not thought likely to be supported.

- 3.2 The area has a mix of modern and some Victorian or Edwardian properties. It is not, however, of sufficient special architectural or historic value, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to protect or enhance, to warrant conservation area designation under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- 3.3 The building would need extensive modification for use as a community centre, and would be more expensive to run and maintain than the Council's other community centres. There is no provision in the Council's capital or revenue budgets to purchase and run the building for community use. Residents, whilst concerned about the loss of the GP practice, have not raised the need for additional community space as a priority in recent consultations, and there a number of other community facilities in West Green which may be usable for the type of space sought in the provision.
- 3.4 Leacroft Medical Practice was originally located at Leacroft, 118 Ifield Road, Crawley until 2011. Then the practice moved to their new premises at Langley House, Langley Drive, Crawley. The practice currently serves a population of over 10,000 patients. Then on the 23 December 2013 the roof blew off Langley House, Langley Drive, Crawley in a storm. The building was badly damaged by water because it took several weeks to make it water tight and hence the damage to the building has been severe. The practices insurance company is dealing with the claim, but they have been slow. The building has now been gutted and cleared and the insurance company has been out to tender for the reconstruction works. They will hopefully be appointing a building company in the next few weeks. It looks as if the practice will not be able to move back to Langley House until spring 2015. In the meantime the practice is working out of the building known as Cross keys House, 14 Haslett Avenue West, Crawley in very cramped conditions. Therefore the Council will work with Leacroft Medical Practice, NHS England South and Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group to; ensure continuity and access to NHS health services for patients in West Green and Langley Green over the next twelve months, in the meantime we will facilitate parking spaces for staff and patients, investigate restoring access to a GP service in West Green in the longer term, improve public transport links between West Green and Langley Green in the longer term by working with Metrobus as the practice is now located in the town centre.

4. Background

- 4.1 'Leacroft' has previously been used as a GP practice and as the petition has demonstrated it was highly valued by the local community. However, the building has been vacant since the Practice relocated and merged with the Langley Green Surgery. Developers, who have an option on the building understood to expire in the near future, have been seeking planning permission to demolish the building and two neighbouring properties to redevelop the site for housing. Two planning applications, for 13 and 12 houses respectively, have been refused and the subsequent appeals have been dismissed. The planning inspector considering the appeals felt the location of the site was suitable for residential development, as it is within a mixed residential area, accessible to the town centre and public transport. However, the inspectors felt that the proposed developments would have a materially harmful impact on character and appearance of the site and the street scene and would provide a cramped and unsatisfactory environment for its occupants. The Inspector of the second appeal also noted that, whilst the building is generally attractive, it is not statutorily or locally listed and has been the subject of

various unsympathetic additions. The building is also surrounded by a large and unsightly area of hardstanding and as such, its loss would not amount to a reason for dismissing the appeal.

- 4.2 In February 2014, a petition led by the then Ward Councillor Vanessa Cumper was submitted to the Council with over 1,000 signatures. This requested that the Council save 'Leacroft' from destruction because the residents of West Green and Crawley do not want the building to be knocked down and replaced by new development. The petition asked that the Council purchase the building for use as a community hub so that residents could have a place to meet and access advice and health services which would be beneficial to the wider community of Crawley. It also asked that the Council widen its conservation area and place the building within it and list the building for local importance because 'Leacroft' has many period architectural features that are unique and significant to the residents of Crawley but the building also has important intangible significance to the people of West Green and the wider community of Crawley. Full Council moved that the petition be referred to Cabinet.
- 4.3 As part of the debate at the 26 February Full Council, an amended Notice of Motion was also carried stating that the local listing status of Leacroft would be investigated, that the Council would work with the Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group with regard to continuity of medical provision for residents of West Green, that the Council would work with Metrobus to improve public transport for West Green residents trying to access the surgery site in Langley Green, and would investigate the potential of designating Ifield Road as an Area of Special Local Character.

5. Description of Issue to be resolved

- 5.1 Leacroft is now a vacant building, likely to be the subject of further planning applications for redevelopment or conversion. The building may be marketed in the near future. The petition to save the building demonstrates the significant local concern about the loss of the GP Practice, which was felt to have provided a valuable community meeting place, and the potential loss of the building which is felt to have historic significance. The Council has been asked specifically through a petition signed by over 1,000 residents to purchase the building for community use, and to protect it as a heritage asset.

6. Information & Analysis Supporting Recommendation

Potential Heritage Designations

- 6.1 National Planning Practice Guidance (2014) states that local heritage designations should be considered against consistent criteria so as to improve the predictability of the potential for sustainable development. The Council's Design and Historic Buildings officer has assessed the interior and exterior of 'Leacroft' and a Heritage Assessment is set out in Appendix 1. The building is of modest quality, with no out of the ordinary examples of craftsmanship, no mention in local history books and no known significant historical association with a person or event. The building's best features are its roof, decorative bargeboards, ridge tiles and chimneys and on balance these have been assessed as insufficient to meet the threshold for individual building protection.
- 6.2 A request was sent to English Heritage to consider statutory listing of the building but this was rejected on the basis that Leacroft is indistinct from the great many other similar buildings of its type and date; it does not have the requisite levels of special

architectural or historic interest for listing. English Heritage's report is attached in Appendix 2.

- 6.3 A conservation area can only be designated in line with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and must be of special architectural or historic value, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that when designating a conservation area, councils should ensure that the concept of conservation is not devalued by designating areas that are not worthy. The area around 'Leacroft', whilst pleasant, especially in regard to the two pairs of semi-detached Victorian /Edwardian villas on the opposite side of Ifield Road, is not of sufficient special architectural or historic interest to warrant conservation area designation.
- 6.4 Specific criteria are also applied to the consideration of any areas for designation as Areas of Special Local Character. These are as follows:
- Does the area have a homogenous and cohesive character?
 - Are there are historical landscape features?
 - Is there strong landscape value, eg mature trees, hedges, grass verges etc?
 - Is the area low in density within a spacious landscape setting?

Whilst 'Leacroft' and some of the buildings nearby are Victorian /Edwardian, and this is one of the older areas of the town, the area does not meet the criteria above with regard to landscape or setting and therefore it is considered this area does not merit designation as an Area of Special Local Character.

Community Use:

- 6.5 At the time the residents' petition was considered at Full Council, the Council's Community Services team advised that, based on feedback at a West Green neighbourhood engagement event in March 2013, there was little evidence to suggest that lack of community space was an issue, although people did cite lack of community spirit. It is important that the Council does not confuse the desire of residents to have a GP surgery return to the ward with lack of local community facilities. There is ongoing liaison between the Council, the Practice, the Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS England to help improve access to health services for West Green residents in the short and long term. Any development of other community facilities would require further investigation of need. There used to be a Community Centre in West Green in Town Barn Road, which due to lack of community use, was first let to the PCT, then Age Concern, and now the WRVS. This building is still owned by CBC. Community Services also identified that there are a number of other community facilities in West Green which may be usable for the sort of the provision sought in the petition.

<u>Venue</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Other information</u>
WRVS Community Centre	Town Barn Road	CBC owned
Charis Centre	West Green Drive	
Crawley Hospital	West Green Drive	Crawley Horsham NHS Trust
Crawley Baptist Church	Crabtree Road	
Siri Guru Singh Sabha	25-29 Spencers Road	
St Peter's Church	Ifield Road	
Crawley Youth Centre	Longmere Road	
Carey House	Town Barn Road	CBC owned – possible community use for older people

- 6.6 There is no provision in the capital programme to purchase the building so agreement to do so would need to be accompanied by an approval by Cabinet and Full Council to increase the capital programme. If the Council were to decide to use the building for community use, a further capital budget would be required in respect of the extensive modification that would be required and a supplementary revenue budget would be required in respect of the costs of operating the facility.

Residential Use

- 6.7 The option of the council purchasing the building and converting it into flats, or semi-detached dwellings has been explored, possibly with additional small scale development in the rear garden to help viability. This could save the building and provide much needed residential accommodation. However, the Council's Property Team is aware of recent offers on the building, with a strong likelihood of an early sale, and has advised that whilst the potential returns to the Council of a basic conversion of the house to Council standards are unlikely to be commercially beneficial, a more extensive scheme utilising the garden land might be cost effective. However, CBC would need to secure time to carry out surveys and valuations, but it could not be recommended to place an offer on the property to secure this time. Therefore, this option is not being explored any further.

Bus Services

- 6.8 The issue of bus access between West Green and Langley Green has been raised by local members several times at meetings with Metrobus. In summary, Metrobus has indicated that it is very difficult for a route to be provided between the two neighbourhoods as West Green and Langley Green are currently on two different routes at present. Linking the two neighbourhoods would mean re-routing a lot of the neighbourhood services which may not be possible. It is difficult just to extend routes as it leads to longer travel times for other through passengers and it would not be viable to provide a link between West Green and Langley Green on its own.

Ward Members

- 6.9 Councillor Ward emphasised the importance of the Council continuing to work with the Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group to see if there is a way to restore access to a GP in West Green, potentially through the shared use of existing community facilities. He stressed the need to continue liaison with Metrobus to try and improve bus links between the town centre, West Green and Crawley Hospital, and Langley Green Leacroft Surgery. Councillor Ward also felt that many residents in West Green have an emotional attachment to the Leacroft building, as it represents to them an important part of the social history of West Green and in the collective memory it remains a landmark building. He stated that, following a recent residents' meeting in West Green, he will continue to support the call for Conservation Status to be awarded to many parts of the pre-New Town areas of West Green.

7. Implications

- 7.1 If the recommendations are agreed, there are no direct implications for Council. It is likely that further development or conversion proposals will come forward and these will be fully considered by Development Management.
- 7.2 If Cabinet decided not to accept the recommendations there are several implications:

- i) If Cabinet determine the building should be included on the local list, the reasons for designation will need to be very clear, and consultation will be undertaken with the owners, neighbouring residents and any others with an interest in the building prior to a final decision to locally list the building. The emerging Local Plan policy for locally listed buildings, set out in Appendix 1, would then apply. This seeks the retention of these buildings wherever possible but it does allow for their alteration or demolition in certain circumstances (They do not have the same level of protection as listed buildings on the statutory list). The policy does, however, ensure that any extension or alteration would have regard to the aspects of the building that were the basis of the local listing and, if demolished, that key elements are recorded. The local listing of the building would make very little difference to consideration of whether one use of the building is more appropriate than another. It should also be noted that, should a planning application affecting the building be refused and then go to appeal, an Inspector would consider very carefully the merit or otherwise of the building's inclusion on the Local List.
- ii) It is considered that, if this building was locally listed, then the minimum standard for inclusion on the local list would be lowered, and there may be many more buildings within the town that should be treated equally. This would mean the local list would need to be reviewed. It could also set a precedent for other buildings, particularly if redevelopment is proposed. Designation of Ifield Road as an Area of Special Local Character would have a similar effect on this designation.
- iii) If Cabinet determine that the area around 'Leacroft' is "of special architectural or historical value, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to protect or enhance", then consultation would need to be undertaken locally prior to designation in accordance with the statutory procedures. There are a number of implications for residents should the area be designated as a conservation area as properties within them would be subject to tighter controls on development. Total or substantial demolition would require permission and, in addition to general planning controls, planning permission would also be required for certain external works including cladding, some enlargements to the side and rear of properties, as well as alterations to the roof. Reduced permitted development rights also relate to buildings within the curtilage, works to chimneys and the installation of satellite dishes. Works to any trees require an application to be made to the Council six weeks prior to commencement.
- iv) Should the area be designated as a conservation area in the absence of evidence demonstrating special interest, the designation could be subject to legal challenge, and /or there could be an increase in planning appeals in the areas which may result in costs being awarded against the Council.
- v) Council purchase of Leacroft, 117 Ifield Road, for community use would require the identification of additional funding to increase the capital programme, and reductions /savings elsewhere in the revenue budget to support the running costs of the building.
- vi) Purchase of the building could also set a precedent whereby the Council is repeatedly requested to purchase property in order to prevent redevelopment taking place and /or to try and secure new facilities to redress the loss of community services withdrawn by others.

8. Background Papers

- Full Council February 26 2014, Agenda and Minutes
- National Planning Policy Framework *DCLG (2012)*

- PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment PRACTICE GUIDE, *English Heritage (2012)*
- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, *English Heritage (2011)*

Report author and contact officer: Sallie Lappage, Forward Planning Manager, 01293 438578

APPENDIX 1: Heritage Assessment of Leacroft, 117 Ifield Road

In determining whether any building would be suitable or worthy of Local Listing status the Council undertakes an assessment of the building based on a number of key factors.

These criteria were adopted as a result of work undertaken for the 2008 heritage study and were adopted by the Council in April 2010 following studies undertaken by AECOM and Alan Baxter.

The following criteria used in assessing whether a building is worthy of locally listing are:

- 1) Historic Interest of the building
- 2) Architectural Interest of the building
- 3) Group or Townscape value
- 4) Intactness
- 5) Communal Value

To support this, the emerging Local Plan also proposes policy wording that is as follows:

Policy CH15: Locally listed Buildings

4.73 There are many buildings within Crawley that of particular local architectural or historical interest. These buildings are not considered to be of national significance but are local heritage assets that are irreplaceable. These buildings should be retained wherever possible, as they make an important contribution to the borough's heritage and character. Such buildings are included on the council's Local Building List.

Policy CH16: Locally Listed Buildings

All development will seek to secure the retention of buildings included on the Crawley Borough Local Building List. Development should also maintain features of interest, and conserve or enhance the character or setting of the building.

Development proposals affecting Locally Listed Buildings must demonstrate in the Heritage Impact Assessment that proposals take account of the following criteria:

- i) The Historic interest of the building.**
- ii) The Architectural interest of the building.**
- iii) The Townscape value of the building.**
- iv) The Communal value of the building and its surroundings.**

Locally Listed Buildings should be retained. Proposals seeking the demolition or partial demolition of a Locally Listed Building may be acceptable in exceptional circumstances if the development proposals:

- a) reflect or retain the key features of the original building;**
- b) significantly outweigh the merit of retaining of the original building with regard to social, economic and environmental benefit to the wider area; and**
- c) records the building to English Heritage Level 4, unless previously agreed with the Local Planning Authority, and submits that record to the Historic Environment Record in consultation with the Local Authority;**

The council will also assess the merit of designating new locally listed buildings in consultation with local residents and will define the characteristics of the buildings that warrant this level of protection.

The policy approach and the criteria allow residents and stakeholders to utilise the same criteria to consistently assess the merit of the buildings considered.

LEACROFT 117 Ifield Road

In regard to 'Leacroft', officers including the Council's Design and Historic Buildings Officer have assessed the building based on the criteria set out above. The conclusion is that the building is of limited architectural interest. In addition, the unsympathetic extensions, the large area of tarmac parking and alternations to the setting of the building, are not considered worthy of locally listed building status.

In making the assessment, officers have had due regard to the criteria and have not been able to find any additional information to support any historically significant information, for example through an association with a famous architect/designer or event, to justify statutory listing. The information submitted regarding Crawley's first female doctor would not warrant statutory listing.

1) Historic Interest of the building:

Whilst 'Leacroft' was built in the early twentieth century, there is no specific information that has arisen that identifies any specific elements of historic interest that make the building or its construction of particular importance.

2) Architectural Interest of the building

Whilst the building still displays some original features, such as its roof, decorative bargeboards, ridge tiles, chimneys, front door and windows, the fact that the building and its setting are otherwise unremarkable and have been so significantly changed means that the building is not a good example of early twentieth century architecture. There are no specific features that are unusual or intact to warrant designation.

3) Group or Townscape value

The area around the building has also been assessed regarding the merit of designating a conservation area, in order to protect the buildings. It is considered that there is not sufficient merit in the building on its own or in conjunction with those buildings surrounding it to warrant a conservation area designation, nor to support its inclusion in the Local List.

4) Intactness

The building has been substantially altered with side and rear extensions and the overall balance and appearance of the building has been compromised. Even if the extensions were to be removed the original building would not be worthy of designation, especially given the alterations to the interior and the surrounding curtilage.

5) Communal Value

The most effective protection for communal value is through Conservation Area designation. The building is not located within an existing conservation area and is 245 metres from St. Peter's Conservation Area. The building does not form part of a collection of buildings and the road, although pleasant, especially in regard to the two pairs of Victorian/Edwardian semi detached villas opposite, the area is not of sufficient special architectural or historic interest to warrant designation.

Application Name: Leacroft, West Green, Crawley, West Sussex

Number: 1420140

Type: New

Heritage Category: Listing

Address:

Leacroft Medical Practice, 117 Ifield Road, Crawley

Leacroft Medical Practice, 117 Ifield Road, Crawley

County District District Type Parish

West Sussex Crawley District Authority Non Civil Parish

Recommendation: Reject

Assessment:

CONTEXT

English Heritage has received an application to list Leacroft, West Green, Crawley an early-C20 detached suburban villa, converted to a GP's surgery and offices in the 1970s. The building is vacant and is proposed for redevelopment.

HISTORY AND DETAILS

Leacroft dates from the very late C19 or early C20. In the 1970s it was converted to a GP's surgery which involved the reordering of the plan, opening up rooms, an extension to the north-west, and a later extension to the west. Notable internal features are few; fireplaces have been removed. External elevations are rendered and pebble-dashed. There is a timbered gable and clay-tiled roofs with brick chimney stacks. Many original sash windows remain.

ASSESSMENT

Based on the information provided and with reference to the Principles of Selection (March 2010) and English Heritage's Listing Selection Guide for Town Houses (October 2011), Leacroft is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons.

* Date: suburban villas of this date were built and survive in great numbers; to merit listing it should exhibit a far greater degree of architectural and/or historic interest;

* Architectural interest: the building is typical of its date and is modest in terms of architectural details and treatments;

* Levels of alteration: the plan of the ground floor has been affected by the conversion to a GP's surgery, with rooms opened up and circulation routes altered, and many internal features, such as fireplaces, have been removed.

CONCLUSION

Leacroft is indistinct from the great many other similar buildings of its type and date; it does not have the requisite levels of special architectural or historic interest for listing.