SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO:	Development and Conservation Control Committee	2nd March 2005
AUTHOR/S:	Director of Development Services	

S/0209/04/F - Steeple Morden
Demolition of Existing Workshops and Redevelopment of Site to Provide 6 Dwellings
15 Ashwell Road, for Marchfield Developments

Recommendation: Delegated Approval
Date for Determination: 31st March 2004

Members will visit this site on 28th February 2005.

Site and Proposal

1. This full application, as amended by drawings received on 6th January 2005, proposes the erection of six dwellings on a 0.38ha site off Ashwell Road, Steeple Morden. The site currently contains approximately 800m^2 of industrial buildings which are in a poor state of repair.

2. The site is served by a narrow access roadway approximately 70m in length, which is a little over 4m in width for most of its length. The roadway is bounded on either side by the side and long rear gardens of semi-detached houses in Ashwell Road. The boundaries comprise wire fencing or hedging. The main part of the site adjoins the rear gardens of two pairs of semi-detached houses in Ashwell Road and to the west a side garden of a detached house in Ashwell Road. To the rear the site adjoins a house in Station Road, which is set well back from the road and abuts the site. To the east the site adjoins the rear gardens of properties in Plough Close, a modern development off Station Road. The boundary with Plough Close comprises a row of tall conifer and Poplar trees.

3. The proposal involves the erection of four detached houses and a pair of two bedroom houses groups around a turning head. The pair of two bedroom dwellings provides the affordable housing element of the scheme.

4. A landscaping scheme is submitted as part of the proposals. It is proposed to remove the existing conifer and Poplar planting on the east boundary of the site and replace with new planting.

5. The site is within the village framework. The density of the scheme is 17 dph.

Planning History

6. The site has been used for industrial purposes since the 1970's.

Planning Policy

7. **Policy SE4** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") identifies Steeple Morden as a group village where residential development and

redevelopment up to a maximum scheme size of 8 dwellings will be permitted within the village framework provided that:

(a) The retention of the site in its present form is not essential to the character of the village;
(b) The development would be sensitive to the character of the village, local features of landscape or ecological importance, and the amenities of neighbours;
(c) The village has the necessary infrastructure capacity; and
(d) Residential development would not conflict with another policy of the Plan, particularly **Policy EM8.**

Development may exceptionally consist of up to 15 dwelling, if this would make the best use of a brownfield site.

All development should provide an appropriate mix of dwelling size, type and affordability.

8. **Policy HG7** of the Local Plan sets out the District Councils policy in respect of affordable housing on sites within village frameworks. In villages such as Steeple Morden, where the population is below 3000, such provision should represent up to 50% of the total number of dwellings for which planning permission may be given, dependant upon the level of clearly identified local need, although higher or lower percentages may be agreed in the light of such factors as proximity to local services; access to public transport; the particular costs associated with the development; and whether or not the provision of affordable housing would prejudice other planning objectives warranting greater priority in the particular case.

9. **Policy HG10** of the Local Plan states that residential developments will be required to contain a mix of units providing accommodation in a range of types, sizes and affordability, making the best use of the site and promoting a sense of community which reflects local needs.

10. **Policy EM8** of the Local Plan states that the conversion, change of use or redevelopment of existing employment sites to non-employment uses within village frameworks will be resisted unless the existing use is generating environmental problems such as noise, pollution or unacceptable levels of traffic or where it demonstrated that the site is inappropriate for any employment use to continue having regard to market demand.

11. **Policy P5/5** of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 ("The County Structure Plan") permits small scale housing developments in villages taking into account: the need for affordable rural housing; character of the village and its setting; and the level of jobs, services, infrastructure and passenger transport provision in the immediate area

Consultations

12. **Steeple Morden Parish Council** recommends refusal of the application as amended. It states:

"The Parish Council regrets the loss of any local employment opportunities and consequently fully supports Policy EM8 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, covering change of use of such a site to a non-employment use. We therefore trust that, in line with paragraph 5.43 of this Policy, the Planning Officers have received

documentary evidence that the site has been adequately marketed over the past 12 months to confirm its non-viability for such a purpose.

Should this be the case, we would still oppose the application on the following grounds:

We have serious concerns over the viability of the narrow access to the site, bearing in mind that it would have to carry both pedestrians and vehicular traffic, is not wide enough for two vehicles to pass and has limited sightlines at its junction with Ashwell Road. We note that the applicant has indicated that previous usage of the site involved 40 vehicle movements a day and would ask for this claim to be substantiated, as we understand that several of the workshops were jointly used by a single tenant and a covenant restricted their use at the weekends and after 6pm on weekdays. Bearing in mind these limitations, we regard the claimed previous level of vehicular movements to be unlikely and note the happy coincidence of the given figure with the standard reckoning for those likely to be generated by five dwellings.

In our response to the previous application, the Parish Council suggested that the need for 5-bedroom houses had already been met in other, more sustainable locations than Steeple Morden. Whilst noting that, in line with our previous request, the amended version has at least replaced one of the large dwellings with two affordable dwellings, we would concur with the Highways Department that 5 dwellings would be the absolute maximum for this site, due to its access problems, and would therefore ask for 2 of the 5 dwellings to be affordable dwellings (or alternatively, for a commuted payment towards the provision of affordable housing in the village.)

In addition, we would ask for the Highways Department to make a site visit, to confirm that the access road, its sightlines and its suitability for use by delivery and utility vehicles conforms to with their requirements. We would also ask for Anglian Water to confirm that the local (and overloaded) sewage system has the capacity to cope with the contributions of the five extra dwellings.

We note the concerns of neighbouring residents in Plough Close over the likely impact on their property if adjacent mature trees are removed, and the need for some after-care provision for the maintenance of the screening on the site boundaries. We also understand that there will be a need to decontaminate some areas of the site before any building commences and would wish to see proposals for this.

We see no mention of any street lighting for the proposed development and would wish to see proposals for this, particularly with a view to enhancing pedestrian safety on the access road without intruding into the amenity of adjacent dwellings.

Without prejudice to these objections, we would ask, that should Committee decide to approve the application, any Section 106 Agreement attached to the permission should require any education contribution from the development mainly to benefit Steeple Morden Primary School.

Finally. Given the likely impact of the proposed development on its immediate surroundings, we would be very grateful if members of the Committee could make a site visit to assess any problems, before reaching their decision.

13. The **Local Highway Authority** comments in respect of the amended plans. “Whilst I appreciate that some 801m^2 of light industrial units *could* be anticipated to generate in the region of 64 - 96 vehicle movements a day (TRICS), the actual daily

movements associated with these run down buildings has not been established. On this basis I was prepared to accept the redevelopment of the site for five dwellings, which is likely to generate some 40-vehicle movements a day.

A further dwelling unit will not only exceed the recommended number of dwellings served by a private drive, but has the potential to add another eight vehicle movements per day along this very narrow track.

Clearly, the more traffic likely to be generated, the greater the likelihood of conflict within the track - particularly at the junction, resulting in vehicles manoeuvring/waiting within Ashwell Road.

I recommend that the number of residential units remain as five as originally proposed."

14. The **Environment Agency** requests conditions requiring the submission of schemes in respect of ground contamination and foul and surface water drainage as well as setting out informatives

15. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests conditions restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the period of demolition and construction, and a scheme for the investigation of any contamination of the site. Informatives should be attached concerning the use of driven pile foundations, burning of waste and the need for a Demolition Notice.

16. The **Chief Financial Planning Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council**, is concerned that adequate secondary school capacity is not available at Bassingbourn Village College, where additional pupils generated by the development could be expected to go and a seeks a contribution to cover the cost of providing an additional space in the sum of £9000.

    The **Development Manager** supports the scheme.

17. The comments of the **Trees and Landscapes Officer, Environment Operations Manager, and Building Control Manager** on the amended scheme will be reported at the meeting,

Representations

18. The occupier of 17 Ashwell Road, adjacent the access, expresses strong concerns, particularly about the access to the site. Does the proposal accord with the requirements of the Fire Safety Officer, Building Inspector in respect of width of access roadway and turning provision? Can refuse vehicles turn within the site or will owners of the new properties have to leave bins on Ashwell Road to be collected? There is already problems with damage to fences either side of the access roadway due to its limited width, and there are children that play outside the houses. The access roadway is unsafe. If the plans are approved who will be responsible for the fences? Visibility for cars is obstructed at the entrance by cars parked in the parking bay to the right and an electrical pole and parked cars to the left. The old buildings contain a lot of asbestos - will this be dealt with properly? As factory units there is little noise from vehicles, normally less than 10 a day and n there was no movement in the evenings or weekends. The proposed development will lead to an increase in car noise.

19. The occupiers of 1 Plough Close expresses concerns that the upstairs window of the semi-detached house on Plot 1 will over look their property causing a loss of privacy. Could this window be obscure glazed or a bungalow built there? The remaining dwellings are too large for the needs of the village. There is concern at the safety of the narrow access and the existence of asbestos in the existing buildings.

20. The occupiers of 4 Plough Close, whilst having no fundamental objections to the proposed development are concerned at the impact that the removal of the existing conifer and poplar trees on the east boundary of the site on nearby buildings. Assurance is sought that any asbestos in the existing buildings will be properly dealt with and that the site will be properly decontaminated.

Applicant's Representations

21. A detailed planning statement has been submitted by the applicant which is available as part of the background papers and will be displayed at the meeting

Planning Comments - Key Issues

22. The key issues to be considered are whether the site complies with Policy EM8 of the Local Plan in respect of the loss of an existing employment site; whether the development would be sensitive to the character of the village and the amenities of neighbours; highway safety and; affordable housing.

23. The existing industrial buildings on the site are in a run down condition. In my view any long term use of the buildings for employment purposes is likely to result in pressure for replacement buildings. Although it would not necessarily be appropriate to allow replacement on a similar scale (800m^2) it is likely that any redevelopment would lead to potential levels of traffic generation above that which would be appropriate for the narrow access road. The existing buildings have not been used intensively for the past few years but have the potential to generate additional traffic movements. To the west of the site is Wyndmere Farm, which benefits from planning consent for conversion of buildings to employment use. In my view the long term use of this site has the potential to be incompatible with adjacent residential properties and given the existence if a significant area of employment floorspace at Wyndmere Farm I do not consider it essential that the application site remains in employment use.

24. As amended I do not consider that the proposed dwellings will have an unreasonable impact on the amenity of adjacent residents in terms of overlooking or being overbearing.

25. The Parish Council and local residents have expressed concern about the suitability of the narrow access to cater for the traffic likely to be generated by six dwellings. This concern is supported by the Local Highway Authority which has previously indicated that five dwellings should be the maximum allowed. In my view this is the key issue in determining this application and there is a balance to be struck between making best use of the site and the constraints imposed by the access.

26. As originally submitted the application proposed five detached dwellings. Although an additional unit has now been included one of the larger detached dwellings has been replaced by two smaller two bedroom dwellings. There has therefore been no increase in the number of bedspaces proposed.

27. Given that there is 800m^2 of industrial floorspace on the site which has the potential to generate a significant volume of traffic, although this has not been the case in recent years I am of the view that it would be difficult to resist the additional dwelling now proposed. I will report the views of the Building Control Manager in respect of emergency access.

28. The Development Manager supports the provision of two affordable dwellings as proposed. Although this represents only a 33% provision, development costs associated with the site preclude additional affordable units.

29. The Environment Agency has not raised any concerns in respect of foul water drainage although requested a condition.

30. The applicant will be asked to provide evidence to address the concerns expressed by residents in Plough Close regarding impact on existing buildings as a result of the loss of the existing trees.

31. Details of street lighting can be required by condition.

Recommendation

32. That subject to the views of outstanding consultees the applicant be invited to enter into a Section 106 Agreement securing the provision of two affordable dwellings. Subject to the prior signing of the Agreement delegated powers be given to approve the application subject to safeguarding conditions.

Reasons for Approval

1. The development is considered generally to accord with the Development Plan and particularly the following policies:

   - **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003:**
     P5/5 (Homes in Rural Areas)

   - **South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004:**
     SE4 (Dwellings in Group Villages)
     HG7 (Affordable Housing on Sites within Village Frameworks)
     HG10 (Housing Mix and Design) and
     EM6 (New Employment at Rural Growth and Limited Growth Settlements)

2. The development is not considered to be significantly detrimental to the following material planning considerations which have been raised during the consultation exercise:

   - Residential amenity including noise disturbance and overlooking issues
   - Highway safety
   - Visual impact on the locality
   - Loss of employment use
   - Drainage

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003

- Planning file Ref.S/0209/04/F

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