

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Development and Conservation Control Committee 3rd August 2005
AUTHOR/S: Director of Development Services

S/1114/05/F - Melbourn
Erection 35 Flat Very Sheltered Residential Home, 18 Flats and 4 Houses, Including Demolition of Existing Residential Home, Moorlands Residential Home, The Moor, for Cambridge Housing Society

Recommendation: Refusal
Date for Determination: 5th September 2005

Site and Proposal

1. Moorlands Residential Home is located on a 0.67 ha site to the east of The Moor, Melbourn, opposite the Village College. The site currently comprises two main buildings, the main residential block and a day care unit, set within well-landscaped grounds.
2. To the north the site abuts an unmade roadway leading to a pumping station beyond which is a recreation ground. To the south the site is an industrial building fronting The Moor behind which there is a block of flats currently under construction.
3. To the east the site abuts the rear gardens of bungalows in Dickasons. These properties are set on land which is slightly higher than the main part of The Moorlands site.
4. This full application, registered on 6th June 2005, proposes the demolition of the existing buildings on the site (this element is to be phased) and the erection of a 35 flat very sheltered residential home, 18 private flats and 4 private houses.
5. The 35-bedroom residential home comprises a mainly three-storey building, rising to a height of 10m, although there are sections of the buildings which are single storey or two storeys. The building extends directly behind three of the existing bungalows in Dickasons for a length of 37m and the distance between it and the boundary varies between 14m and 15m. At this point the new building will be part single storey at its northern end and two storey at the southern end where the gardens of properties in Dickasons are deeper. There is some screening on the east boundary of the site although views into the site from the rear gardens of properties in Dickasons are still obtained.
6. The building is designed in a 'U' shape, and whilst requiring the existing day centre building to be demolished, it wraps around the existing residential building, allowing it to be retained whilst the new building is constructed. Several trees are to be removed including a mature walnut tree, lime tree and a silver birch on the site frontage.
7. At the front of the site the building is part three storeys and part two storeys. The two storey element is flat roofed with a terrace. The building is sited a minimum of 6.25m from the boundary with The Moor.

8. Fronting The Moor, to the north of the proposed entrance road which serves all properties, is a three storey 'L' shaped building containing 12 two-bedroom flats and 6 one bedroom flats. In the north east section of the site are two pairs of houses each containing a 2 bedroom (two storey) and 3 bedroom (part three storey) unit. These buildings are set minimum of 17m from the boundary of properties in Dickasons.
9. The application contains a tree survey and report, and a design statement.
10. The scheme is developed at a density of 85 dph.

Planning History

11. Members will recall discussing a similar proposal at the February meeting this year **Ref S/2305/04/F**. Having visited the site Members resolved to refuse the application on the grounds of the impact of the proposed building on the occupiers of properties in Dickasons, inappropriate design and the loss of the day care facility.

Planning Policy

12. **Policy SE2** of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2004 ("The Local Plan") designates Melbourn as a Rural Growth Settlement where residential development and redevelopment will be permitted on site within village frameworks 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
13. Development should provide an appropriate mix of dwellings in terms of size, type and affordability and should achieve a minimum density of 30 dph unless there are strong design grounds for not doing so.
14. **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 Melbourn, where the population is in excess of 3000, such provision should represent up to 30% 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.
15. **Policy HG9** of the Local Plan states that the development of residential care homes within village frameworks will be permitted where:
 - (a) the quality of design is in keeping with surrounding properties and landscape in terms of scale, form, layout and materials;
 - (b) boundary treatment provides privacy and a high standard of visual amenity;
 - (c) the privacy and amenity of neighbouring properties is protected;
 - (d) there is safe and convenient access for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians;
 - (e) parking facilities are in accordance with District Council standards: and

- (f) there is access to an adequate level of services to meet the need of the development.
16. **Policy CS9** of the Local Plan states that the District Council will refuse planning permissions for proposals which would result in the loss of a village service, where such loss would cause a significant reduction in the level of community or service provision in the locality.
- Consultations**
17. **Melbourn Parish Council** recommends refusal. “The Parish Council took the decision to recommend refusal of the application because it is felt that accepting the planning application would mean that it also accepted the extra care scheme. It feels that this scheme will not provide the care that residents of Moorlands are receiving at the present time. The charges will be higher; the level of nursing will not be as it is at present and only one hot meal a day is provided for in weekly charges.”
18. The **Chief Environmental Health Officer** requests a condition restricting the hours of operation of power driven machinery during the period of construction. He also comments in respect of the use of driven pile foundations and the burning of waste and points out that a Demolition Notice will be required in respect of the existing properties.
19. The **Local Highway Authority** states that the access road serving this development is to remain private. No objections are raised to the drawings subject to conditions and that a suitable number of parking spaces are to be provided to meet the Councils’ standards as on-street parking should not occur as a result of insufficient spaces on site.
20. The **Environment Agency** offers standing advice in respect of surface water drainage and recommends that the Councils’ Drainage Manager be consulted in respect of surface water drainage.
21. The **Council’s Drainage Manager** stated in respect of the previous application that the Council is responsible for the award drain immediately downstream of the site. As the proposal represents an increase in the impermeable area of the site, the applicant should produce a flood risk assessment that will outline the impact on the award. Proposals for the disposal of surface water from the site should then be agreed with the Council’s Drainage Manager. These discussions have now taken place and the Drainage Manager has no additional comments to make in respect of the current application but points out that the contribution agreed with the applicants’ agent is £9000.
22. The **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service** requests that adequate provision is made for fire hydrants.
23. The comments of the **Trees and Landscapes Officer** will be reported verbally. Previously he objected to the loss of the Walnut tree and noted that, whilst a Lime tree was shown for retention it would also be compromised by the proposal and an objection was raised. The current proposal requires the removal of both the Walnut and Lime tree along with a Silver Birch at the front of the site.
24. The **County Archaeologist** recommends that the site be subject to a programme of archaeological investigation, which can be secured through the inclusion of a negative condition.

25. The **Architectural Liaison Officer, Cambridgeshire Constabulary** comments that the layout does not appear to make optimum use of natural surveillance opportunities afforded by pedestrian and vehicular traffic using the main road, The Moor and nearby properties. The front entrances to the flats and the two northern most houses do not benefit from direct views from The Moor, while the remaining two houses are set back some distance from The Moor so reducing significantly the value of natural surveillance. The car park, which is rather large, may be vulnerable to vehicle crime. This should be provided with column mounted white down lighting to BS 5489: 1996 code of practice for outdoor lighting, which, given the layout should also be designed to cover footpaths through the development. It is not clear to what extent the area to the rear of the flats is subject to access control. Given that the dwellings are at their most vulnerable from the rear this is an area that requires attention. Given the relative remoteness of the cycle store from many of the dwellings served this should be provided with lighting and benefit from high levels of natural surveillance from the six one-bed flats.
26. The comments of the **Commercial Director** will be reported verbally.

Representations

27. The occupiers of 12 Dickasons have no objections to the proposed works and feel that for the peace of mind and well being of the present elderly residents of Moorlands it would as well if the matter could be sorted out as soon as possible.
28. A letter has been received from the occupier of 126 High Street, Meldreth expressing concern. The letter states that the plans have been presented to residents and their relatives and it is believed that what is proposed constitutes a loss of amenity and is not fit for purpose. The current residents will be offered places in the new facility provided that they pass an assessment but it is estimated that the majority will not be able to benefit from the new facilities and will not be offered places. Those not offered a place would be accommodated 'somewhere else' however the Primary Care Trust (PCT) could not name any premises nearby. The proposal therefore represents a loss of amenity for most of the current residents of Moorlands.
29. If it is the intention of the PCT to accommodate people of the level of dependency of the current residents in the new facility then it is believed it will be found not to be fit for that purpose. All flats are suitable for accommodation by couples which means that it will be more expensive than necessary for a single person and it is believed that residents who could not safely operate kitchen appliances would have their kitchens switched off. Why provide a facility which cannot be used? The majority of residents spend their day in the communal living space and do not use their bed sitting room during the day. Why is it necessary to expand the bed-sits into flatlets and contract the area available for communal care? Many of the current residents cannot use a bathroom or lavatory or return to their own room without assistance so why build en-suite bathrooms and provide only 3 assisted lavatories and 1 assisted bathroom? Why provide a computer room when none of the current residents is able to change channel on the television?
30. The letter concludes by suggesting that it is inevitable that the proposed facilities will be found to be unsuitable for residents with the level of disability of the current residents of Moorlands. It will then be rational and economic to fill the new facility with residents who are able to make the most use of the facilities. Local residents with the needs of the current residents will not be catered for and will be consigned to the non-existent 'somewhere else'. The application should be rejected until it is clear

that the new facility will be suitable for occupation by the current residents of Moorlands and people in the local community who will need this level of care in the future.

Applicant's Representations

31. The application is accompanied by a design statement, the main text of which is produced at Appendix 1. A full copy of the statement can be viewed as part of the background papers and will be displayed at the meeting.
32. In a further letter from the applicants it is stated that the building has been moved forward in order to prevent overlooking to the rear of the site. The whole building, and houses for sale are beyond the 15m overlooking/privacy building line. The building is now closer to the pavement at the front. The whole of the second floor and two thirds of the first floor to the rear elevation have been removed. The accommodation has been moved to the central section of the building. A significant proportion of the rear elevation is now single storey only. This greatly reduces the bulk of the building to the rear.
33. Creating interesting sections using materials that relate to the village has lightened the front elevation. Two of the flats have been placed elsewhere to create a terrace area that is lower than the rest of the elevation and balconies have been added for the benefit of the residents and to create a softer elevation. The window details have been altered to relate to small paned windows that are common in Melbourn, but still relate to the proportion of the building. The shallow pitched roof reduces the perceived bulk of the building and the overall impression will be pale, with white render, buff brick and seasoned timber.
34. A community facility has been included on the ground floor, designed for general use but also to be operated as a separate entity if required. This facility includes a kitchen area and assisted toilet; it is also close to other community facilities such as treatment and hairdressing facilities. It is intended that residents and the general public will have access to the community and communal facilities incorporated into the scheme.
35. The revised plans show a significant amount of landscaping included; trees to the front elevation, lining the access road, and to the rear of the properties; a buffer zone of low level planting to the front elevation to soften the effect of the buildings and heavily planted garden areas for residents. The landscaping design also accommodates changes in soil levels around existing trees to be retained. The Leylandii hedge to the north east boundary are well over the legal height limit and will be removed as part of the preliminary site works and replaced with a more suitable species.
36. The housing for sale has been adjusted to include some one-bedroom flats as well as two bedroom flats and two and three bedroom houses in line with the local housing survey and requested by District Councillors. The layout of the flats has been altered to reduce the number of flats to the front of the site to accommodate parking places and to balance the overall layout.
37. The houses to the rear of the site have been repositioned to accommodate the parking that is now located within the site and the roof line of the properties has been changed to create a lower roof line at the rear and to reflect the architecture of the flats and extra care scheme. The overall density of the site accords with current planning policy.

38. The parking at the front of the building, which was designed to replace existing parking, has been moved further into the site. There is a single access road into the site for the extra care scheme and private housing. The revised layout of the housing, access road and parking creates a tree-lined vista through the site.
39. The bid submitted to the Housing Corporation will be considered in the next round. This bid for funds is a top up to the grant already received as the Housing Corporation have indicated that this is required to be repaid. Feedback received from the Housing Corporation so far has been very positive.

Planning Comments – Key Issues

40. The site is within the village framework and therefore the principle of redevelopment is acceptable. The key issues to be considered with this application are whether the development would be sensitive to the character of the village, local features of landscape or ecological importance, the amenities of neighbours, whether safe and adequate access can be provided, and whether the proposal confirms to Local Plan Policy HG7 in respect of affordable housing. In addition the applicant should be able to demonstrate that the proposal does not result in the loss of a village service, where such loss will cause a significant reduction in the level of community or service provision in the locality.
41. In terms of the impact of the development on the amenity of neighbours I am satisfied that the revised proposal addresses the previous concerns regarding the impact of the proposed building on existing properties in Dickasons. The gardens of these bungalows are relatively shallow, ranging from 8-13 metres. The proposed care home building will now be a minimum of 14 metres from the boundary of properties in Dickasons. This compares to a distance of 11 metres on the previous scheme. The rear elevation is in part single storey where it abuts the shallower of the gardens in Dickasons, and at this point the three storey section of the proposed building is 20 metres from the boundary. The proposed private housing in the north east section of the site is 17 metres from the rear boundary.
42. The existing building is located on attractive planted grounds, particularly at the southern end. In designing a new building for the site the applicant is constrained by the need to retain the existing residential home building while the new one is being constructed and this continues to dictate the basic footprint of the main building. Following previous concerns about the impact of the building on adjoining properties in Dickasons the main building, in addition to the design changes, has been moved forward on the site. This has necessitated the removal of additional trees within the site, including the important lime which was previously shown for retention and a silver birch on the front of the site. The Trees and Landscapes Officer objected to the previous application and I anticipate the current one will compound his concerns.
43. I did not object to the building as previously proposed in respect of its impact in the street scene. In my view however the revised position of the building, within 6 metres of the frontage of the site with The Moor, when coupled with its resultant form and mass will have an unacceptable visual impact and appear out of character in the street scene. In coming to this view I have had regard to the limited opportunity that exists at the front of the site for landscaping. Although shrub planting is shown it will have to be less than 0.6m high as it is within the visibility splay.
44. The Development Manager has previously confirmed that this scheme has been the subject of lengthy discussions with Cambridge Housing Society and that the mix of

housing is appropriate. The applicant has indicated that the private housing is required to fund the extra care home part of the scheme. I have asked the applicant to provide a detailed financial appraisal of the scheme to support this claim but to date this has not been received. It would normally be appropriate to secure a percentage of the scheme as affordable housing under Policy HG7 of the Local Plan and it is for the applicant to demonstrate whether development costs preclude such provision in this case.

45. I had hoped that prior to submission of the latest application that the applicant would have been able to satisfy Melbourn Parish Council in respect of the issue of the day care centre. Given the comments of the Parish Council this does not appear to be that case. The applicant is aware of these comments and in addition I have sent a copy of the letter from the local resident which expresses concern about whether the proposed building is suitable for existing residents. I will report the response of the applicant at the meeting.
46. Other matters raised, including the comments of the Drainage Matter could be covered by condition/Section 106 Agreement.
47. In coming to a decision on this application Members will have to have regard to the desirability of providing the 35 bed extra car home and associated housing against the impact of the proposal on the locality. I regret that I am unable to support the proposal as submitted as in my view the applicant has not been able to demonstrate that the site is capable of supporting the level of development proposed, given the constraint of the existing building within the site, without having an unacceptable visual impact on the street scene.

Recommendation

48. That the application be refused on the grounds that the quality of the proposed design is not in keeping with surrounding properties in terms of its form and scale and that the boundary treatment fails to provide a high standard of visual amenity, contrary to the aims of Policy HG9 of the Local Plan.

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 files Ref. S/2305/04/F & S/1114/05/F

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