

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee

16 January 2019

**AUTHOR/S:** Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development

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**Application Number:** S/1823/18/FL

**Parish(es):** Girton Parish Council

**Proposal:** 16 one-bedroom apartments in one two-storey building and one small office building including car-parking, bike storage, bin storage, garden store, a substation and landscaped open spaces.

**Site address:** 16-22 (including Michaels Close) High Street, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0PU

**Applicant(s):** The trustees of Girton Town Charity

**Recommendation:** Refusal

**Key material considerations:** Principle of development  
Impact on the character and appearance of the area

**Committee Site Visit:** 15 January 2019

**Departure Application:** No

**Presenting Officer:** Rebecca Ward (Principal Planning Officer)

**Application brought to Committee because:** Local Member call in and significant public interest

**Date by which decision due:** 31 August 2018

### Executive Summary

1. There is proven current and future demand for age exclusive accommodation, and this scheme would make an important contribution to the supply of this form of housing and in the right location.
2. However, the proposed development by virtue of its scale, massing, form and siting would cause adverse harm to the enjoyment of the amenity area of No.14 High Street and to the character and appearance of the local area. Both of which would be contrary to design policies in the adopted Local Plan.
3. The Local Planning Authority has received a significant number of objections against the proposed development on these grounds and amongst a number of other concerns which have been listed in this report.
4. In this instance, the harm identified would, in the view of officers, outweigh the

benefits of the development and therefore the scheme has been recommended for refusal for the reasons set out in this report.

### **Relevant Planning History**

5. Pre-application advice (PRE/0108/17) - Proposed re-development - Supported the principle of re-development on the site subject to further details.
6. Pre-application advice (PRE/0539/17) - Redevelopment of 6 dwellings and office bungalow into 15, 2 bedrooms apartments and a new headquarters for the charity. Issued 17 November 2018. Proposal was for an 'I' shaped building with office to the frontage, accommodation set behind the frontage building in a linear form and towards the rear of the building would extend towards the north and south boundaries. The scale and massing/form was considered to be broadly acceptable by officers but amendments needed to overcome neighbouring amenity concerns.

### **National Guidance**

7. National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (NPPF)  
Planning Practice Guidance
8. **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Submission – Adopted September 2018**
  - S/1 Vision
  - S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
  - S/3 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
  - S/5 Provision of New Jobs and Homes
  - S/6 The Development Strategy to 2031
  - S/7 Development Frameworks
  - S/9 Minor Rural Centre
  - H/8 Housing Density
  - H/9 Housing Mix
  - H/10 Affordable Housing
  - H/12 Residential Space Standards
  - NH/4 Biodiversity
  - CC/1 Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change
  - CC/3 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy in New Developments
  - CC/4 Water Efficiency
  - CC/6 Construction Methods
  - CC/7 Water Quality
  - CC/8 Sustainable Drainage Systems
  - CC/9 Managing Flood Risk
  - HQ/1 Design Principles
  - HQ/2 Public Art and New Development
  - NH/2 Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character
  - NH/3 Protecting Agricultural Land
  - NH/4 Biodiversity
  - E/12 New Employment Development in Villages
  - E/13 New Employment Development on the Edges of Villages
  - SC/2 Health Impact Assessment
  - SC/4 Meeting Community Needs
  - SC/6 Indoor Community Facilities
  - SC/7 Outdoor Playspace, Informal Open Space, and New Developments
  - SC/8 Open Space Standards
  - SC/9 Lighting Proposals
  - SC/10 Noise Pollution

SC/11 Contaminated Land  
SC/12 Air Quality  
TI/2 Planning for Sustainable Travel  
TI/3 Parking Provision  
TI/8 Infrastructure and New Developments  
TI/10 Broadband

9. **South Cambridgeshire LDF Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):**

Open Space in New Developments SPD - Adopted January 2009  
Trees & Development Sites SPD - Adopted January 2009  
Landscape in New Developments SPD - Adopted March 2010  
Biodiversity SPD - Adopted July 2009  
District Design Guide SPD - Adopted March 2010

**Consultation**

10. **Girton Parish Council** - Whilst modifications have been made to the application following residents concerns, some of the committee members were still concerned that the proposed building is overbearing in relation to the surroundings and felt that the number of parking spaces was inadequate. The committee voted as follows; two approved the application, two rejected the application and there were two abstentions and no casting vote from the chairman.
11. **Affordable Housing Officer** - As alms-houses, the dwellings would not meet the Council's definition of affordable rented housing for social or affordable rent. Although the applicant is a charity whose properties, as a landlord, are managed by a registered provider, the charity is not itself a registered provider. However the recently revised definition of Affordable Rented Housing in the NPPF could be applied in this case, as the proposed scheme is in effect the same as a Build to Rent scheme with the dwellings let at an Affordable Private Rent, where there is no requirement for the landlord to be a registered provider.
12. **Urban Design Officer** - In urban design terms, I would not support the application as I have concerns about the narrow distance from the block of flats to the site boundary, the legibility and convenience for pedestrians of the entrance to the block of flats and some aspects of the appearance of the built form.
- Further comments following discussion: The main building, by virtue of its scale, form and mass would not be in character with the local character, which is currently, one-two storey dwellings with modest size gardens.
13. **Landscape Officer** - No objections with the proposed development and would recommend the following landscape planning conditions: hard and soft landscape details, boundary treatment, cycle/refuse parking store material details, existing tree protection, SUDs within parking area.
14. **Tree Officer** - No arboricultural or hedgerow objections to this application. There are trees on or adjacent to site with no legal protection. A Tree Survey and Arboricultural Implications Assessment and Preliminary Arboricultural Method Statement & Tree Protection Plan (dated 23 March 2018) has been submitted. This is sufficient for this stage of the application but a further detailed Tree Protection Plan will be required if the application is approved. Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Strategy should be conditioned on any decision notice.
15. **Ecology Officer** - The applicant has submitted a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in

support of this application. The report appears to be a robust analysis and I do not believe that further surveys are required to inform this application. The report recommends a series of non-licensable mitigation activities that will remove any residual risk of legislative conflict. I am in agreement on these matters and would recommend that they are formalised into a Construction Ecological Management Plan (CEcMP) and secured by condition, should the case officer be minded to grant permission.

16. **Archaeology Officer** - Records indicate that the site lies in an area of high archaeological potential. There are no objections to the development from proceeding in this location but consider an investigation should be secured through condition.
17. **Anglian Water** - The sewage system at present has the available capacity to take the flows of this development via a gravity discharge regime.
18. **Local Highways Authority Development Management** - The inter vehicles visibility splays must be within the existing adopted public highway or land under the control of the applicant without crossing 3rd party land which the Local Highway Authority believes cannot be achieved. Following the submission of a plan the applicant has demonstrated the splays can be achieved within the adopted highway.
19. **Police and Crime Officer** - Supports the application
20. **Environmental Health Officer** - I am satisfied with External Lighting Assessment Stage 3 Report (Revision 2) dated 18 April 2018 provided by MEP Engineering which details the level of illumination for the site, and how this will be mitigated to control potentially adverse impact on nearby residents. The following conditions should be applied to any consent: operational Noise Minimisation Management Plan / Scheme, traffic management plan, foundation details in the event of piling, scheme to minimise spread of dust, construction hours, burning of waste.
21. **Air Quality** - I have considered the implications of the proposals in relation to potential impacts on local air quality and do not object to the proposed development. I consider the above documents sufficient to reduce the impact of the proposed development on local air quality. Therefore, a condition relating to Air Quality is not considered necessary in this instance.
22. **Lead Local Flood and Water Authority** - Based on the amended documents the LLFA have no objection in principle to the proposed development. The documents demonstrate the surface water from the development can be managed through the use of attenuation tanks and permeable pavements restricting surface water discharge to 1l/s for the 1 year, 2.3l/s for the 1 in 30 year and 2.5l/s for the 1 in 100 year. Condition for a detailed surface water scheme and maintenance plan should be applied to any decision notice.

### **Representations**

23. The Local Planning Authority has received 34 letters of objection on this application. These letters relate to the original scheme and subsequent amendments that were made on 4 December 2018. The comments can be found on the Councils website. In summary the followings material considerations have been raised:
  - Amendments have not dealt with concerns raised on impact to amenity of No.14 High Street.
  - Scheme is out of character with the local area and does not maintain the

existing street layout.

- Unduly dominant due to size, bulk and location
- Industrial/commercial style which is out of keeping with the residential location
- Building heights are higher than existing building heights
- Building is not in line with others along the High Street
- Concerns with the internal arrangement of the building
- Density of the proposal would not be in keeping with the surrounding area
- Materials used in the design are not in keeping with the area and extensive use of glass would lead to concern with reflections
- Concern about the location of the substation in proximity to residential amenity.
- Car parking would not be sufficient as study/craft room in the units could be used as bedrooms.
- Safety concerns with the access onto High Street.
- Temporary planning permission for office use is not permanent.
- Local community have not been involved in the design process including amendments.
- Shadow diagram not accurate
- Loss of trees
- Detrimental to existing wildlife
- Flood risk concern
- Noise impact on existing residential amenity
- Responsibilities of the council under the Human Rights Act, in particular Protocol 1, Article 1 which states that a person has the right to peaceful enjoyment of all their possessions which includes the home and other land.
- Impact to setting of Grade II Listed Buildings on Duck End and impact on the oldest part of the village
- Almshouses are of historic interest and should be maintained or refurbished to preserve the character of the village
- Need for single storey dwellings for older residents.

24. Three letters of support has been submitted. In summary the followings material considerations have been raised:

- Improvement to the existing bungalows.
- Valued addition to the community
- Designed sympathetically and does not have any detrimental impact on neighbourhood.
- Buildings are no higher than adjacent properties.
- Hedges will screen neighbour houses

### **Site and Surroundings**

25. The site has an area of 0.336 ha. It is accessed from Girton High Street, and constitutes four one-bed bungalows on Michaels Close and two semi-detached bungalows facing the High Street. The Girton Town Charity (GTC) Office (a former dwelling) is also located on the site.
26. The levels across the site slope from north to south, with the area immediately off the High Street rising by approximately 1m with a grass embankment to the frontage. There are dense tree/hedges running along the eastern perimeter with hedging on the northern and southern perimeters. The site is surrounded by residential houses and their associated garden spaces on all sides. A public footpath runs along the boundary of No.14 High Street with views into the site. The site is within a Flood Zone 1.

27. In terms of the applicant's background, GTC is registered with the Charity Commission and exists to help Girton residents, both as individuals and collectively through Village societies and activities. One of their arms includes providing Almshouses. GTC has a total of 16 Alms-houses, comprising two and three bedroom homes in Girton. This includes the properties on the application site. The houses are intended for Girton families to help them save and move onto the housing ladder or for active retirees who can live independently. Accommodation is allocated through vetting process during which each individual applicant is assessed in terms of meeting set criteria.

### **Proposal**

28. The application seeks planning permission for the demolition of the existing bungalows and office building and the erection of sixteen one bedroom apartments. The apartments will be restricted for occupiers that are over 55 and a replacement of an office building for the GTC. The apartments will all be located within a two storey building on the site. The site will be accessed from the High Street and will have provision for 14 car parking spaces.

### **Planning Assessment**

#### *Principle of development*

29. The site lies within the village framework of Girton, a Minor Rural Centre where policy S/9 envisages developments up to 30 dwellings being acceptable. The proposal would therefore accord with policies S/7 and S/9 of the adopted Local Plan which together seek to ensure residential developments are located in sustainable locations.
30. The proposed office will replace one that is already on the site for the Charity. The proposed use is considered to be acceptable in a residential area being a Class B1 use. If the Charity wish to convert the office back to a dwelling in the future a separate planning application will need to be made to the district council.

#### *Affordable housing provision*

31. The dwellings would be for almshouses for the over 55s. Officers understand that the properties will be rented out by the GTC. The properties will be let out to those that are 'in-need' within the Girton community or those that have a close connection to the village following a vetting process in which each applicant is assessed in terms of meeting set criteria.
32. Paragraph 77 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning authorities should '*support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs*'. The affordable housing definition in Annex 2 states that '*housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market can be permitted*' subject to complying with one of the affordable housing definitions.
33. The GTC have confirmed that their model will meet definition (a)a of Annex 2 in providing affordable housing for below 20% local market rent. Whilst the charity are not technically a 'Registered Housing Provider', private landlords, such as the GTC are still able to meet the definition of (a)b. provided it is a 'Build to Rent' scheme. If the scheme is permitted a S106 agreement will need to be required to secure the properties at an affordable price for future eligible households. The applicant has agreed to this

approach and therefore would meet the final criteria (a)c.

34. The proposal would therefore exceed the requirements of policy H/10 of the adopted Local Plan that seeks to secure 40% affordable homes on developments of 11 or more dwellings.

*Housing mix and space standards*

35. The Council's Housing Statistical Information Leaflet (HSIL) provides information on the housing need for Girton. There is significant demand for affordable rented 1 bed dwellings in Girton, with 8 applicants on the register aged 60+. Recent research for the Greater Cambridge Partnership has resulted in a model (HOPSR) for estimating the required supply of housing for older people of which there is a significant deficit. There is therefore significant proven current and future demand for age exclusive accommodation, and this scheme would make an important contribution to the supply of this form of housing.
36. This application proposes 16 one bedroom dwellings of 72m<sup>2</sup> each that greatly exceed the minimum threshold of 50m<sup>2</sup> in the Nationally Described Space Standards. In addition all dwellings are designed to Building Regulations Part M (4) Category 2 as a minimum, with the B1 office space designed as capable of being converted to C3 use and to Building Regulations Part M (4) Category 3.

*Impact on character and appearance of the area*

37. A main objective of the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 9) states that decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area. Paragraph 127 also states that decisions should ensure developments are sympathetic to the local character and history including the surrounding built environment, whilst not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.
38. The applicant has engaged with officers through the Council's pre-application procedure. During this time there have been various different revisions to the proposed development to try and overcome concerns. However, ultimately both planning and urban design officers feel that the scheme, as submitted, has not lived up to its initial potential in order to comply with design policies in the Local Plan.
39. The site is located in a residential area surrounded by modest sized two storey and single storey dwellings and their garden areas. The building line along the southern side of the High Street is staggered with dwellings setback from the roadside by landscaping and associated parking areas.
40. The proposed buildings will be set slightly forward of the existing building line, however the proposal still maintains a reasonable landscape buffer between the closest elevation and the highway. Given its siting forward of the building line the presence of the buildings will be a more prominent features in the street scene.
41. Whilst the two storey height of the proposed main building would not necessarily be out of character with the area given that there are other two storey dwellings to the north, the overall linear form and mass of the building would be noticeably substantial in this location and would be contrary to the existing residential character. This difference would be experienced from public view points along the High Street (and between existing housing), the public footpath along No.14 and from the private garden areas.

42. The applicant considers the offshoot from the main range on the northern side and the saw toothed elevation on the southern side both aid in reducing the perceived mass of the building. However, given the various public vantage points, rising land levels from the High Street and the continuity of the linear roof-form, officers do not consider these design features fundamentally reduce the overall mass of the building to make it an acceptable one in this location.
43. Some of the trees/hedgerows on the eastern boundary treatments will be removed as a result of the buildings siting. This will open up views into the site from the east. Whilst it is recognised that additional boundary treatments along the southern and northern boundaries will provide some visual containment, however, the degree of visibility will vary according to the seasons.
44. Whilst officers accept that the design and layout of the main building has been constructed to provide an innovative solution to the GTC, officers are of the opinion an alternative design solution could be found that would mitigate the identified harm. The proposed development is not the only solution.
45. For these reasons, the development by virtue of its scale, bulk, massing and siting would adversely harm rather than positively contribute to the character and appearance of the area contrary to policy HQ/1 of the adopted Local Plan. This policy amongst other things, seeks to ensure that all new development is of a high quality design that preserves or enhances the character of the area, respects the local context and local distinctiveness of the area and would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the village character.
46. Material details can be conditioned on any decision notice to ensure they are in keeping with the surrounding area.

*Residential amenity*

47. Officers have considered the impact of the development in terms of overlooking and overbearing to No.12 High Street and properties along Church Lane. Given the distances of the dwellings from the main building there would be no unacceptable impacts.
48. No.24 High Street is a two storey dwelling slightly set back from the High Street. The garden area of No.24 wraps around the existing GTC office. In terms of privacy and overlooking, the first floor northern elevation of the building has been amended to include only high level windows serving a hall-way, therefore as amended; the proposal would not result in unacceptable overlooking impacts.
49. In terms of overshadowing, the garden area of No.24 High Street is modest-large in size. Whilst the building might cast some shadow over part of the garden area closest to the shared boundary, the majority will remain un-impacted and therefore is not considered to result in unacceptable over-bearing impact to warrant the scheme for refusal.
50. No.14 High Street is a single storey bungalow set back from the High Street with a long front garden and small rear garden with outbuildings. In terms of privacy and overlooking, the southern elevation of the proposed apartment building will be located at its closest 13m-16m to the shared boundary with No.14. The apartment building will stretch the length of the plot and at first floor; the southern elevation will contain 14 windows which will each serve the living room/bedroom space of each of the

apartments.

51. Given the sheer length of the building, the distance from the boundary and the number of windows in the elevation, the perception of overlooking to the amenity area of No.14 would cause a significant and adverse impact. Landscaping could not be relied upon to mitigate the identified harm. In this regard the proposal would be contrary to policy HQ/1(n) which seeks to protect residential amenity.

#### *Highway safety and parking*

52. The development would include a new access off the High Street, which has been designed to ensure adequate visibility and the ability for 2 vehicles to pass each other when entering and leaving the site. Bin collections and any servicing of the sub-station are facilitated by their locations close to the access. The layout of the car park enables cars to enter and leave the site in a forward gear. The Local Highways Authority has not raised any objections to the application on these grounds.
53. The proposal seeks to introduce 14 vehicle parking spaces, two of which will be for disabled users. Of these spaces, two will be allocated to the office and the remaining spaces unallocated to the apartments. The Transport Assessment submitted with the application states that 14 car parking spaces will accommodate the potential demand for parking, however, a low level landscaping area will be incorporated into the scheme which will enable the provision of a further two parking spaces, if this is required.
54. Policy TI/3 of the adopted Local Plan states that car parking should be provided through a design-led approach in accordance with the indicative figures in figure 12. The table does not set out criteria for a development of this nature and therefore the proposal has to be considered on its merits.
55. The TA indicates based on research for retirement schemes car ownership rates is typically 0.3-0.4 per dwelling. Based on this rate, and the car ownership rate of the existing residents, it is likely that there will be a demand for fewer than eight parking spaces at peak demand. The additional eight spaces will allow for a further buffer in the event more of the occupiers have a car or they have visitors. In addition to this, Girton is allocated as a Minor Rural Centre with some good service provision to a local shop, public house, village hall etc. and a regular bus service to Cambridge. Therefore the sustainability of the location is generally good and a location where future occupiers are more likely to meet their daily needs without having access to a car.
56. Based on the above, it is considered that there will be sufficient car parking spaces on site to accommodate the likely demand, without increasing parking on the surrounding streets and would accord with policy TI/3 of the adopted Local Plan.

#### *Drainage*

57. The application site is within a flood zone 1 (low risk). During the course of the application process the applicant submitted additional details to overcome the holding objection maintained by the Lead Local Flood and Water Authority. The submitted information now demonstrate that surface water from the proposed development can be managed through the use of attenuation tanks and permeable pavements, restricting surface water discharge.
58. Conditions have been suggested for a detailed surface water drainage scheme and maintenance plan to prevent the risk of flooding and protect water quality. Officers consider these conditions to be reasonable in order to comply with policy CC/8 of the

adopted Local Plan.

59. In terms of foul water, the system will connect to the main sewer along the High Street. Anglian Water has confirmed there is capacity in the network to take the flows from the development. A condition for a foul water drainage scheme is not considered necessary in this instance.

### **Other Matters**

60. Recommended conditions linked to archaeology, landscaping, ecology, boundary treatments and tree protection are considered to meet the tests of paragraph 55 of the NPPF and will need to be applied to any decision notice in the event planning permission is granted.
61. Comments from third parties in relation to ecology and trees are noted, however, the applicants have provided sufficient information to mitigate the impact of the development on these features. Other information can also be secured by a planning condition.
62. In terms of the impact to listed buildings, the closest Grade II Listed Buildings are located further down the High Street at No.65 and No.67 and at No.8 and No.3 Ducks End. All the listed buildings are in excess of 100m from the application site with new residential development in-between. Therefore the proposed development would continue to preserve their existing setting in accordance with policy NH/14 of the Local Plan.

### **Planning Balance and Conclusion**

63. There is a proven current and future demand for age exclusive accommodation, and this scheme would make an important contribution to the supply of this form of housing and in the right location.
64. However, the proposed development by virtue of its scale, massing, form and siting would cause adverse harm to the enjoyment of the amenity area of No.14 High Street and to the character and appearance of the local area. Both of these impacts would be contrary to design policies in the adopted Local Plan.
65. In conclusion, the harm identified would, in the view of officers, outweigh the benefits of the development and therefore the scheme has been recommended for refusal.

### **Recommendation**

67. Refusal for the following reasons:

#### **Reason one -**

The site is set within the village development framework. The site currently consists of a group of single storey bungalows surrounded by existing residential properties and their garden amenity areas. As proposed, the main building block will extend in a linear form from the High Street towards the back of the plot stretching approximately 70m in length and have a height of approximately 7m.

By virtue of the overall scale, mass, form and siting of this building, it would introduce a visually intrusive form of development that would jar with the existing residential character of the area. This harm would be prominent from view points along

the High Street (and between existing housing), the public footpath along No.14 High Street and from the private garden areas.

Consequently, the proposal would be contrary to policy HQ/1 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted 2018) and paragraphs 9 and 127 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) which seeks amongst other things, to ensure that all new development is of a high quality design that preserves or enhances the character of the area, respects the local context and local distinctiveness of the area and would not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the village character.

**Reason two -**

Given the sheer length of the main building, the distance from the boundary at 13m-16m and the number of windows in the southern elevation, the perception of overlooking to the outdoor amenity area of No.14 High Street would cause a significant and adverse overlooking impact. As such, the proposal is contrary to policy HQ/1(n) of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (adopted 2018) which seeks to protect residential amenity.

**Background Papers:**

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website and / or an indication as to where hard copies can be inspected.

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
- South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's)
- Planning File Reference: S/2941/18/FL

**Report Author:**

Rebecca Ward  
Telephone Number:

Principal Planning Officer  
01954 713236