

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Planning Committee held on
Wednesday, 13 December 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Dr. Martin Cahn – Chair
Councillor Peter Fane – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Ariel Cahn Bill Handley
Geoff Harvey Judith Rippeth
Peter Sandford Heather Williams
Eileen Wilson

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Vanessa Blane (Senior Planning Lawyer), Laurence Damary-Homan (Democratic Services Officer), Adam Dzimidowicz (Planning Officer), Tom Gray (Principal Planner), Mike Huntington (Principal Planner [Strategic Sites]), Luke Mills (Principal Planner [Strategic Sites]), Michael Sexton (Area Development Manager) and James Tipping (Principal Planner [Strategic Sites])

Councillor Cllr Dr James Hobro was in attendance remotely as local Member.

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. Apologies

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Dr Tumi Hawkins and Dr Richard Williams.

3. Declarations of Interest

With respect to Minute 4, Councillor Dr Martin Cahn declared that he knew the public speaker (speaking on behalf of the applicant) as a neighbour but had not discussed the application and was coming to the matter afresh. Councillor Bill Handley declared that he had held discussions regarding the application in his role as Lead Cabinet Member for Communities and would withdraw from the Committee for the item.

With respect to Minute 7, Councillor Bill Handley declared that Cabinet had held various discussions regarding the wider development on the site, of which the application was a part of, and given that he had been part of these discussion he would withdraw from the Committee for the item.

4. 23/03248/REM - Northstowe Phase 1, Parcel 6, Pathfinder Way, Northstowe**Councillor Bill Handley withdrew from the Committee, in line with his Declaration of Interest**

The Principal Planner (Strategic Sites), Luke Mills, presented the report. In response to Member questions, officers gave the following details:

- A café was to be included as part of the proposal.
- The main hall could be used in a variety of ways, with a maximum building capacity of 300 people, and that an Event Management Plan condition was in place.
- Cycle parking provision exceeded standard requirements.
- The comments of the Access Officer, laid out in the report, had been addressed, although some of the comments regarded issues that were not planning considerations.
- The comments of the Landscape Officer had been considered and the majority of the comments had been addressed, although the desire to see further soft landscaping on the northern edge of the building was not possible without compromising cycle parking.
- The building was in close to a guided busway stop and that there was a temporary footpath in place between the site and the guided busway stop, and that a Travel Plan condition was in place to promote sustainable transport.

Questions were raised with regard to car parking and officers, including the Principal Transport Officer (Cambridgeshire County Council), gave details of the proposed parking, explaining that the highways authority was satisfied with the proposed level of parking. The Committee was advised that a scheme with less parking provision than initially proposed was acceptable, with ample parking in the vicinity being available, and that parking around the community centre would be monitored once the use had commenced.

The Committee was addressed by a representative of the applicant, Kirstin Donaldson, who responded to questions regarding:

- The long-term viability of the community centre- the Committee was advised that work on the future governance and management was being undertaken by the Communities Team of the Council, with the solution likely to be subject to a future decision by the Council's Cabinet.
- Accessibility- Members were assured that accessibility considerations had been taken into account, with refinement to accessibility measures to be

made during the technical design stage, and that the applicant was taking into account all comments made with regard to accessibility.

Councillor Richard Owen of Northstowe Town Council addressed the Committee on behalf of the Town Council and in support of the application.

In the debate, the Committee expressed support for the application. Members felt that conditions and proposed monitoring alleviated concerns around the proposal but requested that officers ensured that the conditions were strong and enforceable. Members described car parking provision as the main point of concern, but agreed that the details provided by officers in the meeting resolved these concerns and noted the support for the proposed parking from both the Town Council and the highways authority.

By unanimous vote, the Committee **approved** the application in accordance with the officer's recommendation, and subject to the conditions, as laid out in the report from the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

Councillor Bill Handley rejoined the Committee

5. 22/05427/FUL - Land to the south of 86 Chrishall Road, Fowlmere

The Chair advised that correspondence from the applicant had been sent to all Members of the Committee, but not all had reviewed the correspondence, and officers had not received the correspondence. In order to allow for time to review the correspondence and make it available to the public, Councillor Peter Sandford, seconded by Councillor Peter Fane, proposed that the order of business be varied to take application 22/05427/FUL as the last item of business of the meeting. The Committee agreed to the proposal by affirmation.

The Committee moved to Minute 6 (application 23/03293/HFUL)

Following the conclusion of Minute 7 (application S/4329/18/COND21), the Committee returned to application 22/05427/FUL

The Chair noted that a Member site visit had been conducted for the application and the Principal Planner presented the report and provided an update on the correspondence received by Members and clarified a number of points raised by the correspondence:

- Biodiversity Net Gain was assessed as bring 33.29% gain in habitat units alongside 20.74% gain in hedgerow units.
- The proposed creation of a new footpath would connect the application site to the Shaw Close development to the north and no footway along Chrishall Road itself was proposed.
- The indicated 30mph speed limit relocation was outside of the planning process.
- 75% reduction in carbon emissions and zero fossil fuel use was contained within the sustainability statement and could be conditioned for, if the Committee was minded to approve the application.

- The retention of the woods could be secured through a S106 agreement.
- No supporting letters from the two housing associations had been provided as evidence.
- There was no guarantee that affordable homes would be required as a result of the new research and development hub at The Way, with identified housing need being based on current need rather than projected future need based on approved future development.
- Officers did not view the site as a sustainable village location.
- There were development constraints to the village of Fowlmere, such as green belt to the east, the Conservation Area within the centre of the village and countryside frontage for part of the western side.

The second of the recommended reasons for refusal was updated to also include reference to the loss of grade 3a agricultural land. In response to Member questions, officers provided clarity on:

- The development to the north of the site at Shaw Close, an entry-level exception site which was being constructed at the time.
- Housing mix- policy H/11 of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018 (Rural Exception Site Affordable Housing) did not require tenure-blind housing mix when market housing was included to facilitate the viability of the delivery of affordable housing in a rural exception site. Officers were satisfied that the inclusion of market housing was justified.
- Parking- the majority of affordable housing proposed had on-plot parking, with on road-parking being provided for other plots.
- Local connection- officers confirmed that a local connection cascade provision for the affordable was to be part of the S106 agreement (as described in paragraph 7.52 of the Local Plan 2018), if the Committee was minded to approve the application.
- Assessing a small site- officers advised that there was no fixed definition for a small site and paragraph 8.16 of the report laid out the reasons as to why this was the case. Officers advised that they did not view the proposed number of units as appropriate for an exception site in a Group Village such as Fowlmere.
- The requirement laid out in policy H/11 for an exception site to be adjoining the development framework boundary and the fact that the proposed site

was not adjoining the development framework of Fowlmere.

- The retention of the affordable housing in perpetuity in the form of affordable rent and shared ownership dwellings.
- Officers' view that the proposal did not relate well to the development to the north (Shaw Close).

The Committee was addressed by an objector, Salli Roskilly. The applicant, Colin Blundell, spoke on the application and, in response to Member questions, advised that a letter of support from Stonewall (a housing association) had been published on the Council's website, and another letter of support had been received from MVTH which had been discussed with officers but possibly not provided to them. Steve Lester addressed the Committee as a public supporter of the application, and Councillor David Brock of Fowlmere Parish Council addressed the Committee on behalf of the Parish Council who supported the application. Councillor James Hobro addressed the Committee as local Member who described the application as carrying significant merit but the scale of the proposal was large for the scale of Fowlmere and that he supported the officer's recommendation of refusal.

In the debate, Members described the application as one with both merits and reasons for refusal, with the Committee agreeing that the decision came down to the weighting of material considerations in the planning balance. Some Members raised concerns over the size of the development, feeling that it was inappropriate given the scale of the Fowlmere and its status as a Group Village, especially as the 5-year housing land supply for the village had been secured. Other concerns were raised, including lack of amenities in the village and the transport links in Fowlmere. Further concern was raised over the loss of agricultural land, but some felt that as the land had not been used for agricultural purposes in recent times, the weight given to this consideration should be small. The Committee agreed that the provision of affordable housing in South Cambridgeshire was a high priority and carried significant weight but, whilst some Members felt that the proposal was a good opportunity to provide affordable housing, many felt that need for affordable housing was outweighed on balance by the excessive scale of the proposal.

Prior to the vote on the application, the Committee agreed, by affirmation, with the update to the second reason for refusal to include reference to the loss of grade 3a agricultural land.

By 8 (Councillors Dr Martin Cahn, Ariel Cahn, Bill Handley, Geoff Harvey, Judith Rippeth, Peter Sandford, Heather Williams and Eileen Wilson) votes to 1 (Councillor Peter Fane), the Committee **refused** the application in accordance with the officer's recommendation as laid out in the report from the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development. The reasons for refusal were:

- 1- By virtue of its excessive scale, the proposal would neither meet the definition of 'small sites' nor be of a scale appropriate to the size and facilities of the settlement. Given the application site would neither adjoin the development framework boundary nor be well related to the settlement's built-form and taking into account the limited facilities and services within the village of Fowlmere, the proposal would fail to be in an appropriate

location to comply with Policy H/11 of the Local Plan 2018. The proposal is therefore contrary to policies S/2, S/6, S/7 and TI/2 of the Local Plan 2018. These policies seek to provide land for housing in sustainable locations and reduce the need to travel, particularly by car.

- 2- By virtue of the presence of significant built development encroaching into the open countryside further to the south and west, beyond the established development framework, and the resultant loss of grade 2 and grade 3a agricultural land, the proposal would cause harm to the rural character and appearance of the open countryside and the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, contrary to policies HQ/1, NH/2 and NH/3 of the Local Plan 2018.

6. **23/03293/HFUL - 24 West Street, Comberton**

The Planning Officer presented the report. In response to questions, officers provided clarity on the distance between the proposed garage and the eastern wall of No. 14 West Street and what a cart-lodge style garage entailed. Clarity was given that the window that would be affected by the proposal at No. 18 West Street was to a non-habitable room (a bathroom) and thus loss of light to this window was not a reasonable reason for refusal, and that the proposal would allow sufficient light into the window adjoining the habitable room at No. 14 West Street.

The Committee was addressed by the applicant, Alistair Funge, who also confirmed the distance between the proposed garage and No. 14 West Street in response to a Member question.

In the debate, the Committee agreed that the proposed garage and associated landscaping was acceptable in the context of the area and would avoid harm to the setting of the nearby Listed Buildings or the character of the Conservation Area. With the significant changes to the previous proposal on the site (23/00375/HFUL) which the Committee had refused, Members agreed that there was no longer a detrimental impact on the ground floor window of No. 14 West Street. Members expressed support for the application.

By unanimous vote, the Committee **approved** the application in accordance with the officer's recommendation, and subject to the conditions, as laid out in the report from the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

7. **S/4329/18/COND21 - Wellcome Genome Campus, Hinxton**

Councillor Bill Handley withdrew from the Committee, in line with his Declaration of Interest

The Principal Planner (Strategic Sites), James Tipping, presented the report. In responses to Member questions, officers provided the following clarity:

- That the application before the Committee was to discharge condition 21 of

the outline consent (S/4329/18/OL), which required the submission of a Design Guide, rather than approve the details of the Design Guide itself.

- That a Design Code defines the precise details of a development, whereas a Design Guide is guidance only and allows for a level of flexibility. The Committee was advised that the outline consent required Development Briefs and Reserved Matters applications to secure the precise details of the development as it came forward.
- The images of roofscapes in the presentation were precedent images of the types of roofscapes that could be used on the site, rather than being the proposed roofscapes for the development.
- The Design Guide provided the Development Principles that were set out in the Development Specification document approved under the outline consent. Members were advised that the “musts” and “must nots” would need to be complied with in the reserved matters applications, as per the wording of condition 21 of the outline consent, and thus would be enforceable.
- Development Briefs would provide more fixed detail for specific parts of the wider development.
- The Design Guide would be maintained in perpetuity. The minor amendments could be made after a permission was granted, but wholesale changes may require a new application to vary the condition. A review mechanism was in place within the Design Guide that would allow for minor updates if required, allowing for the development to stay up to date with updated new standards, legislation etc.
- The Briefing Note on the Design Guide received from David Lock Associates in December 2023 which covered the provision for 25% Biodiversity Net Gain amongst other matters.

The Committee was addressed by a representative of the applicant, Caroline Foster of Urban & Civic, who also responded to Member questions. The representative of the applicant provided clarity on:

- How “serendipity” was being incorporated into the design of the development.
- Concerns over light spillage, stating that detailed lighting design would

come forward in a reserved matters application and would accord with the requirements of the outline consent.

- The influence of other science park developments and how this was incorporated; the Committee was advised that the proposal had been informed by other similar developments but the proposal was unique and specific to the site.

In the debate, Members felt that the clarification provided throughout the discussion of the application had been satisfactory and that concerns that were relevant at this stage (such as the level of community engagement) had been allayed. The Committee agreed that condition 21 of the outline consent had been complied with and full discharge of the condition was appropriate.

By unanimous vote, the Committee **approved** the full discharge of planning condition S/4329/18/COND21 (subject to minor amendments to the Design Guide post committee decision that are not material to the outcome of the document delegated to officers), in accordance with the officer's recommendation laid out in the report from the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development.

Councillor Bill Handley rejoined the Committee

The Meeting ended at 3.07 p.m.
