

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

14 January 2015

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number:	S/1344/14/FL
Parish(es):	Great Eversden
Proposal:	Proposed development of 10 affordable dwellings
Site address:	Site known as OSP 148, Church Street, Great Eversden
Applicant(s):	Accent Nene Ltd
Recommendation:	Refuse
Key material considerations:	Principle of development/Green Belt; Landscape character; Heritage Assets; Highway Safety; Ecology; Archaeology; and Other considerations
Committee Site Visit:	Yes
Departure Application:	No
Presenting Officer:	Andrew Fillmore
Application brought to Committee because:	The application site is owned by South Cambridgeshire District Council
Date by which decision due:	6 th March 2015

Planning History

1. **S/1044/11** - 10 affordable dwellings. Approved by SCDC, after which the decision was subject to a successful application for 'judicial review' on grounds the Local Planning Authority failed in its duty to undertake a 'Screening Opinion' as required under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. The decision was quashed and the application later withdrawn.
2. **S/3202/88/F** - 16 flats and garages. Refused, dismissed at appeal and by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State concluded the need for the affordable houses did not outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and significant harm to the character and appearance of Great Eversden.
3. **S/1174/81/O** for residential development, **S/1657/81/O** for residential development, **S/0735/86/O** for local authority housing, and **S/1205/86** for

Council housing for the elderly were all withdrawn.

Planning Policies

4. National

National Planning Policy Framework
National Planning Practice Guidance

5. South Cambridgeshire LDF Core Strategy DPD 2007

ST/1 Green Belt
ST/2 Housing Provision
ST/7 Infill Villages

6. Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies DPD 2007

DP/1 Sustainable Development
DP/2 Design of New Development
DP/3 Development Criteria
DP/4 Infrastructure and new development
DP/7 Development Frameworks
GB/1 Development within the Green Belt
GB/2 Mitigating the impact of development in the Green Belt
HG/1 Housing Density
HG/3 Affordable Housing
HG/5 Exceptions sites for affordable housing
SF/6 Public Art and New Development
SF/10 Outdoor Playspace, Informal Open Space and New Developments
SF/11 Open Space Standards
NE/1 Energy Efficiency
NE/3 Renewable Energy Technologies in New Development
NE/4 Landscape Character Areas
NE/6 Biodiversity
NE/7 Sites of Geological Importance
NE/9 Water and Drainage Infrastructure
NE/10 Foul Drainage – Alternative Drainage Systems
NE/11 Flood Risk
NE/12 Water Conservation
NE/14 Lighting Proposals
NE/15 Noise Pollution
NE/16 Emissions
CH/4 Development within the curtilage or setting of a Listed Building
SF/10 – Outdoor Play Space, Informal Open Space and New Developments
SF/11 – Open Space Standards
TR/1 Planning for More Sustainable Travel
TR/2 - Car and Cycle Parking Standards
TR/3 Mitigating Travel Impact
TR/4 Non-motorised Transport

7. Supplementary Planning Document(s)

District Design Guide SPD – adopted 2010
Affordable Housing SPD – adopted March 2010
Listed Buildings: Works to or affecting the setting of SPD – Adopted July 2009

8. Emerging Local Plan

S/1 Vision
S/2 Objectives of the Local Plan
S/3 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
S/4 Cambridge Green Belt
S/5 Provision of jobs and homes
S/7 Development Frameworks
S/11 Infill villages
CC/1 Mitigation and adaption to climate change
CC/3 Renewable and low carbon energy in new development
CC/4 Sustainable design and construction
CC/6 Construction Methods
CC/7 Water quality
HQ/1 Design principles
NH/2 Protecting and enhancing landscape character
NH/4 Biodiversity
MH/8 Mitigating the impact of development in and adjoining the Green Belt
NH/14 Heritage Assets
H/10 Rural exception sites for affordable housing

Consultations

9. **Eversden Parish Council** – Approve. The provision of additional guest parking spaces in the south west corner of the development is highly desirable. Lighting for the site should be low pollution as in Low Close, Little Eversden. We are not at all happy with the proposed red brick boundary wall.
10. **Councillor Page** – (Local Member) - (Full comments set out in Appendix A) The reasons for continued refusal on this site are simple. OSP148 is an open space in the Green Belt and outside the village envelope, and once lost is lost forever. In the context of nearby listed buildings and the church it is a very significant open space. The site should have two further protections – the hedge along the frontage should be declared an ‘Important Countryside Frontage’, with the site a ‘Local Green Space’. No serious attempt has been made to find an alternative site. There is local opposition to the scheme with 53 signatories to a petition against the development.
11. **Councillor Howell** (Housing Portfolio Holder) – (Full comments set out in Appendix B). As Housing Portfolio Holder I felt it was important to write to provide my support for this planning application, which is seeking to secure 10 units of affordable housing on a rural exception site, which is in the ownership of this authority.
12. I understand that there is a need for small development to help meet the local housing needs of this village. It is important that as a strategic enabling authority where housing demand is high that we try and use any assets that we hold to help in meeting this increasing need.
13. Since 2007 this authority has provided over 486 new homes on rural exception sites. Policy HG/5 has delivered more affordable housing for this district than policy HG/3 (with the exception of the strategic growth sites) and it is important that we provide much needed affordable housing to our parishes. We also have a

commitment through the City Deal to provide an additional 1000 homes on exception sites over the next 10 years.

14. I am aware of the Low Close Little Eversden scheme which was completed approximately 4 years ago and this has been well received by the parish and local community. I am advised that the development was able to accommodate residents who had a local connections to either Great or Little Eversden and I would like to ensure that the same allocation criteria is applied to this scheme too. Whilst our policy asks us to consider just the local need to the particular parish. Given the size of some of our villages we are at serious risk of not being able to provide any more affordable homes in smaller parishes where the needs of others cannot be accommodated.
15. The changes to the way affordable housing is funded and managed now and in the future presents a real threat to the success of projects such as this, we should ensure that as an authority we embrace projects such as these where we have willing partners who would fund such projects.
16. **SCDC Housing** – Support. A housing needs survey was carried out in January 2014 which identified 12 households as being in need of housing and who had a local connection to the Eversdens. The proposed housing mix is in accordance with the housing needs survey.
17. **SCDC Landscape** - Object. Much of the area has a relatively tranquil rural character. Great Eversden is a historic village with small paddocks around its perimeter creating a buffer between the village and large arable fields, and the development in one of these paddocks will have a harmful effect in its own right. When viewed from the footpath the development would have a harmful effect on the specific views and general amenity. The layout would not be appropriate within this well-defined village edge and be harmful to the character of Great Eversden
18. **SCDC Ecology** – The application is supported on ecology grounds due to the environmental enhancements proposed from the layout – primarily the provision of the community orchard and retained tree belt at the front of the development.
19. **SCDC Historic Buildings** – Adopted policy CH/4 advises permission will not be granted which adversely affects the wider setting of a listed building. English Heritage define setting as ‘the surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve’. The immediate area to the site has been subject of very little change and a previous proposal for low cost housing as an exception site was dismissed at appeal primarily on the likely effect on the character and appearance of the village and making reference to the concept of Guardian Fields. In line with English Heritages precautionary principle, where there is any doubt decision makers should err on the side of caution and recommend refusal.
20. **Highways Authority** – No objection.
21. **Anglian Water** – The foul drainage and sewerage system has available capacity to cope with the flows.
22. **Environmental Health (Contamination)** – No conditions are required.

23. **Police Architectural Liaison Officer** – No issues in terms of layout and design but raise the following issues; surveillance for the car parking for plots 1 and 5 is not spectacular, with little surveillance of the parking for plots 4 and 10. The semi-private nature of what is proposed means that for this application this won't actually be too much of an issue. The site is non-permeable which reduces considerably the risk of crime.
24. **English Heritage** – Object. The proposed development would cause harm to the setting of the grade 2* listed Church of St Mary and other designated heritage assets in the vicinity and is therefore contrary to policies 131, 134 and 137 of the NPPF.
25. **County Archaeology** – No objection. Recommend a condition requiring a programme of archaeological work prior to commencement of development.
26. **Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England** – Object. An estate of 10 dwellings would be out of keeping with this rural area. Result in a loss of rural landscape. Encourage the identified need to be found elsewhere with every effort to locate such developments in villages which have facilities.

Representations

27. Two representations have been received supporting the application citing the following reasons;
- Most residents regard the recent project at Low Close a success and so would this development proposal
 - Few houses have been built in the village in recent years
 - The site is central to the village with the dwellings attractive
 - The village desperately needs more affordable housing
28. Eight representations have been received opposing the application for the following reasons;
- Harmful to the character of the village
 - Harmful to the church and other heritage assets
 - Located in the Green Belt and contrary to Green Belt policy
 - Lack of local services in the village
 - The need for affordable housing is in Little Eversden where the development should be located
 - The site is only under consideration as the land is owned by SCDC
 - The building materials are out of keeping with the village
 - Loss of green space
 - Vehicular access is dangerous as is the nearby S-bend
 - Sewerage will not be able to cope
 - Surface water drainage concerns
 - There is a lack of community support for the development
 - No attempt has been made by the applicant to identify other suitable locations
 - Great and Little Eversden are separate parishes and the need should be provided in each individual parish in accordance with the adopted Affordable Housing SPD
 - Harmful to bats, through the loss of the hedge
 - There is no need for the development
 - Harmful to the landscape character

- Site is not sustainable

29. A petition signed by 63 residents objecting to the development has been received. The grounds of objection can be summarised as: unsafe vehicular access, out of character with rural village, disproportionate for a village of 100 dwellings, inappropriate in the Green Belt, cause harm to the setting of historic buildings, removal of elm hedge undermines character of street scene, lack of services in the village and there is no evidence the applicant has researched more sustainable sites with better services.

Planning Comments

30. The site which is broadly rectangular in shape is located to the east of the village of Great Eversden immediately north of Church Street, and is presently used for livestock grazing. A mature hedgerow forms the southern boundary extending parallel with Church Street.
31. Full planning consent is sought for the construction of 10 affordable dwellings comprising 2no. two bed houses for shared ownership, 1no. two bed bungalow for rent, 6no. two bed house for rent and 1no. three bed house for rent.
32. The site lies outside the village framework and in the Green Belt.
33. Great and Little Eversden are two separate administrative parishes, although they share a Parish Council.

Principle of development/Green Belt

34. The site lies within the Green Belt where the NPPF advises the construction of new buildings is inappropriate development which by definition is harmful to the Green Belt. One of the exceptions to this is "*limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan*". The relevant SCDC policy is HG/5 which states planning permission may be granted for schemes of 100% affordable housing designed to meet local needs on small sites within or adjoining villages.
35. The site is located adjacent the village framework of Great Eversden, which is defined as an 'Infill Village' on the Councils settlement hierarchy in both the adopted Core Strategy and emerging Local Plan. Infill Villages are described as having a poor range of services and facilities where it is often necessary for local residents to travel outside the village for most of their daily needs. Core Strategy policy ST/7 reflects this, only allowing a maximum of two new open market dwellings on greenfield sites within the framework boundary.
36. The adopted Affordable Housing SPD is less prescriptive advising exception sites should be 'small', and not greater than the level of local need identified, as well as being appropriate in scale to the category of the village in the settlement hierarchy.

Need for the development

37. The application is supported by a Housing Needs Survey, which examined the 'need' for affordable housing across both Great and Little Eversden. This concluded there is a current and immediate need for 12 houses to be built. The results of this survey are supported by the Councils Housing team and as such it

is considered there is an identified need for the scale of affordable housing proposed within this application. The development comprises 2no. two bed houses for shared ownership, 1no. two bed bungalow for rent, 6no. two bed house for rent and 1no. three bed house for rent. The size, design, mix and tenure of the dwellings is considered to meet the identified need.

38. Some of the third party representations draw attention to this 'need' emulating from Little Eversden and not Great Eversden, in conflict with the requirements of the affordable housing SPD which advises *'for the purposes of the rural exception site policy, local need is defined as identified need in the individual village or the local area it serves, defined as the parish boundary'*.
39. Officers are of the view given the small size of both villages and close proximity to one another assessing the need across both Parish Council administrative areas is justified. Moreover the Planning Committee has previously addressed this issue elsewhere for development in the Eversdens and indeed accepted the "joint" need was appropriate when considering the original scheme back in 2011.

Alternative sites

40. Policy HG/5 requires that in the case of sites within the Green Belt, planning permission should not be granted unless the District Council is assured there are no other appropriate sites for the scale and type of development proposed. As above, the 'need' for the development has been assessed across both parishes and therefore it is necessary to consider alternative sites adjoining both villages. The application is supported by a 'Sequential Test' which examines and discards a range of sites abutting the village framework of Great and Little Eversden. Officers are supportive of the reasons why these sites have been discarded.
41. It is of note both villages are completely surrounded by Green Belt, and therefore any exception site outside the village framework would need to be located within this designation.

Sustainability

42. Criterion c. of Policy HG/5 requires the development site to be well-related to the built-up area of the settlement, with the scale of the scheme appropriate to the size and character of the village. Criterion d. requires the site is well related to facilities and services within the village.
43. Great Eversden is listed separately from the village of Little Eversden on the settlement hierarchy (both Infill Villages) as well as being two distinct parishes. However both villages share a Parish Council and are in close proximity to each another, and as such for the purposes of assessing the sustainability of the site it is considered logical to take into account the scale and service provision offered across both villages as a single entity.
44. This approach is supported by paragraph 55 of the NPPF which advises in rural areas 'development in one village may support services in a nearby village'. Officers have already expressed the view this logic applies to the 'need for the development' as well as a consideration of 'alternative sites', where the search area should reasonably extend across both parishes.
45. In combination both villages have a total of 340 residential properties, doctors surgery, recreation ground, Indian restaurant and village hall. Within this context

the construction of 10 affordable dwellings is considered sustainable and in compliance with the spirit of the Affordable Housing SPD. To this extent, the scale of the scheme is appropriate to the size and character of the village.

Effect on heritage assets

46. Criterion e. of Policy HG/5 states development should not damage the character of the village or rural landscape. Policy CH/4 advises planning permission will not be granted for development which would adversely affect the wider setting of a Listed Building. Further policies relating to heritage assets include the adopted SPD and emerging Local Plan policy NH/14, which both advise a precautionary stance when considering the impact on heritage assets.
47. The NPPF advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the assets conservation, with the more important the asset the greater the weight. The framework goes on to advise significance can be harmed by development within a heritage assets setting.
48. The protection offered to heritage assets extends beyond policy guidance, with planning law requiring the decision maker to 'have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting'.
49. The site is located circa 60m, at its closest point, from the 'S bend' in Church Street to the east, around which a number of listed buildings are grouped. These include The Homestead, Outbuilding at The Homestead, Church Farm and Barn at Church Farm (all Grade 2 Listed), along with the Grade 2* Listed Church of St Mary. This grouping is visually separated from the village by the application site and further 'open countryside' to the south of Church Street. Officers are of the view this separation significantly and positively contributes to the setting of these listed buildings and in particular the Grade 2* listed church.
50. The appeal decision for planning reference S/3202/88/F refers to this land (development site) as 'Guardian Fields'. Although this is not recognised heritage terminology this is an accurate description of the role the site plays in the setting of the listed buildings.
51. The proposed development would extend the built form of the village east of Chapel Road into the 'Guardian Field' creating a visual link with the isolated listed buildings concentrated around the church. This link would be apparent from a number of views in and out of the village.
52. English Heritage advise the isolation of the listed buildings from the main village affords a much stronger presence (for the listed buildings) in the landscape and underlines the churches historic status as the primary building in the community, and conclude the development would harm the setting of these buildings. Officers are of the view this harm is 'significant' but not 'substantial'.
53. Further listed buildings (The Cottage and Telephone Kiosk, both Grade 2 listed) can be found to the north-west of the site beyond no. 3 Church Street, with the Grade 2 listed hall to the north-west. These buildings are sufficiently separated from the application site such that no material harm arises to their setting.
54. The construction of ten residential dwellings in this location will permanently erode the open space or 'Guardian Field' between the village and group of listed

buildings concentrated around the church, adversely affecting the setting of the listed buildings contrary to local and national policy requirements. Both the councils historic buildings officer and English Heritage oppose the scheme.

55. Whilst the application attempts to mitigate this harm through a low density scheme and detailed design of the properties, this is insufficient to address the harm and the setting of the listed buildings and the historic landscape will be significantly adversely affected.

Landscape

56. The landscape officer advises Great Eversden is an historic village with small paddocks around its perimeter which creates a buffer between the village and large arable fields, and that the village is in linear form with rows of cottages and a few larger farmsteads facing the roads and paths. A further notable landscape feature is that the site is bordered by a hedge to its south-western boundary which extends parallel with Church Street, and which is an attractive feature in the landscape.
57. The construction of 10 houses on this site including removal of part of the hedgerow to provide the required access, will result in an adverse impact on the landscape character. This is compounded by the site layout which is not considered appropriate in a village with a well-defined edge.
58. Whilst the landscape impact is mitigated by the low density of the scheme, bespoke layout and varied form and appearance of the properties, this is insufficient to overcome the landscape harm.

Highway safety

59. The county highways authority does not raise an objection as the required visibility splays of 2.4m x 43m can be achieved. Furthermore sufficient off road parking is provided on site.

Ecology

60. The application is supported by a habitat and protected species report, which although dating from 2011 is considered acceptable by the council's ecologist. The ecology officer supports the development on grounds the environmental enhancements proposed through the provision of a community orchard and retained tree belt to the front of the development result in benefit with the development not significantly impacting upon biodiversity interests.
61. The most significant short term impact arises from works to the front hedge, and although a large section is to be lost this will be adequately compensated through new planting within the site.
62. The site is located close to Eversden and Wimpole Woods SAC and as such there is potential for the vegetation to provide feeding and habitat linkage for bats moving across the landscape. Light pollution emitting from the new houses can impact on bats but sufficient 'dark gaps' will remain for bats to continue to move through this parcel of land. The erection of bat boxes and the planting of trees and shrubs (which can be controlled through condition) will ensure enhancements for local bat species as a greater variety of feeding opportunities will be created.

Archaeology

63. The County Council archaeologist highlights there is known archaeological evidence in the vicinity of the site owing to prehistoric and Roman occupation along with the more contemporary origins of the village, and recommends a programme of archaeological investigation to be secured by condition.

Environmental Impact Assessment

64. The application has been 'screened' under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (EIA). A screening opinion was given on 17 December 2014. The development falls within category 10(b) of Schedule 2 of the 2011 regulations and exceeds the threshold in column 2 of the table in that schedule. Taking into account the criteria of Schedule 3 (the characteristics of the development, the site's location outside of any 'sensitive' area, and the characteristics of the potential impact the development) it is not considered to represent EIA development.

Other considerations

65. Concerns have been raised relating to the impartiality of the planning decision making process given the site is within the ownership of South Cambridgeshire District Council. The permission may result in financial benefit to the Council through means of uplift in the value of the land due to the grant of planning permission. This is not a material planning consideration and cannot be taken into account in the decision making process.
66. The police architectural liaison officer advises there have been three crimes recorded in the village in the past 12 months none of which were in this post code, and considers the 'non-permeable' layout of scheme to reduce the risk of crime considerably. Some concerns are expressed over the natural surveillance of the parking spaces, however this is not considered significant.
67. No concerns are raised with regard to contamination from the Council's Environmental Health officer.
68. Anglian Water confirms there is sufficient capacity for waste water and foul sewage treatment. Surface water run off can be controlled through condition.
69. The National Planning Practice Guidance has recently been amended and advises planning obligations should not be sought from developments of 10 units or less and which have a maximum combined gross floorspace of no more than 1000sqm. In light of this legal advice is being sought as to whether the authority can secure the necessary financial contributions for public open space and community facilities and members will be updated at the planning committee. This does not affect the ability to secure the dwellings as affordable units in perpetuity.

Representations

70. Local opinion is divided on the application, with the Parish Council supporting the scheme and a number of local residents of Great Eversden and the District Councillor opposed.
71. The Campaign for Rural England oppose the application on grounds the development will ruin the view from the footpath to the edge of the site, and whilst recognising the need for affordable houses consider such a scheme should be located elsewhere in a locality which has facilities.

Conclusions

72. In determining planning applications it is often necessary to balance competing factors. In this case the identified need and public benefit of providing much needed affordable housing needs to be weighed against the harm to the Green Belt/landscape and adverse effect on the historic environment. In addition, planning law requires the decision maker to have “special regard” to the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings.
73. Officers accept and understand the importance of delivery of affordable housing especially when it is built out to meet the needs of a particular parish. Nonetheless, and reluctantly, officers are of the view that the harm identified to the historic environment and landscape character are major concerns which outweigh the public benefit of providing the affordable housing.

Recommendation

74. Refusal for the following reasons –
- (i) The development will result in the permanent loss of open countryside and Green Belt which forms an important gap between the cluster of Grade 2 Listed Buildings (The Homestead, Outbuilding at The Homestead, Church Farm and Barn at Church Farm) and the Grade 2* listed church of St Mary and the village of Great Eversden. This loss of separation will significantly detract from the setting of these listed buildings contrary to the requirements of Policy CH/4 of the Local Development Framework Development Control Policies (LDF DCP) 2007 which states planning permission will not be granted for development which would adversely affect the curtilage or wider setting of a Listed Building, adopted Listed Buildings: Works to or affecting the setting of SPD, and Chapter 12 of the NPPF. This harm is considered significant, and is not outweighed by the public benefits of providing affordable housing.
 - (ii) The development will introduce a form of development contrary to the prevailing linear form of the village and result in the loss of an important gap site that will harm the landscape setting of the village. The development is therefore contrary to Policies DP/2, DP/3 and HG/5 of the LDF DCP 2007 which states planning permission will not be granted for development which would fail to preserve or enhance the character of the local area and have an unacceptable adverse impact on the countryside and landscape character. This harm is considered significant, and is not outweighed by the public benefits of providing affordable housing.

Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The following list contains links to the documents on the Council's website or elsewhere at which copies can be inspected.

- Nation Planning Policy Framework
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- Local Development Framework, Development Control Policies, Adopted July 2007
<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/content/local-development-framework>
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, Proposed Submission July 2013
<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/localplan>

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